



Live from the Field By D.J. DeKlerk

ATTENTION! Read this article if you are procrastinating. (The author did by writing it!)

This is the time of year many of us frantically realize we should have done more at the beginning of the semester. The epidemic suggests we need better motivation for learning than just a deadline. After all, we are training for *ministry*. I hope this article inspires motivation deeper than deadlines.

I'm in the 3rd year of the M.Div. program and on a full-time internship in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Other than the now-familiar moving headache for my dear wife Alicia, the last six months have been *wonderful*: my mentor and his wife are engaging and inspiring for both of us, the church and community have embraced us kindly, and I have freedom to explore a variety of ministry experiences.



But in tandem with such factors coming *from* the congregation are things I am bringing *to* this ministry experience. The class-work of the first two years at Calvin Seminary is what I have especially in mind.

My philosophy of education in the first two years was elementary but effective: be a reservoir. Soak up living water and wisdom, then let it flow as richly as it came. I'm convinced (and exuberant!) that our education here shapes us meaningfully for ministry as servants of the Word in service to the world.

Looking back I can see how each course contributed uniquely to that filling. Every day new insights, resources, and skills poured in. Slowly the reservoir filled. It is on this now significant reserve that I presently draw. I'm careful to ensure by devotion and reflection

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Reflections on Funeral Preparation By Ben Spalink

Over the past couple of weeks, my wife's grandmother quickly passed from this world into the next. When I finally got the call that she had died, I had trouble getting back to sleep. My wife had been at her side in Morgantown, WV, from 2:30 in the morning till 5:30 AM when she finally breathed her last. Something was troubling me —Grandma was not a churchgoing born-again Christian. Was Grandma in Hell?

I called again that morning and the funeral arrangements had been made. Christy's parents, who are Presbyterians, had asked that I come to Maryland to participate in the funeral. They wanted me to do the eulogy. I said I would, knowing in advance that this was not going to be an easy task. First of all, I didn't know Grandma that well. Second of all, Grandma wasn't a Christian. How could I come up with anything good to say about Grandma while being haunted by this shadow? I mean, I could say nice things about her, but the reality of the

afterlife seemed every bit more real than her earthly life. The fact that Christy and her parents had watched Grandma die, all the while knowing and fearing the worst, sickened me.

As I drove to Maryland, my new Jimi Hendrix CD blaring, I attempted to sort through the issues. Christy's father, Rick, had become a Christian through a Billy Graham crusade when he was in college. Christy's family was Presbyterian. But Rick's only sibling, Aunt Barb, was not a Christian. The family was split: half Christian, half not. Rick's Presbyterian pastor was to deliver the sermon. What would Pastor Capper's take be on the whole thing? Would he say that Grandma was in Hell and you'd better become a Christian so that you don't end up where she is? Or would he be sensitive? Would the "Christian" funeral be a time and place where the non-Christian family members would be able to grieve for their loss?

It seemed to me that we had to

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Schedule of Events

- February 16— The Artist Series - Boston Camerata
- February 16—Final Day of Classes for Spring Quarter
- February 17-18— Reading Days (No classes)
- February 21-25—Winter Quarter Final Exams
- February 24: noon-1:00 p.m.— Karin Maag: Advertising One’s Beliefs: Polemical Images of the Reformation Period – Calvin Chapel Undercroft
- February 28—Break between Quarters
- March 1—Spring Quarter Begins
- March 5: 8:00 p.m.— Calvin Orchestra Concert—FAC Auditorium
- March 6: 6:00 p.m.—Calvin Band Cathedral Concert—West Leonard Christian Reformed Church
- March 10: noon-1:00 p.m.—Tom Rademacher: The Guy Next Door—Gezon Auditorium
- March 10: 8:00 p.m.—Faculty Recital: Hyesook Kim, piano—FAC Auditorium
- March 11-12— A House of Prayer for All Nations: Building a Multicultural Congregation—Oakdale Park CRC
- March 14—1st drop/add deadline
- March 15—Dies Natalis
- March 18- Oral comprehensive exams
- March 20— Calvin Seminary Choir participating in evening service—Blythefield CRC

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discover a middle ground between pastoral and theological, a funeral which was attentive to everyone’s needs and which took into consideration the fact that Grandma’s status was unknown. This got me to thinking about salvation. Really truly believing that someone you love is in Hell is virtually impossible—it’s one of those thoughts that you cannot endure. Besides that, I think it’s also inappropriate. The fact is that Grandma believed in a god, but that she never said a word about Jesus and rarely went to church. Christy’s family had tried to witness to her, and had prayed fervently for her salvation for years and years. It’s not like Grandma had never heard the gospel. Did Grandma have a “relationship with Jesus?” Probably not. But did God have a plan for her life? Had God used her to raise two upstanding children? Absolutely. Did Grandma pray before meal times? No. But she had a loving Christian family who prayed for her. Did Grandma have some hostility towards overbearing Christians who criticized her daughter for wearing pants instead of a skirt to church? Yes. But did God have control over Grandma’s life through all these years and bless her with 61 years of marriage? Absolutely.

The Reformed acknowledge that you cannot know who the reprobate are. This is why we’re called to evangelize even though we believe in predestination. It was both pastorally sensitive and theologically apt to leave Grandma’s eternal situation *almost* out of the picture. If a message of salvation, a message of hope in Christ, was presented, and we wanted it there, it would not come at the cost of sending Grandma to Hell or threatening her non-Christian family with final judgment. This funeral was just not the time or place to do that.

So this is what we did. We read a

lot of Scripture, Scripture which talked of salvation through Christ. Then I gave a eulogy. This was a good exercise for me because it forced me to talk to family members and to ask them their memories of Grandma. Remembering those stories helped people articulate why they loved Grandma so much. She really was a good person, a noble person, even if she wasn’t a born-again Christian. In the message, the pastor alluded to the fact that Grandma had “faced her creator.” Because Rick and I had talked to him (and impressed our thoughts on him rather forcefully), he was especially sensitive to the non-believers’ need to mourn for Grandma without being burdened by judgment. But Christ was preached. Salvation was offered. If you paid attention, you would have known, coming out of that funeral, that you could mourn for Grandma with or without the hope and joy that comes from Christ. We left it open. And I think we did what was right. Un-believers must be allowed to mourn for their loved ones. If they reject the hope offered in Christ, the funeral is not the place to shake the dust off our sandals. You will have rejected your task as pastor. I know that seeds were planted because Aunt Barb’s family got a taste for how Christians mourn. The funeral was at a funeral home. But afterwards, Rick’s church hosted a post-committal service luncheon for us, and Aunt Barb’s husband, being very impressed with the church’s hospitality, told Pastor Capper that they’d have to come and visit the church the next time they were in town. Everybody in the family personally thanked Pastor Capper for his message—and me too. As far as I can tell—and as strange as it sounds—the funeral was successful.

Please keep the Stewarts in your prayers as they continue to miss their grandmother very dearly.

Contemporary China and the Future Growth of Christianity

By Joseph Dong

I. The Big Picture

Any sound judgment about the future of Christianity in China must be based on an understanding of the historical backgrounds, the current trends of Christianity in China, and the interactions of Christianity with the economic, political, and social situations in China. Besides political persecution, the main difficulties reside in the cultural and historical differences between Christianity in China and elsewhere. These differences are readily observable, but are largely underestimated—which also makes the consideration of the growth of Christianity in China a unique issue.

Since China has been isolated culturally during most of her history, Christians from outside, at the present time, could have a valuable opportunity to carry on a dialogue with their Chinese counterparts.

Actually China is in an unfortunate situation because of the dominance of Confucianism for more than two thousand years, and a largely passive attitude towards western culture in the past two centuries. Unlike Japan, my country has repeatedly attempted to choose an optimal middle way to avoid radicalism. Today people are talking about a Chinalized socialist market economy in a very similar way to that of the late Qing Dynasty. But such a seemingly optimal, wise, and less risky middle way is nothing more than a foolish dream. It still reflects the difficulty of carrying out a huge cultural transformation process.

Today in China, on the one hand, nobody is clear what kind of process this could be, except for the agreement that her economic system will continue the transition toward an

open market economy, and her economy will probably keep growing. On the other hand, the reality looks more like a chaos in which you can find a mixture of authoritarianism, materialism, utilitarianism, liberalism, and cultural nihilism. This society is historically diversified.

It is noteworthy that China is still suffering from the specific side effects of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which at least partly reflected Mao's initial intention to transform the traditional culture into a new one. Unfortunately, this was a disastrous endeavor as God was excluded from consideration. People were encouraged to betray each other, to break traditional rules, and worship Mao himself. Even today, in the education system, which is largely controlled by conservative politics, people still have enough incentive to lie. Such factors contribute significantly to a chaotic China.

Traditional culture has been preserved in some other regions such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. But in China several huge parks have been set aside with some rebuilt temples, simply hiding the loss of the once culturally rich history of the nation. The educational system leaves no room for students to learn about the rich cultural heritage of China. Ironically, the present leaders in China often look back to Confucianism since they also have no confidence in seeking a solution of the contemporary moral crisis—namely, the “creditability gap”, “free sex”, etc.

Above all, China is a complex country with a unique cultural and historical background currently

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Preaching Schedule

Editor's Note: *The following is a list of times when some members of our community are preaching. This is not an exhaustive list, so we encourage you to talk to those not listed here and/or send us your information on where you're preaching.*

• February 13

Prof. Deppe—Christ Community (East Paris and Burton) 10:00 am
Dean Sytsma—Trinity CRC Sparta
Ken Krause—Coopersville CRC
Dave Loew—Oakdale evening service
Joel Vande Werken—Oakland CRC morning service

Ben VanArragon—Roosevelt Community, GR, 6:00 pm service

• February 20

Mike Ribbins—Eastern Ave 5:00 pm
Doug VandeKamp—Woodlawn CRC 5:00 pm (candidacy sermon)
J. Greg Sinclair—New Community Church - Newaygo am service

• February 27

Nathan Gritter—Big Rapids, 9:30 am
Joel Renkema—Tinley Park, Illinois at Faith Christian Reformed Church 9:30 am
Dave Loew—Mc Bain, MI, both services
Michael Bruinooge—Grace CRC, Grand Rapids, MI - 11:00 am
J. Greg Sinclair—Sunshine Community Church pm service

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controlled by a basically authoritarian government. The assumption that China is a communist country is largely incorrect, or at least very superficial. Now China needs to be recognized clearly as an emerging entity economically, morally, and culturally.

Therefore, when China opens her door economically to the outside world, this mixed entity cannot avoid the powerful cultural challenge from that world. Christianity, as an important value of the western world, could play a critical role in the development of China. In this sense it is preferable that China become somewhat a melting pot like America and the ancient Tang Dynasty. We have confidence that Christianity is robust enough to win many converts in a pluralist society. Therefore, we welcome any step the Chinese government takes towards religious liberty.

II. The Church and the State

God is doing great work in China, both in the underground Church and in the registered one. Since both are mushrooming, they are being subjected to tighter control by the elitist authoritarian administration.

As far as I know, the government authorities feel no fundamental hatred towards Christianity itself. They are largely ignorant, and even arrogant in this respect. They are not real

communists and have no real faith; instead, some of them deliberately avoid any ideological tendency. They concentrate on solving problems one by one, rather than enduring the big headaches of engaging in any deep thinking. It is true that some love their country, but they attentively avoid the risk of ideological challenge. Basically, they are pragmatists, specifically focusing on the annual growth rates, unemployment numbers, and the ratio of the US GDP per Capita to that of China.

The Chinese officials have observed that Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea have adopted open market economic policies while they maintained authoritarian governments—at least for a pretty long period. It is understandable for China to attempt the same thing and eventually relinquish control of religious institutions along with increased income levels. Simply put, they want to avoid the risk of instability. You may disagree with them because the mistake they make is rather obvious to devout Christians. However, it is very hard to modify the position those gradualist mainstream scholars in China now hold.

In Asia, most people still cannot figure out the difference between a Confucian stability and a Christian harmony. We must not underestimate the dominance of Confucian pragmatism, which not only significantly blocks the way for many Asian people to become Christian, but also casts a shadow within Chinese Christian circles.

Consistent with such thoughts, the state controls the "Three-Self" church tightly, and regards any unregistered organization as a threat to its stability. Any obvious political interest within the Church or close financial relationship between domestic Christians and their overseas counterparts could only arouse more suspicion. For pragmatic reasons,

the authority keeps closely watching the underground Christian organizations instead of imprisoning all, which would be impossible. From their perspective, it would obviously be better to weave them into the registered church peacefully.

What the government cares about is not whether people are Christians, but whether they have political interests or have financial connections with foreigners who might interfere.

III. Within the Church

During the past decades, China has witnessed dramatic church growth, not only in numbers, but also in growing theological interests. However, compared with the Church of many other places, the Chinese Church is more immature—and also more complex in some respects.

The Chinese Church—both the official one and the underground house church—cannot be isolated from the cultural and historical background. One obvious characteristic within the Chinese church is that the leadership tends to be more authoritarian than in many other societies. Even worse, in some cases, is that those leaders treat their missionary work as a commercial business, particularly when they can easily attract financial support from a great number of Christian sympathizers from overseas.

Basically, the incentive for the ordinary Christian congregation members is to go to the Church to worship God. By contrast, among the leadership there are a lot of self-important professionals who are very much involved with financial abuses, or arbitrary heretical teachings. Although these problems are universal, they seem more rampant within the Chinese church.

Since China is a country without Reformation, capitalist revolution, and Renaissance, and also experiences the side effects from a unique cultural and historical background, it

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Dies Natalis

will be held on Tuesday March 15, 2005. It is an occasion to laugh together about the challenges and joys of Seminary.

If you have anything you'd like to contribute (jokes, skits, videos, etc.), contact Joel Vande Werken (jvandew2@calvinseminary.edu)
If you have any articles, including spoofs, for the 'Dies Natalis' *Kerux*, please send them to bheyink5@calvinseminary.edu

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is understandable that the Church produces some wildly arrogant self-educated theologians. Unfortunately, in my observation, it is currently very hard to find a professional Chinese Christian who is not too authoritarian.

Such experiences cooled my initially overly-optimistic view of the future of Christian influence in China. But meanwhile I began to recognize the importance of thinking about the cultural and historical differences seriously, instead of putting an overly-simplified focus on political persecution. Meanwhile, as a touchstone, persecution also reveals that diverse people involved in the current Chinese Christian movement have various aims. Besides some faithful and devout messengers who may not be well known in the western world, some Church people deliberately conduct their “holy work” as a mere commercial business and are mainly fundraisers. Undoubtedly self-interested pastors are hurting the Church and not building it. The result has come to be that “they fill the congregations entrusted to them with a

thousand and one troubles,” in the words of Chrysostom (*On the Priesthood*, p.79).

Thus, it is not a good thing if the church leadership is dominated by hypocrites. As the Scripture says, “what good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?” (James 2: 14) However, strict regulation by the government discourages many people from joining the visible Christian Church. The leaders of the underground church and the official church are not necessarily competent or qualified.

IV. Concluding Remarks

We need to encourage the government authorities in China to take steps towards greater religious liberty—but we must not simply treat the official church and the government as evil. We also need to recognize the difficulties in promoting Christianity that arise from the cultural and historical side effects, and not focus our attention only on political persecution. Only if North American Christians avoid obvious political interests and a dramatic financial involvement, can they be of help in China.

Christianity cannot simply be something the government tolerates, but it should eventually transform the government in significant ways.

Thus apologetic work is essential in China. In my own case, it is part of my calling to persuade scholars, government officials, and others in China that Christianity is reasonable, practical, and really advantageous.

It is important to understand the Chinese situation rationally, instead of over-simplifying the challenges the Chinese are facing. They need really devout Christian leaders and true theology; faith, instead of cheap knowledge; devotion, instead of money; purity, instead of tricky ideas.

Another implication of what I have said is that we should emphasize spreading the Gospel and being witnesses of our God through as many indirect channels as possible. These could include offering help to combat the AIDS epidemic, helping unschooled children, and supporting the anti-alcoholic movement. The integrity of true Christians is the best advertisement of the Christian faith.

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that it continues to fill.

A sampling of my drawings to date reveals the value of this reservoir:

1. In a sermon on Acts 17 (Paul in Athens) I used the term ‘misguided’ to describe the religious zeal of the Athenians. A 13-year-old member later e-mailed her inquiry, “Does that mean that all religions are misguided? Would people go to hell because they didn’t worship the God you and I believe in? The native Americans believed in the spirits of the land and water. They believed everything had a purpose. How does God deal with them?” Out came the Missiology notes.
2. A friendly conversation with a stranger at a baseball game led to his business card in my hand. Over several lunches he shared of God calling him back to faith after a 15-year fallout. Yet having grown up Catholic, the worship services at Peace presented a dilemma: “Is there a conflict between the Catholic and Protestant belief of salvation? If there is, would a person be able to embrace both views and share them both?” Out came

the Doctrine of God, Christology, and Missiology notes!

3. Pastoral care moments constantly arise... A youth with suicidal thoughts, a family grieving loss, a member lamenting the sad effect of lost parenting years (he was a workaholic). Ron, it’s just like you said it would be.

4. And then... How do you preach a text assigned by the discipline of a series on Genesis? Next up: Genesis 34, Shechem and the Rape of Dinah. Shortly after, Judah and Tamar. One commentary surrendered, “No sane preacher would ever think to expound on this passage.” Oh yeah!? Hello theme, goal, need!

Drawing daily from the reservoir is frequent and necessary. If there’s one thing this internship has taught me, it’s that real-life ministry demands a well-constructed theology. With that motivation next year I’ll be blazing through the books and burning up the keyboard. (Yes professors, you can hold me to it...)

Of course in the balance of social and family I do draw lines. But what I get accomplished will be motivated by far more than just a deadline.

Even still, deadlines help. Sunday’s coming!

When Culture Trumps Scripture: The roots of the *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* discussion in the CRC

by Lisa Vander Leek

The *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* discussion has been prevalent in the CRC for many years. Multiple Synods, study committees and exterior committees have been dedicated to the issue, whether in favor or in disagreement. Many battles have been lost and won, many insults and accusations have been hurled, and many tears have been shed. The main component of turmoil in the discussion centers on the place of women in culture. Too often it has been assumed that the discussion began with culture and was settled by scripture, but that assumption is false. Recently I looked into the roots of the discussion for the CRC church history class and was surprised at what I encountered. In a study of the first seven years (1970-1977) of the *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* discussion I discovered that the discussion commenced on a theological foundation **affirming** *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* and that this discussion later matured into a much wider discussion encompassing oppositional worldviews and the place of women.

The Commissioning of the Theological Foundations

The initiation of the *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* discussion in the CRC began in an unusual and unsuspecting place. Contrary to popular belief, it did not begin with an approach to the culture at large. The CRC did not examine what it was that other Churches were doing. It did not look at its congregation and the vast role women's gifts played in missions as well as in the Church's structure and ministry. The CRC did not respond to fanatical feminists crying out for women's rights. Rather the CRC was obligated to theologically examine the issue through its ecumenical activities; the

Reformed Ecumenical Synod requested that the CRC "examine in the light of Scripture the general Reformed practice of excluding women from the various ordained offices in the Church." Thereby the CRC Synod of 1970 appointed a committee to report to the Synod of 1972 in order to develop a theological framework from which to discuss the issue.

The Theological Foundation: Synod 1973

In 1973, in conjunction with the report on "Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination", Report 39, from the committee on *Women in Ecclesiastical Office*, was presented to Synod. The conclusion of the majority report astounded Synod. The majority report legitimized the use of women in ecclesiastical office: "The practice of *excluding* women from ecclesiastical office *cannot* conclusively be defended on biblical grounds." The decision was in line with Synod's ruling in 1957 concerning women's right to vote, on the grounds that, "the word of God teaches the spiritual equality of man and woman as image-bearers of God and as heirs of the grace of life and as participants in the office of believers." Women are not to be excluded.

Yet the expectation within the denomination is that Report 39 would deny women the right to hold ecclesiastical office; a view which many in the denomination held. Therefore Synod was faced with two divergent views. Therefore, in reaction to the disagreement, Synod Synod decided more work ought to be done and appointed another committee in order "to receive and evaluate the reactions of the Churches and structure the discussion as it deems best..." as well as to evaluate the claims of the first committee. Therefore the issue was put on hold until

the second committee report at the Synod of 1975.

The Cultural Rebuttal: Synod 1975

At the Synod of 1975 the study committee and Synod switched tactics. It no longer became about biblical authority, but rather the focus settled on the *present cultural and ecclesiastical situation*. The report offered by the second committee on *Women in Ecclesiastical Office*, Report 46, was in agreement with Report 39 in its biblical conclusions, but differed in its recommendation. Report 46 states: "One of the most significant aspects of Report 46 is that the authors of this second report are in essential agreement with the authors of the first report on the fundamental idea that biblical teachings is not opposed in principle to the ordination of women to any office that men may hold in the Church."

In contrast, however, to Report 39, Report 46 opposed moving in the direction of ordaining women to ecclesiastical office. They argued from the standpoint of culture, both inside and outside of the ecclesiastical setting: Whether or not to ordain women to office in the Church at the present time, therefore, is to be determined on the basis of our **present cultural** and ecclesiastical situation. The report further added that the present (i.e. 1975) would "not be a proper time to open the offices of the Church to women. Since many of the Churches are presently opposed to the ordination of women and since many would find such ordination to be a threat to the overall well-being of the Church..." The report even went so far as to say that "*some of us are convinced it may be possible for women to hold ecclesiastical office in the future...*" **The report's opinion all headed in the direction**

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that the Church is culturally not ready; ordaining women would pose a threat to the Church and to the family.

The primary threat against Church and family, and the rationalization for that threat surfaced via the guise of and unbiblical understanding of the principle of headship which would become the primary contention disputing women in ecclesiastical office. Many could not fathom Synod’s decision. Kay Limburg recalls sitting in the mezzanine at Synod 1975, applauding a delegate who spoke in favor of women’s ordination, thinking “Gentlemen, you’ve lost the battle; you’ve had two study committee reports which tell you that there is not Biblical basis... For how many more years will they go on appointing study committees?”

But the Synod of 1975 was clear: *Women in Ecclesiastical office* must not be practiced in the CRC (or at least not yet). Even though the committee maintained that it would be possible to maintain the principle of headship (which was misunderstood and errantly proclaimed), and ordain women; they did not want to risk it. The normative, social function of “headship” and the patriarchal authority structure within marriage was to trump God’s call, and use of women in the ordained offices of the Church. So, overall, when it really came down to the nitty-gritties Synod 1975 could not deny the biblical precedent for women holding ecclesiastical office, but they couldn’t get over the cultural hurdle...maybe someday in the future...but not now... The Synod of 1975 forever changed the face of *The Women’s Issue*; culture trumped Scripture.

The Cultural Response

The denominational response to 1975 was fast and furious – especially from those affirming women in Ecclesiastical office. Groups like the Committee for Women in the CRC were formed, letters were written, rallies were held, all focused on the same goal: proving that the CRC was *culturally* ready for women to hold positions of authority. Synod had played the culture card – they would respond with the culture card.

In the end, Synod 1975’s action refocused the discussion from its theological foundation toward the role of women in society, opening the floodgates of further debate and turmoil. The

Jonah 2: A Seminarian’s Paraphrase

Editor’s Note: This is taken from a Kerux, published on March 4, 2002. Due to how it fits with this time of the quarter, it is re-printed here.

From Inside Room I [Room I42 W] Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.

He said:

“In my quiz I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.

From the depths of page two I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

You hurled me into the vocab,
into the very heart of the C to C minus range,
and the verbs swirled about me;

all your piels and puals swept over me.

I said, ‘I have surely been banished
from your seminary forever;

yet I will look again toward next quarter.’

The engulfing infinitive constructs threatened me,
the clauses surrounded me;
parsing was wrapped around my head.

To the thematic roots of the verbs I sank down;
Graduation with its benefits was now surely closed behind
me forever.

But you brought my life up from the pits,
O LORD my God.

“When my time remaining was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

“Those who cling to worthless cheat-sheets
forfeit the grade that could be theirs.

But I, with the a song of thanksgiving,
will sacrifice study time to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.
Salvation comes from the LORD.”

And the LORD commanded the professor, and the professor

CWCRC was formed to refute the cultural claims of Synod 1975, and Synod 1977 further emphasized the changing sex-roles in the church and society. A new wave in the discussion had begun, and would continue on until the present. The discussion never started with culture, but unfortunately it has rested there ever since. The results have been painful. The *Women in Ecclesiastical Office* discussion has not been easy on the CRC; not for those on either side, nor those stuck in-between.



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The *Kerux* is usually published biweekly on Thursdays, but tends to be random based on subscriptions and the school schedule of the editors. It is funded by Student Senate and CTS.

Submissions are due by ten regular days after the current publication. Anyone may submit an article, but members of the CTS community are given first priority. Submission does not guarantee publication.

Editors reserve the right to edit submissions for content and propriety. Anonymous submissions will not be published. There is no remuneration for submissions.

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"By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place." Proverbs 3:19

Joining In The Conversation by Brenda Heyink

Anamnesis is one of those terms that I've managed to remember, even three years after taking the class - probably because it means 'to remember'. So much of what I learn, I manage to forget - whether that be a language, a story that a friend has told me, birthdays, or a lesson that God has been teaching me. Knowing this, I try to practice ways of remembering. For the small things, it means writing them down. For the bigger things, I get friends to push me forward and hold me accountable. And when it comes to the big thing of remembering what really matters in life, Sundays are probably the greatest gift. Those are the times when I go to worship God with others, irrelevant of whether I really feel up to being there. I hear the word of God, I sing praises, confess my failings, and I

often have the Lord's Supper - and I remember. The rest of the day, I refrain from all the busy tasks of the rest week, so that I can remember that it is not my task to fix the world, and that there is more to life than tasks. I carry this lesson over into the rest of the week, with smaller times of remembering and varying degrees of success.

Yet, some times the sheer overwhelming-ness of a task or the utter exhaustion of trying too hard makes the space between Sundays seem way too long - and what's really important is too easily forgotten. The oral comprehensive exams seemed like one of those tasks, especially as I planned to spend some serious time studying for them (I started studying with my group only 5 weeks before I was to take them). I had been told by some not to worry much about it; yet, being the over-achiever that I am, I wanted to study well for them (maybe even astound my professors by my brilliance). As I realized that I would probably become stressed in studying over Christmas holidays, I kept wondering with God how to continue to remember not to trust in my own knowledge while trying to cram my head with knowledge. The solution appeared to be spending the week before oral comps at a monastery, where in the midst of studying I could be drawn into the prayer times of the community and remember that I was studying not to show how smart I was, but for God's glory.

During the week before comps, in the midst of reading church history, straightening out some systematic theology, and going over study

notes that others had shared with me, every few hours I was called to prayer. I heard almost all of the Psalms read. In my conversations with others there, I delighted in what they had yet to teach me about theology and what it meant to real life. Even as I wondered if I ought not to be spending more time being productive, studying and studying, the laughter over meals, the peace of the place where so many prayers had been offered, and the time spent in services was just as important as the actual studying. As we recited repeatedly 'Glory to the father, to the son, and to the Holy Spirit - as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever will be,' the theology that I had been studying overwhelmed me - reminding me why the Christological controversies mattered, and how awe-inspiring it was to serve the trinitarian God.

And then came oral comps. I felt comfortable about what I knew, and I carried with me the peacefulness of the monastery. I was more anxious about my lack of anxiety than anything else (part of me was a little too aware that if I didn't sustain this exam, then I would get a chance to do it again [i.e. visit the monastery again], and at least I wouldn't have to face the same scary group of professors who had turned me down before). Most people who've sustained would say that oral comps were okay, and that they survived. I, however, would go so far as to say that I had a lot of fun during the experience (we were even a bit rambunctious at times, having our laughter carry over into the next room). My having sustained was something I was thankful for (even as I was saddened by knowing that not everyone had sustained), but my thankfulness paled in comparison to the delight of knowing that a friend who had struggled through this process had sustained his comp. And on top of that, I was overjoyed that somehow I had not only survived one of the more grueling events of Seminary, but had been given a delightful week of remembering why I was doing this all in the first place.