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NEWS

An Interview With the President-Elect

Editor's Note: Rev. Jul Medenblik is the President-elect for Calvin Theological Seminary. Senior Staff Writer Nate Van Denend interviewed Rev. Medenblik about his upcoming position at CTS.

JM

When I was an attorney and processing my sense of call there were two questions I kept asking myself. First, do I see myself continuing in that field for the next twenty five to thirty years? Second, what would I regret not doing for God? The answer was the opportunity to go to seminary and study and be in that full time vocational ministry.

NVD

What should we know about you as a student body?

JM

That's a big question. I like to travel with my family. Sometimes the opportunity to be in the car together is the best part of a family trip. I have a 22-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter. Am I a sports fan? Yes, particularly the Chicago teams. I am a Chicago Cubs fan, which means suffering is part of the process, since they haven't won the world series for over a century now.

NVD

How do you see yourself interacting with the student body?

JM

My wife and I particularly look forward to the sense of connectedness and the opportunity to have an occasional class to teach and to be present with students, eating at the student center. I have a sense that there is an opportunity to make connections with students and draw them in. It probably works best in a small group format rather than doing it in a large town hall meeting. I think it gives an opportunity for you as students to know what's going on in administration.

It may not be best to always think about a course. Maybe it's an hour presentation where you bring in local pastors or special speakers, but you're up front with them and you have the opportunity before and after to dialogue with students. So rather than think of just a course, I think about occasional seminar presentations that I might be able to offer as a way of connecting with the student body.

NVD

In the next five to ten years, many of the faculty will require. What kind of traits, and skills will you look for in the new faculty?

JM

That's a great question, because we do face new opportunity of not only blessing those who are finishing up in their work at Calvin Seminary and who have gone through a number of changes, especially most recently, but I also think about what it would mean for us to have a more diverse faculty - a faculty that continues to balance, as I think our current faculty does, what does it mean to be deep in academic scholarship but also relate that to the local church and pastorate that many students are being trained for. I look for people who connect head and heart together and who connect with people in diverse settings. But, I would also ask, are they the type of people that would joyfully mentor and walk alongside students, even as they are people who need to have the gift of scholarship?

NVD

I was talking to Prof. Rylaarsdam a little about this question and he said "What would the Seminary look like if every single faculty member had participated in someone's conversion?"

JM

I think Professor Rylaarsdam was right to challenge us to think about what it means to walk alongside people. My church has had the privilege over the last year of having four or five adult baptisms and I just received an email this week from someone who had just heard about what was happening here at Calvin Seminary thanking me for my role in bringing them to Christ. That's something for pastors and leaders of churches to think about - what it means to have a hospitable community where there is that level of understanding to walk alongside people who initially seem so far away from God and to experience the joy that you have with sharing in their story but also sharing Christ with them along the way. We allowed these people to have time to listen, to learn, to develop, to grow, to ask questions in an atmosphere where they knew it was safe. I think that's a category we'll especially need in the 21st century. What does it mean to have a safe church where people can ask questions about God?

NVD

So then to tie it into the question again, when you're thinking about the next generation of professors. What will Calvin Seminary look like ten years down the road?

JM

The faculty themselves have a major role in identifying people in their field who may fit at Calvin Seminary. It's obviously something that students will be involved in. At this point in time what I would love for us to see is how do we do this by planning ahead of time and understanding that sometimes its related to a whole department. So, rather than thinking of this as taking just one piece out of the faculty and putting another person or piece back into the faculty, instead looking at the entire faculty alignment.

I think we need to recognize that not any one person brings all the gifts that are needed for every endeavor. So, I do think that interdisciplinary studies and opportunities for professors to work together is not only something that's happening now but something that will be enhanced and grow over the next decade.

NVD

Since you're a pastor and not a professor moving into this position, does that represent a shift towards making the Seminary education more practical?

JM

That's an interesting question. It's hard to talk about myself, but I have a constellation of gifts. So in that way, it's a recognition that one title may not define a person. For example, because I lived for a decade in Florida does this mean that the seminary desires to reach out to Florida or because I served in Canada for a year is that a signal that they want to demonstrate to the church in Canada an openness to more Canadian students? It's hard to think of my selection as creating a message in that direction. I think that because of my role in the board of trustees I would continue in the same direction in terms of calendar and curriculum and an emphasis that way in formation for ministry and an appreciation for being Biblical, contextual, authentic, and an environment that fosters lifelong learning, because our desire obviously is to train people who have theological breadth and depth and also pastoral sensitivity.

There are two things I am particularly mindful of in all interactions. One is prejudging a person or situation and the other is exclusion. In this case, to prejudge someone with a J.D. and an M.Div. as someone without an interest in scholarship is obviously not true. But, there is also some level of exclusion to assume that just because someone has a Ph.D. they do not have a deep love for the church

NVD

Recently there have been a series of decisions making it easier to go to another seminary and then become ordained in the CRC. That means Calvin Seminary has to compete for students in a way they never had to before. To what extent does Calvin Seminary have to be mindful of what other seminaries are doing?

JM

I have a desire for us to not only have better connections with other seminaries but also other students who may for whatever reason be choosing that particular seminary in that particular location. I think Calvin Seminary has to be Calvin Seminary. We have to be a place where people choose to come. I look forward to helping us articulate that well, connecting us with other seminaries and other students in other locations.

I come at this with somewhat of a unique story. In 1991 when we were living in Florida I was an attorney who had the opportunity to go to Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando. RTS was just opening up their Orlando campus and I was practicing law three hours away. RTS was shaping its curriculum and calendar so that students could come to class on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. So, I could have then stayed in Lakewood, FL, continued practicing law a part-time basis and then went to school Tuesday- Thursday. But, because I was rooted in the CRC and my understanding of the value of the education I would receive at CTS, I chose not to go to RTS in Orlando but came to CTS with my family. I have never regretted that choice and I will tell every prospective student that there's a great value to coming to CTS, as I've found, and I hope others have found it as well.

NVD

What is the gospel?

JM

I love a lot of different ways that we frame that question and frame it well. You can think of it as the fact that the whole gospel is related to the whole story. It's about Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation. Many people focus on the middle two. As Reformed people we broaden to that full gospel and ask, what does it mean to know the creation but also to be part of the re-creation project?

NVD

So when did the Gospel grab you?

JM

I think of two times when it particularly did. One I cannot describe other than as a particular Easter when I was 12 or 13 and feeling clean. That's a different word to describe it, but I think it's a biblical word and just having a sense that what I had just heard, and I had heard it previous years, was something that I now understood that God intended for me to hear and that Jesus Christ did die for my sins and desired to have a relationship with me. Later on, when I was 17 and my dad was going to undergo open heart surgery. At that time I was the eldest son and we're farmers and he was away having that surgery and we wondered about his living beyond that surgery. It's getting to be harvest time and there is a sense of worry and concern and anxiety, but also a sense of lament saying, "God, do you understand what's going on? Do you hear us? Do you hear our prayers?" And I remember really having a sense that God heard us and that God said "I'm a father who understands pain and suffering and loss and anytime you ever doubt that, understand again the cross." That was another opportunity for me to deepen my faith and recognize that it wasn't about going to church Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings but it was about something so much more. I've had the great opportunity to help people understand the Gospel as something that they can be a part of and something they can be connected to - not because of anything that they've done but because of what Jesus Christ has already done for them.

NEWS

Building Walls, Creating Awareness

by Kory Plockmeyer

On Wednesday, April 21, Calvin Seminary students entered the Student Center to find a wall dividing the communal space. The wall, decorated with posters of information about the Israel-Palestine conflict, was part of a campaign by Hope Equals to promote peace in the Middle East. Similar events were coordinated at Calvin College and Trinity Western in British Columbia.

The day included the opportunity for students to write letters to local representatives to encourage them to vote for policies that promote peace. Micah Schuurman, the head of CTS' chapter of Hope Equals, explained the goal of the letters and the wall: "We asked students, faculty and staff to write to the members of Congress who represent Grand Rapids. We encouraged people to encourage their representatives to support a balanced, even-handed approach to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Christians who want to advocate for peace, we need to learn to empathize with both sides. That was the point of the wall and that was the point of the letters."

Schuurman believes that it is important for church leaders to understand the issues surrounding the conflict in the Middle East: "People are becoming more and more aware of the conflict and my personal hope is that Hope Equals can help familiarize future pastors with the core issues surrounding the conflict. We need pastors who can speak intelligently about the conflict, particularly when it comes to trying to understand what the Bible has to say about these issues."

The wall created a springboard for discussion about the role of the church in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Schuurman believes that a group of Christians committed to loving relationships with both sides of the issue can create long-term solutions: “While Christians who work for peace and hope cannot stop Palestinians and Israelis from demonizing each other, we can look within ourselves to find ways in which we demonize other people. Once we have done that, we can begin the slow process of forming relationships with both sides, empathizing with both sides, working with both sides and loving both sides. If this happens enough on a small scale, it has the potential to become the sort of movement that can bring genuine peace and reconciliation.”

Hope Equals hopes that this event gave students a small taste of the life of many in the West Bank: “The actual wall in the West Bank makes life difficult for Palestinians by often cutting right through the middle of their communal spaces. Sometimes the wall runs down the middle of a once busy street. If you go to those communities right now, all you can see is boarded up shops. We wanted students to get an idea of what it would be like to have a huge barrier in our communal space.”

Hope Equals plans to host a movie night during the month of May and a Middle Eastern dinner in the fall. If you are interested in getting involved in Hope Equals, contact Micah Schuurman at micah.schuurman@gmail.com.

FEATURE

Amen

by **Rev. Richard Sytsma**

Sunday morning our Woodlawn CRC choir sang the hymn written by William Cowper: “Oh for a Closer Walk with God.” Accompanied by the piano and flute, the choir finished the anthem with the words, “So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame, so purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb.” As the echoes of the final notes faded, a hush enveloped the congregation.

Suddenly a hearty “Amen” from a member of the congregation punctuated the silence. Rev. Andy Kuyvenhoven, who is not afraid to voice a spontaneous “Amen” when his heart is touched, expressed what we all felt: a deep yearning for a closer walk with God.

That “Amen” resonated in my heart. Recently at the seminary too my heart has been saying a quiet “Amen” over and over.

- My heart has been moved in our chapel services. Friday Kathy Smith preached eloquently on the Great Commission. Then after singing “Here I Am Lord,” we heard Joshua Amaezechi pronounce the Aaronic blessing and invite God’s people to respond. Our response was enthusiastic: “Amen!”
- Every morning we end our Morning Matins service with an audible “Amen.” For me the “Amen” I say with my mouth is truly heartfelt. What a blessing it is to begin the day with students, staff, and faculty by reading passages from the Psalms and the Gospels, offering our prayers to him and singing his praise.
- Every Wednesday noon a small group of students pray for students, staff, and faculty by name. By the end of the year every person in the CTS community will have been interceded for by this prayer circle. How can we not say “Amen” to that?
- What a blessing it is to me to hear the collective “Amens” of the students in our Thursday noon prayer group after we have lifted each other up in prayer—knowing that God has heard us.
- Recently I was invited to preach in the Korean Student Association monthly worship service. The vitality of our Korean brothers and sisters’ prayer and singing was so contagious. Again the desire to say “Amen” welled up in my heart.

•Nick Bierma’s enthusiasm about the deep impact the discipline of scripture memory is having on him and the other members of the Scripture Memory Club is also contagious. Nick writes, “The Scriptures impressed on our minds, that then filter and permeate our center with Life by the Spirit of Truth is truly amazing. My experience and testimony is that God has opened more of Himself, more of his veil has been pulled back. . . . I suppose my fervor comes after allowing myself to be convicted and used by God through this discipline.” I read his testimony and I say, “Amen.”

•At the beginning of the spring semester half the seminary choir dropped out because of workload issues and schedule difficulties, and yet Director Roy Hopp has been able to elicit beautiful anthems of praise from his small choir. I see how God blesses the seminary chapel worship with a few voices and I say (in my heart), “Amen.”

•Last week a student told me how in the middle of a struggle to retain her faith she had a profound encounter with God that restored and revived her spirit. Again, “Amen.”

•Last Friday the Student Senate, after wrestling with reports that students are struggling with spiritual dryness, asked me to write an article in Kerux. I said, “yes” and wrote “Amen.”

At this time of year when the burden of papers and exams weigh us down and anxieties about our uncertain futures gnaw at us, our spirits may dry up and our hearts grow weary. With the Psalmist we may ask ourselves, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” Like Elijah in the wilderness we may even feel like saying to God, “I have had enough, Lord. . . Take my life.” Like William Cowper, we may experience doubt and depression.

But God does not leave us. He leads the downcast Psalmist to write, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” He nourishes Elijah with bread and water and sends him on his way with important work to do. He ministers to William Cowper and inspires him to write “Oh for a Closer Walk with God.” And at Calvin Seminary, too, he provides so many ways to help us walk more closely with our God. Let all God’s people say. . .

RECIPE

Sugar-Dusted Blueberry Muffins

(Makes 6-8)

by Sara Bosscher

1/4 cup quick oats

1/4 cup orange juice

4 tablespoons butter, melted

1 egg

a heaping 1/4 cup to a scant 1/2 cup of sugar

(depending on your tastes, I do somewhere in between)

3/4 cup flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/8 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt

large 1/2 cup blueberries

1 tablespoon sugar + 1/8 t. cinnamon

- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees
- 2) Mix oats and oj. Let it sit for 5 minutes.
- 3) Beat in egg and sugar.
- 4) Toss in rest of ingredients except blueberries, stir until moistened. It should be a bit lumpy.
- 5) Fold in blueberries. If you use frozen blueberries, run them under the faucet in a strainer for a few minutes to break them up and soften them a little.
- 6) Place paper liners or cooking spray in muffin tin. Spoon in batter, 1/2-3/4 full.
- 7) Sprinkle the sugar/cinnamon mixture on top of each.
- 7) Bake for 18-22 minutes and turn out immediately onto a towel or wire rack to cool.

Happy munching!

COLUMN

What Can We Learn From an Arab Perspective of Iran?

by Micah Schuurman

Non-Muslims often lump all the Muslim peoples together into a monolithic bloc. We tend to ignore the subtle distinctions between the various people groups. For example, we sometimes forget that Iran is not an Arab country. The largest ethnicity in Iran is Persian and Persian also happens to be the main language. Furthermore, Iranians are predominantly from the Shia branch of Islam whereas countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Morocco and Saudi Arabia are almost entirely Sunni. Practically speaking, this means that Iran is very much a foreign country.

Having lived in the an Arab country and having spent a significant amount of time paying attention to Arab media outlets, I have come into contact with some themes in an average Arab's perspective of Iran. Since I began my introduction with a caution against lumping the people of the Muslim world together, I should issue a caveat regarding my own words. That being said, I think that there is still some value in stepping outside of our own perspectives of Iran long enough to imagine how an average Arab might view this member of the so-called "The Axis of Evil."

One of the ways in which an Arab might view Iran is as a valiant hero, defending the Muslim world from the imperialist power of the West. France and the United Kingdom carved up the Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In the 50s, the secular, democratically-elected Iranian government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh attempted to nationalize the Iranian petroleum companies. In response, in August of 1953, the CIA initiated Operation Ajax at the order of Dwight Eisenhower for the purpose of deposing Mosaddegh and set up the reign of Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi more commonly known as the Shah of Iran. Pahlavi brutally oppressed his people with the help of American-made arms until 1979 when the Iranian Islamic Revolution deposed him and set up the Ayatollah Khomeini as the supreme leader of Iran. Even then, the United States didn't stop meddling. The US funneled millions of dollars worth of weapons to the young Iraqi dictator named Saddam Hussein to fund his war against Iran in the early '80s.

Another example of perceived imperialism is the state of Israel. Arabs view the nation as a European colony. This carries more weight when one tries to understand why the survivors of the Holocaust were given a piece of land which belonged to the Arabs rather than a chunk of Germany.

More recently, Osama bin Laden cited the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia after the first Persian Gulf War as an act of imperialism and as one of his main reasons for declaring war on the Saudi Royal Family and the United States. Concerning the Iraq war, the neo-conservative arguments used to justify the war are virtually indistinguishable from the arguments used to support European colonialism of the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Given these perspectives, it is little wonder that the peoples of the Middle East are afraid of Western Imperialism and often look somewhat admiringly at Iran, one of the few countries in the world that seems capable of standing up to the West.

Yet, Arabs are also concerned about Iran's growing influence in the region. Saddam Hussein had acted as a buffer, keeping Iran at bay and preventing Iran from meddling in the Arab world. With Hussein's fall, Iran's political tentacles began to spread throughout the region. It is no coincidence that Hezbollah's Iranian sponsored war with Israel took place scarcely three years after the invasion of Iraq. Similarly, much of the recent unrest in Northern Yemen has been linked to Iranian support for the Shia rebels in the area. The power vacuum created by the fall of Saddam Hussein has allowed Iran unchecked influence in the region. Many Arabs are aware of this and are naturally concerned.

We who live in the West certainly do not need to agree with everything that an average Arab might think concerning Iran. Yet, if we do not take these thoughts seriously, we are destined to become more and more alienated from the Muslim world due to preventable misunderstandings.

We can learn, however, that Iran's bravado and intransigence may have its roots in a resentment towards Western dominance. Ever since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran has felt that it has been unjustly ostracized, marginalized and ignored. Iranians are tired of their country being treated condescendingly by nations in the West. This may be the roots of Iran's attempt to develop nuclear technology. In terms of the nation's psychology, they may be saying to themselves, "This seems to be the only way that you in the West will ever treat us with any respect."

We can work with the Arabs to diminish Iranian power in the region provided we can convince them that we have given up our imperialistic aspirations and our meddling ways. This won't be easy. But, recent administrations have taken small steps to make amends. In a speech in 2000, then Secretary of State, Madeline Allbright said, "The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons. ... But the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs." Similarly, in his 2009 speech at the University of Cairo, President Barak Obama took responsibility for the coup and offered Iran the opportunity to move forward in relations with America rather than leaving both nations trapped in the past.

Our relationship with Iran can and must change. Iran poses a serious threat to the general stability of the Middle East. A powerful Iran is a danger to our allies, particularly Israel. But, we ought not fool ourselves into believing that sanctions and strategic bombings will solve anything. In terms of hard-line approaches, nothing short of a full-scale invasion will end Iran's quest for nuclear weapons. A missile strike would only delay Iran's quest to produce a bomb by a few months at most. If the West wishes to tame Iran through peaceful means, it will have to use diplomacy to address the fundamental reasons for Iran's aggression. Hopefully, this will involve convincing Iranian leaders that they can gain more international respect and legitimacy by abandoning their quest for a bomb than by continuing to pursue nuclear warheads.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Year's End

by **Kory Plockmeyer**

How quickly time has flown the last 9 months. It seems like just yesterday when I was arriving at the Seminary for my first day of Gateway, meeting my mentored ministries, group, and learning a whole new set of acronyms. One can certainly see God's faithful hand working in the Calvin Seminary community this last year.

One year of the new curriculum under our belt, we move forward as a community into the great unknown, putting our trust in our faithful God and Father who will walk alongside us every step of the way. There will continue to be changes and adjustments along the way, but we will work together as a community to encounter those challenges as they arise.

For those who are graduating, the Kerux staff wishes you special congratulations. We pray that God will guide you and bless your ministry as you work for the furthering of His kingdom.

For those of you who remain, see you next year!

MOVIE REVIEW

The Hurt Locker

By **Dave Bosscher**

I must admit, I initially ignored *The Hurt Locker*. Several friends recommended it to me, but I shrugged it off. However, after it won 6 Oscars and an unheard-of 97% rating on Rottentomatoes.com, I was compelled to take a look.

First off, this film does an excellent job of creating a feeling of tension in its audience. Without making us feel miserable, we are sharing a feeling of restless and nervousness with the characters on screen. *The Hurt Locker* is quite well acted and also does a great job of illustrating the difficulty of adjusting back to civilian life after serving time in Iraq.

Yet, *The Hurt Locker* has been lauded an accurate film. According to director, Kathryn Bigelow, the film gives us a "boots-on-the-ground" look at combat. Truthfully, I found myself struggling to find what exactly was accurate about it.

Most war movies have a lot of attention to detail. In this regard, *The Hurt Locker* was laughable. From the very first scene, I started to notice problems. The soldiers were wearing the wrong uniforms, ones that hadn't yet been issued as of 2004, when the film was supposedly taking place. Second, the main character is a somewhat mentally unstable EOD officer. EOD personnel have some of the highest psychological requirements around. This makes an unstable EOD officer about as likely as a legless Navy SEAL. I had to watch a Barret M82 jam on dirty bullets. This does not happen. Also, I had to watch supposedly highly trained British and American soldiers using said rifle, a rifle firing such a large round that it couldn't care less about wind, missing shots by 8-10 feet at 200 meters. A soldier would have to have an epileptic seizure to miss that shot. Meanwhile, some guy in the distance is landing perfect headshots with a PSL, which is a rifle with roughly the same accuracy potential as a Michael Moore documentary. The list goes on, but I think I've made my point.

Nearly all details down to vehicles used, weapons carried, combat situations portrayed, and tactics used were completely inaccurate. It was definitely entertaining, but saying that *The Hurt Locker* is an accurate representation of the Iraq war is like saying that an episode of *House* shows exactly what its like to be a doctor.

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