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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# FORUM

SPRING 2016

# Missional Living of Scripture

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HOW NOW SHALL WE LIVE?



# Articles

- 03** **From the President: How Now Shall We Live?**  
by Jul Medenblik
- 04** **Every Believer Called to Mission**  
by Cory Willson
- 06** **Prayers from the Missional Conference**  
by Mary Vanden Berg and Sarah Schreiber
- 08** **Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics**  
by John Bolt
- 09** **Meet Herman Bavinck**  
by Jessica Driesenga
- 12** **Fostering Formation for Mission in Our Classrooms**  
by Kristy Manion
- 15** **Is There a Future for Sacrifice?**  
by Erin Zoutendam
- 16** **Taste and See Israel Trip**  
by Paula Seales
- 18** **Church Growth and Its Challenges in Ethiopia**  
by Fikre Norcha

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# From the President



by Jul Medenblik,  
President

## How Now Shall We Live?

As President of Calvin Theological Seminary, I am blessed to be in the middle. I am in the middle of various conversations related to church renewal, church planting and leadership development as the seminary trains servants of the gospel who seek to form more servants of the gospel throughout the world. In the same day, I can speak to someone who has served over 60 years in ministry and someone who is in the first six weeks of seminary training. I am glad to be in the middle.

I have found myself in the middle of many conversations, emails, and letters related to the last issue of the Forum which had the theme, “Biblical and Hermeneutical Reflections on Same-Sex Relationships.” In the middle, I have heard contrasting voices and even of contrasting actions:

*“Thank you for addressing a complex topic with clarity and thoughtfulness” is countered by “I am very disappointed in the tone and content of the articles.”*

*A telephone call from a church pastor who asks for 100 more copies of the Forum for their congregation is shaded by hearing of another pastor who tossed the same issue of the Forum in the garbage.*

I received many thoughtful comments in response to the last issue of the Forum,

two of which I would like to highlight:

*When framed as selfish, individualistic, drive for sexual fulfillment, it is obvious and clear that obedience and sacrifice are the only appropriate responses. Perhaps framing these dilemmas in the context of the God-given desire for kinship within covenant marked by self-emptying love might deepen our reflections and rein in our certainty.*

*We always need to be on the lookout that we don't twist scripture and that we don't fall for twisted teaching. And we all have our biases and prejudices. The danger of twisting scripture to fit ourselves and then to justify our behaviors is a lurking danger no matter what side you take.*

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**I am glad that the FORUM reader community does seek to be centered and rooted on being faithful witnesses to the gospel.**

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In this issue, the Forum Editorial Committee hopes to continue to serve the church by helping the church explore the wider lens of the “Missional Living of Scripture.”

This issue of the Forum takes its theme from the title of a recent conference held at Calvin Theological Seminary: “Missional Living of Scripture.” This conference brought

together scholars, pastors and missionaries from three continents to discuss what it looks like to equip churches and Christian leaders to creatively align their ministries with God's mission in this world. Here is a link to videos from the 17 presenters: <https://www.calvinseminary.edu/igcpr/resources/videos-from-missional-living-of-scripture-2015/>

We are glad to present the new voice of Professor Cory Willson who joined our faculty this past summer and teaches in the area of Missiology and Missional Ministry. He also serves as Director of The Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal. In addition, we are pleased to also hear from Professor John Bolt who teaches in the area of Systematic Theology. Professor Bolt has faithfully worked at bringing the treasured insights of Herman and J.H. Bavinck into the current context, also writes to set the “missional” conversation in a broader framework. Finally, you will have the opportunity to “overhear” a conversation among faculty members as to forming students for ministry.

As we continue to learn from one another as brothers and sisters in Christ may we, as one person wrote to me, “join in praying that God grant us humility for the conversation, willingness to listen, and submission to the Spirit of Christ.”

# Every Believer Called to Mission

by Cory Willson, Jake and Betsy Tuls Assistant Professor of Missiology and Missional Ministry



A few months into my job I had several encounters with local CRC pastors that have proved helpful to me in my new position as the professor of missiology and missional ministry at Calvin Seminary. “I have a church filled with really good folks,” the pastor will say to me. “They are hard-working, generous and eager to lend a helping hand to those in need. The only challenge is that they are insular as a group and are not good at reaching out to others.”

This communal trait is not an isolated phenomenon among CRC churches in Grand Rapids or, for that matter, in Christian communities throughout North America. Decades before Darrell Guder and his colleagues coined the term “missional” in the late 90’s, Hendrik Kraemer, J.H. Bavinck and Lesslie Newbigin critiqued the “introverted” and “insular” Church in the West that had separated Christian identity from God’s mission, and called for a missionary encounter with Western cultures and not just far-off lands.<sup>1</sup> Being a Christian means that there is an inherent, intentional calling of every follower of Jesus to live under the reign of God in every area of their

lives: home, work, and public spaces. Being a Christian means we are called to seek opportunities to share with others the good news of what God has done in Jesus to rescue us and this world from the tyranny of sin, Satan and death.

There is a lot that these missionary theologians have to teach us about how to see ordinary events of daily life as opportunities to show how the Lordship of Jesus can bring shalom into our jobs, neighborhoods, and cities today. But faithful discipleship today requires more than simply restating what has been said in the past; it requires the courage and

imagination to be guided by tradition as we attempt to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in our contexts today. Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the community of believers are needed for such a calling.

In 2013, the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal hosted the *Missional Reading of Scripture* conference at Calvin Seminary. Plenary speakers N.T. Wright, Christopher Wright, Darrell Guder, and Michael Goheen explored how the Bible not only conveys Christian truths and moral principles but also tells the story of God’s ongoing mission in the world. Like any good piece of literature, they argued, this unfolding biblical story invites the church into this drama as we participate in God’s mission in the world today. Reading Scripture as a story of God’s mission helps us make sense of the Bible and of our world today. But this hermeneutic also raises practical questions as we move from Bible reading to faithful living in our context today.



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**Christopher Brooks illustrates his holistic approach to ministry in his urban context.**

The 2015 *Missional Living of Scripture* conference revolved around this central question: what does it look like to align your ministry with God's creative and redemptive work in your city? The conference gathered ministry practitioners, scholars, students, and community members to examine the way God's mission impacts our day-to-day life, our ministries, and our cities.

Speakers came from divergent contexts, both rural and urban, in Latin America, Europe, and North America. The diversity of contexts and experiences provided stories, frameworks, and practical tools for ministry and preaching. A few examples from the conference speakers will offer a taste of the rich experience. Christopher Wright and Michael Goheen explored the relationship between biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) and Christian living (mission and ethics). Ruth Padilla DeBorst drew on her current ministry in Costa Rica to show the ways in which faithful discipleship requires an embodied prophetic critique of the prevailing cultural milieu in Western society. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo discussed community development through the work of World Renew; Eric Jacobsen discussed a missional theology of place and practical ways of analyzing the built environment of the neighborhoods around our churches; and Christopher Brooks drew illustrations from his pastoral work in Detroit, Michigan as he put forward a holistic approach to ministry in his urban context.<sup>2</sup>

After the conference I received an email from an evangelical pastor who attended the conference that reminded me of why I was first drawn to the Reformed tradition during my early ministry days. The email read:

*"I have always been drawn to the Neo-Calvinist tradition and this conference reminded me why. [It] was utterly unique ... there are plenty of conferences that celebrate reformed theology and gospel-centered piety, and there are others that talk about social justice, others which talk about worship, preaching and mission, and still others which talk about the intersection of faith and culture. But, the conference at Calvin Seminary uniquely brought all of these themes together ... and within the context of a rich and beautiful liturgical experience."*

Reading this email inspired me to reflect on why my wife and I felt called to join the Christian Reformed Church and the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary. God has called his church to play an integral part in his mission in the world. This mission is cosmic: encompassing the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus in word (evangelism), deed (justice, mercy and love of neighbor), and our communal life (the pursuit of shalom). Given this reality, places like Calvin Seminary have a strategic role to play in helping support churches that desire to be faithful participants in God's mission. This requires finding ways of nurturing Christian leaders

to embody a deep and winsome Reformed theology and missiology in the contexts to which God calls them.



**Janice McLean presents *Living Scripture Missionally in New York City*.**

The Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal at Calvin Seminary seeks to be a critical link between academia and the church, enabling the seminary to learn from the needs of the church so that it can provide theological resources to help the church address the pressing issues in our world today. Embodying this posture of learning is a vital quality of the kind of Christian hospitality that the Institute seeks to cultivate. As the director of the Institute, I look forward to learning from pastors and local church leaders as we seek together to cultivate faithful communities of Christians whose rich theological heritage gives shape to an embodied life together that blesses all nations and peoples. In the weeks ahead please visit the forthcoming blog, [www.theologyfromtheroad.com](http://www.theologyfromtheroad.com) to find out more about the work of the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal.

<sup>1</sup> See for example Kraemer's *A Theology of the Laity*, Bavinck's *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* and Newbigin's *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*.

<sup>2</sup> Conference speakers included Christopher J.H. Wright, Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Eric Jacobsen, Janice McLean, Michael Goheen, Stefan Paas, Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, Jan Van't Spijker, Larry Doornbos, Ricardo Agreste Da Silva, Tommy Kiedis, Steve Andrews, Ronaldo Liborio, Christopher Brooks, Tyler Johnson, John Witvliet, Kevin Adams, David Bailey, and Tim Blackmon. Recordings of these sessions are available on the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal ([www.calvinseminary.edu/icgpr/resources/](http://www.calvinseminary.edu/icgpr/resources/)).

# Prayers from the Missional Conference

**A sample of the liturgy from the Missional Living of Scripture Conference, Calvin Theological Seminary, November 18-19, 2016**

*Offered by Professor Sarah Schrieber\**

All glorious God, we give you thanks: in your Son, Jesus Christ, you have given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. You chose us, before the world was made, to be your holy people, without fault in your sight.

You adopted us as your children in Christ. You have set us free by his blood; you have forgiven our sins. You have made known to us your secret purpose, to bring heaven and earth into unity in Christ.

You have given us your Holy Spirit, the seal and pledge of our inheritance.

All praise and glory be yours, O God, for the richness of your grace, for the splendor of your gifts, for the wonder of your love.

Father, you do as you please with the powers of heaven and the peoples of earth. We praise you for marshaling the powers of heaven for the salvation of ill-deserving rebels, like us, and for securing the ultimate transformation of the cosmos.

We sang our prayer: be thou my vision. Open our eyes, Lord. Help us to be expectant people. Bend our thoughts and aspirations beyond the moment, beyond what we can see in front of us at any given time.

It is easy, O God, for us to see why this world needs saving, but sometimes it is not so easy to believe that in Christ it has already been saved.

We make petition this morning for your needy world. We see a world of war and rumors of war, a world of violence and injustice. We pray for those people who are holding the guns. We pray for those people who are nervously waiting for news of loved ones. We pray for those people who are displaced, who don't know what to tell children who ask when they can go home.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. There is trouble far away and trouble right here, even in our own hearts. You alone see us as we are, dear Savior, and so we beg for you to nurture us according to our needs, to minister to us according to our hurts, to heal us in all those places where you see that we are broken or sick.

O God of majesty and power, above the clamor of our violence, your Word of truth resounds. Over nations enshrouded in despair, your justice dawns.

Grant your household a discerning spirit and a watchful eye to perceive the hour in which we live. Hasten the advent of that day when the weapons of war shall be banished, our deeds of darkness cast off, and all your scattered children gathered into one.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

# Lord in your mercy

Offered by *Dr. Mary Vanden Berg\**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name  
 Indeed you are holy, O Lord, and most worthy of praise.  
 All glorious God we give you thanks for in your Son,  
 Jesus Christ,  
 you have given us every blessing.  
 We praise you for the richness of your grace,  
 for the splendor of your gifts,  
 and for the wonder of your love.

*Lord in your mercy  
 Hear our prayer.*

Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in  
 heaven.

How long, O Lord, must we wait?  
 It feels sometimes, Lord, like your kingdom is far from us.  
 It feels sometimes like evil's word is stronger than your word  
 in our homes, our churches, and in the world.  
 We lament the brokenness in our homes  
 where the call to serve our spouses and children  
 can easily be drowned out by self-interest.  
 Rule us by your word and Spirit, Lord  
 so that we can be examples of self-giving love to the world.  
 We lament the brokenness in our churches  
 where our own comfort often trumps our desire to bring  
 your good news to our neighbors.  
 where our fear of criticism thwarts our passion to speak the  
 truth.  
 Keep you church strong and add to it, O Lord.  
 We lament the brokenness of our world, Lord,  
 Where the voices of terror and death have been loud of late  
 in places like Paris, Beirut, and Syria.  
 Where people are forced to flee their homes or to face  
 death.  
 Destroy the devil's work and every force which revolts against  
 your will.

*Lord in your mercy,  
 Hear our prayer.*

Give us this day our daily bread,  
 for we know that apart from your provision  
 and blessing, Lord,  
 our work would be in vain.

*Lord in your mercy,  
 Hear our prayer.*

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,  
 We know, O Lord, that even as we pray that you will destroy  
 evil in our world  
 so very often we are part of the problem.  
 We are apt to seek your will only insofar as it does not  
 undermine our own will.  
 Forgive us, O Lord, just as we are fully determined as  
 evidence of your grace in us to forgive  
 our neighbors.

*Lord in your mercy,  
 Hear our prayer.*

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the  
 evil one  
 Because by ourselves we are too weak to resist the devil, the  
 world, and even our own desires.  
 Uphold us and make us strong with the strength  
 of your Holy Spirit.

*Lord in your mercy,  
 Hear our prayer.*

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever

Amen

*\*Excerpts of these prayres are from The Worship Sourcebook (CRC Publications) and Rev. Scotty Smith's  
 blog, Heavenward (blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/scottysmith)*

# y, hear our prayer.



# Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics A 'Missional' Theology?

by Dr. John Bolt, Jean and Kenneth Baker Professor of Systematic Theology



Today we regularly hear the claim that the church must become missional. This is often accompanied by calls for a new missional theology because, so it is said, older theologies are tied to Christendom, to defending what is already in place rather than sending us out. From that perspective, a work of systematic theology like Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics, now more than one hundred years old, might not seem to qualify as missional. In this

article I dispute this presumption and argue that the Reformed Dogmatics is still a valuable missional work.

First, what does it mean for a theology to be missional? We may not start out with a pre-set idea of what a missional theology should look like and ask whether or not Bavinck fits it. The first question we need to ask about any work of theology is: "Is it true?" Does the way it talks about God actually comport with

because they are addressed to different audiences with distinct needs can all be true to biblical teaching. When we compare John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion (16th century, Geneva) with Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology (1871–72, USA) and Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics (1st ed. 1895–1901, The Netherlands) we see three Reformed works of theology with much similar content yet distinct forms.

Once we agree on the truth question we can then ask about a theology's missional character. A true theology could nonetheless be said to be not very missional if it did not intentionally promote the church's mission. Conversely, another work could be very intentionally missional but not entirely in harmony with biblical teaching. I am convinced that today a good systematic theology must be missional; our historical context requires this. Hence the following definition:

**The first question we need to ask about any work of theology is: "Is it true?"**

who God really is? Theologies that look very different from each other

*A missional theology understands the task of systematic theology to consist of providing comprehensive and contemporary summaries of the Christian truth about God with a view toward assisting the church in effectively fulfilling the Great Commission in our day.*

It is with that definition in mind that I judge Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics to be a profoundly missional theology.

Bridging cultural divides is one of the greatest challenges missionaries face in communicating the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ to people who are not at all familiar with the imagery of the biblical world. At a very elementary level, missionaries wonder whether "the Lord is my shepherd" is a meaningful statement to native people who live in Arctic regions, the barrios of Mexico City, or the favelas of São Paulo, or to others who have never seen sheep and do not know what a shepherd

is. Conceptually, it is also a challenge to defend the notion that God is a King to modern people who are constitutionally wired for democracy, equality, and personal autonomy. And how does one proclaim the "good news" of eternal life to people whose worldview includes notions of ongoing cycles of reincarnation that feel like an oppressive burden? Wouldn't "good news" be a doctrine in which we are set free from eternal life?

*continued on page 10*

# Meet Herman Bavinck

By Jessica Driesenga



It is difficult to be a theological voice that speaks winsomely to the theological and cultural questions that arise in our current context. More difficult, however, is to provide a theological perspective that aptly contributes to the faith and life of Christians generations after you. Perhaps that is why it is not our natural inclination to look to voices of the past in order to speak to the pressing issues of our age.

In the case of Herman Bavinck, however, we ought to do just this. His words, from the 19th century,

have much to offer us in the 21st. In our time of rapid social and cultural change, Bavinck's articulation of the Reformed tradition has a theologically robust and culturally engaged word for a church seeking to be engaged in the mission of God in our world.

Neo-Calvinism's rich cultural vision has been accessible to the English speaking world through the words of Kuyper since the 1930s. He has been long seen as a model for Reformed Christians, and increasingly in the broader evangelical world, of what it means to be a culturally and politically engaged Christian. While Kuyper has been known, Herman Bavinck has remained relatively unknown within the English speaking world.

The relentless, dedicated work of John Bolt, amidst other translation efforts has succeeded in opening up the unique genius of Bavinck – most

notably through his editing work in the English translation of Bavinck's Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics). This work has exposed Bavinck as a careful, articulate theologian; a man of "deep piety and great learning who faced head-on the challenges posed to Reformed orthodoxy by modernity."

In his Dogmatics Bavinck highlights the task of dogmatic theology, "[to] describe the deeds of God done for us and in us." Bavinck's thinking on these matters has been accessible to the English speaking world for quite some time now. Following this is the task of ethics, "[to] spell out what those for whom and in whom God has acted, in love and grace, must now do." Bavinck never finished his work on ethics, so few encountered his thoughts on the matter – until now.

*continued on page 10*

continued from page 9

## Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics

Missionaries need to have in-depth and, as much as is possible, existential awareness of the deepest longings and aspirations of those to whom they bring the gospel. A simple biblical theology that summarizes the “truth” of Scripture in its own terms and language (covenant; kingdom of God; justification, etc.) is inadequate for this mission task. Unless missionaries know how their message will be received they risk being misunderstood and undermining the gospel itself. A classic example

of such misunderstanding has been chronicled by Canadian missionary Don Richardson who worked among the tribal people of Western New Guinea, Indonesia. When he tried to explain the meaning of Christ's atoning sacrifice at Calvary to the Sawi people, he found that, as a people that valued cunning and deceit, they considered Judas the real hero of the story. Speaking the good news of the gospel into such a worldview presented a real challenge. Richardson found a

way in through witnessing an unexpected ceremony. The Sawi people were in a perpetual state of war and effected a peace treaty with their enemies through a “peace child ceremony” in which each village presented the enemy with an infant as a “peace child.” As long as the child lived the village would live at peace. Richardson had found his breakthrough and used the peace child as an analogy for God's redemptive love in Christ.

Theologically, what is going on here? Reformed theology teaches that God is already present to all people, revealing himself to them; therefore, their religions, their myths and legends, and their ritual practices, are a response to this general revelation. If people are to understand the gospel, the special revelation of God's saving work in Israel and definitively in Jesus Christ, gospel truth (or Christian doctrine) must be connected to what people already know and believe about God and the world. A good missional theology must relate the knowledge of God that is given in Scripture to the rest of our knowledge. It must relate biblical truth to universal human experience.

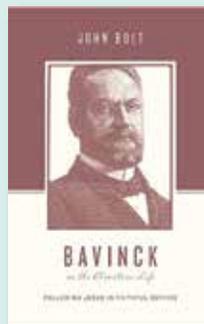
This is exactly what Bavinck does, starting with his understanding of the Bible itself. He reminds us that Israel's religious practices — including covenant, circumcision, sacrifices, and the priesthood — have much in common with those of her neighbors. Why? Because God is present to all people; as God's image bearers living in God's creation they cannot avoid

continued from page 9

## Meet Herman Bavinck

Bolt's latest work, *Bavinck on the Christian Life*, is an important achievement, providing readers with invaluable insights into Bavinck's convictions on this application of theology, what it means to follow Jesus in our daily lives. Bolt weaves together decades of insights into Bavinck's understanding of the Christian life, articulating a vision that is vital both for those who are already enraptured by Bavinck's thought and those who don't yet know how valuable it might be for their life and ministry. This work illustrates the important wisdom that Bavinck provides for Christians today seeking to think theologically, living as devoted followers of Christ in our world.

In this work, we see a vision of discipleship that encompasses the whole of the Christian life: “The notion of Christian discipleship should not be restricted to service that is explicitly linked to gospel ministry, Christian witness, or Christian service. We live our Christian lives in the vocations to which God calls us, whatever they may be.” What follows is a wealth of Bavinck's wisdom, embodying a Reformed witness for the way of Jesus in our world — one that is trinitarian, Christ-centered, and culturally engaged: a timely vision for life in our world.



or evade responding to God. Biblical revelation does not drop out of the sky; God comes to Abraham, to Moses, to post-exilic Jews in the days of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, to the Greeks and to barbarians, to Frisians and to native peoples everywhere, and calls them to himself in language they can understand.

All people, therefore, must respond to God. The natural response, according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 1, is to suppress this general revelation and exchange it for an idol. But even idolatrous responses teach us something about God and human longing. The religious traditions of the world show that they have some understanding of God's power, an awareness that there is a norm by which they ought to live and that all people fail to meet, that we need a deliverer, and the like.

I consider Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics to be helpful for the missional task of communicating the gospel because he regularly introduces the main topics of theology by calling attention to these universal expressions of response to God's general revelation. Consider the following example from his chapter on Christ's exaltation:

*The death of Christ, the end of his humiliation, was simultaneously the road to his exaltation. In all religions and philosophical systems, one encounters the idea, expressed more or less consciously, that death*

*is the road to life. People saw this phenomenon in nature, where day follows night and an awakening in the spring occurs after a winter of hibernation or dormancy. (Reformed Dogmatics, III, 421)*

Bavinck is not saying that Christ's death and resurrection should be treated merely as a sign of new life just like the daffodils that come up in the spring. He is simply observing that as people wrestle with the boundary issues of their own life and death, they have religiously created myths of dying and rising that missionaries can tap into as entry points for the gospel. That is

**Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics provides both a theological frame of mind that is missional and plenty of examples to help the missionary.**

all they are: entry points, nothing more. But entry points are essential for all mission work and Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics provides both a theological frame of mind that is missional and plenty of examples to help the missionary.

Bavinck's treatment of the fundamental Trinitarian doctrine of God is even more important than such entry points. This was reinforced for me recently at a seminar for Chinese pastors and church leaders on the role of Christianity in helping create a flourishing society in China.

Calvin Seminary students Jin Li and Mary Ma, who are translating Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics into Mandarin, asked me to prepare a paper for the conference on its possible relevance for Chinese society, particularly Christian engagement with government. Here, in brief, is what I said. I pointed out that for Bavinck all Christian thinking has to begin with the Trinity and that creation itself bears the marks of the Triune God. Furthermore, we can recognize these marks because "the Logos [Word] who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made," and thus we who bear God's

likeness and image have the capacity to see them. Reality is an incarnation of God's thought and is created by the same Logos who created the laws of thought in us. This leads to the important insight that

"just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity." This Christian worldview, finally, is eminently translatable into the Chinese traditions of Heaven's Mandate and Dao and provides Chinese Christians with a worldview that honors unity, respects plurality, and provides a perspective for how Christians relate to the state.

A missional theology must be true and helpful to the church in mission. Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics passes both tests.

# Fostering Formation for M

By Kristy Manion

Early this year, four members of the Calvin Seminary faculty met to talk about their goals and strategies for shaping students in their classes.

**Amanda Benckhuysen** (Associate Professor of Old Testament), **Danjuma Gibson** (Lecturer in Pastoral Care), and **Sarah Schreiber** (Assistant Professor of Old Testament) assumed teaching responsibilities in 2014.

**Cory Willson** (Jake and Betsy Tuls Assistant Professor of Missiology and Missional Ministry) began teaching at the Seminary in 2015. They spoke with Forum contributor and Calvin Seminary alumna **Kristy Manion**.

**Kristy:** Each of you began teaching at Calvin Seminary within the last two years. As you begin a new class, how do you try to foster a welcoming environment for learning?

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**Amanda:** One thing is creating a learning community, a sense of [being] in this together, an environment where people can express their views and opinions without feeling somehow ashamed. Then we can get into some good conversation around whatever subject matter you're teaching.

I want to help the students feel safe, and that they're part of a broader community that has come

to engage issues. They're not passive learners; they're coming into the classroom as active learners. They need to contribute to the conversation.

In my Hebrew classes, one of my values is that we're in this together. So if [you're a student and] someone close to you is struggling, you come alongside them. It's your responsibility to help them learn as much as it's my responsibility to help them learn. You empower students to be teachers as much as learners.

---

**Sarah:** I love the idea of students teaching one another.

Amanda and I just returned from a trip to Israel and Palestine with students. We visited biblical sites—archaeological world heritage sites, or churches, or other holy sites. And we had our students give presentations about them.

The students chose a site that they wanted to teach the class about. I think that's empowering for learning. They weren't just assigned a site; they could do research ahead of time and choose something they were really interested in.

Our students were passionate about their sites. They not only taught the students during the fifteen-minute

presentation; but also, as you toured the site, they'd say, "Hey look at this—I read about this!" They were teaching us as instructors, and they were teaching their fellow classmates.

We had one student who was passionate about Hezekiah's Tunnel, which is a water tunnel you can crawl through in Jerusalem. He was so pumped about it; but at the same time, he was terrified to go through it himself.

He gave a great presentation right before he went into the tunnel. All the other students said, "Man—if you can do a presentation now, when

# Mission in Our Classrooms



**Amanda Benckhuysen**



**Danjuma Gibson**



**Sarah Schreiber**



**Cory Willson**

you're so anxious about going into the tunnel, you can preach anywhere!"

**Kristy:** What does the phrase “flipping the classroom mean,” and how does it affect learning?

**Cory:** Flipping the classroom is a paradigm of teaching in which a majority of the course content is given through readings and activities outside of class.

So it's not just content deliver through lecture in the class time. Class is filled with Socratic dialogue and experiential learning to critically analyze and assimilate new knowledge. The classroom

becomes a safe place where you establish trust to have a conversation, to see how students are making connections.

Sometimes I'll stop class conversation and say, “Ok, somebody pose a question that will help us take this conversation to the next level.” If I can get classes to that place, I know [they're learning].

When I'm learning from the students, I know they're all in. When the center of learning has shifted from the teacher to the student then you know that the “flipped classroom” is working well.

**Danjuma:** The classroom becomes electric. Before you know it the time has run out.

I am always hoping that students in my classes are in an environment where they can go to those spaces that they were afraid to go, or that culture has said, “Don't get on that slope because it's slippery, don't color outside those lines.” I want to push students there, especially as I'm talking about pastoral care, because we live in a society where people live on a slope, not in safe spaces or controlled environments.

For some students it's difficult, but I have been pleasantly surprised in the

last year and a half with the courage that I see students engage in class. It is really refreshing.

**Kristy:** Often we've thought of the classroom as the place where students come to gain knowledge and information. But it sounds like you're seeing class meetings—whether at an archaeological site or in a room with four walls—as a place where students themselves are formed.

**Amanda:** We've come to understand our task at seminary as much larger than simply intellectual formation. It's also character formation and vocational formation ...

*continued on page 14*

## Goals and Strategies

I would even say spiritual formation.

Seminaries are known to be spiritual deserts. That seems counterproductive to me. Especially in North America where there's a growing secularism, we don't want to send people out who have lost their faith at seminary.

More than anything else, congregations need pastors to be the people who stand up and say, "This is really true! We live in a world where the resurrection really did happen. And this is the difference it makes in our lives and in our world."

When I went through seminary, it was all about what was going on in the head. It's got to be more than that to sustain people, to prepare people for the challenges they're going to face in ministry today.

**Kristy:** What kinds of practices are you asking students to engage in that help form them spiritually or vocationally?

**Danjuma:** Next week my students are doing marriage counseling in front of the whole class, with staff members from

the seminary signed up as counselees.

Whether it's that, or having them go interview someone that they would call a "sinner" ... And after they've touched another human being, how does that impact how students think about them?

I'm not asking students to change their theological propositions. But after they have touched another human being, what does that do when they get to a computer and reflect? Their concrete theological assumptions become discursive.

**Amanda:** Students in my exegesis classes engage in a practice called dislocated exegesis. They go and read the text in an environment where they're not very comfortable: a soup kitchen, a food bank, Walmart. I ask them to imagine reading the text through the lens of the environment they're in, and see what that generates in them.

Students still come back to me and say, "That was a very meaningful exercise. It helped me put myself in the place of someone else and hear the Word of the

Lord in a different way."

**Cory:** Are we forming people to really inhabit the lives and questions of other people? To take their ideas and aspirations seriously even if their questions are disturbing or unsettling to us?

I assigned a reading from *Peace Child* by Don Richardson, who worked in Papua New Guinea with the Sawi tribes. He describes how the gospel was contextualized in that tribal context.

There is one story he described about the rancid death rituals of the Sawi people, and how they attempt to overcome the curse of death.

One of the students in our class was from Southeast Asia. He said, "I understand this." He began to tell us about the reasons within his culture why these death rituals exist. One of the motivations for these rituals was the question of maintaining connectedness to ancestors.

I drew his comment into the classroom and invited the students to have a conversation about it:

What are the lived needs or the questions that the gospel must address based on what you've just heard? What is the "good news" of the gospel that speaks to these needs and questions?

And [as you engage those lived needs and questions], you're forced to make a decision ... You're forced to go back to the biblical text and say, "How is the gospel good news [to these people]? Even if Scripture redirects those questions and needs it cannot ignore them."

It was one of those "Aha!" moments with the students. They began to see how Scripture is way bigger as they engaged in this kind of "dislocated exegesis," how Jesus and the gospel become more beautiful. While engaging the question might have been threatening to you at first, it is ultimately life-giving.

I'm concerned with students' theology; but I'm always trying to help them not only exegete Scripture, but also to exegete culture, to grow in empathy for the sake of communicating the gospel.

# Is There a Future for Sacrifice?

## Coakley Says Yes.

by Erin Zoutendam, ThM Student

“The topic of sacrifice is urgently in need of theological and philosophical reclamation ... if we are to confront some of the deepest challenges that currently threaten human flourishing worldwide,” said theologian Sarah Coakley, establishing the stakes for her Stob Lectures, delivered at Calvin Seminary in November.



*Coakley is the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, an Anglican priest, and the author of God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the*

*Trinity.'* The Stob Lecture Series, sponsored by Calvin Seminary and Calvin College, is held annually in honor of Dr. Henry J. Stob and features topics related to ethics, apologetics, and philosophical theology.

Coakley's work is known for its interdisciplinary approach, and she has published on topics as diverse as Gregory of Nyssa, feminist theology, and evolutionary biology. Her Stob lectures displayed the same breadth of expertise, drawing from Calvin, Kant, Derrida, René Girard, and a slate of feminist theologians.

In her first lecture, “Modernity Against Sacrifice: From Kant via Girard to Contemporary Feminism,” Coakley examined modern objections to sacrifice. After the horrors of the Holocaust, there has been increasing resistance to the concept of sacrifice as a “rational or transformational spiritual project,” Coakley said. She then examined two of the most important contemporary critiques of sacrifice: the claim rising out of French thinker René Girard's work that sacrifice is mere violence, and the

claim of many feminist theologians that sacrifice is a patriarchal concept used to justify the victimization of women.

In her second lecture, “Retrieving Sacrifice: Why a Classic Christian (and Reformed) Theme Refuses to Die,” Coakley maintained that sacrifice, though it may at times be used abusively, nevertheless has the potential to be life-giving. She then sketched the foundation for “a vibrant theology of sacrifice” that would still be “truly cognizant” of the dangers highlighted by its critics.

Drawing from Calvin's Institutes—a source she acknowledged as particularly fitting given the location of her lectures—Coakley responded to the two critiques laid out in her first lecture. Abusive actions can never be justified by Christ's expiatory sacrifice, Coakley contended, since this act is unrepeatable and no further punishment is needed.

However, while Christians cannot offer or demand sacrifices of expiation, they are called to make sacrifices of praise and thanks, especially through the Eucharist. Though impossible without Christ's expiatory sacrifice, the Eucharist redirects sacrifice away from violence

and toward the feeding of the body. This becomes a model for “ecstatic forms of moral response”—acts of love that humans could not do without the divine graces of justification and sanctification.

Coakley concluded her lecture by returning to the question of whether sacrifice has a future. Drawing from her research into the theological implications of the evolutionary concept of cooperation, she explained how sacrifice is becoming a foundational concept for evolutionary biology. “Selfishness is not the only story in evolution,” she said, noting that surrendering an individual fitness trait for the sake of the whole species can lead to stability and productivity. Coakley concluded, “This nexus of themes on evolutionary cooperation and productive sacrifice is one without which final ecological survival cannot now even be plotted or imagined.”

With the survival of creation at stake, the Christian has a special call beyond evolutionary processes. “Prayerful and costly entry into the Eucharistic sacrifice,” Coakley concluded, “should issue forth in responsive and prophetic action to protect the planet and protect others.”



# Taste and See Israel Trip

## Reflections on a Calvin Seminary Travel Course

by Paula Seales, ThM Student



Snow and long lines at security checkpoints greeted us as we started our 13-day Taste and See Israel Course with Professors Sarah Schreiber and Amanda Benckhuysen, while some of us carried with us exhaustion and lingering flu symptoms. These were the realities juxtaposed against the incredible reality of visiting the Holy Land, where Abraham was given God’s promise of his blessings, where Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness assured of God’s cloud and pillar presence, and where God himself became one of us. So while we eagerly looked forward to a “real” taste of ancient biblical history: dipping in the Dead Sea, boat-riding on the Sea of Galilee, dirtying our hiking boots and gym shoes, and savoring some good Mediterranean food, there was perhaps also an unconscious desire to taste and see hope in a land where God first put his footprint.

Layers and layers of stone and mortar evident the first few days at some of the historical sites, particularly in places like Masada and Beit She’an, were signs of the bitter reality of struggle and conquest among ancient civilizations. These ancient signs of conflict seemed to echo contemporary conflict between Israel and Palestine over occupation. Our visit to Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) in the West Bank gave us much educational fodder on the Israel/Palestine situation to chew on. The everyday realities of the Palestinians: having to avoid certain roads, traveling long distances to navigate around Israeli-controlled territory and being subjected to work curfews in Israel, also provoked some emotions. Dr. Munther Isaac, one of the BBC faculty members, seemed to echo the cries of the Christians there in his thesis title, “Where is Christ at the checkpoint?”

Conflicts over two sites considered sacred continued to remind us of humanity’s brokenness. The first, Temple Mount, is a most holy site for Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and has long been a center of tension with each group protective of their sacred quarters. A second site, the

Church of the Holy Sepulchre we found was a center of tension among Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Churches, which all claimed rights to worship there. A ladder remains leaning against the wall at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, untouched for some years, a visible sign of ongoing conflict. Land mines also remain some yards from the path to the Jordan River, not far from an abandoned church, where in years past believers remembered the baptism of our Lord.

So where, amidst such violence and suffering, could we see glimpses of hope? We saw hope in the people who continued to profess their faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized in the Jordan River in spite of the muddy water; in the tears and emotional stirrings in the hearts of fellow Calvin Seminary students who

voices singing, “Amazing Grace” and “It is Well With My Soul.”

There was also hope seen in the diverse group of CTS students whom God brought together for the trip: some Korean, some Canadian, and some African-American and Latino; some Distance Learning students, and some Grand Rapidians: all just ordinary folks. We became like family, thanks to the wonderful leadership of Sarah and Amanda who in a spirit of friendliness and knowledge, like that of our experienced bus driver and tour guide, greeted us each morning with the Hebrew words “Boker tov,” which means ‘Good morning!’

The Tent of Nations, located in the West Bank, was the last site we visited, and stood out like a beacon of hope. Palestinian Christians, Daher and his family – who own the Retreat

Center – faced many challenges: no running water, no plant-generated electricity, and, because of Israeli government restrictions, no access to resources to develop their land, which the family has legally claimed for over 100 years. But Daher and his family remained optimistic. The cave-turned meeting room, where we gathered for a debrief, was flooded with David’s passionate speech. “Tell

them our story,” he says. It’s a story of endurance and faith, of not knowing sometimes where help will come from. But it’s also a story of God’s help through many well-wishers and supporters from abroad who continue to provide for the needs of the Palestinian people.

Cara DeHaan, one of the Calvin Seminary students who went on the trip, wrote this blog: “On the day we visited Bethlehem Bible College, some of us ate lunch with Walter Brynjolfson, a student from Vancouver, Canada, enrolled in BBC’s brand-new MA in Peace Studies. Walter shared that he is financing his education and supporting the local [Palestinian] economy by transforming tear gas canisters thrown by the Israeli army into Christmas ornaments. He collects the canisters littering the streets of Bethlehem (and even the grounds of BBC), removes the ash, paints them, and finishes them off with ribbon. His “peace parcels” are sold locally and on etsy.com - an inspiring example of how swords can be beaten into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4). Some of us left the Retreat Center thinking the world would be in good hands if there were more people like Walter and more people like Daher, who boldly declared, “We refuse to be an enemy!” This is the kind of hope that is grounded nowhere else but faith in Jesus Christ!

We began the journey home exhausted and had to undergo more security checks. But we were returning with new eyes for reading the Old and New Testament, new knowledge, new friendships, and a deeper love for God and his people. What a trip!



**Calvin Seminary students at the Tent of Nations**

were perhaps reminded of their own baptism; in the convergence of people from all around the world to the Holy Land because of their deep love for Christ and a desire to walk where Jesus walked; and in the students and professors from Western Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary who all gathered at St Anne’s Church and were enchanted by the echoes of their harmonized

Center – faced many challenges: no running water, no plant-generated electricity, and, because of Israeli government restrictions, no access to resources to develop their land, which the family has legally claimed for over 100 years. But Daher and his family remained optimistic. The cave-turned meeting room, where we gathered for a debrief, was flooded with David’s passionate speech. “Tell

# Church Growth and Its Challenges in Ethiopia

*by Fikre H. Norcha, MDiv Student*

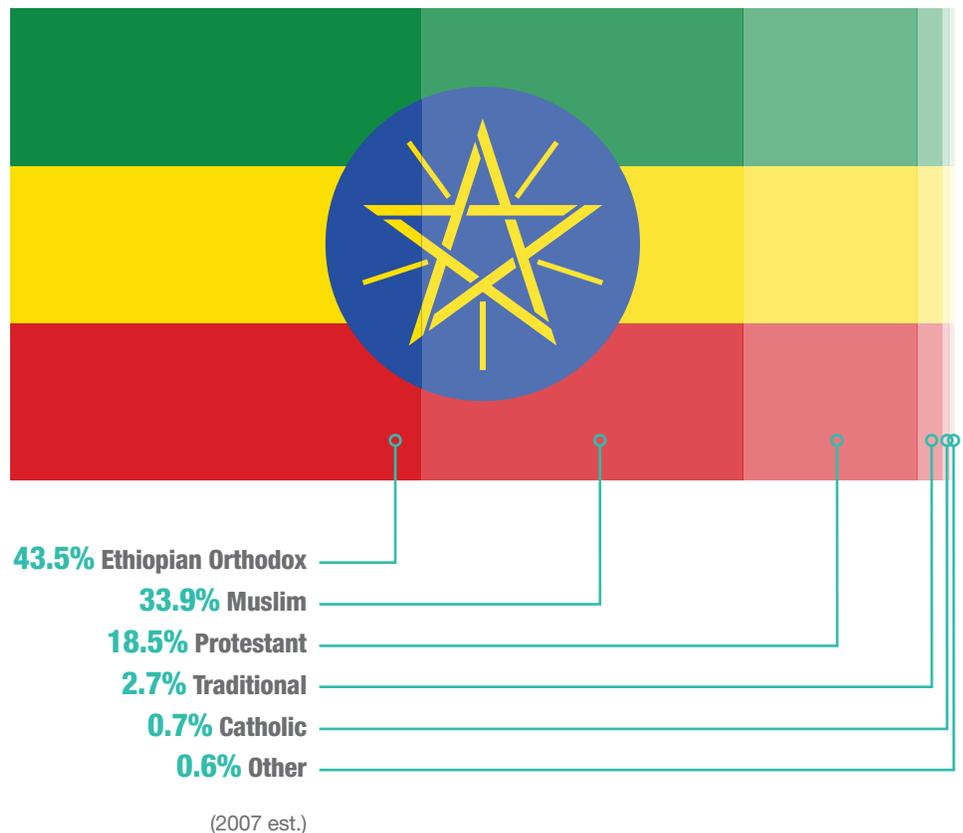
Ethiopia has been considered to be a Christian nation since the fourth Century. Christianity was a state religion until the last few decades. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) is a unique African church and is the largest denominations in Africa. However, evidence of genuine transformation in the lives of the people through faith in Christ has been minimal. During the twentieth century, Protestant missionaries and mission agencies have become effective for the Gospel. The downfall of communism has brought the freedom to exercise faith, and evangelical churches in Ethiopia are growing. Yet, the continuity of Christianity in Ethiopia and the present numerical growth of professing Christians have not been united with the improvement of living condition and the transformation of the socio-economic life of the nation which the gospel should bring.



The reality is that Ethiopia, with a population of almost 98 million, is constantly rated by the UN as among the world's ten poorest countries and holds a position close to the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index. Hunger, famines, and internal and external wars occur frequently. Severe drought and famine still threaten the national development of the nation.

Despite the famine and drought, socio-political instability, the legacy of communist rule, and severe poverty, evangelical churches in Ethiopia are experiencing explosive growth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Intensive evangelistic effort and new church planting is flourishing throughout the nation. Many new converts come mainly from animistic religions, while others convert to Protestant Christianity from the Orthodox Church or Islam, creating sometimes violent backlashes from those groups. In some areas of Ethiopia, churches are experiencing severe persecution.

The spreading of the gospel in Ethiopia has been the preeminent long-term vision of the Presbyterian Church since the turn of the last century. The United Presbyterian Mission of America planted the first Presbyterian Church in 1920 in West Ethiopia. Until 1974, this planted church played an enormous role in the spiritual, educational, and social development of the country and formed the Bethel church synod. However, in 1974 the government was taken over by the communist regime with its anti-capitalist sentiment. The Presbyterian Church has since been known as American Mission and was handed over to the Lutheran mission, nationally called



“Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church.” This was the end of the Presbyterian Church in Ethiopia and there was no church under the name Presbyterian until recently.

In August 1997, after the fall of the communist regime, a few Ethiopians planted a new Presbyterian Church in an under-privileged and Muslim-populated area of the south-west suburb of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Now, after 18 years of ministry, the Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia (PCE) has planted more than 116 local churches with 75,000 members all over the country. It has become a recognized denomination and a member of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE). The Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia (PCE) is one of the new and growing denominations in the country with a Reformed perspective.

The PCE has also been able to organize development programs, six elementary church schools, and holistic activities.

Since the Evangelical Churches of Ethiopia in general and, specifically, the PCE, are growing rapidly, there is a need for trained ministers to continue to promote church-planting efforts across the nation. Alongside poverty-alleviation, programs such as child development, women's empowerment projects, and access to education for children experiencing the most extreme poverty are crucial. The PCE is praying for potential partnership with Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, churches, organizations and individuals for continued growth and the advancement of the Kingdom in unreached areas in Ethiopia and beyond.



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