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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE REFORMED?

Explore what it means to be Reformed as we hear from professors, staff, and alumni about their experience as members of our global community.



Karin Maag

Reformed Identity
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"Identity questions are complex and challenging to answer because human beings are multi-faceted."



“We are part of a long tradition. Calvin and the other reformers didn’t think that they were inventing something new. They thought they were recovering something that was very old, that had been lost and needed to be restored. And we’re in the process of trying to continue that work.”

RONALD FEENSTRA
PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

forum.

The Calvin Theological Seminary Forum magazine is published two times every academic year. Questions and comments may be directed to forum@calvinseminary.edu.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It happened almost every time I introduced myself as pastor of New Life Christian Reformed Church to a person who was unfamiliar with the denomination or the word “Reformed.” The question was asked, “What does it mean to be Reformed?”

I remember the variety of answers I gave to that good question. If someone came from a Presbyterian background, I might share how much we shared and were similar. If they were from no church background, I spoke of Biblical themes like God’s unconditional grace and His care of the whole world, including them (sometimes I even used the word “sovereignty”). I hoped to give an answer that communicated the truth and connected with the person before me.

I also remember some people who found it difficult to understand what it meant to be Reformed because, in the past, it had been presented as a private club that could not include them, especially if they were from a different ethnic group than me. In a world where people are searching for identity and wondering where they can “belong,” we present as the central conversation for this issue of the Forum that crucial question: “What does it mean to be Reformed?”

You might hear familiar answers, but you might encounter others that expand your understanding and help you see that “Reformed” is a big word and that many accents need to be heard and recognized.

As Calvin Theological Seminary looks ahead to celebrating its 150th Anniversary in 2026, I invite you to explore what it means to be Reformed because the offered answers help us to connect to one another. At the end, we all hope this issue brings glory to God and God alone.

In His Service With You,

Jul Medenblik
President



Features





What does it mean to be Reformed?



KARIN MAAG
*Co-Director, ThM Program
Adjunct Professor of the History of Christianity
Director of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies*

During my graduate studies in Scotland, I sometimes attended social gatherings with theology students and professors. One particular senior professor always made new students anxious. She had no skills in small talk or in making new arrivals comfortable. Instead, she would turn, stare at the student, and ask in a carrying voice, “And WHO are YOU?” A small circle of silence would form around her while more advanced students would look on with a mixture of commiseration and amusement. I felt rather panicky when confronted with that piercing look and question. How much information was she looking for? Did she want my name? My nationality? My family background? My program of studies? Did she want an overview of my life? She was a professor of theology, so was she inquiring about my faith journey? How much detail should I provide? What could I say in a few short sentences that would convey the essence of who I was?

Identity questions are always complex and challenging to answer in a few short phrases or slogans because human beings are multi-faceted. Even when explaining their understanding of Reformed identity, as in this issue of the Calvin Seminary Forum, faculty members and alumni come up with different focal points depending on their fields and areas of interest.

What is fascinating, however, is to trace the commonalities that emerge, whether from the roundtable discussions held by Calvin Seminary faculty in the summer of 2022 or the summaries of essays on Reformed identity prepared by professors Scott Hoezee and Mary Vanden Berg or in the reflections of alumni.

Among the commonalities highlighted are the primacy of Scripture, the importance of the confessions, the vital role of covenant, the Trinity, the community, the willingness to learn from others and engage with complexity, the reality of sin, the even more powerful reality of Christ’s victory over sin and death, and the call to service. We warmly invite you to read these contributions and join in the discussion. These insights show that conversation on what it means to be Reformed continues to flourish at Calvin Theological Seminary as we welcome new colleagues who contribute to this ongoing and fruitful dialogue.

Coming Around the Table To Explore Our Reformed Identity



Calvin Theological Seminary recently hosted two roundtables to discuss the Reformed tradition and how it shapes life and learning at the seminary. The following excerpt is adapted from these discussions between seminary scholars. To view both roundtable discussions, search for Calvin Theological Seminary on YouTube or scan this QR code (QR code expires January 1, 2026).

KARIN MAAG

Director of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies:

Let’s start by talking about in what ways the Reformed teaching of our various subject areas is distinctive and valuable at Calvin Theological Seminary.

GARY BURGE

Adjunct Professor of New Testament:

What I have enjoyed about the Reformed tradition is that we say clearly and absolutely that the Bible is central to everything we say theologically. So when you think about the great traditions that have come to us over the last 2,000 years—the great confessions, the creeds that we all celebrate today—the Bible is the principal conversation partner in all that is said to us inside of the creeds.

RONALD FEENSTRA

Professor of Systematic Theology:

We are part of a long tradition. It goes way back to the early church. Calvin and the other reformers didn’t think that they were inventing something new. They thought they were recovering something that was very old, that had been lost and needed to be restored. And we’re in the process of trying to continue that work. I think it’s

important that at Calvin Seminary, we interact with Christians from other traditions and with writings from other traditions to see what we can learn from them.

We are part of that broader Christian catholic church that also includes an international community. We have an international community here, but we also want to see ourselves as part of a whole international community of Christians around the world. Not just one narrow little slice of Christianity but part of this broader, important Christian tradition. So that leads us to another question: We identify ourselves as a Reformed seminary. What does it mean to take that Reformed identity seriously here at Calvin Seminary?

JUL MEDENBLIK

President:

Our leadership takes place, especially in a Reformed context, in a community of faith. You’re not an individual leading a group. You’re actually joining a group, a covenant community, and helping them learn, question, and discern together where God is leading you in ministry.

We’re not separate from that kind of catholic view of the church, but we also want to say directly that we take sin seriously in our tradition. We also take

grace very seriously. We identify the fact that as you come to know Jesus, as you come to know what it means to give of your whole life, we’re actually saying to people: this isn’t just about believing in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but also in terms of Redeemer for your life, and one who is the king of this world.

JEFFREY WEIMA

Professor of New Testament:

In the area of New Testament, I think I have to concede, and it’s an important concession, that much of our Reformed hermeneutic we share with many other Christians, so that picks up the catholicity aspect of our faith. And so we emphasize here the languages, as many traditions do, and appropriately so. As someone once said, every translation involves interpretation.

We try to equip future leaders to be able to have tools that handle the text in the original languages. The historic element is really important. You know, revelation happens in history and real situations in time. And so we try to equip students with knowing more about the history and the personalities and the specific churches that are being addressed.

A more recent phenomenon is literary—in other words, an appreciation for the form and structure and how

that’s important for communicating information. You take it seriously: Is this a letter, and how do we interpret a letter as a letter? And what about apocalyptic writings—what things do we need to know about that in terms of properly interpreting it? But the area maybe where the Reformed faith comes more to the fore has to deal in what we sometimes call the more theological approach. And one of those theological themes is the paradigm of creation, fall, redemption, consummation. So that’s an important Reformed distinctive to emphasize in our teaching.

Another one would be the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of life. There are some Christian traditions which maybe give the evil one too much power, and there’s a sense that we Christians are weak and vulnerable. The Reformed faith has taken seriously the final words of Jesus: that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, talks about how God has raised Christ above every principality and power in a position of supreme authority. And so that is an important theme for us as Christians because that gives us the authority to speak and to evangelize and to proclaim God’s kingdom here on earth.

So, on one hand, in our biblical teachings, we share a lot with other Christians. That’s the catholicity aspect, but there are a number of distinctive Reformed emphases, which we also try to highlight in our courses.

WILSON DE ANGELO CUNHA

Professor of Old Testament:

I think one of the precious motifs of Reformed theology is the concept of covenant. As far as Old Testament goals, we really take the Old Testament seriously as the Word of God, and we want to make sure we listen to God carefully through this revelation in the



Old Testament and then also connected with the rest of Scripture, the New Testament, as well.

And we also try to not lose the forest for the trees, so to speak. We want students to have a good idea of what is the Old Testament and what message does it bring to the church today in terms of witnessing to the Triune God’s mission in the world. We want students to be able to parse that theological part of Scripture really well, too.

KARIN MAAG

It’s very important to talk about Reformed identity and what that might mean at the seminary. And sometimes, it can come down to certain words, but these words carry weight. So if you think of the paradigm of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, it seems like, well, that’s a list of words.

But each one of them carries a lot of weight for our teaching. So, the Reformed emphasis on creation says that God created the world good, right?

And that has implications for our own lives as human beings, but also for our care of the natural world. And also at consummation, the idea that God will restore what He originally made good. So, we’re not sort of disembodied souls floating around. There are these really important concepts that shape what it is to be Reformed, and those hopefully are integrated into each of our classes, regardless of our disciplines.

YUDHA THIANTO

Professor of the History of Christianity and Reformed Theology:

Now, redemption is at the center, and Christ’s redemption is so powerful that it encompasses the whole creation. Now, within the redemption that Christ has given us, we are not afraid to wrestle with difficult issues. We are not afraid to try to find the answers in conversation with the sciences with other areas of studies.

May I bring in the question of evolution, for instance? We are not looking at it as a taboo or something not to be discussed, but we are willing to study to learn and to try to find the answers together with scientists or other experts. That’s one of the emphases of what it means to be Reformed that really enriches us. When I was a student at Calvin Seminary, that already opened my mind, and that has helped me to open more doors in my studies.

We are all on a journey, both the faculty and the students. As faculty, I never promise my students I know all the answers. But we learn together. I also tell my students I personally am never “there.” I have never arrived, but I keep continuing my journey and asking the questions and asking the questions together.

KARIN MAAG:
Always reforming, right?

YUDHA THIAN TO:
Yes!

KARIN MAAG:
Our students come in also with knowledge that we need, particularly as our student body becomes more international and more diverse. There are stories and experiences that really will help us as a community as well.

JEFFREY SAJDAK
Dean of Students:
One of the blessings of Calvin Seminary is having students who come from all around the world—to be able to sit in a classroom or sit over coffee in the student center and talk with a student who’s been planting churches in Kenya or who has been active in ministries in Brazil, and to discover that God is at work in those other places. They’re bringing a story; they’re bringing knowledge and experience to the table

so that in the classroom and in these conversations, we are all sharing together.

God has been at work in our lives in our different contexts. And so that helps us to understand as we bring a biblical text, as we look at a theological concept, how does that relate in Brazil, or in Guatemala, in Korea, or in Chicago? It helps us see God is at work in all these places, and we all bring part of the story to the table.

JOHN WITVLIET
Professor of Worship:
One of the joys of being in seminary is being with students from so many different cultures, so many different kinds of congregations, and with people who aspire to serve in so many different ministry settings. When students leave Calvin Seminary, they will be leading in worship, preaching, or helping shape worship behind the scenes even if they never appeared upfront.



And that might be in a large church. It might be in a tiny house church; it might be in a summer camp. It might be in a dementia unit, a hospice unit, or in the military. They might be leading worship in a very formal context, or in a very informal context. They might lead worship in a place where a service should not go longer than an hour, and they might lead worship in a context where worship is almost always longer than three hours. And it’s a beautiful thing to learn to recognize the beauties and opportunities of those spaces, for all of us to understand and realize that throughout a life we ourselves will be in and are really called to be engaging with people in many contexts and cultural spots.

And so I always think when students enter seminary—coming with one powerful experience that may have brought them—to think of seminary as a great opportunity for cross-training and to gain expertise and experience in serving the kind of place they’re already familiar with. And then learning to love and embrace, be comfortable in, and recognize the unique opportunities in other contexts, as well.

Understanding Reformed Identity from a Teaching, Learning, & Scholarship Perspective

This excerpt from the faculty roundtable explores the questions: “What does it mean to be a Reformed seminary? What does it mean to teach, do scholarship, and learn from a Reformed perspective?”

Calvin Seminary identifies as a Reformed seminary. What does this look like in the classroom? Is the type of Reformed learning that takes place at Calvin Seminary unique?

JEFF SAJDAK
Dean of Students:

I think it starts with an essential double knowledge; it's about knowing God and knowing ourselves. We are all being formed in the image of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the Trinitarian formational work that is essential to what we do here at Calvin Seminary. Whether it's learning theology in the classroom, in-context learning, or uncredited learning happening in chapel and other places, we take seriously the importance of forming the whole person.

RONALD FEENSTRA
Professor of Systematic Theology:

The way I teach systematic theology is rooted in scripture. We pay serious attention to scripture at Calvin Seminary! But we also teach theology to give life to the statements that we make in the creeds that we believe as part of the holy catholic church. We ask, ‘What

does it mean that we are part of the catholic church?’ ‘What does it mean that we're part of the universal church?’

We are engaged in that same kind of process today. We need to look towards scripture and church tradition in the same way. We should examine what the early church says about things, what the great medieval theologians had to say, what the reformers say, and what people since the reformers have had to say for the purpose of learning.

JOHN WITVLIET
Professor of Worship:

In the teaching of worship here, it's essential that there is a theological center to all our discussions. We approach worship in a way so that the Bible is informing everything about what we do: not just the actions of worship but the theological imagination that allows us to put those actions into practice. Seeing worship as trinitarian and covenantal is essential.

KARIN MAAG
Director of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies:

At Calvin Seminary, I think there is a willingness to think deeply

about complicated issues. There is a willingness to remain in complex realities. We don't say, ‘Here is a cut-and-dried answer. Go and memorize it, and you're done.’

YUDHA THIAN TO
Professor of History of Christianity and Reformed Theology:

And redemption is at the center! We believe here that Christ's redemption is so powerful that it encompasses the whole creation. Within this redemption Christ has given us, we are not afraid to wrestle with difficult issues. We are not afraid to try to find the answers in conversation with other areas of study.

GARY BURGE
Adjunct Professor of New Testament:

The Reformed tradition says to take the things we learn from scripture and bring those learnings into a larger conversation. So, when I teach the Book of Romans, what's important is not simply explaining what Paul meant by his writings, but I also want my students to understand these great ideas found in Romans are seed ideas. These ideas have contributed to the formation of our great traditions. I don't see the book of Romans in isolation. If my students





develop a reflex so that when they read scripture, they see they're reading a part of a great story, then suddenly, the entire message of the Bible begins to make sense. They have greater clarity and see unity in the scriptures.

JOHN WITVLIET:

I'll add that when students come to Calvin Seminary, we invite them into classes in a variety of departments: Bible, theology, history, and ministry practices. However, oftentimes, what happens is students will discover that one specific class covers all these areas.

As professors, we have our own discipline or expertise, but one of my prayers is that when students leave a class in worship, they think 'Wow, that was a class on theology,' 'That was a class about the Bible,' 'That was a class about leadership,' or 'That was a

class about pastoral care,' in addition to learning about how to participate in worship, how to shape a worship service, and prepare a congregation for worship. There's a symphonic vision in our classes that I pray students will increasingly learn to see and love.

JEFF WEIMA

Professor of New Testament:

The key word I think you're talking about is integration. And I'd like to think, and I have some evidence to the fact that this is true, that there is a lot of good integration taking place. I know that in theology they're working with the scriptures and they're encouraging students to memorize key texts. I also know that in worship class, too, they're looking at biblical texts and what principles they have for worship. That's the kind of ideal integration that ought

to take place in any education. And I'm happy to say that there's evidence that that's happening at Calvin Seminary.

What does it mean that Calvin Seminary has a Reformed identity? What does it mean to be Reformed?

JEFF SAJDAK:

I think it's an awareness of Scripture being very central to what we know. Knowing that God is sovereign, that He rules in all things and in all areas, that Christ is Lord in all places.

JEFF WEIMA:

I see our Reformed identity coming to the forefront in what we sometimes call the theological approach, using the paradigm of creation, fall, redemption, consummation. It can also be seen in

our thinking and teaching about the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of life.

WILSON DE ANGELO CUNHA

Professor of Old Testament:

A theme we often emphasize within Reformed theology is the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament is full of examples of what God is doing in the world and proclaiming the Lord reigns. That's the word of the Psalms, for example. And often, it's proclaiming the Kingdom of God in a situation where the world has gone wrong.

The Old Testament is not shy about pretending the world is not broken, but the Old Testament is seeking this God who reigns in prayer and in worship, and creating a community that waits for this God to put things right again.

YUDHA THIANTO:

As I think about the way Reformed beliefs were shared and spread in the East Indies, what I see is it was not done by individuals, but instead it was done communally. Maybe it went from the clergy through the other church workers, elders, and deacons, even through itinerant catechism teachers in the villages. In all of this, I notice that Reformed theology is adaptable, but it also takes the community to accept it, to be willing to wrestle with it and ask questions.

This is how I see covenant 'in work.' I'm not talking about covenant 'of work,' but covenant 'in work,' in the sense that we are covenantal people. We are in the presence of God, but we are also the ones bringing God's covenant to each other to form the community.

How does Calvin Seminary's Reformed scholarship prepare graduates for work in ministry?

RONALD FEENSTRA:

When I start my classes each semester, I make it clear that the purpose of doing theology is actually to address the pastoral needs of the church, questions that people have in their spiritual lives, moral questions that people have. Theology isn't primarily to address intellectual issues, but it's about trying to help us understand how Scripture and the Christian tradition can help us to address the real needs in the church.

JEFF WEIMA:

We equip future leaders to be able to handle or have the tools to handle the scripture text in the original languages. The historic element is really important. Revelation happens in history and in real situations in time. So, we try to equip students with knowing more about the history, the personalities, and the specific churches that are being addressed.

The problems of life are great, and we can't cover them all in, say, three years of study. So, we give students the tools by which they can come to the answers themselves.

JUL MEDENBLIK

President:

Leadership takes place in a community of faith, especially in a Reformed context. You're not an individual leading a group; you're actually joining a group, a covenant community, and helping that community learn, question, and discern together where God is leading your ministry.

KARIN MAAG:

Calvin Seminary has such a strong community of students from all over the world, and this is one of the ways in which we equip not just students but ourselves for service to the church. Our God is a big God. His church is a big church. And it encompasses people from all sorts of backgrounds. I think it's an increasing strength of Calvin Seminary.

WILSON DE ANGELO CUNHA:

When looking at the Old Testament, we often find the question, 'Why is God forming this new people, this new community?' And the answer comes right in Exodus 19, to be a blessing to the nations. We want our students to leave here knowing what their purpose is and what the purpose of the church is, which is to be a blessing, an instrument of God, in order to bless the whole of His creation.

JUL MEDENBLIK:

As we think about our students and what it means for them to faithfully serve in a ministry setting, we are equipping them to be faithful witnesses in those communities, to help that community give testimony to God's grace, and to think about how they are graceful people as they engage the broader community. As Professor Cunha just noted, we are forming people who are called to be a blessing, to bless their future ministry communities, wherever they might go.

ALWAYS BEING REFORMED

MARY VANDEN BERG

Professor of Systematic Theology

One of my colleagues used to teach a class entitled “Reformed Confessions and Worldview.” It was a course that all students at Calvin Seminary had to take, preferably during their first year, regardless of their ecclesial background. Toward the end of the semester one year, a student from a broadly evangelical tradition, who was also in my formation group, stopped by my office to chat. He said he was enjoying the course and the introduction to Reformed theology. Nonetheless, he pointed out that while Reformed theology was clearly part of the course, most of the doctrines, according to him, “were just Christian, not much different from what he had grown up with.”

That student was right. The majority of Reformed teaching is simply Christian teaching. So what does it mean to be Reformed? In my essay for the forthcoming volume on Reformed identity written by the seminary’s faculty, I highlight three core aspects of Reformed identity that are hallmarks of my teaching in systematic theology. First, Reformed doctrines are grounded in a deep and broad familiarity with scripture: not carefully selected proof texts, but the whole range of the Old and New Testaments. Second, Reformed identity is rooted in a lively recognition that the Reformed branch of Christianity is part of a long and rich tradition of Christian teachings that stretches from the time of the apostles until today—no part of the Christian tradition should be automatically discounted or ignored. Third, Reformed theology is confessional: embedded in the creeds and confessions that trace out the territory for our work—for Calvin Theological Seminary, these include the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt.



The ultimate end of theological thinking is the knowledge and love of the Triune God as he has revealed himself. Building on the foundation of scripture and attentive to the broad theological tradition, Reformed theology looks for general themes and, using the tools of logic and reason, seeks to explain what has been revealed further. Thus, we begin with faith in God and that his inspired Word is true. But we move from what we have received to working out an understanding of God and our relationship to him within the community of believers of all times and places. In other words, the Reformed faith is a faith-seeking understanding, like the many centuries of believers before us. As we seek understanding in and with the church catholic, we come to know and love the Triune God of the Bible in whose image we are made. Indeed, our biblically grounded communal profession of faith, reflected in the creeds of the Church and the Reformed confessions, is at the heart of what it is to be Reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God.

BIBLICAL PREACHING IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

SCOTT HOEZEE

Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching

In my contribution to a forthcoming volume highlighting the Reformed nature of instruction at Calvin Theological Seminary, I will focus on the teaching of preaching. Like many seminaries, the nature of homiletical instruction has changed at CTS over time. For a long time, the focus was on what can be termed “deductive preaching” that yielded somewhat propositional sermons and fit into the model of what many call three-point sermons. Some may even recall the homiletical method of Samuel Volbeda, who taught preaching from the mid-1920s until about 1952 and instructed his students to use the “Its” method. Whatever the subject at hand was in a given sermon, the preacher would present Its Meaning, Its Application, Its Nature, Its Value, etc.

In recent decades, like most of the homiletical world, CTS has shifted to more “inductive preaching” methods that weave in more narrative elements in sermons that appeal to shared experiences. The “Four Pages” method introduced by John Rottman in 2004 is an example of this style of preaching in which preachers lift out of the passage both Trouble and Grace and seek to illustrate both through vivid stories and portraits drawn from everyday life. In a time when many, especially younger people, value authenticity in a preacher as much as anything, “inductive preaching” shows that the pastor is in touch with real life in all its nitty-gritty and sometimes lyric details.

But what has never changed at CTS is a dedication to deeply biblical preaching. At the center of every sermon, a well-exegeted Bible passage must control everything else in the message. Although CTS has never much used the term “expository



preaching,” there is a sense that this is what has traditionally been taught. Sermons “expose” the true meaning of Scripture. Preachers are first and foremost students of God’s Word, bringing their hermeneutical tools to the interpretive task every week.

As former CTS President Neal Plantinga says, preaching God’s Word should be “eventful.” When the preacher is faithful to God’s Word and when the Holy Spirit is blowing in the sanctuary, we can expect wonderful things to happen in preaching. And by God’s grace, precisely this happens every Sunday!

REFORMED IDENTITY THROUGH THE EYES OF A PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

Professor of Philosophical Theology, Dr. Young Ahn Kang and his wife, Hee Sook Choi, have been gifts to Calvin Theological Seminary since Dr. Kang began teaching in 2016. Together, the couple has contributed to making the campus the warmly welcoming, deeply faithful, and academically rich environment it is today. Since January 2022, Dr. Kang and Hee Sook Choi have served the seminary remotely from their home in South Korea.

Before the couple moved overseas last year, PhD candidate, Meeter Center curator, and theological librarian, Sam Ha, sat down with Dr. Kang for a milestone interview. Through this interview, Ha and Dr. Kang cover the Reformed tradition, what makes CTS unique, and more. The following are adapted excerpts from this insightful conversation.



To view a video of the whole interview in Korean with English subtitles, search for Calvin Theological Seminary on YouTube or scan this QR code (QR code expires January 1, 2026).

Sam Ha: Professor, why do you think the Reformed tradition still matters today?

Young Ahn Kang: If we were to say that there are three big traditions—Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—then out of these three big traditions, the Reformed tradition can be said to belong to the Protestant tradition. Within this Protestant tradition, there are many traditions. There are Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, or Presbyterian (in Scotland) traditions, as well as Methodist and Baptist traditions.

Although the Reformed tradition shares a lot with the Lutheran tradition, we are talking about the Reformed tradition's uniqueness. According to Matthias Schneckenburger, a 19th-century Swiss Reformed theologian, Lutheran or evangelical theology asks, "How can I be saved?" Conversely, the Reformed tradition asks, "How can I glorify God?" Of course, this question presupposes that I have been saved by the cross and blood of Christ. It asks how a saved person must now live.

This question is about asking how to live for God's glory with all my life and every aspect of my life. I would like to say that the Reformed tradition still matters today. Although we have a lot to learn from the Roman Catholic tradition and from the Orthodox churches, such as their liturgical traditions and their deep understanding of symbolism, the most distinct contribution that the Reformed tradition can give to the global Church is our understanding that our whole lives belong to God and our lives are a gift from God.

Young Ahn Kang began his studies at Korea Theological College & Seminary, where he became interested in the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. He has a B.A. in Dutch, along with an M.A. and a Ph.D. in philosophy. Over the last 32 years, he has taught philosophy at colleges and universities in the Netherlands, Korea, and the U.S., including Calvin University.

Sam Ha: What are the unique characteristics of the Reformed tradition?

Young Ahn Kang:

Divine Grace

The Reformed tradition understands this idea that every aspect of our lives is under God's grace more than any other. For example, Roman Catholicism still separates nature and grace quite significantly, but we say that both nature and grace equally are God's gift and divine grace. So, in the Reformed tradition, we say that every aspect of our lives belongs to God's sovereign grace.

Since we interpret our lives by appreciating them as gifts from God, I believe that the Reformed tradition has something to offer to other traditions and the whole world. In that sense, the Reformed tradition is necessary, valid, and very beneficial.

Church Polity

Compared with Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox traditions, the Reformed tradition provides room for a greater number of voices through shared governance and decision-making involving pastors, elders, and deacons. Elders and deacons are elected by church members in the Reformed churches.

This has to do with our way of understanding the laying on of hands. In Roman Catholicism or Greek Orthodoxy, the laying on of hands is related to hierarchy and succession. It's receiving something from above and transferring something below as a way of handing down the tradition. In the Reformed tradition, however, ordaining a minister, an elder, or a deacon is to dedicate them to God. An important concept in the Reformed tradition is the equality among pastors, elders, and deacons. Just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God in an equal way. Just as they co-exist in perichoresis as if they are dancing as one.

The ordained have been raised by the people of God to serve God's purposes as equal members of the church. They are not higher or lower than other people in the church. If we expand this to families, then husbands and wives are equal. If we expand this to the workplace, then bosses and employees are equal. If we expand this to the whole society, those in leadership and government or those who are in public office have simply been handed over the rights and commissioned to do their jobs. I think this is a unique contribution to the Reformed tradition.

Sam Ha: What does it mean to study at Calvin Theological Seminary, a place with a Reformed heritage and identity?

Young Ahn Kang: Calvin Seminary was founded in 1876 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And it has tried to be faithful to the Reformed tradition.

To define the Reformed tradition in a more familiar way: We believe that the Bible, the Word of God, is the ultimate authority. Neither pastors, believers, nor even synods have the final say. Only the Scriptures have the final authority because they are the Word of God.

When we say we acknowledge the authority of the Word of God, we recognize that God is sovereign over everything and bestows his sovereign grace. This sovereign God calls and nurtures his people by means of the church. This church and God's sovereignty are important in the Reformed tradition.

The Bible and the Holy Spirit

Interestingly, although the Bible is crucial in this tradition, the Reformed tradition does not fall into biblicism. We don't fall into biblical literalism because we recognize the Holy Spirit's ministry. I believe that the Spirit works on three levels in relation to the Bible. This is not what I read somewhere, but something that I realized as I've been reflecting.

First, the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors to write the Word of God. We call that "inspiration." Second, the Holy Spirit inspires the person who is reading the Bible, so that they understand. Third, the Spirit helps believers put understanding into practice in their daily lives.

So, because we emphasize the Spirit, we do not fall into literalism. We appreciate the Spirit with the Bible and the Bible with the Spirit. This interrelationship between the Bible and the Spirit is one of Calvin Seminary's characteristics.

Emphasis on Responsibility

Although we highlight God's sovereignty, we also emphasize our responsibility. We are indeed called according to God's election, and we are called to be God's people and his church. But what is important is that God has called us to be sent out to the world, to live as the called ones. In that sense, we emphasize our responsibility.

Sovereignty of God: Church and the World

And although at Calvin Seminary we emphasize the church, we do not become separatists. That is because



we believe that the whole world belongs to God and is under God's sovereignty.

God has allowed his people to live in various spheres, spread out in different places, with the church at the center. Some work in politics, others in education, some in trades. We also belong to our families. So we belong to these places, but we gather together as the people of God at churches to grow in the Word and to worship together.

And those who have been formed by the Word are now sent out to the world. So we don't emphasize the church or the world at the expense of the other. God has called us to be his people, his church, but we live in the world. We have to live as the people of God in places where God called us to live.

CTS in the Reformed Tradition

Since Calvin Seminary's founding in 1876, for the last 150 years, there have been changes.

But we have always kept these three traditions: the Word of God, God's sovereign grace, and the importance of the church. God has called his people to the church, but every place of our lives is where God's people are called to serve.

We teach with these points in mind at Calvin Seminary. We teach, according to the Reformed tradition, that God reigns in the church and the whole world and that the whole world is under God's sovereign grace. We teach and train our seminarians with that spirit in mind. In that sense, Calvin Seminary has been faithful to the Reformed tradition to this day.



Sam Ha is the Meeter Center Curator and theological librarian, as well as a Ph.D. candidate in systematic theology and history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary. He received his Master of Divinity at Korea Theological Seminary in 2019 and a B.A. in theology at the London School of Theology in 2011.



New Faculty Members’ Reflections on Reformed Identity

The following pieces provide an opportunity to hear directly from incoming thought leaders about their own understanding of what it means to be Reformed. We are grateful to our faculty for sharing their Reformed experience within their own religious, social, and cultural contexts—not only in these reflections, but also in their daily teaching, scholarship, and mentoring at the seminary. Through them we see models of Reformed theology in action.



MEET

Wilson de Angelo Cunha

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT

When the Forum requested a five-hundred-word reflection on what it means to be Reformed, I hesitated. The Reformed tradition has different flavors for different groups, and precisely who or what counts as the most authoritative source for defining Reformed? So, despite the risks inherent in the current enterprise, I offer general remarks.

First, the Reformed tradition emphasizes the unity of the Old and New Testaments. For example, John Calvin (1509–1564) affirmed that the Old and New Testaments share the “same substance/reality:” “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same.”

Second, the Reformed tradition views the Old Testament law positively. Calvin claimed the law “has the force of exhortation, not to bind their consciences with a curse, but by urging them, from time to time, to shake off sluggishness and chastise imperfection.” The law “forms us and prepares us for every good work.”

Third, the Reformed tradition emphasizes the unity of special and general revelation. Because all truth stems from God, no matter where it is found, any tension between special and general revelation lies in the interpreter, not in the data both types of revelation provide. On the relationship between astronomy and faith, Calvin remarked that “astronomers prove, by conclusive reasons, that the star of Saturn, which on account of its great distance, appears the least of all, is greater than the moon. Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labour whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend.”

Fourth, the Reformed tradition highlights the comprehensiveness of sin and salvation. Just as sin has affected all of creation, redemption encompasses the individual and creation as a whole. Accordingly, some strands of the Reformed tradition, especially Neo-Calvinism, reject “pietistic dualism,” that is, the separation of “the spiritual from the physical... of nature from grace.” And finally, the Reformed tradition underscores the glory of God as the primary goal of Christian living. Calvin aptly urged us to eliminate “from our souls the desire to possess things for ourselves, to love power, and to long for the praise of men” and “uproot our appetite for ambition as well as our appetite for human glory.”

The Westminster Catechism for Young Children summarized it well:

*“Why did God make you and all things?
Answer: To glorify him.”*



MEET

Gabriela Tijerina–Pike

DIRECTOR OF LATINO MINISTRIES

I first heard the Gospel through a Pentecostal church outreach. Although virtuous, the church’s emphasis on evangelism hindered theological leadership preparation. Eventually, the lack of good theological education culminated in some church leaders doubting, even denying, the divinity of Jesus Christ. This experience motivated me to acquire higher critical thinking skills to understand and correctly explain the Scriptures to the church.

Naively, I thought reading the Bible in its original languages would be sufficient. Although these exegetical skills helped, I also discovered my need for a consistent and congruent theological approach to biblical interpretation because situational and circumstantial comparisons were insufficient to explain spiritual truths correctly. Gratefully, I learned about the church’s devotion throughout history to formulating theological concepts and systems. As a computer systems programmer, I was trained to formulate precise processes in theological concepts and systems. In this theological understanding, I found consistent and congruent reasoning that maintained the Scriptural unity of the faith in Christ Jesus. That is when I became a student of systematic theology.

Persuaded of the worth of theological concepts and systems, I pursued master’s and doctoral studies. While researching the Judeo-Hellenistic and Greco-Roman contexts of the New Testament, I learned about the processes of knowledge formation and the priorities of cultural worldviews. This led me to the challenge of determining my hermeneutic philosophy, with the need to codify my theological organizing principles. Eventually, I concluded that covenant theology corresponds to and is coherent with the reality of the relationships between God and humanity. Hereafter, I became a student of Reformed theology.

At present, I continue to devote my life to theological education. In the classroom, when students voice those same questions that I had, I help fill their intellectual gaps with the reasoning of Reformed theological concepts and systems. My experience in the classroom comes to fruition when students improve their understanding through Reformed epistemology. In such moments, as a Reformed student of the Word myself, I join the class. I know from experience that my students’ faith and mine will gradually grow in the gift of theological education.

As Calvin said, “A special gift of God in both ways—in purifying the mind so as to give it a relish for divine truth, and afterward in establishing it therein.

For the Spirit does not merely originate faith, but gradually increases it, until by its means he conducts us into the heavenly kingdom.”



MEET

Yudha Thianto

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY & REFORMED THEOLOGY

At the center of the Reformed faith is the firm belief in the sovereignty of God. God the Trinity holds supreme authority over all creation. He is the creator, preserver, sustainer, redeemer, provider, and keeper of all. One of the highlights of Reformed theology is the doctrine of election and predestination.

In Reformed theology, the sovereignty of God is directly linked to redemption. Our salvation is sure and secure because God is sovereign. It does not depend on what we can do to please God, but it fully and wholly lies in God, who knows us and has chosen us to be his before the foundation of the world. A good understanding of God’s sovereignty leads us to have the only comfort we all need, namely, as the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism says, that we belong, body and soul, in life and death, to our faithful savior Jesus Christ. As the Catechism also says, Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, not only delivers us from sin through his death and resurrection, but he also knows us so intimately that nothing that happens in our lives, including a strand of hair falling from our head, escapes the knowledge of our sovereign God and Father.

Another way of understanding what being Reformed means is by looking at our lives and our relationship with God within the contours of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. God has created the entire universe in all its goodness in his sovereignty. In Adam, we all fell into sin. Jesus has completed the work of redemption, leading us to a new creation. Read together with the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, this worldview shows us that the sovereign God who creates us and redeems us has placed us in the world today to experience the fullness of his work in us as we seek to advance his kingdom here on earth, at the same time that we look forward to the new heaven and new earth where he will make everything new.

The sovereign God goes with us along this journey, for we are bound in a covenantal relationship with him;

He is the one in whom we “live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)



LOOKING AHEAD:

A FACULTY PROJECT ON THE REFORMED IDENTITY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



RONALD J. FEENSTRA
Professor of Systematic Theology

What does it mean to be Reformed? What does God call us to be and to do? Our Reformed identity and mission are at the heart of what we do at Calvin Seminary.

Answers to questions about identity and mission vary considerably from one denomination to another, from one seminary to another, from one congregation to another, and from one person to another. At Calvin Theological Seminary, we continually need to renew our sense of our Reformed identity and mission, being alert to both strengths and weaknesses in our current living out of that identity. A clear sense of our identity and mission will help our students understand our Reformed “accent,” connect our Reformed heritage to contemporary issues, and enable us to provide more effective service to the church. We do not want our Reformed identity to be a museum piece but rather a living faith that enriches and strengthens the kingdom of God both at CTS and worldwide.

As is evident in the other pieces in this issue of the Forum, the faculty, students, and graduates of Calvin Seminary care deeply about being authentically Reformed in our service to God’s church and kingdom. Given the importance of this topic, about a dozen faculty members have been writing essays about our Reformed identity from their disciplinary perspectives and then meeting to discuss the essays with one another. Those who have participated in this project have learned from each other and have clarified their sense of our shared mission.

Calvin Seminary hopes to share the fruits of this project in an edited collection of these essays to appear during our 150th anniversary year in 2025–26. The volume that faculty members are preparing will address what we at Calvin Theological Seminary mean when we say that we are Reformed, with faculty members drawing from their subject areas to speak to future and current students, alumni, and the church in accessible, warm, and engaging essays. We hope that offering this volume to the wider community during this milestone anniversary will help Calvin Seminary and the broader church take stock of who we are, where we have been, and what God calls us to do.

Seminary News



Latino Ministries Program Builds on History of Excellence

Since 2013, Calvin Theological Seminary’s Latino Ministries program, founded by inaugural director Dr. Mariano Avila and taught entirely in Spanish, has produced 134 graduates. These graduates are living out their callings, equipped with one or more of the degrees or certificates formerly offered in the program: the Master of Arts in Family Care, the Certificate in Hispanic/Latino Ministry, and the Certificate in Family Care.

After a decade of excellence in equipping leaders for Latino ministries and the retirement of Dr. Avila, CTS welcomed Dr. Gabriela Tijerina-Pike to the program’s helm in the summer of 2023. Now, Dr. Tijerina-Pike carries the torch forward, joining in the program’s longstanding mission to provide sound biblical and theological education for leadership formation targeting Spanish-speaking pastors, church leaders, missionaries, and lay persons to advance the Kingdom of God through the emerging Latino church leadership in North America, Latin America, and the rest of the world.

Dr. Tijerina-Pike is a seasoned scholar, a former missionary, and a current writer and editor for Christian publications. Her past seminary teaching has been done through schools in the United States, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

She leads students in the program’s online stackable curriculum of three key certificates, culminating in a complete master’s degree. This advanced degree, taught in Spanish, is the seminary’s newest offering: the Programa de Maestría de Artes en Formación de Liderazgo (Master of Arts in Leadership Formation).



Throughout the master’s program, students will add these certificates to their credentials: the Certificate in Biblical Worldview Formation, the Certificate in Identity and Community Formation, and the Certificate in Character Formation. Each course will be taken for eight weeks, with six weeks devoted to lectures, live discussions, and online forums. The final two weeks of each course will be dedicated to research and practice, putting learning into action within the student’s ministry context.

When Dr. Tijerina-Pike joined the seminary’s faculty, she said her expectation was “to lay a solid foundation for Reformed theological education in Spanish.” Beginning in fall 2023, Dr. Tijerina-Pike led a new cohort of Latino Ministries students to begin this revamped program.

To learn more about the program or to apply, visit <https://calvinseminary.edu/program/liderazgo>.



DOCTOR OF MINISTRY STUDIES IN A VUCA WORLD

GEOFF VANDERMOLEN

Director of Vocational Formation
Director of Doctor of Ministry

Effective leadership in Christian ecosystems is significantly challenging these days. In ways that few could have imagined, the praxis of ministry has been entangled by a potent combination of embittered politics, scathing interpersonal assessments, theological melees, and a spiritual melancholy that has infected both congregants and ministry leaders alike.

Many who seek to navigate this fractured ecclesial landscape have found a helpful reference point in the concept of “VUCA.” Initially coined by Warren Bennis in the post-Cold War era, VUCA is an acronym that can be aptly used to describe seasons of leadership that are Volatile because of instability, Uncertain because cause and effect relationships are difficult to discern, Complex because the sheer volume of variables at play is overwhelming, and Ambiguous because the interconnectedness of vital factors is nearly impossible to comprehend.

VUCA seasons can be overwhelming. Yet they can also be a powerful catalyst to learning; often, the knowledge is specific, timely, and inaccessible at any other time. Christian leaders today might do well to consider VUCA as an orienting concept for the challenges facing Christian organizations of every kind. Consider that the intersection of VUCA and the Missio Dei describes the minefield of thorny ministry questions crying out for answers these days. Who will help the Church and its adherents find new, brief explanations about our current reality that propel the praxis of ministry in helpful ways? One group of people might be Doctor of Ministry (DMin) scholar-practitioners.

At Calvin Theological Seminary, DMin students are invited to root themselves at the convergence of VUCA and the Missio Dei. They are invited to be curious, ask important theological and practical questions, and become astute ethnographers. The result? Our DMin scholars can identify contextual challenges, remain driven by a persistent and healthy God-authored quest to apply theology well, and think and act precisely to advance ministry.

The following are but a few questions prompting current dissertation projects in Calvin Seminary’s DMin program:

Could humility, embodied well and deliberately in the context of worship, unite a congregation comprised of people from a plurality of religious, political, and economic backgrounds?

What would it look like to build a system to sustain and encourage the development of ordained women leaders in Black independent churches?

What does “purple” church leadership look like? That is to say, what does it look like for a pastor to give unifying spiritual leadership in a season of political and theological fragmentation?



After 20 years as a pastor, Geoff Vandermolen joined the Calvin Theological Seminary faculty as Director of Vocational Formation in 2016.



These praxis-based inquiries drive dissertation projects of current Doctor of Ministry students at Calvin Seminary. Each student is trained in and using various qualitative research methodologies. As importantly, each of these doctoral candidates strives to uncover new knowledge that will aid the practice of ministry for their community and faith tradition. A significant component of every DMin dissertation is a chapter that proposes real-time applications for building new models and methods for impactful ministry. The research of a DMin student is aimed at impact!

It could also be that you long for some specific change that will advance God's Kingdom, but effecting change seems too complex and challenging to tackle on your own. Would you consider leaning into these challenging questions alongside us? Could we invite you to wonder what it might be like to join a cohort of learners who care deeply about the questions that keep you up at night? How might you develop new insights and skills through taking courses in the Mission of God, Ethnography, Interpreting Culture and Context, and Leadership in Ministry? What could you learn from immersing yourself

in four specifically chosen electives? What might be gained by hunkering down in a concentration of doctoral courses in Homiletics? Spiritual Renewal and Missional Leadership? Urban Ministry and Prophetic Method? And how might you grow as you engage in original research, searching for answers to the problems hindering ministry in your context?

Calvin Seminary's DMin program invites a deep dive into a season of learning and discovery. This learning and discovery will be challenging. It will take hard work. At the same time, it holds every promise of equipping leaders for the mission of God in a world where the only constant seems to be change itself. It might be time for you to join. We hope to see you soon.

To learn more about the program or to apply, visit <https://calvinseminary.edu/program/doctor-of-ministry/>.



&
NEW STAFF
FACULTY



MEET
**Laura
Bardolph**

RHETORIC CENTER
PROOFREADER AND TUTOR

I’m Laura Bardolph, the new proofreader/tutor at the Rhetoric Center. I received a degree from Calvin in English and Spanish in 2010, and since then, I’ve been a teacher, copywriter, publicist, marketing director, editor, and literary agent. There’s been a common thread in all these different occupations: I enjoy helping writers get their message across in a clear, winsome, and persuasive way.

I have always loved language, whether in the form of essays, book-length works of fiction, and nonfiction, or the New York Times crossword puzzle. In any given year, I read over a hundred books, ranging from the challenge of theological treatises to the comfort of murder mysteries. When I’m not at the Rhetoric Center, I work as a founding partner of BBH Literary, an agency devoted to helping scholars reach the broadest possible readership with thoughtful work that resonates with people of faith in their daily lives. I am also the editor of Means of Grace: A Year of Weekly Devotions by Fleming Rutledge.

When I’m not working at the Rhetoric Center or with BBH Literary, I’m at home tending to two delightful kids: Samuel (so named because he is a gift from God) and Lucy (named after the character in C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia). I’m a member of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church and am happy now to be part of this community of faith at Calvin Theological Seminary.



MEET
**Jennifer
DeJong**

VOCATIONAL FORMATION AND
DMIN ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR

Since beginning my work at Calvin Seminary, I have been impressed by how the curriculum is attentive to the character and leadership development of future pastors and ministry leaders and provides them with a strong theological and biblical foundation. As part of the Vocational Formation Office, I provide administrative support to many aspects of our program, which assist students in their reflection and growth, including contextual learning within ministry sites, vocational assessments, and mentor-led formation groups. My work with the Doctor of Ministry program provides similar support as students engage in their studies and ask deep questions, seeking to meet the challenges of daily ministry in their context.

I have a background in education and worked as a corporate trainer for several years before being drawn into ministry as a campus staff member with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. While with InterVarsity, I served at campuses in Albuquerque, NM, Washington, DC, and Grand Rapids, MI. Since putting down roots in Grand Rapids, I have enjoyed mentoring students at Calvin University and serving in various ways within my church. Amid this, I completed an MA in Theology through Western Theological Seminary. My time in seminary was formative in my discipleship and helped equip me for these ministry roles. My passions include faith formation, supporting ministry leaders, and helping individuals and organizations to thrive. It’s a privilege to join CTS in its mission to equip leaders of the church around the world!



MEET

Randy DeVries

CONTROLLER

I grew up in Kalamazoo, MI, but moved to Grand Rapids after graduating from Calvin University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in Public Accounting. After college, I worked for a public accounting firm in downtown Grand Rapids for six years before joining the private accounting world working for an electrical contractor. Following this, I spent three years with a gift card fundraising company in Grand Rapids when I saw the need arise for Calvin Seminary. I am very excited to be the Controller here at the Seminary and look forward to helping to continue to grow the excellent work of both the denomination and the Seminary.

Outside work, my wife and I have four kids who keep us very busy. We enjoy sports and being outside as much as possible. I enjoy helping coach my kids, and my wife and I are active within our church and Christian School communities.



MEET

Liz Frisbee

ADMISSIONS COUNSELOR

In the short time I’ve lived in Grand Rapids, I’ve decided it doesn’t feel all that different from my hometown. Despite their size, Grand Rapids and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, have a small-town feel. Of course, “home” becomes a relative term in your twenties; I spent January through August of this year in Nashville, Tennessee, and I spent three and a half years before that in northwest Iowa studying English. In that sense, I have several homes and am grateful I can add Grand Rapids to the list.

As you can probably tell by my university major, I’m a big fan of words; reading and writing are significant forms of solace for me. I love several genres of literature, though I find myself partial to the “planet-like music of poetry” (Sir Philip Sydney, A Defense of Poesy). But while there is a certain music in poetry and literature at large, there are times when words alone fail to express the stirrings of our spirit, to describe the beauty we crave to capture or to extol the Creator in His fullness (though in this last point, of course, we will always fall short).

Though I have never worked in admissions before, I’m excited at the prospect of being a welcoming presence for new and prospective students (as so many of you have been such a welcoming presence for me). And as this community grows, my prayer is that pursuing the intellectual and the beautiful will not isolate us but instead shape us into deep-diving disciples willing to traverse the depths—intellectually, spiritually, and relationally. I pray that as a community, we will all remember that our working, studying, reading, and singing—everything we do and love—means nothing apart from Him. And I pray that Calvin would continue to be a place where God’s kingdom is enjoyed, explored, and expanded to praise His glorious grace and the service of His precious children.



MEET
Sam Ha

CURATOR OF THE MEETER CENTER
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIAN

Born and spent his childhood growing up in South Korea, Sam’s story begins with a strong foundation in the Presbyterian faith. His father, a Presbyterian pastor and church planter, instilled in him the value of loving Jesus. This upbringing gave him a unique perspective on faith, emphasizing a practical, experiential connection with Christ.

Sam discovered the Reformed faith as he delved into theological literature like J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God* and John Calvin’s *Institutes*. Here, the lines between loving God and knowing God blurred, forming a seamless bond. This newfound perspective sparked his passion for theology.

His quest for a more profound theological education led him to Korea Theological Seminary, which was valuable and formative but left him yearning for more. His professors there encouraged him to explore Calvin Seminary, known for its combination of academic rigor and a strong emphasis on loving God and neighbor as a unified mission. He is now a PhD candidate at Calvin Seminary, writing a dissertation on Calvin’s doctrine of covenant.

His academic interests span John Calvin, the Reformation, Reformed theology, and global Christianity. He is also very keen on understanding and teaching biblically informed systematic theology in a way that helps everyday Christians to thrive and flourish in their lives.

Sam joined the seminary faculty in the summer of 2023 as Curator of the Meeter Center and a theological librarian, and his role goes beyond reshelving and ordering books. For him, it’s about teaching effective research methods, fostering a deep understanding of complex subjects, and nurturing virtues like justice, patience, humility, and courage. He seeks to instruct students to study and research theology in a way that is intellectually diligent, pastorally relevant, and spiritually edifying.

Sam’s scholarly contributions include presentations on various topics, from John Calvin and Barth to covenant theology, pneumatology, consolation, and global Christianity. His published works explore the thoughts of theologians such as Calvin and Luther and delve into themes such as worship, virtue ethics, and atonement theology.

Beyond academics, Sam serves as an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Korea, reaching congregations in the UK, South Korea, and the United States. This global perspective enriches his ability to connect with diverse individuals.

In his personal life, Sam is a loving husband to Lila and a proud father of three. His family has so far enjoyed living in West Michigan, the place of “Water Winter Wonderland.”



MEET
Dr. Lisa Hoogeboom

DIRECTOR OF DISTANCE LEARNING
DIRECTOR OF MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
DIRECTOR OF MASTER OF ARTS IN BIBLE AND THEOLOGY
ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

Dr. Lisa Hoogeboom joined the seminary full-time in the summer of 2023 after 17 years at Kuyper College as a Professor of Biblical and Intercultural Studies. She is not brand new to CTS as she had previously taught New Testament Greek as an adjunct professor. She continues to teach Greek and other courses as part of her new position.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching CTS students. I’ve found them motivated, curious, eager to learn, and eager to serve Christ and the Church.”

Lisa was one of a handful of professors who launched the first hybrid-format classes back in 2013 in the Distance Learning program. That initial group of seven students in 2013 helped set the program that now serves over 100 students in motion. The experience of being present for the launch of the hybrid degree a decade ago helped lay the foundation for her new role at CTS as the Director of Distance Learning.

“I’m still on a learning curve in my new role, but I am motivated to work towards excellence because I have seen first-hand the wonderful students who come through the program who work so hard to study, even as they’re highly involved with their church in their home areas.”

Lisa is also the director of two academic programs offered at CTS: the Master of Theological Studies and the Master of Arts in Bible and Theology. These degrees

are appropriate for teachers, scholars, writers, or theological editors, as the coursework is primarily academic.

Her academic interests include Bible translation and how intercultural and interfaith experiences affect students’ beliefs and attitudes. She lived in Turkey for several years, organizing and leading intercultural immersion experiences for college students. She still uses travel experiences to learn about people and culture. She and her husband, Mike, have three grown children and four granddaughters. She enjoys cooking, canoeing, camping, and hiking in her free time.

“I regularly think about my teaching through the lens of these questions: Did I affirm through words and actions that every person is created in the image of God? Did I lay a foundation for understanding that God made a diverse creation that includes diverse people, and every one of those people is also created in the image of God? Did I demonstrate love and respect for God’s Word? And did I instill this truth in the minds of students: that God wants to be in relationship with all people, from all walks of life, from all around the world?”

Alumni News



Global Reformed Identity

In the following vignettes, CTS alumni share their understanding of what it means to be Reformed within their own religious, social, and cultural contexts.



From Ontario to Cairo, alumni from around the world discuss how this Reformed identity was shaped by their time at Calvin Seminary, where they see it surfacing in their current work and life, and how they view future challenges in light of the enduring significance and relevance of this identity. We hope these alumni reflections will help our readers to, as one alumnus describes, “earnestly rediscover the wonder of the faith.”

Read on as we rediscover this sense of wonder together.



HEBER C. CAMPOS, JR.

Brazil

I have taught Reformed theology in Brazil in ecclesiastical and academic circles for the past fifteen years. During this time, the growing interest in Calvinism that spread through American evangelicalism in the early 21st century has also affected my part of the world, and it has not waned. I have had several conversations with pastors, those going into the ministry, and church members about what it means to be Reformed. They all have a sense of what the Reformed identity is. However, they differ in what they believe is its core: the soteriology of Dort, certain liturgical features, the five Solas of the Reformation, worldview matters, etc.

As I have studied the matter more thoroughly, I have learned to appreciate two things. First, to humbly admit the breadth of the Reformed tradition. During my studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, I have studied the Reformed efforts and contributions in different areas of theology in ways that enhanced my view of the Reformed identity. For those who identify Reformed as a Systematic Theology stance, I have challenged them to see the Reformed distinctive in biblical theology, pastoral studies, missiology, and a particular view of the church and worship. My course on Introduction to Reformed Theology has one main goal for the students: to let them see the tradition is more encompassing than they thought it was.

Secondly, to earnestly expect a rediscovery of the wonder for the faith. As a student of the history of the Reformed tradition and the distortions of some of its strands, I have learned that Reformed churches grow qualitatively and quantitatively as they experience a fascination for the beauty of God’s Word, as explained in the Reformed Confessions. If those who are new to the tradition need to learn that being Reformed is more than he or she had thought, those who have been in the tradition for a long time need to understand that we honor the tradition when we see the love and enchantment of those who have newly discovered it and become enraptured by the faith once again.



LAURA DE JONG

Canada

I grew up in a Southern Ontario community that was, in my estimation, deeply Kuyperian, shaped by the Institute for Christian Studies (AACS) conferences of the 1970s and 1980s that were part of my local community. Worship at my home church drew on the artistic contributions of its members, valuing and making space for creativity. Numerous family members worked for the Christian Labour Association of Canada. To be Reformed was to participate, engaging the world and taking it seriously as agents of renewal in the Kingdom of God.

This understanding was deepened at Calvin University. Concerts and movies, history and literature, travel and languages—every corner of the world could teach us something about God and ourselves and our participation in the kingdom, a kingdom more expansive than anything we could imagine.

At Calvin Theological Seminary, I experienced a different articulation of what it means to be Reformed. Seminary education’s primary concern and context was learning to read, preach, and teach Scripture. To be Reformed was to adhere to a belief system as expressed by the creeds, confessions, and teachings of Reformed theologians.

Both emphases are needed. The kingdom remains expansive, and our theological tradition provides much wisdom for engaging God’s world with discernment. In the face of a quickly changing and polarized world, Christians may occasionally be tempted to shrink the kingdom or cloister themselves off for stability. Above all, to be Reformed is to be brave, participating in the world with the humility and courage that comes from our faith in a sovereign God.



REV. NAJI UMRAN & DR. ANNE ZAKI

Egypt

Few things have influenced, equipped, and grounded us more than the MDiv program we studied at CTS. Where we live and serve in Cairo, a city of 30+ million, this admittedly small, sometimes self-conscious, and generally unassuming Reformed foundation has been a good one because it has taught us to do our theology through four constants: (1) constantly returning to the Bible; (2) constantly reformulating, our faith seeking understanding, yet returning to the sovereignty of God and the assurance of God’s faithfulness over our own; (3) constantly wrestling to remain relevant, persistently discerning the practical purposes and potency of our faith; and (4) constantly engaging others, new people, of other denominations, of other faiths, some who are too sure of themselves, some who struggle against faith, and others whose faith is slipping.

Distant as we now are from Calvin, this little faith of ours in a majority Orthodox community within a greater majority Muslim context still fits, still has teeth, and still inspires us, no matter how many cities we connect with virtually every week, or how many countries stamp our passports every year, as the missionary and the professor. This Reformed perspective has proven itself to us over and over to be stable, adaptable, and ultimately sustainable in the face of our world’s growing challenges.

Even as we see that there’s something solid to stand on here in this Reformed approach—a substantial foundation for us—we also appreciate its transparency and humility. It is good that our churches recognize the tininess of this tradition and the limits of our Reformed views and that they are still working out where they came from and what they will be in this 21st century, in this rapidly changing, increasingly global social context, where new multiethnic streams, sciences and technologies, and culturally diverse influences interact chaotically.



AMOS WINARTO (OEI)

Indonesia

I was introduced to the theme “My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely” through the Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) logo, where I furthered my study. CTS was the only place I studied abroad and the only place abroad I will always be grateful for in the spiritual formation of my own heart after the Lord. Fast forward to the ministry the Lord entrusted to me not long ago, as president of Aletheia Theological Seminary, “My heart I offer to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely,” encapsulates the profound commitment and dedication required.

This theme highlights the President’s role in shaping future church leaders’ minds and hearts and fostering the seminary community’s spiritual growth. A seminary President is called to offer their heart to the Lord promptly and sincerely, serving as a spiritual leader and role model for students, faculty, and staff. They are entrusted with cultivating an environment where faith, devotion, and deep spirituality thrive. Their commitment to God’s call becomes a source of inspiration for the entire seminary community.

In summary, the theme “My heart I offer to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely” calls upon a seminary President to be a steadfast spiritual leader, a model of authenticity, and a diligent steward of the seminary’s vision and mission. This commitment is essential for the seminary community’s growth and for shaping the minds and hearts of future church leaders who will carry the Light of the World into the world.



B. HOON WOO

South Korea

I first encountered the term Reformed faith during middle school in my denomination, Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. However, it wasn’t until college that I truly grasped its significance. I was an active member of SFC (Students for Christ), which promoted Reformed faith among campus students. Within SFC, two core aspects of Reformed theology were emphasized: intensive Bible study and a genuine, devoted life for God. Subsequently, as I pursued my studies at Korea Theological Seminary, I delved deeper into the Reformed faith, exploring its Trinitarian characteristics and understanding the influences of American and Dutch Reformed theologies on Korean Presbyterian churches. Working at a local church, I grappled with the challenge of applying the Reformed faith practically, which led me to further my studies at Calvin Theological Seminary.

My decision to study at CTS had two main objectives: to deepen my understanding of the Bible and to gain practical insights into the Reformed faith and the Reformed Church. While at CTS, I benefited greatly from Richard Muller’s lectures, which encouraged me to contemplate the diversity and unity within Reformed theology. Ronald Feenstra’s inquiries into the contributions of Reformed theology to contemporary issues prompted me to seek answers gradually. Additionally, the teachings of Herman Bavinck, which I acquired through John Bolt and the philosophical insights shared by John Cooper, have continued to shape my theological perspective.

Today, I teach systematic theology to 200 undergraduate students at Kosin University in Busan, Korea. Moreover, I serve as a mentor to dozens of master’s and doctoral students. In my teaching of Reformed theology, I emphasize three key aspects. First, I encourage students to contemplate the biblical foundation of Reformed theology, urging them to discern the biblical underpinnings of its doctrines. Second, I guide them through the historical roots of Reformed theology, tracing its evolution from the 16th and 17th centuries and delving further back to explore its connections with the Church Fathers and medieval theology. Lastly, I explore the relevance of Reformed theology in modern Korean society. Given the post-modern nature of contemporary society, coupled with its dominance by science, technology, and market economics, I firmly believe that Reformed theology can effectively convey the gospel to diverse audiences and aid believers in contributing to the greater public good. By focusing on these aspects in theological discourse, I am confident that the Reformed faith will continue to convey the ‘true truth’ in postmodern society, uphold humanity in a scientific and technological world, and support marginalized individuals within the global market economy system.

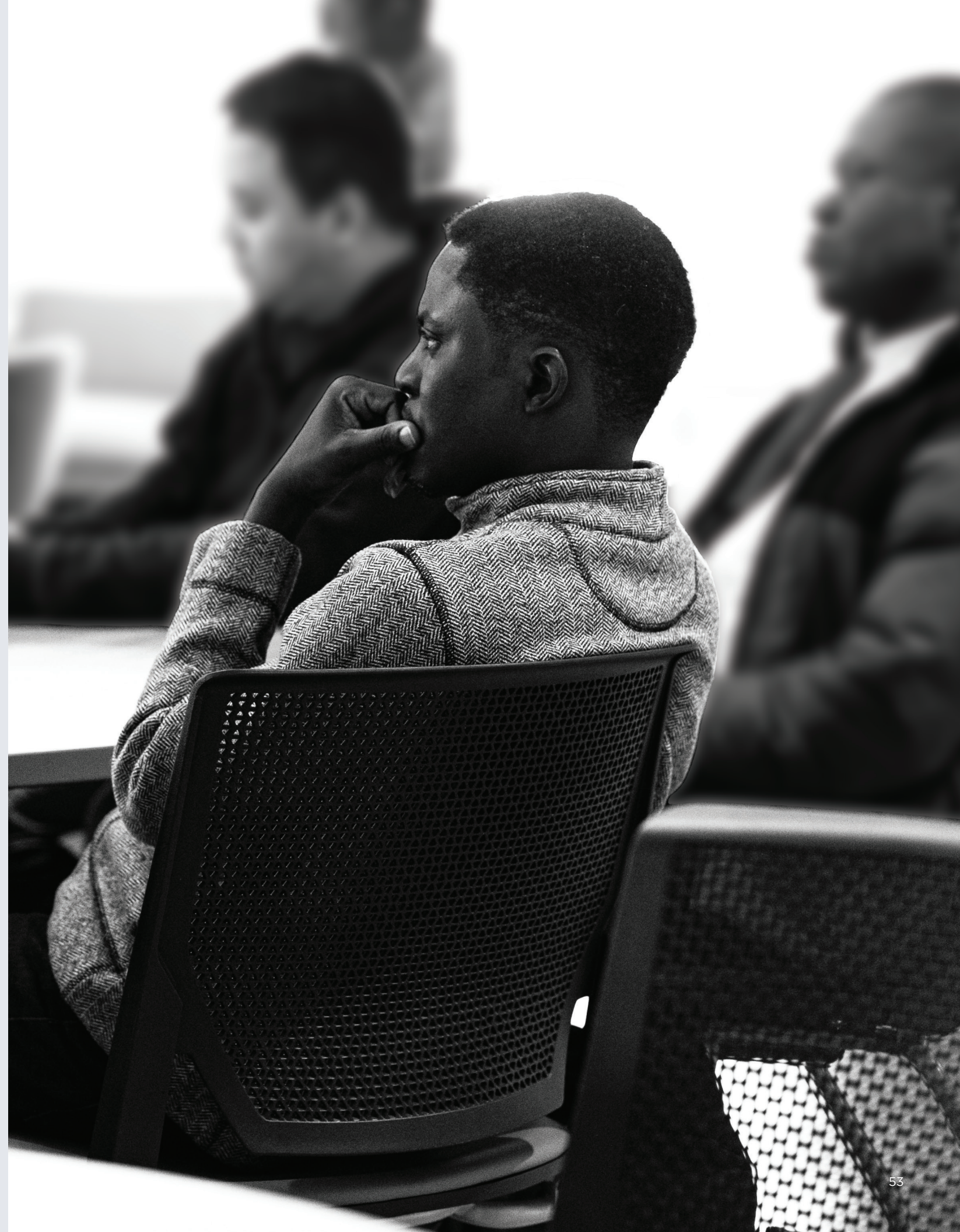
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