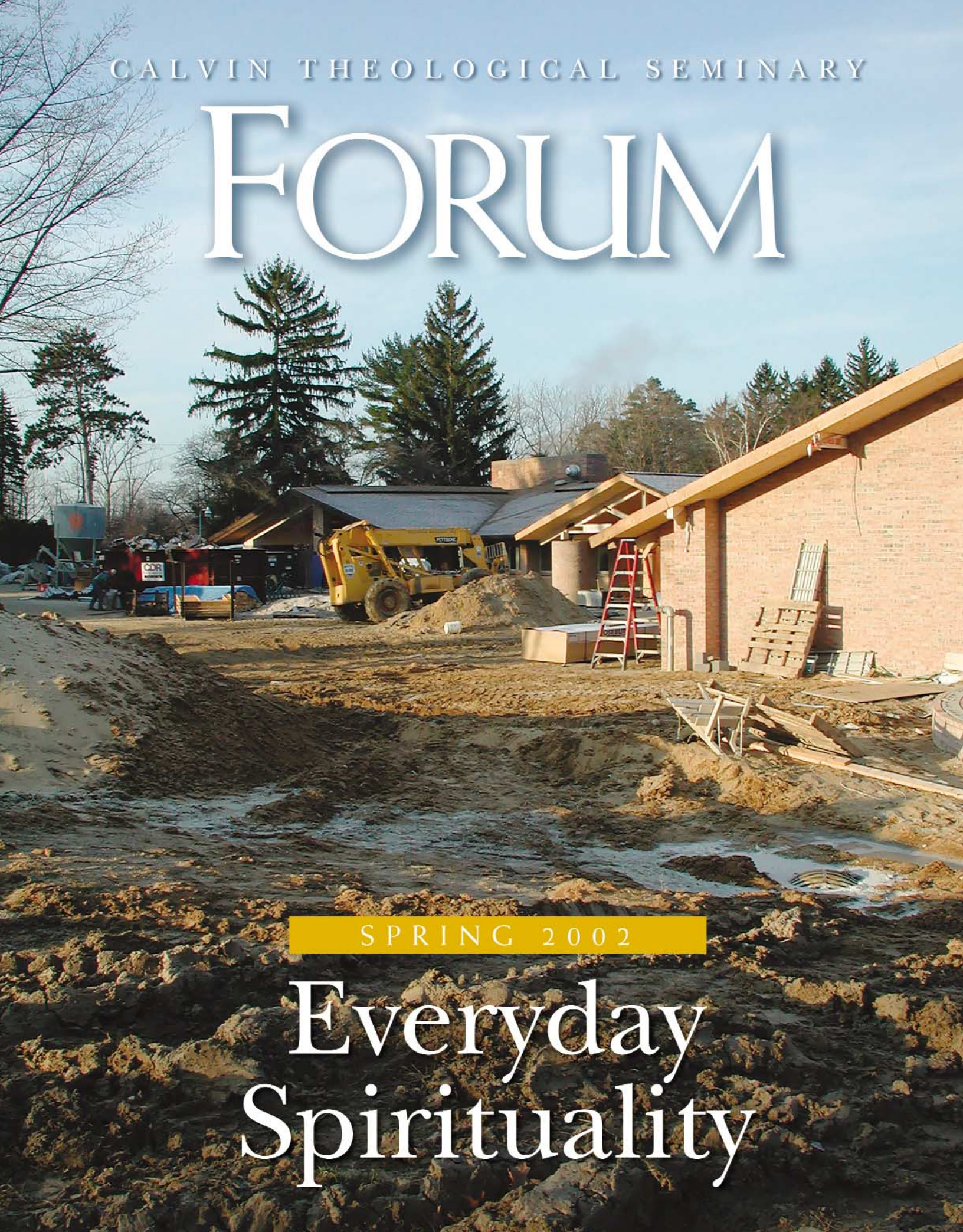


CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FORUM



SPRING 2002

Everyday
Spirituality

FORUM

Providing Theological Leadership
for the Church

Volume 9, Number 2
Spring 2002

REFLECTIONS ON REFORMED SPIRITUALITY

3

A Reformed Perspective on Life:
All of Life is the Lord's

by *John Cooper*

5

Hating What is Evil;
Clinging to What is Good:
The Center of Christian
Spirituality

by *Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.*

7

A Biblical Perspective
on Spirituality

by *Mariano Avila*

DEPARTMENTS

Preaching	9
Continuing Education	10
Pastoral Care	12
Alum News	13
News	14

Cover photo by Paul Stoub

Scripture texts are from the *New International Version*.

The *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* is published
in Winter, Spring and Fall editions.
Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton St. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49546.
Subscription Price: \$8.00; in Canada: \$10.00.
Editorial Committee: Lugene Schemper, Editor;
Mariano Avila, John Cooper, Duane Kelderman
Editorial Consultant: Kathy Smith
© 2002 Calvin Theological Seminary

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40063614
Canada address: Calvin Theological Seminary, 3475
Mainway, LCD STN 1, Burlington ON L7M 1A9

from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Dear Church Leader,

By the time you've finished reading this issue of *Forum*, the picture on the cover will make more sense. Spirituality is the subject of our reflections in this issue, and when Calvinists think about spirituality, they see all of life, and everyday life, as deeply spiritual. The vocations of carpenters, carpet layers, and chaplains alike are all deeply spiritual in character. And we should be no less spiritual in our Monday to Friday jobs than in our Sunday worship. Hence our cover shows a spirituality that is ordinary, everyday, and all-embracing.

Over time the cover has grown on me, and I've lately liked it for another reason. I would like to think that the mess shown in this picture is temporary! And certainly, by late summer we expect our building program to be completed and the grounds of the seminary to look much better. By late summer I will also be completing my first year at the seminary, and I would like to think that the second year will be much more orderly than the first.

But the fact is, all of you at the ground level of ministry know that ministry is always messy. Creative, dynamic ministry has loose ends. We never quite get everything tucked in. Things are always moving. As much as we dream of everything being "in its place," modern life is not so neat, and creative, dynamic institutions are always in flux. Experts on organizations even have words to describe this. "Chaos" and "creative disequilibrium" are the words organizational gurus use to describe the nature of organizational life in our fast changing world.

So whether we like it or not, our cover photo may be a more revealing picture of our ongoing ministry than it might appear at first glance. The good news, of course, is that in and through all of our messes, and sometimes in spite of them, Jesus Christ is building his church—here at the seminary and where you worship. And, somehow, in and through and in spite of our efforts, Jesus Christ is making all things new.

Blessings to you in your ministry. And don't worry too much about the mess.

Grace and peace,

Faithfully yours,

Neal

REFLECTIONS

ON REFORMED SPIRITUALITY

A Reformed Perspective on Spirituality: **All of Life is the Lord's**

Marx was wrong. Religion is not “withering away.” In fact there are more religions and spiritualities now than a hundred years ago. Major traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, continue to flourish. Cults like the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) have become mainstream. Novel spiritualities, such as Scientology and the New Age Movement, still proliferate. People have not stopped searching for something deeper than ordinary life.

Christians likewise quest for spiritual renewal. Catholics become charismatic. Evangelicals embrace Eastern Orthodoxy. Praise and worship songs displace Lutheran chorales and Wesleyan hymns. Mainline Protestants dabble in mysticism. Spiritual advisors are hired and spiritual journals kept. Prayer chains are forged and prayer warriors recruited. Christians too are spiritually seeking. Some of what we find is healthy; some is not.

Reformed Spirituality

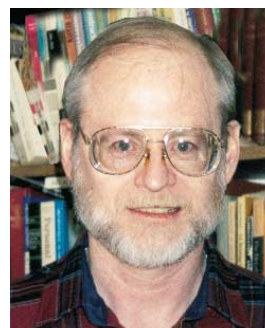
It is tempting to look elsewhere for novelty and excitement even when we have nourishing spiritual food at home. Recently rereading Abraham Kuyper's clas-

sic devotional book, *Near Unto God*, (ed. James Schaap, CRC Publications and Eerdmans, 1997) reminded me how rich and biblical the spirituality of the Reformed tradition is. Like Calvin, the Puritans, the “Second Reformation” Dutch, and Jonathan Edwards before him, Kuyper practiced a piety that is profoundly personal and experiential—almost mystical—yet doctrinally anchored and engaged with the world.

What is Reformed spirituality? Simply put, it is stewardship of God's gracious gift of a full and complete relationship with him, according to Scripture. Some of its key characteristics are these: Reformed spirituality is dependent on God, Trinitarian, personally intimate, “worldly,” comprehensive, and open. Let's briefly consider some implications of each point.

Dependent on God

All kinds of Christian spiritualities focus on God. But not all stress our dependence on God. Some concentrate instead on *our* efforts to get closer to God—our devotional practices, our praise



*by John Cooper
Professor of
Philosophical
Theology*

and worship, our meditation techniques, and our advances in nearness to God. Important as such discipline is, genuine spirituality is a gracious gift from the sovereign God, who generates it in us through his Word and Spirit. Our efforts at spiritual discipline are empowered by God and ought to express grateful stewardship of his gifts.

Trinitarian

Biblical piety is devoted to the Triune God. While the Creeds simplify the picture, relating creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit, Scripture teaches that the Triune God is present in all his works. The Son and Spirit are active in creation. The Father initiates redemption and sanctification. Thus a spirituality that fully appreciates the mighty acts of God is Trinitarian. This point may seem obvious, but it is overlooked in those forms of piety that concentrate disproportionately on the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit. Some Christians even dwell

All of Life is
the Lord's



on the earthly Jesus as he walked with his disciples instead of the ascended Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Personally Intimate

Although mature spirituality is more than a “personal relationship with Jesus,” Reformed Christians prize an intimate, loving relationship with the Triune God. Assurance that we are children of the heavenly Father through the Son by the Spirit is our greatest privilege, security, and joy. Reformed piety is not just thinking a lot about God and feeling earnest about living for him. We desire a warm, personal, “I-Thou” relationship with God no less than evangelicals and mystics. As Kuyper writes, “Only he who feels, perceives and knows that he stands in personal fellowship with the living God, and who continually tests his spiritual experience by the Word, is safe.” (*Near Unto God*, Preface).

“Worldly”

Reformed spirituality is “worldly.” This does not mean that it focuses on the world more than God or that it is soft on sin. It means that Reformed spirituality aims at living life with God as he created it to be. We humans were made from the earth, blessed to have children, and given dominion over the creation as God’s image-bearers in his “very good” earthly Kingdom. We were called to live in loving obedience to the King as his children and covenant partners. This is what it means to be human. Salvation and spirituality do not remove us from life, they restore it. When the Kingdom comes, we will still be worshipping God as humans with bodies, living on the new earth, and reigning with Christ.

Because it begins with creation, Reformed spirituality embraces the “ordinary” and tends to avoid the “extraordinary.” It relates to God from within the natural context of human life, not seeking transcendence to supernatural heights. Some traditions regard mystical meditation or unusual charismatic gifts as the highest

and most desirable kinds of spirituality. Following the pattern of Scripture, Reformed Christians commune with the Lord in more ordinary, mundane, and natural ways—through Scripture, the sacraments, prayer, and worship. If other, more esoteric or paranormal practices are legitimate, they are neither the core nor the culmination of healthy biblical spirituality.

Ordinary food for ordinary people whose ordinary lives follow ordinary routines can seem unappetizing to a culture that is quickly bored with familiar things, always looking for something new, addicted to excitement, and constantly craving the “rush” of a “peak experience.” Although we strive to give our best for God’s glory, Reformed spirituality is neither “showy” nor elitist. Ordinary, everyday life with God is full of inspiring surprises and exciting possibilities for creativity, growth, and excellence. So there is no reason why our piety should be monotonous, lethargic, mediocre, or tradition-bound. Our challenge is to discern the difference between what Scripture means by “Spirit-filled new life” and our culture’s preoccupation with novelty and excitement.

Comprehensive

Being “worldly” also means that Reformed spirituality involves all of life. Spirituality and piety are not limited to prayer, praise, Scripture, and meditation—so called “devotional” activities. We were created not only to dialogue with God, but also to marry and have children, to be stewards of the earth, and to engage in culture. We are to serve the Lord whether we eat or drink or whatever we do.

Spirituality must permeate and integrate life, but eating, carpentry, and voting are not automatically spiritual. What makes these everyday activities spiritual is *why* we do them and *how* we do them. *Why* we do them is because we love the Lord and wish to give him glory, and because we are grateful that he is renewing our lives. *How* we do them is according to God’s will as expressed in Scripture and in the good order of creation. Thus, eating is a spiritu-

al activity when we do it with conscious thanks to God and we have intentionally prepared our food so that it is healthy, enjoyable, and stewardly as God intends. Cooking and eating as well as table devotions should be spiritual disciplines.

Comprehensive spirituality includes all of life’s dynamics and circumstances, good and bad. We are fallen creatures, redeemed and being restored by God. We still suffer from the consequences of sin and evil, so we lament our troubles and feel Godly sorrow for our sins, as well as rejoicing in our salvation and celebrating God’s goodness. A lot of contemporary spirituality focuses almost exclusively on praise and “positive feelings.” Biblical piety certainly stresses the hope and joy of our salvation, but it also includes the penitence of the sinner, the lament of the sufferer, and the cry of the child unsure of the Father’s presence. Read the Psalms!

Open

The spiritual dynamics and practices of the Reformed tradition are deeply biblical, vital, inspiring, and nourishing. We should not abandon this way of living with the Lord because we no longer appreciate it or find problematic kinds of spirituality more attractive.

But we ought not to be close-minded traditionalists. Reformed Christians confess that we are part of the “holy catholic church” and that we continually need reforming. We should adopt devotional, liturgical, and life-disciplines of other Christian traditions that can enrich and fill some of the gaps in our own. There are also features of contemporary culture that can invigorate traditional Reformed spirituality. Our “worldly” disposition should incline us to adopt and reform the good things of culture for God’s glory and our edification.

As grateful stewards of God’s gracious power in us, we ought to cultivate an everyday spirituality that is biblical, self-conscious in its historic Reformed identity, and intentionally open to the richness of the broader Christian tradition and the best of contemporary culture.

Hating What is Evil; Clinging to What is Good

The Center of Christian Spirituality

In a book called *Days of Our Years*, Pierre Van Paassen tells the story of a hunchback named Ugolin who lived in the French village of Bourg in the years before World War II. Ugolin was a kind man and a devout Christian. He was also ugly. In fact, he was so ugly that he scared children and stopped traffic. So the villagers mocked him. They stared at his hunched little body and pointed out that Ugolin's hands twitched and hung to his knees. People followed Ugolin as he walked, and sometimes they jeered at him. "Whore's child!" they shouted. "Devil's spawn!"

Ugolin made what he could of life in Bourg. During the night hours he would loiter near the village station, hoping to earn a few coins by carrying a bag for a visitor. Sad to say, on his way home from the station he would sometimes stray onto a street where the local toughs had gathered to ogle girls and tell jokes. Then a couple of them would undertake to teach Ugolin a lesson. They would grab at him and curse him. And finally, to send him home with something to think about, they would give Ugolin a good drubbing on his crooked spine.

Pierre Van Paassen was one of the few to take pity on Ugolin. He invited Ugolin into his home one night, and made a meal for him, and asked about his life. As it turned out, Ugolin's family was dead except for one older sister named Solange, who had taken care of Ugolin as he grew up. When Solange was a teenager she had gone to work for a farmer in order to make something to support herself and her brother. This arrangement worked until one day when the farmer tried to take advantage of Solange. She resisted, so the farmer took his revenge by accusing her of theft and getting her jailed for two years.

It was while Solange was in jail that

By Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.
Professor of Systematic Theology



Ugolin's spine had become diseased. When she was released, she tried to get a job, but nobody would hire her. Wasn't she a thief, after all?

Ugolin's health deteriorated during this period and was restored only when Solange showed up one day not only with her usual words of kindness, but also with food and medicine. She also arranged for a

physician to see Ugolin and even got her brother some treatment in a hospital.

How had all this happened? Ugolin found out the truth only after he was discharged from the hospital. The truth was that his lovely sister had become a whore in order to pay for his care. Because she loved her brother, Solange had rented out her body to some of the same customers who had treated Ugolin so shamefully.

Pierre Van Paassen heard Ugolin's story, and in the weeks afterward he gave Ugolin a little work and looked after him. But he couldn't prevent the terrible event that shook the village to its roots. One night Ugolin was making his way home when he ran into a crowd that was in a jovial mood. Some of the men were drunk, and one of them tied Ugolin to a lantern post, and stripped him. Then a ring formed, and pretty soon everybody in the ring was dancing around Ugolin and singing, "The lovers of your sister pay a dollar apiece."

Finally the village priest appeared, cut Ugolin loose, and carried him away. Father de la Roudaire, the 80-year-old priest, hoisted Ugolin over his shoulders like a sack of potatoes, carried him home, and put him to bed. In the morning, while the priest was at Mass, Ugolin woke up, walked to the river, and drowned himself. That afternoon Solange shot herself in a room at the brothel.

Pierre Van Paassen reports in his book that Father de la Roudaire performed a Mass of requiem, treating the deaths as *murder*, not suicide. Never was such a crowd at church as on the day of the funeral. Half the shops were closed, and all the dignitaries were there, and most of the local rowdies. Up in front, one black cloth covered the two coffins of Solange and Ugolin, sister and brother.

Van Paassen tells what happened next. Father de la Roudaire mount-

"When the Lord of life and death shall ask me on the Day of Judgment, 'Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are your sheep?' I will not answer Him."

Hating
What is Evil



ed the pulpit and stood there for a moment in silence.

He slowly swept the congregation with his eyes, as if he wanted to peer into the soul of every man and woman who was there.

“Then he said: ‘CHRISTIANS!’ and the word was like a whiplash. ‘CHRISTIANS!’ When the Lord of life and death shall ask me on the Day of Judgment, ‘Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are your sheep?’ I will not answer Him. And when the Lord shall ask me for the second time: ‘Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are your sheep?’ I still will not answer him. “But when the Lord shall ask me the third time, ‘Pasteur de la Roudaire . . . where. . . are. . . your. . . sheep? then I shall hang my head, and I shall say: ‘O Lord, I never had any sheep. All I had was a pack of wolves!’”

As Van Paassen tells his story, you find yourself filling with alternating love and hatred. You love the courage people show; you love their kindness. You hate the mockery, the taunting, the sheer wickedness that tells us how much our world needs its Savior.

“Hate what is evil,” says St. Paul in Romans 12:9; “cling to what is good.” This is the natural rhythm of people who have died and risen with Christ—people who have been mortified and vivified by the Holy Spirit. Such people *naturally* hate what’s evil and cling to what’s good. Paul is teaching us, I believe, that when we are transformed by the renewal of our minds, then we will know something of the will of God, and we will hate what God hates and love what God loves.

●
Christians are spiritual in a special sense: they are animated by the Spirit of Christ because they have died and risen with Christ.
●

Hate what’s evil; cling to what’s good. Each implies the other. If you love the truth, you will hate lies. If you love faithfulness, you will hate treachery. If you love kindness, you will hate the cruelty that shames a person to death. If you love the compassion of Jesus Christ, who was mocked and maimed to save all the Ugolins of the world, then you will hate the sin that made all this terrible saving so necessary. You can’t do the one without doing the other.

Here, says Jonathan Edwards, is the center of true religion. Here is the center of Christian spirituality. Everybody is “a spiritual person” because the world is full of spirits that claim human allegiance. As Robert Roberts once put it, “the Holy

●
Christian spirituality consists largely of healthy loves and hatreds, and then of thinking, acting, and speaking in ways that follow suit.
●

Spirit isn’t the only spirit around” and so we need the gift of “discerning the spirits.” But Christians are spiritual in a special sense: they are animated by the Spirit of Christ because they have died and risen with Christ. They have been born again. You can tell by what they love and hate, and especially by the way their loves and hatreds generate a whole life of devotion and good works—what Edwards called “the central business of the Christian life.”

In a noble essay elsewhere in this issue, my colleague John Cooper tells us about the height and depth, the length and breadth, of Reformed spirituality. I want to say only that at its center will be a great sequence of *Yeses* and *Nos*. That’s what determines who we really are; that’s what generates the central business of human life—what we love and what we hate; what we cling to with all our heart and what we loathe and fear so much that we want to drop it like a snake.

Christian spirituality consists largely of healthy loves and hatreds, and then of thinking, acting, and speaking in ways that follow suit. Every prayer, all longing for God, every thoughtful reading of Scripture, each spiritual discipline—each and all express our loves and hatreds, and deepen them. Why preach Scripture instead of just reading it? Why sing our praise instead of just saying it? Because, as Edwards says, these activities stir our hearts. They help us cling to God, who is our first love whether we know it or not.

So let love be *non-hypocritical* (as the Greek says). Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Let life before God begin to thrive.

A Biblical Perspective on Spirituality

Spirituality is one of those terms widely used today by Christians and yet frequently misunderstood. Much of our understanding of the term comes from popular religious usage, which often is plagued by a dualism that draws a sharp contrast between body and soul, material and spiritual realities. In this view, the “spiritual” is generally valued as good, and all material, earthly things are considered evil. This belief reflects very well the beliefs and perspectives of some Oriental religions which are very influential in Western culture, but it has nothing to do with a biblical perspective of a life consecrated and pleasing to God. How then can we understand what a biblical spirituality is?

Our Lord Jesus quoted two key texts of the Old Testament to summarize God’s will for his people. These texts give us a biblical perspective on *true spirituality*: “Love the Lord your God with all your being” (the *shema*, Deuteronomy 6:5), and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18b). Both love of God and of our neighbor must be kept in balance in order to develop a healthy spirituality. When they are divorced, we end up with an inhuman pharisaic religiosity, or with a meaningless philanthropy.

How is a healthy *spirituality* expressed? Leviticus summarizes our love of God and our love of our neighbor with one word: *Holiness*. The first part of Leviticus 19 shows us that *holiness* is about both of these areas of human life. We may call this a *spirituality of holiness*.

Analysis of Leviticus 19:1-18

Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. (v.2)

The chapter opens with a general imperative to the entire assembly of Israel,

*By Mariano Avila
Professor of New Testament*



an imperative which is explained in the rest of the chapter, mainly within the framework of the Ten Commandments. Israel was called to live as a people consecrated to serve and please God in everything they did. The following verses make explicit the diverse areas of life and ways in which the people of God are called to live a life worthy of their calling.

Each of you must respect his mother and father... (v. 3a).

The first indication of what it means to

These texts give us a biblical perspective on true spirituality: "Love the Lord your God with all your being" and "love your neighbor as yourself."

be holy is respect for parents, the fifth commandment. But notice a significant change. While in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the verb used is “to honor,” here the verb is “fear” which frequently is used in the Old Testament to describe our relation to God. Thus, our text teaches us that the “fear” or “respect” that we give to our parents must be similar to that which we give to God. *This is true spirituality.*

And you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God. (vv.3b-4).

The fourth, first, and second commandments demand an exclusive worship and commitment to the LORD. *True spirituality expresses itself in worship to the only true God.*

When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf... (vv. 5-8).

The fellowship or peace offering was one of the few offerings in which the giver might eat a part, and the priest another. It was a voluntary act of worship in which thanksgiving and communal celebration were expressed.

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God. (vv. 9-10).

These verses have a strong social sense. A part of the fruit of our labor belongs to the poor and to aliens. Obedience to this instruction is a requirement that we may receive God’s blessing on our

A Biblical Perspective

labors (see Deuteronomy 24:19 and the book of Ruth). We express our spirituality not only in the worship of God but in acts of solidarity with the disenfranchised of the earth.

Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. (v. 11)

Respect for the property of others, coupled with truthful, honest, and open relationships with those to whom we relate on daily basis, are expressions of a healthy spirituality.

Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. (v. 12)

Swearing oaths falsely in legal situations would damage a person. Thus, it appears here in the context of commandments to protect the integrity and well-being of our neighbors. To sin against others is to *profane the name of God*.

Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight. (v. 13).

The eighth commandment applies to fraudulent labor practices: exploitation, robbery, and salary retention (see Deuteronomy 24:14; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5). These are still common practices today. *Just labor relations are another sign of a deep spirituality.*

Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD. (v. 14)

Another way of showing our “fear of God,” or true piety as Calvin called it, is to love, respect, and show solidarity with those who are limited in their capabilities. Rather than take advantage of other people’s limitations and have fun at their expense, we are called to abandon such

How is a healthy spirituality expressed? Leviticus summarizes our love of God and our love of our neighbor with one word: Holiness.

cruelty and put in its place a compassion that recognizes and honors the dignity and value of all human beings, regardless of the handicaps they suffer.

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. (v. 15).

This demand of an impartial judgment is directed especially to those who have the high responsibility of the administration of justice. Neither the poverty of a person, nor influence and power, should affect the practice of justice.

Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD. (v. 16)

Utter respect for the good name of others and an active promotion of a meaningful and rich life of those who are close to us are fruits of a *well-cultivated spirituality*. The destructive nature of the tongue is described by James (3:1-12). For James,

We express our spirituality not only in the worship of God but in acts of solidarity with the disenfranchised of the earth.

taming the tongue is a sign of genuine religion or true spirituality (1:26).

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. (vv. 17-18).

The internal and spiritual character of the Law is shown in these verses. God sees and values not only our actions but our thoughts, desires, and feelings. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we need to obey God’s will from the most intimate part of our being. An external conformity to the law will not do; God desires a higher justice.

Hatred and grudges against our sisters and brothers should be resolved by an open confrontation and a loving restoration of the relationship. This is the kind of communal spirituality that Jesus demands from us (Matthew 18).

The central commandment, and summary of the Law, “*love your neighbor as yourself*,” is repeated in v. 33b, with a meaningful nuance: the object of our love is the alien, the foreigner, the pagan. Thus, the scope of the word is expanded to include everybody in the definition of *neighbor*. In his exposition of this commandment, Jesus included even our *enemies* (Matthew 5:38-48). What a challenge for our spirituality after September 11th!

In the remainder of Leviticus 19, other areas of life are included as places in which God’s people are to exhibit holiness. In all these areas we are called to love God and our neighbor. In them we can offer concrete expressions of our holiness and of the spirituality that the Lord demands of his people. And if we want a concrete example of such spirituality we need to continue to read the Gospels and see how Jesus loved God and his neighbor.

What Makes a Sermon a Good Sermon?

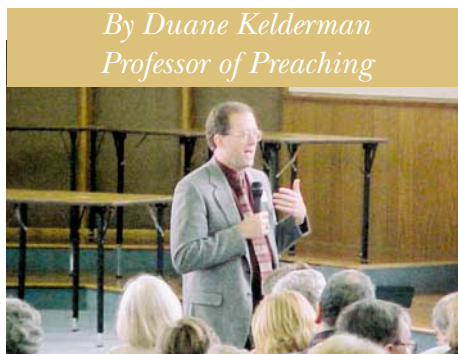
For the past couple of years I've been asking adult education classes I've been conducting on sermon-listening, What makes a sermon a good sermon? I explain that I'm not looking for "the right answer." Rather, I want to know how thoughtful listeners honestly evaluate the sermons they hear week in and week out. The answers I've been hearing are very helpful. They fall into roughly three clusters.

The first cluster of answers defines a good sermon in terms of **communicational excellence**: "A good sermon is a sermon I can follow. The main point of the sermon is clear. The sermon is well-organized. The preacher doesn't speak over my head. The preacher doesn't repeat the same point over and over. The preacher uses images, stories and ways of speaking that keep me listening and move me."

Indeed, today's listeners are constantly exposed to the internet, television, and movies that sizzle communicationally. Some preachers used to say, "My job is just to preach the Word. It's the people's job to listen." Few preachers talk that way today because preachers know they must prepare sermons that are not only biblically based but also carefully designed to win a hearing. Communicational excellence is an absolute requirement of effective preaching today.

A second way people define a good sermon is in terms of its **biblical faithfulness**: "A good sermon is rooted in the Bible. It teaches me something from a text of the Bible. A good sermon is not the opinion of the preacher, it's a Word from God that has authority because it's from the Word of God."

Preachers and churches run into trouble when they forget that preaching is first and foremost a proclamation of Scripture. Pity the preacher whose congregation is



*By Duane Kelderman
Professor of Preaching*

Rev. Kelderman leads a preaching workshop in New Jersey at the Midland Park CRC.

satisfied with just hearing a communicationally excellent speech. Congregations must also clearly expect their pastor's sermons to set forth the Scriptures. And pastors dare not speak, except to proclaim a Word far greater than their own words.

The third way people define a good sermon is in terms of its **transformational power**: "A good sermon changes me. It challenges me to a deeper obedience. It stretches me. A good sermon brings me closer to God. It deepens my faith. It makes us a better church. A good sermon makes me a better, more loving person. A good sermon makes me a better kingdom citizen."

Indeed, preaching that doesn't call for and lead to transformation is only a noisy gong and a clanging symbol. A good sermon is not the same as an enjoyable sermon. This transformative purpose of preaching reminds me of one of Fred Craddock's lines: "There are two kinds of

preaching that are difficult to hear: poor preaching and good preaching." Good sermons call us to the cross and invite us into a new life in Christ.

Spiritual transformation of course is not just the work of preachers and worshipers. It is the work of God. Preaching doesn't change people. God changes people through preaching. Preachers and worshipers must approach the sermon filled with awe, humility, and expectancy that the Holy Spirit will do a great work through this sermon. This involves intense prayer and spiritual preparation on the part of preacher and worshiper without which transformational power is sure to elude everyone.

I find these three criteria for evaluating sermons helpful. And the challenge today is to apply not just one or two but **all three** criteria as we preach or listen to sermons. Preachers can't get by with saying, "I think I'll shoot for two out of three of these marks of a good sermon." Two out of three does not a good sermon make. In the same way, only when worshipers understand that a good sermon involves all three of these marks are they in a position to evaluate whether the sermon they have heard is a good one. This is another way of saying that worshipers cannot simply sit back and dare their preacher to wow them with a great sermon. Worshipers must lean forward and be active participants in the proclamation of God's Word, urgently seeking out what word God has for them on this particular Sunday.

I have never heard of a church that didn't rank good preaching as the most desirable qualification of its pastor. Only as preachers and congregations do everything they can to make the preaching event meaningful and life changing will we be able to speak of "good sermons" in their church.

●
*Preaching doesn't change
people. God changes people
through preaching.*
●

New Jersey Conference Celebrates Worship

“How could anyone imagine a better spring break than sharing gifts and songs with each other?” asked Calvin College pre-seminary student Carrie Titcombe after being part of an exciting weekend of events in New Jersey in March. Cosponsored by Calvin Theological Seminary and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the weekend included a pastors’ lunch, a high school seminar, a Hispanic conference, an English workshop, and culminated in a combined Festival Service of Praise.

The Midland Park Christian Reformed Church was our host church for the weekend, and Pastor Peter Hoytema also helped us connect with other area churches and schools.

Small group discusses worship at Eastern Christian High School.



CRC pastors gather for seminary-sponsored luncheon in Glen Rock, N.J.



Worship Conference at Midland Park CRC

including a visit to Ground Zero.

Students enjoyed the trip, and especially appreciated the mixture of people from the college and the seminary. Seminarian Dan Brown reflected that the “chance to meet new people and to learn from and worship with each other was wonderful.” Calvin student

Worship Institute Director John Witvliet brought along a combined choir of Calvin seminarians and Calvin College students to sing in Sunday services and to form the core of an area-wide combined choir. They also attended the workshop and facilitated a seminar at the local Christian high school. An extra treat was a whirlwind tour of New York City,

Matt Ackerman said, “The value of the workshops was only topped by meeting so many memorable and fascinating people.” And for Seminarian Greg Llerena, “it was a blessing to meet the pastors and leaders in the Hispanic churches. I am passionate about making sure there is an increased connection and interaction between our denominational agencies and the Spanish-speaking churches.” That connection became reality during the weekend, as members of the group visited, preached,



Mariano Avila (l.) and Cindy Holtrop (above) lead workshops on worship and hospitality at Midland Park CRC.

and worshipped in four Spanish-speaking CRC's of northern New Jersey in Bayonne, Passaic, Prospect Park, and Jersey City.

The Saturday workshop, entitled "In Spirit and Truth: Celebrating Worship That Is Both Profound and Relevant" was attended by 200 people from various churches and denominations. Topics were woven together as strands of a worship tapestry by speakers from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, including Cindy Holtrop, Kathy Smith, and John Witvliet, and by Mariano Avila and Duane Kelderman of Calvin Theological Seminary. The weekend culminated in the Festival Worship Service



John Witvliet leads choir and congregation in song.

which was based on the Psalms and used music from the new hymnal, "Sing! A New Creation," recently published by the Worship Institute, CRC Publications and the Reformed Church Press.

One of the great benefits of the week-

end was connecting with an important part of the church in New Jersey. We were touched by the hospitality of our host families, and by their witness to the ongoing effects of September 11. People in their communities had stopped in their tracks on the sidewalks as they watched the Twin Towers fall. Overall, the weekend was a wonderful time of worshipping God and building relationships with his people in the churches of New Jersey. Pastor Hoytema remarked that it was "rewarding to see how God used us to be a blessing to each other."

New Continuing Education Initiatives At Calvin Theological Seminary

One of the strongest messages we heard in a recent survey of seminary alumni was the need for continuing education for pastors. Over the years the seminary has offered a variety of courses, conferences, and lectures. We're pleased to announce a major boost in our continuing education efforts with the appointment of Rev. Kathy Smith to the position of *Director of Continuing Education for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Calvin Theological Seminary*. Kathy is an employee of the Worship Institute, but her primary job is to coordinate grant-funded and other continuing education events that have a direct connection to the seminary. As John Witvliet, Worship Institute director envisions it, "We are eager to build bridges between congregations and the college and seminary, to connect practice and theological study and reflection. We believe that this position is strategic for accomplishing this goal and that Kathy is uniquely qualified for this work."

Kathy brings a wealth of ministry experience to this task. She has been Ministry

Coordinator and Minister of Congregational Life in two different churches over the past 10 years, and she also served on the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and in other denominational leadership positions. The daughter of Rev. Leonard Hofman, pastor and past General Secretary of the CRC, Kathy has been intimately involved with the church and ministry all of her life.

"We are doubly thankful about this appointment," says Duane Kelderman, Vice President for Administration at the seminary. "We're grateful to John Witvliet and the Worship Institute for so strategically using the seminary in this way. We're also grateful to have Kathy Smith here at the seminary. Kathy brings not only great life

experience and ministry experience, but also a keen mind and excellent theological resources as we think hard about how best to serve churches and pastors today."

Kathy is looking forward to her new task. "I'm excited about serving the church through this new position and strengthening the relationship between the seminary and the Worship Institute. Together we can provide many wonderful resources for pastors and church leaders. And with grant funding from the Lilly Endowment, we will be able to bring some of these resources to them, instead of requiring them to travel

to Grand Rapids. We recently sponsored a conference in New Jersey (see previous article) and we hope to hold conferences in various parts of the United States and Canada. We would love to hear from potential host churches."



Kathy Smith

How Do People Change?

Exactly how do people change? How do people become Christians? Decide to do the right? Have a change of heart? Forgive? Repair? Our answers to this question will determine how we respond to persons in need of pastoral care. How we think people change determines the nature and intensity of our reactions and responses to people, not only in ministry, but also in our marriages, families, and friendships. To the degree that ministry is about change, including changing the hearts of people toward Christ and *reforming* all of God's creation until it fits together at the feet of our Savior, it follows that our theories of change are central to our understanding of ministry. Knowing precisely what we think about change will help us become more effective Christian caregivers.

Let me suggest *three ways* that people change, each of which is illustrated in the Scriptures and reflects a way that God changes us!

First, *people change by the reinforcement or punishment of behavior.* We are always adapting to our environments and responding to the stimuli and pressures put upon us by outside forces. If we study hard, we are rewarded with good grades. If we obey the speed limit, we drive in freedom. And if we honor our elderly parents, we are blessed to "live long in the land which the Lord gives us." However, if we slack off in our studies, we are held accountable with a C-. If we speed along the highway, the State Police hand us a summons to court. Or, if we forsake the ways of the Lord, God's eternal punishment awaits us. Something is at stake, so we change.

According to this way of thinking, we change others by how we react to their behavior. We reinforce the things we hope for and punish the behavior we want to stop. We employ rewards and punish-

ments, and blessings and curses, all the way from full acceptance in our fellowship to excommunication. This way of change is always about law, but obedience to God's law gives liberty.

Second, *people change by the way they think about things.* Our beliefs guide our behavior. An essential part of our Christian faith is believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and responding with praise and gratitude. The "power of positive thinking" promoted by Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller, can "change our scars into stars" by the way we think about life's experiences. Conversely, thinking negatively is self-defeating and stops hope. Those, for example, who are caught in the cycle of poverty may believe that they can never get out, and, therefore, never do. Many people who lived in former communist-bloc countries for years learned to depend on the state for sustaining life. Some of them now do not *think* that they can do it on their own, and live in learned helplessness. People suffering from depression may believe the Lord does not care about them and abandon hope for themselves, despite all of our arguments to the contrary.

Transforming people by this theory of change means changing their thoughts. Sometimes, we are prisoners of our minds, but our theology, our thinking about God, comes to play directly as we seek to "set the prisoner free."

Third, *people change as the result of relationships, most importantly their relationship with Jesus Christ.* This theory of change is the one I teach as most transforma-

By Ronald Nydam
Professor of Pastoral Care



tive and central to Christian ministry. In it our relationships with others themselves serve as tools of change. Our empathy, our care for the pain and personal struggles of others, and our presence with others in the midst of life's difficulties become the healing, transformative presence of Christ. People change because they are loved; the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. People in pain find hope

because we have hope. The young take on the values of their parents because they are loved by their parents. People feel understood and the weight of their sorrows is lifted. When we care for others and make these spiritual connections, the emotional bond we develop communicates that a person matters, that he or she is significant. The cared-for-person-in-relationship responds by taking in our hopes, our beliefs, our Lord. This dynamic theory of change is the most "expensive" because we do not simply offer rewards or punishments or even good and right ideas, but we are called to offer ourselves in relationship. We give our hearts as they "go out" to others. This costs us something, but as we work with hope that Christ will "enter the hearts" of others, we pave the way.

By themselves, each of these theories of change is insufficient. Dealing with behavior by reward or punishment pays no attention to the heart. Limiting ourselves to thoughts and beliefs keeps us only in our heads. And empathic caring by itself may neglect acknowledging the truth that our hope is in Christ. How interesting that to bring salvation, the truth must be personified in the real presence of Christ to set us free...and it must be personified in us to change others!

We're Listening!



Vice President for Academic Affairs Henry DeMoor leads discussion at the board/faculty retreat.

One of the highest priorities of President Plantinga is to *listen carefully* to the church so that the training done at Calvin Theological Seminary is in touch with the needs of today's church. So Neal made his first item of business on January 2, 2002—the day he officially became president—to send a letter to hundreds of alumni, pastors and friends so that he could listen. He invited readers to respond with their counsel about how the seminary “can be, or become, a wonderful servant of the Gospel and the church.” And respond they did—600 of them! Plantinga has read all the responses and recently used them to facilitate a discussion at the January board/faculty retreat.

Neal and others were very encouraged by the sheer number of people who responded. People do care about the seminary! Many affirmed the seminary's commitment to academic excellence and its core value for producing good preachers who are grounded in the careful study of Scripture. The responses also revealed some general themes of challenge for the seminary. These comments pointed out the need for a greater emphasis on the important matters of community nurture, spiritual formation, disciple making and lead-

ership development. One respondent put it this way: “Continue the classical theological training, but add to it a healthy dose of spiritual formation, or discipleship training, so that students graduate not only as theologians, ministers, pastors, but also as disciples who know how to make disciples.”

Alongside these desires was a call for more teaching of practical ministry skills in creative ways, such as through pastors-in-residence and mentoring pastors and churches. Many respondents expressed the desire for further educational opportunities through the seminary.

These responses reinforce the results of an alumni survey sent out a year ago by

Richard Sytsma, Dean of Students and Director of Alum Relations. Respondents to that survey also asked for more continuing education offerings, as well as better communication and connection through an alumni directory and alumni reunions. These matters are being addressed through the development of an online alumni directory and assistance in holding class reunions. The seminary's continuing education program will be expanding this year through programs funded by a Lilly Endowment grant.

The seminary will continue to listen to its alums and to the churches it serves. Its leaders are committed to learning from the church they seek to serve.

Announcing Alumni Awards

Calvin Theological Seminary will begin giving Alumni Awards next year to honor alums who have made a significant ministry contribution in the kingdom of God and have reflected positively upon the values and mission of Calvin Theological Seminary. Two recipients will be chosen each year beginning in 2003 and will receive the awards at the annual commencement exercises in the month of May.

We are excited about these new awards. We trust that by honoring a few of our alums, we will be honoring all of our alums. The Faculty and Board of Trustees will choose the individuals to be honored. In the near future, we will be soliciting nominees from our alumni and from members of the Christian Reformed Church.



CTS Choir Tours Illinois and Wisconsin

The Seminary Choir toured Wisconsin and Illinois in February, leading worship at Trinity Christian College, First CRC in Sheboygan, Wis. and Ebenezer CRC in Berwyn Ill. They also visited the Holland Home in South Holland, Ill., and the Pine Haven Christian Home in Sheboygan Falls, Wis.



Facing Your Future Program Expands

For four years the *Facing Your Future* program has brought high school students to Calvin Theological Seminary for a month-long study of biblical themes and modern issues, including a ten-day trip to Israel or Turkey. Funded by the Lilly Endowment, the program aims to stimulate consideration of ministry as a lifetime vocation.

Only 35 out of over 100 nominees are chosen, causing disappointment for some students. Program Director Marcia Van Drunen notes that “some students are struggling with what this means in their

lives, and wonder if God is closing doors for them on the path to ministry.”

However, the seminary is now offering a new program for these students in conjunction with the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship called the “Worship Ministry Weekend.” FYF nominees will be invited to attend a youth leadership track at the Institute’s *Symposium on Worship and the Arts* in January. Van Drunen says, “How wonderful it is that we can now offer the Worship Ministry Weekend. It truly is amazing how God has opened up this opportunity.”



Marcia Van Drunen

“Passage of the Quarter” Will Begin Next Fall

One of the new ideas President Plantinga implemented this year was the “Book of the Quarter” program. Each quarter the entire seminary community is invited to read and discuss a particular book. It’s been exciting to hear that many others, including pastors, alumni, and pastors’ book groups, have read these books along with the seminary community.

Now students at the seminary have begun the “Passage of the Quarter” program in which the entire seminary community will be invited to memorize a particular Bible passage. The Student Senate has adopted the program and is eager to get started. The three passages for next year will be Philippians 2:1-11, Psalm 121, and Philippians 4:4-13, and they will be printed on bookmarks which students, staff and faculty will be able to carry with them and collect. Randal Meyers, one of the students behind the idea, explained, “having a handy little card with us wherever we go is one way of fixing the words of Scripture in our hearts and minds. Just like the Israelites tied Scripture on their foreheads and doorposts, we hope these cards show up everywhere.”

Our Vice President for Administration memorized a number of Scripture passages over the years of his pastorates. “Memorizing some of ‘the great passages’ of the Bible is such a valuable thing to do,” says Rev. Kelderman. “It’s personally and spiritually enriching, as well as pastorally useful. From the hospital room to the pulpit, having command of only a dozen or so of these central passages of Scripture enriches ministry.”

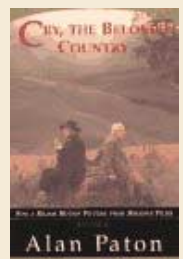


Ethnic Potluck a Success

Partners in Ministry, a seminary student organization, sponsored an ethnic potluck in December. Everyone who attended enjoyed delicious food, musical selections and wonderful student testimonies from China, Nepal, Kenya and Nigeria.

Book of the Quarter

The Spring 2002 book of the quarter is Alan Paton’s famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the classic story of apartheid and reconciliation. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is a beautifully told and profoundly compassionate story of Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom, set in the troubled and changing South Africa of the 1940s. The book is written with such keen empathy and understanding that to read it is to share fully in the gravity of the characters’ situations. It both touches your heart deeply and inspires a renewed faith in the dignity of mankind.



Where is the church going today?

Who is going to lead
the church of tomorrow?

A lot of people are asking these questions.

A lot of different answers are being given.

Calvin Theological Seminary is delighted
to be part of that conversation.

The future is uncertain,
but some things are clear.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
The authority of God's Word
The centrality of the Church

Calvin Theological Seminary
trains leaders who believe the Gospel,
know the Word and love the Church.



CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Classical theological education for contemporary ministry in a global context

Calvin Theological Seminary
3233 Burton St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Non-profit org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit No. 657