Calvin Seminary Forum

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COVER STORY

THE RIGHT TO DIE: — Is compassion enough?

In his futuristic novel 1984, George Orwell coined the term "newspeak" to describe the deliberately deviant use of language for propaganda purposes. The purpose of newspeak, the artificial and official language of Oceania, was to disguise the real intentions and acts of the State by ambiguous and deceptive communication. What Orwell did not envision is the extent to which even ordinary language has been debased in our century to disguise evil intentions and deeds.

The term "democracy" has been co-opted by ruthless totalitarian regimes and the innocent-sounding "choice" covers up the murder of infants. And now a truly disturbing use of "compassion" as a rationalization for evil in the growing clamor for public, legal acceptance of euthanasia. Michigan's crusader for doctor-assisted suicides, "Doctor Death" Jack Kevorkian, and his attorney Geoffrey Fieger, consistently appeal to the higher law of "compassion" as justification for helping people kill themselves. Similar appeals for "compassionate" care of people who are suffering come from national "right to die" groups such as the Hemlock Society. Christian sensitivities have led many to become suspicious about these appeals, wondering if the calls for compassion do not in fact reflect a reluctance on the part of care-givers to avoid the inconvenience involved in caring for those who suffer. The recent publication of Rita Marker's Deadly Compassion: The Death of Ann Humphrey and the Truth about Euthanasia (New York: William Morrow, 1993) adds considerable fuel to those fires of suspicion.

Derek and Ann (Kooman/Wickett) Humphry met in August 1975, five months after the death of Derek's first wife, Jean. They were married six months later and collaborated on a book, Jean's Way, the story of Jean's Humphrey's assisted suicide after a struggle with breast cancer. Together they also founded the Hemlock Society, perhaps the foremost euthanasia advocacy group in North America today. The two also co-authored additional volumes including The Right to Die and a suicide manual, Final

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Exit, while actively working for "right to die" laws in the United States and in other countries.

For more than a decade the Humphrys built successful careers for themselves out of euthanasia advocacy enjoying international reputations as well as considerable income from it. The Hemlock Society appeared to be a flourishing organization, supported and endorsed by numerous celebrities of the medical and media world. Even some court decisions seemed to favor the "reasonable and compassionate" route of assisted suicide for the terminally ill and desperate-ly suffering.

What is important is that the rhetoric of the Hemlock Society and other euthanasia advocates consistently puts forward the good face of compassion and mercy as well as freedom of choice. Furthermore, as a speaker to a Hemlock conference called to garner support for a California "Right to Die" initiative known as "The Humane and Dignified Death Act," observed, in a characteristic moment of self-congratulation, euthanasia proponents are bold and courageous.

We're involved in a bold venture. We seek to change sanctions that have existed in Western civilization for four thousand years. How dare we be so bold? Because we seek human dignity, self-determination, and the right to privacy. [Life that is] devoid of hope...is not the type of life we cherish. (pp. 78-79) It is the opponents of euthanasia, so we are told repeatedly, who rob persons of their right to "death with dignity." They are the cruel, the uncaring.

This rhetoric seems particularly empty after the autumn of 1989. That is when Ann Humphry was diagnosed with breast cancer. The caring and compassionate Derek almost immediately deserted her, remarking along the way, "I can't believe this can be happening to me again." This was followed by the termination of her employment at the Hemlock Society which resulted in loss of her medical insurance. When Ann threatened to sue Hemlock, a vicious public campaign to discredit her was conducted by Derek and the Hemlock Society. It all became too much for Ann. On October 8, 1991 her body was found in a wilderness area near the Humphry farm in Oregon. She had taken her own life and left subsequent harassment of a dying woman--is so unspeakable there are no words to describe the horror of it. Yet you know. And others know too. You will have to live with this until you die. May you never, ever forget. Ann.

Ann sent a copy of her note to the author, who had befriended her during her illness, with this accusation against her husband: "He is a killer. I know. Jean actually died of suffocation."

Deadly Compassion is a sad book. For, even if the co-founder of the Hemlock Society did in fact do more than "assist" in the death of his first wife, the arguments for euthanasia are not defeated by appeals to the immoral character or conduct of their proponents. At the same time the story of Ann Humphry does give pause. Compassion for the suffering and dying or convenience for the living? Admittedly medical technology has helped to create complex

The true act of compassion is...to resist the erosion of laws which protect the weak.

...and difficult situations for treatment and care of the dying. Yet, is the wise counsel of the Western medical-ethical tradition--"Always to care, Never to Kill"--not the only truly compassionate answer to our queries about treatment and our anxieties about abandonment? And is the clarity of the law--"Thou shalt not Kill"--not the absolutely necessary line of defense against all the myriad possibilities of abuse by advocates of "good death?"

Another point worth pondering. Much of the rhetoric coming from euthanasia is strikingly anti-Christian. Why? Perhaps because the Christian faith considers suffering a consequence of and punishment for human sin. Not all suffering is tied to specific sins of course but Christians do confess their share in a universal guilt and acknowledge a universally groaning creation. Furthermore Christians affirm that Christ has borne the curse of sin in his suffering and that his victory over death gives us hope: that is an encouragement for the sufferings of this age along with a vision of ultimate triumph over all suffering. For "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18)

But what about those who deliberately repudiate the Christian faith and its hope? Does the rejection of God and the substitution of the idol of self also make it difficult if not impossible to come to terms with human suffering? South African heart surgeon Dr. Christian Barnard at an international "Right-to-Die" Conference held in Nice in 1984 insisted that "The sufferings of Christ were meaningless. It was his life that had meaning... There was no purpose to the suffering." (p. 52) Barnard went on to say that in his experience as a doctor, "I have found that there is [no purpose to suffering]. Suffering never ennables. People who suffer never become better people as a result of it." He then added, "Is it playing God to interfere with the natural process in a terminally ill patient?" His answer: "If it's playing God to stop suffering, I don't think God would mind very much." Since life is
Editorial board during Forum gestation—under the watchful eye of John Calvin!

Front: L-R: Holwerda, Plantinga
Back: DeMoor, Weima.

From Dream to Forum

Welcome to the first issue of the Calvin Seminary Forum! A long cherished dream has now become a reality. We hope the reality lives up to the expectations of our dream.

WHY THE DREAM?

Professors like to be heard. In fact, that is their job. The church appoints seminary professors to teach the Word. To test the spirits of the age. And to train leaders who will build up the church and guide its ministry. Professors do such work all the time. But their words are heard mainly in the classroom, sometimes at synod, often in articles written for special journals, and even in books. Today that seems not to be enough.

We have heard voices in the church suggesting we are too silent. They mean, of course, we are too silent in the public arena of church discussions. Interestingly, in a recent selected survey of CRC church opinion, many respondents wanted to hear more from us. One of the most important services desired from us is that we "write popularly on church issues and religious matters." Well now...that also has been our desire. And the source of our dream.

Often in the past we have been silent not by choice but by necessity. There was no forum in which we could be heard. Other church papers and journals had their own agendas. Thus it became clear that we had to create a new forum. Thankfully, the Lilly Foundation agreed such a forum would be a significant way for the Seminary to serve the needs of the church. And a partial subsidy grant from the Lilly Foundation has made it possible to transform our dream into this reality: the Calvin Seminary Forum.

WHY THIS FORUM?

We have all been shocked by the rapidity of cultural change. How quickly the unthinkable becomes thinkable! When belief in God disappears, almost anything becomes possible. As society rejects Christian truth, the values of ancient paganism reappear: from witchcraft to Satanism, from spiritism to pantheism, from abortion to euthanasia. Shocking, isn’t it, how easily in a formerly Christian society paganism again raises its head?

The world in which the Christian Reformed Church exists is changing rapidly. Are we ready for it? Are we prepared for ministry to it? Do we know how to address our society? To challenge it? Do we have to change?

Although the church possesses and is possessed by the unchanging truth, its grasp of the truth is never perfect. Thus the church must always be reforming. Of course, reforma-

Our agenda is set by the Christian Reformed Church, by the questions and challenges affecting her life and ministry: questions about marriage, sexual morality, and homosexuality; questions about artificial insemination, abortion, and the right to die; questions about the structure of the church and its offices, women in office, and worship practices; questions about outreach and church growth, youth ministries, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of demonic forces. The questions go on and on. How do we think about such matters?

This magazine is a forum, a place where voices can be heard. Even though most of the voices will be those of seminary professors, we do welcome other voices. If you wish to join the discussion, we invite you to submit an article, a few paragraphs, or just a question or problem you think should be discussed. This Forum is intended to be a forum for the Christian Reformed Church.

We dedicate this Forum to the Lord of the church. We pray that He will use it to assist us in becoming more fully Christian and Reformed in our lives and in our ministry to the world.
Missions is SPIRITUAL WARFARE!!

One of the most controversial subjects being debated in mission circles has to do with spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare means essentially the struggle between Christ's Kingdom and Satan's, between truth and falsehood, between angels and demons. It is a conflict affecting believers in a variety of ways, particularly believers engaged in missionary activity.

Spiritual warfare takes many forms. Sometimes it involves encounters with demonized persons, exorcisms and prayers for healing. Basic to the spiritual warfare approach to missions is an awareness of the gospel's supernatural enemies. Demons, Satan's agents, oppose the gospel's messengers and try to disrupt the gospel's spread. Working through individuals and institutions they oppose truth and righteousness in all areas of life.

The image of spiritual warfare has a long history in both Scripture and church history. Ephesians 6:12 is the text most often quoted. In the Middle Ages, the Crusades were organized expressions of the spiritual warfare idea. Today, echoes of spiritual warfare themes are heard in hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus."

The domestic version of spiritual warfare runs throughout Frank Peretti's two popular novels, This Present Darkness, and Piercing the Darkness. In many church libraries these are among the most sought-after books.

Missionaries, particularly those working overseas, are often pictured as front-line soldiers of Christ, engaged in battle against Satan and his allies. An example of how missionar-

Roger S. Greenway
Former missionary to Sri Lanka and Mexico, has experienced firsthand the reality of missions as spiritual warfare. He alerts us to the importance and the dangers of this reality. He teaches world missions at Calvin Seminary.

During my years in Asia, I was often frustrated by the inadequacies of my Western-Reformed theological training. At that time there was scarcely a line of our theology books which addressed the realities of demon possession, the role of shamans, belief in ancestral spirits, and the practice of exorcism.

Yet I encountered all these things within days of our arrival on the mission field! Needless to say, I was not prepared to deal with them. My sermons failed to address issues that were real and troubling to my hearers. I could offer only feeble answers to many of their questions about the supernatural world. In their eyes I must have appeared very ignorant about spiritual realities and my praying very weak.

Therefore, I disregard the current discussion of spiritual warfare as very important. The church cannot afford to send out missionaries who are naïve about Satan or ill-prepared to engage in spiritual conflict. Given what is happening in North American society, the subject ought not to be brushed aside here either.

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spirits of each locale are engaged through power encounters.

Charles H. Kraft, a respected anthropologist and a faculty colleague of Peter Wagner at Fuller, served as a missionary to Nigeria. Kraft has described his missionary experience in terms of "Powerlessness." He worked with Nigerians who were very power-conscious people, but Kraft himself was unaware of the supernatural realities around him. And ill equipped to confront them. He was so committed to a Western, scientific worldview that he discounted healing prayer, miracles and demons as superstitions.

But Kraft's thinking changed radically when he began to see and to experience some of the things he formerly discounted. He now exercises the gift of healing and writes extensively on the practice of deliverance from evil spirits. He argues that the Kingdom of God must be proclaimed and demonstrated in terms of love and power. Miracles express both love and power.

Timothy M. Warner, professor of Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and former missionary to Sierra Leone, has published a book on the subject of spiritual warfare. In his writing and classroom lectures, Warner seeks to present a balanced, biblical view of the subject.

If you are balanced, says Warner, you get criticized from both sides—from the materialists who deny the supernatural and from the magicians who blame demons for everything. But stick with the Bible, he urges, even though being in the middle means continual attack from one side or the other.

Warner writes extensively about the influence demons can have on Christians. He offers suggestions as to how demonic presence can be detected in people. Like Wagner, he is concerned about the apparent powerlessness of large segments of the contemporary church and he calls for taking the offensive against satanic strongholds. Around the world, he observes, the church is growing wherever Christians demonstrate divine power in defeating the devil.

The Early Church, says Warner, took the subject of Satan and demons much more seriously than most Christians do today. Early candidates for baptism publicly renounced the devil and all his works and went through a form of exorcism as part of the baptism service. When we fail to take seriously demonic activity and do not apply the power of Christ against it, demons are free to carry on their deceptive work unchallenged.

Paul G. Hiebert, former missionary to India and professor of Anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School comments on the fact that Christians in the West are today strangely fascinated, or repelled, by the idea of spiritual warfare.

In the West, as a result of the Enlightenment, spiritual realities were consigned to the heavens and studied by religion, while everything connected with the material world was studied in science. This left a "middle zone," the realm of angels and demons, excluded from serious recognition. Many people labeled the world of spirits as fiction and superstition.

This had repercussions for Christian missions. Many missionaries dismissed what they heard about witchcraft, sorcery, magic, ancestral powers and demon possession as mere superstitions. They tried to explain away the visible evidences for such things with psychological or scientific arguments.
God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

How did Paul turn people from darkness to light and from Satan's power to God? invariably he did it by preaching the gospel, planting churches and praying for the Spirit's transforming work in the lives and hearts of believers. That, in short, was Paul's basic strategy.

In places like Ephesus, miracles and other extraordinary signs occurred and these authenticated Paul's ministry. But they were largely incidental to his main strategy. Not once did Paul launch a healing campaign. Never did Paul command others to cast out demons. But he instructed them to preach the word, teach the truth, pray without ceasing and live righteous lives.

Another area of divergence between New Testament missions and the spiritual warfare school has to do with the teaching regarding "territorial spirits." The proponents of this view continually hark back to Daniel 10, with its references to the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece. From this obscure passage the conclusion is reached that Satan assigns demons to control every geopolitical unit in the world and protect it against missionary advance.

This teaching is not found in the New Testament. As far as we know it played no role in Paul's missionary strategy. It is my judgment, therefore, that the proponents of spiritual warfare-missiology seriously jeopardize their position when they place so much emphasis on an idea lacking solid biblical support.

This leads to the most serious problem I have with at least one of the leaders proponents of spiritual warfare, namely, Charles Kraft. In Kraft's recent book, Defeating Dark Angels, he takes an entire chapter to promote the idea of "getting information from demons" by interviewing them. The purpose of these interviews is to gain knowledge of what Satan is up to and then use the information against him.

God reveals things to us, says Kraft, even through demons! The quickest way to get essential information that God wants us to have is often to get it from demons themselves. Listen to God first, he cautions, and then go to demons to learn more.

I cannot accept Kraft's argument gained from interviews with demons is not only foolish, because who could trust such information, it also insults God by implying that in order to do his will more effectively we should obtain information by consulting the devil. This denies, in effect, the sufficiency of Scripture.

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN WORKERS

With respect to spiritual warfare, missionaries and all Christian workers have much to learn. My first advice is to take seriously everything the Bible teaches about Satan and his kingdom. However, avoid the secular worldview of a Frank Peretti where demons are into everything.

Avoid going beyond Scripture in investigating Satan and his kingdom. We tread on forbidden territory when we build demonologies based on information obtained from demons or from pagan religions.

In every encounter with Satan's kingdom, keep in mind Christ's victory, and our own victory through Him. There is indeed a battle out there, and Christ wins it!

Build your prayer life, for that is where the real action is in spiritual warfare.

Prayer is not behind-the-lines-activity; prayer is frontline combat in spiritual warfare.

In his helpful book, Spiritual Warfare: Victory Over the Powers of This Dark World, Timothy Warner urges churches to upgrade their prayer programs, making sure that it rests on sound theology and a biblical, not a secular, worldview.

The bottom line in spiritual warfare, says Warner, may be whether we pray to a sovereign God who controls the universe and all the forces in it, and whether we believe he will give us victory over demonic powers.
SMEDES FOR PREACHERS

Working the border between academic and popular theological audiences is a cadre of gifted writers whose work possesses both spine and sparkle. Robert Farrar Capon, Philip Yancey, Robert Roberts, Richard Mouv, Peter Kreft, Frederick Buechner, and, of course, C. S. Lewis, attract lay people as well as academics because these authors wear their learning lightly and because their writing is alive with all the blood, joy, smoke, and pain of real human existence.

Like good translators, border workers must know at least two languages. They need to know the language and thought of the famous minds of intellectual history, even some of the bloated ones, and they also need to know the language of accountants, engineers, and advertising executives. They have to master classical theological themes so that they can play them fast or slow, upscale or down, in sharps or flats.

Calvin Theological Seminary alumnus (now Professor of Integrative Studies in the Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary) who has distinguished himself across a spectrum of ministries. Pastor, theologian, ethicist, preacher, professor, lecturer, award-winning author (reassuringly, he doesn’t play the French horn particularly well; in fact, he doesn’t play it at all), Lewis B. Smedes has published ten books. These include scholarly books (All Things Made New), popular ones (Forgive and Forget), and some that are both scholarly and popular (Merc Morality). What’s wonderful about Smedes is that even his scholarly work snaps and cracks and even his popular work defines, distinguishes, compares, contrasts, and elaborates in ways that suggest the Henry Stob school of theological precision.

Why should preachers read Smedes? To find models of vital writing, sharp thinking, and, plicities, and his general feel for language show the way for the rest of us preachers.

"A discerning person has the makings of a connoisseur," Smedes tells us--and, I might add, the makings of an apologist. When he is really hum- ming, Smedes writes proverbs: "A real gift never puts the receiver in debt." "Shame is heavy, grace is light." "Disown a child, and when she is older she will disown herself."

For a blend of wisdom, truth, and grace, try this from SG:

We should forgive in verbs, not in nouns. Forgive people for what they do, not for what they are. Retail forgiving is for us, not wholesale. It is hard enough to forgive anyone for doing a bad thing. It is almost impossible to forgive someone for being a bad person. Not even God forgives us for what we are. He forgives us for what we do and then accepts us for what we are.

Besides writing well, Smedes thinks straight too. For instance, in SG, a popular book, Smedes takes the time up front to define shame (a heavy feeling "that we do not measure up and maybe never will") and then to distinguish it from guilt, embarrassment, discouragement, depression, and frustration. He distinguishes healthy shame (a wakeup call from our true self) from unhealthy shame (a false alarm from a corrupted self). Interestingly, Smedes is more worried about people troubled by unhealthy shame they have picked up from secular culture, graceless religion, and unaccepting parents than he is about those happy-go-lucky types who feel no shame at all.

Of all the memorable distinctions in SG, one of the most important concerns grace. Smedes suggests that although every recipient of divine grace is undeserving, none is unworthy. In fact, God wants and redeems us just because of our worth to him. The result? We may sing "Amazing Grace" without feeling like wretches.

Smedes understands human character passionately. In this way he shows not only "cognitive discernment," but also "imaginative discernment" (a distinction I’m borrowing from APGP). He brings empathy to what he knows, and naturally enough: some things can’t be known without it. Discernment of the hopes and fears of other persons, for example, depends on compassion for them. Knowledge of these persons comes in to us only if our hearts go out to them. Only so can we see behind the status of divorce, for example, or homosexuality, or disability to discover complex persons who may possess gifts and wholenesses greater than their troubles, and unseen by the unloving.

The good Christian border writers help us preachers think, see, and feel. None helps us more sensitively, more intelligently, and more recently than Lew Smedes.

"When he is really humming, Smedes writes proverbs."

- Plantinga

all depending on their audience. Particularly, they have to play the great themes with grace and simplicity so that their greatness comes home to every soul with its windows open. "Any fool can write learned jargon," said C. S. Lewis. "The real test is the vernacular." The best border writers have passed the test.

Scoring in the 99th percentile of all test takers is a perhaps above all, a kind of humane, passionate Christian wisdom. Let me illustrate, using samples from just two recent books, A Pretty Good Person and Shame and Grace.

Smedes writes awfully well. Though in my judgment his Harper editors sometimes crop his paragraphs and buzz-cut his sentences too much for even a popular audience, Smedes' savvy examples, eloquent sim-
How should we face questions of demon possession and demonology? What resources does the Christian tradition offer to help us understand the status of the devil in our day?

In his classic study of the atonement, *Christus Victor*, Gustaf Aulen (1879-1978) brilliantly revives the idea that Christ's atoning work was a victory over the devil and the powers of evil. As Aulen sees it, the New Testament and the church fathers present the work of Christ as a victory over Satan and his hosts. Yet, with the notable exception of Martin Luther, the Christian theological tradition has neglected this central biblical motif. In place of the biblical and patristic ideas of spiritual conflict and victory, says Aulen, medieval theologians and their heirs posted a legalistic relationship between God and humans, so that atonement depended on humanity's making a payment to satisfy the demands of God's justice.

In Christ, making a payment to satisfy the demands of God's justice.

Despite the value of his retrieval of the important biblical idea of Christ's victory over evil, Aulen's interpretation of the history of atonement doctrine is not supported by the evidence. The idea of Christ's victory over the evil powers is clearly present even in the fountainhead of medieval reflection on the atonement, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). Both biblical and traditional depictions of Christ as the victor over evil provide an important insight into the work of Christ.

In his classic work on the atonement, *Why God Became Man*, Anselm makes three important points regarding the devil. First, the devil has no rights even over fallen humanity. The devil did not earn the right to torment humanity; nor was he appointed by God to do so. Although it was just for humanity to suffer torment for disobeying God, it was not just for the devil to take upon himself the job of doing the tormenting. Still, in his "incomprehensible wisdom" God permitted the devil, who remains one of God's subjects, to hold humanity captive. Second, Anselm observes that the primary problem for fallen humanity is its alienation from God, not its captivity to the devil. The captivity of fallen humanity is a consequence of a more basic problem: we have sinned against God and therefore deserve condemnation. Only a full satisfaction for sin can release us from the wrath of condemnation against us.

Third, Anselm suggests that Christ overcame the devil through his obedience. In fact, humans were created to honor God and overcome the devil by not sinning. So one way in which Christ takes our place is by overcoming the devil by means of his sinless obedience.

Both Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin also affirm that part of the atoning work of Christ involved his defeat of the powers of evil. Here they echo scripture, which speaks of Christ's having defeated and dismantled the principalities and powers and making a public example of them (Col. 2:15), of his having cast out the ruler of this world (John 12:31), and of his reignaling until he defeats all his enemies, including death (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Therefore nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37-39).

So Aulen is correct in noting the importance of Christ's victory over the devil and his hosts. But he is deeply mistaken in his claim that major Christian theologians, including Anselm, ignore the important biblical theme that Christ emerged from the grave victorious over the powers of evil. Rather, without ignoring this theme, Anselm recognizes that the fundamental human problem is alienation from God, not captivity to the devil. Thus, when Christ reconciled us to God, he also thereby freed us from our captivity to the hosts of evil.

What lessons are there for us in Christ's defeat of Satan and his hosts? First, we must recognize that whatever power or force they may appear to have, the evil powers have been defeated. They are a spent force. Their activity is subject to the reign of the victorious Christ. Although they were only rebellious creatures, and thus never were a serious threat to the almighty God, they have now been publicly defeated as well.