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## From the Kerux Staff

### A new beginning

Welcome to a new year at CTS. Changes abound for everyone on campus this year. Whether you are a new student adjusting to life at the Seminary, a returning student navigating the transition between the old and new curriculum, or a faculty/staff member trying to re-adjust to the semester system, nobody is immune from the stress of a new academic year. We hope that *Kerux* provides a venue for honest and frank discussion of our Seminary and ministry experience. As the leaves change color and we move forward through the fall months, we give thanks for God's providence in the shifting seasons. Likewise, no matter the magnitude of the transitions we face in this year, we are grateful for our good God who upholds and rules heaven, earth, and all creatures.

Blessings,  
*Kerux* Staff  
KLP

### NEWS

## CTS Curriculum Undergoes Massive Overhaul

Changes abound in the 2009-2010 academic year

by **Kory Plockmeyer**

When professors passed out syllabi at the beginning of this semester, students noticed an important new feature: course goals were now centered around four categories: person, message, context, goal. These four areas of proficiency form the basis of the new curriculum and provide clear benchmarks for tracking the progress of students' preparation for ministry.

The impact of these changes goes far beyond the goals of a given course. Recognizing the disparity of student backgrounds, Calvin Seminary restructured the course path taken by students. Under the new curriculum, each year brings the student to new depths of the material, focusing on literacy in the first year, analysis in the second, and integration in the third. This year also saw the implementation of advanced standing exams, allowing those students who have already achieved proficiency in literacy courses to move to analysis courses more quickly.

The implementation of the new curriculum also brought a significant change to the way students learn Hebrew. In place of the online course previously in use, students now take the introductory sequence in one semester. Scott Page, a first year M.Div student, was pleased to note that Professor Williams is paying careful attention to the needs of students during this adjustment period, including a willingness to slow down the course's pace at the request of several students.

One of the largest adjustments in this near school year has come in the transition to a semester schedule in lieu of the quarter system. The new schedule has brought with it a new pace and changes to old courses. Some courses have been combined into one semester-long course and other new courses have been created. While the semester system brings with it many perks, including a homework-free Christmas break, it also creates some consternation over the adjustment of professors to the new pace: "I am curious how professors are going to work with the 2-credit courses that some think should be 3-credit courses. Will they continue to teach at a 3-credit pace or will they adjust?" wondered third year M.Div student Scott Elgersma. The shift in schedules brings with it a new set of breaks. While these breaks are certainly a welcome relief from the stress of coursework, they do have their drawbacks. As Matt Borst, a third year M.Div student pointed out, "The hard part is going to be coming back right after Thanksgiving when we're used to starting over and it's just going to be more of the same."

Although some first year students are concerned about a perceived sacrifice of intellectual rigor in the new curriculum, Elgersma encouraged them to be patient: "The first quarter that I had here wasn't as intellectually rigorous as I was anticipating. By the second and third quarter it's ramped up and by the second year you're really into it. The concerns may be fair, but be patient, because you're still coming into things that are much more difficult."

For those students who entered under the old curriculum and now face the adjustment to the new, unanswered questions and unclear expectations can cause frustration and anxiety. Thankfully, the administration has gone out of their way to help students during this period. In particular, the Registrar's office has provided upper level students with detailed schedules of their coursework and required coursework. As Matt Borst phrased it, "Joan Beelen is the bomb."

Most students seem to have adopted a "wait and see" attitude to the new curriculum. Second year M.Div student Ruth Lemmen hopes that this is a positive change for the school: "For the institution as a whole, the curriculum seems much better thought out and much better pedagogically, especially for people who were not religion majors in college. It's laid out much better." As Ben Schaefer, a third year M.Div student, pointed out, "This is the first year. We need to wait at least three years before we can make a judgment."

## NEWS

# Former Ethiopian Prime Minister Visits CTS

Tamrat Layne shares his story with the Calvin Seminary community

by Alex Snider

On Thursday, October 1, 2009, the Calvin Seminary community was honored to host the Former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Tamrat Layne. Layne had spoken at Calvin College the night before and came to the Seminary to give an abridged version of his story as well as to answer student questions.

Layne's story was amazing. He was a founding member of the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (now the Amhara National Democratic Movement). As a leader, Layne participated in seventeen years of rebellion before his group overthrew the socialist military dictatorship. After the takeover he was named Prime Minister. In 1996, however, Layne's associates turned on him. He was arrested and convicted of corruption and abuse of power.

After serving twelve years of an eighteen-year sentence, Layne was released late in 2008. After acquiring a Bible while in prison, Layne became a Christian in 2001. His faith carried him through the next seven years of incarceration.

## NEWS

# H= (Hope Equals)

**New student organization commits itself to peace in the Middle East**

by **Micah Schuurman**

A new club has begun this year at the Seminary. Under the guidance of Christian Reformed World Missions, the club Hope Equals will seek to raise awareness and do advocacy relating to the Arab/Israeli conflict.

A few months ago, World Missions put together a focus group consisting of a variety of young adults in the Christian Reformed Church. They provided the focus group with a number of major issues in the world today and asked the members of the focus group to indicate which issue interested them the most. Unanimously, the focus group chose the Arab/Israeli conflict.

World Missions responded to this overwhelmingly unified statement of interest by creating Hope Equals. In this endeavor World Missions has partnered with the Office of Social Justice, CRWRC and a number of other organizations.

As the name hints, Hope Equals is about working towards hope as equals with a common goal. Given the wide variety of deeply entrenched opinions relating to the Arab/Israeli conflict this is no easy task. Division, anger, frustration and alienation are dangers that lurk around every corner. But, Hope Equals will do its best to remain as neutral as possible. In short, Hope Equals is neither pro-Israel nor pro-Arab. Rather, it will seek to be pro-peace and pro-hope.

Practically speaking, the short-term goals of Hope Equals involve setting up clubs on campuses across the United States. Those running the Hope Equals have begun the process of setting up clubs at Calvin and a number of other schools with hopes of attending the Urbana Conference with the hope of developing an even broader coalition of groups.

The club at Calvin Seminary is the first of the clubs to open under the guidance of World Missions. However, the Middle East Club at Calvin College has been in action for a number of years and will likely work closely with the club at the seminary.

The Hope Equals club at Calvin Seminary is currently thinking of ways to creatively discuss the Arab/Israeli conflict. The leaders are already planning to invite speakers to the campus and show movies. Other plans are on the table including field trips to Dearborn and Chicago to meet with Muslims and Jews, debates, demonstrations and even trips to the Holy Land.

To express questions, ideas or concerns relating to this club, contact Micah Schuurman.

**MAKE YOUR OPINION KNOWN! SUBMIT YOUR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TODAY!**

## NEWS

# In Brief

The headlines, just in case you missed them...

-President Barack Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize

-A Louisiana Justice of the Peace refuses to marry an interracial couple

- The National Academy of Science estimates that there are 47 million Americans living in poverty, higher than the Census Bureau's number of 40 million
- The Obama administration unveils looser regulations for the prosecution of marijuana use in states with legalized medicinal use of the drug
- Falcon Heene, a Colorado child, thought for several hours to have flown away in a homemade balloon, was found at home in his parents' house.
- Baseball playoffs hit full swing: in the American League, the Yankees battle the Angels while the Phillies and the Dodgers clash in the National League.

## COLUMN

# Nobel Intentions

Columnist Braden Kok reflects on President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize

by Braden Kok

I awoke on the morning of October 9 to the news that President Obama had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Soon, the slew of emails and people's personal opinions began. My favorite was an email that informed me that President Obama has received the Heisman Award after watching a college football game. I had friends making claims that the Nobel Peace Prize is now a mockery and that he has done nothing to deserve this.

So I wanted to address these things with some thoughts. The idea that the Nobel Peace Prize has become a mockery made me look at who had won the award in the past. On the day he received the award, Anwar Sadat was waging war against Israel. Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State, received the award, even though he has been tied to Operation Condor, which initiated the assassination of communist and socialist leaders in South America. Looking at past recipients, there is plenty of controversy; so, to claim that the Nobel Peace Prize was spotless until now is, in my opinion, a little farfetched.

The statement that he has done nothing to deserve this award is something that I think merits the most attention. After all, he was nominated for the Prize after only two weeks in office. People are glad to point out that during those two weeks he had done nothing to further the movement of peace throughout the world. I agree that he did nothing to deserve the nomination, but I assume that after the nomination process, they looked at his past eight months as president and not his first two weeks. I think President Obama has worked to further the cause of peace, whether he was addressing the challenges in the Middle East or changing the tone of the U.S. around the world. The U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon commented on President Obama's win by saying, "We are entering an era of renewed multilateralism ... President Obama embodies the new spirit of dialogue and engagement on the world's biggest problems: climate change, nuclear disarmament and a wide range of peace and security challenges." The deputy head of the Islamic organization Nahdatul Ulama in Indonesia stated that Obama was the only American president to ever reach out to them in peace. Clearly, leaders around the world recognize President Obama's commitment to peace.

The strongest opposition that I have seen about this award comes from within the United States. Obviously, there are others from around the world who disagree with the award, just like in years past. I look at it this way: this was not an award given to Obama by the United States. Instead, it was presented to him by the Nobel Committee. Others around the world feel that America is going in a positive direction in our relationship with the rest of the world, maybe we should take notice. The award for Peace is unlike the rest of the Nobel prizes, not solely based upon a body of work. The reason that is given for his win says, "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples." He has changed the tone of international relations and for that he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Perhaps we ought to appreciate the positive shift in attitude from the rest of the world.

## ESSAY

# Old Glory?

## The impact of patriotism on church choice

by Micah Schuurman

Picking a church can be a difficult process. Many questions went through my mind as I began the process of looking for a church in Grand Rapids. Is the pastor engaging? Does the congregation play an active role in the life of the church or are they there to be entertained? Is this a church where I could "plug in" to the ministries of the church? Can I worship God while staring at the American Flag?

This last question ended up playing a decisive role in my choice of congregation. The honest answer to the question is, "No, I cannot worship God while staring at the American Flag." This very issue eliminated two of the three churches that I was considering.

Why is this an issue? Doesn't the flag belong in the sanctuary? After all, the United States gives us the Freedom of Religion. The United States gives sanctuary to our sanctuaries. Shouldn't we give the flag a place in our churches?

I have no direct objections to these questions. My only thought is whether it is possible to show due respect to the state by putting the flag somewhere else in the church.

I have two reasons for disliking the presence of flags in places of worship. The first is that it seems to blend civil religion with Christianity. Civil religion is the religion of the state. It worships the god named in the phrase "In God We Trust" put on our money. It is the god mentioned in the hymn, "God bless America." When we hear God referred to in this manner, we naturally think that the words refer to our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is not necessarily the case.

One of the surest indicators that the god of the state is not the God whom we worship is the fact that the god of the state loves America. We regularly hear politicians and other political personalities utter supplications to god that implicitly and explicitly assume that god loves America

Voltaire said, "If God made us in His image we have certainly returned the compliment." When we mix religion and politics in such a way as to make God seem partial towards America, we are guilty of creating an image, an idol.

In short, a flag in a church looks very much like an idol. Indeed, it does become an idol to some people. I once visited Ebenezer CRC in Berwyn, Illinois for their Memorial Day service. Mid-way through the service, we said the pledge of allegiance! This is what can happen when patriotism begins to warp our understanding of God.

The second reason that I dislike having flags in sanctuaries is much more practical. I love the American flag. It stands for so many wonderful things. It stands for freedom, justice, equality and so much more. When we bring a flag into a place of worship, we bring those ideals with it. However, the flag also represents much more. In the minds and hearts of many, it represents imperialism, injustice, greed, arrogance and tyranny. If introducing a flag to a place of worship brings the favorable connotations, it must consequently bring along the more negative ones.

The American flag is a powerful symbol that arouses deep love in some and deeper resentment in others. It also has many of the characteristics which we associate with idols, especially when the flag is joined with religion. Given these facts, I cannot help but ask, "Can't we just keep it in the narthex?"

**EDITOR'S CORNER**

**A New Year**

## The editor's thoughts on a new year of the *Kerux* by Kory Plockmeyer

Editing a student newspaper is a tricky business. We have to navigate the waters between students and administration. Somehow, we are supposed to provide a forum for frank and honest discussion, yet, we must never forget that *Kerux* is published online and accessible by more than just those within the Calvin Seminary community. In addition, there are all sorts of questions of what the student newspaper is actually supposed to *do*. Ought we simply report on the latest happenings on campus and around the world? Yet, this seems like a vain endeavor, considering the time lapse between publication and the actual occurrence of the events in question. Simply reporting the "news" seems to limit too narrowly the scope of this publication. Should *Kerux* then be a forum for longer discussion? A place for interested students to espouse their viewpoints with impunity? A mouthpiece of Student Senate? A bastion of liberal thought? A resource for future church leaders?

With a new year, a new editor, and a (mostly) new staff, perhaps this is the best time to ask these questions. I encourage the rest of the Seminary community to get in on the conversation. Nothing makes an editor of a student newspaper happier than actually receiving feedback from his/her audience. We are excited to bring several regular features to this year's edition of *Kerux*, including columns by first-year M.Div students Micah Schuurman and Braden Kok. We also look forward to a series of articles on the work of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches by Nathaniel Van Denend and are considering a complete revamp of the format of *Kerux*, looking into options that would give it the look of a more traditional newspaper.

No matter what changes the new year may bring to *Kerux*, we cannot do it alone. I covet your feedback, opinions, articles, letters, and, most of all, prayers. May God bless you richly in this new academic year.

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Interested in writing for *Kerux*? Contact the Editor