

## ESSAY

# CPE, Death and Resurrection

A Reflection

by **Nate Van Denend**

What follows is a theological reflection I presented to my CPE group. This was an opportunity in my group of two Jews, an Episcopalian, a member of the United Church of Christ, and a Buddhist to put a Christian frame on the work of being a chaplain and to demonstrate how closely integrated Christian praxis is with chaplaincy.

“Hello,” I said to a woman sitting in the waiting room. She gave me an alarmed look. “Who are you?” she asked, her voice betraying anxiety. “My name is Nate. I am a chaplain on this floor.” This didn’t help her anxiety level, and the woman became even more visibly afraid. “My daughter is in surgery right now.” I realized quickly what was happening, so I reassured her saying, “Oh, I don’t know about your daughter. I just stick my head in the waiting room every once in a while to see who is there.” The woman relaxed. “I was worried about my daughter. She is in surgery right now for a transplant. When you walked in, I thought it was really bad, so they sent in the chaplain!” We talked about her daughter and about how she as the mother was coping with the situation. I promised to follow up with her soon.

The next day, I went up to the ICU to meet with the patient. As I approached the room, I met the nurse. The nurse informed me of the bad news. The surgery was successful; however the patient developed a blood clot in the transplanted organ. Emergency surgery was then required to remove it. The patient was now recovering in the ICU room and slowly coming to grips with the bad news. I entered. The patient was tired and nauseated. I introduced myself and indicated that I met with the patient’s mother during her surgery. I prayed with the patient, and then I left.

Over the next week, I stopped to see this patient once each day, and we began to build a relationship. Initially, the patient was feeling very disappointed and sad. She had waited a long time for this transplant. The transplant, if it had been successful, would have cured a disease she had been coping with for almost 40 years. She had come from out-of-state to this hospital for the surgery. Now with her hopes shattered and her body recovering from the surgeries, she felt the weight of loss. We talked about this loss, and it began to take on a larger shape. She began to doubt her faith and God’s presence during this process. She began to question her own ability to continue living and began to wonder if she would have the strength to accept another transplant should the opportunity present itself. She also found that she could be more honest with me than with her husband and mother. “My husband and mother want me to be a fighter,” she would say, “but I don’t have any fight left. And I can’t tell them that.” But she began to gain strength. Her body recovered and so did her spirit. By the time she left the hospital she was feeling mentally prepared to try the surgery again. She also felt a resurgence of faith.

It was a privilege for me to be able to walk this road with this patient. We were able to go down to the dark place of doubt and giving up. Then, we were able to climb slowly back out of it and find renewed strength on the other side. I say ‘we’ because, as much as I could, I tried to walk this road with her. I tried not to be ahead of or behind her. At times I offered her encouragement, but unless I got a direct question I tried to listen and be.

What I witnessed here was a reflection or a shadow of a great mystery. That is the mystery of death and resurrection. This mystery is shadowed in Psalms where the psalmist begins in the dark place and ends up in a

place of worship. Psalm 130: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord"... "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope." Psalm 64: "Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint; Protect my life from the threat of the enemy"... "Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him." Also, this mystery is expressed in the death of Jesus with the words of Psalm 22 on his lips: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 22 also ends with a promise of restoration: "Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord." And two mornings later Jesus rose from the dead. As a Christian I see this resurrection as a seal of the promise that someday I too will rise from the dead, that someday the promises of restoration made throughout the Bible will come true. This belief gives me hope in the face of suffering. As Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection of the dead" (Php. 3:10-11). This belief gives me the courage to venture into the valley of the shadow of death. So this patient and I walked down to a place of despair, disappointment and suffering. There we cried out to the Lord, and the Lord led us out.

Because of my Christian faith, I see the place of suffering as a holy place. Jesus says in Matthew, "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Whatever you did for the least of these you did for me.'" So visiting the sick in the hospital is visiting the King of the Universe. This is not to be taken lightly by any means, and it is certainly not a place for false pretenses and insincerity. Rather, this is a place to enter humbly and with reverence.

So what did I learn through this experience? I have read and heard about this process of going down and then coming out the other side, but this time I vividly experienced it. The experience gives me hope as I anticipate the struggles I may have to face in this life. I learned that my theology of suffering can bear the test of real suffering. Can it bear the test of even greater suffering? I will have to see as my life goes on. Will there come a time when I cannot hold on to God anymore? I don't think so. Where then would I turn? My situation would go from bad to worse. At least by holding onto God there is hope, no matter how faint. I also learned that I really can be honest with God. I learned that I don't need to go and get faith in the time of need; rather I only need to be honest with God about suffering, and God will provide the strength that is needed. To put it this way sounds too simple, almost obscene. Being honest with God does not guarantee that the suffering will go away. It may get worse as I acknowledge the reality of the situation; however God reassures us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Co. 12:9).

Looking toward the future, I have gained the experience of drawing beside a person in their suffering – someone I didn't know and probably will not meet again. This gives me some confidence in drawing near to another person in their suffering. I also have come to see through this experience and the many others how tightly my Christian faith is connected to my ministry. As far as other possibilities for me, I will take this experience into the parish. I will continue to encourage others to be honest with God about their suffering and in my own life will continue to be honest with God about my own doubts and sufferings. I will continue to yearn for the resurrection and restoration, when all things will be made right.

## ESSAY

# Leaving Church

When the Church Leaves You

by Chelsey L. Harmon

Unlike so many other young people my age who have left the Church in search for their "own" ways, I have learned what it means to have the Church leave you. A few months ago my home church in California took the definitive step of a long journey out of the Christian Reformed Church. On a Tuesday night, the people who raised me, who taught my Sunday school classes and changed my diapers in the nursery, voted

overwhelmingly to leave the denomination of its heritage. The major issue was women in office.

It's easy to see how my church and I have traveled varying paths since my youth. While we have both studied the topic of women in office the last number of years, we have ended up on separate roads; as a female in the M.Div. program with the intent to seek ordination, I knew that my church could not support my choice, but I also knew that they supported my intent to serve God and his Church because they told me so and prayed as much.

And over time, we've found ourselves in the awkward situation that consists of love and confusion. Women in office as the issue and me as the woman going into ordained ministry – these are white elephants in the room that overshadow me every time I go back. But they are also the white elephants that prompt us to pray for one another, to cry for one another, to be confused about how each of us can love the Lord and how we can both go our separate ways.

When I finally fully recognized my call to ordained ministry a little over a year ago, I purposely kept my membership at my home church even though they had publicly made their stance known. I chose this because I wanted them to know how much it meant to me to learn and grow in my faith among them. I did this because I wanted them to know that I wasn't abandoning the faith and family and church of my youth. I did this because I wanted them to know how formative my time among them was in my life and call. I also did this because I knew that as a congregation they were struggling with the trends of our denomination, and I wanted them to know that I was not trying to take the easy way out. I purposely kept myself in the church so that I would continue to be under the council's discipline and pastoral care. But most importantly, I did this because my church and its people showed me God and God's love for this world and me.

On that Tuesday night, when 90% of the people I call my home church family decided that it was time to align themselves denominationally elsewhere, I learned what it means to have a church leave. I learned what it means to have two roads diverge and say there's no chance for their public, unified support. I learned what it means to have a prayer answered negatively by human actions while knowing that there were many others who praised the decision and saw it as their own positive answer to prayer. You might have seen me since then. You might have held my hand or comforted me while I cried and mourned and grieved. You might have laid hands on me and prayed for me and my church. You may have even encouraged me in my call in the face of such adversity.

Although I know that my church didn't actually leave *me* when they left the denomination, I can't help but feel a little bit of personal hurt because of who I am and what I'm doing with my life. Their decision to leave has separated us, denominationally as well as personally. But what gives me hope and helps me as I continue to prepare for ordained ministry, besides the immense support I've received from friends at the seminary and my local Grand Rapids church, is the fact that my home church is full of people who love God, who are trying to be faithful to God, and who are trying to serve God in this world. Knowing this and knowing that I am doing the same thing comforts me. It also doesn't hurt to know that someday, we will no longer be arguing about women in office, but instead will be spending our time praising God together. To that, all I can say is, "Come Lord Jesus."

## FEATURE

# Stress-Busting: Setting Boundaries

Reflecting on Dr. Henry Cloud  
by **Allen Kleine Deters**

Calvin Fine Arts Center  
October 9, 2008

Dr. Henry Cloud, a clinical psychologist, has a unique way of connecting with people through his books,

through speaking all over the country on issues ranging from healthy dating to integrity, and through consulting with Fortune 500 companies on the best leadership practices. His book *Boundaries* has sold over 2 million copies.

The qualifying statement for the evening was this: "Making and communicating boundaries that free you to really live." Instinctively the "it's-all-about-me" warning light flickers in my brain fearing that what I am about to hear for the next hour is support for the popular evangelical mindset of Jesus as my homeboy. However, having previously heard Cloud speak with great wisdom and discernment on the dynamics of small group ministry, I was willing to cut him some slack and to see where he would take us. I shot a quick prayer out that I would use a healthy differentiated filter but would avoid being too judgmental.

The first point Cloud made was to point out that we tend to see stress as a bad thing. Yet in reality, we were created with the capacity to deal with stress, which is merely a "demand on the system." Stress is part of dealing with life. The problem occurs when we are dealing with toxic stress, and we grow weary and broken down. Having been in ministry for many years, I knew what he was talking about. Persuaded by the fantasy that they can lead a comfortable, utopian life, people come to pastors confused as to why their lives are in turmoil. Underlying much of this false notion is the idea that all stress is bad, or at the very least that Christians shouldn't suffer like the rest of the world. In response Cloud points out that "God has called us to stress. To the degree you avoid your stress, it will become bigger." I agree that God calls us to follow him with humility in service, but I'm not sure about being called to stress. On the other hand, the second part of Cloud's statement is valid, and I would add that avoiding the obvious stresses in one's life can lead further to phobias or other pathologies. While this summation was nothing new to me, it was a good reminder to take the necessary steps of pastoral care with those who enter my office or with whom I chat over coffee or on the phone.

Good stress is that which grows us in our relationship to God and others. It's that healthy tension that is so vital to spiritual and emotional growth. Cloud believes that actively working out our stress as Christians is part of working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Php. 2:12). Because of the false notion that Christians need to act like they have it all together, "Christians can be extremely passive about the sources of those fears," says Cloud. And in oxymoronic fashion, Christians won't deal with their real issues. Is it any wonder why many of the statistics regarding broken relationships and abuse in the church almost mirror those of the world? I'm not surprised. While Christians obviously don't have to have our act completely together, it should be apparent that while troubles do assail us, we as Christians deal with our "stresses" in a much healthier way.

The second topic Cloud addressed was the necessity of boundaries. Having previously read his book *Boundaries*, these ideas were not new to me. I learned many years ago during my ministry the importance of boundaries for keeping my sanity, health and family together. Some might consider setting boundaries selfishly motivated. But Cloud would say that setting boundaries is an understanding of Proverbs 4:23 which says, "Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." Whether or not we agree with his exegetical interpretation or not, we must consider the value of healthy boundaries. It is in guarding our hearts that we protect our personhood as image-bearers of God.

The first step to setting boundaries is the realization of Romans 3:9-18 that we as fallen humanity desire to be gods ourselves rather than seek God. When we set boundaries, we realize that we can't do it all. "To think we are 'omni' anything puts us into emotional isolation," says Cloud. Within this boundary there is a realization of dependency on God. To keep this boundary, we need a great support system that keeps us accountable. I have found small groups to be an invaluable resource in this area.

One practical way to set boundaries is the use of one's "no" muscle. According to Cloud, many people learn that "yes" is good and "no" is not, believing that there is no such thing as "no" in Christian love. But the opposite is actually true and keeps a person from giving into toxic and abusive behavior or giving into good things that are not necessarily healthy for them at that time or possibly at all.

Overall, Henry had a lot of wise insights that he encouraged with. He also mentioned having to put a boundary around destructive thought patterns, taking "every thought captive." At other times we need to put a boundary

around our consumerist mindset to have it all *now*. Obviously geared to the mainly freshman and sophomore Calvin crowd, Dr. Henry Cloud gave something for everyone to take home with them and ponder because, let's face it, we all have a little stress now and again.

For the simple scoop on boundaries, check out this article:  
[www.cloudtownsend.com/library/articles/7articles6.php](http://www.cloudtownsend.com/library/articles/7articles6.php)

## FEATURE

# Service

## A Review of Our Town Hall Meeting

by **Gayle Doornbos**

“One need not look far to see preachers who do not preach to reach people but preach to reach the top, to become ecclesiastical superstars. They see discipleship to Jesus in terms of rank and privilege. They assume that Jesus is someone who will achieve things for them, and give them status of the lords.”

-David Garland

October 2, 2008

Service is a vital part of discipleship, but making service into a way of life is often difficult. Many students within the CTS community participate in community service, but understanding how these acts of servanthood translate into daily life can be difficult—particularly when the demands of classes and the apparent disparity between community service and the classroom create a difficult environment to understand how the two work together. However, as those who desire to be leaders, learning service as a way of life is vital, as David Garland’s quote above illuminates.

To help the CTS community contemplate how service becomes a lifestyle, Student Senate hosted a panel discussion at the Town Hall meeting on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. The panelists were Paul Haagsman, Volunteer Coordinator at a local non-profit called In the Image; Stedford Sims, Pastor of Outreach at Sherman Street. CRC and Lead Pastor at Step of Faith; and Brad Knetsch, a senior M.Div. student at CTS and Middle School Ministry Coordinator at Madison Square Church. They shared their insights, joys, frustrations and experiences about living lives of service.

Although each panelist serves in a different capacity within the Grand Rapids community, for each an essential element of service is the common desire to respond to God’s call to serve within the kingdom of God. Because of this desire, Brad noted, engaging in service is both a practice of response as well as a spiritual discipline that shapes us as believers. Moreover, it is something that does not come primarily out of our own desire to do good but flows out of faith. By incorporating regular acts of service into life we already begin to be transformed into people who see service as a lifestyle.

Seeing service as a response is important for leadership not only because it shapes us but also because it allows us to equip others to serve. A large portion of the discussion was dedicated to practical examples of service and volunteers within the panelists’ communities. Stedford Sims explained how placing service within the bigger picture of responding to and following Christ’s example allows him to lead his two diverse congregations to utilize their distinct gifts to serve others. Sims, as well as the other panelists, also pointed out the importance of recognizing gifts and passion within themselves and volunteers when equipping others to serve. For them, a lifestyle of service will not always be easy or flashy but, as a response, it utilizes the God-given abilities that permeate through people’s personalities.

As we engage in service, we are also changed through the interactions we have with those we serve and, sometimes, by those who serve us. Service, according to the panelists, has fundamentally changed the way

they think about God and his work in the world. Paul Haagsman described how a lot of the volunteers at In the Image are people who were originally served. This means volunteers who have never received services from In the Image have the opportunity to work with those for whom service has become an ingrained part of life. The questions, insights and perspectives that we encounter when serving outside one's immediate community change us and make us understand the world differently.

Overall, the discussion was insightful as it explored the ways in which service becomes a way of life. Although the discussion was diverse, it did reveal the importance of service as a practice that is transformative – both for the one served as well as for the one serving. For each participant, service did not remain a momentary exercise. Learning a lifestyle of service involves both hours of service “outside” our normal communities as well as committing to serve within our usual communities daily so that we might all bring glory to God.

## FEATURE

# Curriculum Change

## A Town Hall Update on the New CTS Curriculum

by **Kristin Palacios**

September 18, 2008

In a Town Hall meeting on the New CTS Curriculum, Allen Kleine Deters served as moderator. The panelists were Dr. Bierma, Dr. Rylaarsdam, and Joan Beelen. Here is a summary of important points made by the panelists:

**Bierma:** Changes in the MA and MTS will be coming soon, but this Town Hall concerned the changes that have already been effected in the M.Div.

**Bierma:** The Formation For Ministry (FFM) program is the leaven in our curriculum. The new curriculum integrates FFM with the curriculum itself.

**Rylaarsdam:** One highlight of this new curriculum is its developmental pedagogy; that is, you get to practice the theory along the way. For example, students will receive 3 credits for completing a required 120 hours of Service-Learning throughout their seminary education.

**Rylaarsdam:** Under the new curriculum, incoming students will be able to have Advanced Standing; this will exempt them from certain classes. For example, the Bible Knowledge Exam will be taken before students start their first year. If the student passes, they are exempt from the Bible Survey course scheduled for the fall quarter of the student's first year. Students can receive Advanced Standing in six different areas, and the final number of credits required for graduation with no Advanced Standing (94 credits) is reduced with each Advanced Standing exemption. The six areas include the areas of Bible knowledge, Reformed creeds and confessions, Hebrew/Greek (both first and second semester exemptions possible), world religions, and church history.

**Rylaarsdam:** The oral comprehensive requirement will now be part of a substantially expanded 902 course. As has traditionally been the case, the panel of examiners will include professors, but that panel may be expanded to include pastors. The intent is to prepare students for classical exams.

**Joan:** For current students, the number of hours required to graduate will be flexible, but each student must have covered all the required content at some point in their education.

### **Other notable facts**

There are several new courses that will be included under the new curriculum. In addition to the 3-credit Service-Learning course mentioned above, new courses include the following:

Gateway to Seminary (2 credits): This course is an introduction to basic hermeneutics and homiletics; this course happens during the two weeks preceding the start of the fall quarter.

Language Tools (1 credit): First-year students will take this course during the January term.

Pastoral Identity Retreat (2 credits): Also during the January term of the first year, students will participate in this course which includes classes on pastoral identity as well as a retreat.

World Religions and Global Christianity (3 credits)

Internship preparation courses (2 credits: Cross-Cultural Internship; 1 credit: Congregational Internship): Both summer internships will be introduced with a classroom component to help prepare students for their internships.

Two final notable changes are that Hebrew will now be taught in the classroom rather than online; in addition, CRC History and Polity is now one course (3 credits).