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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# FORUM

FALL 2007



## The Work of the Holy Spirit

# FORUM

Providing Theological Leadership  
for the Church

Volume 14, Number 3  
Fall 2007

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# from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I write, I'm looking out at a perfect September afternoon. Everything is soft sunshine, fragrant air, green trees and grass. A northern September has long seemed to me the one month that almost perfectly balances promise with loss. Students start a new term and also store their beach umbrellas. Teachers gain a class of fresh students and also lose their summer's liberty. People plant grass seed, knowing that shorter, sunny days will alternate with longer, cooler nights and that their new grass will take root just before an October frost puts it to sleep.

In September you think about aging. September is deep middle age, a time that suggests more is gone and less is left. Carl Jung apparently had a theory to the effect that a person voyages and discovers till middle age. Anything is still possible. But then, one day, one week, one September, you reach an apex and look down the other side and you know that you will die. "As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more."

Fall is therefore a fine time to think on the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life."

In this issue, colleagues and I raise a number of questions about the Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit? What do we make of the fact that the Spirit seems to have a comparatively thin personal profile in the Bible? If the Holy Spirit is at war with the principalities of "this present darkness," how might we experience his protective power? How might preachers, in particular, experience it? Or worshipers?

More questions: If the Spirit gives life, what must we make of prayers for life that seem to come back unopened? Does this mean something was wrong with the prayer or that the person praying was somehow unfaithful? What about the Third Wave movement, in which people claim to hear the voice of God directly and spontaneously and in which some of the more dramatic work of the Holy Spirit (deliverance from evil powers, for example) is regularly claimed? On the other side of the street, how can we retrieve a "mundane" view of the Spirit as the giver of our every breath and brainwave?

Our questions arise not from doubt, but from faith seeking understanding. I know you will seek it too.

Grace and peace.

# REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## The Secret Agent

Think about the Holy Trinity and your head may start to hurt. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Three persons, but only one God. It occurs to you that you do not know how to picture this three-and-one. Who *is* this mysterious being? How many of him are there? Do you imagine a single transcendent person so versatile that he can create, redeem, and cleanse like a fresh wind? Can he do these things simultaneously? Just one person who, so to say, wears three hats or plays three roles? Alternatively, do you imagine a small transcendent committee, just three members, of perfect equality but voluntary division of labor? Or should you picture one of them as largely in charge, sending the others on various errands into the wilderness? Or is the whole project of trying to picture God in these ways futile and maybe impious? Or what?

For centuries Christians have reflected on this central mystery of the nature of God, searched the Scriptures, and brought forward the fruit of their search. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, says simply, "Three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God" (Q&A 25).

There you are. Three distinct persons; one true God. That is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It can be stated in eight words, but the words hide great riches and mysteries.

One of the mysteries is that the biblical portrait of one of the persons seems hazier

than those of the other two. The Father and the Son have family names. The Holy Spirit does not. "Father" and "Son" are clearly the names of personal beings, capable of interpersonal relationships. "Spirit" is ambiguous. It might refer to a personal being, such as an angel: "the seven spirits before his throne." But, then again, it might also refer to a person's character (he has a generous spirit), or vitality (she played with such spirit!), or mood (his spirit sagged). Sometimes "spirit" refers to a person's influence, as when we say that the spirit of Lincoln still hangs over Gettysburg.

A spirit can be a person, but a spirit can also be a quality of a person. This makes Bible translators twitch. When Paul writes to the Romans (1:4) that Jesus

by Cornelius  
Plantinga, Jr.,  
President



was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness," should "spirit" be spelled with a big "S" or a little one? Is Paul speaking of a person or of a quality of a person? Bible writers often tell us about the Spirit *of*. It's the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ that we read about. Is this a person, like the Christ of God? Or is this a quality of a person, like the love of God, the glory of

God, the name of God?

Still further, the New Testament writers sometimes refer not to the Holy Spirit, but to Holy Spirit (without the definite article). Both Jesus (Luke 4:1) and the believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) were filled with Holy Spirit. Mary became pregnant of Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18), and believers are baptized in Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16). This last expression, like God's promise "I will pour out from my Spirit" (Acts 2:17), suggests that the Spirit is being thought of as something like a fluid.

The Spirit is called "God" at most once in the Bible (Acts 5:3). Bible writers say of Jesus Christ that he is equal with God, in the form of God, in the image of God, and that he bears the stamp of God's being. But they do not say any of these things about the Holy Spirit. John tells us repeatedly of the love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father. But he never tells anything about the Spirit's love

We worship one God  
in trinity and the  
Trinity in unity.



**The Secret Agent**

▶ for the Father or the Son, either as giver or receiver. Finally, and most significantly, the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is never an object of worship or prayer. All prayers there are directed to the Father and the Son. We contemporary Christians do pray to the Holy Spirit (think of all the Holy Spirit hymns that are prayers), but it took centuries of tradition to get us into the habit.

The general biblical portrait of the Holy Spirit is somewhat indistinct. The Holy Spirit is the Holy Ghost of the Trinity. Using a lovely image, my former pastor, John Timmer, likes to speak of the Holy Spirit as “the shy member of the Holy Trinity.”

So how did the church come to confess that the Holy Spirit is a person, a divine person, a fitting object of prayer and worship along with the Father and the Son? Did the church fathers figure that if Scripture gave them only 2.7 persons of a trinity they might as well round up to 3?

No. There are good biblical reasons why the Holy Spirit “with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.” I’ll give five of them.

First, while biblical authors sometimes describe the Holy Spirit in language that could be read impersonally, the rest of the time they use strongly personal language for the Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to believers (Acts 21:11), searches the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:10), teaches the disciples and reminds them of things Jesus had said (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit can be lied to (Acts 5:3), and can also be grieved (Eph. 4:30), which strongly suggests that the Spirit is not only a person, but also a person who loves and whose love can be wounded. In a sentence of great mystery and beauty Paul tells us that when we don’t know how to pray, then the Holy Spirit intercedes for us “with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26).

Second, while the Holy Spirit can sometimes seem more anonymous than the

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secret agent—a very  
powerful one.*

Father or the Son, he nonetheless does extraordinary work. He’s a kind of secret agent—a very powerful one. So the gospels tell us that the Holy Spirit is the one who begets Jesus Christ within Mary (Matt. 1:18). The Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove, to identify him, and then remains on him (John 1:32-33). The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness, where the wild things are, so that Jesus may be strengthened for the start of his ministry (Mark 1:12-13). After Jesus’ ascension, the Spirit (“another Counselor”) unites believers with their “Abba” (Gal. 4:6), inspires believers to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), and directs and empowers the mission of the apostles just as Jesus had done for the disciples (Rom. 15:19). The Holy Spirit imparts life, freedom, glory, deliverance—all the benefits of the saving work of Jesus. He performs actions only God performs: he breaks the power of sin in people (Rom. 8:2), sanctifies them (15:16), frees them to be children of God and to recognize themselves as such (8:15-16), and sparks in them faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:9). He generates both supernatural gifts (1 Cor. 12) and supernatural fruit (Gal. 5).

Third, Paul makes much of our union with Jesus Christ. He often says we believers are “in Christ” and that Christ is “in us.” What’s interesting is that he also states,

with seemingly no difference in meaning, that we are “in the Spirit” and that the Spirit is “in us.” The ascended Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons, but much of their work is functionally equivalent. Consider this: In Romans 8:26, as we saw, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Eight verses later, Paul says exactly the same thing about Jesus Christ, “who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”

Fourth, the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed (Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10). Indeed, in Mark’s gospel Jesus calls blasphemy against the Holy Spirit an unforgiveable sin. Blasphemy is, generally speaking, an act of verbally injuring someone who is divine—usually God the Father. So when Jesus warns us against blaspheming the Holy Spirit, he is in effect warning us against injuring God.

Finally, the New Testament contains at least a dozen “tridic formulas.” These are places where the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit appear together. Perhaps the most famous is Jesus’ Great Commission—“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). But there are a number of others too, almost all of which are in the writings of Paul. A famous one is often used as a benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Cor. 13:13) A natural conclusion here is that if “Father” names a distinct divine person and “Son” does too, then so does “the Holy Spirit.”

These and other considerations have led the church to worship and glorify the shy member of the Holy Trinity right along with the other two. No person of the Trinity is God alone. Each is God only with the other two. “The only true God” is the Holy Trinity itself. And so, as the Athanasian Creed says, we worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity.



# The Work of the Holy Spirit

*On August 22, 2007, five CTS faculty members sat down to discuss the Reformed understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, led by Vice President for Administration Duane Kelderman. The discussion included Professor of Systematic Theology John Bolt, Professor of Philosophical Theology John Cooper, Professor of Preaching Mary Hulst, and Director of Continuing Education Kathy Smith.*

**Kelderman:** What's so important about the work of the Holy Spirit?

**Hulst:** Without it we do nothing. It's the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us that animates everything we do—not just what we do in the church, but in our everyday lives.

**Cooper:** To put it another way, I think the Holy Spirit is behind everything in creation and everything in recreation. The well-known Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper taught that the Holy Spirit is involved in every square inch of creation, even beyond the Christian church. If trees are alive, if Adolf Hitler's heart kept beating—that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Bolt:** It's one of the theological areas still on the agenda of the Christian church. In the early church we worked through the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ; in the Middle Ages we worked through the doctrine of Christ's atonement; in the Reformation we dealt with

questions of justification. But there has not been that kind of broad ecumenical work and agreement on the doctrine and work of the Holy Spirit. And then the twentieth century comes along and we have this phenomenal development of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. The church today is just bursting with evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Experientially there is so much evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work in dramatic ways in the last one hundred years. That's why the view that extraordinary gifts like speaking in tongues and prophecy were just for the age of the apostles is simply indefensible. That doesn't mean that everything that seems to be a wonder and a powerful working of the Holy Spirit has to be accepted as such. We still are called to be discerning in view of what Scripture teaches about it. But we have to put our theological arms around this powerful evidence of the Holy Spirit.

**Smith:** Another reason it's on the agenda is not just what the Holy Spirit is doing in the church, but also the fact that spirituality of

all sorts is on the world's agenda. In different religions, in people creating their own religions, in the heightened awareness of spiritual things in general—the church is more aware of spirituality, how it's expressed, and how we think about it.

**Kelderman:** Years ago someone told me to go through the Heidelberg Catechism and underline all the times the Holy Spirit is mentioned. It's pretty amazing to see how the Holy Spirit is involved in every facet of life and salvation. So what does it mean when the Catechism says that the Holy Spirit enables us to “share in Christ and all his blessings”?

**Bolt:** The first thing is the benefit accomplished by Christ in his atonement: the full payment of sin. To share in Christ's benefits is to be forgiven and empowered to be the imagebearers of God we were created to be.

**Cooper:** It's also regeneration and union with Christ. It's the new birth of John 3. The old nature is transformed into



**Work of the Holy Spirit**



the new, though the old still hangs on. But we are new creations. That's the work of the Holy Spirit—a supernatural miracle. This is a charismatic miracle—the regeneration of a human heart like mine—and it happens all the time in the Christian church.

**Kelderman:** Is the fruit of the Spirit also a charismatic miracle?

**Hulst:** Yes. It's all part of the regeneration. Without that miracle of the Holy Spirit none of us has love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. I think it's really miraculous when you see the transformation happening in a person. And it happens all the time!

**Bolt:** That is the understanding Reformed folks have had of the baptism in the Spirit—that in the Christian life there are times of special empowerments, special baptisms, special anointings of the Holy Spirit in which we are renewed and strengthened in our faith. And those happen over time in a person's life, and more than one time. So to pray for baptism of the Spirit is to be praying for regular anointing of the Spirit that we may be more Christlike.

**Kelderman:** In the Heidelberg Catechism the phrase "Word and Spirit" appears frequently. Why do Reformed people pair up those two words?

**Hulst:** One of the correctives we want to give to those who might say, "God told me this," or, "The Spirit told me that," is to check that out against the Word and the Christian community.

**Cooper:** We also speak of Word and Spirit because of the Trinity. The whole Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is involved in creation, redemption, and recreation. "Word and Spirit" doesn't just mean the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The Word is the second person in the Trinity and is incarnate in Jesus Christ, and the second and the third persons work together with the first person. Some of the problems in Christianity come when you get Father religion without Son and Spirit,



**John Bolt:** The church today is just bursting with evidence of the Holy Spirit.

or Son religion without the others. A danger of Pentecostalism is to focus on Spirit, but leave the Father and Son in the background.

**Bolt:** Let's also not forget 2 Timothy 3:16. "Scripture is God-breathed." Scripture came into existence through the active work of God the Holy Spirit.

**Kelderman:** My seminary professor Henry Stob said, "The Holy Spirit rides the back of Scripture."

**Cooper:** That's right. *And* Scripture came into existence on the back of the Holy Spirit, so it's a symbiotic relationship.

**Kelderman:** Reformed folks are sometimes perceived to be really weak on the Holy Spirit. Yet when you look through our tradition there is so much richness of the Holy Spirit. Are we not embracing our own theology?

**Bolt:** I think that's part of it. We have to acknowledge Christians who go to church and coast along, and then all of a sudden go to a retreat, read a book, or have a crisis and then think, "I didn't have this power of the Spirit before that I have now," rather than make judgments about their past or about their church. Indeed, if we are not encouraging a full Spirit life in our churches all along the way, we're going to have these kinds of reactions.

**Cooper:** I think that there is both room for growth in the CRC and also a tremendous forgetfulness about our rich tradition of the Holy Spirit. Today we don't have a *mundane* enough view of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. The Spirit is there in Genesis 1, the Spirit makes trees grow and hearts beat, the Spirit gives people intellectual and artistic and engineering gifts and teaches farmers how to farm. We also don't appreciate how much our forebears were deeply pious and spiritual. Abraham Kuyper's devotional book *To Be Near Unto God* is about as spiritual and charismatic and mystical as anything in the Christian tradition. Perhaps we don't emulate these Reformed people enough and believe what they did about the Holy Spirit, but that's forgetfulness about our own tradition. It's important to realize that these deeply pious and spiritual people were also very ordinary people who had hard lives and simply trusted God. They got up in the morning and prayed and went to very difficult kinds of work and came home and didn't know if they were going to have enough money or if their health would be there next year or if their kids were going to live another year. These people had a living faith, but they didn't pray six hours a day and didn't have tongues and words of knowledge and weren't full of bursts of spiritual energy. I think the living faith—the life-bearing, sustaining faith of those hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people over the last four centuries—that's the work of the Holy Spirit! I'm not going to look down on that just because it isn't flashy.

**Kelderman:** This is exactly the message of Eugene Peterson, who admits he's the guru of spirituality but says the first thing we need to do is get rid of the word "spirituality" because it gives this notion of something other-worldly, not part of our normal day-in, day-out lives.

**Smith:** Isn't it ironic that those saints who truly relied on the Holy Spirit every moment of their lives didn't talk about it very much? Today we talk about the Spirit a lot, but in fact our understanding of the Holy Spirit may not be as substantive as it was for people who talked about it very little.

**Kelderman:** Let's talk about the power of the Holy Spirit from a more global perspective. It seems like our missionaries testify more to dramatic power encounters between light and darkness than we do in North America. Does the enemy manifest himself in different ways in different cultures, and then does God respond in different ways in different cultures?

**Hulst:** I disagree with your premise. The power of the enemy is not only just as real but just as visible here as it is anywhere in the world. I served pretty much a white bread Christian Reformed Church and was very aware of the powers of the enemy and the powers of darkness in that place, though they manifest themselves in different ways. When you are dealing with domestic violence, adultery, and addictions of different kinds, you may not actually have a demon screaming at you, but they are just as real, and you are in need of the power of the Holy Spirit in those situations as much as in Indonesia. All you need to do is read *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis to understand that the power of the enemy is real and it's subtle. One of the things that I've found in preaching is that you constantly have to call people's attention to where the enemy is working right in their midst.



**John Cooper:** This is a charismatic miracle—the regeneration of a human heart like mine—and it happens all the time in the Christian church.

**Cooper:** I agree. I also think that North American Christianity turned off on the realm of angels and demons after the historic Salem witch trials. We can be as pious as the day is long and say, “I believe in angels,” but we don't think they do anything. Folks in third-world situations who come from a spiritist background of shamanism or primal religion are really tuned into this kind of stuff.

At the same time, I think we have to be very savvy about the fact that almost all the Charismatic gifts claimed by Christians also occur in shamanism or in spiritism, and in manifestations that may be like shamanism more than they are like any biblical expressions of the Holy Spirit. Take, for example, the idea that there are territorial demons that you have to name and locate to cast them out. There's not a word about that in the Bible, but that's a common practice in shamanism. The Shaman is the one who is able to do that. He is the master of the spiritual world. Animal noises, laughter, being smitten when touched by the spiritual guru, speaking in tongues, healings, inflicting curses on people—this kind of stuff occurs regularly in many other religions. We have to have a very discerning spirit. People who are involved in the Pentecostal and Third Wave Movement realize that they must discern the spirits precisely because there are all these counterfeits. I wonder how savvy we are about these kinds of things. I think this is some of what our colleagues Ruth Tucker and Mariano Avila were trying to warn synod about in their minority report. (See article by David Holwerda on p. 11.)

**Kelderman:** Let's talk about how the Holy Spirit is involved in worship and preaching.

**Hulst:** There is a lot of experiential understanding of worship right now. If the music is good and the preaching is good, then the Holy Spirit has been there that day. I think that we need to be really clear that sometimes worship can be not so good and the Holy Spirit is just as present. It is not our experience that determines whether or not the Holy Spirit is in the house. The Holy Spirit is in the house because that's what happens in worship. Human experience is not the barometer of the presence of God.



**Duane Kelderman:** It's pretty amazing to see how the Holy Spirit is involved in every facet of life and salvation.

**Bolt:** And there is also the idea that planned spontaneity is more an instance of the Holy Spirit's presence than a carefully prepared prayer or sermon.

**Hulst:** Every preacher has had the experience of offering a sermon that isn't the best. It's the Hamburger Helper of the kitchen of God. It's going to do the job, but it's not filet mignon. You get up there and do your best with it. At the end you are hanging your head a little bit in the back of the sanctuary, and invariably it's after those sermons that someone comes up and says, “Wow, God really spoke to me today with that message.” You have enough of those experiences as a preacher not only to make sure your humility is well in place, but also to be aware that this is not about you as a preacher—something else is going on.

**Kelderman:** I hate to be the skunk at the lawn party, but . . . While I don't disagree with anything that has been said here, the fact is that we have people leaving the CRC in significant numbers. We can quickly scapegoat these folks and say they misunderstand the riches of their own heritage. But that won't do. When I ask people, “Why did you leave?” often the theme that runs through their answers is, “You know, I just ached to see the power of God, but in the church I was going to



**Work of the Holy Spirit**

► Sunday after Sunday I didn't see it. The minister, the worship leaders, the congregation as a whole—no one seemed to really believe things deeply. A lot of going through the motions." We have a problem here. People, particularly young people, are leaving the CRC. They are yearning to see the power of God.

**Hulst:** I think we have been weak at testimony. We don't know how to articulate what God is doing in our lives. We don't know how to talk about it with each other. Testimony is bearing witness to the power of God in your life. I think one way we can revive worship and congregational life is to incorporate the power of testimony.

**Smith:** Maybe that would open us more to the practice of inviting a word from the Lord. That's a practice in other traditions that then moves toward what we might call extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. Moving from offering testimonies to "who has a Word from the Lord this morning?" is not that big a step and would be a good practice to develop.

**Cooper:** Certainly we can't scapegoat these people who are leaving the CRC. We have to take a long, hard look at ourselves. In my own experience the parallel between physical health and spiritual health is illuminating. I can take my health for granted

and eat what I want; or I can watch my diet and work out, to enhance the gift of health I have been given. One of the essential marks of the Christian life is taking up your cross and growing in Christ-likeness. But many of us are satisfied with a status quo kind of Christianity where we are not taking the gift and cultivating it. I think vitality and growth are what people find missing when they leave the church, but what they're missing then is not some special charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit as much as the ordinary fruits of regeneration. I think many of us are spiritual couch potatoes—perhaps the majority in some congregations.

**Hulst:** A lot of people go to worship as spiritual couch potatoes. "It's up to you, worship leader, to get me fired up, get me going." But worship is the work of the people and we need to enter it expecting to do something too to make it flourish. When you have a preacher who doesn't hit it out of the park every week, how do you actively listen to those sermons for the presence of God? How do you actively worship if the music isn't to your particular taste? Is it "what did you get out of worship," or "what did you bring into worship?" We need to take responsibility for the growth of our spirituality in worship.

**Bolt:** We also may be failing to make clear our humble reliance on the Holy Spirit. We're Calvinists—we are "can do" people in the context of American "can do-ism." I don't think we always give the impression of being a church that is lost without God's Spirit working in us.

**Kelderman:** Let's talk a little about the Holy Spirit and prayer.

**Hulst:** I had a conversation recently with an elder who was talking about the efficiency with which their chair of elders got them through their meetings. I asked how much time they spent praying in those meetings. She said, "At the beginning and the end." I asked, "And how much time are you talking about what's going on in the church and the struggles that people are having?" She said, "Well, we're really not doing that." I replied, "Your efficiency may be trumping your spiritual leadership." If



**Kathy Smith:** How extraordinary is the ordinary work, or how ordinary is the extraordinary work, of the Holy Spirit throughout our lives!

we are not going before God in prayer and bringing up the needs of our congregation as their spiritual leaders, how can we expect to lead the people of God well and wisely? If we don't cultivate spiritual leaders who are people of prayer and passion, we are not going to be as sensitive to the Holy Spirit as we need to be.

**Kelderman:** We need to challenge one another to a deeper and fuller life of prayer without reducing prayer to another program in the church. It's difficult because we do need programs for prayer—systematic teaching and practice and accountability for a life of vital prayer. But at the same time we have to be careful to acknowledge that the people with the deepest prayer life in our congregations usually had that life of prayer long before and will have that life of prayer long after a specific program to make a congregation pray better. I don't want to put down programs for prayer renewal. I also don't want to overlook scores of saints in every congregation who truly walk with God in prayer but just don't broadcast it.

**Smith:** There's that theme again—how extraordinary is the ordinary work, or how ordinary is the extraordinary work, of the Holy Spirit throughout our lives!



**Mary Hulst:** The power of the enemy is not only just as real but just as visible here as it is anywhere in the world.

# Bright Wings: The Ever-Moving Spirit

**A**cross the years whenever I deposited a sermon into my files, I typically paperclipped to the sermon a copy of that week's church bulletin. At the top of such bulletins, I had jotted down a list of members in need whose names I wanted to include in that Sunday's pastoral prayer. So when I upon occasion looked up one of my old sermon manuscripts, I'd see also a roster of people for whom I once prayed. But upon reading through the list, I'd realize that a good many of those people were now dead—indeed, most had died of the very disease we prayed God would heal. Of course, there were any number of people on those same lists who had been healed or who did go on to have a successful surgery or whose troubled pregnancy turned out just fine. But seeing those old prayer lists was like peering through a window into the past—a past that included wonderful answers to prayer and more disappointing outcomes as well.

All pastors know that praying in public worship involves a certain pastoral risk. We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit; and we pray that God's Spirit will be active in the congregation to cure diseases, to mend fractured marriages, to return wayward children, to bring forth healthy infants, and to keep those little ones safe as they grow up in a dangerous world. What's more, we pray specifically. We don't pray that the Holy Spirit take care of cancer in general but rather that God will work by his Spirit to cure *Harold's* cancer. We don't offer up bland petitions to the effect that we want marriage as an institution to remain vibrant, but rather we pray for *Katie and Nick*, who were united in marriage last Friday evening.

Each time pastors invoke the power of the Holy Spirit, they render themselves vulnerable to subsequent questions

that could arise if Harold is not cured or if Katie and Nick's marriage falls dismally apart. Indeed, the questions become more acute when savvy observers notice that the Holy Spirit's work in response to our prayers seems a bit random. Why did the Spirit work healing in the body of Jill but not of Harold when we prayed for the healing of each person in the same Sunday morning prayer?

What is to prevent a cynic from claiming that what Christians call answered prayers are really little more than random happenstance? Since few of us claim that the Spirit works according to our prayers 100 percent of the time, how can we connect the dots between a given prayer for healing and a subsequent healing that did in fact come? If we cannot account for the healing that did *not* come, how can we be

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sure we are correct to claim as God's work a healing that *did* come?

These are dicey questions borne of pain. Tragically, some theologians and pastors deal with this by saying that when we pray for a working of the Spirit that then does not come to pass, something was wrong with the prayer—or with the person offering the prayer. The Holy Spirit will respond to the prayer

of a righteous person who offers up a prayer radiant with faith-filled confidence and power. So if a prayer goes “unanswered,” we know where to lay the blame. Pastorally, however, I find blaming the pray-er to be a little sub-compassionate.

Others claim that whether or not there is anything lacking in the prayer or in the faith of the one offering the prayer, sometimes we are not discerning enough to pray according to the will of God. So we pray for things that, for some mysterious reason, are at variance with God's plan. Again, however, it's a bit difficult to see how God could be pro-cancer or pro-brokenness such that we could ever be sawing against the grain of God's will to pray for the eradication of such things.

A better approach may be to claim that prayer ushers us into the mysteries of God and into realms where even the most Spirit-filled person can see no better than “through a glass darkly.” When we pray, we abandon ourselves to the working of God in the midst of a world where any given situation is fraught with more complexity than we know. So we pray for something that, all things considered, is good and desirable—even if we cannot know for certain whether that good and desirable outcome will come to pass. It's not that our prayers are faulty or

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**Bright Wings** ▶

that our faith is weak, but instead we recognize that the Spirit's work in response to prayer may be more nuanced than we often realize.

One of the most striking ideas to emerge from twentieth-century science is the so-called "butterfly effect." Scientists have concluded that the physical world is so intricately interconnected on myriad levels that it is no exaggeration to claim that the flapping of a butterfly's wing over Bangladesh on Tuesday morning could have something to do with the whipping up of a thunderstorm over London the next Sunday afternoon. As it turns out, the universe is a vast web, and the slightest vibration on one part of the web eventually reverberates through the whole.

Who but God could possibly keep track of physical (and spiritual) interconnections so vast as to approach the infinite? Only the Holy Spirit is nimble enough to navigate such overlapping and interconnected avenues. Christians believe that the Spirit is constantly active and is always responsive to our prayers, even as we admit that it's difficult to see the myriad aspects of the Spirit's work. There may well be a kind of spiritual "butterfly effect": What looks to us to be an odd response to our prayers—or perhaps what looks to be a non-response to our prayers—achieves a larger effect after all (even if we may never quite grasp what that larger, good effect is).

But a question remains: Are we right to celebrate as a work of the Spirit those times when bodies are healed or lives are put back together in response to our petitions? Yes! The Spirit of God is both responsive to our prayers and active through them. If we did not believe that, we would not pray.

However, are those more dramatic instances of the Spirit's work the limit of the Spirit's power? If we celebrate only visible manifestations of the Spirit on those occasions when we get what we asked

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for, we may inadvertently send the signal that in the ordinary run of life—not to mention when life's bottom falls out—the Spirit is not present or active. That would be a mistake.

God always gives his Spirit to those who pray; and the Spirit that is given is a vibrant, incessantly active presence who works wonders, gives gifts, shores up faith, and comforts those in grief whether or not we witness one of those more powerful manifestations of the Spirit that tends to make congregations rise to their feet and applaud. Perhaps, even, we diminish the

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power of the Spirit if we limit that Spirit's work to *only* those occasions when a tangible, dramatic event takes place.

Let us confess instead that the Spirit of God is as gloriously at work when a baby is born after an "uneventful pregnancy" as when a baby is born after a fragile pregnancy over which a congregation had prayed much. Let us confess that we have reason to give God glory for the work of the Spirit as much when tumors mysteriously disappear as when they are eradicated through six months of chemotherapy and radiation. Let us confess that the Spirit is at work as much when someone's life is spared from harm as when a family holds a deeply Christian funeral for one who died despite our most ardent prayers that he would not.

Of course, some could allege that if the Spirit is everywhere in general, then it's difficult to celebrate the Spirit's presence anywhere in specific. Don't we run the risk of shortchanging the Spirit if we claim as much enthusiasm for the Spirit's work at a deathbed as at the bedside of someone who was inexplicably healed? We certainly do not want to take the Pentecostal wind out of the sails of proper celebrations of those miracles that God works today. But neither do we wish to convey the message that absent such miracles, people cannot be full to the brim of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes looking back on my old prayer lists makes me sad—I still miss the saints for whose healing I prayed before the congregation. But even in that sadness the Holy Spirit of God reminds me that the Spirit's work does not end at death nor is that work absent when life is difficult. As Gerard Manley Hopkins so well phrased it in his poem "God's Grandeur," sometimes, in even the darkest places of our lives, we spy that divine Spirit who broods over our bent world "with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."



# The Neo-Pentecostal Movement Encounters the Third Wave

**Note:** In this article David Holwerda gives a detailed explanation of the Christian Reformed Church's evaluation of Pentecostal movements, including the latest discussions of the Third Wave at Synod 2007. For those interested, the full text of the reports from 1973 and 2007 can be found at [www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm).

The twentieth century was a “gifts of the Spirit” century. It began with the Pentecostal Movement claiming the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues, miracles of healing, and prophecy. Midway into the century the acknowledgment of these gifts began to penetrate the walls of denominations that previously had looked at them with suspicion. This led to the Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement, sometimes called the Second Wave. The closing decades of the century witnessed the beginnings of another movement which many call the Third Wave. It emphasizes hearing the voice of God directly through listening prayer and prophecy, healing and deliverance ministries, and spiritual warfare that involves both truth and power encounters with the demonic realm.

To evaluate the Second Wave, the synod of the CRCNA appointed a study committee and accepted its report in 1973. Recently, another study committee was appointed to consider the Third Wave, and it submitted two reports to Synod 2007—one from a majority of the committee members and one from the minority. Synod decided to recommit the majority report to a new committee for further biblical and theological reflection. But its action was not completely neutral toward the Third Wave. Synod basically agreed with “the gracious openness of the majority report” to the Third Wave. It decided not to give the new committee the minority report, which had recommended that “synod issue a strong warning against Third Wave as a movement that seriously affects foundational elements (biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical) of the CRCNA’s identity.” Synod

also asked the new study committee to consider key elements of the 1973 report and their relevance for the Third Wave.

Interestingly, both the majority and minority reports appealed directly to the 1973 report on the Second Wave. As a member of that 1973 committee, I was gratified by such appeals, but I wondered how both reports could make that claim. Were there unnoticed inconsistencies in the 1973 report, or were the different applications of that report due to differing assessments of Third Wave phenomena? I think it is primarily the latter.

I was asked to write an article on the relevance of the 1973 report for assessing the Third Wave. My intention is not to do the work of the study committee, but only to give the impressions of one who was involved in producing the 1973 report but has little first-hand experience of the Third Wave.

The most basic contribution of the 1973 report was its rejection of *cessationism*, that is, the belief that the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased with the death of the apostles and the close of the scriptural canon—when the church decided on the books to be included in the Holy Scriptures. Cessationism teaches that the scriptural record of miracles and teachings are sufficient as the foundation and guide for the church’s life and mission until Christ’s return. It emphasizes that the purpose of the extraordinary and miraculous gifts was to authenticate the apostles’ ministry and ceased with the conclusion of their ministry. The 1973 report, however, pointed out that such gifts also authenticate the gospel wherever

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it is preached, and are also given for the building up and equipping of the Body of Christ. So it concluded that the Holy Spirit is as free to give such gifts throughout history as in the first century. When certain gifts are claimed, the church’s task is to search the Scriptures to see whether the claim is true and to decide how to receive and use such gifts.

The key problem confronted by the 1973 report was the claim made by some, including some in the CRC, that speaking in tongues is necessary evidence of baptism in the Spirit. This problem is no longer an issue in the CRC, in the Third Wave, or even in certain parts of traditional Pentecostalism. However, the Second Wave also claimed many other extraordinary gifts, especially the gifts of healing and prophecy. So it was necessary for the 1973 report to examine all of the so-called “extraordinary” gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the New Testament. Although the Third Wave denies any direct dependence on the prior gift-movements, the phenomena of the gifts does continue, so this denial can only refer to the theological understanding of the gifts.

In order to address some of the biblical and theological issues raised by the Third Wave, I will consider the differences between the majority and minority reports submitted to Synod 2007.

The majority report recommends that synod “gratefully accept all the ways in which the movement manifests the work of the Spirit,” especially the gifts of the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit in various ways and on multiple

**Third Wave**

occasions. This recommendation stands in harmony with the anti-cessationism of the 1973 report. The minority report objects to the phrase “all the ways” as being too favorably inclusive. Although “all” could easily be dropped as possibly misleading, the phrase itself intends to include only those phenomena which the majority report considers the genuine work of the Spirit. In fact, the majority is critical of certain phenomena associated with the Third Wave. Actually, the two reports disagree on two of the eight recommendations presented by the majority: that we acknowledge the gift of prophecy today, and that we think of prayer as a dialogue.

Those with gifts of prophecy and dialogical prayer claim to receive messages from God. For this article, I will focus on the gift of prophecy. The majority report defines it as follows: “The spiritual gift of prophecy operates by receiving a word from the Lord as a special insight for a specific situation.” The report affirms that such prophecy “must be coupled with the gift and process of discernment and be regulated by ministry leadership.” It also distinguishes the gift of prophecy from preaching because preaching is the result of study and preparation, whereas prophecy is not directly tied to the study of Scripture. Appealing to the 1973 report, the minority report disagrees.

The 1973 report argued quite vigorously against a similar distinction in Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal teaching between “prepared prophecy” (preaching) and “compelled prophecy” (a direct message from God). It pointed to the fact that the Old Testament prophets themselves applied previously revealed Scripture to new situations, a task similar to the task of preaching. The 1973 report also rejected the notion that spontaneity is what distinguishes a message from God as a gift of the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the use of the intellect. The majority report expresses agreement with this principle, but it seems to depart from that same principle in its reasons for not including preaching in the gift of prophecy. The 1973 report followed a long Christian tradition in understanding the preached Word as the primary way of listening to the voice of God and thus an important part of the gift of prophecy. But

it did not foreclose the possibility of a sudden prophetic word like the one given to Paul in Acts 21:11 by the prophet Agabus. Why should we now restrict the gift of prophecy to the minor phenomenon in Scripture of a sudden prophetic word and exclude the basic and primary Christian understanding of prophecy? The difference between spontaneity and prepared study is not a legitimate reason.

One reason the minority report rings alarm bells about the majority’s limited definition of prophecy is because the defi-

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nition assumes prophecy to be new revelation and requires persons with the gift of discernment to judge its authenticity and authority. The minority report senses a necessary and almost inevitable connection between the emphasis on this gift and the call of some in the Third Wave for a new apostolic office to monitor the prophets. The majority report rejects the new apostolic movement and places it outside what it approves of Third Wave phenomena.

Finally, the minority report warns against the theology of power that rules the Third Wave’s concept of spiritual warfare. The minority report stresses the role of righteousness, truth, and suffering as the biblical way to overcome the Evil One—rather than naming demons and mapping their territorial rule in order to defeat them by exorcism. While the

majority report recognizes that an emphasis on power can negate the biblical emphasis on victory through suffering, it wishes to acknowledge power encounters and exorcisms and warn that these practices are a “dangerous area of ministry fraught with spiritual and theological risks.”

Much more could be written. I’ll conclude with some unsolicited words of advice and a question or two for the new study committee.

1. Large parts of the CRC (especially in North America) have little or no direct experience with Third Wave phenomena, so the spiritual phenomena must be characterized clearly (reflecting as much as possible actual experiences, including those of CRC members) so that the church knows what it is approving.
  2. It would be helpful if the new study committee would explain more fully both the gift of discernment and the identity of the ministry leadership that regulates or judges these matters. In addition, since some in the Third Wave prefer to call the phenomena a gift of knowledge rather than a gift of prophecy, it would be helpful to know why the former committee chose to call it prophecy.
  3. It would be helpful to describe deliverance ministries and to distinguish truth encounters from power encounters. A minor matter in this connection: Please clarify the 2007 report’s use of 1 John 4:1 as possibly referring to more than a truth encounter even though the following verses clearly make truth the test. In addition, assuming that the author of 1 John and the Gospel of John are the same, it may be significant that John’s Gospel is the only one without an exorcism. John’s emphasis is on love, truth, righteousness, and suffering.
  4. Although the 2007 report holds that believers cannot be demon-possessed, it speaks of believers being inhabited by demons. What is the basis for and meaning of this distinction?
- The task of analyzing and testing the gifts and work of the Spirit is an invigorating and serious challenge. We should all pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance of and blessing upon the committee assigned to this task.

# It's Not Even My Fight!

*At the time this issue of Forum was being developed, one of our students gave a testimony to the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit in our most trying moments in ministry.*

A few months ago, I was asked to preach at Calvin College's Sunday evening LOFT (Living Our Faith Together) worship service. On that particular Sunday, Calvin was planning for a visit from Equality Riders, a national group that challenges Christian colleges to be Christlike in their dealings with gay and lesbian students. Obviously this is a polarizing issue with many different dimensions. During the week leading up to the worship service, I received several comments from different people, some humorous and some serious, highlighting the significance of the occasion. One jokingly asked, "So, have you found the perfect text yet?" Another advised, "Just preach grace!" And yet another said, "Stand firm on the Word of God." As hard as I tried to stay focused and prayerful in my sermon preparation, by Friday all the social noise had gotten the best of me, and I was trapped in my own fears and pride: "Did I choose the right text? Am I sensitive to the needs of my audience? Will the guests hear judgment in my words, thus driving the wedge between them and the church even deeper, or will they hear God's warm invitation of grace? How about the leadership team? Will they approve of my biblical interpretation? Will they be disappointed with my lack of hospitable inclusiveness?"

Needless to say, the social noise in my head left me with a mental and spiritual block, so I decided to talk with my preaching professor, John Rottman. After I distressfully shared the pressure I felt, he calmly asked me to sit down. Then he said that he'd like to pray for me. The prayer was a wonderful gift to me, especially coming

by Anne Zaki,  
CTS Student



from one of my professors. His prayer lasted about ten minutes, the bulk of which was pleading with God for protection from evil powers and principalities that seek to divide the church and work against the kingdom of God. He prayed for protection in Jesus' name against evil forces causing confusion in my own mind, as well as those that would be present at that worship service causing confusion in the listeners' minds.

He claimed on my behalf Jesus' promise to give peace that surpasses all understanding and his guarantee that his Word shall never return to him empty.

As the prayer went on, I felt my burden lifted, my mind ordered, and my vision cleared. Jesus had entrusted me with himself, the Living Word; and he had empowered me with his Spirit to give life to my words, and to change lives through my words. I walked out of Professor Rottman's office that day once again reminded that it's not even my fight!

## Prayer Service Held for Korean Hostages

“He received the best birthday gift from God: the kingdom of heaven.” That's what Rev. Hyung Kyu Bae's wife told their eight-year-old daughter when Bae was killed on his 42nd birthday—the first victim of the Korean group held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan this past summer for six weeks beginning on July 19.

CTS student Ho Jin Nam told this poignant story at a special service of prayer for the Korean hostages held at CTS on Tuesday, August

7, 2007. In the service Nam told about his connections with the group of hostages—23 members of Korea's Sammul Presbyterian Church captured while traveling by bus on a 10-day service trip in Afghanistan. He was a close friend of Rev. Bae and had served in Korea as an assistant youth minister at Bae's church, so he knew many of the other hostages as well, including the second one to be killed—Sung-min Shim.

The prayer service at CTS was attended by 100 people. Three languages were chosen for the Scripture reading: Korean, for the hostages, their church, and their families; English, for the Christian community at Calvin and beyond; and Arabic, a language abused by the Afghani Muslim terrorists, yet redeemed in prayer by the Middle Eastern Christian community which suffers persistent terrorism. In a fervent concert of prayer, the CTS community interceded for these captives.

A few weeks later, on August 30, news was received that the remaining hostages had been released. We are grateful that their lives were spared and grateful for the way this concern pulled together the Christian community around the globe, as well as at CTS.





## Seminary Learns from Youth Ministers

Listening to people in various types of ministry has become a regular practice at CTS. For five years each August such consultations have been held—on rural ministry, multiple staff ministries, church planting, urban ministry, and this year on youth ministry.

For two days youth ministers from around North America came to the seminary and shared with faculty, staff, and students some of the joys and challenges of their calling. Representatives of other agencies and organizations attended as well. It was a time of conversation and learning that was full of honesty about the amazing opportunities youth ministers have in shaping the faith of young people. The dialogue also revealed the frustrations of keeping up with ever-changing youth culture and gathering enough support from parents and congregations for this important work.

Together we learned about the challenges of navigating today's youth culture, where relationships develop on MySpace and Facebook more than in coffee shops. CTS student Sarah Meekhof noted that the young people she works with say, "Everybody knows me online, but no one judges me." The challenge for youth ministers and church members is to develop good relationships without communicating judgment, she said. "Adults are afraid of kids and kids are afraid of adults. We need to teach adults how to get along with kids—to see beyond tattoos and piercings—and equip them to love these kids too."

We asked hard questions about why so many young people are leaving the Christian Reformed Church, and how young people can be included more in the church. Some believe that youth ministry is dying because something new is being born—a more intergenerational ministry. Others, like Steph Vander Hart of Chino, California, said we need to ask, "How do we keep kids from leaving?" while also asking, "How do we get kids into the church?" Steve Van Meekeren of Chatham, Ontario, wondered, "Are the youth modeling what the larger church is doing on a



**Youth Ministry consultation attendees enjoy dinner together at the Prince Conference Center.**

Sunday morning—just warming the pews? Are we good examples of what we want our youth to be?"

Sometimes we assume that young people are attracted by contemporary worship, but that is not always so. One survey conducted by Bob Grussing of Grand Rapids, Michigan, revealed what is really important to young people when it comes to church. It didn't reflect their preference on worship style, but revealed more about their feelings when they walk in the door—they want to know if someone will reach out and accept them.

Scott Elgersma, a youth pastor from Visalia, California, pointed out that the seminary's Facing Your Future program has been excellent in "firing up youth and encouraging them to make changes in their own churches." He also spoke of the impact of church internships for students, which express to students that "There's a

place for you here, and your gifts can serve the kingdom of God."

Consultation attendees lamented the fact that oftentimes churches assume that being a youth pastor is a stepping stone to becoming a senior pastor. Our guests observed that most youth workers feel specifically called to minister to that age group and want to have a long-term influence on youth. We discussed the need to prepare people specifically for youth ministry through college and seminary courses and programs, as well as the importance of preparing all pastors to work in multiple-staff situations and to affirm those who serve in youth ministry.

Our guests affirmed that youth pastors need to be deeply grounded in Scripture, and need to have a deep theological vision that provides strength and direction for everything they do in youth ministry.

While more questions than answers were raised, participants were energized by the conversation and the commitment of the seminary to integrate this conversation into its ongoing efforts to form people for ministry to all ages.



***Celebrating a reunion are youth pastors Judy Ko (Grand Rapids, MI), Frankie Wunderink (Las Vegas, NV), and Tim De Jonge (Holland, MI). Judy and Tim followed in the footsteps of Frankie, who was their youth pastor before they went to seminary. They are graduates of CTS, and Frankie is a current MA student.***

## Seminary Students Receive Huge Boost with \$2 Million Gift for Tuition Support

Calvin Theological Seminary has received its largest single gift ever—\$2,050,000—and it's all going to students! The gift significantly boosts the amount of money available in the Ministry Incentive Program (MIP), a seminary loan program specifically geared to students going into ordained ministry in the CRC. "The most attractive feature of MIP is its forgiveness provision," explains Duane Kelderman, Vice President for Administration at the seminary. "Students who become ordained



*Seminary student Sarah Steen Schreiber talks about her program with Registrar Joan Beelen.*

ministers in the CRC for ten years are forgiven 50 percent of their loans!"

In recent years the largest source of MIP funds has been the special offerings of local congregations for Calvin Seminary. These offerings, coupled with individual donations, have made MIP loans an important part of the seminary's financial aid package for many students. Now, Kelderman notes, the seminary will be able to build upon this base of support and significantly increase the amount of

MIP loans for students. "Over the life of this gift alone, CTS students will receive more than ten million dollars in loans at a very attractive interest rate and with a great forgiveness provision. We couldn't be happier for our students."

Sid and Joanne Jansma talked and prayed for many years about giving CTS a significant gift that would reduce the financial burden for students. While this gift will more than double the MIP funds available to students over the coming

years, Sid challenges the church to do even more. "I hope our gift will remind congregations and other donors of the great need of our students and the wonderful opportunity to help their future pastors through contributions to MIP."

Jeff Vandermeer, a senior M.Div. student, testifies to the huge difference MIP has made in his life: "This program has truly been a blessing for my family and me as we seek to follow

God's call." James Kuiper, another senior M.Div. student, adds, "It's another way the denomination shows how serious it is about training pastors."

Kelderman is also excited about the impact of the gift on future enrollment. "We understand we're in a competitive environment with other seminaries and are pleased to be uniquely positioned to offer even more financial aid specifically targeted to students entering CRC ministry."

## M.Div. and M.T.S. Programs Reduced to Balance Students' Lives

In June 2007 the CTS Board of Trustees approved faculty recommendations for reductions in the Master of Divinity and Master of Theological Studies program requirements. One of the primary purposes for changing the curriculum was to allow students to slow down a bit so that the quality of learning would be enhanced and so that they could balance family, school, and personal spiritual formation in a healthy way. In response to student feedback, the faculty worked together to reduce the M.Div. program by 19 credit hours (from 153 to 134 credit hours) and the M.T.S. program by 13 credit hours (from 91 to 78 credit hours). Most of the changes were accomplished by reducing the number of elective courses required.

Students have been pleased with the changes, since for some this means

finishing seminary a year earlier than they had anticipated. While a three-year M.Div. program has been possible for students starting seminary since the fall of 2005 when the new Ministry Formation program replaced the older Field Education plan, students have had to carry heavy workloads to stay on track and had to begin with all admission requirements and prerequisites met. With the reduced M.Div. program, students can finish in three years and have a more balanced life—or they can still opt to spend four years in seminary by spreading out their coursework or taking the optional full-year internship to gain more ministry practice experience.



*Students share a laugh with Professor Weima in New Testament class.*



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