

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# FORUM

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# Preaching



# FORUM

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# from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As a boy in the early 1950s I belonged to a church whose minister wore a tailcoat when he preached. Dressed in a cutaway coat and striped trousers, our minister would stand in his pulpit and deliver sermons as sturdy as his collar. These sermons typically began not with a story from history or an observation of current events, but with a businesslike statement of the preacher's theme and of the three points by which he proposed to develop it. Like many of his colleagues, our minister would often start in this way no matter what biblical literature he was preaching. Thus a sermon on the parable of the prodigal son might have begun as follows:

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ: my theme this morning is The Justification of Guilty Sinners. Three points, beloved, under the head of God's sovereign justification: firstly, its origin in the divine decree; secondly, its forensic realization in the satisfaction of Christ's righteousness; thirdly, its vindication in the eschatological glorification of the elect in life eternal.

Firstly, then, its origin in the divine decree . . .

A heavy-duty sermon of this kind, thick with its Latinate language and dogmatic purpose, didn't always get us into the drama of "a man who had two sons." That wasn't its purpose. Meeting his congregation's expectation, our preacher aimed to proclaim Reformed doctrine, which he did with such gusto that when men from our congregation hunted deer in November with their Baptist buddies, they would sit in the woods arguing with the Baptists over the meaning and membership of the covenant of grace. (Everybody agreed that deer weren't in it.)

Scenarios of these kinds now seem remote. Doctrinal sermons have become rare or, at least, medium-rare. Pulpit language has changed, too. A few preachers use language ("He goes 'Hey!' and I'm like, 'Whoa! . . . .") that fits less with cutaway coats than with tank tops. But many settle for speech as upscale casual as a shirt from L.L. Bean, and, thankfully, much CRC preaching today tells the Bible's great stories with a feel for the narrative line.

In any case, I hope this issue of Forum will raise for you questions and issues about preaching that transcend the fashions of 1953 and of 2003. After all, Jesus Christ, the center of what we proclaim, remains the same today, yesterday, and forever.

Grace and peace,



Neal Plantinga

# REFLECTIONS

## Preaching Christ

From recent lectures on 'Preaching Christ from the Genesis Narratives' given at Dallas Theological Seminary in February 2003.

Early in my ministry, I preached a series of sermons on the book of Ecclesiastes. After one of these sermons, a retired preacher said to me, "I appreciated your sermon, Sid, but I wonder, 'Could a rabbi have preached your sermon in a synagogue?'" That image etched itself indelibly in my brain. Was my sermon distinctively Christian? Had I preached Christ?

I recognize now that even with a doctorate in biblical interpretation and preaching, I did not know how to preach Christ from Ecclesiastes with integrity, nor was I overly concerned about it. My major task, I thought, was to do justice to the chosen text and to avoid twisting the Scriptures. Was it not sufficient to preach God-centered sermons? Christ, after all, is God.

But later research and reflection persuaded me that "Christ-centered preaching" is much more specific than "God-centered preaching." According to the New Testament, preaching Christ is not preaching God in general but preaching the incarnate Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, as the climax of God's self-revelation. As John explains, "No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

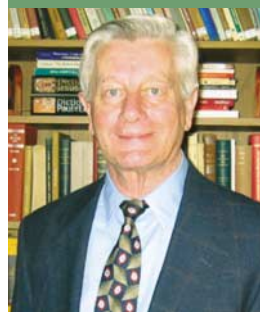
### *The Necessity of Preaching Christ*

The necessity of preaching Jesus Christ is clearly communicated in the New Testament. First, Jesus mandated his disciples to preach him. After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples, "Go ... and make *disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Second, we must preach Jesus Christ because he is the way of salvation. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). In fact, Jesus said that he is the *only* way of salvation. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; cf. John 17:3; Acts 4:12).

Third, we should preach the message of Jesus Christ explicitly in our post-Christian culture. In the past Christian culture, preachers could assume that their hearers would instinctively make connections between

by Sidney Greidanus, Professor of Preaching



the message of the sermon and Jesus. But one cannot make such assumptions in a post-Christian culture. If people think about God at all, they are inclined to think that there are many paths up the mountain to God. Christians follow one path, Jews another path, and Muslims still another. Eventually all meet on the same mountaintop. But if

the Bible is right, there is *only one* way to God: Jesus Christ. It becomes crucial, then, that we explicitly preach Jesus Christ in every sermon.

### *The Meaning of "Preaching Christ"*

But what is the meaning of "preaching Christ?" The most common understanding of "preaching Christ" is that it is preaching the person and work of Christ — work usually understood as Jesus' atoning work. This broader definition is supported by the New Testament. Although Paul claimed, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23), his letters make clear that his preaching was equally concerned with preaching Christ risen (1 Cor. 15:4), preaching "Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5), and preaching Jesus' Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

But even this definition of preaching the person and/or work of Jesus

*We should preach the message of Jesus Christ explicitly in our post-Christian culture.*

## Preaching Christ

Christ is too narrow for preaching Christ from every passage with integrity. Most Old Testament wisdom texts cannot legitimately be linked to the person or work of Jesus. We should add to our definition one more element: the *teaching* of Jesus.

In his missionary mandate, Jesus himself commanded us to pass on his teachings: “Make disciples of all nations ..., teaching them to obey everything *I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:20). John reiterated the importance of Jesus’ teaching: “Anyone who ... does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching [of Christ] has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

In thinking about preaching Christ, therefore, we should also include the teaching of Christ about such topics as God, the Kingdom of God, Jesus himself and his mission, salvation, God’s law, and our responsibility and mission. Accordingly, I suggest the following definition: “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament is to preach sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

This definition sees the task of preaching Christ as two-fold. First, preachers must discover the message of their chosen text in its own historical context. Second, preachers should understand this message in the broader contexts of the whole Bible and all of redemptive history. As they do this, they should look for a road from the periphery to the center of the Bible and redemptive history — a road from their text to Jesus Christ.

When the text contains a promise of the coming Messiah, preachers make this move instinctively. They automatically move from the promise to the fulfillment. For example, when we preach on Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” we do not stop at the meaning for Isaiah’s hearers but move from there to its fulfill-

ment in Jesus (Luke 4) and its meaning for contemporary hearers. Similarly, when we preach on God redeeming Israel from enslavement in Egypt, we should not stop at its message for Israel, but move on in redemptive history to God’s ultimate redemptive act in Jesus and its message for the church here and now.

### Ways of Preaching Christ from the Old Testament

In studying the New Testament as well as the history of preaching, I came to the conclusion that there are seven legitimate roads from the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. They are: (1) redemptive-historical progression, (2) promise-fulfillment, (3) typology, (4) analogy, (5) longitudinal themes, (6) New Testament references, and (7) contrast.<sup>2</sup>

If the preaching text is the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3, the choices are limited because the account describes a pre-Fall state. Yet preachers can move to Jesus by way of New Testament references: John 1:1-5 alludes to Genesis 1 and speaks of Jesus

as the Word of God by which all things were created. John continues in verse 14, “The Word became flesh,” which could be linked to Philippians 2:6-7, where Paul speaks of Christ Jesus, “who, being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”

If the preaching text is about a post-Fall event such as the Cain and Abel narrative in Genesis 4, preachers can move to Christ in a variety of ways:

- by way of *redemptive-historical progression*, tracing the battle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman from Cain vs. Abel, to Egypt vs. Israel, to Canaan vs. Israel, to Herod vs. Jesus, to Satan vs. Jesus, to the world vs. the church, to the final defeat of Satan (Rev. 20:10) and the victory of Christ.

- by way of an Abel-Christ *typology*: Abel, the seed of the woman who was killed by the seed of the serpent, is a type of Jesus

Christ, the Seed of the woman who would be killed by Satan.

- by way of *analogy*: As God assured Israel that he would maintain his covenant people in human history (see Gen. 4:25-26), so Jesus assures his church that “the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18).

- by tracing the *longitudinal theme* of the seed of the woman from Seth, the “seed” that replaced the martyred Abel (4:25), to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, to David, and finally Jesus Christ, the Seed of the woman.

- by using *New Testament references* such as Hebrews 12:24 or 1 John 3:11-13 as a bridge to Christ.

For Old Testament wisdom texts the road of *analogy* coupled with New Testament references can be a fruitful approach if the preacher discerns an analogous teaching of Jesus, the rabbi who taught in parables as the wise men of old. For example, in preaching on “Do not wear yourself out to get rich.... Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone” (Prov. 23:4-5), one can use analogy to move to Jesus’ similar teaching, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19). Or, preaching on Ecclesiastes with its frequent refrain of vanity, a preacher can use the way of *contrast*: because of Jesus’ resurrection, human life is not *vanity*. This can be supported by Paul’s final words in his resurrection chapter: “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is *not in vain*” (1 Cor. 15:58).

The point is that in the broader redemptive-historical context one can do justice to the original message of the preaching text, and preach Jesus’ person, work, or teaching, without twisting the Scriptures. Christ-centered preaching is not opposed to God-centered preaching. If done well, Christ-centered preaching exposes the very heart of God.

<sup>1</sup> This definition is from my book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 10.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed explanation of each of these, see *Preaching Christ...*, 203-77.

If done well, Christ-centered preaching exposes the very heart of God.

# Reading for Preaching

When my friend Jack Roeda and I were young ministers just out of seminary (he in Exeter, ON; I in Webster, NY) we used to talk about two things. We talked about preaching and we talked about reading. It seemed to us then, and seems to us now, that they go together. Good preaching needs good reading to nourish it, and the best preachers read a great deal more than Scripture and commentaries. They also read fiction, for instance, and biography, and essays. They read great children's literature for its "noble simplicity." A few even tune their ear on the poetry of such masters as Jane Kenyon.

Why read in order to preach? Of all reasons let me develop only one: reading deepens our knowledge of human character. If you enter the world of a good novel or biography, you will meet people in whom compassion and ambition vie for preeminence (Lyndon Johnson comes to mind), or who, at fifteen, instruct their parents' friends in politics (William F. Buckley). You will meet characters who boast of their dishonesties and conceal their virtues, or ones, like Adolf Hitler, who in private speak great wickedness with a soft and hesitant voice. You will find people, as in the novels of Russell Banks, whose dreams collapse and who then turn for reorientation not to the commands of God or to some other form of reality therapy, but rather to superstition. (How would you preach Saul and the witch of Endor without some exposure to this last possibility?)

As a preacher, if you ponder such novelties, they will expand you. You will become bigger and wiser. In fact, such growth in wisdom rises, I believe, to the

level of duty. After all, few of us possess lives so rich that we can sample most human possibilities — including possibilities for relationship to our Lord — within our own experience. So, in order to serve others wisely, we'll need to get out of town, out of the country, out of our own generation and century. To do this, we can travel or we can read. For those of us on a budget, reading takes us places. Reading widens the circle of our acquaintances. Reading gives us more to be Christian *with*.

We otherwise get stuck in our little phone booth in (say) southeast Grand Rapids, breathing our own carbon dioxide, and able to make only outgoing calls. We become provincial in thought, word, and deed. Our great, God-given, human capacities shrink, and even the gospel starts to look to us less like a drama than a formula.

What I'm saying is that reading deepens preaching because it deepens the preacher. The preacher who presumes to speak for God had better struggle to understand human character, divine grace, and the ironies and surprises at

*Reading for preachers  
is as non-negotiable  
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and just as arduous and  
just as rewarding.*

By Cornelius  
Plantinga, Jr.,  
President and Professor  
of Systematic Theology



their intersection. Let alone the fact that preachers who don't read cannot speak well: they have never developed a real feel for language, their first tool. Let alone the fact that the unread preacher displays to public scrutiny, week after week, a mind that is not decently clothed: they learn how to hide from themselves. The really sobering reality in this unhappy scenario is

what it says of a Christian minister's estimate of the preaching of the gospel: it need not be imaginatively excellent. Flat preaching is good enough. According to this line of thinking, as a preacher I can run programs and attend meetings and make visits; I can golf and pray and woodwork and watch TV. But I shall not struggle to furnish mind and spirit with rich things to gladden the hearts of hungry daughters and sons of God. I shall not struggle for new ways to retell the gospel of Jesus Christ so that it is astonishing all over again. I shall not read.

Church councils ought to decide whether such preachers need a sabbatical, a new job description, or even a new job. At the risk of sounding dogmatic — or just *being* dogmatic — let me say it straight: reading for preachers is as non-negotiable as training for athletes, and just as arduous and just as rewarding.

Maybe church councils should appoint committees to which preachers monthly report their conquests in the field of reading. Nothing less than the vitality of the preached gospel is at stake.

# Triple A (AAA) Assurance from Psalm 121

*From a meditation delivered December 6, 2002,  
in chapel at Calvin Theological Seminary*

Psalm 121 is known as “the traveler’s psalm” because its words have been a constant source of comfort for travelers. The missionary David Livingstone, for example, read this psalm when he left for Africa. In my own life, I read this psalm in January, 1968, in San Francisco before I boarded an airplane for Vietnam. In January, 1976, my father-in-law read Psalm 121 before our family left Grand Rapids to do mission work in Brazil.

Despite its popularity, however, this psalm is riddled with exegetical questions. For example, is the second clause of verse 1 a statement, as I learned from the *KJV*, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help?” Or is it a question, as the *NIV* translates it, “Where does my help come from?” I prefer to think of the mountains as the residence of the false Canaanite gods. I believe that this does justice to the penetrating question: “Where does my help come from?” It does not come from the mountains. The mountains are, as Jeremiah (Jer. 3:23) recognized ever so clearly, a source for deception.

## **A Confident Declaration of Trust**

This question sets the stage for the theme of this song: the confident declaration of trust in verse 2. The speaker declares with utter confidence that in times

*by Carl J. Bosma,  
Professor of Old  
Testament*



of trouble our only true source of help is the Lord, not the gods whose shrines are located on the mountains.

This declaration of trust is based on the speaker’s faith that the Lord is the “Maker of heaven and earth” a phrase used in the Apostles’ Creed. The word “maker” translates a Hebrew verb that denotes ongoing action. The Lord continues to act. The Old Testa-

ment concept of creation is not limited to a single act of the Lord in the past. Unlike false gods, the Maker of heaven and earth is not dormant but continues to be actively involved in history and in our lives. That is the distinctive character of the Old Testament doctrine of *continuous creation*, or what the Heidelberg Catechism calls providence.

## **Three Distinctive Assurances**

The practical implications of this doctrine are worked out in verses 3-8 by a series of personal assurances of the Lord’s protection. These verses hammer home this assurance by the repetition of the key verb “to watch over” six times. These assurances are addressed to you and me in a very personal way because verses 3-8 repeat the word “you(r)” 10 times. “The Lord watches over you” (vs. 5a). “The Lord watches over your coming and going” (vs. 8).

The poetic structure of verses 3-8 suggests that help from the Maker of heaven and earth takes the form of three distinctive assurances of the Lord’s protection.

For this reason I have entitled this meditation “AAA Assurance.”

## **A. The Assurance of Constant Vigilance**

The first assurance, found in verses 3-4, guarantees us the Lord’s constant vigilance. Verse 3 should really be translated as a prayer of intercession:

“May he not let your foot slip!  
May the one who protects you  
not slumber!”

This double petition links our song of unqualified trust to the voice of suffering believers in the lament psalms. These psalms (Ps. 38:16; 94:17) show us, first of all, that the danger of your foot slipping in the first petition refers not just to falling down. Rather, it is a common idiom for suffering a serious personal blow to health or other circumstances. Second, these psalms reveal that the concern addressed in the second petition is a real one. Listen, for example, to the voice of a believer struggling with injustice: “Awake, my God; decree justice!” (Ps. 7:6). Or hear the anxious cry of believers struggling with the Lord’s absence and inactivity: “Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever” (Ps. 44:23).

If we translate verse 3 as a prayer of intercession, then our song of trust does not brush these tensions of life to the side. Instead, it faces them head on in the powerful assurance of vs. 4: “Look, the Protector of Israel doesn’t sleep!” The divine title “Protector of Israel” evokes the memory of the Lord’s promise to Jacob: “I am with you and will protect you wherever

you go” (Gen. 28:15). The emphatic assurance of verse 4, therefore, doesn’t come out of thin air but is based on the personal experience of believers like Jacob (Gen. 35:3) and Joshua (Josh. 24:17).

### B. The Assurance of Personal Protection

The second assurance is found in verses 5-6. The assurance of these verses supports the testimony of verse 4. Significantly, its opening declaration repeats the participle “watch over” for the third time. However, we should note that the second assurance expands the vitally important testimony of verse 4 in two ways. I call this the assurance of the Lord’s personal protection.

First, the pivotal opening statement of verse 5a applies the truth of the constant vigilance by the Protector of Israel on a personal level. It emphatically announces: “The Lord is *your* protector.” In other words, clearly the anonymous protector of verse 3 and the Protector of Israel mentioned in verse 4 is the Lord. And he personally protects each one of us.

Second, the second statement in verse 5b describes for us the intimacy of the Lord’s constant protection with a lovely metaphor: “The Lord is your shade at your right hand.” Please note the position: “at your right hand.” The Lord doesn’t watch over you from a distance. He is right there with you, like a dutiful sentry. He is your personal bodyguard. I experienced that personal protection in Vietnam when our base camp in Cat Lai was attacked at the beginning of the Tet offensive.

The metaphor “shade at your right hand” denotes unfailing protection. Verse 6 gives us an impressive example of the unfailing power of the Lord’s intimate and personal protection over us with another emphatic negation. “If the Lord is your shade at your right hand, then neither the sun nor the moon can harm you. People not only knew the danger of sunstroke but also thought that the rays of the moon could cause brain damage. Just remember

the word *lunatic* (cf. Matt. 4:24; 17:15)! More importantly, the sun was worshiped as a high god. However, if the Lord is the Maker of heaven and earth, then the sun is only a big light, as Genesis 1:16 underscores so masterfully. Because the Lord is right there with us the sun has no power over us.

### C. The Assurance of Complete Coverage

The concluding couplet (vv. 7-8) constitutes the third and most comprehensive assurance of the Lord’s constant protection. For this reason I call it “The Assurance of Complete Coverage.”

This drums home the assurance of the Lord’s constant personal protection through a climactic triple repetition of the key verb “watch over.” Twice in verse 7 the psalm assures us emphatically that the Lord protects our lives from *all* evil. What a claim! Verse 8 then tops it all and expands the Lord’s constant protection to cover “your going out and coming in,” i.e. all our daily activities (Deut. 28.6) throughout all time.

Just imagine! This verse assures us that the Lord will protect our lives from all dangers, anywhere and anytime. Complete coverage, in other words, better than any insurance that can be purchased. Can you think of a more comforting assurance? I can’t! You’re in good hands with the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

### *The Lord’s Protective Presence*

We must be careful, however, to hear these powerful assurances of the Lord’s constant protective presence in the light of the prayer in verse 3, “May he not let your foot slip,” and in connection with the poignant expressions of pain and frustration in Psalm 120. If we don’t, there is the danger that the AAA Assurances of Psalm 121 will raise false hopes.

To avoid this danger, one must read Psalm 121 in the light of preceding psalms of lament. One must first hear the anxious voices of believers in Psalms

25:20 and 86:2, “Protect my life!” Only then can one fully appreciate the bold assurance that the Lord will protect our lives from all evil.

I made it back from Vietnam. I can testify with Jacob and Joshua that the Lord has protected me. But the sad fact is that some of my Christian buddies did not come home.

My wife, Anneke, and I have both suffered from cancer. Like the psalmist, we too took refuge in the Lord and cried out, “Protect my life!” By God’s grace we are both in remission and can testify with Psalm 12:7 that the Lord protects us. Sadly, however, Anneke’s cousin died from cancer a couple of weeks ago. So did Jylene Baas, the seminary’s faculty secretary in previous years.

The Lord protected the elders of the Presbyterian Church of Camboriú in Brazil with me when we were ambushed in the mountains on our way home from a weekend mission trip into the interior. But years before, one of our coworkers, Rev. Midkiff, was stoned.

These experiences constitute the real ambiguities of life that all of us know. And it is precisely in the midst of these trials that Psalm 121, placed strategically between Psalms 120 and 122, aims to awaken in us unassailable trust in the Lord’s constant providential protection of our lives. Its aim is not to opiate us from the pain of human suffering. Rather, it aims to move us from deep tragedy to profound trust.

To help us make that crucial move, however, Psalm 121 does not dwell on specific dangers. Instead, the six-fold repetition of the verb “watch over” in verses 3-8 teaches us that we should march through the complex ambiguities of life with our ears tuned to the drumbeat of the assurance that the Lord will watch over us.

Moreover, the position of Psalm 121 in the Book of Psalms teaches us that we must first voice publicly and boldly the anger and frustration

**Triple A Assurance**

► associated with the tragedy of our suffering to the only one who can take them away, the Lord. The Psalms provide us means to vent our deepest anxieties and fears. However, they also teach us that, as necessary as it is to unlock our pain, voicing it through psalms of lament is

not enough. We must also risk testifying about the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, whose personal providential protection is with us constantly as we suffer.

As we journey from Psalm 120 that laments our lack of peace to the city of peace — the New Jerusalem — in Psalm

122, be assured that you are in good hands with the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion (Ps. 134:3). Indeed, may the peace of God, “which transcends all understanding,” protect “your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). Amen.

## From Text to Sermon

*Forum editor Lugene Schemper interviews Carl Bosma*

**LS:** Carl, we’ve published your sermon on Psalm 121 in an edited form, omitting some of your exegetical comments as well as some of your applicatory comments related to your own experiences. I see it as a splendid example of biblical study applied to personal experience. This is obviously an important psalm for your life.

**CB:** This psalm has had a prominent place in Reformed worship and its declaration of trust was ingrained indelibly on my mind from an early age. As a young boy in the Netherlands I would answer the pastor’s question at the beginning of the service: “Congregation, where does your help come from?” with the words from verse 2: “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” As you can see from the sermon, the assurance of Psalm 121 has continued to be central in my life.

**LS:** It’s easy to see that there’s a lot of close biblical study behind this sermon. When you preach, how do you decide how much of that technical biblical study to include directly in the sermon?

**CB:** When I preached this sermon at Calvin Seminary I included more technical exegetical comments. That’s because most of the members of the seminary community are involved in the study of

the Bible in its original languages. I wouldn’t preach it that way for a regular congregation. But I wouldn’t exclude any hint of that work. People want to be equipped to study and read the Bible knowledgeably themselves. They want to know that you’ve done some serious study of the text, and some of the reasons for the decisions you’ve made in your interpretation of the text. Of course, a sermon is not a lecture, but only after you’ve made those decisions wisely can you begin to apply the Scriptures to everyday life correctly and sensitively.

**LS:** You teach the biblical courses on the psalms at Calvin Seminary. What are some of the important things future pastors ought to know in order to interpret the Book of Psalms for their congregations?

**CB:** I can illustrate a few of them from this sermon: You can see that it is important to understand something about the history of ancient Israel. (What is the significance of the mountains?) It is important to be able to look for literary patterns and clusters of important words in order to uncover important themes. (“Watch over” is repeated in this psalm six times. That’s not completely apparent from the English versions.) It is important to be able to discern the type or genre of the psalm and its location in

relation to other psalms. (This is a psalm of trust, occurring after a psalm of lament.) It’s important to be able to understand the vocabulary and conventional ways of speaking which the psalmist uses. (“May he not let your foot slip” does not indicate that the psalmist was speaking to mountain climbers, but is an idiomatic expression for something else.) I could go on, but my point is that the knowledge one gains by a close study of the psalms is important for preaching.

**LS:** How do you help students make the connection between academic study and sermon preparation?

**CB:** A major assignment for students in my introductory course is to construct three sermon outlines from the psalms. Students in my upper-level course on Psalms are required to write three sermons on the psalms and present them in class. I’ve worked hard to teach students to use *Logos*, a biblical studies software package that will help them use the biblical languages in their future sermon preparation. One of the primary goals of the biblical division at Calvin Seminary is to help students with their preaching. We teach biblical languages not to turn out Hebrew or Greek scholars, but to equip students to better understand the Scriptures for teaching and preaching.

# Who Seeks for a Spring in the Mud?

Ambrose, a famous fourth-century bishop, once refused to ordain a person for the ministry because the person walked too arrogantly. The decision was not sordid church politics; neither was it rash. Ambrose acknowledged that the person possessed some skills for ministry, but he was convinced that the candidate lacked humility, that his strut summed up his heart.

Many leaders in the early church believed that the excellence of a person's character should be the most important criterion for ordination. Making a less than virtuous person a pastor of God's people, Chrysostom said, was like marrying a beautiful young woman to an ugly pervert. Ambrose used a different analogy: "Who seeks for a spring in the mud? Who wants to drink from muddy water?" Who seeks a fountain of wise counsel in a dark soul?

Teaching or preaching was seen as the primary task of the pastor in the early church. It was assumed that if listeners were to draw pure water from sermons, the preacher would need virtually angelic virtue. Humility, for example, would keep a preacher's head from swelling as flatterers in search of favors showered their praises. When prostrated by slander, a preacher would need courage to rise but self-control to resist the sweet satisfaction of revenge. A preacher would need to love listeners enough to spend countless non-credit hours studying Scripture and culture. Patience too would be required, since preaching is less about coercion than about persuasion: preachers can't

force people to make progress in holy living, but they can plant powerfully enticing words and wait for growth.

Such general benefits of virtue are easy to understand. But for the early church, virtue was also critical because their preaching methods were often based on the moral character of the preacher. Take psychagogy for example. Psychagogy means, literally, "to guide souls." According to this method, the preacher is to guide listeners down the path of ever greater maturity by preaching the Gospel with gentleness and severity. The precise combination of tenderness and candid firmness depends on the faith and life circumstances of the listeners. In other words, this method assumes that the preacher must be virtuous — both truthful and gracious. The preacher must tell the shocking truth of who we are and what God has done, but say it graciously so that people are not unnecessarily offended.

By David  
Rylaarsdam,  
Professor of  
Historical Theology



Preachers in the early church detected this method throughout Scripture. The Apostle Paul was a master of psychagogy. Anticipating his listeners' needs with each word or turn of phrase, Paul varied the tone and content of his letters so that he was as persuasive as possible. He had integrity, he always spoke the truth, but sometimes that truth was presented less nakedly than at other times. Chrysostom's analysis of 1 Corinthians 1, for example, runs something like this: "See Paul's choice of words! Through his opening praises, he is subtly attacking them, already anticipating his open confrontation about the immoral brother in chapter 5 .... In this next phrase, Paul cuts and cauterizes. Soon he will apply a gentle medicine so that his listeners will not despair .... See how Paul, by a kind of divine art, inserts this covert accusation. He is clearly reproving, but simultaneously winning them over." Preaching as pastoral care. Coaxing, nudging, guiding, Paul's preaching was full of grace, yet full of truth.

Of course, said the early church, this is not Paul's preaching method. It's Christ's. He is "the One and Only, come from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Clothed in Christ's virtue, it is no longer Paul who preaches, but Christ who preaches through him. Through the preacher, we hear the persuasive voice of Christ saying, "Come to the spring. Here is living water; no mud. Come, drink, and live."

*The preacher must tell the shocking truth of who we are and what God has done, but say it graciously so that people are not unnecessarily offended.*

# Would Jesus Drive a Hummer?

## Reflections on Preaching about Social Issues

Put yourself in my shoes. I'm a busy preacher who has to prepare two sermons a week that are biblical, confessionally Reformed, timely and relevant for all ages. I am also keenly aware that the members of my congregation are wrestling with the moral, social, and political issues of the day such as abortion, euthanasia, the war on terrorism and Iraq, the environment, poverty, and racism. They want guidance — a word from their Lord.

Entering this arena as a preacher fills me with trepidation. I know how divisive these issues can be. It would be easier to avoid them altogether, but my conscience bothers me when I remember, among other things, the church's silence on race during the civil rights movement. At the same time, I have also seen so-called "prophetic" preaching and posturing that only cheers up political partisans who agree and alienates those who disagree. I am concerned that political disagreements might become an occasion to divide Christians at the table of our Lord.

I am now toying with a sermon idea captured in the title, "Would Jesus Drive a Hummer?" The title of course takes off on a recent ad campaign by environmentally concerned evangelicals under the theme "Would Jesus drive an SUV?" My sermon title raises the stakes considerably by going beyond your basic standard SUV to the newest status icon of high consumption, the Hummer, the desert military vehicle morphed into the ultimate macho, gas guzzling SAV (suburban assault vehicle). The Hummer serves as the perfect symbol for a whole host of issues demanding serious Christian moral reflection today: consumerism, stewardship, militarism (blood for oil!?)

I'm actually rather pleased with the sermon title.

But then I begin to reflect. Do I, as a preacher speaking with the Lord's authority, have any right to tell my congregation what kind of car to drive or what to think about Saddam Hussein? Is the title of this article really a serious moral question or only the sort of debating fun that takes place in college dormitories; or, perhaps, in a marquee-quality sermon title?

I know that appealing to the example of Jesus is popular today. In addition to the anti-SUV campaign, a high-ranking bishop of the United Methodist church recently appeared in a television ad schoolmastering fellow Methodist, President Bush, that an attack on Iraq is contrary to God's law and the example of Jesus. How does he really know this? I am reminded that in the

By *John Bolt*,  
Professor of  
*Systematic Theology*



CRC we have been rather careful about making such public pronouncements. Through study committees and synodical deliberation, we have developed thoughtful, principled positions on a host of issues, including just war, abortion, homosexuality, gambling, and apartheid. Do we need to do more? Specifically, do we need to be more aggressive in addressing immediate moral, social,

and political issues such as the current war on terrorism?

Let me get back to my sermon preparation and focus on the important questions to consider regarding preaching on social issues. The first has to do with the *identity* of the church and my own identity as a minister of the gospel. In a Reformed view, advocating or lobbying for specific social or political agendas is not the church's task. The church's mission and the pulpit's task is to proclaim the gospel. While social and political transformation must flow from this proclamation, it may never be its substitute. So, I need to ask, am I preaching the gospel or pushing a political ideology?

Second, does the church's specific mission or my office and training as a minister provide the necessary *competence* to address the many social, political and economic problems facing the world? Of course I have opinions on these matters, opinions I trust are shaped by the gospel. But when Christian "experts" in these fields disagree, how do I dare claim gospel certainty for a debatable political view?

*Do I, as a preacher speaking with the Lord's authority, have any right to tell my congregation what kind of car to drive or what to think about Saddam Hussein?*

Third, does being too specific on detailed public policy matters create *immature* believers? Does the principle of *Christian liberty* not leave political choices up to individual Christian believers? When churches or their preachers take public stands, what happens to members who disagree? It's difficult when a "thus saith the Lord" from the pulpit frames the position from which they dissent. Faced with a "submit or rebel" option, members find their maturity challenged and their freedom in Christ threatened.

Furthermore, how *necessary* is it for the church to be directly involved in advancing a socio-political agenda when the tradition of American voluntary association already affords believers a host of possible avenues for distinctly Christian political witness (e.g. Bread for the World, Prison Fellowship)? It is one thing for me actively to encourage members of my congregation to fulfill duties of discipleship by listening to God's call to "act justly and love mercy," but quite another to direct them to specific political and social causes.

Finally, where is the pulpit's real *power*? With what *weapons* does the church of Christ do battle against injustice and unrighteousness? I think of Paul's discussion of the Christian's armor in Ephesians 6 and the apostle John's profession that "faith is the victory that overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). Doesn't the church become weaker when it moves in the direction of becoming another political lobby group? After all, the Great Commission does not say, "Go into the world rallying people around your political campaign."

As I write this article, the coalition forces are approaching Baghdad. This Sunday some preachers will struggle not with whether to preach about driving a Hummer, but with whether to use the

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peoples of the earth.*

pulpit to support or denounce a war. Regardless of my personal political inclinations, as a minister of the gospel I need to call God's people to prayer and action around three key affirmations.

### **1. God is sovereign, the Lord of history and the Judge of the nations.**

Passages such as Psalm 2 ("Why do the nations rage ...?") and Psalm 46 ("He makes wars cease ... /Be still and know that I am God.") come to mind. God's people need to have their hope and confidence rekindled in critical times such as these. The first task of a minister of the gospel is to point to the promises of our faithful God and to lead God's people to this confession: because God is King and Jesus is Lord, we can confidently acknowledge that the Lord's judgments (even in war) are "right and true altogether."

### **2. Our ultimate allegiance is to God's kingdom above all kingdoms of this world.**

God's people, especially those who are American citizens, need to be warned about the dangers of civil religion, an idolatrous devotion to one's country. We

must seek God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) and obey God over all human authority (Acts 5:29). "Thy kingdom come" trumps all prayers for national well-being. We ought to pray for freedom, justice, peace, and flourishing for all peoples of the earth. At the same time, as exiles and strangers in this world (1 Peter), we are to pray for the welfare of the city/nation in which we live (Jer. 29:7). We may and should pray for our nation's well being, but we must also pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

### **3. Civil authority is God's servant to establish justice and order.**

In our preaching, teaching, praying, and acting as Christians, we ought to avoid assuming that peace is the mere absence of warfare and that peace means avoidance of all exercise of sword power. We ought to pray for liberation from all tyranny and tyrants. The key texts here are of course Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

In the Great Commission God calls us to pray and work so that the gospel of the kingdom will come to the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). The immediate implication for us today is to pray for the gospel of peace to be proclaimed in places like Iraq, to pray for our brothers and sisters there, and to pray for missionaries, especially mindful of their persecution and suffering.

So, would Jesus drive a Hummer? Actually, here we do have a clue from the gospels. When Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly on Palm Sunday, it was not on a war steed but on a humble beast of burden, a donkey. Jesus in a Hummer? Not likely. While there may be a lesson here about the church's task in times of war, I am not sure if this really provides any direct moral guidance to what sort of cars we ought to drive.

# Four Recent Books on Preaching

Reading good books on preaching helps me as a preacher to continue to think in fresh ways about what God calls me to do each week in the pulpit. In my experience God has used my reading about preaching and reading good collections of sermons to stimulate me as a preacher, to hone my skills, and to prompt me to embrace my calling more deeply. Here are a few suggestions of recent books I have found helpful.

Two books on my shelf that embody theologically well-developed homiletical approaches are Paul Wilson's *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Abingdon, 1999) and Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Baker, 1994). Either of these can serve as a mini refresher course in preaching. Both Wilson and Chapell stimulate us to think again about the place of God in our preaching and the importance of balancing preaching sin with preaching grace. Wilson's book is especially helpful and readable, since he includes numerous sermon samples and stories that portray the ongoing activity of God. Good preaching leads people into a life-giving encounter with the living God and periodically thinking about how best to do this is central to our calling as preachers.

Ronald J. Allen's *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (Chalice Press, 1998) offers a broad survey of some recent trends in modern homiletics. Allen summarizes the approaches of more than thirty writers on preaching, including David Buttrick, Tom Long, Eugene Lowry and Joseph Jeter, and includes a sermon by each. Some of the writers address specific homiletical situations such as preaching at weddings and funerals, or preaching about social justice. Allen's book, while too short for its broad scope, can serve as a quick introduction to

important people and issues in preaching today. It also offers those of us who preach more sermons than we hear an opportunity to listen through our reading to a variety of colleagues.

Richard Lischer's recently revised *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching* (Eerdmans, 2002) offers a survey that includes both sermons and theological reflection on the homiletical task across the centuries. This book offers a little course on the history and theology of preaching.

by John Rottman,  
Pastor of Grace  
Christian  
Reformed Church,  
Scarborough,  
Ontario; Part-time  
Instructor in  
Preaching



Collections of good sermons are also important for practicing preachers. Among them are Barbara Brown Taylor's *Home by Another Way* (Cowley, 1999) or Fleming Rutledge's *The Bible and the New York Times* (Eerdmans, 1998) which offer readers the opportunity to listen to the pure voice of a single preacher at her seasoned best.

This year expect God to use your reading to shape you as a preacher and include several books on preaching in your reading plans. Read a few good sermons too.

## Ministry Resource Center Opens

Have you ever wondered where to go for the most helpful materials to plan a worship service, write a sermon, teach a church school class, lead a small group Bible study, or develop an outreach program for your church? Have you ever wished you could compare leading church ministry programs and their related materials, some of which are available only at great cost and effort? Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College are delighted to introduce the new Ministry Resource Center (MRC), located physically in the Hekman Library, but with many resources available electronically to anyone with Internet access.

The MRC is designed to be a collection of practical resources for all aspects of congregational ministry. The Hekman Library is officially administering the new center, with assistance from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and funding through Calvin's Lilly Vocation Project. The Center formally opened in January 2003, and Center manager, Dr. Ed Seely, says the MRC is now fully operational.

Seely, an ordained pastor in the RCA with thirty-five years of experience in church ministry (primarily church education), says the Center will benefit a variety of people: pastors, worship planners and leaders, church school teachers, youth pastors, students and faculty, as well as many others. Seely says the Center is designed to be a carefully monitored collection of biblically and theologically sound resources, with an emphasis on materials designed for use in ministry settings. The resources are being annotated, with recommendations as to their subject matter, special features, uses, strengths, and weaknesses. The MRC is a "work in progress," with more resources being added every day and over 200 each month. For information as to hours of operation, as well as electronic access, check [www.calvin.edu/library/mrc](http://www.calvin.edu/library/mrc).



Ministry  
Resource  
Center

## Preach Leaving; Support Cleaving

*“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh.”*

Genesis 2:24 (RSV)

One of the deepest sorrows in any church is the report of another divorce in the congregational family. Marital breakdown has become increasingly common within the Christian community. We no longer live in a culture that holds people to a high standard of marriage. We forget that part of the mix of married life *includes* conflict and its management. All too often, a husband or wife may call for an end to a marriage precisely at the point where there is gold to mine from the depths of marital difficulty. Helping married partners find their way through the interpersonal disagreements that emerge as an inevitable part of the intimacy of marriage can promote their personal spiritual growth together.

How can preaching support marriage and assist husbands and wives in respecting the boundaries of marriage? One way is to preach *leaving*, as Moses intends it in Genesis 2:24. God intends that men and women make *a critically important break* from their parents in order to become adults who are capable of the intimacies and the battles of marriage. This break is part of the “letting go” that parents must quietly do when their children grow beyond childhood. It results in the necessary and important tear in a mother’s eye when a son or daughter leaves for college, and the tear in a father’s eye as he walks his daughter down the marital aisle. It hurts to truly let go, but this pain is a testimony to the depth of the relationship between parents and child. It is a good pain, and a source of suffering *not* to be avoided. If our children are to marry well and be married well, God tells us that

they must leave us so that they are first of all accountable to each other. “For this reason,” a husband and wife must push off from the homes of their childhoods and set sail in their own marital ship.

Put negatively, married couples who fail to follow this Biblical prescription of leaving their parents create relationships that are not sufficiently insulated from parents, and not clearly bounded. If this is the case, there may not be enough room for marital intimacy to thrive or for marital conflict to be managed. Marital partners may be too concerned with pleasing their parents as a family duty. Or they may be too invested in displeasing parents because of unresolved family conflicts. When this happens, their own primary connection to their spouses is compromised. As married adults, it may be good to have coffee with parents some of the time, but it may not be good to have coffee with them all of the time!

Additionally, leaving parents as God instructs us means forgiving them for

By Ronald Nydam,  
Professor of  
Pastoral Care



whatever hurts they may have caused us in our earlier years. Wherever we fall short of this ideal of letting go of resentments, our marriages are *always* affected in a negative fashion. It may take years to take leave of parents, but God’s instruction is wise. We must take *leave* well if we are to *cleave* well to the person we marry.

Jesus makes reference to this Biblical principle when he reaf-

firms the permanence of marriage in Matthew 19. “Haven’t you read?” he asks, “that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, ‘for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Our Lord sees the permanence of marriage resting on leaving parents so that married couples can stay together. *Leaving is God’s condition for cleaving.*

Paul makes reference to this leaving and cleaving when he speaks of the profound mystery of marriage in Ephesians 5:32. He speaks of the wonderful capacity to lose yourself in another and to become so “one flesh” with another so that two become one. This is the kind of union that Christ creates with his bride, the church. This is the goodness of marriage, but it is only set in motion to the extent that leaving really happens. We can’t have it both ways; that’s not God’s way for marriage. We must preach the leaving presented to us in Genesis 2 as the God-given basis for building good foundations for marriages. These will be marriages that can bless husbands and wives so that someday they too, secure in their relationships, can let their children take leave of them.

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## CTS Promotes Continuing Education for Preachers

Preaching is an important topic in the seminary's continuing education program. A conference was held in January 2003 on "Preaching and Teaching from Romans" featuring the Rev. Dr. N. T. (Tom) Wright, canon theologian of Westminster Abbey in London, and soon to be the Bishop of Durham. Dr. Wright expounded on Paul's entire letter to the Romans in three sessions and gave a number of preaching or teaching themes for each section. The presentations were based on Dr. Wright's recent commentary on Romans in the

New Interpreter's Bible series, volume 10 (Abingdon, 2002). Close to 200 students, pastors, and teachers from a variety of churches and institutions enjoyed Dr. Wright's presentations, and were encouraged to hear an internationally known biblical scholar who preaches on a regular basis in his own congregation.



God from the Old Testament." And on June 5-7, 2003, the Second Bible and Ministry Conference on "Preaching the Gospel of Isaiah in the Twenty-First Century" will be held at CTS. Registration information is online at [www.calvin.edu/worship](http://www.calvin.edu/worship).

On March 13, 2003, Dr. Richard Pratt of the Reformed Theological Seminary led the annual Expository Preaching Conference on the topic "Preaching the Kingdom of

For those who cannot travel to CTS, tapes of lectures and conference sessions can be ordered by phone (616)957-6029 or email ([semit@calvin.edu](mailto:semit@calvin.edu)). Also, the lectures can be listened to online by going to the lecture archive at [www.calvinseminary.edu](http://www.calvinseminary.edu).

## First Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients Named

The Faculty and Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary are honored to name the Rev. Clarence Boomsma, the Rev. Herman Keizer, Jr., and the Rev. Dr. Lewis Smedes (posthumously) as recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Awards for 2003.

**Rev. Clarence Boomsma** was ordained into the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in 1943, serving the congregation in Imlay City, Michigan for five years. In 1948 he accepted a call to serve as the first pastor of the Calvin Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI, where he ministered with distinction until his retirement in 1983. His denomination asked Rev. Boomsma to write its landmark Report on Homosexuality in 1973, appointed him Secretary of the Inter-Church Relations Committee, and four times elected him President of Synod.



Throughout his ministry, Rev. Boomsma gained a reputation for eloquence, love of the church, and faithfulness to the gospel. His ministry became a quest for Christian wisdom and a model of it. When Rev. Boomsma entered the pulpit at Calvin Christian Reformed Church,

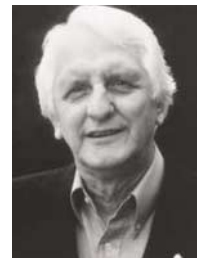
everyone knew they would hear the work of a craftsman, but, above all, of a man filled with the grace of Jesus Christ.

**Rev. Herman Keizer, Jr.** was ordained into the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in 1968, and spent thirty-four years as a military chaplain in service of his church and country. He has served as Executive Director of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board, The Pentagon, Washington, DC, from 1968–1994; as Chaplain (Colonel), HQ US European Command, Stuttgart, Germany from 1994-97; as Special Assistant, Army Chief of Chaplains and Assistant Deputy for Human Relation and Leadership, The Pentagon, during 1997 and 1998, and as Special Advisor, International Religious Freedom, Washington, DC, from 1998 until his retirement from the Army in 2002. Following his distinguished military career, Colonel Keizer returned to civilian life and is currently serving as Director of Chaplaincy Ministries for the Christian Reformed Church. In these endeavors Rev. Keizer has displayed crisp intelligence, a hunger for God's righteousness, and an appealing blend of strength and compassion. In an ecumenical environment, he



joined hands with all who worship Jesus Christ, while also anchoring his ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

**Dr. Lewis B. Smedes** (1921–2002) earned bachelor degrees at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary and a Th.D. from the Free University of Amsterdam. His graduate work also included study at Oxford University and at the University of Basel. He was ordained into the ministry in 1954 to serve as pastor of the Madison Ave CRC in Paterson, NJ. In 1957 he joined the faculty of Calvin College, where he taught theology with remarkable imagination and power. During his tenure at Calvin College, Dr. Smedes also published regularly in *The Reformed Journal* and led the Grand Rapids Urban League as its President. In 1970 he accepted an appointment in theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, where his classes filled with grateful students, some of whom simply wanted to hear Lewis Smedes pray. He was a man of many parts — a brilliant author, creative preacher, absorbing friend and counselor. Many believe he is the most humane Christian they have ever known.



## Choir Encounters Ministry in the Midwest

“A rich variety.” That’s how CTS choir members described their experiences on the Ministry Encounter Weekend that took them to Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois during spring break in April 2003. As well as singing and preaching in various places in the Midwest, they also gained perspectives on ministry from rural and urban pastors and from campus ministers and seminary professors at Dordt and St. Olaf Colleges and Luther Seminary. The choir sang in places as diverse as a retirement home in Pella, Iowa, and the soup kitchen at Roseland Christian Ministries in inner city Chicago. They had a variety of musical listening experiences too, including an organ concert at Dordt College in Sioux Center, a quartet of disabled persons at Hope Haven in Rock Valley, the famous choirs at St. Olaf College, and the praise and worship band



at Willow Creek Community Church.

A main event of the six-day excursion was a combined worship service held in the B.J. Haan Auditorium at Dordt College on Sunday evening, April 6. In spite of a snowstorm developing outside, 800 people gathered for the Service of Lenten Word and Song with the CTS choir singing, Norma de Waal Malefyt at the organ, and Vice President Duane Kelderman preaching.

A highlight for many seminarians in the group was talking about their calling to ministry with church members and high school and college students. This happened in adult education classes at six churches in northwest Iowa, in informal conversations over sandwiches with Dordt students, and while scooping snow with members of host families.

This was just one of the ways choir members moved from singing to mingling. Director Roy Hopp has a special hand signal to let the choir know when it’s time to go out and mingle — meet the people, start conversations, shake hands, warm hearts. Students did this everywhere they went — spreading compassion and making connections. Along the way they also learned about the great variety that ministry has to offer, and found themselves being shaped and molded and stretched as they developed in their pastoral identities.

## ‘The Parsonage’ Takes Shape at CTS

When Neal Plantinga was being interviewed for his new post two years ago he said that hospitality would be one of his top priorities. Thanks to the generosity of Ren and Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, the President’s dream for the Seminary is taking physical shape in a



large, two-story house just southeast of the Seminary building. At least twice a

week, Neal and Kathleen plan to host meals there for students, faculty, staff, donors, trustees, and guests from around the world. Plans also include sign-up sheets for students to play pocket billiards, and child-sized furniture to accommodate students’ children during meals on the lower level. “No student should go through CTS without having dinner at The Parsonage,” says Neal, who will receive assistance in the Seminary’s mission from the skilled people of the Food Service at Calvin College. The Parsonage will be finished in August, and the Plantingas expect to move in before the beginning of the next academic year.

**Members of the quilting circle of South Grandville CRC presented beautiful home-made baby quilts, hats and mittens to several of our seminary families. Their gifts were very much appreciated by the always-growing family at CTS.**



Where is the church going today?

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**The future is uncertain,  
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