

Calvin University

## Calvin Digital Commons

---

Calvin Seminary Forum (1994-2001)

Calvin Theological Seminary Publications

---

4-1-2000

### Calvin Seminary Forum

Henry De Moor

*Calvin Theological Seminary*

Henry Zwaanstra

*Calvin Theological Seminary*

Carl Zylstra

*Calvin Theological Seminary*

Calvin Van Reken

*Calvin Theological Seminary*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/seminary\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/seminary_forum)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

De Moor, Henry; Zwaanstra, Henry; Zylstra, Carl; and Van Reken, Calvin, "Calvin Seminary Forum" (2000). *Calvin Seminary Forum (1994-2001)*. 8.

[https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/seminary\\_forum/8](https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/seminary_forum/8)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Calvin Theological Seminary Publications at Calvin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Calvin Seminary Forum (1994-2001) by an authorized administrator of Calvin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@calvin.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@calvin.edu).

# FORUM

CALVIN SEMINARY

Vol. 7 No. 2

Summer 2000

## COVER ESSAY

# A ONE-WEEK SYNOD?

Synod 2000 will be the fourth one-week synod in our denominational history. The experiment of reducing the time from what was always closer to a two-week period was begun in 1997 and is up for review this year. To guide that review, a committee has written about the pro's and con's and makes some recommendations to guide us. It's a procedural issue. **Yet something tells me that it may have a more profound effect on our future than whatever we decide on so-called "hot button issues."**

### Elders, Efficiency and Economy

The decision to switch to one-week synods made in 1996 was motivated primarily

by three considerations. It was hoped that the new format would make it possible for more elders to consider serving as delegates. For them, unlike ministers, attendance is an avocation. Younger elders, especially, just couldn't spare the time. It was hoped, secondly, that the efficiency of synodical work could be increased. Finally, meeting-costs could be reduced significantly.

With respect to the latter, the review committee is unable to provide clear comparisons due to a change in bookkeeping methods during the past four years. They surmise a few things but, **unfortunately, there are no hard statistics.**

The committee states that the past three synods "would have to be declared

more efficient than their predecessors." It also observes that not all the time allotted to them was even used. True. The problem, of course, is that efficiency is being measured in purely quantitative terms. The one-week synods did their work in less time. **But what of quality?** It's not an easy thing to measure. The review committee was told that there is some anxiety among us about whether we could do justice to the issues, especially if dealing with them appropriately would require well-articulated majority and minority reports from advisory committees. With several highly significant issues before it, **Synod 2000 will be a major test for the one-week synod concept.** In fact, it may well be the first major test. So time will tell.



**HENRY DE MOOR**

Professor of Church Polity at Calvin Theological Seminary

That leaves the matter of the availability of elders. On this, the review committee has solid statistics. The number of unfilled elder positions has actually increased over these years, the average age of elders has changed very little, and the number of first-time elder delegates does not show any appreciable change. The committee concludes that

Please see COVER ESSAY page 8 ▶

## FEATURED ARTICLES

"A One-Week Synod?" - Henry De Moor .....p. 1  
 "Women in Office: Where we are." - Henry Zwaanstra .....p. 2  
 "The Changing World of Education for Ministry" - Carl Zylstra .....p. 4  
 "Compassion at the End of Life" - Calvin Van Reken .....p. 6

# WOMEN IN OFFICE

*Where we are.*



**HENRY  
ZWAANSTRA**

Professor of Historical  
Theology at Calvin  
Theological Seminary

This issue of FORUM is devoted to a discussion of some of the matters on the agenda of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Synod 2000. The editorial committee asked me to write on the Report of the Committee to Review the Decision regarding Women in Office.

After many years of contentious wrangling, enervating debates, and conflicting synodical decisions, the synod of the CRC decided in 1995 to allow classes to permit local churches to ordain and install women as elders, ministers, and evangelists. The 1995 Synod said, **"there are two different perspectives**

**and convictions," (within the church) "both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God,** on the issue of whether women are allowed to serve in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist." The synod permitted classes to declare the word *male* in Article 3 of the Church Order inoperative. The synod's purpose in making these decisions was to bring a measure of peace to the church and to allow it to focus its energies and resources on ministry. The decision was an interim decision to be reviewed in five years. Many were unhappy with synod's decision. They believed that the synod had validated two biblically and theologically irreconcilable positions. Understandably, they were also displeased with the decision to declare an article of the Church Order inoperative.

The committee now reporting was appointed in 1998. The synod asked the committee to solicit responses from congregations and classes to determine the effects of the 1995 decision. The synod also asked the committee to propose recommendations for Synod 2000, including a biblical-theological argument to undergird the position(s) recommended. Synod 1995 did not provide a biblical-theological argument for its

decision. The committee now reporting finds in the request for biblical-theological underpinning evidence of the CRC's desire to adhere to Scripture and at the same time to honor differences in understanding what Scripture says about the ordination of women.

## The Survey

The committee surveyed the opinion of CRC councils and classes, not church members. Great matters of truth are never satisfactorily settled in the church by conducting surveys, nor by a raising of hands or a simple counting of ballots. They are settled only when the church reaches a consensus based on God's Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To reach such a consensus sometimes takes a long time. The purpose of the survey was not to get answers to the question of women's ordination by means of an opinion poll. The survey was taken to "take the pulse of the denomination," to find out where we are on the issues, and to answer practical questions such as: Can the church live with differences on the issues and still maintain trust and fellowship?

**What do the numbers show? Of the councils responding, eighteen (18) percent said that synod should not allow women's ordination. Sixteen (16) percent preferred opening all offices to women across the denomination. Sixty-six percent (66) preferred maintaining the option approved in 1995.** Six (6)

“  
the issue...  
is really  
a matter of  
wisdom...  
”

percent of the classes thought keeping women's ordination as a classical-local option would have a negative impact. Nine (9) percent thought that keeping the option would have a positive impact. An overwhelming eighty-six (86) percent said that retaining the option would have only a mixed or no effect.

## Two Perspectives

The committee wisely chose to use previous synodical study committee reports and synodical decisions to present the biblical and theological arguments for both closing and opening the offices to women. Lucidly, yet in considerable detail, the committee presents the biblical witness for both positions. This witness includes how representatives of each position use the general teaching of Scripture, analogy of faith, in their interpretation and how they interpret specific texts. The committee also confronts the two positions with their problematic texts. It then shows how representatives of each fit those texts into their overall interpretation. **The committee uses the same principles and**

“ The synod permitted classes...to declare the word *male* inoperative. ”

**WOMEN...cont.**

ZWAANSTRA

**methods of interpretation for both positions. They are the traditional Reformed principles and methods.** The committee's presentation of the biblical witness illustrates that the 1995 Synod was correct when it said that there were "two different perspectives in the church and that both of them honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God."

**What the Issue Is and Is Not**

According to the committee, **the women-in-office issue is not a confessional matter.** If it were an essential confessional issue, our salvation would depend upon it. That is not the case. **Neither is it a moral issue,** like adultery, stealing, or killing. If it were, the Lord himself would never have allowed women to serve in positions of authority even by way of exceptions to the rule as he did in Old Testament times. **Nor does it belong to disputable or indifferent matters, adiaphora.**

The committee attempts to identify more precisely the issue now facing the CRC with the help of the Bible. It finds the answer in Old Testament wisdom literature and in principles regarding wisdom taught in the New Testament. According to the Bible, wisdom teaches us as individuals and communities how to live as humans in the presence of God.

**The committee concludes that the issue of**

**women in office is really a matter of wisdom and that biblical wisdom principles should be applied to it.** Paul in his time, the committee contends, applied wisdom principles in what he said about the place and role of women in the early church. He did so in some passages that are now interpreted in different ways in the CRC.

The committee believes that characterizing the issue as a wisdom issue can help the CRC deal with appeals to conscience. Representatives on both sides of the issue have claimed that conscience is the arbiter when synods made decisions contrary to their interpretation. The committee thinks to do this is not right. The differences touch neither essential doctrines nor moral standards. They belong to the area of biblical wisdom. They therefore, should more appropriately be called "serious differences in judgment" rather than "conscientious objections."

**Church Unity**

**The CRC's failure to reach a consensus on women in office has resulted in serious problems, problems far more serious than the issue itself. One of them is church unity.** The committee describes the failure to reach consensus as a strong centrifugal force, "tearing apart those who belong together." It is of the opinion, however, that differences in understanding Pauline passages do not separate members of the CRC



**Great matters of truth are never satisfactorily settled in the church by conducting surveys, nor by a raising of hands or a simple counting of ballots.**

either from Christ or his church. As fellow church members, we do not have "to walk away from each other, reject each other, or excommunicate each other." Oneness in Christ and unity in the body of Christ, the committee suggests, should provide a centripetal force that is strong enough to withstand and overcome the forces which divide the church.

**Conclusion**

**The study committee puts three options on synod's table: 1) To revise the decision of Synod 1995 and close the offices to women, 2) To retain the 1995 decision as is or to modify it by either restricting it or opening it up further, and 3) To simply remove all references to gender from the Church Order.**

The committee does not favor the first option. The church simply has not been convinced that Scripture clearly prohibits women from serving in the ruling offices. There is also a practical problem with

this option. Ordained women are now serving effectively and with appreciation in many churches. To remove them from office would require convincing biblical evidence.

The committee does not favor the third option either. It does not believe that insight into the matter has grown to the point where the issue can be settled in this way. The committee also questions whether the turmoil in the church has subsided to the point where it is wise to implement the third option.

**In the committee's judgment the church needs to understand the differences more clearly and to evaluate them with greater balance. The committee, therefore, favors the second option, staying the present course for another five years.** The committee submitted a unanimous report. A minority, however, recommend that classes which have authorized churches to ordain women should be allowed to delegate women officebearers to synod. ■

**" the church needs to understand the differences more clearly and to evaluate them with greater balance."**



**CARL E. ZYLSTRA**

President of  
Dordt College

# THE CHANGING WORLD OF EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

report, the committee attempts to survey the changed ecclesiastical setting and to review current practices both within the CRC and in other Reformed denominations. The report then outlines specific standards that can be applied no matter what routes to ministry are followed.

**The question hovering over this report, however, is whether the analysis and suggestions are adequate to address the changed world of ministry education in the CRC.** As my own anecdotal experience related above would indicate, we now are in an era where the pastors and ministry staff of the CRC are being trained through a host of different routes. In fact, statistics developed by the committee indicate that during the 1990's only 56% of those entering the ordained ministry were graduates of Calvin Seminary. It probably needs to be asked whether it is traditional education at CTS that is fast becoming the "alternate" route to ministry.

## The Need for Denominational Standards

The report coming to synod makes some solid and well-founded suggestions regarding standards for CRC ministry. Particularly helpful is its attempt to outline foundational standards that are not, first of all, culturally determined or tradition bound. Rather, the committee proposes denominational standards for personal character,

**// Let the denomination set the standards... and the local churches apply those standards by calling and ordaining people to ministry. //**

biblical and theological understanding, and essential ministry skills that are demanded by the content and nature of the gospel itself.

And what's especially valuable is the committee's insistence that **these standards should be applicable in some degree of proportionality to all those employed in full-time ministry, not just to the ordained ministers of the Word.** For surely it makes little sense to preserve carefully the orthodox competence of a preaching minister only to have that ministry undercut by the lack of understanding or of full conviction on the part of a youth pastor, evangelist, or other staff person.

In short, the committee proposes well-articulated standards designed to keep churches from employing someone simply because of winsome personality or ready availability. Instead, each congregation would be held accountable within the family of churches to employ on its ministry staff only those who can be judged by biblical standards to be effective and authentic ministers of the gospel.

At the same time, it seems to me that two items remain as unfinished agenda in the committee's report. **What will**

**be the accountability structures by which the standards for ministry are maintained?** And can our current structures really supply enough ministry workers to meet the expanding and diversifying ministry needs of the CRC congregations?

## The Need for New Structures of Accountability

In the past, the accountability structure was fairly simple. The synod of the CRC approved candidates for ministry. But, in general, the synod delegated to Calvin Seminary and its board of trustees the task of evaluating whether potential candidates met denominational expectations for ordination. Thus the board and faculty of CTS would establish the curriculum that needed to be followed by those preparing for ministry. And even if a prospective minister fulfilled the written curriculum, the student still needed a faculty recommendation and board approval to become a candidate in the CRC. Technically, each year's synod would approve the candidates. Most synods, however, were loath to overturn the well-considered judgment of the faculty

Cont. pg. 5 ►

**EDUCATION... cont.**

ZYLSTRA

**// the board of trustees and the faculty... need to be given the resources... to meet the other 50% of ministry needs... //**

and board of trustees who had spent years in repeated interviews and observation of potential ministers.

Even graduates of other accredited seminaries had to gain the approval of the CTS faculty and board in order to enter the CRC ministry. A Special Program for Ministerial Candidacy was established by which seminarians at other seminaries could be monitored throughout their studies at the other seminary. After graduation they then spent a year in residence at Calvin Seminary. This program was designed to ensure that even those who followed other courses of ministerial training would pass through the accountability standards of the CRC en route to ministry within that denomination.

**The problem, now, is that close to half of the ordained ministers and the vast majority of other ministry staff are simply bypassing this denominational accountability structure altogether.** Local congregations and classes are following alternate routes in supplying their ministry needs. And intriguingly, while the committee reporting to Synod 2000 does not propose scrapping the old accountability structure, it does make some remarkable

suggestions. They recommend that the focus of accountability needs to be shifted away from the synodical structures directly to the local classes of the CRC. They say: "The local church is the place where ministry takes place, where alternative ministry positions and tasks as well as alternative routes to ordination are born and nurtured, where the real vocational recruitment takes place. It is thus appropriate that classes develop the appropriate structures where these alternatives can be encouraged and regulated within the framework of denominational standards."

Thus a new model for accountability is suggested. Let the denomination set the standards and let the local churches through their classes have full freedom to apply those standards in calling and ordaining people to ministry. The report suggests the establishment of Classical Ministry Candidacy Committees to work in coordination with a denominational Ministry Leadership Advisory Council. The denominational group will maintain standards; the classical bodies will apply them to the admission of candidates for ministry.

But if synod is persuaded that this model will work, another more fundamental question seems obvious. Why then should the old centralized accountability system be maintained at all? If more than half the ministry staff will come through the localized system, why should anyone be required to follow the centralized synodical path? The committee's survey of other Reformed denominations indicates that most follow the decentralized model. In the light of this report, the Synod 2000 will have to ask whether the time has come for the CRC to do the same.

**The Need for a Greater Supply**

Regardless of how the accountability question is answered, the issue of supply remains. As the committee's report indicates, one of the main reasons so many people enter ministry through alternate routes is that the CRC simply is not supplying its own ministry needs through established routes.

If that is the case, then perhaps Synod 2000 will also want to ask whether the time has come to expand the educational and training opportunities available at its own denominational ministry-training-center, Calvin Theological Seminary.

**Over the past two decades CTS has emerged as a center for**

denomination that their ministry needs are the top priority and that they and the classes will devise whatever routes are necessary to find candidates to meet those needs. It may be that the board of trustees and faculty of Calvin Seminary need to be given the resources, freedom, and encouragement to rapidly and dramatically increase the seminary's capacity to meet the other 50% of ministry needs, not currently being met through its programs.

Yes, the world of ministry has changed. New opportunities for service have stretched the old structures for supplying ministry staff who meet denominational standards. The committee has served the church well in clarifying, and setting denominational standards for ministry. It is also to be commended for shifting

**“ is traditional education... becoming the alternate route to ministry? ”**

**providing ministry leadership for Reformed churches both in North America and around the world.** The Ph.D. program has been notably successful in this effort. Perhaps the time has come for synod also to encourage CTS to expand the diversity of its programs for the kinds of ministerial training that the congregations of the CRC have determined they need to carry out their own ministry effectively.

**It will not do for the denomination simply to demand that its churches employ ministry staff that meet denominational standards.** As recent CRC history shows, the churches will simply tell the

accountability for meeting the standards to the local congregations and classes. If these standards and this process of accountability can be combined with a renewed emphasis on the importance of denominationally-provided education and training for ministry, these suggestions can serve the CRC well as it pursues the ever widening ministry opportunities God has brought its way as the 21st Century begins. ■

# COMPASSION AT THE END OF LIFE



**CALVIN P. VAN REKEN**

Professor of Moral Theology at Calvin Seminary.

In the agenda for Synod 2000 is a study report that addresses some of the pastoral and moral issues associated with dying. I appreciate the thoughtful reflection and pastoral tone of the report. It has much in it that is helpful for pastors and churches. **The authors had the difficult task of walking a tightrope between two important Christian values which often seem**

describes the origin of the report, a topic I will touch on later. The second section reports some actual cases dealing with end of life issues. A similar section later (the fifth) provides four vignettes each of which chronicles the specific circumstances of a person's dying. All these historical examples acquaint the reader with some of the complexity of the issues. They are helpful in giving a human dimension to what could easily lapse into a theoretical discussion. The four vignettes in the fifth section are especially helpful in identifying some of the better ways of caring for the dying.

The third section identifies three social factors influencing the discussion. The first factor is that the twentieth century was "perhaps the most deadly century in the history of the world." Ironically, the second factor is that scientific developments in the twentieth century have resulted in "a tremendous advance in life-enhancing and life-preserving capabilities." The report gives the most space to the third of the three social factors, and so will I. The third

we need be alert. The report says that this shift itself has been brought about in part by the following five factors: the erosion of community, the desire for personal autonomy, the fear of incremental death, the increasing institutionalization of death, and the high cost of dying. These are powerful factors in the shift in thinking in much of the culture. What the report does not mention are factors in this shift such as the marginalizing of religion in society and the increasing scepticism about the validity of moral standards. Christians, too, are affected by all these factors. As a result we we need to do two things simultaneously: help the society turn back to the earlier, more biblical view, and resist the pressure that we ourselves are under to adopt the idea of "compassionate homicide."

The fourth part of the report gives some biblical foundations for how Christians should regard end-of-life issues. The section appropriately begins with an affirmation that life is a gift of God. It goes on to say that "each person has an inestimable worth as an individual and as a member of a community." **According to the report, however, the Bible is "strangely silent when it comes to condemning suicide."** After surveying some biblical cases, the report concludes that "examples of suicide in the Bible must not be taken to suggest that every depressed or suicidal person has intentionally chosen to pursue the way of evil."

The fourth section on biblical foundations continues by considering what the Bible says about how we should deal with situations when human life becomes what the report calls "an unendurable burden" because of physical pain. (It is not clear how much pain over what period of time makes life

**// our most fundamental obligation is to do all we can – short of acting with the intention to kill – to relieve pain and suffering. //**

unendurable. Who gets to decide when life has become unendurable? What exactly is the implication of saying a life is unendurable?) When someone is in extreme pain what is the right response of others? The report says "the most appropriate response to suffering is compassion . . . , compassion compels us to ease pain and suffering. Not to do so is wrong. . . . As Christians we have as our most fundamental obligation to do all we can--short of acting with the intention to kill--to relieve pain and suffering. . . . Motivated by God's own compassion for hurting people, we must not allow those who suffer to bear the burden alone." Here the report hits its major theme: compassion. Not to show compassion is "wrong." When our compassion is aroused by the intolerable suffering of another person, what may we do to relieve her? Everything possible, says the report, except we may not act "with the intention to kill."

The sixth section of the report explains ten ways in which our congregations can be more effective as communities of care. This is the most helpful section of the whole report and forms the basis for many of the recommendations in the last section. If you read only part of the report, read this section. The seventh section draws out some implications of the report for

**“ Compassion, taken alone and severed from...our nature and destiny, kills morality. ”**

**at odds near the end of life: protecting human life and showing compassion.**

Overall, however, it is my conclusion that the report goes too far. In this essay I will summarize and evaluate this report.

**Summary of the Report**

The report is divided into eight sections. The first section

factor is identified as "a major shift in thinking." This major shift in the social climate of opinion is away from the idea that suicide and homicide are serious moral wrongs toward the "legal recognition and social acceptance of compassionate homicide."

In my judgment, the report is accurate in speaking of a very significant shift in our moral environment. It is one to which

**COMPASSION...cont.**

VAN REKEN

public policy pertaining to the end of life. **Here the report encourages making it legal to "permit medical intervention only for the relief of pain and suffering even if such treatment could shorten life when patients are clearly approaching the end of life."**

Finally, in the eighth section the report gives nineteen guidelines for how individuals, caregivers, pastors, and churches can deal more effectively with respect to end-of-life issues. Most of these are very helpful. An important one is that families be encouraged "to prepare advance directives regarding palliative care." Making clear what your wishes are regarding how you would like to be cared for in dying is an important way of showing love to those family members who sometimes have to make hard choices.

**Comments and Evaluation**

As I said at the outset, I appreciate the thoughtful reflection and pastoral tone of the report. The authors try to negotiate between two important Christian values: protecting human life and showing compassion. The traditional ranking of these two values is in the order I listed them: protecting human life is the more important. Where these two seem to pull in opposite directions, one ought to lean always to the side of protecting human life. My main criticism of the report is that it leans to the side of showing compassion. It's always dangerous to criticize showing compassion, so let me briefly identify what's at stake.

Gilbert Meilaender, a Christian ethicist, writes, "Without moral ideals a society cannot shape much of a common life. And sometimes one moral ideal--isolated and taken

by itself--can undermine all others. For us the language of compassion...has done just that...Compassion, taken alone and severed from deeper, richer understandings of our nature and destiny, kills morality" (First Things 84, June/July 1998). The problem Meilaender notes when we make compassion the preeminent Christian virtue is that it trumps consideration of what is good and right. **Compassion is too episodic, individualistic**

**// According to the Catechism... we are not to 'harm or recklessly endanger ourselves.' Self-murder is not a trivial instance of the former. //**

**and temperamental to be the foundation of Christian morality.**

Now let me try to show very briefly how the report favors showing compassion over protecting human life.

The section of the report dealing with suicide concludes that "examples of suicide in the Bible must not be taken to suggest that every depressed or suicidal person has intentionally chosen to pursue the way of evil." It is worth noting here how delicately, even compassionately, this is worded. In contrast, our confessions clearly imply that suicide is sinful. According to the Catechism, the sixth commandment means in part that we are not "to harm or recklessly endanger" ourselves. Self-murder is not a trivial instance of the former.

When the report speaks of the later church's strong condemnation of suicide, it claims that this judgment rests on Augustine's arguments which are "based on the classical

virtues and on common sense rather than on biblical evidence." The report concludes that "increasingly in the twentieth century many Christians have tempered their attitude on this issue. They recognize that persons caught up in despair are often so burdened by life that suicide seems the only solution." Perhaps so. But that doesn't mean choosing suicide isn't wrong. **Our comfort in the wake of suicide is not suggesting that it must have appeared as the only option, rather it is that God forgives and will fix this evil too.** The language in the report about taking one's own life is soft and virtually exculpatory.

Compare this gentle speech with what is said in connection with the need to show compassion. As already quoted, the report says, "the most appropriate response to suffering is compassion...Compassion compels us to ease pain and suffering. Not to do so is wrong...As Christians we have as our most fundamental obligation to do all we can--short of acting with the intention to kill--to relieve pain and suffering..." "Here you hear the strongest language of the report addressed to those who fail to show compassion. It is coupled with the incredible claim that relieving pain and suffering is the Christian's "most fundamental obligation." This claim is simply false.

More seriously, the report seems to countenance the idea that you may knowingly cause the death of someone in relieving his pain, but such an act would only be clearly wrong if you intended to kill him. The report is clear that any action with the unintended consequence of causing death would only be morally permitted when someone is near the end of life and in terrible pain. **Thus, while the report clearly states that compassionate homicide is morally unacceptable, it leaves open**

**the possibility that, in a narrow set of circumstances, compassionate manslaughter is morally acceptable.** (Manslaughter is killing a person without malice aforethought.) Since such an action may be morally acceptable, the report recommends it be decriminalized. So there is a detectable preference in the report for showing compassion at the expense of protecting human life.

Finally, it is noteworthy that this report was not requested to be presented to a synod, nor is it the product of a synodically appointed study committee. In 1997 synod, rather than appoint a study committee on end of life issues, asked the Canadian Council for Contact with the Government to revise and expand a document it already had prepared and "to make available future drafts of these materials to churches in the US as well as Canada for evaluation and discussion." **Synod 1997 did not ask for the report to be submitted to a synod.** Had synod intended for the report to come back to it there would have been no need to request to make the revised report available "to churches in the US as well as Canada" since matters before synod are published in the agenda. Moreover, since the General Secretary has published the report in the agenda for synod 2000, the wish of synod 1997 is accomplished: the report now is available to the churches. Thus Synod 2000 could simply receive it for information.

The report says much that is useful in addressing the very complex issues that often attend the end of a life. Its pastoral tone and advice are commendable. It could help many persons and churches who help others struggle with these issues. But it concedes too much to "the major shift in thinking" taking place in our culture. ■



## CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

**“One need not be a rocket scientist to figure out that delegate fatigue is not likely to decrease.”**

“there is no clear evidence that the availability of elder delegates has increased.” It would seem more reasonable to say that **there is clear evidence that this primary purpose for the switch in format has not materialized.** Yet, the committee speaks of the “apparent success of the trial period.” A bit puzzling.

### Deliberation

The review committee acknowledges that “longer days of meeting time with less opportunity for rest, reading, and reflection may produce increased fatigue among delegates.” It also reports that in the minds of some who have been there, the “time for discussion and debate was diminished.” It therefore proposes that the hours of meeting-time each day need to be shortened to provide more opportunity for reading and rest. On the other hand, it proposes to increase worship time on Sunday as well as in the mornings. It even suggests a “Ministry Fair” for Sunday afternoon. **One need not be a rocket scientist to figure out that delegate**

**fatigue is not likely to decrease.** It’s difficult to argue with worship and fellowship, yet synod’s primary purpose is to do the business of the church and encourage and guide its ministries.

Deliberation at church assemblies cannot be measured in “discussion time.” It is more than talking together and reaching as close to a consensus as possible. It is a matter of probing deeply into the mind of every corner of the church. More importantly, it is a matter of probing deeply into the heart of God. That requires a leisurely pace. The issue is not whether there’s enough time to talk. It’s about truly wrestling with one another and with our Lord until we’ve gotten it right.

### Changing the Rules?

Without any foundational material for them in the body of the report, the review committee suggests two alterations in synodical procedure. First, the rules should now stipulate that the vice-president of one synod becomes the president of synod the following year and, analogously, that the second clerk of one synod

becomes the first clerk of synod the following year. The stated reasons are that this “would facilitate better leadership preparation” and that it would “decrease the number of advisory-committee leaders who may be removed to serve as officers of synod.” Synod 2000 will have to look very closely at these recommendations. Are there really such serious concerns about inadequate leadership? Have advisory committees really been hurt by having an alternate in the chair or as reporter? And what does this really have to do with the issue of one- or two-week synods?

More seriously, these proposed alterations are not mere changes in procedure. They touch on more fundamental matters of Church Order. Article 46-c clearly says that a synod shall elect its officers. This is in keeping with the notion that a synod is not a continuing assembly but, rather, one that begins with an opening gavel and ends with a closing gavel. **These alterations would seem to give one synod authority over the affairs of the next.** The Church Order also provides, in Article 45, that “each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to the synod.” **These alterations would seem to bind the classes of the two persons involved, limiting their freedom to delegate whom they will.** The only way to avoid that is to

## CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

Calvin Seminary Forum  
Volume 7, Number 2  
Summer, 2000

The Calvin Seminary Forum is published in Winter, Spring, and Fall editions.

Calvin Theological Seminary  
3233 Burton St. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
Subscription price: \$8.00  
In Canada: \$10.00

Editorial Committee:  
Henry Zwaanstra, Editor  
John Cooper  
Lugene Schemper  
Calvin Van Reken  
Jeffrey Weima

© 1999 Calvin Theological Seminary

Publication Mail Agreement # 1703757  
Calvin Theological Seminary  
3474 Mainway, LCD STN 1  
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9

allow such a president and such a first clerk to serve regardless of whether they were delegated by a classis. But that would seem to be an even greater oddity of Reformed polity: a synod led by two officers who are not delegates.

It is unfortunate that the review committee has not blessed Synod 2000 with more substantial grounds for these proposed alterations. They seem to “drop out of nowhere” and the crisp argumentation for them does not even address these serious concerns about Reformed church polity. Should the President of Synod rule them out of order if they make it to the floor? ■