

In this issue

The troubles in the economy have not left the seminary untouched. Co-editor Nate Van Denend describes the financial situation of the seminary and the steps being taken to address it in the article “Seminary Reacts to \$500,000 Budget Short Fall.” It is not only the seminary that our troubled economy is impacting. Churches are also being forced to reconsider their priorities. This is a point brought out by David Salverda in “Debate,” which is about an exchange between Prof. John Bolt and Peter VanderMeulen regarding the relationship between the institutional church and current social justice issues. In a time of financial crisis we learn what the church really cares about. John Burden suggests an herbal remedy to the stresses of these financial times in his letter to the editor. Burden also contributed a poem, “The Monologue of Calvin Seminary.” In December and January, senior seminarians took their oral comprehensives and in “A Pedagogically Satisfying Experience,” co-editor Nate Van Denend summarizes students’ reactions to this exercise. Finally, Amos Groenendyk’s chapel message on Mark 5 is included for those who missed what Amos had to say.

Briefly Noted

Friday, March 13th, was Dies Natalis. This year’s line up included Brian Seifert literally jumping though hoops, an application of the four page method to baseball, the quarter system lamenting its exile, a cameo appearance by a fit and ready-to-play-ping-pong Lyle Bierma, and one disappointed, celibate Tim Wood. Prof. Tuit was roasted a bit and his tenure at the seminary was honored by a standing ovation. Most comments were that this year was better than last.

Rev. Mark Stephenson, director of the CRC Office of Disability Concerns, spoke to the seminary community on March 12th. He brought with him a guest who is deaf. While she spoke through the interpreter, the seminary community was able to learn how to communicate with someone who uses interpretation to communicate. “Look at the person you are talking to, not the interpreter,” Stephenson stated. This was a bit more difficult to do than it seems. The Office of Disability Concerns is a resource for churches as they seek to serve all members of the family of God.

Dr. Henry De Moor’s position of Vice President for Academic Affairs is being temporarily filled by Dr. David Rylaarsdam until the seminary hires someone to fill this position.

February marked the end of winter quarters at Calvin Seminary. It is true, this year marks the end of all quarters, but the end of the winter quarter is the most notable. No longer will a final exam on Friday be followed by a syllabus on Monday.

FEATURE

Seminary Reacts to \$500,000 Budget Short Fall

Two perspectives on recent layoffs

by **Nate Van Denend**, co-editor in chief

“You can’t bend math,” stated Vice President for Administration Duane Kelderman in a recent interview with *Kerux*. In light of the current state of the economy and budget shortfalls in churches across the denomination, seminary revenues from ministry shares are projected to be down 15%. Ministry shares account for 43% or \$3 million of the seminary’s \$7 million annual budget. The shortfall is projected to be about \$450,000. In addition,

other revenue streams have slowed. All in all the projected shortfall for the 2009-10 fiscal year is about \$500,000.

In order to compensate for this shortfall, President Plantinga stated in his email to the student body on February 25, 2009, "I'll announce faculty and staff contractions as well as across the board compensation reductions." A few weeks after this email, two of these staff contractions were announced. These announced staff contractions were actually the second and third staff contractions. The first was the elimination of the Administrative Assistant to the Making Connections Initiative and Academic Office position. This position was eliminated in late 2008.

In addition to reductions in staff positions, the possibility of a reduction in faculty positions remains on the table. Some changes in the faculty have already been announced, including Prof. Mary Hulst's move across the pond to the college and the retirement of Dr. Henry De Moor. Neither Vice President Kelderman nor the faculty members interviewed for this article would comment on the ongoing discussions amongst the faculty regarding the possibility of faculty position elimination or the possibility of faculty compensation cuts.

Other efforts to cut costs include four day work weeks for administrative assistant staff during eight weeks of the summer and an across-the-board compensation cut for all employees to be implemented once the pertinent decisions are made with respect to the faculty. Unnecessary travel and hospitality have also been cut from the budget.

On the revenue side, efforts are being made to increase donor contributions to the seminary. This process is a two-phase process. The first phase includes contacting donors who may be willing to match funding raised in churches and by individuals. The second phase will be to contact churches and individuals with the promise that the money they raise will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the donors. The first phase of this fundraising effort is nearing completion. The second phase will begin shortly.

Currently there are no plans to pass the burden of the budget shortfall to the student body. Tuition will not be raised for 2009-10 but will remain at the 2008-09 rate. In addition, scholarship monies will remain roughly the same as last year. This is because these monies are distributed based on a three-year rolling average to allow for market fluctuations.

While math cannot be bent, the emotions of individuals caught up in the reality of financial contractions do bend. In an interview with Richard Eppinga, Senior Development Officer, these emotions were expressed. With regard to the recent layoffs of Amy Vander Slik and Karen Obits, Eppinga stated, "I am bitterly disappointed. I gave my best advice [to the administration on how to avoid layoffs]. It seems to me that the seminary could have done better. People would have sacrificed for dedicated people to stay on.... What about voluntary days off? What about everyone taking a hit?" Eppinga openly wondered if it was necessary to let go of these two dedicated employees.

He did not feel adequately informed regarding the process leading up to the layoffs, which in turn led him to question the necessity of them. "People just get told this is the way it is," he said. "While I love my seminary, I don't feel good about it because of this process."

Kelderman's view of the staff cuts was different. "The number one piece of advice [the administration received from those it consulted] was to make the necessary cuts, not avoid the hard decisions and kill the organization by a thousand little razor blade cuts." With regard to Amy Vander Slik and Karen Obits, he stated, "Both were really appreciated and these were really tough decisions to make.... You got a \$500,000 problem. After consulting the development committees, we realized there could be no 'sacred cows.' Staff was one of those areas that needed to be cut."

As to Eppinga's issue regarding not feeling adequately informed about the process leading up to the layoffs, *Kerux* raised this issue with Vice President Kelderman, although from a different perspective. *Kerux* wanted to know what students could learn from the seminary's response to its current fiscal situation. In particular, what concepts should students take into the pastorate when revenues are down and staff cuts are being

considered? Kelderman responded that it would be a good idea to have a panel discussion to explain the steps and the decisions which had been made.

The panel discussion is anticipated to take place before the end of this academic year.

The interviews with both Kelderman and Eppinga ended on conciliatory notes. Kelderman stated that if the board disagreed with the decisions made by the administration, then the board has the authority to redirect the administration or, for that matter, appoint a new administration. But it seemed clear to him that the administration is actually implementing the board's directives. Eppinga concluded, "I would be happy to be proven wrong [about my misgivings regarding the process and necessity of laying off Vander Slik and Obits]. And I would apologize."

FEATURE

This Debate Is Important

The institutional church and social justice

by David Salverda

On Monday, March 9th, I had the delightful opportunity to hear a lengthy and respectful impromptu debate between Prof. John Bolt and the CRC Office of Social Justice representative Peter VanderMeulen.

The debate emerged after a formal lunchtime conversation between CTS students and two representatives from the CRC Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action. This conversation was just one out of many conversations sponsored by "The Organic Church" lunch series this year.

What was particularly delightful about this impromptu debate was that I was able to listen to two people, both older and wiser than myself, discuss a topic that I find myself, less coherently, debating in my own mind on a regular basis. And more than this, I felt like I *was* the conversation. It was representative of the two different (but related) ideologies that have significantly shaped my character over the years.

On the one hand, there is the perspective of Peter VanderMeulen and others that had and continues to have great influence on my thinking. Not too long ago I was an overly curious college sophomore riding in the back of pick-up trucks through the hill country of Central America, a tattered copy of Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* in my hand. Needless to say, the arguments in that book at that particular time were cogent. I instantly became a convert to his understanding of the Bible, of Shalom and of the holistic mission of the church. VanderMeulen believes, like Wolterstorff, that working for justice should not be wholly separated from the mission of the church. In fact, in certain cases such as in Sierra Leone during the early 90s, working for justice proves to be integrally connected with the mission of the church. According to VanderMeulen, it is because of instances like the devastation that occurred in Sierra Leone that the Office of Social Justice exists. VanderMeulen presents his perspective exceptionally well. In fact, one can tell that he is regularly forced to defend his job.

But on the other hand, there is the perspective of Prof. John Bolt and others who are currently shaping and exerting influence over my thinking. Prof. Bolt believes (at least from what I can tell) that the church should exercise great caution with regard to political pronouncements about policy. In fact, the church—as institution—should probably steer clear of the political arena almost entirely. The institutional church has enough on its plate holding Christ out to the world via the Word and sacraments; it does not need to make lofty political pronouncements. In fact, such policy pushing often gets in the way of and confuses the church's God-given function in the world. This of course does not mean that Christians should stay away from the political arena. They, of course, can and should get appropriately involved. This position exhibits some existential cogency in my life as well. I have plenty of friends who have slowly come to see that Jesus is not essential for justice and as a result they have thrown out Jesus. They realized that one can care about systemic issues without a Christ-shaped worldview. In addition to this, I know of churches that care way too much about social

justice and way too little about reconciliation with God the Father through Jesus the Son upon being regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

From what I can tell, the process of resolution of this debate—both the one in my mind and the one that actually happened at Calvin Seminary—includes work that needs to be done in a couple of different areas. First of all, this debate revolves around ecclesiological and missiological issues. The way one understands the church and the church's function in the world is going to change the conclusions one will draw on this issue. Secondly, there are some practical issues involved in this debate (issues that stem from the theoretical issues). I got the feeling, when listening to Peter VanderMeulen and Prof. Bolt debate, that their disagreement had a lot to do with priorities and resources. VanderMeulen believes that his office is an integral component of the church's mission in the world and should therefore receive a seat around the "missions" table and should also receive the resources to exercise its function. Professor Bolt, on the other hand, would like to see a much more restricted role for social justice in the mission of the church; and hence, social justice advocates should receive little priority and resources from the church—if any at all.

The debate between these two men, from what I could tell, revolved around the issues presented above. More issues, of course, were discussed, but from what I discerned, the debate centered upon ecclesiological-missiological and priority-resource disagreements.

In my opinion, this debate is currently an important one for us to have—and not just for my own mental sanity. The Christian Reformed Church, for better or worse is moving in a decidedly Wolterstorffian direction without debate. Furthermore, I think that this debate will probably have some influence on the Belhar Confession conversation that is and will continue to be an issue in the CRC. Finally, how one answers these questions might very well influence the way the CRC deals with the financial crunch—how we determine what is central and should stay, and what is non-essential and can be let go. Perhaps the debate that occurred on Monday between VanderMeulen and Bolt needs to be continued in a more public setting. Perhaps people can use *Kerux* as a forum to express their opinion and engage in debate.

My own opinion, if I have one yet, is that social justice and the Office of Social Justice should continue to play a role in the life of the church. This being said, I think that it should take on a supportive role. It should be an office that works to support the central mission of the church in ways that only it can. With regard to what the central mission of the church is, I personally appreciate Prof. Tuit's distinction between the *heart* of the gospel (the reconciliation of sinners to God) and the *scope* of the gospel (the reconciliation of all things to God). In my mind, the church should focus its attention on the heart of the gospel. But sometimes, however, I think that periphery issues (justice issues) will affect the church's ability to carry out its central mission.

ESSAY

Herbal Remedies

A letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

I have a confession to make: I drink funky tea and it gives me funky dreams ... and I like it.

I have a second confession to make: I have become increasingly interested in the concept of "well-being" and I will talk to pretty much anyone about it.

Phew. With that off of my chest I want to talk to you, yes you, about the connections between mind, body and kava root. And I hope these very short non-paragraphs simply spark a conversation.

Kava root (just look it up on Wikipedia.org for basic information) has been known to relax muscles, calm nerves, create a general feeling of well-being (yahtzee, I am interested now), induce feelings of peace, contentment and relaxation, and many other amazing things that cannot be found at Family Christian Stores.

But you can find it at Global Infusions (located at Lake and Diamond). It is naturally occurring and has been used in drinks for 3000 years as a natural relaxant.

According to Prof. Cooper, we are not part body and part soul (dualism), but we are bodies and we are souls. We are bodily beings and spiritual beings. We are holistic; our souls are in our bones. What we do to our bodies affects our souls and vice versa. I don't have the space to argue this here. You just have to take my, I mean Prof. Cooper's, word for it.

So, what we eat affects our well-being. What we drink affects our well-being. If you sit on the couch for 10 hours watching *The Wire*, it affects your well-being. If you sit out in the woods in complete silence and just focus on the air coming out from your nose on to your upper lip, it affects your well-being. If you run for 10 miles it affects your well-being, your soul, your body, your *self*, however you want to say it.

So when we talk about the good life, the Christian life, what should we talk about? Should we not talk about it holistically? Should we not want things to put into our bodies that are natural, something that we can grow, something with kava root, lavender and chamomile? Are we missing something that other cultures (and North American sub-cultures and even counter-cultures) have known all along?

I had a friend at Michigan State who believed that most of our personal problems could be solved by naturally occurring herbs. I think he might be right.

Maybe part of the solution isn't in a Christian book store but in our gardens (or in an alternative spirituality book store).

John Burden

Dear John,

Wasn't it eating something from the garden that got us in trouble in the first place?

-Editor

POETRY

The Monologue of Calvin Seminary

A poem

by John Burden

bored.
mental atrophy.
Caught in an intellectual monologue
Where the most excitement
Comes from disagreements on what a sermon should look like
Where are the atheists
the pluralists
the panentheists
the feminists
the existentialists
They are only to be found in ink,
Voiceless
it is easy to disagree with those who have no voice.

FEATURE

A Pedagogically Satisfying Experience

On the benefits of oral comprehensives

by **Nate Van Denend**, co-editor in chief

During December and January, this year's class of potential graduates endured Calvin Seminary's rite of passage: oral comprehensive examinations. The format is simple: one student, three professors, one hour. Condensed into that hour are three or four years of preparation, learning and studying. The student must be prepared to field questions relating to anything covered in any of the courses that student had taken. In addition, the student must be prepared to answer on-the-spot practical questions that require being able to synthesize information and apply that information to a given situation.

How does one prepare for this one hour? Is the oral comprehensive a beneficial, useful, practical pedagogical tool? What did these students learn from the experience? *Kerux* asked a few students to answer these questions and to discuss the process of preparing for the oral comprehensive.

The answers from students were surprisingly positive. Brian Seifert stated, "I thought working with my group was absolutely the best experience by far." Sean Baker and Dirk Van Eck offered similar sentiments. Sean Baker said, "Preparation for comps was the most enjoyable and profitable learning experience of my seminary career." Similarly, Dirk Van Eck said, "It was one of the best pedagogical experiences of my life."

But why?

Dirk Van Eck gave this reason: "I was forced to think critically about how past councils or systematized theology applies to the average person walking down the street." And Sean Baker explained, "I sensed an urgency that both my colleagues and I learn how to articulate the Christian faith clearly and cogently." Brian Seifert responded, "I was pushed to answer over and over in a clear, intelligible way where as trying to formulate these answers on my own would have been a ripe invitation to stick my foot in my mouth."

So the process of the studying together in groups helped these students learn how to articulate their answers clearly to the average Joe. Sean Baker picked up on an additional positive effect of group study, saying, "In studying, as in our future ministries, we were in this together. This meant we were invested in each other's competence and success."

The students not only gained some camaraderie and learned how to answer tough questions. They also learned content from their peers and on their own. Brian Seifert said, "There was so much I learned from them [my group] that I just would have never been [able] to learn on my own." Sean Baker added, "I learned a lot of Reformed Theology for the first time. It was in prep for comps that I committed much from scripture and confessions to memory...When you or your colleague gives an 85% strong answer, the group has a mandate to strengthen the other 15%."

So what did these comp groups look like?

Sean Baker described his group: "Our frequent practice comp sessions, where one student would field 45 minutes of questions, created a venue for all of us to sharpen both our knowledge of the content of our faith, but also to sharpen the winsomeness by which we communicated it." Dirk Van Eck's group used the calm of nature to help them prepare. He said, "A bunch of us went up to a cabin north of Grand Rapids. We took turns putting each other in the 'hot seat' and asking that person all sorts of questions." Brian Seifert's group got a little more creative: "I think the best story that came out of our group was putting answers to song."

For this group of students, the experience of oral comps was a positive an educational experience. It also had one final payoff. Brian Seifert concluded, "The biggest gleaner from oral comps was the incredible amount of confidence it gave each one of us for going into ministry."

For students facing the same process next year, Dirk Van Eck has the final word. “One of the most beneficial resources...was the WikiComps google site. I think that the site really brought the community together to pool resources for every students’ collective good. Future students should really check it out.”

SERMON

Mark 5:1-20

A chapel message

by Amos Groenendyk

Something to remember: Jesus is the central character of the gospel. We read this gospel to find out about the Son of God. So we read with this question in front of us: Who ... is ... Jesus? And what sort of things does he do? And especially for Mark 5, what sort of places does he go?

Jesus goes where no one else would go.

This is a dirty passage. It stinks with what, according to Old Testament law, would make you ritually unclean.

First. Notice the location. Jesus gets in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. Immediately after our passage, he gets back on the boat and crosses back over. So it would seem that Jesus goes out of his way to visit this region. Could it be that the place is important? And if so, what makes it special? The region of the Gerasenes is deep in Gentile territory. Gentiles are very unclean people. And these aren't just any Gentiles. These are Romans! Jesus enters the Decapolis region: the ten cities built to exert imperial dominance the area. Gentiles: They worship other gods. They are sexually immoral. They are offensive and disgusting. I suppose the area might have had reputation akin to Las Vegas. Sin city. And Jesus makes a special visit.

I risk overstating the case, but this is not our only clue. Jesus visits a man who lives among the tombs. Another red flag. Numbers 19 says that if you come into contact with corpse or touch anything associated with death, you will be unclean for seven days. You must purify yourself and if you don't, you defile the tabernacle of the LORD and will be cut off from your people. This guy hasn't just touched a dead body. He's living among the tombs—cut off from his people. He is unclean.

There's the obvious one too—right? The pigs that Jesus sends the spirits into later. Pigs are unclean animals. A symbol of paganism.

Where am I going with this?

Unclean region, Unclean place, unclean animals. And Jesus meets a man with a verse 2. The NIV says he meets an “evil spirit,” but the Greek is *pneumati akatharto*: an unclean spirit.

Jesus goes where no one else would go.

He comes into contact with a man possessed with hundreds of demons. It says has he has superhuman strength. He's covered with dried blood and scars. People have tried to tie him down without success. This is a scary dude. Think of him like WWF guy from the late 90s: maybe like Stone Cold Steve Austin. You don't want to mess with this guy. You don't want to go near him. But Jesus does.

Not to preach a sermon—that's not what he needed. But to show mercy.

The man comes running toward Jesus and falls down before him and shouts, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!” Remember who we're talking about here. Stone Cold Steve Austin falls down before Jesus.

As repulsive as this man may look at first appearance, it only begins to hint at the storm going on inside this man. A legion of demons. This man's life is out of control. He is self-destructive. He doesn't have any say in his own fate. He is helpless and unable to even speak for himself. When Jesus asks, "What is your name?" It is the host of demons who answer, not the man, "We are legion." It seems there is very little humanity left in him.

But just as Jesus had stilled a storm on the lake, Jesus stills the storm in this man. He sends the demons into a herd of pigs, which go rushing down into the lake, into the abyss. By the time the townspeople show up, the man is sitting there clothed, calm and in his right mind. Jesus had restored his humanity. The image of God in this man was once more visible. His life transformed, forever changed. Jesus had given him his life back.

Jesus prepares to once more embark across the Sea of Galilee. The man follows Jesus and begs to go with him. From the same lips that begged Jesus not to torture him, the man—now healed—begs to follow him. Jesus denies him this request, but says "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

And now I pose the question, How much has Jesus done for you?

To answer, I think we need to back up a few paces and consider our condition. How are we like this demon possessed man? I don't know if the word "unclean" resonates with many of you or not. You strike me as a pretty sanctified bunch. But I think for a few of us feeling dirty is an appropriate description. Maybe shame is a better word. Or maybe, simply we wish we were better people. Maybe we find ourselves a slave to addiction or a worshiper of grades. Maybe it's lust or envy that gets us. I must admit, I don't think about my sin very often. But that doesn't mean I don't do it.

We all do it.

Another way some of us are like the man. It seems we have lost control of our lives. We don't know who we are anymore. A storm rages. Swamped by homework, family and church responsibilities. We can't even speak for ourselves, we just keep saying "yes." Maybe you are gripped by fear of what comes next ... after graduation, where you'll be this summer or where you'll be after budget cuts. Maybe you wonder where *the* money is going to come from. Maybe it's the future of the CRC that grips you with uncertainty. Or maybe it's a fear of failure. That I'm not really cut out for ministry.

Jesus goes where no one else would go. He reaches out to unclean people. A few chapters later in Mark, Jesus himself will find himself covered in dried blood, with his own scars, naked, outside of town among the tombs. Jesus goes where no one else would go: to the cross, to atone for all our sin, to make us clean, and to make us the holy, even. His Spirit enters those places inside ourselves that even we don't want to face in order to purify us. And Jesus goes where no one else would go: to defeat the powers that wreak havoc on our lives—those powers that storm inside and around us. He walks straight into the storm to set us free. To empower us to go on. To give us our lives back.

Amen.