

Clarion

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*A
thankful
farewell
for
Rev. J. Visscher*

Inside this Issue

- *Child Sacrifice*
- *Hallowed Be Your Name*





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Child Sacrifice

*Children's lives are
 being tampered with
 where they are often most vulnerable*

In the world of ancient Israel, child sacrifice was a reality in pagan religion. So much so that God warned his people to have nothing to do with the practice even before they entered the Promised Land (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5). "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire!" (Deut 18:10) This horrific practice did, however, take place in Israel in both the northern and southern kingdoms. It was also part of the reason why God sent his people into exile (2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Ezek 16:20-21).

While we today can recoil at the thought of taking your own offspring and laying them on the altar of a pagan god such as Molech, the question can be raised whether the danger and temptation to commit child sacrifice is not becoming stronger as our society drifts from its Christian moorings. Children today are also being sacrificed to idols of one's own making.

One can of course point to the radical Muslim practice of honour killing. The January 2012 conviction in a Canadian court of first degree murder for a father and son killing four women in the name of family honour brought this issue to the forefront. Three teenaged girls and the father's first wife were sacrificed for the sake of "honour." It is a reality that honour killings are occurring more often than they are identified in the press as such.

One need not, however, turn to radical Islam for child sacrifice. Western society is practising it much more than is generally acknowledged. The widespread evil of abortion comes to mind.

Abortion

There are parallels between the ancient pagan practice of child sacrifice to the god Molech and the current practice of abortion. In both instances, the child whether before or after birth is offered up to a false god.

In the case of abortions today, they are often done on the altar of secular feminist ideals such as having the right to decide what to do with one's own body (denying that the unborn child is a separate human being). Or an abortion can be carried out in submission to the god of convenience; a human sacrifice is made in the name of easy living, for children are often considered a nuisance. According to one study, one fifth of all abortions in the United States were carried out on married women, often at the instigation of the husband.

Another parallel to ancient pagan child sacrifice relates to the fact that abortions are often carried out to hide an unexpected pregnancy due to an illicit promiscuous relationship. In the case of ancient Israel, it is likely that prostitution with Molech's priests formed part of the worship of this god. The fact that child sacrifice is listed with sexual sins in Leviticus 18 can point in this direction. Furthermore, cult prostitution was a widespread feature of pagan ancient near eastern religion. In the case of Molech worship, children born of religious prostitution could have been given to the priests for sacrifice. It would have been a convenient way to dispose of the unwanted fruits of religious sexual relations. So today, not a few engage in extramarital sex without worrying too much about a possible pregnancy since abortion is perceived as a way out.

There is evidence that abortion in ancient times also served as a means of population control. More specifically, among the social elite, child sacrifice helped to keep the size of the family down and so helped consolidate their wealth since it would have to be divided among less people in the next generation. Among the poor, child sacrifice would have helped keep poverty at bay. Today, abortion is used in China as a means of population control. Enormous pressure, social and financial, is placed



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In This Issue

Editorial – Child Sacrifice
— C. Van Dam 302

Treasures, New and Old – Hallowed Be Your Name
— R. Vermeulen 305

Pentecost: The Feast in the Light of the Old Testament (3)
— C. Van Dam 306

Early Canadian Church History (4)
— L. Joose with W. Bredenhof 309

Meet the Pastor Who Never Retires
A thankful farewell to Rev. J. Visscher
— J. deGlint 311

Letters to the Editor 313

on couples who already have a child to abort a subsequent pregnancy. Abortions are frequently forced upon unwilling mothers.

While modern abortions parallel the physical killing of offspring as in ancient child sacrifice, there is another insidious way in which children today are essentially being robbed of their very life. Children's lives are being tampered with where they are often most vulnerable. They are at risk as never before to lose their childhood and sexual innocence.

Robbing children of their innocence and life

The trend in education is to include ever more so-called sex education in the primary grades. In the name of political correctness and inclusiveness,

What's Inside

Issue 12 begins with an editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. In it he draws parallels between abortion, liberal sex-education, and the ancient practice of child sacrifice. We are also concluding Dr. Van Dam's series on Pentecost with his third article, this one on the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

The series on early Canadian church history also comes to a conclusion in this issue with the fourth installment. The articles are adapted from a chapter of *Geloof in de Nieuwe Wereld: Ontmoeting met Afrikanen en Indianen* by Leen Joose with the assistance of Dr. Wes Bredenhof.

In news from our federation, we bring you an article from Langley congregation of Dr. James Visscher's retirement. The Lord's blessings to Dr. Visscher and his wife in this new stage of life. . . though I am happy to report that we retain Dr. Visscher as Editor-in-Chief of *Clarion* magazine!

Readers will find several letters to the editor in Issue 13, on the topics of the new Psalter as well as science and creation. There is also the regular Treasures New and Old meditation as well as a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

more and more children's books depict homosexual "families" and other gay themes as if this is perfectly normal. As I write this article, Ontario's liberal government is pushing Bill 13 which, in the name of being anti-bullying (a commendable cause), is advancing a radical sex education agenda. If passed in its present form, schools will be forced to promote sexual tolerance by supporting pupils who want to organize activities such as gay-straight clubs.

Force-feeding young children and teens this type of sex education and trying to mould their minds according to the unbiblical and unnatural moral dictates of the gay lobby is at best most confusing for them. Indeed, since children and teens are at a very vulnerable age, it is immoral and irresponsible for educators to teach those in their care to question their sexual or gender identity, as if the gender that God gave them is not a sufficient indicator of what his expectations are.

Children's lives are to be protected and nurtured

One's sexual identity is critical to how one views oneself. It lies, in a sense, at the very heart of one's life. As Dr. Miriam Grossman's 2009 book *You're Teaching My Child What?* demonstrates, the last thing children and teens need are what the so-called sex education experts are calling for. At that age they are not ready to logically reason out this area of life. Neurological science has shown that the teen brain cannot make responsible rational decisions when it comes to sexuality since the brain wiring is not yet complete. The poor decisions that teens do make when it comes to sex is not due to lack of information but to lack of judgment. Only time and maturation will solve that limitation. Encouraging sexual freedom and sin puts children's health and possibly lives at risk. Misguided ideology is driving much sex education and not sound science. Grossman makes this clear in her study.

Young lives are being ruined. Children and teens are being robbed of their sexual innocence and the chance to grow up in a normal way, gradually realizing their identity as a boy or girl without being pushed into adult problems. The gay agenda in particular, with its influential input in sex education, is sacrificing children on the altar of their cause and current political correctness. The repercussion for the students can be devastating and lifelong. This is basically a form of child sacrifice. The perverse ideology driving the gay lobby seeks to socially engineer society into new directions, regardless of the price children must pay.

Our children as a living sacrifice

Children are a great gift of God. Their lives are to be protected and nurtured. Christian parents may be God's instruments in giving them life – physical life, but they may also be God's instruments for giving them life in Christ. Believing fathers and mothers may offer their children up to God as a thank offering, just as they offer themselves to God's service. The Lord our God exhorts us through the Apostle Paul to offer ourselves "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" (cf. 1 Pet 2:5).

To offer *living sacrifices* – alive to God, that is the holy challenge we face with respect to our children as we live in a neo-pagan culture of death and moral bankruptcy. We may seek to bring up our children in the fear of the Lord, offering them to him who is the Giver of life, for life now and forever. What a wonderful and life-enhancing privilege!





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Hallowed Be Your Name

MATTHEW 13:52

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." (Matthew 6:9)

"I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever." (Psalm 145:1)

There is something so out of this world about our Father in heaven. He is intimately involved with us, as the address of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father in heaven," teaches us. At the same time he is so different from us. And lest we approach him too casually, the first petition of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that he is a Holy Father: "Hallowed be your name." The first thing in our prayer is to ask God to make his name holy in and through us.

We ask God to do this for us because of who he is. He is holy and we ask him to ensure that in our lives and in the lives of others he is honoured, revered, respected, praised, sanctified, and glorified as holy. When we pray this petition we are asking God to ensure that we rightly know him not only from his Word, but also from his works. Lord's Day 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism, as a faithful summary of God's Word, teaches us this truth.

Our prayer is that when we see and contemplate God's works, we will receive a glimpse of who he is. It's a prayer that we might see in his works his power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. It's a prayer that having caught a glimpse of who he is, we might also praise him and so hallow his name.

That is what the psalmist David is doing in Psalm 145. He is contemplating God's works

and praising God for them – he is hallowing God's name. He begins the psalm with praise, in verses 1-3: "I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom."

Then throughout the rest of the Psalm, David speaks of God's works. He does so because it is those works which show God's holiness so beautifully. It is God's works that show his apartness from his creation. It's those works that give rise to the praise in verses 1-3 as well as the call to worship in verse 21, "Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever." No matter where David looks, he sees God's "mighty acts," his "wonderful works," his "awesome works," his "great deeds," his "abundant goodness and righteousness." David sees a holy God whose name is worthy of all praise.

You see, God is a holy God and his works show that, time and time again. Just think of a little baby woven intricately inside his or her mother's womb. We see that work of God, and we say "Wow!" You want to see God's works? You want to understand that God is holy, awesome and so set apart from us? Then look at a baby.

A covenant child is baptized. A sinner worthy of death receives the promise of life. There you have evidence of God's mercy and goodness. Psalm 145:8 says it, "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love." You want to see that God is holy, so much beyond us? You want to see that God is majestic and awesome, that his ways are so far beyond ours, that his wisdom is infinitely greater than ours, that his righteous ways are beyond our ability to comprehend? You want to see that? Then watch a baptism. Our awesome and holy God saves sinners!

He is holy. There is an infinite distance between his holiness and our humanity. It is not for nothing that the seraphim whom Isaiah the prophet saw above the throne of God were calling out to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

When we pray "Hallowed be your name," we are asking God to help us see and understand something of his holiness so that we might revere, treasure, sanctify, esteem, respect, praise, and stand in awe of his holy name – that we might stand in awe of him! It's a prayer that we might constantly be at the point of saying with the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty."





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Pentecost: the Feast in the Light of the Old Testament (Part 3 of 3)

The great breakthrough at the New Testament Pentecost

The Lord Jesus came to earth in order to fulfill all the requirements of the law so that God's people could be holy and pleasing to God. Christ satisfied God's just demands for sin committed (2 Cor 5:21; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). When the end was in sight and the completion of his work was coming closer, the Lord Jesus said in John 14:16-17 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives *with* you and will be *in* you." Notice those words: "for he lives *with* you and will be *in* you." There is progress here in the history of revelation. Sin does not have the last say. God will come to dwell right inside his people! Before Pentecost the Spirit was with God's people but not within in the way he would be later. This calls to mind the words of John 7:39 where it says that Christ "meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." The timing of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was linked to Christ's glorification. That means that only after his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension were accomplished would the Spirit be given to the church. For only then would all be accomplished for the payment of sins and the justification of his people on the basis of his sacrificial death. And he would be given in fullness unprecedented in the history of the world up to that point.

Let us consider some of the aspects of the outpouring of the Spirit that set it apart from the Old Testament work of the Spirit.

The new temple of God

The main change is of course the fact that God's presence was no longer centred in the temple. When Christ died on the cross the temple and the entire sacrificial service of reconciliation became obsolete. Indeed, at the very moment that the Lord Jesus died, the temple curtain dividing the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place ripped from top to bottom (Matt 27:51; cf. Heb 9:3, 8; 10:19-20). This was God's doing. By this action, God put the temple aside as his dwelling place and claimed his people, sanctified by the blood of *the* Lamb, as his new home on earth.

This was unlike anything in the Old Testament. The church and not the temple is now God's permanent home on earth! That awesome truth is clearly taught in Scripture. The congregation as a whole is called such when the Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians saying: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you [plural]?" (1 Cor 3:16) This truth is repeated in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your [plural] body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you [plural], whom you [plural] have received from God?" This truth is never articulated this way in the Old Testament. But the reality of the Spirit's dwelling in the congregation is repeated many times in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul writing to the Roman Christians and to Timothy speaks of the Spirit who lives in them (Rom 8:9, 11; 2 Tim 1:14; also Eph 3:17). Indeed, the church is the house of God (lit.: 1 Tim 3:15).

The reality of the indwelling Spirit in the church as his temple has two huge implications. First, New Testament believers have what the Old Testament believers did not have, namely union with Christ through the Spirit. The author of Hebrews mentions that in comparison with the believers of the old dispensation, "God had planned something better for

us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb 11:39-40; cf. 7:22; 8:6). This "something better" is the spiritual union Christians today may have with the exalted and glorified Christ. It is the basis for all the other blessings of salvation, "yet it was not enjoyed prior to Christ's death and resurrection. Old Testament believers were regenerated, justified, and sanctified on the basis of Christ's (future) work," but the mode of covenant fellowship in which they experienced these blessings was with God's official dwelling at a distance from them. His being among them "lacked the finality and permanence of union with (the glorified) Christ." (The quotes are from R.B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 36.)

We are so used to hearing of the union with Christ by the Spirit, but behind this theological truth is the momentous reality of having an intimate relationship with almighty God (cf. Matt 13:16-17). It means that as Christians we have been given new hearts on which the law of God can be written (Ezek 36:26-27; Jer 31:33). It also means that we have been adopted into the family of God as his children (Rom 8:14-17 [cf. 5:5]; Gal 3:23-4:7).

The second related implication is that the outpouring of the Spirit truly ushered in a new age – the last days in God's program for this world. The momentous event of the Spirit coming down to live in the church means that the church becomes a separate, independent entity in a way that ancient Israel was not. Ancient Israel, the church at that time was defined as a nation, among other nations. However, the church as home of the Holy Spirit transcends all national and ethnic boundaries. The unity is the unity not in race but in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:18; 4:3-6). This means that the people of God are free to expand and go wherever the Spirit directs. Driven by the Spirit, the gospel spread in the early church, eventually all over the Roman Empire. Today the Spirit still drives mission activity and the triumphant Christ gathers his people through the Word and Spirit.

This brings us to the next topic: the Spirit's presence also means a superabundance of gifts.

Outpouring of gifts

Prior to his ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus told his disciples: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is clear from the context that this power they were to receive is directly related to equipping them to spread the good news of Jesus Christ as his witnesses. The Spirit would enable them

to be good witnesses of their Saviour and so spread the gospel even to the ends of the earth. That is what the book of Acts also tells us (Acts 8:29, 39-40; 10:19, etc.).

This receiving power to spread the gospel is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). All will now share in the prophetic office of spreading the good news! Everyone is equipped to publicly witness to the risen Christ. Moses' wish that all would be prophets has been fulfilled (Num 11:29). And it is not restricted to Israel. Also the Gentiles receive the Spirit (Acts 10:45).

As Christians we have been given new hearts on which the law of God can be written

When the Spirit was given, the Spirit was "poured out." This suggests an overflowing abundance, and unprecedented deluge. This is also in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 44:3-4, "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams" (cf. Isa 44:3).

There is a divine and royal abundance here fitting for the glorified Christ as the Spirit is poured out. Nothing like this ever occurred in the Old Testament. This too is a distinguishing feature of the New over against the Old Testament.

The gifts of the Spirit are many. But to go into them at this point would be to divert from the main topic being addressed, namely the significance of Pentecost in distinction with the Old Testament work of the Spirit.

Continuing implications of Pentecost

In conclusion, there are two important implications of the events of Pentecost that can be mentioned. First, with God the Holy Spirit actually residing within the church and its individual members, the struggle against sin is taken to the next level. With the Holy Spirit living in the church and its members, sin cannot be tolerated. If even the eye looks lustfully, it is adultery (Matt 5:28). Sin must not be tolerated and it must be

Church News

Accepted the call to the Canadian Reformed Church of Houston, British Columbia:

Rev. S.C. Van Dam

of Grassie, Ontario

Examinations Sustained

Examined by the Classis Ontario West of May 23, 2012 and granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches: students

Ben Schoof, Calvin Vanderlinde and Theo Wierenga

opposed at every turn. It must not have dominion (Rom 6:22), for Christ has triumphed over sin and Satan and his Spirit now resides in God's people. But the struggle is hard (Rom 7)! We can even grieve the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul admonishes: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30). A timely warning, for it is possible to quench the Spirit. The warning in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 is apt: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire."

A second important implication of the Spirit's dwelling in the church and its members individually is that our future is guaranteed. As a matter of fact, God's Word tells us that the presence of the Spirit in his earthly temple and dwelling place is like a

down payment for the inheritance of the future glory (Eph 1:14). God "has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor 5:5). By his indwelling Spirit, God claims us as his very own. "He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor 1:21-22). The Spirit's presence in the church and in the personal lives of Christians provides a foretaste of the future perfection. Those filled with the Spirit have life eternal now. The Spirit's presence guarantees this life with Christ, now and forever (cf. Rom 8:11; John 5:24). The indwelling Spirit places Christians in the company of a triumphant multitude of people who, though they may suffer now, know that the victory has been won. The future is with them! Put differently, Pentecost ushered in the last age, the last days, and so the only promised redemptive act of God still needing fulfillment is the return of our Saviour and the coming of the new heaven and earth.

And if we get into a situation of great trouble and darkness and don't even know how to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with the Father and we may rest assured that everything will work out for the good of those who love God. The victory over all misery and sin is ours. The present and the future belong to the triumphant Christ (Rom 8:15-39)!

C



Early Canadian Church History (Part 4)

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This series of articles is adapted from chapter 4 of Leendert Jan Joosse, *Geloof in de Nieuwe Wereld: Ontmoeting met Afrikanen en Indianen* (1600-1700) (Kampen: Kok, 2008)

With the support of Cardinal Richelieu, Samuel de Champlain was appointed governor of New France. Both Richelieu and de Champlain were ardent supporters of the Jesuits in colonial Canada. The policy of the Jesuits was to identify the rule of the king with the power of the church. They also actively supported the notion that all the colonial inhabitants and native peoples were French subjects and, as such, de facto under and within the Roman Catholic Church. To be French was to be Roman Catholic. It was virtually impossible for people to separate French identity from Roman Catholicism. However, within the Roman fold, there was some room for diversity as long as the authority of the clergy was recognized.

One of the prominent Roman Catholic clergy from this period was Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary and eventually superior of the order in New France. He made efforts to infiltrate and co-opt the fur trade. Beginning around 1638, Jesuits began training young Hurons. They were being educated to become commercial agents who would cooperate with French interests in New France and beyond.

The Jesuits not only promoted education for First Nations, but also for the colonists. Those living on the frontier without European-style orderly governments and laws were in danger of becoming "wild, barbarous, and disorderly peoples." In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull entitled *Inter Caetera*. This bull mandated the education of both native peoples and colonists, so that all would be brought "to good morals." On this basis, the seventeenth-century Jesuits wanted Latin and Greek to be taught in their schools in New France – this would promote the cause of civilization. This provoked a debate. Richelieu argued that this kind of education was unnecessary for the inhabitants

of New France. The Jesuits, however, argued that unless someone leads an orderly life, receives written laws, and knows how to communicate in a civilized language, he will remain barbarous. In their view, *Inter Caetera* had been clear enough on this point.

Around the same time, the idea developed among the French that the Hurons could only participate in the fur trade if they became "Christians." To be a trader one had to be a Christian, i.e. a baptized Roman Catholic. The Hurons were amenable to this, but in return asked for soldiers to provide protection from the Iroquois. Consequently, both soldiers and Jesuits began living in native villages. The Jesuits taught the Hurons to pray and worship in the Roman manner. Paul Le Jeune also helped the Hurons to become skilled labourers. They became particularly adept at making copper kettles. The Hurons became involved in all kinds of trade and were developing up to French standards.

After 1645, we find Jérôme Lalemant as the superior of the Jesuit order in New France. He was a remarkable missionary strategist. His thinking developed along the same lines as his predecessors. He promoted a greater degree of discipline among the clergy. He argued that the Jesuits should build their own villages next to the aboriginal villages. This led to the establishment of settlements such as Sainte-Marie among the Hurons (near present-day Midland, ON) and Fort Ville-Marie (in present-day Montreal). In such places, the Jesuits erected stone houses and wooden church buildings; they also planted large vegetable gardens and established cemeteries. Lalemant also encouraged intermarriage between the French and First Nations as a means of bringing people into the church. He employed Hurons as church workers and that also advanced his missionary agenda. Roman Catholicism was culturally becoming deeply entrenched in the new world. Prospects were growing dimmer for the establishment of the biblical gospel.

There were further developments around 1659 with the arrival of the first bishop for New France, François



Portrait of
Françoise-Marie Jacquelin



*Cardinal
de Richelieu*

de Laval. Laval was not a friend of the Jesuit agenda. For their part, the Jesuits did not trust him. However, in due time, through some adept political maneuvering he gained the authority he wanted in Quebec. He took a powerful role in the governance of the region and, as a result, any remaining Huguenot influence disappeared, whether in trade or in politics. Under Laval, the colonial Quebec identity became even more intertwined with Roman Catholicism.

Back in Acadia, the Huguenots still had some room for trade and their tobacco plantations. The governor of Acadia at this time was Charles de Saint-Étienne de la Tour, the son of a prominent Huguenot. La Tour resisted the Roman Catholic clergy wherever he could. He made it difficult for Jesuits and Capuchins to hold their masses and have people baptized. La Tour was married three times. His second wife was a remarkable Huguenot lady named Françoise-Marie Jacquelin – she aggressively supported her husband's efforts. She had no patience for the "prudent Huguenots." She became involved with the battle to control Acadia. La Tour was in a power struggle with Charles de Menou d'Aulnay. Jacquelin went back to France to muster Huguenot help, but many feared to join her. D'Aulnay attacked Fort La Tour (near present-day Saint John, NB) while La Tour was away on business in 1645. Jacquelin took command of the Fort while it was under siege. Unfortunately, after four days the Fort was breached and all of its inhabitants captured. All were executed in front of Jacquelin and she herself died three weeks later. The Huguenot cause in Acadia suffered a loss with this defeat. After d'Aulnay's death in 1650, La Tour was able to again become the governor of Acadia until 1654. However, the Huguenot presence never recovered.

Conclusion

During the seventeenth century, Huguenot merchants may have had the money to build and develop Reformed churches in Canada. Yet they never did. It is true that they took their religion with them over the Atlantic. However, it had no lasting effect whatsoever in the St. Lawrence Valley or in Acadia.

This can be partly explained because of French royal policy and the notion that the Roman Catholics were the only representatives of Jesus Christ among the nations. The Roman Catholic Church fostered an ecclesiastical colonialism. Backed with military power, it introduced an aggressive (but nominal) form of politicized Christianity in Canada that lasted centuries. As a result, Québécois identity would long be intrinsically tied up with Roman Catholicism.

The other part of the explanation rests with the Huguenots themselves and the politics of accommodation that prevailed among them. They failed to establish Reformed Christianity in Canada due to their willingness to compromise on certain key points. Because of French royal policy, they were content to enjoy informal worship services with simple Bible teaching and the singing of Psalms – the chanteries. They even went so far as to utilize the sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, just as French policy required. Moreover, while they believed they were holding to the true Christian religion, they did not aggressively promote their beliefs either by missionary efforts or with the sword. Instead, they took a merely defensive stance and even that was comparatively weak. Given all of that, it is not surprising that the Reformed faith failed to prosper in Canada during this era.

C



Sainte Marie Among the Hurons

Meet the Pastor Who Never Retires

A thankful farewell for Rev. J. Visscher

Those who entered the Langley church building on the afternoon of Sunday, May 6, 2012, immediately felt the atmosphere of celebration. Apart from the Langley congregation, many guests were ushered to their seats. The extended Visscher family was quickly detected among the visitors. But many members of Rev. Visscher's previous congregations as well as several former members of his current flock were also readily recognized. Interestingly, these guests had aged at the same rate as the retiring Langley pastor. With Frank Ezinga at the console the organ sounded forth festively with Bach's musical interpretation of trust and faith to a melody that found its way into our *Book of Praise*, "If you but let the Father guide you, relying on his faithfulness." Norman Vanderhorst, the elder who made the pre-service announcements, left no doubt concerning the reason for the special atmosphere. After serving six year in Coaldale, nine in Cloverdale, and twenty-five in Langley (for a grand total of forty), the day had arrived that Rev. Visscher would preach his last sermon as active minister of the Langley congregation.

Farewell service

With his gift for style and ceremony Rev. Visscher led the congregation through the steps of the liturgy to the text of his farewell message, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13: 8). Instantly these words made clear that the theme of the sermon as printed in the liturgy sheet, "Meet the pastor who never retires," was not chosen to focus on the retiring pastor, but rather away from him. Our attention was drawn to the Shepherd "who does not change and will never leave or retire."

When the author of the Hebrews exhorted his readers to follow their earthly leaders, his thoughts suddenly transcended to the most glorious Leader to whom his entire letter was dedicated. This glorious Leader is the Son of God (Hebrews 1), whom we shall see



"Brother to Brother": Dr. Gerhard Visscher
reminisces about his older brother

in the radiance of God's glory and who will come with healing in his wings. In truth, Jesus is the perfect Pastor, that is, the perfect Shepherd. Throughout his ministry Rev. Visscher has striven to be like "his boss," only to be plagued with many imperfections. But time and again he found his comfort "with the Pastor above, who supplies what we all need in complete and perfect fashion."

Moreover, the perfect Pastor is the great Prophet, through whom God spoke to his people (Hebrews 1: 1 and 2). It was Rev. Visscher's privilege to be a lesser prophet who has done what he could to connect his congregation to the greater Prophet, so that we all could become prophets. Jesus Christ is also the greatest King, who reigns with righteousness as his scepter, and under whose banner we "march as kings and queens." Furthermore he is the great high Priest, whose work is the theme of the book of Hebrews. Without the holiness that he bestows on us we would not be able to approach the throne of grace.

The care of our perfect Leader is constant. Rev. Visscher encouraged us not to despair, but to put our trust in our unchanging Shepherd. The parting pastor concluded his active ministry by directing his flock to their eternal Pastor by choosing as text for the



*Four of Rev. Visscher's granddaughters sing Psalm 116.
"Come join with me, and bless him all your days!"*

benediction the words of Hebrews 13: 20 and 21. "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever."

Celebration and praise

Only a few hours after the farewell service the ushers found themselves busy again finding seats for everyone, as congregation and guests gathered for an evening of "Celebration and Praise" in honour of Rev. Visscher. In his discreet and efficient manner Harry Moes, the MC for the evening, guided us through the large variety of presentations. His opening words captured the spirit of the evening. Our joyful commemoration is rooted in the Lord's faithfulness to his people.

The first speaker took us chronologically through Rev. Visscher's life. Al Hendricks, representing the Langley congregation, picked up the thread of Rev. Visscher's life in 1969, when the studious James enrolled himself in what was to become the first graduating class of the Theological College in Hamilton (which is now known as the Theological Seminary). After graduating he took on his pastoral office with the tenacity of a workhorse, which nicely explains why he permanently settled in the horse-capital of the Fraser Valley. The doctorate degree, bestowed on him in 1987, led to the publication of his Catechism workbooks "I Belong," which are used to this day and have been translated in several languages.

The representative of the Coaldale congregation, Andy Leffers, described the positive work ethics of the teachable young minister. It was significant that Rev. Lodder, Cloverdale's current minister, spoke on behalf of Classis Pacific West. It implied that the reach of Rev.

Visscher's labour had extended far beyond his local congregation. And truly it did. He contributed to several periodicals, presided over synods, and organized the mission work among Chinese people.

Right after Rev. Lodder's presentation, as if to prove the point, we were joined via a live-video connection with Rev. Dong, the Chinese missionary supported by the Langley and Cloverdale congregations. After mentioning that he always saw eye to eye with Rev. Visscher, as they are of the same (short) height, Rev. Dong described how he had come to rely on the Langley pastor in matters that ranged from organizing mission work to a leaky roof. Following Rev. Dong's appearance on the screen the floor was given to a representative of the local Chinese congregation, who described Rev. Visscher's work among the Chinese people as a preview of heaven, where all cultures and nations are joined together.

These official speeches were followed by a wide variety of contributions from members of the Langley congregation. Along the way Rev. Visscher received a variety of (second-hand) ties to be worn at specific occasions, while his wife was presented with a traditional apron equipped with gardening and kitchen tools. The young people reassured their retiring pastor that they will neither forget his willingness to be peppered with questions, nor his stories about China. Four of Rev. Visscher's granddaughters gave voice to the gratitude of the congregation and the passion of their grandfather by singing a few stanzas of Psalm 116: "Come join with me, and bless him all your days!" Dr. Gerhard Visscher, a blood brother, expressed appreciation for "James' words of wisdom." A group of women serenaded Willie, the pastor's wife, with a song about her many qualities. A pictorial presentation sketched the pastor's story from young lad in Toronto to pilgrim atop a mountain in Israel. Solos were sung and instrumental music was played. As token of appreciation the ministerial couple was presented with a Rhine River cruise that will take them to the place where the Heidelberg Catechism originated.

After the flow of presentations had come to an end, Pastor Visscher addressed the people with his wife at his side. As he put his arm around her he explained that she had been his trusted and dependable advisor. Reflecting on his years in the ministry the retiring pastor found no reason to boast. Surely, all praise must be directed to our faithful God.

Pastor Ryan DeJonge, who now bears the ministerial load of the Langley congregation by himself, spoke the final word. His description of Pastor Visscher's heart was striking. With "pastoral palpitations" it beats affectionately for the sheep that the Great Shepherd has placed under his care. Pastor Visscher may retire, but he will continue to care deeply for the people in God's pasture.



Something Lost

"As the hart, about to falter, in its trembling agony, longs for flowing streams of water, so, O God, I long for Thee. . . ." A whole generation of us have learned these beautiful words, and keep them close to our hearts. The poetic imagery of Psalm 42 is something that touches us and inspires us as we sing praise to our Heavenly Father.

If these words of Psalm 42 are etched in your memory, you should thank God that they are, for that is the only place where they will live on. These words, as we find them in the 1984 edition of the *Book of Praise*, have been rejected as archaic, outdated, and a stumbling block to the youth of the church.

The Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* has for many years been pleading with synod after synod for the opportunity to update the language of the psalms, even though few, if any, of the churches were requesting such an update. Finally, Synod Smithers 2007 gave the SCBP the go-ahead for a revision. However, the committee was directed by Synod to keep in mind that "it is important to make a distinction between archaic language on the one hand and poetic or biblical language on the other. Therefore the committee should be careful in changing language that is perceived to be archaic" (Art. 148, 3.3). The many churches that were concerned about or opposed to an update were assured that, "as the SCBP explains in consideration 15.2.10, this undertaking will not be such a major undertaking as was assumed by Synod Chatham 2004."

Not a "major undertaking"? Granted, many of the less popular psalms remain unchanged for the most part, but I challenge anyone to examine Psalms 8, 19, 42, 47, 97, 116, 121, 122, 127, 133, and 139 (to name a few), and come to the conclusion that the revisions made to these psalms are "minor."

Many churches have, over the years, voiced their concerns about changing the wording of the psalms that are so well-loved by so many. Synod Fergus 1998 and Synod Chatham 2004 both acknowledged that something would indeed be lost if major revisions were made. Synod Burlington 2010, however, rejected the appeal of several churches opposed to "unnecessary" changes, responding that "the concern expressed about memorized Psalms would preclude virtually any changes from being made."

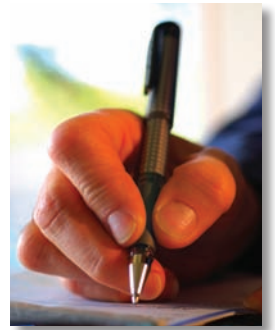
Something is being lost if we adopt the revised *Book of Praise*. That has to be obvious to everyone. What I don't understand is why this loss is being trivialized. Such a major revision of our psalms

will unnecessarily create a generation gap. Those of us who have grown up with the psalms will not be able to sing them with our young children. Sure, when we are sitting in church during the worship services, we can all read the words together out of a book. But is that the only time you sing psalms?

Just to give an example, I drive my elementary-age children to the school bus stop on school day mornings. The ten-minute drive was always the perfect opportunity to practice learning their psalms. If they knew a few of the words, I could usually fill in the blanks and we would sing the psalms together. By the end of each week, they knew their psalms. And we never opened a book. Since the school started using the proposed revised version of the *Book of Praise*, our trips are quiet. Which scenario is more pleasing to God? Singing during the worship services is not the only time we praise God in song. Making drastic changes to the psalms will prevent us from spontaneously singing them with our children.

And is the "archaic language" of our psalms *really* a stumbling block that is preventing our young people from developing a love for the psalms? My five-year-old in kindergarten understands what "thee" and "thou" mean. Just last year a group released a version of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" accompanied by some modernized music, "archaic" language and all. It was, of course, a hit, getting lots of air time on the Christian pop music radio stations. I believe that the best way to instill a love for the psalms in our children is to share our own love for them.

The argument has been made that the revisions are closer to the original text of the NIV. This past winter the Committee for Bible Translation reported that they could not recommend the 2011 edition of the NIV for use in the churches. Considering that the 1984 edition of the NIV is no longer in print, our churches will most likely adopt either the English Standard or the New King James Version. When I compare the text of the revised psalms and the 1984 *Book of Praise* version with the ESV, I do not see a remarkable improvement. When questions were raised a few years ago about some of the proposed hymns concerning faithfulness to the text of Scripture, we were reminded that there must always be room for "poetic liberty" when it comes to rhyming God's Word for song. Does this not apply to the psalms we find in our *Book of Praise*?



I've never been opposed to making minor revisions to update the language of the psalms. Minor changes are easy enough to accommodate, and it doesn't matter if we get a word or two wrong here or there. Changes have been made before – I sometimes still catch myself singing “and rears her brood beside Thy altar” when we sing Psalm 84:2. I am, however, opposed to revising the text of the psalms to the point that they are almost unrecognizable. I do not believe that the SCBP paid enough heed to the instructions of Synod 2007 to “make a distinction between archaic language on the one hand and poetic or biblical language on the other.”

For me, Psalm 19 will always declare: “The spacious heavens laud / the glory of our God / with full majestic praise. The soaring firmament / unmeasured in extent / His handiwork displays.” Archaic? Outdated? I don't believe so. Our gracious, mighty God has been praised with these words for a generation. It will be a great loss to me if my children can't join me in praising him with these precious words.

*Respectfully submitted,
Carl Werkman*

Response

Something Gained

Thank you for the opportunity to briefly respond to Br. Werkman's letter. By the time the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) received the letter, our chairman Rev. George van Popta had left for a visit to his daughter and family in Mexico, so the honour was given to me. I may have a disadvantage here because I have joined the SCBP only a few years ago. But perhaps there is an advantage in that Br. Werkman might think of me as having less blood on my hands. . . .

Let me begin by saying that I sympathize with Br. Werkman and others who have similar feelings about the changes to the psalms, even though I am also convinced that many church members appreciate and enjoy the revised Psalter. But I agree: Something is lost. This happens every time a church federation decides to update and modernize its Psalter. Inevitably, some well-loved lines are going to be left out. When the Anglo-Genevan Psalter was introduced in the 1970s and 1980s, the older generation had to give up the Psalms they loved.

On the other hand, something significant is gained with the 2010 Psalter. No longer do our children have to memorize phrases such as “my soul was

stayed” (Ps 138:2), “they shall sing in joyful lays” (Ps 138:3), “Thou, in the hour of dread, dost lift my weary head and biddest them defiance” (Ps 3:2), “The moon by night, the sun by day, shall not afflict or smite you” (Ps 121:3). Generally speaking, what we have received in the revised Psalter is much better. Just compare the last example with what we have in the new Psalter: “The moon by night, the sun by day, will never harm or hurt you” (Ps 121:3).

Why have the Canadian Reformed Churches updated their Psalter? Is it because the SCBP had been “pleading with synod after synod” and because Synod 2007 “finally” gave in to pressure of the committee (as Br. Werkman suggests)? The committee has certainly played an important role in the process but it would be more correct to say that over the years there has been a growing recognition in the churches that the wording of the Psalter needed to be updated. In fact, this had become inevitable once the churches had decided to adopt the NIV Bible translation and to modernize the wording of the prose sections in the *Book of Praise* (confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers).

There is an important underlying principle here. Any church federation needs to make a choice regarding the kind of language that is used in worship. Do we want to be archaic or contemporary? The Canadian Reformed Churches stem from a tradition (represented by K. Schilder and others) that seeks to sing the psalms using language that is both dignified, contemporary, and faithful to the biblical text. Judging by feedback received from the churches, there is widespread recognition that the revised Psalter is a considerable improvement.

Br. Werkman's main lament appears to be that more has been changed than was expected. The churches had been told that the revision would not be “a major undertaking” but if you look at the end result, it has become a major revision indeed. Again, I can sympathize with Br. Werkman on this point. While nobody knew exactly what to expect, the final result probably amounts to more changes than anticipated. But allow me to mention two aspects that need to be taken into account: First, at the start of the process the SCBP told Synod that the changes would be roughly 1/3, 1/3, 1/3: One third of the psalms needed to be totally redone, one third needed to be updated, and one third could be left untouched. I have not done the math but it is my impression that the end result is not far from that estimation.

There is another aspect involved: Once you start renovating something, you will usually have

to change more than you had anticipated. Compare it to renovating a beautiful home from the Victorian era. Perhaps you want to renovate the kitchen and the washrooms *only*. But as you start replacing stuff in the kitchen you discover that you need to redo one of the walls, and as you start replacing the bathroom sink you discover that you need to replace the pipes as well. . . . Similarly, the committee sometimes discovered that replacing a single word did not work: The whole sentence (or even the whole stanza) needed to be changed. There were some surprises as well: Sometimes it was discovered that the old version was not as faithful a rendering of the biblical text as we had assumed. The psalm's content could actually be improved upon (compare, for example, the old and new versions of Psalms 3 and 47 with the biblical text).

In closing, two smaller issues. First, people are wondering whether the revised Psalter will have to be revised again if the churches were to reject "the new NIV" and adopt another Bible translation. This won't be necessary. The revised Psalter is based on a variety of translations, and ultimately on the original Hebrew. This means that the revised Psalter will remain up to date as long as the churches use recent Bible translations.

Finally, a comment about the generation gap. I'm sorry to hear that the psalms are not being sung in Br. Werkman's car anymore. There is a solution, of course, although this needs some effort on the part of our brother: If he would be willing to memorize the psalms that his children are learning for school, they could still sing together on the way to the bus stop. And I expect that over time Br. Werkman will find himself warming up to the revised versions of the Psalms, even if he stills loves the old ones better.

*Dr. Arjan de Visser
Hamilton*

Letter to the Editor

In her response to Dr. Tony Jelsma (*Clarion*, April 13, 2012) regarding human origins, Dr. Helder pictures science in ways that need correction. Regarding separate creation or common descent of humans and chimps she writes that "it is *impossible to prove either position by appeal to observational data.*" In support she points out that conclusions drawn from data depend on one's background beliefs. This is the truth, but not the whole truth. If background beliefs had the disproportionate role in science that Dr. Helder gives to them, one loses the possibility of finding the truth about God's world.

Christians believe that God created this cosmos. Therefore, it exists irrespective of what we believe about it. Background beliefs that do not match this reality eventually go by the wayside. Yet science is impossible without them. Background beliefs and theories are like search lights. They put the spotlight on a place and direct attention to it. Thereby they exclude other places from receiving attention. But that is not a problem because other scientists use different spotlights. Together they add the pieces to the puzzle until it is complete.

The discovery that "junk DNA" may not all be junk after all illustrates this point. Dr. Helder is quite right in asserting that the theory of biological evolution informed the characterization of large amounts of DNA as left over from an evolutionary past. What she left out is that the same secular scientists have reduced their estimates of the extent of junk DNA and accepted that some of it has a controlling function. Here we see objective reality stubbornly weeding out incorrect ideas and affirming correct ones even among secular scientists.

Dr. Helder recounts the discovery that humans do not have many more genes than worms. This discovery also shows that objective reality trumps background beliefs. Secular scientists concluded that if the difference between humans and animals does not lie in the number of genes, then it must be in the way they are operating. Clearly secular scientists are interested in truth and particularly in understanding the fundamental differences between humans and animals.

The disproportionate role Dr. Helder gives to background beliefs is easy to spot in the remainder of her response to Dr. Jelsma. At issue is the idea that characteristics shared among animals are inherited from a common ancestor. She attributes this explanation exclusively to background beliefs. This is a half-truth. The conclusion that a group of animals have a common ancestor is an interpretation based on similarities among the animals in anatomy, physiology, and genetics. Dr. Helder believes these similarities can be explained by common design (God placed them there). So do I. But God could also use natural processes (procreation) to create those similarities. How else would she explain that children share characteristics with their parents?

A special instance of similarity is a damaged gene shared by humans and chimps. Its intact version occurs in other organisms and is required to make vitamin C. How do we know that this gene is damaged rather than created inactive as Dr. Helder

suggests? Humans and chimps need vitamin C and cannot make it because the required gene is inactive. This inactivity is abnormal because we would all die if we didn't make up for the deficiency by eating fruit. That is how we know the gene is damaged. This is confirmed at the molecular level where damage is found in seven places. But Dr. Helder would have us believe that the damage is a delusion produced by a background belief in biological evolution. Instead, she believes that God created the damage in the same seven places in humans and chimps and call this the wise choice of the Creator. Why would God create us with a gene we need, but leave it inactive?

In conclusion, scientists do not claim to prove anything as Dr. Helder suggests they do. By and large they know their limitations. The most important limitation placed on their beliefs comes from the things God has made whether they acknowledge him as Creator or not. Sometimes scientists have to be dragged by their hair to accept this stubborn reality. But accept they must. I did after forty years of resisting evolutionary biology and being left with empty hands by scientific creationists who were willing to commit scientific fraud to save their beliefs. Scientific creationists have their counterparts among secular scientists who abuse science in support of their atheistic agenda. But they are easy to spot and labelled as fundamentalists by their secular colleagues. After all is said and done, facts turn beliefs into knowledge. To portray biologists as twisting the facts to fit their evolutionary belief is a caricature. There is a price to pay by Christians who portray science as nothing but background beliefs so that they can dismiss the science they are uncomfortable with. That price is to ignore the work of God in creation.

Jitse van der Meer

Response

As a major component of his letter referring to human origins, Dr. Jitse van der Meer refers to the "shared mistakes" argument suggesting animal ancestors for man. But terms such as "shared mistakes" are based on interpretation and not evidence provided by data. Similarly his use of "molecular damage" is based on his interpretation of data and not on the data itself.

His argument deals with the vitamin C pseudogene. How do we know that there are "mistakes" in the human vitamin C "pseudogene"? We must have a standard of reference with which to compare the human version of the gene. While humans, chimps, macaques, and orangutans as well as guinea pigs cannot synthesize vitamin C, but must

acquire it from their diets, many other creatures are able to synthesize this vitamin. Rats, for example, can synthesize their own vitamin C, so the relevant enzyme in this creature is adopted as an example of the ancestral intact version.

The working assumption then is that an ancestral creature started out with an intact gene/enzyme like the one in rats. Then through lines of descent, this capability was lost in some creatures. Those that have identical "mistakes" (differences with the rat), would be expected to have descended from the same common ancestor which originally developed that mistake. One would not expect identical mistakes to occur independently very often. However if humans and other organisms did not start with the intact enzyme, there would be no basis for identifying "mistakes."

There are several problems with the "shared mistakes" argument for common descent of man from animal ancestors. For a start, the identification of the vitamin C pseudogene in humans and higher primates is based on only one third of the rat gene: only five exons (expressed pieces of information) out of twelve from the complete gene have been identified. Thus this DNA sequence in humans and other primates might have nothing to do with vitamin C but might have an entirely different function than in the rat gene. This is perfectly reasonable because of "alternative splicing" of various pieces of code that cells use to form a variety of proteins from a compact piece of information.

Another interesting thing is that guinea pigs show a lot of the very same details in this piece of DNA as do humans and higher primates. But guinea pigs are considered to be not at all closely related to humans and higher primates. Over one third of the supposedly random mutations that are common to higher primates and humans, but different from rats, are also found in guinea pigs. If these identical mutations are not attributable to common descent, as is the case with humans and guinea pigs, then that argument for shared descent does not work either for the similarities between humans and the higher primates. We might rather conclude that these features can be interpreted as indicating shared engineering and/or artistic similarities. In other words, it is possible to derive an argument for common design, not descent, from the situation.

Dr. van der Meer also refers to the role of background beliefs in science. What might these be? Firstly we encounter the standard secular assumption that only matter and process are suitable for interpreting nature, including origins. Most scientists, for example, insist that we must never attribute any phenomenon to supernatural agency (God). However

the work of God is everywhere evident such as in the information content of DNA (requiring the work of a mind) and the amazing complexity of the living cell. Secular scientists deny this fact and have been searching in vain since the 1960s for a process that could have brought about these phenomena without supernatural input.

Nobody is accusing biologists of “twisting the facts to fit their evolutionary beliefs” as Dr. van der Meer suggests creationists imply. Rather what we find are competing expectations of what is true, and the interpretations of the data that flow from these views.

We can all agree however that God’s creation most assuredly testifies to his work and character. As we read in Romans 1:20, “His invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and deity, have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things he has made” (NEB). There is absolutely no reason to go along with the secular world’s claim that scientific theories must explain events and phenomena only by reference to natural laws. With this restriction on scientific interpretations, the separate creation of mankind will never be acknowledged by science. How could Christians possibly support such an approach?

Yet there are many who declare, along with their secular counterparts, that we must go along with the interpretive framework that involves natural explanations only. The theological consequences of such a position are far reaching, as Dr. van Dam pointed out in his original editorial.

Margaret Helder

Dear Sir,

I have been following the evolution versus creation debate within our churches in the past couple of years with considerable interest, and also concern.

It seems to me that it comes down to the question of where we wish to place our trust; in our sin-filled eyes and what we think we see in this creation, or in the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God.

Then, my thoughts are led to the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:20, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

I am very thankful for the faithfulness our church leaders have shown in this issue.

H.A. Stel, Barrhead, AB

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

