



## Newsletter March 2022



Matt Lundberg  
Director

Global events over the past month and a half have reminded us of something that should need no reminder: The world is an uncertain and tumultuous place. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the horrifying and heart-wrenching scenes we're witnessing there, have reminded us of the ongoing threat of aggression and how it brings death and destruction, throwing the lives of ordinary people (their families, work, places of worship, communities) into disarray. Of course, the Western world has been particularly attentive to the Ukraine invasion since this conflict was started by one of the West's historic geopolitical foils. To our shame, those of us in the West have often been less attentive to conflicts elsewhere in the world. Even more, this moment in which a new war is added to the world's ongoing wars takes place alongside the world's ongoing struggle with a global pandemic, which itself has tragically killed millions of people.

During these tumultuous times, which Christian theology associates with evil (the moral evil of aggression and the natural evil of disease), there is a renewed need for the Christian Gospel's word of hope, for Christ's promise of the coming kingdom of *shalom*, which we glimpse already through the resurrection of Jesus that we prepare to celebrate during this season of the church year. That coming kingdom, of course, is not merely something that Christians believe in and expect; it is also the promised reality of God that we are called to *witness* through our own words and acts of *shalom*—compassion, justice, forgiveness, rescue, kindness, accountability. How those elements exactly fit together is sometimes unclear and even debated within the Christian community (e.g., defense of innocent victims and compassion toward oppressors). But God's call to the Church is a call to be engaged in the world, as light that points toward the true Light of the world.

For Christians to be prepared to serve as witnesses to the Light in extraordinary and tumultuous times, we need to be constantly reflecting (including in so-called ordinary times) on the relevance of the Gospel message (including the beliefs and practices that are bound up in that message) in all of the arenas of life. If it is needed in all the arenas of life, then it is also needed in all areas of academic reflection. Proactive reflection on the difference that Christian commitment makes in learning and life will help to guard us against ill-considered knee-jerk reactions in times of crisis. Times of crisis require hard decisions, of course. There is nothing that can remove the need for discernment in the pressured moment. But careful, considered Christian reflection in everyday normal times will help our speaking and action in times of change or turmoil or academic paradigm shifts to draw from a well of deep, faith-animating wisdom. Helping to equip Christian scholars in this way is the mission of the de Vries Institute.

May God's peace rest upon all of you, wherever you are in the world, whatever specific challenges you are facing, through the resurrection light that reaches into the shadows of the cross.

## N.T. Wright, "Beyond Cliché," Faculty Development Event

In January, renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright spoke to faculty and staff of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in a webinar hosted by Matt Lundberg. The de Vries Institute was delighted to be invited by the [Calvin Institute of Christian Worship](#) to partner in this opportunity to engage in conversation with Prof. Wright, one of the most influential theological voices of our time.

Over the course of a wide-ranging 90-minute conversation, Wright clarified a variety of important topics related to the integration of faith and learning—Vocation, Image of God, Revelation, Personal and Structural Sin, Justice, and the Kingdom of God, to name just a few. In each case, he provided the audience with ways to deepen our biblical and theological understanding of that idea. Wright also provided some cautions related to potentially misguided understanding of each idea.

[Read more about this event](#) in an article by de Vries Institute student writer, Anastasia Watson. Video clips from this event will be appearing in new Reflecting Faith courses and on the de Vries Institute website in upcoming months.

## Kuyper Conference and Prize

On April 6, Ruth Padilla DeBorst will accept the 2022 Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life. A theologian, missiologist, educator, and storyteller, Padilla DeBorst has been involved in leadership development in Latin America for several decades. She currently serves with [Resonate Global Mission](#), leading in the Comunidad de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios, a learning community with students across Latin America. She also coordinates the Networking Team of International Fellowship for Mission as Transformation and is actively furthering missional leadership formation processes with the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

"I am humbled and honored to be chosen as a recipient of the Kuyper Prize, recognizing that there are hundreds of more deserving candidates, women and men who are silently living out God's mission in challenging contexts, often with no public recognition," said Padilla DeBorst. [Read more](#) about Padilla DeBorst and the award.

### Kuyper Conference

Padilla DeBorst will be awarded the prize during the annual [Kuyper Conference](#) which runs April 5-7, 2022, on Calvin's campus in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The theme of this year's conference plenaries is "Tribes, Tongues, and Nations: Global Christianity and Reformed Public Theology," and will include plenary sessions featuring Mateusz Wichary, Agnes Chiu, and Lucas Freire. The [Henry Institute Symposium](#) on Religion and Public Life will begin on April 7, and cross-registration is available for those who would like to attend both conferences.

The Kuyper prize and conference have been possible due to a generous gift from the late Rimmer and Ruth de Vries, whose vision for Christian higher education also made the de Vries Institute possible.



Ruth Padilla DeBorst  
Recipient of 2022 Kuyper Prize



**reflecting faith**  
Resources for Christians in the Academy.

We are currently developing four brand new *Reflecting Faith* courses. Our courses on Humanity in God's Image, Community and Learning, Faith and Online Pedagogy, and The Sin-Disfigured World are in the final stages of development and will be available in the second half of 2022. Each of our courses explores one facet of the relationship between faith and learning, and we plan to continue to develop further course topics over the coming years.

Over the past two months, a group of faculty from Christian universities in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda have been working through our courses on Educating for Shalom and Hospitality to Strangers. We are delighted to be able to welcome these groups to our courses in partnership with the [International Network for Christian Higher Education](#).

During the first half of 2022 we have been training a group of 12 faculty at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, to become course leaders for Reflecting Faith courses. During the next academic year, each will lead a group of their colleagues through a Reflecting Faith course, acting as the local instructor and point of contact. If you would like to explore this possibility for your university, contact us at [reflectingfaith@calvin.edu](mailto:reflectingfaith@calvin.edu).

## Reading Group with Dr. Clair Mesick

Dr. Clair Mesick, assistant professor of Religion at Calvin University, recently led an interdisciplinary reading group for Calvin University faculty on Esau McCaulley's book *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. A winner of various book awards, [McCaulley's book](#) is a valuable contribution to conversations about reading Scripture responsibly and taking heed of the importance of cultural and social context in the responsible reading of Scripture.

Prof. Mesick noted that the group included biblical scholars, sociologists, economists, liturgical scholars. There were also several different cultures represented, with each contributing their own perspective. She said that the group observed that "What we see -- and what we miss -- in the biblical text has a lot to do with our own cultural and social background (gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, religious background, etc). *Reading while Black* illuminated facets of the biblical text that most of us, coming from different cultural backgrounds, had missed."

## L. Gregory Jones at Calvin's January Series

The de Vries Institute was pleased to underwrite L. Gregory Jones' presentation at Calvin University's [January Series](#). The newly appointed president of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, Jones previously served as dean of Duke Divinity School among other roles at Duke and as provost and executive vice president of Baylor University. Jones has also held strategic advisory roles with several foundations.

The author or editor of 19 books, Jones's most recent book is *Navigating the Future: Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas*, co-authored with Andrew Hogue.

Jones is known as a leader and strategist whose creative engagement has helped institutions across the world create transformational resource models. His global imagination has guided business, education, and religious leaders in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. He is passionate about reshaping cultures within and across organizations and has coined the term "traditioned innovation" to capture how to reframe complex challenges as significant opportunities. This approach to institutional change is especially crucial for faith-based institutions, as they do their work out of deep resources of tradition and commitment, but nevertheless have the responsibility to engage with new challenges and new situations.

His talk, "Trusting Institutions: Rediscovering the Power of Christianity's Surprise," highlighted the significance of institutions in the spread of Christianity and explored how trust is so important in renewing them (and developing new versions of them) today. [Watch a recording online](#).



L. Gregory Jones  
President  
Belmont University

## Meet Our Advisory Council

As the newest of Calvin University's [centers and institutes](#), one important task for the de Vries Institute has been developing leadership infrastructure to guide our work. Since the mission of the Institute—as signaled by its name—is *global* in scope, it is important for voices beyond Calvin to play a crucial role in shaping our agenda. A key body to bring the Calvin context and the global context together is a new advisory council for the institute. Here are the members of this council:

- Péter Balla, vice-rector and professor of New Testament at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church of Hungary
- Ronald Feenstra, professor of systematic theology and director of Ph. D studies, Calvin Theological Seminary
- Peggy Goetz, professor of speech pathology and audiology at Calvin University (chair of the council)
- Olga Mugerwa, lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, Uganda Christian University
- Retief Müller, director of the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity at Calvin University
- Oh Yen Nie, dean of education at Universitas Pelita Harapan in Indonesia
- Eric Washington, professor of history at Calvin University
- David Wunder, dean for faculty development and research initiatives, and professor of engineering, at Calvin University
- Matt Lundberg, de Vries Institute director (*ex officio*)

This group of people will meet regularly to keep the Institute accountable to its mission and to deepen its work in ways that meet the needs of Christian scholars around the world.



Among the 11 [centers and institutes](#) at Calvin University, one with a special synergy with the work of the de Vries Institute is the [Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity](#). The Nagel Institute is an educational research institute focused on ways in which the study of World Christianity can change perspectives, foster knowledge, and reinvigorate Christian thought and practice. Nagel has sponsored a variety of research projects and educational opportunities throughout its history, including projects in China and Brazil among many others. Its current work is focused on research done by African theologians.

The de Vries Institute has been blessed by the presence of Nagel director Retief Müller on our advisory council, although we lament the fact that he is leaving for a faculty position in Norway. Accordingly, Calvin University is seeking Dr. Müller's successor as Nagel director. [Click here to read the job advertisement](#).

## DVI Team Member Profile: Jordan Ballor

Dr. Jordan Ballor has served as coordinator of the Kuyper Prize and Conference at Calvin University since 2018. We asked Jordan to answer a few questions about his work at Calvin and beyond.

*In addition to your Kuyper position at Calvin, you work at the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy. What does that work involve?*

- I am the director of research at CRCD, which envisions democratic societies that affirm the essential role of religious convictions, peoples, and institutions in cultivating free and flourishing communities. My work involves directing the research agenda of the center, including the work of research and senior fellows, serving as executive editor of the *Journal of Religion, Culture & Democracy*, and my own agenda of scholarship, popular speaking, and writing.



Jordan Ballor

*What's one important insight that you think Kuyper's work provides for theology and academic work at our current moment?*

- One of Kuyper's foundational convictions had to do with God's sovereignty, an ultimate and transcendent reality that informs all of life. In his words, "If God is sovereign, then his lordship *must* extend over *all* of life, and it cannot be restricted to the walls of the church or within the Christian orbit. The non-Christian world has not been handed over to Satan, nor surrendered to fallen humanity, nor consigned to fate. God's sovereignty is great and all-dominating in the life of that unbaptized world as well. Therefore Christ's church on earth and God's children cannot simply retreat from this life. If the believer's God is at work in this world, then in this world the believer's hand must take hold of the plow, and the name of the Lord must be glorified in that activity as well."

*What is life like for you beyond work?*

- I am married to Amy. We have three children, one each in elementary, junior, and senior high school. I enjoy recreational sports, especially golf and basketball, and my favorite Wordle starting word is RENTS.

## Contact us

Have a question? Contact [dvi@calvin.edu](mailto:dvi@calvin.edu).

