



Kerux

EXTRA LARGE
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exam
EDITION

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What happened to *Kerux*?

by Christian Bell, Editor in Chief

In my first editorial of the year explaining the change of publishing *Kerux* online, I made the bold statement that "*Kerux* is published every Friday during the main academic school year, excepting holidays and exam weeks." That same statement of commitment is also reflected in our About page. And yet the date of the most recent *Kerux* prior to this one is 19 March.

What happened? The short version is that it's my fault. The long version is that it's still my fault.

Kerux is a student publication of Calvin Theological Seminary; its content reflects students' content. This year, *Kerux* moved to a more structured approach. There is an actual *Kerux* staff, who faithfully attended many meetings and gave their input on what content should appear in *Kerux*, to say nothing of the large volume of their own writing that appeared in these pages.

The *Kerux* staff have faithfully fulfilled their duty to attend meetings, write articles, and maintain momentum. The lapse in publication came in spite of their hard effort. The staff submitted articles, and yet no publication was put out.

When it comes to actually putting together the finished product you now hold in your hands or read through on your screen, *Kerux* is largely a one man operation, and I am that one man. The problem with relying on one person is that that one person has to, in turn, be reliable. In my case, that was a problem. I could cite a number of potential excuses: full-time work and part-time school, outside commitments, having to take my oral comp exams twice, being in my last quarter, etc. Ultimately, though, none of these excuses bypasses the simple matter that my responsibility as editor in chief is to attend to *Kerux* faithfully throughout the year, and in the past six weeks, that did not happen.

Why bother you the reader with this? Because you need to know that the commitment to put out *Kerux* on a weekly basis — the most ambitious publication schedule ever undertaken by this publication — is still important. The life and community of CTS is vibrant and alive; things happen all the time. It's not enough for the student publication to come out monthly, bi-monthly, or occasionally as the editor sees fit. That this weekly schedule fell to the wayside has surely broken my heart more than anybody else's who is now reading this.

So let it be known that readers have questioned and *Kerux* staff members have prompted, "When is the next *Kerux* coming out?" The answer is, "Today," and "Next week." And hopefully, for many years to come. May future editors run the race more consistently than I have — it's a goal that's worth striving for.

CTS town hall discusses Third Wave Pentecostalism

by Chad Vandervalk, Contributing Editor

On Thursday, April 26, a town hall meeting was held in the Student Center at Calvin Theological Seminary to discuss the two synodical reports on Third Wave Pentecostalism; topics discussed included prophecy, healing ministry, spiritual warfare, and dialogic prayer.

The panel consisted of Dr. Mariano Avila, professor of New Testament and contributor to the 2007 minority report on Third Wave Pentecostalism, Dr. David Holwerda, author of 1973 report on Neo-Pentecostalism, Rev. Dr. Jeff Stam, founder and former director of Set Free Ministries, Rev. Dr. Tom Swieringa, Advocate for Renewal in the Reformed Churches, and Dr. Paul Tameling, administrative director of Set Free Ministries and contributor to the 2007 majority report on Third Wave Pentecostalism.

The opening question to the entire panel was, “What is the third wave?” This proved very hard to define. Tameling refused to define it as “it is carried on in different levels and it is multi-faceted.” Swieringa and Stam linked the third wave to developments in the Vineyard movement. Swieringa defined the first wave as the movement in the early 1900's generally labelled as the Pentecostal movement, the second wave as the 1960's Charismatic movement, and the third wave as a balancing influence to the excesses of the Charismatic movement. Stam linked third wave Pentecostalism to the Signs and Wonders movement. Avila noted that the so-called third wave developed earlier in Latin America. He also mentioned that there have been some extreme expressions which gave rise to “extra and para-Biblical expressions.”

Given the size of the panel, there was little time for discussion, and they each presented some of their own experiences with the various expressions of Third Wave Pentecostalism in Reformed communities. All of the panellists expressed a desire to maintain close connections to scripture while looking at this movement, some were more reticent than others, however. Avila noted that an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit often leads to division and tension in churches as individuals begin to think themselves superior to others. He argued that this emphasis has caused people to think of themselves as less Christians and that is a danger. “What about the Reformers, they did not have any of these waves, but their preaching of the word caused them to change the world in which they lived.” The main thing Avila urged was caution, “There are some very dangerous situations in the movement which require a very sound foundation to understand.” Stam noted that Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International has formed the Dunamis project to “gain some of the benefits of the movement while remaining faithful to scripture. Are we a people that cry out to God in expectation? I think we should be!”

Holwerda argued that one of the central concerns was the definition of prophecy. He argued that the majority report had narrowed the definition of prophecy to such an extent that the preaching of the Word was excluded. It seems to limit prophecy to a spontaneous word that speaks the truth about a person or situation while having no human way to judge the truth of the information. “If a message is prepared is it no longer prophecy?” He argued that this is a shift that moves against not only the whole tradition but also against the scriptures. “The Old Testament prophets were not giving new messages, but repeating the message of the Torah, the scriptures.” Stam conceded that since the report is a response to a cessationist concept of the work of the Spirit may have leaned too far in the other direction.

One thing that was interesting about the discussion was the lack of terminological unity with the panel. It was difficult for them to even define what it was that they were supposed to discuss. It is important for terms to be defined so that people can speak about the same things and not talk at cross purposes.

So, how do we define the spiritual gift of prophecy? Is it something different than preaching? Should we include the gift of prophecy in the list of ministerial qualifications? Does the church recognise it when prophecy happens? Do church members understand how to think of this spiritual gift? These are questions the community will continue to wrestle with.

Engaging the world or feeding the hype?

A retrospective of the 2007 Festival of Faith and Music

by Daniel Hoard, Staff Writer

As many people are so fond of pointing out, I am too churchy, so not to disappoint such an empowering title, I am excited about giving some informative commentary about my experiences in attending the 2007 Festival of Faith and Music (FFM).

It was interesting – a Christian conference where a body of Christians are committed to intentionally and genuinely engaging with the world of Christian artists who produce the so-called art that is appreciated by secular and Christian audiences alike. While I must congratulate the intention of Christians seeking to have a conversation with world about anything, at the same time, I must disagree with wisdom saying of the baseball movie *The Field of Dreams* that “If you build it they will come.” FFM 2007 was, at best, a conversation between Christians about their favorite secular bands.

FFM began on March 30th with a brief introduction by Ken Heffner, Director of Student Activities at Calvin College concerning the goal and mission of the FFM and the etiquette of not living out a cult of personality and celebrity. One of the goals of the FFM is to acknowledge that in the history of the church, engaging the arts of the world has not been done thoroughly, and when it has been done, it has not been done well. This festival was advocated for by Calvin College to correct this. While I would agree with that, there is also a judgmental and Kuyperian pat on the back that begs the complement to oneself that says: look at what I can do and see what you have not done.

Heffner emphasized, with emotion, that there is a noble calling that the FFM seeks out within its mission. This noble calling is to create a ‘safe space’ where engaging God’s world is necessary in order to see the beauty in the world of art where many unchurched and churched people alike thrive.

The passion that Heffner is trying to capture with such a calling is that of a strict Kuyperian worldview; however, when one looks around at FFM 2007, one sees the coolest of cool within the body of the church, who nevertheless delineate themselves as Christians, Christ followers, or spiritual believers.

Heffner warned about not fostering a culture of celebrity – which means not doing things like asking a favorite celebrity for photo opportunities or autographs. Whenever you need to make such declarations, its too late, because many would confess their attendance to such a festival is just to attend Sufjan Stevens’ performance and hear a lecture by him because he is so cool. If Sufjan Stevens were not the keynote component at FFM 2007, would the attendance be so high?

It seems to me Heffner is fostering a culture of personality intentionally within the Christian sub-culture. At Calvin College, the FFM is primarily an experiment in Christians engaging with Christians about the art world. The rest of the people attending such a conference are there in order to either hear their favorite band or witness the intellectualization of their favorite band.

Why is it that those who abuse the Kuyperian heritage are so intent in turning mediocre artists into the next Bono – somebody who will give a lecture about art, music, faith, and culture? Let’s move on.

The saving grace of the FFM 2007 was in one of the keynote speeches by author Lauren Winner, which seems to have happened by complete accident. Winner, who is best known for her contributions to art in the form of literature, memoir, and sexuality, asked the question herself: “Why am I here, at a conference on faith and music?”

In her keynote, she enlarged the focus of the conference to engage faith and art at large, not just music. She encouraged

attendees to reflect on the biblical notions of art. She also said that it would be a mistake to say that Christians can only participate in the creation of art, and not to say that there are no connections between God, truth, beauty, and the creation of art. Winner's focus was that of the higher arts. To Winner, the 'higher arts' means to look at classical music, classical literature, and whatever else needs the word classical to develop its ontology.

To think about faith and the high arts is a noble task, and a worthy pursuit for intellectuals at a place like Calvin College. However, given the hipster representation at FFM, the events and performances would have to be relevant to the audience in attendance, and the higher arts had little representation at FFM 2007. Given Winner's keynote address, there seemed to be two fighting ideologies at FFM: the call to be cool and hear the coolest new bands around in pop culture, and the constant critique of embracing the high arts.

Author David Dark also made an appearance at FFM 2007 to give a lecture on faith, culture, and the arts. Dark, known for his books *Everyday Apocalypse* and *The Gospel According To America*, gave some ideas about how to think about faith and culture. Although Dark's presentation was inherently provocative, it lacked any solid content and never seemed to go anywhere. (Note to self: If I ever speak at a conference, make sure my presentation fits within the allotted time I have been given, because they will cut me off.)

Dark reflected on the perception of poetry, music, and art within language frameworks. He used as an example of this poetry the lyrics of the Beck song "Where It's At," in which the band sings about "the jigsaw jazz and get fresh flow." Again, intellectually looking at these ideas is fun in a Calvin College sort of way, but when it comes to engaging the world's perceptions about faith and music, the world would be sick of such Christian privatizations of such a non-spiritual saying from a cool band.

Dark also seemed to suggest that if art is true, it is Christian. While this is an interesting (if narrow) approach to examining art, faith, and culture, one misgiving I have about such naiveté is that artists are constantly using art as means to tell lies that show truth. Similarly, there are examples of Christian art that tell lies but don't always reveal truth. The same cannot be said of non-Christian art though.

As I try to embrace the experience as a whole with positive language and less critique, I find myself having to apologize for being too critical and not positive enough. I do think the general idea behind FFM is sourced in a good calling. The Kuyperian heritage of Calvin College keeps them accountable to the threat of being worldly. However, I do think this event used Kuyper and abused his intentions in engaging the world in faith and art. The truth is that this so-called 'conversation' with the world never left the boundaries of the church and Christendom.

I would have to say that, at best, this was a conference on exploring who is leading whom in the cult of Christian cool. Such a meeting does not bring forth serious conversation with the world at large; only like-minded Christians, whether in culture or in practice, participate in the conversation.

New coffee system perks up student body

Arrival of new caffeine dispensing machinery sparks discussion, awe amongst community

by Walter Miedema, Contributing Editor

In March, the Student Senate of Calvin Theological Seminary purchased a new coffee maker to be placed in the student center. While this may seem like a trivial matter, reaction from students has indicated otherwise.

Student Senate President Dave Prince said of the new machines "In my three years on Senate, no other student life issue has inspired more complaints than coffee."

While progress was made on improving the coffee situation a few years ago, the student body indicated to the Senate that not enough had been done.

"Two years ago, Senate purchased a commercial coffee machine for the Student Center which is dependant on students making their own coffee, for which they pay 25 cents per cup on the honor system," Prince said. "Coffee availability is contingent on someone making the coffee, and is therefore inconsistent in quality."

Not only was the quality of the coffee inconsistent, there were other factors that made the old coffee system and coffee maker unpopular.

"In the evening it seems that coffee was made and then left on the burner, resulting in burned out coffee pots and potential fire hazards." Prince said. He also said that either Assistant to the Dean of Students Ina De Moor or a Student Senator needed to service the coffee area through regular cleaning and trips to Costco for supplies. Cleanup was always a hassle.

The new coffee system is set up to deal with these difficulties. Under the new system, the coffee machine makes individual cups of coffee from which students can select one of more than ten flavors, as well as decaffeinated coffee or black tea. A coin system has been set up and the cost of a cup of coffee is 50 cents, but there may still be some cost to Senate for monthly machine rental and some initial start up costs. Student Senate hopes that this system will be cleaner, more efficient, and far better quality.

Coffee drinkers at CTS agree that the quality of coffee is much better. It is also evident that the coffee area is cleaner and less of a hassle to maintain.

Yet not everyone is entirely convinced that this is a better system than the previous. Aaron Greydanus, a first-year M.Div. student and frequent coffee drinker, is a little skeptical of the new system. "To be honest, I don't like it, but that's mostly because you're paying a lot more for a lot less coffee," Greydanus said.

This is a minor hang-up that some CTS students have about the new system: its cost versus its relative size.

On the new coffee machine, there are two options for selecting the strength and size of the cup of coffee. A larger cup means more coffee, but not as strong a cup, while selecting a smaller cup means less coffee, but a more potent portion. Yet, even if a student selects a large cup, there is only enough coffee brewed to fill half to three-quarters of a cup of coffee (depending on the size of the mug). Many students who bring their own tumblers and coffee mugs would need to buy two large cups of coffee for a dollar to fill their mugs in this new system, instead of paying a quarter to fill their cups with the old system.

Greydanus has remedied this situation by bringing his own coffee to school in his tumbler and one-person thermos. "I used to buy a cup of coffee from the student senate about 3 or 4 times a week. But since they switched to the new coffee maker I bought a cup of coffee once in the last two weeks. It's true that the coffee is better quality, which might be a bigger plus for many students, it's just that, to me, coffee is coffee and I'm not as particular about what kind I drink."

It's obvious from the number of cups already sold that many CTS students are unlike Greydanus in that they are apparently more particular about what kind of coffee they drink — and they enjoy the change. M.Div. student Dan Hoard is one of those students. "I think it (the new coffee maker) is really good," Hoard said. "The quality is much better — I can actually drink this kind of coffee, and I couldn't say that about the other coffee."

Hoard also says that the new coffee machine has another advantage besides being better quality coffee.

"It keeps people honest. There were people who wouldn't put their 25 cents into the coffee can under the old honor system."

"Not me of course," Hoard was quick to add, "but there were a number of people who used to abuse the generosity of the Student Senate. So I don't mind paying a little more for a better cup of coffee."

Have a little class

Everything [else] you need to know to not be an embarrassing failure in ministry

by Susannah Constantine, *Kerux* cultural attaché

Through four years of classes, the seminary teaches students everything they need to know to have a good baseline understanding of Scripture, theology, church history, and pastoral care. But a vital component is lacking in that educational rubric that many students will sadly never receive a formal education in: everything else. The seminary isn't, of course, a liberal arts academy – it's assumed that students had that before coming in. But what if they haven't? (And many students seem not to have.)

What follows is a partial list of everything else apart from doctrines and Bible verses that you need to know to not be an embarrassing failure in ministry: how to dress, how to eat, what to drink, and more. You might criticize this list for being cosmopolitan, but so much of the real world is.

Clothes

Be able to dress yourself for any occasion. Know the difference between business casual, semi-formal, formal, and black tie. Have at least two outfits for each. Know how to mix and match colors. Never ever wear black and brown together. If you're going to wear jeans, wear nice jeans. Learn how to shop sales at boutique stores; you can dress yourself well for a tenth the tag price if you know when and where the sales are. Ask around if you don't know. Know a nice shoe from an ugly shoe; professor Van Reken tells about how a conversation with a wealthy congregant prompted him to go out and buy wingtips. Do you know what a wingtip is or where to buy a pair? Learn it.



Men: Know how to tie a tie. Absolutely know how to tie a bloody tie. If I was on a candidacy committee, one of my questions to you would be, "Show me how to tie a tie." If you couldn't do it, you wouldn't pass: It's that important. Anybody with a modicum of fashion sense can spot a clip-on from a mile away; they're as classy as that spray-on hair you see advertised on late-night TV. If you don't know how to tie a tie, learn today. Try the Windsor knot. Sure, Ian Fleming called Windsor knots "the mark of a cad," but what does he know?

Women: Know the difference between open-toe and a closed-toe shoe occasion. Don't dress overly sexy unless you want the nickname Rahab. Have a nice handbag; it's the first thing that some people judge you by. Don't show up for a black tie event in slacks. And pigtails are an absolute no, regardless of how cute you think you look.

Restaurants

Know how to behave in a restaurant – this is a must. You will be invited out to nice restaurants; don't conduct yourself as if the nicest place you've ever eaten was Applebee's. If you're served oysters, don't reach for the salad fork. Read a few web pages if you need to learn what fork and spoon is for what course – people still care about this. Turn your fork over on your plate when you're done eating to signify to the server that you've finished. Remember all the things your mom told you about not talking with your mouth full, not putting your elbows on the table, and all that.

On the food itself: If you're invited to a steakhouse, don't order your steak 'well done' unless you want dumb looks from the

server and rolled eyes from your guests. If you don't know seafood, have a good reason for it. Where I grew up, the freshest seafood you could possibly order was at least 8 hours old. If you grew up near a lake or ocean, know your salmon from your snapper.

Nydam covers tipping in the first pastoral care class, but hear it again: tip well, regardless of service, unless you're 100% certain there's no way the server will ever find out you're a minister. If this clashes with your Dutch blood, pretend you're French for a few minutes while signing the receipt (but keep the snooty accent and cries of retreat to yourself).

If you're going out for drinks and you order more than one round, you have a \$5 minimum tip per person. Getting drinks and cleaning up after a large group sucks. If you're one of the CTS group that goes to the Grand Rapids Brewing Company or Bar Louie every week and gets a \$2-and-some-change bill, you'd be better to leave no tip at all than to round up to \$3. You know who you are.

Alcohol

Speaking of the bar, love it or hate it, people drink – and like to drink – a lot of alcohol. And love it or hate it, you need to be fluent in this. Knowledge of this equals sophistication to many people.

Know the names of at least three cocktails not served at TGI Friday's that you like to drink and what goes into them – the last thing you want is to be invited for a drink with someone who offers to buy for you and to have no idea what to order. If you're going to pick an easy answer like a martini, know different martinis and how people like them to be served. Know the grades of brandy and cognac, or at least know that there are grades. Have a favorite whiskey.

On the subject of wine, you absolutely need to know the basics about wine. You don't have to be a viticulturist, but at least have a passing idea of the differences between whites, reds, and sparklings. Have a favorite white and a favorite red; better yet, have a favorite vineyard (Sutter Home doesn't count). And know how to drink wine: smell before you sip, and never chug. Know that in a nice restaurant, ordering by the bottle is common, and making bug eyes or astonished comments about some bottles costing hundreds of dollars is tacky.

Last thing: If you thoroughly abstain from all alcohol, be prepared to give a short, calm, and polite reason why. Do not cite Scripture. Even if the Scriptural case for abstaining weren't dubious (it is), hauling out a Bible verse to defend your position means that you just called everybody at the table with a martini in their hand a hedonist. Don't do that.

Whatever you do, don't ever, ever, ever get drunk. If you do get drunk, submit your resignation to the church board the following morning before somebody else goes there to ask for it first.

Parties

If you're invited to a party (ha!) be punctual, but not obsessive. As a church leader, you have more hypothetical excuses than almost anybody for being late (hospital visit, funeral, sermon writing, church softball game, etc.), but don't push it. Never be late if you're the guest of honor. Promptly write (don't type) thank-you notes for being invited.

News

Subscribe to your local newspaper, and read it. If you have the money and the time, subscribe to the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal; your well-to-do congregants do. Know why you subscribed to one but not the other; you will be asked. You absolutely must know what's



going on in your immediate community, because it affects the day-to-day life of your congregants. Watch the entire evening newscast. Don't air your political opinions unless asked, and only sparingly then; people want you to care for their souls, not their ballots. Way too many ministers screw this up.



Know where the stock market closes every day. You don't have to know the exact number, but be able to give the Dow within 500 points; "The Dow closed in the lower 13s last week" is an acceptable response. Know that the Dow isn't the same as the NYSE, which isn't the same as the NASDAQ. Business professionals in particular will appreciate this.

Sports

Have at least a passing knowledge of sports: they are a huge part of the life of many people in your congregation. Know at least the big four (football, baseball, basketball, and hockey) and some general things about them: The basic rules, method of play, and so on. Be able to toss in at least a sentence or two into a conversation about the sport. Force yourself to sit down and watch a few games if you have no clue. Better yet, go to a sports bar during a game and listen to people talk.

Know a bit about what's going on with the locally-cheered-for professional teams. If you don't have a favorite team in the sport, root for the home team like they've always been your favorite. If there's a regional sport that's big in your area (like NASCAR), know something about that too.

It never hurts to know how to play a little golf. At the very least, know when to hit with a wood versus an iron versus a wedge. Never say your favorite kind of golf is putt-putt.

Entertainment

For the love of all that is good and holy, know something about what's going on in pop culture. Remember that television is a babysitter for a large portion of the youth in your congregation, and television is the evening 'together time' for many families. It's okay to hate TV, but at least know what people are watching. You don't have to become a 'fanjaya' or have an opinion on Meredith and McDreamy, but at least know which shows are being referred to. Need the easy way out? Watch the hour-hour Inside Edition on NBC, or subscribe to Entertainment Weekly. Seriously, you actually need to know this stuff, and you certainly aren't going to learn about it here.



On the topic of music, more people in your congregation can recite an entire album of some band's lyrics than can quote you the entire 23rd Psalm. Music is so fundamental to many people's lives that if you're completely disconnected from it, consider whether you'd be better off as an accountant instead of a minister.

Oh, and never make fun of accountants – one decimal point to the left and you're taking a 90% paycut.

Still looking

by Sherilyn Vandervalk

After all these weeks I know what you're thinkin'
Are you sure that girl hasn't been drinkin'?
You might think it's become an obsession,
But I'm trying to convey a point or a lesson.
I'd just like my mug back!
Am I on the right track?
Someone must have misplaced it,
'til it returns I just can't quit.
A mug can't just walk away
They're like good dogs, they sit and they stay.
So please take a look
In case you accidentally took
Someone else's mug or cup
For when it safely returns we all can sup.

The gift of prophecy

by Chad Vandervalk, Contributing Editor

Have we lost the gift of prophecy? Does the church recognise it when it happens? Do members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America understand how to think of this spiritual gift? I have had a few experiences in which I have come face to face with this gift, and it has left me wondering.

The first time I encountered the gift of prophecy, I was attending a Church of England chapel in Woodford Green, London, England. This church was going through an intensive training program in the spiritual gifts; something I admittedly felt a bit uncomfortable with. One of the evenings when my wife and I were in attendance the church was exploring the gift of prophecy. There was a point in the service when the pastor encouraged the community to gather into small groups and to try to exercise this gift, to try to give the people around them a word from God. I was not approached by anyone with a word from God, nor did I dare to join a group and attempt the exercise. However, I sat in the pew and prayed hard for God's direction in my life. At that point I had not yet made the decision to enter into the ministry. I was having much difficulty figuring out on my own where God wanted me. I prayed, "Lord, I am sick of trying to figure this out, tell me where you want to be." Right then and there God laid it on my heart that I should go into the ministry. It was a strange experience. I am certain this was God's voice, and his will for my life. It was not something audible, just a very clear thought. That evening we went home and printed off the application for Calvin Theological Seminary, where I have been ever since.

On Palm Sunday, 2007, I led services at a church local to Grand Rapids. As we were praying before the service, one of the ladies felt led to lay her hands on me and pray especially over me. Apparently, these urges are a regular occurrence for her; she said that if she does not follow those impulses, she gets stomach aches. After the service she approached me again and told me that she had a message from God for and about me. During the service, just before I began to preach, God began to tell her things about me, and for me. She wrote them down and read it to me later. Without going into the details, it was an extremely comforting message, though also a bit scary. There was encouragement, and challenge. It was a strange experience for me, though I did not feel that uncomfortable. She then prayed over my wife, son, and I after she delivered the message to me. I felt the presence of God there with us and I have no doubt the message was from Him.

Experiencing this gift in such a direct way these couple of times raises a few questions. How do we approach such things in the church today? This lady obviously had the gift of prophecy, but it was also obvious she had never been taught a good way to think or speak about it. You could tell she felt awkward trying to tell me the message. This is a strong indictment against our church. Do we expect so little from the Holy Spirit that we do not train our members to identify and understand when the Spirit moves? One of the best things that is coming out of these reports that are going before Synod is that a discussion is starting. People are beginning to take seriously our need to understand and address these things. It is sad when a person does not have a Biblical vocabulary to talk about her spiritual gifts. There is a real need within our churches to discuss these things together so that we can come up with a Biblical vocabulary to put our experiences into words.

A long Holy Saturday in Virginia

by Nathaniel Van Denend, Guest Writer

On a Monday morning in April, a young man walked down the hallway of his dormitory at Virginia Tech, and shot and killed an RA and another student. From there, he mailed a manifesto to NBC and then proceeded to kill an additional 31 people, including himself. His statement to NBC was accusatory. He said that he gave plenty of people plenty of chances to prevent what he was going to do. Somehow in his mind, his own actions were someone else's fault. He said, "I didn't have to do this."

What he says is half true; a painful half truth. He didn't have to do this, he could have prevented it. Just as his own life should be counted in the number of murders that he committed Monday morning, so too should he be counted as one of those who had plenty of chances to prevent what he was going to do.

In refusing to stare evil in the face, the media/culture seeks out hypotheticals which could have prevented what happened. Maybe stricter gun laws should be passed, maybe the professors should have paid more attention, maybe the councilors and psychologists should have been able to detect his homicidal tendencies. Maybe the police should have responded quicker and evacuated the campus earlier. Maybe there are things that we can do to protect ourselves from the evil that stares at us from the other side of a 9mm. This side of the eschaton, there will be times when evil stares us down and seems to get the upper hand. There will be times when, in spite of our greatest human efforts, the waves of the terror of Good Friday crash against the shores of our lives.

Then, there will be Holy Saturdays. Days when God seems dead and hope seems an irrational fantasy. These days are filled with silence, sadness and trembling. Prayer on such days is a sheer act of the will against a poisoned rationality. The psalmist cries:

Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?
Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?
Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

It will be a long Holy Saturday for those who lost friends and loved ones. It will be a long Holy Saturday for those who witnessed the deaths of others but they themselves did not die. It will be a long Holy Saturday for the parents of a wrathful young man who left his bloody mark on history.

We know what God can do in the face of great evil, even though we dare not speak it. We know that Easter Sunday followed Holy Saturday. We know that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption even resurrection have followed the Holy Saturdays of the past. Yet when the women tell us so, we scarcely believe it. We wait to see for ourselves.

We look at this horrific evil and we pray: How long, O Lord, how long?

Transforming God's kingdom: Leading by serving

by Jonathan Masselink, Guest Writer

Many people in North American society have benefited greatly from the economic boom over the last 12 or more years. There has been an increase in the standard of living filled with traveling, extreme sports, lots of fashionable clothing, all within the context of an upwardly mobile community.

As Christians, we recognize that we are 'not our own', that we belong, body and soul, to Jesus Christ, our Lord. Therefore everything we do, we earn, we have, is solely because of his grace and gifting. In spite of our pride in the fruits of our hard work, the reality is that the papers we write, the classes we teach, the sermons we preach, they are all because of the blessings we have received.

But what about those who have not been able to participate in this time of increased wealth? It is true that Jesus tells us in Mathew that the 'poor will always be with us' forever. And yet, does that mean we are to simply tell our brothers and sisters to simply 'pick themselves up by their bootstraps?'

In Ezekiel 34, we read that the Lord will save the weak in His flock, so that they will no longer be taken advantage of. The word flock or 'sminos' in Greek refers to the group of sheep collectively. We understand this to mean that while God is concerned with every single person He created, He is also concerned with communities being rescued from danger, from their enemies, from suffering and oppression. Jesus himself healed the sick that were shunned from their communities and reunited them together!

What then does this article have to do with us, as future leaders in the Christian church? Is church not just about helping non-believers see the power of Christ's love, calling them to repentance and encouraging them to come into an eternal relationship with him?

As leaders, we need to understand that many people in our communities have not received the same blessings from our parents. They may have grown up in highly dysfunctional homes, perhaps never had a role model that exemplified a good work ethic to improve their life situation, or never had someone acknowledge their gifts and potential. Perhaps they were always put down and rejected by the very people God put in place to nurture and guide them. What if their whole neighbourhood, school and friends reflected the same negative perspectives towards improving their life situation?

As leaders in the church, we are called to serve our church community and to equip them for serving in God's kingdom on earth. To do this, we are preparing our hearts and minds here at Seminary, but we must also prepare by learning about those in our communities who struggle to grow.

So how can we help our neighbours and fellow Christians who are struggling? Contrary to common thought, supporting our neighbours in need is about more than simply 'giving them a fish for day', it's more than 'teaching them to fish for a lifetime'. In fact, these are only the first of many steps involved in serving those in need in our community, both inside and outside the church.

So you want to be a Minister of the Word

by Jay Knochenhauer, Guest Writer

“Preaching is ‘old church.’ It does not work anymore. A new paradigm is needed.”

Experts will offer to help you reinvent the gospel. They will offer a complete pyrotechnics program. “Ooooh,” says one preacher, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could use iMax for my sermon illustration instead of this little video screen!” No. Please no. But it will happen. It is the natural trajectory of the crowd of industry experts who will tell you that preaching in the post-modern MySpace world is nearly a hopeless task. But it is not cleverness or vision or technology you need most. Nor is it Greek or Hebrew or another preaching class. They will help. They are useful. But what you need more than anything else is faith.

Faith seems to be the weak link. Too often we lose sight of the essential role that faith plays in the development of the Christian minister. It is not a sharper sword we need, but a firmer grip. Not more steel but more nerve. You must have a robust faith in the God whose word you preach. Along with your diploma you need to develop a faith with guts.

It’s not that they don’t know what they believe; it’s that ministers don’t believe what they know. Seldom is a powerless ministry explained by lack of knowledge or theology or work experience. The issue is faith. Certainty is what is lacking. The 100 pound man who thinks he is a giant can bully the 200 pound man who thinks so too. There is massive power in the man or woman whose soul is staked on the assurance of the faithful God of heaven who promises His presence whenever His word is preached.

If the world yawns it is because too many ministers have become docents rather than dogmatists. If you ask some about redemption they will tell you classic schools of thought and take you to the Museum of Theological History. They will take you on a tour and explain the sights and squint with you into the case, but their entire tone belies the fact they have never stepped into the displays. To them these are mere curiosities of days gone by. They see the great doctrines of the faith as though suspended by pushpins and splayed out in ancient catalogues from expeditions of faith journeys long ago. They think the ideas died with the men who wrote of them. Too often these same ministers are the critics who wonder why today’s church seems so unreal. They gaze into the past amazed that such dry stuff could ever have walked and talked. To them the creeds are museum relics. The janitor comes each night to erase the grease spot their nose made as they pressed against the glass wondering what those men saw. But it is futile, because they look instead of read. They read instead of think. And when they do think, it is without humility and so they cannot learn. They have the stuff of knowledge, the innumerable data bits stored and filtered and cross referenced, but they don’t believe it. Faith is the *ousia* of *exousia*.

We need faith. Not blind faith or ignorant faith. But rather that substance that we identify as the *gravitas* that says, “Don’t mess with me.” It’s the faith of the pub. It’s the barroom drunk that doesn’t just imagine that he can fight anyone; he really fights. Eyes blaring with daring and consumed with a spirit not his own, he gives himself over completely and risks all. And everyone knows that he means business. It’s the caricature that Paul uses to describe the Christian. The drunk loses all inhibition and control and demonstrates the power of the “proof” of the spirit; the Christian loses all inhibition and control and proves a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. Ask God for that kind of faith. How will He grant it? Faith grows out of direct encounter with Christ in the bread and wine with the gospel echoing in your ear. It is not technology or technique dependent, but a Spirit-led eye-opening heart rending pulse-pounding presence of the Almighty God as He reveals Himself in His word. What other drama do you need?

It is this certainty in the power of the preached word that is missing from so many ministers today. They simply do not believe. They lack confidence in God. They lack confidence in His word. They do not trust Him. The muscles of faith necessary to engage the creeds and confessions have atrophied. They fear the world more than God. They would rather change their opinion about God than have the world change its opinion about Him. The pressure of popularity bends their back under the burden of worldly concerns. They imagine it is a small thing to displease God in their attempts to please the

consumer or their council.

Today's ministers are being stared down by a world that says, "Your message is passé. Your technique is old. Your music is dull. Your church is dead." And instead of throwing down the gauntlet and engaging in real discourse, too often the church turns tail and runs. Instead of more Gospel, it opts for less and fails to pray. It concentrates on a children's fair or a Church block-party pancake breakfast. "That will bring out the neighborhood." Preaching takes nerve. A minister cannot be a eunuch. It takes.....guts. When the church retreats from the consistent and faithful preaching of God's word it puts its light under a bushel basket and hides. When a church snuffs out the light and erects an espresso cart in its place it should not be surprised if sinners find more comfort and better coffee at Starbucks.

The Word of the LORD from Isaiah 55:10-11:

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Sem Eye: Flirt to convert

“Hello, my name is Tamara! As you can probably tell, I’m a Christian woman who loves Jesus Christ and cares for all humans, even the wicked. What you probably don’t know is that I’m hot. My picture below isn’t really that good. I want to use my beauty for GOD, and want to encourage Christian women (my sisters in Christ) to do the same, according to the Great Commission.”

Tamara, Tamara, Tamara, what are you doing to me? How could anyone miss your heavenly hotness? I don’t understand, though; to what use are you putting your dazzling appearance today? As I mulled these questions over my eyes finally drifted away from Tamara’s steamy pictures, (who doesn’t love a girl apparently huffing something out of a Ziploc bag?), and upwards to the title of her web-based dating service, “Flirt to Convert: Matchmaking with a Higher Calling.” In an instant a blinding vision of budding romance turned to ash in my mind, for I have a fatal flaw Tamara could never forgive: I already share her heart’s deepest religious convictions. Never have I more fervently wished I were damned.



Flirt to Convert is a offshoot of the “Date to Save” movement. The basic premise is evangelical-Reformed down to its very marrow: use the beauty of the booty your divine daddy gave you to proclaim some very good news to the unbelievers of the world, starting with its club scene. Starting out is, presumably, easy enough: head down to the seediest local watering hole you dare enter (remember Daniel and the lions!) and set yourself down alongside the least coherent hottie in the place. Converse. Flirt. Offer to take your lucky mark someplace a little quieter and then sit provocatively yet chastely on the church steps until dawn brings Sunday morning and the strains of a gospel choir. Shove your hung-over honey up to the front when the altar call begins, rinse him in the baptismal font, and repeat. If you want a little help with the first step you can sign up for Tamara’s matchmaking service. To avoid coming across as narrow-minded Tamara lets you sign up to convert or be converted to any major world religion, even atheism, and allows you to date only the already married.

Unfortunately dating those not brought up on Elisabeth Elliot comes with a certain degree of risk. At some point you may find yourself in a compromising situation and need a pithy avenue out. Still, nothing is less of a turn-on in missionary dating than a holier-than-thou attitude. Tamara offers a few pointers. “If (your budding beau) wants to hold your hand...give him a Bible!” If he tries to kiss you, “remind him that a kiss killed your Savior,” and “mention that you’re not ready to ‘speak in tongues’” just yet. Even better, “if he gets angry that you won’t put out...clarify to him that WWJD does not mean ‘who would Jesus do?’”

Tamara also fields questions from her adoring fans concerning the Bible’s admonition against being “yoked with unbelievers” and appropriate dating circles. On the yoking count she simply points out that yoking means “‘a crossbar with two U-shaped pieces that encircle the necks of a pair of oxen or other draft animals working together.’ I would never encourage anybody to do this on a date...” And as to who to date she points out Jesus’ command to reach the outermost parts of the world, but makes very clear that she will not be flying to Kenya “to date some guy who eats worms.” Xenophobic? Maybe. But do you really want to not be kissing someone with Annelida on his breath?

Finally, Tamara has begun producing her own line of missionary dating propaganda, replete with t-shirts, coffee mugs, apparel for dogs(?!), and of course, the ubiquitous thong: “Toss these message panties onstage at your favorite rock star or share a surprise message with someone special ... Later!”

To contact Tamara or one of her many fine co-workers in evangelistic foreplay log on today at www.flirttoconvert.com. Tips and tricks are available at www.datetosave.com, and the thong can be purchased for \$12.99 at Cafépress. Until next time, this is SemEye, wishing you happy hunting!