

Alan Keith-Lucas Lecture—Friday, November 7, 2014 (1.0 CEU)

## Dr. James R. Vanderwoerd

### *"All Things New: Neo-Calvinist Groundings for Social Work"*

**Abstract:** *"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain... See, I am making all things new."* This vision from Revelation 21 – perhaps the most comforting words a Christian in social work will ever hear – provides a beacon of hope in the face of despair. This lecture will ground this hopeful vision in Reformed Christianity, specifically within the neo-Calvinist tradition, and highlight contributions of this tradition to social work and social welfare.

#### **Outline:**

- I. Introduction and Overview (**2 minutes**)
- II. Neo-Calvinists on the Christian Family Tree (**8 minutes**)
  - a. The Christian Family Tree: Christian Traditions
  - b. Neo-Calvinism Joins the Family in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
  - c. Neo-Calvinism Grows Up: The Emerging Influence of Neo-Calvinism in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- III. Distinctive Elements of Neo-Calvinism (**10 minutes**)
  - a. The Sovereignty of the Triune God: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"
  - b. Grace restores nature: creation, fall, redemption
  - c. "It's all good": structure and direction
  - d. Salvation isn't just for you and me
  - e. "The True Story of the Whole World:" reading scripture as drama
- IV. Neo-Calvinist Insights for Social Work & Social Welfare (**10 minutes**)
  - a. Humans created in the image of God
  - b. Nature of societies
    - i. Differentiation of social structures
    - ii. Pluralism
    - iii. The role of government
- V. Some examples of Neo-Calvinist Influence in Social Welfare (**5 minutes**)
  - a. Faith-based social services
  - b. Christian education
  - c. Christian labour unions
- VI. Challenges and Opportunities (**5 minutes**)
  - a. Some weaknesses:
    - i. Triumphalism, incivility, arrogance
    - ii. Heads over hearts or hands
  - b. Looking ahead

## VII. Questions and Discussion (10 minutes)

**Learning Objectives:** *As a result of this presentation participants will be able to:*

- Describe distinctive elements of the Reformed, neo-Calvinist tradition of Christianity
- Understand how a Reformed, neo-Calvinist worldview shapes social work and social welfare
- Consider how Reformed, neo-Calvinist insights might be used to refine and strengthen their own practice as Christians in social work

**Primary Audience:** Social workers and related professionals

**Content Level:** Basic/Intermediate

**Number of Continuing Education Contact Hours:** 1.0

### **Bio Information:**

**Dr. James R. Vanderwoerd** has worked as a practitioner and educator in human and social services for more than thirty years. He worked for five years as a child and youth counselor working with children in residential treatment in Catholic Social Services in Edmonton, Alberta, and as a teacher's assistant with behaviorally challenged youth in special schools in the Region of Waterloo Board of Education. After completing his Master of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University, he joined Better Beginnings, Better Futures ([www.bbbf.ca](http://www.bbbf.ca)) – an innovative prevention demonstration project funded by the province of Ontario – as a community site researcher with a team of researchers from five universities. From there he took a position as a research associate with the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University where he worked on multiple research projects in child welfare and family services.

In 1997 he felt God's call to teach in the social work program at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. During his time at Dordt he completed his PhD in Social Welfare at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Vanderwoerd served as the Director of the Social Work program at Dordt, where he successfully led the program through CSWE re-accreditation. Dr. Vanderwoerd joined the faculty at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ontario in 2006 and teaches in the areas of introductory sociology; social work practice; social work with communities; diversity and oppression; social welfare policy; social science research, and poverty. His research interests and publications are in the areas of domestic violence and sexual assault; religiously affiliated nonprofit organizations; the role of religion in social welfare; social work education; and the history of social welfare. Dr. Vanderwoerd has served as the harassment and discrimination officer at Redeemer, and has recently been appointed as the Director of Mentoring for new faculty.

Dr. Vanderwoerd lives in Brantford, Ontario with his wife Valerie. They have four children: Colin, Trevor, Graham and Hannah.