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### ESSAY

## Listening to the Voices of Dissent

A proposal for a change to the curriculum for Mentored Ministries

by Micah Shuurman

### Introduction

The current curriculum of Calvin Theological Seminary runs the danger of unintentionally teaching students to fear points of view differing from their own. For example, I am quite certain that CTS is one of the safest places in the world for a thoughtful Christian to enter into conversation with a thoughtful atheist. A rigorously intellectual, Biblically based Christian community such as ours is the perfect place for students to engage differing beliefs. Yet, we do not have these kinds of dialogs happening. Even those professors who work very hard to bring in outside opinions in the forms of course readings are limited in their ability to do justice to the opinions expressed there.

What are students learning about differing opinions by the way in which the seminary teaches those differing opinions?

### Proposal

For this reason, I propose that the institutional seminary add to its curriculum the practice of bringing in outside voices for the sake of public dialog.

### Goal

Students will learn how to think and talk about points of view that differ from their own.

### Objectives

#### *Cognitive*

Students will better understand the beliefs held by others.

Students will better understand their own beliefs.

#### *Affective*

Students will experience less anxiety concerning their own beliefs.

Students will come to value more highly the process of theological reflection.

#### *Behavioral*

Students will seek out opportunities to be challenged to think critically about their faith.

### A Vision

Suppose that the seminary were to bring in a scholar for the purposes of dialog. The scholar would be a guest

lecturer at various classes for a day or two. Then, on the last day, the seminary would cancel all classes and require that all students and faculty attend a series of lectures given by the visiting scholar and by various Calvin Seminary Professors in response to the scholar.

#### *Scenario #1*

Suppose that the visiting scholar is a Jesuit. Dr. Muller could talk with him about the positive and negative results of the Reformation. Likewise, Dr. Feenstra and Dr. Bierma could reflect on ecumenical issues that both encourage and restrict Catholic/Protestant relations. The Missions Professor could talk about issues relating to missions and approach ecumenism from that point of view.

#### *Scenario #2*

Suppose that the visiting scholar is a firm believer that a person can be a Christian and a practicing homosexual. Dr. Nydam, Dr. Van Reken and Dr. Cooper could all enter into dialog with this scholar.

#### *Scenario #3*

Suppose that the visiting scholar is deeply compelled by reader-response literary criticism. The entire Biblical Studies department could discuss the merits and drawbacks of different approaches to the Bible.

#### *Scenario #4*

Suppose the visiting scholar is a committed atheist. Dr. Cooper could engage in dialog with the person. The seminary could even invite Dr. Alvin Plantinga or a faculty person from the Philosophy department of Calvin College to participate as well.

Students would watch as their professors model calm, thoughtful dialog. At the end, students themselves could pose questions to any of the speakers or to the group in general.

### **Practical issues**

#### *Logistics*

The most feasible way of integrating it into the current curriculum would be to require that students write a theological reflection on the experience and process it with their mentoring groups. This would allow the students to debrief from the experience in a safe, constructive setting. If students felt the need to continue discussing these issues, they could take up the matters one-on-one with their mentors or with one of the professors involved in the discussion.

Professors know their own fields best and could submit recommendations for specific scholars who would make for good partners in dialog.

Many students have commitments outside of their class schedules. Some might not be able to attend these events. After getting permission from their mentor, they could skip the event and instead watch it online afterwards.

#### *Limits*

What limits should we put on the sorts of issues with which we engage?

The governing principle here is that the seminary should always seek to decrease anxiety among students. The immediate experience of witnessing the dialog may temporarily increase the anxiety and doubt of the students. However, the time of debriefing and processing the anxiety and doubt should generally leave the student with a greater sense of calmness and peace concerning his or her beliefs.

The seminary should never seek to increase anxiety among students. If the seminary treats certain issues as though they are too dangerous, that message will make its way to the students. Students may indeed learn to nuance their views of the issues raised. But, the ultimate goal of this whole process is to show students that their faith can stand strong in the context of theological disagreement.

#### *Concerns*

Events like this will be very demanding of both the visiting scholar and the professors who enter into dialog with the scholar. The entire process works only if it remains a calm discussion rather than a heated debate.

This is a real danger. But, it should not dissuade us from attempting dialog like this.

### **Conclusion**

What do we have to fear from dialogue? In the worst possible scenario, a particular case made by a visiting scholar will cause a couple of students to experience a crisis of faith and drop out of seminary. As bad as that might be, it is not as bad as teaching students to fear that they themselves might be that very student who might drop out after a crisis of faith. The seminary runs the danger of teaching its students to fear that they might be wrong.

For that reason, I propose that the seminary immediately take steps to implement a change to the curriculum that would incorporate thoughtful engagement with dissenting voices.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

# **Book Review**

*Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasure of Hate* by David Augsburger  
by **Kyu Bo Kim**

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center in New York was destroyed by suicidal terrorists. The attack took the lives of 2,800 - 3,500 persons in a moment, and the U.S. government suspected that Osama Bin Laden plotted the terrifying event. After 9/11, the U.S. president strongly proclaimed “war against terror” and sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq to destroy Al-Qaida, the terrorist group. The war has been going on for a decade. Finally, on May 1, 2011, Osama Bin Laden who is assumed to be the face of global terrorism and the architect of 9/11 was killed in an official U.S. operation. This hateful retribution persisting for a decade now seems to be over after numerous battles, wounded people and deaths. However, nobody knows whether a “second Osama Bin Laden” might come out and commit a “second 9/11.” Hate creates hate, and the hate spiral seems to have no end. Why does hate spring eternal? How does hate take control? What is hate?

In regard to the hate issue, David W. Augsburger wrote a noteworthy book, *Hate-Work: Working through the Pain and Pleasure of Hate*. After September 11, according to Augsburger, there was a serious challenge: “Either we will come to new understandings of hate, hate’s causes, hate resolution, or we will accelerate and perpetuate it” (vii). In this challenge, he presents an in-depth understanding of hate, and suggests “Just-Hate” resolving the destructive aspects of hate, which is to reject sin and evil, but to love our enemy, the sinner and all humanity, with empathy.

To understand what hate is, the author describes the spectrum of hate in the first chapter: simple hatred, spiteful hatred, malicious hatred, retributive hatred, principled hatred, moral hatred, and just hatred (9-12). Augsburger does not simply assert to represent the entire spectrum of hatred, but suggests a spectrum from simple and spiteful hatred to just hatred. Just-Hate is the form that expresses passion about evil along with compassion for the evildoer in agape. It moves from subjective hatred, “being directed in a diffuse way toward substitute objects,” to objective hatred, focusing on a rational goal, directed toward a more principled end or consciousness (34). He adds that the sign of this transformation is “empathy” (44).

In an in-depth study about hatred in the next chapters, the author searches the origin of hate from our infancy, and indicates that hatred can be succeeded through memory from generation to generation. He suggests that “we are born bilingual-wired for both love and hate” (53). This inborn hatred, as he argues, enters into our shadow, and then is projected onto another person, group, or racial category.

This projection, the author insightfully pointed out, is fundamentally deluded by “the demon of the Absolute,” namely “all-or-nothing thinking” (115). He explains that this demon inspires *judgmentalism* and *prejudice*, justifies “discriminatory systems, racist laws, and ethnocentric practices” and rules in “polarized minds and

paranoid community” (117-8). Then, in chapter seven, the author explores the Holocaust as an example of the worst kind of hatred combined with “the demon of the absolute.” He provides six-theological concepts supporting the anti-Semitic attitude, and concludes that the essence of the hatred is “the myth of the devil-Jew” (153). In chapter eight, he further presents the enemy formation in relation to *paranoia*, *enemification*, and *denial*.

Finally, in chapter nine, Augsburg suggests that our task is not to deny hate but to respond with empathy, and seek justice and mercy. This task is not based on a projection of evil onto others, but on “a real wrestling with evil both within ourselves and others” (213) and on “what is truly good for friend and enemy” (194). In justice and mercy, through our self examination against projection and empathy for enemies, there are “no longer the people we previously despised” (222), but the love of enemy.

His work is meaningful in providing a profound understanding of hate, its origin and practical ways of coping. I mostly agree with his ideas of “Just-Hate” and “enemy love,” and its practice of empathy and self-examination. It contributes to achieve justice in mercy, overcoming malicious, retributive and principled hate. Indeed, the practice of Just-Hate and enemy love should be encouraged as an ongoing process in our entire daily life. Then, justice and mercy in this world would gradually be accomplished until the day of Christ.

However, I could not follow the author’s assumption that God is not the Absolute nor that God’s being is “becoming” when he deals with “the demon of the Absolute” (123). Admittedly, God is not the absolute monarch since he gives us free will. However, all our free decisions and behaviors, even in bad, wrong and painful situations, are under the eternal providence and sovereignty of God. God is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8). This means that God’s eternal being transcends the “becoming,” which is limited by time and space. In eternalness, he knows absolutely everything and dominates every moment in our world. Thus, it is more reasonable to say that God’s being is not becoming, but that our beings and understandings are “becoming” in accordance with the revelation from the Absolute God. Indeed, the assumption that God is becoming seems to be derived from our limitations for understanding the eternal absoluteness of God. If so, the idea of a “becoming God” as a trap of “the demon of the absolute” locks God in our limited understanding of the absolute.

Therefore, we need a clear boundary between God and us. God is absolute, but our understanding of him is not. Our knowledge and belief about the absolute God are relative, limited, and corrupted by situation and interests. Thus, we should not absolutely force our own understanding and view onto others. However, it does not mean that we have to give up belief in our absolute God. The absolute God in his providence and sovereignty must remain in our beliefs over that of limited human understanding.

This clear boundary between Creator and creation leads us to another issue. The author argues that an “absolute deity” leads us to “absolute action,” and “violence” (124). However, the acceptance of an absolute deity does not simply mean that our understanding of an absolute god is absolute. Thus, we cannot be certain that the acceptance of an absolute deity really promotes absolute action and violence on the part of humanity. In fact, our absolute action and violence stems from distorted misunderstanding about God’s absoluteness and the results of our sinful nature, not from the real absolute nature of God. Rather, a true understanding of God’s absoluteness and human limitation makes a clear boundary between the Absolute God and our limitation, which should lead us to humility and enemy love. In other words, when we truly understand the difference between God and us, we, even in an unfair situation from the perspective of human eyes, can fully trust in God’s treatment and faithfully obey the commandment for loving our enemy without resorting to retributive revenge. The real issue of this discussion should not be the existence of an absolute deity, but our distorted thoughts that we ourselves actually know the absolute deity and will.

Though he mishandles some theological issues, Augsburg’s *Hate-Work* is an insightful and practical book to use to access hate. Particularly for those who have lost the true concept of forgiveness and reconciliation by considering enemy love as only an inner-psychological problem, his book could contribute to the restoration of real relationships and communities, and enable us to live with the spirituality of loving our enemy and pursuing just hate. When justice and mercy fill our minds and relationships, as the author suggests, we can wisely treat

our hatred with agape. Then, we will be able to expect mutual restoration among past enemies and finally break the endless history of the hate spiral.

## ESSAY

# On Being a Student Senator

by Phillip Westra

I served as the senate secretary in 2009-2010, the year the new curriculum and schedule went into effect. That year I saw our senate listen well to students and present their challenges before a very attentive administration. I watched senators sharpen their deliberation skills in meetings and blossom as they used their gifts in various subcommittees. I gained a deeper appreciation for the seminary's administration and the challenges they face. I watched classmates laughing together at events I helped plan. I, along with the other senators, was given the opportunity to interview our next seminary president, represent the students' perspective within a board meeting, and use my own skills to keep things running smoothly.

So when I was nominated for President this year, I said "Yes" because I know the job and believe I can do it well. I said "Yes" because I enjoy imagining what kind of great work the senate will do in the year ahead of uncertainties and opportunities. I said "Yes" because this is an opportunity to make a lasting difference here, to leave the seminary a better place than I came to.

After I said "Yes," I discovered I was the only one who had. The challenge the senate had in finding people to stand for nominations in the executive positions this year is what really led me to break from my research papers to write this article. I think some students have wondered if being a senator is a commitment is really worth the time and energy. Others are perhaps already stretched too thin and exercised the discipline of saying "No" to maintain healthy boundaries. But if anyone is unaware of what the senate does and will be like next year, I hope this helps clear some mud.

At the risk of undermining my very goal for sharing this, I will share some of my thoughts about student senate wrapping up this academic cycle and going into next fall. The first thing I want to talk about is the solid executive team we have lined up for next year—Ashley Stam as Vice President, Jess Driesenga as Secretary, and Mark Langenbach as Treasurer. I know this group keeps a pulse on student life and knows how to dig in when things need to get done. We will keep things moving through the summer so we are all ready for the fall. Second, my process-minded background has me thinking about how our senate could streamline some of our administrative tasks and cut down the cycles we spend on event planning (especially in last-minute planning), giving us the time to address other issues as they come up. I am also thinking about any procedures students deal with here at seminary that might be more complex than necessary. While the transitions are happening, are there things that can be simplified to make everyone's work a bit easier? Third, I believe it is important that we have students who represent all the programs here and that our international students are represented on senate. I will recruit and campaign and do whatever I can to see this happen next fall.

Next year we will welcome a new president and adjust to a new administration. Staff positions will need to be filled and several professors will be on sabbatical, adding stress to our faculty and staff. A year from now I understand ANGEL will be retired and all online course interaction will be done through Google sites. Some online courses are being developed and the Church Planting Institute will be taking more definite shape. Through all of this, the senate will do its part to keep thoughtful and helpful student feedback ubiquitous in the seminary system.

Which classmates would like to represent you well next year? Is senate something you are interested in? We will not hold elections until next fall, but thinking ahead is a good habit to get into and one I hope will characterize our 2011-2012 senate. After your exams are done and you learn what the outdoors are like again, think about what went well and what did not go so well this year, and who of your classmates might contribute to the betterment of Calvin Seminary. If you have question or comments, you can always email them to [semsen@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:semsen@calvinseminary.edu). I, along with the rest of the executive team, am committed to making senate a

valuable endeavor for everyone involved. We will need a full senate and thoughtful feedback from the student body to make that happen.

Phillip Westra  
Student Senate President

## CLOSING THANKS

# Looking Ahead to Next Year

by AJ Gretz and Brandon Haan

We would like to say “thank you” for making this a great year with the Kerux! Thank you to all of our contributors this year, who provided informative and thought-provoking articles. And thank you, CTS community, for reading the Kerux this year, and engaging with the ideas we’ve been discussing.

As the Kerux goes forward into next year, our hope is that we can continue to use the paper to provide a safe place for students to have their voices and ideas heard. Although our school faces more changes in the next year, our goal is to work alongside the incoming administration to provide a sounding board for student ideas in a responsible and loving way.

As we look ahead to next year, we hope to continue the conversations we’ve had this year about sexuality, the curriculum, and the nature of pastoral ministry, both in the Kerux and, more importantly, in the hallways of our community. We also hope to explore new topics, including (but certainly not limited to) the obstacles that stand in the way of CTS being a more diverse community.

We hope and pray that you will take advantage of the power of the written word to process and refine the experience of being a student at CTS, and the issues we face as future pastors, teachers, and leaders in the Church.

May God give you all you need for this summer ahead, and beyond.

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