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*from the
president*

Julius T. Medenblik

What Makes a Good Sermon?

I still remember one of the ways that God worked in my life when I was a lawyer to burnish a call to pastoral ministry. I was an attorney during the week, but on Sundays I was writing out sermon notes and I found that I was moving points or thinking of other metaphors or stories to communicate the gospel. In my own way, I was wondering what made a good sermon even better, at least on a piece of paper.

This issue of the *Forum* focuses on the ever important subject of preaching. In this issue, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Center for Excellence in Preaching and through other articles hope to provide other angles on this question—"What Makes a Good Sermon?"

As a seminary we have developed some key categories to evaluate sermons for our students and I would like to simply highlight these eight categories for your consideration.

1. **Biblical**—The sermon needs to be clearly derived from Scripture.
2. **Clear**—The sermon needs to be unified around a central idea and be easy to follow.
3. **Engaging**—The preacher displays passion in ways that draw hearers into the message.
4. **Authentic**—The preacher speaks from the heart and with clear Christian convictions.
5. **Pastoral**—The preacher displays pastoral sensitivity.
6. **Contextual**—The sermon is relevant to the life and world of the congregation.
7. **Redemptive**—The sermon communicates the good news of the gospel.
8. **Life-changing**—The sermon encourages and strengthens persons in their faith and in their life of obedient discipleship.

Maybe you have your own category to suggest to us for teaching and training. You can provide that suggestion to us at forum@calvinseminary.edu as one way to continue the dialogue.

One category that I would add that connects to engaging and life-changing is that I think it is vital for the preacher to exhibit the expectancy that God will work through the sermon to impact lives. An expectant preacher understands that he is an instrument that God desires to use in communicating the gospel.

The preacher stands up and can be assured that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Biblical text will be present and God will be at work to use that message to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Good preaching is ultimately the work of God.

Preaching to a Millennial Audience

Over spring break at the college where I work, one of my students posted a short video every day of the wilderness adventure trip he was leading for fellow students. Each video was about a minute and a half long, and some were set to music, some had running commentary, and some were just a series of quick, playful images. All were entertaining.

When I saw him back on campus, I complimented him on the videos. “No big deal,” he shrugged. “It was fun. I did it all on my phone.”

This student isn’t a film studies major, he’s not been trained in directing or editing, he has just come of age when fluency in the digital arts is a given.

The college students (a generation sometimes called “millennials”) to whom we preach generally have a knowledge of and expertise in technology that far surpasses that of most of their preachers. The challenge—and the problem—comes when we preachers (Boomers and Gen Xers) think we have to keep up. It is tempting to think that if we don’t have the pop

and sizzle in our sermons that most people can find on their Facebook pages, then they are going to tune out. So we try for snazzy presentational technology, we shoot a video, we hunt the web to find just the right image for each point in the sermon—and the result is that we spend a lot more time trying to be impressive than in actually being present.

Here’s the truth: millennials can get pop and sizzle anywhere. What they need from their preachers is the Gospel. Our sermons don’t have to

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be high-tech. They need to be high-presence.

We need to demonstrate by our preaching that we are present: present with the text, present to their lives, and present in the preaching itself.

Present with the Text

Fewer and fewer of our listeners know the Bible. I am preaching to more and more students who came to Christ in high school or who have a varied ecclesiastical heritage or whose parents are not believers. These students love Jesus, but they do not know the Word. To be present with the text means that I may need to explain what a gospel is, and how many gospels there are, and what has happened in the story up to this point. I want to be present with the text in such a way that everyone is invited into the story.

Our listeners will take our cues on how to handle Scripture from what they see us do in our sermons. If we only use the passage as a jumping-off point for what we want to say, our hearers will think that is a legitimate way to approach Scripture. If we



► Preaching to a Millennial Audience

wander through many different texts as a way to prove what we want to say, they will do so as well.

Instead, being present with the text means that we show our listeners what it means to humble ourselves before a text. If it has hard spots, we say that. If it has been misinterpreted at times, we say that. Millennials (just like everyone else) love honest engagement with the text. Show them that you have read commentaries this week, name the scholars you lean on, or put the titles of the books you used in the bulletin or online. Remind them that we read and study Scripture in community with the church. This is a desperately needed corrective to the “what does this passage mean to you?” vibe that is too present in young adult small groups. Show them what it looks like to open a passage, go deeply into it with the help of others, and love the God who shows up there.

Remind them that we are present together before the text because we fully believe that the God whose story

To be present in the preaching itself is to think less about getting the words perfect and more about getting the Word across.

this is will reveal more of himself through our study of it.

Present to Their Lives

This generation has big questions about hell, sexuality, other religions, the meaning of marriage, racism, and what kind of life they should be striving for. One student wonders if the Muslim friends she met on her semester abroad are really going to hell. Another is gay and loves the church but is terrified of how he would be treated if he came out. Others go to a worship service in which no mention is made of a painful racial incident and

they wonder if the Christian church has the courage to wade into hard conversations.

Millennials are hungry for doctrine—what do we believe and why? How do I approach my agnostic roommate? Why aren’t we universalist? Is the Bible worthy of our trust? Is God?

If our sermons do not name their deep questions and wrestle with them in a way that is honest and engaging, they will think that the church (or God or their preacher) has nothing to say to the things that really matter. And this generation wants to live lives that matter! They are very aware that the material goods available to their parents may not be available to them. They are very aware that their earning potential may never match that of the generation before them. If their lives will not be measured by the normal measures of North American success, how will their lives be measured?

They are eager for preachers who call them to live boldly for Jesus. They are eager for preachers who live boldly themselves. They are eager to live lives that can be measured by the things that matter to God.

Do you see how our digital expertise or lack thereof is practically meaningless in the face of these questions?

Being present to their lives means listening to their questions and their pain and their hopes, and bringing those things into our preaching.

Present in the Preaching Itself

So much of the communication we receive is professional and polished. The ESPN guys have smart suits, the CNN anchors have snowy teeth, the politicians read off their teleprompters, and everything goes exactly as planned.

Most millennials can see through this. They have edited enough videos and filtered enough photos to know



Mary Hulst preaching

that anyone can make anything look good. What they are really hungry for is something that looks real. In preaching, this means they are looking for someone who loves them and loves Jesus and loves the Gospel and is going to do his or her best to preach a sermon that demonstrates those things.

Most of us who preach came of age when sermons were fully written manuscripts that were delivered from a pulpit. The preacher usually stayed

in one spot. The emphasis was on word choice and sentence structure. We had to remember to make eye contact.

To be present in the preaching itself is to risk preaching without polish. To think about preaching without notes, even if that means that the perfectly turned sentence never gets uttered. To think about preaching without a pulpit even if that means we aren't sure what to do with our hands. To think about using a prop, even though people from older generations may find it

gimmicky. To be present in the preaching itself is to think less about getting the words perfect and more about getting the Word across.

Can't put together a good PowerPoint? Don't know how to shoot a video? Haven't tweeted in your life? No problem. You're not a teacher, a film director, or a politician. You're a preacher: preach. Preach the Gospel. Love them, love Jesus, love the church. And leave the fancy video-making to them.

Preaching for Church Renewal

Twenty-one years ago this spring I received a phone call asking if I could preach the following Sunday at a congregation facing a challenging situation. The caller was on a steering committee attempting to keep a church alive after the past Sunday's announcement that the majority of the congregation and the entire leadership team, minus one, were immediately leaving to form a new, non-denominational ministry.

What do you preach to a handful of discouraged believers the first Sunday after a painful separation? I chose Acts 15:36-41, recalling Paul and Barnabas's separation prior to the second missionary journey. The message was entitled "When Christians Part Company." I pointed out that believers sometimes separate in less than optimal ways, but even in the messiness of parting God always has a greater plan. Through parting God multiplied kingdom possibilities, developed new leaders, and clarified calling.

Within weeks that congregation invited me to join them on a renewal journey as their pastor. This past January I completed two decades of service to this revitalized congregation that has become a significant missional outpost. At the farewell, some mentioned how that first Sunday's message lifted them from momentary despair to a renewed sense of hope and calling.

That message is illustrative of preaching for renewal. Preaching for renewal is intentional preaching that strengthens congregations and shapes a vision for a God-preferred future. Statistically, most pastors preach to congregations in need of renewal. In North America more than 80 percent of churches have plateaued or are in decline, meaning that four out of five preachers serve in a renewal context.

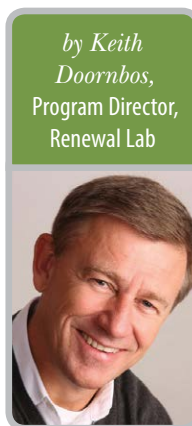
The pulpit is the most important tool in a renewal pastor's toolbox. Preaching has the power to change the at-

mosphere and help journey to mission. Peter reminded his readers that they had been renewed by the enduring Word of God that had been preached to them (I Peter 1:23-25). So what are the characteristics of preaching that renews?

Hope-Filled

First, renewal preaching is hope-filled; revitalization preachers broker in hope. They believe God's work is not finished in this world or in this place. Hope-filled pastors preach as Haggai preached to disappointed temple builders who saw the sad foundations of their post-exilic temple and recalled the formerly magnificent house of God, constructed under Solomon's leadership. Haggai's sermon to the rebuilders was God's promise: "My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear" (Haggai 2:3-5).

Hope-filled preachers root this hope in Scripture, not in optimism. Think of Cleopas and his



by Keith
Doornbos,
Program Director,
Renewal Lab



► Preaching for Church Renewal

traveling companion ... disappointed, discouraged on a slow walk to Emmaus. Then Jesus comes from behind, reminds them of Scripture's promises, breaks bread, and reveals himself. Suddenly, despair turns to hope and joy. God's biblical promises are the roots of hope.

Of course, preaching hope doesn't deny reality. Naming reality is among the most important responsibilities of renewal preachers. Renewal pastors always say what is so. But they always say what is so through the eyes of faith.

Bible-Based

Hope-filled preaching changes the atmosphere and helps journey to mission. This is also true of a second characteristic of renewal preaching, which is that it must be Bible-based. Renewal depends on life-transforming biblical teaching. Cally Parkinson, author

of *MOVE: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, says that imbedding the Bible in everything is among the five best practices advancing a congregation's spiritual growth (the other four are getting people moving, creating ownership, pastoring the local community, and developing Christ-centered leadership). Biblical teaching stimulates renewal in a congregation. That's what Nehemiah discovered.

Nehemiah orchestrated one of the greatest turnarounds of all time. In 52 days he coordinated the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (which had lain in ruins for 142 years). But renewal did not come when the structures were completed. So Nehemiah built a high wooden platform at Water Gate and the people assembled. Ezra the priest climbed the tall timber pulpit and read the law from sunrise to noon. Meanwhile, Levites milled among God's people, explaining the law and its application to life.

During those morning hours a revival broke out. People began to weep and repent, sometimes uncontrollably. Nehemiah declared the day sacred to the Lord and sent the people home to enjoy choice food and sweet drinks because "the joy of the Lord is our strength." The study of God's Word creates a revival where structures cannot.

Renewal preachers teach a congregation to love the Word, engage the Word, and be shaped by the Word. Renewal pastors encourage reaching for Bibles, opening Bibles, and marking Bibles. Renewal preachers are the Levites milling among God's people with Bible in hand, "making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read" (Nehemiah 8:8). Bible-based sermons that renew are expository (the theme of the sermon is the theme of the text) and tip toward expositional (the structure of the sermon reflects the structure of the text).



Kieth Doornbos leads a Renewal Lab session.

Gospel-Centered

Hope-filled and Bible-based sermons have the power to change the atmosphere and help journey to mission. Gospel-centered sermons also make this possible. The goal of renewal is more than creating healthy congregations that survive another day. The goal of renewal is transforming lives and communities for Christ. Congregations are on a path to renewal when people are being brought from despair to hope, guilt to forgiveness, defeat to victory, bondage to deliverance, anger to love, rebellion to obedience, and death to life.

Only the Gospel has the power to transform a life. Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The Gospel is God's *dunamis* (his dynamite) that blows through hearts of stone, leaving behind hearts of flesh.

Gospel preaching is God's dynamite of choice. Jesus commissioned the apostolic church to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Gospel preaching is preaching saturated with the story of Jesus. It declares the necessity of placing faith in his finished work. It promises new life for all who trust him. It declares that this new life is made possible through the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. Renewal pulpits proclaim that Gospel Sunday after Sunday.

Good Gospel preachers perfect a personal approach to communicating that Gospel in a clear and compelling way. When a renewal preacher develops a way of sharing the Gospel and sticks with it week after week, that pastor teaches the congregation from a Sunday morning pulpit how to share the Gospel from a Monday morning pulpit.

Sadly, many sermons contain little Gospel. In fact, some sermons preach

Quality-infused sermons are especially marked by three characteristics: they are clear, they are compelling, and they are connected to life.

a contra-Gospel. A contra-Gospel is a moralistic self-help message. Much of what is called "Christian preaching" is motivational speaking attached to the Bible. Renewal preachers preach the Gospel and this Gospel preaching changes the atmosphere and helps journey to mission.

Quality-Infused

There is another important aspect of preaching that renews: it is quality-infused. Quality-infused sermons are critical in renewal congregations because they are often on a short list of things going well. Music may be sub-par. Programming may be non-existent. And fellowship may be a small reflection of what has been. But at least there's a quality sermon. Additionally, visitors often decide on future returns based on a present message.

Someone described a quality sermon as having thoughts that breathe and words that burn. Breathing thoughts and burning words are great goals. One thing is sure: quality-infused sermons are never an endurance contest. Sermons should be twenty minutes or feel like twenty minutes.

Quality-infused sermons are interesting sermons, and interesting sermons are preached by interesting people. Interesting pastors read widely, travel broadly, enjoy recreation and

hobbies regularly, connect with people significantly, and enter into suffering willingly.

Quality-infused sermons are especially marked by three characteristics: they are clear, they are compelling, and they are connected to life. Quality-infused sermons change the atmosphere and help journey to mission.

Vision-Oriented

Finally, preaching that renews is vision-oriented. Renewal sermons paint a picture of God's preferred future. Kevin Adams, a church planter in Granite Springs, California, calls this "Preaching Toward Shalom." It's preaching that paints a compelling picture of what life could be if God's kingdom were on earth as it is already in heaven. Preaching toward shalom increases a congregation's thirst for a God-filled tomorrow that begins with Spirit-empowered decisions today.

Renewal pastors regularly preach "I Have a Dream" sermons that envision what can and should be if we'll only have sufficient faith, sufficient vision, sufficient obedience, sufficient strength, sufficient abiding, and sufficient humility to follow God into mission.

A Final Word

A number of years ago I attended a leadership conference at a leading North American church. For two days the why and what of this missional ministry were examined. Near the close, the senior pastor invited attending pastors to join him for a private conversation. When the doors were shut he said, "It's the preaching."

Many factors contribute to changing the atmosphere and journeying to mission in renewal congregations, but none is greater than hope-filled, Bible-based, Gospel-centered, quality-infused, and vision-oriented preaching.



Looking Ahead

21st-Century Trends in Preaching

Not so long ago, a good many pundits and prognosticators predicted the demise of preaching. Skits, dramas, videos, and other multimedia would replace the staid (boring) spectacle of one person talking at a congregation for 25 minutes.

But something funny happened on the way to this predicted homiletical revolution: preaching not only survived, but in some of the largest churches in the country, preaching took on an even higher profile. Sermons by popular preachers like Rob Bell grew from 25 minutes to around 50 minutes in length. Yes, in many places video clips and the use of slideware buttressed

sermons, but the sermon itself remained firmly in place as a verbal art form.

Even so, the cultural and congregational landscape has changed in significant ways. “Audience” expectations are higher than they used to be. A century ago the sermon as delivered by the pastor was the only formal public form of speech that most people encountered in a given week. Preachers had the market cornered! There were precious few opportunities for the average Christian to draw comparisons. Today, however, people are routinely exposed to slick communicators on television, expert speeches by

*by Scott Hoezee,
Director of the Center
for Excellence in
Preaching*



politicians, and, yes, also the sermons of high-profile pastors like Tim Keller that can be downloaded or viewed on YouTube. The bar has been raised in the minds of many people as to what counts as an engaging sermon, and a good bit of this ties in with sermons that have a narrative shape to them.

For this article I was asked to ponder some possible trends in preaching. With the help of the leaders of ten peer groups for the Center for Excellence in Preaching this past year, I would predict that preachers are going to have to become much more skilled in the art of storytelling.



Center for Excellence in Preaching peer group session

A corollary prediction to this would be that such storytelling will need to be contextualized to each individual congregation. People today expect the sermon to speak not to the needs of humanity (or even of the church) in general but to their particular needs in the time and place where people find themselves. In what follows, I will briefly unpack both predictions.

Stories

It is now pretty well documented in homiletical circles that the major shift in preaching across the last 40 years was the move from deductive preaching to inductive. Deductive preaching is often characterized (and perhaps caricatured) as the old “three points and a poem” format in which a central idea was introduced in the beginning (“Today we are going to talk about justification . . .”) and then systematically unpacked in sermons that tended to be information-heavy and aimed more at the head than the heart. Deductive preaching ruled the day when the preacher could rely on a congregation’s automatically granting him authority to speak knowledgeably on the subject at hand based on the preacher’s education and role.

But then came the 1960s and a wide-scale questioning of traditional authority structures. As Fred Craddock detailed in his landmark 1971 book *As One Without Authority*, preachers who were sensitive to where the cultural winds were blowing began to sense that authority could no longer be merely asserted: it had to be earned. One of the best ways to accomplish that was to preach sermons in which the authenticity of the preacher was established through the preacher’s appeal to shared experiences. When the preacher was able to demonstrate that she also understood life’s trials from the inside—when the preacher could

What better way is there to convey real-life experiences than through the avenue of storytelling?

name the questions and the struggles that real-life people in the pews also wrestled with—then the congregation was willing to grant the preacher the authority to speak into such matters. And when the corresponding word of grace was then brought to bear on such situations of real hurt and doubt and crisis, then the congregation would listen because such grace was not a concept or a mere idea: it was something the preacher also experienced in the throes of real life.

But what better way is there to convey real-life experiences than through the avenue of storytelling? What better way to show in just what ways God remains active among his people today than through anecdotes and vignettes drawn from everyday life where grace bursts through in surprising ways? To preach well today, then, preachers need to know not only where to find the stories that connect with people but also how to retell those stories effectively inside the sermon.

However, being a good storyteller is by no means automatic for most people or for most preachers. That is why I always worry about preachers or students who seem unable to tell a joke. We’ve all met people who are lousy joke-tellers. They leave out key details and so have to start over or they backtrack just before getting to the punchline or they tell the punchline but no one finds it funny because the joke-teller left out that one detail necessary for the joke to work. But what

is a joke if not a miniature story? If you cannot tell a joke well, you probably cannot tell a story well, and if the person in question is a preacher, he or she may tend to deliver sermons that feel narratively flat to many listeners. This will be so not only on account of the sermon’s having few if any stories inside of it but also because the whole *shape* of the sermon lacks a sense of beginning-middle-end that moves forward the way a good story does.

Some believe that the 21st-century is seeing a renaissance in storytelling. Some of the most popular radio shows and podcasts now are premised on the art of storytelling. Think of “This American Life” on NPR, “A Prairie Home Companion” with Garrison Keillor’s signature stories from Lake Wobegon as each show’s highlight, the Moth Radio Hour, or Pixar films where it is the quality of the story even more than the quality of the animation that grips the hearts of children and their parents alike.

Our culture is steeped in stories. Thus, preachers need to be good storytellers.

Context

But even that skill will not be enough, because as congregations diversify across denominations (but equally so within denominations), preachers need to become anthropologists who can exegete a congregation as well as a biblical text. My father-in-law, Isaac Apol, graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1951 and served eight congregations between then and his retirement in 1987. But although each congregation my dad-in-law served was a bit different from the others, I doubt that he ever wondered what “kind” of CRC congregation he’d be serving next. For the most part congregations from coast to coast were fairly uniform in terms of liturgy, ►



Looking Ahead: 21st-Century Trends in Preaching

style, expectations, and membership. But today's seminary graduate faces no such certainty. Congregations are now often significantly different from one another. The needs and expectations of a church in California may be quite hugely at odds with the needs and expectations of a church in the Midwest (and possibly even of another church in California!). Preachers today need to understand how and why some styles of preaching will work well in some places even as they will fizzle out somewhere else.

This may well be a key to effective preaching, though along with many of my seminary colleagues I confess that it is not yet clear how we can help seminarians/future preachers become good at this kind of contextual insight. But if storytelling is now a needed skill to effectively communicate the Gospel, then knowing the right *kinds* of stories to tell based on the cultural and

Preachers today need to understand how and why some styles of preaching will work well in some places even as they will fizzle out somewhere else.

emotional climate of any given congregation comes in as a close second for prerequisite 21st-century preaching skills.

Fred Craddock was a storytelling preacher par excellence. Fred died in the spring of 2015, leaving behind a legacy of having shaped untold numbers of preachers through his writings, instruction, and example. In his book *Preaching*, Craddock displayed his own sensitivity to the need for sermons

to evoke the ethos of a story when he suggested that any given sermon may not need what we sometimes refer to as “illustrations” if in fact the whole sermon has a narrative shape to begin with.

“If [the sermon] possessed unity of thought, movement toward its goal, and language lively and imaginative, parishioners may speak of the sermon’s illustrations when, in fact, there were none . . . Just as some very humorous people seldom if ever tell jokes, just as good storytellers do not have to tell stories all the time, so the preacher who leads listeners down interesting and well-illuminated streets does not have to load the sermon with illustrations. Actually, in good preaching, what is referred to as illustrations are, in fact, stories or anecdotes which do not illustrate the point but rather *are* the point” (*Preaching* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984], p. 204).

And *that* is a point all preachers need to heed!

Preaching and Prison

Not long ago I had the opportunity to join with several Calvin Seminary faculty and friends of the seminary to conduct a pastoral retreat in Louisiana’s Angola Prison. Twenty or so years ago Angola, the largest maximum security prison in the United States, was known as the bloodiest prison in the South. Then the kingdom of God came in power. Several small persecuted groups of Christians grew, multiplied, and flourished. The whole remarkable phenomenon was aided by the founding of a seminary

within the prison walls. Starting with a single seminary class, the program morphed into a fully accredited degree program complete with Greek and Hebrew. As the seminary behind the razor wire grew, its graduates founded churches and ministered to Angola’s more than 5000 prisoners. Today there are more than thirty congregations with approximately 400 worship services and Bible studies each month. Over the past twenty years, violence has dropped more than eighty percent and

by John Rottman,
Professor of
Preaching



prison officials estimate that about half of the inmates are evangelical Christians.

Despite all of the changes over the past twenty years, life in prison is difficult and the challenges of Angola’s inmate pastors are daunting. Prison is still prison. Some of the inmate seminary graduates serve as pastors or assistant pastors of one of Angola’s congregations. Others minister pastoral care in particular ministry settings. One of the pastors with whom we spent time ministers to prisoners on death

row. Another offers pastoral care at Camp J, the prison's disciplinary camp. Each of these ten pastors delivers death notification to inmates who may have lost a relative, counsel the suicidal, and disciple those who wish to follow Jesus. None of them get vacation, and each is on the job or on call twenty-four seven.

Our group met with ten of these pastors for two and a half days, listening, teaching, and learning. I'm sure that we learned more than the inmate pastors did. Eric, one of the best preachers at Angola, told us that for the longest time after starting his incarceration, about the only thing that he could think about was one day getting out. But then he said, "Over the years God has brought me to a new place. After twenty-years in prison I don't really care anymore if I ever get out. God has given me to see that he called me to pastor here, perhaps for the rest of

my life. I am content and excited to do what God has called me to do."

Eric's attitude stands in sharp contrast to my own less settled attitude over the years of my ministry. Too often I found myself overly concerned about what the next thing might be and insufficiently focused upon what God was calling me to do at the present time and in the present moment. On too many occasions I wanted a bigger pulpit, more appreciative listeners, or an appointment closer to home. Colleagues that I know sometime embraced an opposite but equally troubling stance, not moving when God may be prompting them to move. The inmate pastors of Angola can teach us to put the call of God or any adjustment he might choose to make to that calling above personal comfort and future prospects. Preaching in a larger pulpit, to more educated congregation

or in a more culturally rich setting is God's call to make, not mine.

The inmate pastors of Angola also underlined the importance of keeping pastoral life and preaching intertwined and linked together. "Nobody in prison has any privacy," one of them pointed out. We sleep with the congregation every night, not just on church camping weekends. Privacy in the shower or in the washroom is unknown. Someone in prison hears every angry or careless word and "prison twitter" sends out the news. A pastor's weaknesses and frailties are no secret.

Conversely though, when the pastor makes a pastoral call everyone sees and some overhear. When the pastor asks for forgiveness, the congregation and his detractors witness the transaction. When the pastor kneels to pray, they notice. If the pastor shares soap, tooth paste or snacks, his charity



Pastoral retreat in Angola Prison



► Preaching and Prison

is on display for all. The pastor's life is lived out transparently before everyone, believers and non-believers alike.

As a result, when these pastors stand up to preach everyone knows whether he loves them, makes visiting a priority, or lives a consistent Christian witness. Nobody can play pastor in the pulpit and follow Jesus from a distance once the sermon is over. When they preach the word, nobody is putting on pious airs that fool anybody. The listeners know that the pastor cares, sacrifices, and identifies with them because he is one of them.

The tendency to embrace preaching with fervor and pastoral work with little or less enthusiasm diminishes both preaching and pastoral care. The temptation to view the pastoral calling as a job distinct from the rest of life runs the risk of communicating inauthenticity both in pastoral work and in preaching. Worse it can leave people with wrong impressions about God.

Perhaps the first two observations about calling and transparency apply more in one direction than the other. Perhaps the priority of calling and consistency in pastoral lifestyle places more obligations on the preacher/

pastor than upon the congregation. But these observations do give church members something to expect from their pastors and to which to hold them accountable.

My last observation moves more in the opposite direction. Pastors at Angola have no vacation and little continuing education. Some even admitted to committing minor infractions of the rules in order to get sent away to a solitary cell for a few weeks as a "prison vacation." As a result, the inmate pastors often find themselves running on empty with little or no time for reflection, prayer, or refreshment.

Our time with them offered among other things several days of Sabbath. We prayed together, talked about personal challenges, and feasted. One pastor shared with the group how lust continued to beset him and asked others for advice about how to approach resisting this temptation. Another admitted to being so busy that he hardly had time to pray. What should he do? We talked together about deadly sins and the spiritual disciplines that might work to combat them.

And we feasted together. Our group provided food of a sort that prisoners had not tasted in years. Bacon, hot scrambled eggs, sausages,

biscuits, orange juice and coffee. Wonderfully thick hamburgers and hot fries for lunch. Fresh fried catfish, barbecued ribs, twice baked potatoes topped with cheese and shrimp. Corn bread, ice cream, homemade King cake, just to give you a sampling. For a couple of days the chicken bone stew and grizzle filled spaghetti sauce was gone. Our hosts beamed from ear to ear because the time and provisions showed them the love and care of the church. More than that, the love and care of Jesus. Time together in the presence of Jesus left us all refreshed, and more eager to embrace our callings and preaching and pastoral task.

Leaders of congregations might give something similar to their pastor. Instead of waiting for him or her to beg for a brief sabbatical, make a generous offer. And encourage the pastor to take time away from his or her task. Show the pastor the love of the church and at the same time allow him or her to feel the refreshing presence and power of Jesus. Work and Sabbath are essential to healthy ministry.

Inmate pastors have so much to teach us, both congregations and pastors. I suppose even an old professor could learn a thing or two.

Preaching the Catechism in a Postmodern Age

I can hear the voices already. "I know I'm supposed to use the Heidelberg Catechism regularly in my preaching. But I just don't think it will work in this postmodern age, especially in churches

that are trying to be intentionally mis-sional. How in the world could I preach the Catechism in a new church plant in inner-city Chicago or in an ethnic enclave in Los Angeles?" I heard them most clearly several years ago when

I led a workshop at Calvin Seminary on using the Catechism in new church plants. For a semester I met with eight church planters to see if we could find ways to effectively preach the Catechism in their settings.

We could easily think of three good reasons not to do Catechism preaching today: the modern reason, the postmodern reason, and the emergent church reason. When I say “modern reason,” I’m referring to the fact that back in the modern age (when I was growing up), many of us heard some Catechism preaching that soured us on it for the rest of our lives. Attempting to explain the faith in the most clear and logical way possible, well-intentioned preachers delivered up sermons with titles like “The Two Natures of Christ in Relation to the Trinity.” Having heard too many of those doctrinally dry “modern” sermons, we don’t want to preach them ourselves.

By the “postmodern reason,” I mean what one of the church planters in my workshop said: “The seekers in my church already don’t believe the Bible. Why would I want to introduce another level of authority into our conversation?” In an age when most folks are distrustful of external authority, the use of the Catechism in preaching seems like a hindrance to Gospel communication. Related to that is the “emergent church reason.” Because of postmodernism, preachers in emergent churches speak of the Christian faith as a way of life rather than as a set of truth claims. Of course it is both, but Rob Bell put it this way: Whenever we say, “This is The Truth,” that truth becomes a brick that begins to erect a wall between us and those who don’t embrace that truth. In the end, Christianity becomes “brickianity.”

While granting that there is some validity in those reasons not to preach the Catechism, I want to suggest that there are even stronger reasons to recover that time-tested practice. First, some readers of this *Forum* are Christian Reformed, so we know that the Church Order requires the regular use of the Catechism in preaching. That

requirement has been softened lately to take account of individual situations, and that’s good. But as part of our denominational covenant, we should do things as an interdependent body rather than as a loose collection of sovereign selves.

But quite apart from any denominational loyalty, using the Catechism in preaching is following an ancient biblical practice. Careful scholars see bits of catechetical instruction scattered through the New Testament epistles. Writing to a young

by Stan Mast,
Adjunct Professor
of Preaching



pastor in Ephesus, Paul said, “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching ...” (II Timothy 1:13). Early on, the most effective missionaries in church history developed a systematic pattern of teaching as they communicated the Gospel in missional settings.

The planters and I agreed on a very practical reason to use the Catechism, namely, its sheer organizational power. Any working preacher knows how difficult it is to decide what to preach on next Sunday and next summer. Following the outline of the Catechism will help us with that crucial decision in a way that will keep us centered on the main aspects of the faith, including dimensions of the faith we might otherwise avoid. And it will encourage us to preach doctrine in a very relevant and pastoral way.

I can hear the voices again (no, I don’t hear voices all the time): “We hear you, old fella. But that just won’t fly with my young seekers steeped in postmodern ways of thought.” That’s what I talked about with those eight church planters. We discovered that the Catechism actually speaks to many features of postmodernism very directly. Consider these things: Postmodernism is anti-institutional, so most postmoderns aren’t exactly in love with the institutional church. But many of these folks who reject the church don’t really understand the central teachings of Christianity. The Catechism’s clear summary of basic Christianity gives us an outline to follow in teaching the faith to those who are largely uninformed about Christianity.

Given the anti-institutional nature of postmodernism, it’s not surprising that so many people are anti-authority. “Don’t tell me what to believe; I’ll decide for myself.” Yet, so many people are spiritual and seek

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*The Catechism’s clear
summary of basic
Christianity gives us
an outline to follow
in teaching the faith
to those who are
largely uninformed
about Christianity.*

► Preaching the Catechism in a Postmodern Age

transcendent experience. Think of all the “spiritual but not religious” folks. As a result of this rejection of external authority, postmoderns are committed pluralists (I know, oxymoronic), affirming the right of everyone to have their own beliefs. The only real standard of truth is pragmatic and experiential. People don’t ask, “Is it true?” They ask, “Does it work for you? If it works for you, I’m good with that.”

Here again the Catechism can be very helpful, because it is our tradition, our point of view. If it is presented respectfully and non-dogmatically, the Catechism is a wonderful way to tell our version of the Great Story. Further, the Catechism is very practical and experiential. Think of all the places where it emphasizes how this belief benefits people, what good it does to believe all this, how doctrine affects real life. Further, the three divisions of the Catechism address all the major issues of life. *Sin* covers the human problem: who am I, what’s wrong with me, how did things get this way, what does it mean to be human? *Salvation* is about the divine solution: what will it take to fix the world, what do I have to do to make life work? *Service* is the human response: how should I live, what is prayer, how can I be in touch with the transcendent, what’s the best way to relate to my neighbors?

Finally, postmodern folks are deeply into relationships. In a broken world where so many are desperately trying to find themselves in a caring community, the Catechism’s overall theme of belonging speaks powerfully to the heart. “My only comfort is that I belong ...” What a perfect entrée into the Bible’s theme of God recreating his family in a broken world.

Those committed church planters agreed that the Catechism has

The Catechism is very practical and experiential. Think of all the places where it emphasizes how this belief benefits people, what good it does to believe all this, how doctrine affects real life.

possibilities even for their frontier settings, but they wondered how they could actually use that old document in their contemporary settings. We agreed that they probably couldn’t just read it before the Scripture, as has been done traditionally. They might use it only behind the scenes for a while, as their own personal sermon guide. They might incorporate it into the liturgy as suggested in another article in this issue of the *Forum*. We all concurred that we should not “preach the Catechism,” using the words of the Catechism as the text for the day, as preachers did long ago. When they actually read the Catechism, they should introduce it with something like this (my way of introducing our yearly forays into the Catechism).

The Catechism is a roadmap that helps us find the central features of the biblical landscape.

“The Catechism is a roadmap that helps us find the central features of the biblical landscape. It is not the landscape and it is no substitute for preaching the Bible. But the Bible is like a foreign land to many people, and the Catechism helps us see the high and low points of the Bible, the hidden nooks and crannies, the hard places and the central teachings. It doesn’t cover the whole biblical landscape, but it ensures that we won’t stray far from the most important features of Reformed truth and life.”

One of the joys and burdens of being a preacher in the Christian Reformed Church is that we have these confessions guarding and guiding us as we preach the Scriptures. In an age of undisciplined individualism rooted in the postmodern belief that each of us is our own authority, the Reformed creeds and confessions call us to accountability, to mutuality, to preaching as a communal activity. Does that hinder our freedom a bit? Yes, thank God, in a way that will liberate us from our pet peeves and the fads of the culture, so that we can center on the main things.

Those church planters provided each other with a number of wonderful Catechism sermons and even sermon series based on the Catechism. For example, Rev. Peter Choi, a church planter in Ann Arbor, created a fascinating series entitled “The Journey Home.” It began with a takeoff on a popular movie, “Homeless in Ann Arbor,” and took us from wandering the cracked “Sidewalks of Sin” to the “Living Room of Salvation” and finally into the “Kitchen of Service,” until we were finally “At Home with God.” As I read other marvelous sermons, I concluded that with a bit of creativity and a lot of hard work the Catechism can be helpful to us preachers—especially in this postmodern age.

For Classroom and Congregation:

Recent Books from Seminary Faculty Serve the Church

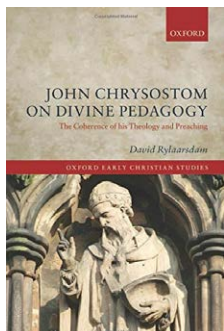
John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of His Theology and Preaching

By David Rylaarsdam

352 pages, Oxford University Press

David Rylaarsdam provides an in-depth case study of one prominent leader's attempt to transform culture by forming a coherent theological discourse that was adapted to the level of the masses.

—Oxford University Press



a basic teaching of Christianity,” Rylaarsdam says.

“He’ll say things like, ‘The end of the world is like the end of a play: Everyone is wearing a mask, and they look like a rich ruler, or a peasant, or whatever ... But when you remove the mask [at the end of the play] you

find out who they really are.

“That’s the way it’s going to be at the end of time. We don’t always know [the truth of] people’s faith life and love for God ... But we all get to remove our masks at the end of the play. Then we see each other for what we really are.”

Rylaarsdam traces one of the primary unifying concepts in Chrysostom’s thought: divine adaptability, or God’s facility in working with his people in just the right way at just the right time.

“[Chrysostom and his contemporaries] see that God always knows the state of your soul. So [God is] always saying things in such a way that it is precisely what you need at that stage of your faith formation—not only the content of what he’s communicating with his people, but also the way in which he does [it].”

The early church recognized a similar adaptability in the Apostle Paul. “[T]hey would read one of [Paul’s] letters and say, ‘Oh, Paul senses that the Corinthians need to be confronted about something, so he’s rather sharp and abrasive in this phrase; but then he backs off in the next phrase because he doesn’t want to send them into despair.’ They’re saying Paul is imitating God’s adaptability because that’s exactly how God relates to us.”

Studying divine adaptability has dramatically affected Rylaarsdam’s teaching. “I keep coming back to these basic themes: How do we strategically do

faith formation in a way that’s rooted in Scripture, rooted in the way God seems to be working with human beings?”

Rylaarsdam plans to undertake a popular version of the book in the next several years.

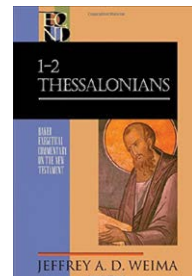
“I think there are lots of practical implications, not only for how we do pastoral work, [but also for] how we train our pastors [and parishioners]. What spiritual disciplines do we encourage in our people? It all goes back to the insightful pedagogy that God seems to use with humanity.”

1-2 Thessalonians

By Jeffrey A.D. Weima

734 pages, Baker Academic

Is it possible for a commentary to be both technical and accessible, comprehensive and concise, academic and pastoral? Weima has produced precisely such a commentary on the Thessalonian Letters.



—Todd D. Still, *The William M. Hinson Professor of Christian Scriptures, Truett Seminary, Baylor University*

Only every great once in a while does a scholar publish a book that can rightly be called his “great work.” Jeff Weima’s commentary on 1-2 Thessalonians fits into that category.

Developed over the course of twenty years and interrupted by many other projects on the Thessalonian correspondence, Weima’s commentary was much anticipated.

But maybe producing a great work over a long period of time isn’t such a bad thing.

“The unintended consequence of all these delays has been the opportunity to gain a more mature



► For Classroom and Congregation: New Books from Seminary Faculty

understanding of 1-2 Thessalonians,” Weima writes in the author’s preface to the commentary. “There have been many occasions when ideas and truths in Paul’s correspondence to the Thessalonians ... suddenly became visible and compelling after the benefit of simply interacting with the text for a longer period of time.”

Published in the acclaimed Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, Weima hopes that this commentary adds value to an already-solid collection. He also hopes the reference will be useful to pastors for years to come, with insights that transfer from study to pulpit to pew to life.

“I take real pleasure and a bit of pride in the fact that as scholarly and detailed as [the commentary is], it’s in a sense pastoral. Despite its intimidating length and technical details, it still is pastorally sensitive.”

One example of the scholarly-pastoral dimension of the commentary can be seen in Weima’s treatment of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, where Paul is offering guidance to those grieving the deaths of brothers and sisters in the faith.

“I suggest ... that there’s a false theology in the church that somehow tears [are] a sign of weak faith, that Christians shouldn’t grieve because, ‘Hey, this person’s in a better place’” Weima says.

“The line I use in teaching, and in the commentary too, is that ‘Tears in the face of death are not a sign of weak faith, but a sign of great love.’”

Another example of the scholarly-pastoral element of Weima’s work is in his discussion of the three end times passages that appear in the Thessalonian correspondence: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 5:1-11; and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17.

“All three of these passages include or end with the same Greek word, the same key concept: *parakaleo*, the word

‘comfort,’” Weima says.

“[Often] people go to these end times passages and get all excited that they’ve got a blueprint for the future. [But] then you’re kind of distorting or misusing the purpose of the text. In other words, Paul didn’t give these texts to give a map for what’s going to happen in the future. No, he gave these texts to *comfort* Christians.”

It was a pastoral focus that initially motivated Weima to write the commentary. “Whether it’s comforting people, or whether its giving proper instruction ... all of this [exploration of the concerns of the Thessalonian church] has practical consequences for the daily lives of parishioners and congregations.”

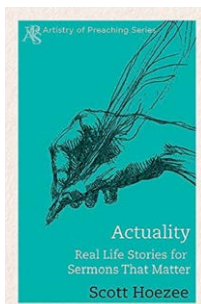
“It’s kind of nice to imagine that in locations where I am not, there are people who will consult the book and in some way it will hopefully help them understand 1-2 Thessalonians. That’s fun to think about,” he says.

What’s up next for Weima? A welcome change in focus to a user-friendly book about Paul the letter writer, exploring ways to read Paul’s letters to better grasp what he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was trying to say.

Actuality: Real Life Stories for Sermons that Matter

By Scott Hoezee

132 pages, Abingdon Press



“Scott focuses on a massive part of the preaching enterprise: namely the choosing and telling of stories. Drawing from literature and film and everyday life, Scott helps preachers see the difference between stories that sink deep and stories that bounce off the surface.”

—Peter Jonker, pastor of
LaGrave Christian Reformed
Church, Grand Rapids, MI

Founded on the premise that stories are both indelible and primary in the way people understand life, *Actuality* is Hoezee’s apologetic for the place of narrative in preaching.

“Research increasingly shows, and real-life experience shows, that we are narrative beings,” he says. “We really are recognizing that we learn best through story.”

Hoezee drew on extensive experience as a preacher and teacher of preachers in developing the book. He also dug into research in the area of creative writing, paying special attention to the writer’s mantra, “show, don’t tell.”

For example, creative writing experts advise authors against simply naming a feeling to communicate a character’s emotional state. “That’s telling,” Hoezee explains.

“How do we know someone’s angry with us [in real life], and what does a novelist do to convey that [a character is] angry? Well, you don’t *tell* us that he’s angry. You *show* us color rising in his face. And veins sticking out on his neck, and pursed lips, and clenched fists, and eyes narrowing to slits. You *see* somebody ready to erupt like Vesuvius and you *know* he’s angry at you without his ever having to say it.”

Hoezee reapplies the “show, don’t tell” principle to the development of sermons. Too often, he says, preachers simply restate a point in various ways without *showing* the congregation what they mean.

“In preaching we say, ‘Jesus is a good Savior. He’s good. He’s good; he’s on the move; he’s active in the world, he really is!’ If it were a real conversation, somebody should stand up in the pew and say, ‘How? How is Jesus active? How is he good?’ And if the preacher can’t come up with anything, then [maybe he doesn’t] know what he’s talking about.”

Hoezee hopes that *Actuality* will inspire preachers to become better critics of their own sermons, challenging

them to express the pain of the world and the grace of God in vivid and meaningful ways. He also seeks to provide them with tools for finding stories for sermons in life and culture.

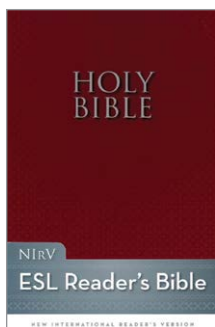
“[Stories] are around us all the time. Preachers need to train themselves to be attentive Stories come through testimony, through listening to people, and also by recognizing that the grace we need to celebrate doesn’t always have to arise to the level of walking on water or turning water into wine. [It] can be ... very simple acts of witness, very simple things that happen to us on a daily basis that [confirm] for us that God is here, God cares, and God’s aware of what we’re going through.”

Although stories increase congregational engagement in a sermon, for Hoezee the listeners’ interest factor is just a corollary of a greater good.

“We look for stories not to be interesting, not to be entertaining, not to give people a time-out in the sermon by telling a cute kitten story. [Stories are] part of the spine and the architectonic of the sermon because this is how we learn.”

Actuality is part of the *Artistry of Preaching Series* released by Abingdon. Companion volumes include Paul Scott Wilson’s *Preaching as Poetry: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth in Every Sermon* and the forthcoming *Preaching in Pictures: Using Images for Sermons that Connect* by Peter Jonker.

The New International Reader’s Version (NIRV) Bible



Michael J. Williams,
Chair of the NIRV
Revision Committee
Zondervan

*“I will use my Bible
... to dig deep in
God’s Word and
learn more about
him every single day*



Annette Bourland, Yvonne Van Ee, Michael Williams
and the kids who helped with the NIRV.

... I now realize that not every person in the world gets the honor of opening a Bible every morning and learning about Him. I also remember ... thinking about God and his wonderful world. Suddenly, I felt the Holy Spirit work through me and now I have a strong relationship with the Holy One.”

— A letter from one of the 60-plus
Rose Park Elementary students
who helped develop the NIRV

Two years. Translation of the entire biblical text, Genesis to Revelation. A committee of four, including biblical language scholars and an expert in early childhood education. Ten meetings for a total of 33 days in eight locations.

The result? An updated Bible translation for the youngest readers and those for whom English is a second language, unveiled in Switzerland at a meeting of the Committee on Bible Translation and just released for sale this January.

Michael Williams chaired the committee, which included Jeannine Brown (Bethel Seminary St. Paul), the late Ronald Youngblood (Bethel Seminary San Diego; Youngblood also served as the chair of the original NIRV committee in the early 1990s), and Yvonne

Van Ee (professor *emerita* of education, Calvin College).

“We wanted the NIRV to be the NIV translated just a little bit further,” Williams says. “We wanted people with only a third- or fourth-grade English vocabulary to be able to engage with the biblical text more easily, and so engage more deeply as well with the author of the biblical text.”

The NIRV first released in 1995. Since then, advances in the understanding of some biblical passages, discoveries of more ancient texts, and changes in English language usage meant the translation was due for renewal.

Between committee meetings, the biblical scholars would translate large sections of the text. They would arrive at meetings, text in hand, and come to agreement about whether the NIRV text needed updating and what the best update would be.

“[The meetings were] a beautiful experience of the church coming together,” Williams says. “There weren’t any theological crises; it was all about getting this right Often the text that we ultimately agreed on was not one that any of us had proposed. You could just see the Spirit working through that process.”

► For Classroom and Congregation: New Books from Seminary Faculty

Seeking to maintain both the mystery and grandeur of God as well as the hallmarks of genre in the Bible, the translators sought to express in the clearest, most accessible language possible the original meaning of the text. Sentence length was limited to ten or fifteen words. Figures of speech were disallowed. And the committee worked from a standardized list of words familiar to people at a third-grade reading level.

More than 60 third-grade consultants from Rose Park Elementary in Holland, Michigan, helped with the project. Van Ee took passages the

committee was puzzling over to small groups of students, asking them to read and express their understanding of the verses in question.

"[Yvonne] was able to 'field test' areas where we had some questions with actual third graders. Their input helped us to stay at the [reading] level where we needed to be," Williams says.

What's next for Williams? A book called *The Biblical Hebrew Companion for Bible Software Users*, which he expects to release late this year.

Williams found every possible linguistic characteristic that Bible translation computer programs can identify for students or pastors studying the text in Hebrew. He then developed a

user-friendly reference guide that (1) demonstrates what each identifier on the software program looks like in Hebrew; (2) explains what each identifier does within the language; and (3) provides exegetical insight that couldn't be gained simply by studying the text in English.

All that in two facing pages. And Williams has persuaded a colleague in New Testament studies to develop a corresponding resource for Greek.

"The computer can give you [all kinds of] information, but it doesn't give you enough to be able to use that information effectively," he says. "I'm really excited about this. It hits a real need."

—Kristy Manion

Retirement Tribute for Dr. Richard A. Muller

Calvin Theological Seminary acknowledges with deep gratitude the significant tenure of academic leadership given by Dr. Richard A. Muller, the P.J. Zondervan Professor of Historical Christianity. He is retiring July 31, 2015, after 23 years of service at Calvin Seminary.

Both his challenge and support to numerous Ph.D. and Th.M. students reflected his deep belief: that the Reformed approach to ministry should be an educated ministry. As he himself states, "My hope for my students is that they will be able to profit from an encounter with the great tradition of our church and, in so doing, will find their years in the seminary to be a spiritually enriching and intellectually stimulating foundation for future work in ministry."

This hope is being realized in the graduates Richard has taught and inspired; their service in ministry now circles the globe.

Upon the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Ph.D. program at Calvin Seminary, Dr. Muller was surprised by



the presentation of a hefty *Festschrift** produced in his honor. The sheer number of entries was evidence of his profound impact on other scholars, including some his former students, and their deep affection for him.

As the editors wrote in their dedication, "the scope and scale of Richard Muller's influence on more than a generation of scholarship of

the Reformation and post-Reformation periods is unlikely to be properly appreciated in the near future. But this volume represents an initial attempt toward that end."

According to colleague Dr. John Cooper, "Richard Muller is a world-class scholar who has benefited the church as well as academia. His great contribution has been to explain clearly what generations of historical Reformed theologians were actually saying in their own religious, theological, and philosophical contexts rather than attempting to praise, blame or recruit them to support some current theological perspective."

Calvin Seminary has been immensely blessed to have Dr. Muller in our community of scholarship and formation. We are thankful to God for you, Professor Muller!

* *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition* Edited by Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, Jason Zuidema. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

2015 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees this year named two recipients for the 2015 Distinguished Alumni Award. The award is given annually to recipients who have brought unusual credit to their alma mater by their distinction in Christian ministry. For 2015, the recipients are Rev. Dale J. Cooper and Rev. Henry De Bolster.

Dale J. Cooper is chaplain (emeritus) of Calvin College, where for 29 years he served as pastor and teacher to students, staff and faculty. A graduate of Calvin College (B.A., 1964), Calvin Theological Seminary (M.Div 1968), and the Free University of Amsterdam (Drs. Th., 1971), he continues to teach in Calvin's Jubilee Fellows program, which aims to help students



explore church ministry as their possible vocation. He also serves (part-time) at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

"Coop" as he is known to countless Calvin students and alumni, describes himself as an "unusually ordinary person to whom the Lord has

given extraordinarily generous gifts: Marcia, my precious wife and partner

in ministry; four (married) children; eleven grandchildren; saintly parents, unfailing defenders of God's honor despite heavy suffering; a generation of Calvin students, through whom the Lord has brought me great joy and blessing. And, surpassing all other gifts, by the Spirit's presence and power my Heavenly Father in love has joined me with Jesus my Savior and Lord."

"What more to say than this: To the Triune God I owe not less than everything."

Reverend Henry De Bolster

grew up in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and as a boy endured hardships of the Second World War and the invasion by Nazi Germany. Following the war, in 1952, he emigrated to Canada. He worked in business in Canada until 1959, when it became clear to him that he had been called into the ministry of the Word. In 1959, he, along with his wife and four children, moved to Grand Rapids for focused study for the ministry. He completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Calvin College in 1960, and then continued at Calvin Theological Seminary and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1962. This transitioned into a Master of Divinity degree in 1975.

His first call was to serve the Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Brampton, Ontario. The second church that he

served was in Calgary at the Emmanuel Church where he served for five years. It was during this ministry that he became involved in Christian higher education and had the opportunity to serve as chairman of the board of a newly formed Alberta Christian College Association. (Later this became the body that began King's University in Edmonton, Alberta). The third church which he served was the Maranatha Church in St. Catharines, Ontario. He was privileged to be in ministry there for 10 years. While in St. Catharines, he



was persuaded to join a committee to study the feasibility of opening a liberal arts college in Ontario dedicated to scripturally-directed learning at the undergraduate level. Subsequently, to his utter amazement, he was chosen to be the founding President of Redeemer College, a position that he held from 1981 to

1994. During his tenure at Redeemer University College, he was able to establish a strong relationship between the institution and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. In 2004, he was presented with an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from McMaster University.

Reverend De Bolster has written a book about the planning and beginnings of Redeemer University College called "Stepping Forward in Faith" (published in 2001) as well as an autobiography under the title of "Struggles and Blessings" (published in 2003).

Although the last 13 years of his ministry were spent in a leadership role in Christian higher education, he retained ministerial credentials. This allowed him to do what he loves to do and that is to preach the word of God. He considers himself to have been wonderfully privileged and blessed to have been God's servant and disciple. His favorite hymn is "If You but Trust in God to Guide Thee" and he has used these words as a humble reminder throughout his ministry.



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Calvin Seminary: God's World, Our Classroom

Every year, especially during January, Calvin Seminary offers students the opportunity to travel outside of our Michigan location to study in other places in God's world. These travel-based courses are instrumental to student learning in a variety of important and lasting ways, including:

- Enriching the way students read Scripture;
- Deepening students' understanding of and appreciation for Reformed theology;
- Opening students' eyes and imaginations to how God is present and working in his world.

Past opportunities have included travel-based courses to Mexico, Turkey & Greece, and Angola Prison in Louisiana. To this dynamic list, Calvin Seminary is pleased to announce a travel-based course to Israel/Palestine.

Taste and See: A Study Tour of Israel/Palestine January 3–15, 2016

In this two-hour credit course, students will experience the land, geography, history, climate and culture out of which the Bible emerged. Readings, presentations, and papers will be coupled with the lessons of place, such as the Sea of Galilee, Mt. Carmel, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

Our purpose—and prayer—for students who enroll in this travel course is that it will deepen their understanding of Scripture and generate for them fresh, compelling ways to communicate the good news of the gospel to the church and the world.

Please consider these ways you can participate:

- **Pray** for our students as they make decisions about the possibility of their participation.
- **Support** a student financially. The total cost of the trip is about \$3,700. Some will receive travel scholarships but all will have some funding gap to fill.
- **Join** us in our study tour of Israel/Palestine. Limited seats are reserved for non-student learners.

For more information, please contact either of the travel-course professors:

Rev. Sarah Schreiber (ss033@calvinseminary.edu)

Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen (ajb23@calvinseminary.edu)



Sea of Galilee near Capernaum