Quality of education is currently receiving a lot of attention from the news media. One picks up *Time* or *Harper's* and reads that college students are having a hard time reading or writing properly, or, perhaps, one is confronted with an editorial or article suggesting that the general level of the quality of education available in our colleges and universities is declining. This decline should be quite real for us at Calvin; a great number of students leave here after their four year stint with only a slight increase in their intellectual or academic prowess.

One significant cause of the decline in the level of the quality of education (at least at Calvin College) is student passivity. It seems that most enrollees come to Calvin to get taught (i.e. to get by), if, indeed, they are at all academically motivated in their enrollment. Note the passive voice of the verb in the previous sentence. People do not come to Calvin to learn; they come to get taught. The common goal seems to become filled with some tangible knowledge which will someday be translatable into dollars and cents.

It must be readily admitted that passivity is not peculiar to Calvin College. It is most certainly a recognizable characteristic of American life. Americans participate, for the most part, only in spectator sports, and most of that participation occurs in an easy chair while images of the sporting event are sent to their titillated minds via television. How often does the average American read a book? How often does he ask himself questions regarding the nature of his existence? The sorry answer is, I'm afraid, reflected in the great number of blue-lit living rooms visible on Main Street USA on any given night.

This passive mentality is manifested at Calvin College in a number of concrete forms. One manifestation is visible in the functional problems which *Dialogue* is experiencing. Passivity is the reason *Dialogue* has to squeeze the campus to extract an opinion. Student passivity is the reason that faculty works have been appearing more often in *Dialogue* than have student works. Passivity causes students to react to *Dialogue* articles with a superficial "Oh, I liked that piece" or with an "I thought it was a terrible (note the descriptive precision of the diction) article." Passivity is why *Dialogue* is only a dialogue in name.

The truly frightening aspect of this passivity is its academic manifestations here at Calvin. A college should be a center for the debate of new ideas as well as a place to learn about discovered truths. A Christian liberal arts college has unique and often conflicting sets of theories to reconcile. It must synthesize contemporary secular thought and problems with its special Christian philosophy in order to cope with the realities of the times. Is it not then ironic that upperclassmen don't know how to speak or are afraid to speak in class? Shouldn't we be frightened when great works of literature cannot drag even a slight reaction from an English major? What has happened at Calvin College to cause students in the classroom to be able to only barely tolerate other students who raise matters for discussion or who even (how elitist!) make a comment to add a point of information. Is it not appalling that at a college a comment in the classroom draws raised eyebrows rather than serving to stimulate discussion? Is it not the epitome of boorishness for students to pack up their books before the hour is over, while the professor is still speaking?

All the signs indicate that life for the majority of middle-class students at Calvin College is self-evident and boring. Education only presents them with tedious arguments which, if they get involved in, will lead to overwhelming questions. When a few students do air their opinions or do participate in their educational experience, the great majority of the student body feels threatened. Painfully overwhelming questions are raised, but in reply, for purposes of distraction, the passive students raise only superficial questions. There is no dominant elite at Calvin College except in the minds of those people who, for one reason or another, are afraid of participation. The question we must ask ourselves is whether or not we dare disturb the universe.

Don Hettinga
 Dialogue welcomes the use of this space for informal contributions.
In this essay, Steve Mulder, a junior from Grand Rapids, comments on a reading of Lillian Hellman's Little Foxes, a play to be produced by Thespians Nov. 13-15 & 20-22.

The Importance of Water in The Little Foxes

It's rather difficult to be real objective about a work of art when it's experienced in the bathtub. I mean, you're in such close contact with your immediate environment (that nice, hot water) that it's bound to affect your judgement, so I knew I was taking a terrible chance when I opted for reading Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes in the tub. Still, it was Thursday, the deadline was Friday, and I really was in great need of a bath, so, with the thought of killing two birds with one stone, I took that chance.

During the whole of the first act the water was hot and still relatively clean, and the play was great. I guess I'm always charmed by the South and under the circumstances was especially charmed. The play opened as the big business deal was closed with all of our favorite Southern characters present: Regina, the self-assured, if a little over the hill, southern belle; her bourgeois up-and-coming brothers, Oscar and Ben; Oscar's wife; the broken and burned out aristocrat Birdie; a son; a daughter; and a goodly number of black servants/slaves. Things were looking good, and I'd even remembered to take the shampoo out of the medicine chest before I got in so as to have it close at hand.

By the second act, however, the characters had developed pretty well and were beginning to look almost as rigid as the wrinkles forming in my fingers. The water was only lukewarm when Regina's husband, Horace, arrived on the scene and the story-line really began to take shape. The plot thickened throughout the second act, and when the curtain fell, the sides had formed in earnest; the good guys were good, the bad were bad, and the water was cold.

Maybe it was just that cold water, but I had pretty well lost interest when the plot broke open in the third and final act, for I had never developed any real sympathy for or affinity with any of the characters. Hellman writes in Pentimento, her collection of personal memoirs:

I had meant to half-mock my own youthful high-class innocence to Alesandra, the young girl in the play; I had meant people to smile at, and to sympathize with, the sad, weak Birdie, certainly I had not meant them to cry; I had meant the audience to recognize some parts of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards; I had not meant people to think of them as villains to whom they had no connection.

I personally felt little connection with any of the characters who, for the most part, left me cold, and I think Hellman failed on this score. Or was I just disgusted by cold bath water and by the sure knowledge that the ring from my marathon bath would require a good half hour of scrubbing?

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Covers by Jake Van Wyk
As a result of some recent work in linguistics, we now know more about the nature of man's most distinctive feature—language—more about the human mind, and perhaps, more about how people fit into the rest of the natural world. The work of Noam Chomsky, in particular, has shed light on the distinctive character of human language, as opposed to other forms of animal communication, and how this language can reveal the workings of the human brain. Moreover, Chomsky's work looms important as an attack on the extreme behaviorist assumptions endemic in the social sciences today, as well as a powerful and effective tool for rebuilding some traditional conceptions of the dignity and uniqueness of man.

II

To a theologian, the dignity of man probably contains at least two important features: man's free will and man's special place in the scheme of creation. Although Chomsky's initial aim was not to champion the cause of those resentful of the scientific attacks on these features, the significance of his work, however, is quite dramatic when one considers the serious blows man's dignity has suffered through the course of history. Probably the first real damage to man's collective ego came from Copernicus—who impolitely informed us that we were no longer the center of the universe, and that the earth, like any other planet, obediently orbited the sun. Two hundred years later, another such blow came from Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, which placed man in a biological relationship to the apes, which for many, was too close for comfort.

But, as Chomsky would say, the worst attack of all, and false to boot, has come from the extreme developments of the behaviorism of Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner, which icily state that man is nothing but a delicate response mechanism who is finely, but inextricably, tuned to the push and pull of the environment. Under this view, man becomes what Shakespeare called a "bare forked animal," stripped of his will and even of his distinctiveness. Man is merely able to respond, marionette-like, to the environment, forever caught in the web of stimulus-response. The present state of man's dignity, at least of the eyes of large portions of the scientific community, is surely on shaky ground.

Nor is man's uniqueness unchallenged. In an article which appeared in August-September, 1975 issue of *Natural History*, Stephen Gould examines man's three main claims to uniqueness (as he sees them): anatomical discontinuity between man and ape, conceptual uniqueness, and "overall" genetic differences. None of these claims, says Gould, can withstand close scrutiny. For example, when the chimpanzee Lana, "star pupil of the Yerkes Laboratory, begins to ask for the names of objects she has not previously seen," Gould concludes that we can no longer "deny to animals the capacity to conceptualize and abstract." The anatomical and genetic claims to uniqueness also fall to some persuasive reasoning. Although he jokingly concedes that "the next president of our country will not belong to another species," Gould suggests that "if we could only find a different way of communicating with them," we may find ourselves "more nearly akin to the chimpanzee than even Huxley would care to admit."

It may be true that man's resemblance to the ape and to the machine are greater than we suspected. If it is, then we must face the facts honestly and head-on, as people eventually did after the Copernican and Darwinian bombshells. After all, it is not degrading or cynical to accept man as he is, but honest and even reverent.

But, as a small but important group of people are discovering, those behavioristic emphases do not adequately represent the facts of human nature. These people, led by Noam Chomsky, are not outraged theologians, philosophers, or artists, but are scientists who derive their information from, of all things, the study of English grammar. Anyone who hated grammar from the day they set eyes on a noun or a verb is probably wondering: "What could grammar have to do with anything?"

The idea of examining language to get at the peculiar character of human nature, however, is not particularly new. Indeed, even the earliest speculators on man's uniqueness sensed that language was an element which marked him off from the rest of creation. For example, J.R. Firth tells how the Egyptians regarded language.
as associated with a god, Thoth:

He was the heart and tongue of Ra, and the means whereby the will of God was pronounced, and having been pronounced, became effective in creation. Nature and its creatures animate or inanimate could not be said to have an existence until his name was called. He uttered the words which created our world.3

Civilization in Babylon also began with the language-giving god, Oannes—half-man, half-fish, who swam up the Persian Gulf and taught Babylonians the use of writing and other arts. Even in the Christian tradition, one could interpret the opening lines of the Gospel of John to mean, "in the beginning there was language."

But not all observers saw language as such a unifying enterprise of mankind. According to the author of Genesis (Moses), the linguistic confusion which God imposed on the early peoples of the earth at Babel is responsible for the diversity, not just amongst languages, but amongst tribes, nations, cultures.

At Babel, languages became so varied and complexly diverse that men saw themselves as not the same, after all, but completely different. Perhaps this was the meaning of Babel—that an essentially unified species chose to view itself as diverse, discrete elements, each incommensurate with the other.

Allowing now for a historical jump, the twentieth-century observers of human behavior are still puzzling over this same vast variety, and many construct their own myths of Babel. In particular, the so-called structuralist school of linguistics as led by Leonard Bloomfield was influential in spreading the idea that languages have almost nothing in common but are defined as a system of discrete parts, analyzable only on its own terms. Moreover, this system was seen to operate in a mechanical fashion which was accessible to manipulation and control. It was these methods and theories which eventually Chomsky so brilliantly opposed.

III

When Bloomfield and his colleagues first encountered the wealth of linguistic diversity among the American Indians, they soon discovered that many languages just didn’t work like Latin did. Try as they might, the attempt to analyze Navaho in terms of the Latin of Cicero and Virgil seemed bound to fail. They decided, then, that every language must be considered on its own terms, with a system unique and sufficient to itself. (This theory, incidentally, was instrumental in combating the then prevalent racist views which held that many “primitive” languages were inferior, lacking definite sound systems.) Even though some features of language may appear to be widespread, Bloomfield concluded that “the only useful generalizations about language are inductive generalizations” because “features which we think ought to be universal may be absent from the very next language that becomes accessible.”

With that, Bloomfield, and much of modern linguistics, marched off down a path of strict empiricism and behaviorism. Although their concern was primarily with methodology and not theory, they did make certain important assumptions which informed the character of their subsequent work. They assumed, for example, that since only data (read: behavior) which is directly observable can be valid, language consists, then, of observable sequences of sounds, categorized into discrete, constituent parts. With this type of assumption, the linguist becomes a sort of verbal botanist, categorizing and classifying only those elements which are accessible to observation.

Since the concern of the structuralists was to elevate linguistics to the exalted status of science, they strove for the rigor of the physical sciences. This rigor, of course, required some strict theoretical housekeeping and many traditional ideas were swept out the door. The idea of mind, for example, was simply abandoned, as were as other vague, non-observable entities. The behavior of any organism, Bloomfield felt, could be much more effectively accounted for in terms of stimulus-response. Stimulus-response was seen to work in a very precise, mechanical fashion, much like the physical laws of physics and chemistry, and it lent itself well to direct observation. Under this view, an organism’s capacity to learn may be explained “in much the same way as one might explain how a thermostat ‘learns’ to respond to changes in temperature and switch a furnace on or off.”

The way that children learn language is also based on the thermostat idea, with a few variations. The environment acts as a climate of linguistic stimuli which adjust his language behavior. For example, “John can fix the bicycle,” “Dave can fix the car,” and “John can fix the bicycle” (In mathematical notation, it might look like a proportion: A:B = C:X). The result, “John can fix the car” is a sentence new to the speaker’s experience. From this process which, incidentally, is not beyond the capacity of certain higher animals, man creates the wide variety of sentences observable in a language. The creativity of language use, thus described, is a trait which is easily programmed on a computer.

These are the views of some other speculators on human behavior. Like early Egyptians, Babylonians, and Hebrews, the behaviorists try to account for why people do what they do. Bloomfield, Skinner, and associates have gained an immense amount of popularity in the past few years, moving towards greater accuracy, predictability, and control of human language. Theirs is a view that explicitly rejects traditional ways of looking at human behavior in favor of mechanistic ones. It is a view we must get predictable, and controllable in terms of reinforcement laws.
used to, to some extent.

Perhaps it is not important to distinguish man as unique. Perhaps it is not important to have some vague sense of dignity to share with the rest of the species. Perhaps, like the characters in the final scene of the movies Nashville, it is not important to have an idea of free will. Perhaps there are ways of mollifying the humanists, theologians, and scientists with some grand notion that the mechanistic behavioristic conception of man is better for the world anyway. Maybe we should brighten up, distribute copies of Skinner's Walden II, cast a vote for the utopian future, and leave the rest to the experts. This, it would seem, is the general direction of behaviorism at the moment.

Chomsky reveals not only the inadequacy of the stimulus-response model, but also his mastery of the literature of cognitive psychology. B.F. Skinner, a leading exponent of the extreme behaviorist approach to language has acquired a surprising degree of prominence in professional and lay circles for his theories on human behavior—verbal and otherwise. His prominence seems especially surprising in the light of Chomsky's brilliant but devastating review.

Chomsky demonstrates some fundamental problems of the stimulus-response model, and then goes on to show that Skinner's use of the words stimulus, response, and reinforcement, and of many other terms is so vague and lacking in any objectivity that the problem is to use his terms inconsistently. Chomsky concludes that Skinner's formulation “covers almost no aspect of linguistic behavior, [and]... it is no more scientific than the traditional approaches to this subject matter, and rarely as clear and careful.”

The book Verbal Behavior gets much of its persuasive power from the forcefulness of its claims. In the first chapter of Verbal Behavior, Skinner makes the astounding claim that “the basic processes which give verbal behavior its special characteristics are now fairly well understood. Although much of the work responsible for this advance has been carried on other species... the results have proved to be surprisingly free of species restrictions.” In other words, Skinner is saying that the basic properties involved in language are not unique to human beings but could also exist in rats, pigeons, armadillos, etc. This is ridiculous. As Chomsky points out, if Skinner were right, it would be very odd that language is limited to man (if language were so easily acquired by other species, one wonders why an ape hasn't written a book about psychology).

Skinner also claims that through the manipulation of variables and controlling stimuli, he can evoke or control verbal behavior (Since thinking, as Bloomfield suggests, is merely “talking with concealed musculature,” thought control would be a very logical next step). But the methods Skinner suggests for getting a response are less than sophisticated. To get the response pencil, he suggests saying to the subject, “Please say pencil” or, to make a large and conspicuous pencil available in an unusual place (“half submerged in an aquarium”) with signs reading PENCIL, and “PEN and...” and perhaps having voices in the background (echoic stimuli) saying “pencil, pencil.” It is this lack of rigor that Chomsky called mere “playacting at science.”

Even more interesting, I think, than Chomsky's rebuttal of Skinner, are his terms have only trivial meanings, if any. He then examines Skinner's notion of control of verbal behavior and finally, implies some of his own ideas on innatism and the worth of traditional formulations.

The stimulus-response, mechanistic view of human behavior, while neat in theory, has some important problems. These are not problems which can be solved by further research but are intrinsic to the behavioristic model. For example, in defining the terms stimulus-response, one must decide if 1a) any physical event is to be called a stimulus or 1b) only one to which the organism reacts. Secondly, one must decide if 2a) any behavior is to be called a response, or only 2b) behavior connected with the stimuli in lawful ways. If Skinner accepts 1a) and 2a) then he must conclude that a large part of anything the organism does is simply not lawful (i.e. there will necessarily be many stimuli to which the organism will not respond).

On the other hand, if Skinner accepts the narrower definitions of 1b and 2b, then, obviously, anything the organism does is lawful by definition; but this fact is of “limited significance, since most of what the animal does will simply not be considered behavior.” Skinner's solution to this problem is to use his terms inconsistently.
is innovative and stimulus free. It is innovative in the sense
which form language.

Another aspect of Chomsky's work, which is simply rife with humanistic implications, is what he calls the creative aspect of language use. Far from being explainable, predictable, and controllable in terms of reinforcement laws or stimulus-response, language, in its essential character, is innovative and stimulus free. It is innovative in the sense that from a finite system of grammatical rules of the type just suggested, we can produce and understand an infinite number of sentences, many of which are new to our experience. Language is stimulus free in the sense that "the principles operating in

The tremendous cynicism of the American foreign policy experts comes oozing out of the pores of the dead flesh of behaviorism...

these grammars are not related to sensory phenomena in any way describable in the terms empiricist psychology has to offer." i.e. the principles are quite abstract and are not mechanistically related to specific environmental stimuli. What's more, Chomsky sees no reason to doubt that if this is true for language, it is also "true of other forms of human knowledge."17

The unique character of human language, and perhaps all of human knowledge, then, is creativity. This is a characteristic that both sets man apart and liberates him in a scientific sense. It distinguishes man taxonomically from the rest of the animals because there are surely no animals capable of this rule-governed linguistic creativity; even Lana, "star" chimp of the Yerkes Laboratory, works with a restricted group of symbols. It also liberates man from useless notions of scientific control of mental behavior. If, for example, Stanley Kubrick had read Language and Mind before he made the movie Clockwork Orange, he might not have been nearly so convinced of the possibilities of such extreme behavioral control. One result of Chomsky's work is that it shows that the behaviorism of the type shown in A Clockwork Orange is, for all practical purposes, not only immoral, but also impossible.

VI

Noam Chomsky leads a double life. It is not a double life in the Superman/Clark Kent sense—a courageous crime fighter in one world and a mild mannered fellow in the other—but it is more of the Superman/Aquaman sort (if that's possible): a courageous (if outspoken) fighter against falsehood in both cases but appearing in different realms. It may be surprising to some people, then, that Chomsky is not only a sort of hero amongst some (though certainly not all) behavioral scientists, but also amongst radical leftists in the very different realm of international politics. He has published widely on the imperialistic policies of the United States and on other crimes of state. His book, American Power and the New Mandarins is probably the most coherent and persuasive condemnation of American imperialism yet available.

He also criticizes the current vogue for experts and advisors in international politics—a realm where expertise is not possible. The demand for so-called expertise is caused not so much by the increasing complexities of the problems, but by the laziness of intellectuals who would rather delegate responsibilities. "The cult of the expert is both self-serving, for those who propound it, and fraudulent."18 It is self serving because the experts, by saying they are dealing with highly specific and involved social problems which require mastery, are able to keep themselves in office. It is fraudulent because "to anyone who has any contact with the social and behavioral (or the policy sciences), the claim that there are certain considerations and principles too deep for the outsider to comprehend is simply an absurdity, unworthy of comment."19

Chomsky's attack on the cult of the expert, I think, is closely aligned with his attack on behaviorism. The experts, like behaviorists, irrationally and irresponsibly restrict their attention to what they consider the highly specific manipulatable motives of the country in question. They fail to see any deeper motives, and rarely appeal to a sense of common morality. They are, therefore, surprised when, for example, "the Chinese irrationally refuse to respond to the schedule of reinforcement we have prepared for them."20 The tremendous cynicism of the American foreign policy experts comes oozing out the pores of the dead flesh of behaviorism, the stinking carcass which lies like a blanket on the country of Vietnam, smothering it. Whoring after the surface features of a problem which demands deeper analysis, American experts cynically manipulate the situation for solutions which serve their own ends.

Although I am on relatively untrod ground amongst Chomsky's critics by associating Chomsky's views on human nature with his political views, I think that in any case, it can be said that his views contain a rebuke for the American intellectual community. Dell Hymes describes the powerful impact Chomsky had at the London Lectures in 1969:

Many . . . came to the lectures moved by the figure of a dramatically successful scholar who would lay his mind and to some extent his body on the line for causes that matter—a man who publicly and committedly broke with the age-old tradition of trahison des clercs in which so many of us, recovered from our fright of the young in the 60's, are beginning to wallow again, rationalizing our toleration of the intolerable as a defense for the academy of civility.21

Chomsky is a man not only committed to the ideas that he propounds but also committed to seeing them happen in the real world.

In a brilliant essay entitled The Responsibility of Intellectuals, he details the way in which Americans,
who have the economy, leisure, and freedom to support a large academic community, have handled their duties. Bluntly stating that “it is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies,” he shows the many ways in which many prominent American scholars—Arthur Schlesinger, Henry Kissinger, David Rowe—have shirked this duty, and done some rather substantial lying in their own right.

He also develops the theme of an essay by Daniel Bell entitled The End of Ideology. The age of ideology it seems, has ended by general agreement that every issue must be resolved in its own terms, by some expert who knows more about some highly specific field. In sociology and anthropology this is the functionalistic school of thought; in psychology and linguistics, this is known as behaviorism. Wherever it appears, it is a movement away from the free-floating intellectual into the specious realm of the expert.

What it amounts to is irresponsibility. American intellectuals have lost any notion of trying to use ideas as social levers. They see no further need for a radical transformation in society: “We may tinker with our way of life here and there, but it would be wrong to modify it in a significant way.” It is fashionable to be cynical about the New Left, and many intellectuals seem to have a quite utopian faith that “technical experts will be able to come to grips with the few problems that still remain.” Complacent and self-satisfied, American intellectuals have rejected ideology in favor of a tinkering type of expertise.

Chomsky’s thought is characteristically controversial. It is by no means accepted by all, or even most of the academic community. But on whatever topic he chooses to focus the beacon of his attention, he emerges as a thoughtful, clear, and articulate scholar of considerable importance, capable of casting light on many current issues. The appeal of Chomsky’s thought comes from his characteristic way of bringing up humdrum issues everyone long ago dismissed or accepted with a yawn—issues like innatism, expertise, and ambiguities of language—and recasting them in a new, socially relevant mold, ready for use.

The impressions he leaves with a reader are varied but always stimulating. In what is presumably a tribute to the striking character of Chomsky’s thought, poet John Hollander sums it up:

_Coiled Alizarine_ for Noam Chomsky

Curiously deep, the slumber of crimson thoughts.
While breathless, in stodgy viridian, Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

**FOOTNOTES**

2 Ibid., p. 24.
6 Bloomfield, _Language_, p. 31.
8 Ibid., p. 552.
10 Ibid., p. 253.
11 Ibid., p. 254.
13 Ibid., p. 562.
15 Ibid., p. 51.
19 Ibid., p. 274.
20 Ibid., p. 282.
Her name was Debby. I guess I should tell you that right at first, bein's that she's the one the whole thing is all about anyhow.

"Tain't a easy thing for me to talk about, but in a way it's kinda important for me to tell you 'bout her, 'cause then maybe you won't get yourself into the same kind o' trouble like I did. The thing is ... I don't want ta tell you not to do it either, 'cause it was worth it—I think—for both of us; leastways I'm trying to talk myself into thinkin it was worth it, or something ... probly "or somethin." But anyhow, I'm gettin aheada myself. I oughta start at the beginnin.

Like I said, her name was Debby. The first time I met her, I was just a'sittin at a friend o'mine's house, jes mindin nobody's business but my own, when this girl walks in, jes like that. She was a pretty ordinary kinda girl, kinda bubbly-bouncy 'n'all, but okay, I guess. I jes didn't pay her a whole lot o'mind right then.

Saw her a coupla days later, out on the road, and spent some time with her, y'know, just talkin some and messin around some, nothin in particular, but I ended up invitin her to a party we was havin that Saturday, same's I would anybody else; I invite people easy y'know, maybe that's why I get into the kinda trouble like I do. Anyhow, I guess that was my first mistake, if you're thinkin of it in mistakes, like I sometimes do and I sometimes don't.

Then the party came. 'N' she came. 'N' it came. Not right away like o'course. It started off okay. We talked normal party talk for a while, no big deal or nothin, just ordinary party talk. 'N' then the music came, 'n' there wasn't a whole lot of people dancin, but she felt like dancin 'n' I felt like dancin so we danced some. Normal party dance, no big deal. 'N' then I taught her how ta slow dance, y'know, real close 'n'all. That was my second mistake (if you're still thinkin mistakes 'n' keepin track). Well, I figger that's where she started a'fallin, 'n' I got to admit that I didn't do a real good job of catchin her or nothin. Matter o'fact I kinda liked it 'n' she wasn't a bad slow dancer either, once she sorta caught on. I shoulda done some thinkin there I guess—I think. Aw I dunno, I still haven't ffiggered it all out.

Well, next thing ya know, the beer was runnin out, so we hopped in the car ta get some more, and drove down ta the party store 'n' got some beer 'n' drove back, 'n' pulled the seat back 'n'... put it this way, the people inside had to wait a pretty long time for their beer. But it was nice.

Ta make a pretty long story pretty short, it happened agin the next day when she come a'visitin, 'n' the day after when we laid out in the sun 'n' talked some 'n' made people wait for their beer some, in a manner o' speakin, 'n' the day after that agin, 'til the weekend come, 'n' I hadta leave, 'cause I was jes there for a coupla weeks ta look the place over, y'know; so we decided to go campin ta end off my visit 'n' look forward ta when I'd be comin back permanent-like ... 'n' no, I don't do that sorta stuff, jes makin people wait for their beer, no more'n that.

'N' then come g'bye time, 'n' yeah, I'd write, even seesin I'd be back in a month or so, 'n' yeah I'd look her up agin 'n' all that stuff.

Well, I left, 'n' I had a whole month ta think 'bout all o'that, 'n' ta think 'bout Debby, 'n' ta think 'bout me, 'n' ta think 'bout us, 'n' ta do some realizin 'n' stuff, 'n' it mostly endin up bein that Debby was a nice kid 'n' all but what was I doin with her. I wasn't ready ta settle down ('n' still ain't). I got things ta do 'n' places ta see 'n' Debby's ready ta settle down, 'n' I'm the one she's ready ta settle down with 'n'—lemme outa here!

So what's I supposed ta do? Jes quit seein her, jes like that? No way. I ain't never on purpose burnt nobody in my whole life, 'n' I don't aim ta start now. 'Sides I been burnt too often not ta know what it's like, 'n' I don't like what it's like, 'n' I gotta do somethin 'bout it this time.

So I set myself down, 'n' seesin I was supposed ta write her anyhow, I wrote her, 'n' I told her why I gotta stop seein her 'n' all, 'n' that it wasn't her—'n' it wasn't—but that I couldn't handle no big deal thing 'n' this gettin ta be a big deal thing, 'n' that we oughta quit now, 'fore anybody's gonna get burnt worse than they's gonna get burnt now, 'n' she'd get over it real quick 'n' all, 'n' that I'd still like ta be friends 'n' all that stuff that ya write when ya write them kinda letters, I guess. Trouble was, I meant it, all o'it.

Well, I come back, 'n' I called her, 'n' I said let's get together 'n' talk 'bout that letter, 'n' talk 'bout us 'n' all that. 'N' we did. 'N' 'fore the night was half gone we was makin people wait for their beer agin; 'n' I'm stuck, 'cause I still mean it, 'n' I'm 'fraid she still means it, 'n' I think that we mean different things. 'n' I'm here now so I can't sit down 'n' write her another letter nomore, 'cause I done that already 'n' it didn't work, 'n' I'm normal 'n' I like makin people wait for their beer, 'n' I can't go off 'n' ignore her, 'cause I don't wanta burn her, 'n' what do I do?

I dunno.
The real question, it seems to me, is whether change is beneficial to the language or detrimental.

John Ciardi, poet, critic, and regular contributor to the Saturday Review and its journalistic offspring, once wrote about a student in one of his writing courses who dropped the course because of what he considered to be Ciardi's pedantic approach to language. The student, a navy veteran of one of our recent wars, had a number of assets that boded well for his future as a writer: he had seen a good deal of action, he had observed carefully and had, consequently, acquired an excellent stock of the stuff of which good fiction is made, and he was already a better-than-average writer when he enrolled in the course.

But when, in criticizing one of the student's early efforts, Ciardi chided him mildly for having written "We arrived at our mid-ocean rendezvous," the student was first bewildered and then, after Ciardi had explained, offended. The basis of Ciardi's objection was that the word arrived was a derivation of the Latin ad ripa, meaning "to the shore" (our word riparian, as in "riparian rights," e.g., the right of the owner of lakeshore property to fish the offshore waters, derives from the same source) and, hence, perhaps not the best word to use in describing what one does at a rendezvous in mid-ocean.

Even Ciardi, who, like most defenders of the language, frequently displays a whim of iron, would not have considered the lapse a capital linguistic crime. What was a crime in his book, however, was the student's reaction to the instructor's lighthanded guidance. "Any person," said Ciardi, in effect, "who lacks enough respect for language to abandon a nonsensical expression once it's been shown to be nonsense ought not to follow writing as a vocation."

This encounter of Ciardi's raises the intriguing question of where one is to draw the line in acceding to change in the language. No one, obviously, will seriously argue that a living language does not change. In fact, change is the very phenomenon that makes a "living" language alive. The real question, it seems to me, is whether the change is beneficial to the language or detrimental: whether the change is a sign of healthy growth, as in a child developing to physical maturity; or of deterioration, as in an octogenarian; or, worse yet, of malignancy, as in a victim of cancer. And I should like to suggest that any change contributing to clearer communication of thought and emotion (that being, after all, the function of language) is to be welcomed, that any change tending to blur fine distinctions in meaning should be resisted, and that any change running counter to rationality or further polluting the environment with meaningless noise ought to be rigorously eradicated.

In the first category, those changes that enable us to say more clearly what we mean, is a word like disinterested. My Shorter Oxford English Dictionary shows that around 1612 the word was used to mean "without interest or concern" and that such a use may by now be obsolete. (But—see below—the editors reckoned without the American public and the American penchant for democracy in all things, not excluding usage.) The entry continues: "Not influenced by interest; now always, Unbiased by personal interest 1659."

The latter definition was certainly given wide currency in the Victorian age by Matthew Arnold's frequent use of the
word to mean “unbiased, objective, not tainted by considerations of personal profit or loss,” as in his definition of culture as the “disinterested pursuit of our total perfection.”

There was room in the English language, I think, for a word like disinterested as distinct from uninterested, because relatively few of the words that we loosely classify as “synonyms” are, in fact, synonymous. (See, for example, the entry under sly in Webster’s New World Dictionary.) The reason is that many so-called synonyms differ subtly from one another on account of the connotations, the emotional overtones, that have accrued in the course of the development of the language. Thus, at least to me, disinterested connotes a higher degree of integrity than does impartial, and a less mechanical and purely scientific view than objective. Impartiality may be due to a lack of interest, and objectivity may be due to a similar lack, in this instance of perhaps quite legitimate emotions. But the disinterested person is the one who, like an upright judge, may well have personal preferences based on bias, family ties, or whatever, but who, nevertheless, surmounts those preferences in making his decision.

I must, therefore, agree with Lionel Trilling when, in a headnote to Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” he writes:

It is a misfortune of the English language in modern times that the word “disinterested” is commonly confused with the word “uninterested.” The modern lexicographers who work on the principle that whatever is the usage of people is acceptable are beginning to accept the confusion, and perhaps they are very wise in their principle, but in this instance the usage of people—or at least of some people—has deprived us of our only word for a very important virtue.

The history of disinterested, then, furnishes us with an excellent example of two kinds of change—first from synonymy with uninterested and, currently, back to its original state as, quite possibly, a substandard substitute for the word. The first, I repeat, is a welcome change; the second is not.

On occasion—such are the benefits, as opposed to the numerous vexations, of a polyglot language—words that mean the same thing in the parent languages will gradually take on different meanings in their Anglicized forms; and that phenomenon, too, is a beneficial kind of change. Take, for example, the words monologue and soliloquy, the first of Greek and the second of Latin origin and both meaning essentially and, so far as I can discover, originally “the speech of one person.” (Cf. the related dialogue and colloquy, both of which entail conversation.) Usage, however, especially in a literary context, has led to a clear distinction between the two, monologue implying an auditor to whom the words are addressed and soliloquy implying merely thinking aloud with no audience intended. Thus the personae in Browning’s dramatic poems engage in monologues, whereas the actors in Elizabethan drama frequently resort to soliloquies to admit the audience—though decidedly not their fellow-personae—to their innermost thoughts. Again, the distinction between two erstwhile synonyms having been made, and the distinction having proved useful, if only as a tool for literary criticism, it would be something of a loss if the two words were to
revert to their original synonymy.

Change, then, does occasionally—perhaps even frequently—enrich a language by enabling the discriminating user to convey his thought more clearly. But (is it a case of all appearing yellow to the jaundiced eye?) to the linguistic conservative it seems that more changes tend toward eliminating these useful distinctions, and in the process creating new and sly families of not-quite synonyms, than otherwise.

That is obviously what is happening to the distinction between imply and infer. Until very recently it was generally agreed that to imply was to hint at and that to infer was to recognize that hint; or, in other words, that the speaker or writer implied (something that he preferred not to state explicitly) and that the auditor or reader inferred. And, indeed, careful users of language still make the distinction, though I should not be surprised if the latest printing of one of the more up-to-date dictionaries were to list the words as interchangeable, on the dubious grounds that the masses, including the mass media, were interchanging them.

Now, I would hardly argue that admitting infer to the language as a synonym for imply would do irreparable damage to the language. Something, however, will have been lost if the process becomes irreversible—some subtlety of meaning that, whatever other function it may serve, still gladdens the heart and brightens the eye of the connoisseur. For imply is based on the Latin words meaning “to fold into,” that is, to include under cover, whereas infer derives from the words meaning “to carry into,” or to include openly. And the latter, it appears to me, is precisely what one does when he infers what another has implied; he brings it out into the open, unfolds it from the wrappings that partially concealed it, and makes visible the details of something only the outlines of which could previously have been seen.

Perhaps the disappearance of the intransitive lie (“to recline”) as contrasted to the transitive lay (“to set down”) will not create an unbridgeable communication gap, either. One obvious benefit of such a disappearance would be the concomitant elimination of the problem of what the past and the perfect tenses of lie are. But if we are to do away with the time-honored difference between lie and lay we ought, I think, to do so on more substantial grounds than merely that it is difficult for some people to remember the difference.3

Rather less innocuous, however, is the threatened loss of distinction between adjectives complementing “linking” verbs of the senses, and adverbs modifying “action” verbs of the senses. I have no strong objections to someone’s saying that I feel “badly,” even when my sense of touch is unimpaired and I am merely suffering from a head cold. But I should be rather put out if that same person, noting with the time-honored difference between that my sense of smell was, consequently, affected, were to reverse the process and spread the word that I smelled “bad.”

Changes such as these, I suggest, do nothing for the enrichment of the language, and where they are concerned I echo Samuel Johnson’s dictum in the “Preface” to his Dictionary of the English Language:

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated; tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution; let us make some struggles for our language.

Such struggles are particularly worthwhile when we are confronted with the cacophonous, meaningless din that accompanies much of contemporary conversation. An idiom can be defined as “a group of words violating grammar or sense or both,” and any language which abounds in such figurative expressions, is, in fact, made richer and acquires its individuality from their existence. But there are, I suggest, limits beyond which even idioms ought not to go in their defiance of sense. An example currently in vogue is “center around,” a physical impossibility and a logical abomination. Similarly, although metaphor and simile, two of the most popular forms of figurative language, have long been used to say what any rational being recognizes as literally untrue, there is a point beyond which even a figure of speech cannot go without assailing the rational order of the universe. Giardi’s student who “arrived at [his] mid-ocean rendezvous” may have only approached that point. A clergyman acquaintance of mine, on the other hand, was unquestionably going too far for rationality to keep up with him when he stated that “some people sail through life on a bed of roses like a hot knife through butter.”

Even more distressing is the present penchant for such meaningless interjections as y’know and like. They debase the linguistic currency of a people, for bad words have a tendency to drive out the good, just as bad money drives out the good. Far better, I think, to revert to the traditional ub when one’s tongue threatens to outrun his mind. Ub, at least, is generally recognized as meaningless; but you know and like are words that ought to convey intelligible messages—and, in a happier day, did.

Let language change, then, as it inevitably will as long as it continues to live. To try to stop it from changing is, in any event, as futile as King Canute’s efforts to make the waves stand still. But let those of us, members of an academic community, who by virtue of our educational opportunities have some choice in the matter do what we can to insure that the changes that we help to bring about are the kind that make clear, reasonable discourse more possible, and not less.

Y’know?

2 Another example of the kind of pejorative change that words like villain, boor, and lewd have suffered. Discrimination used to mean “perception, discernment,” basically, a “capacity for making a judgment.” Everyone knows what it “means” today.
3 Weak as the argument based on mere difficulty may be, it is still preferable to that of an English teacher whom I heard say a few years ago, “Ever since lay became a noun, I haven’t dared bring the matter up in class.”
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Artist’s statement:

I am concerned with thought rather than stable things. Sometimes my works reflect banal and significant things at the same time—hard and soft edges, complex and simple considerations, objective image ideas and individual marks or marking systems.

With investigation of visual language, I might dislocate illusory space and soothing design. I’d rather deal with real time, space, physical material and media application.

As a christian, I cannot overlook paradoxes in people, institutions, or ideas. My work questions and uses ambiguities in addition to classical images.

Jake Van Wyk

Conclusion
Thunder Box
During college I saw no reason to modify the Babel story as I had learned it at home and Sunday School: that when A asked B in Italian for the hammer, B would say in Norwegian to C, "What's wrong with A? We both understood him yesterday," whereupon C would complain in Chinese to D that A and B were putting him on. D, having metamorphosed into a Finn since the day before, withdrew to find others who could understand him, and the next day the Finns set out to establish Finland and to write a Finnish grammar. Every other group also migrated, in order to be away from where people didn't talk right anymore. Each group wrote its own grammar, and thus the universal language was destroyed. Each people had its own distinct language, never to be changed.

In such a view a dialect is at best an oddity and at worst a symptom of linguistic laziness, hostility, and downright depravity. Mistakes in language are then moral faults. In this essay I shall first defend taking an appreciative interest in dialects and mistakes. Next, I shall survey briefly the several methods of language study and argue why I choose the method I do for teaching grammar in English 100. Then I shall conclude with a brief word on how my attitude toward dialects and errors colors my method.

The first inkling I had that linguistic affairs were not as simple as the Sunday school version of the Babel story was a Chaucer course I took with Dr. John Timmerman a year or more after I had graduated from Calvin. Dr. Timmerman insisted that we pronounce the vowels with, not their modern-English, but with the continental values. Pronounced that way, English sounded more like Dutch than I had realized before. It was my first awareness of the evolution of languages.

For English was not spoken at all at Babel. English did not exist at all before the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded Britain in the middle of the fifth century A.D. Their language then was only barely distinguishable from Old Frisian—the speakers of which language, as we all know, did not migrate to Britain—and not distinguishable at all from the Old Saxon which metamorphosed into Dutch. At bottom English is as Germanic a language as the German spoken in Berlin.

No Germanic language was spoken at Babel. Jakob Grimm's discovery in the nineteenth century that all of the major European languages are related to each other by an evolutionary process of linguistic change proved that the Germanic languages were not there from the start. Grimm worked with pairs like the following:
Latin *ego*, Dutch *ik*  
Latin *genus*, German *knie*  
Latin *ager*, English *acre*

Grimm observed not only that wherever Latin, Greek, or Sanskrit has a /g/ Germanic languages had a /k/, but that where Latin, Greek, or Sanskrit had /b/ Germanic languages had /p/, and where those non-Germanic languages had /d/ Germanic languages had /t/. These are only three sound changes of some twelve, each of them documented with long lists of words. Grimm's conclusion, never seriously debated since its formulation: Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, all the Germanic languages, and all the Celtic languages (like Welsh and Gaelic) were derived from one parent language, which Grimm called Indo-European. One by one tribes got cross and moved away from the parent Indo-European tribe—one over a mountain range, another across a river, another across a sea, another simply away—and after several centuries the tribes no longer understood the parent language or each other. Whatever happened at Babel was not the instant production of all the world's languages, but the beginning of a process of language-making. Separation between people causes differences between their languages, and differences between their languages cause greater separation.

When differences between the mother language and the language of an alienated community within it are insufficient enough so that the two communities can still understand each other, we call the alienated language a dialect. When an individual is alienated from a group to the extent that it makes his language a little different from that of the group—and everyone is so alienated—his language is called an idiolect. Every language beings as a dialect—mistakes, if you will—withina mother language, and every dialect begins as an idiolect. If a speaker persuades others to say the mistakes as he or she does, the idiolect becomes a dialect, and if the speakers of a dialect acquire sufficient influence or power so that neighboring speakers begin to imitate them, then the dialect becomes a language.

When the French-speaking Normans conquered England in 1066, the capital moved from Winchester to London. As a result, the London dialect (East Anglian, as modified by French) became the basis for standard English. Along with political influence, Winchester lost linguistic influence. Before 1066, texts written in the isolation of Northumbria show West Saxon forms and expressions, from Winchester; after 1066, Northumbrian texts show East Anglian forms and expressions. Northumbria began to be influenced by the East Anglican dialect, not because it was considered by competent judges to be a superior dialect, but because London was now the center of political power and cultural fashion. The decision what should become the standard was made without anyone's having consciously made it.

An even better example for making my point about dialect is what happened to Latin—not to the teaching of it, but to the language itself. It is simply false to say that Latin died. Latin is going strong in 1975 in its offspring "dialects:" Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, each of these dialects having by now acquired language status. One never thinks of French as being odd Latin, or Spanish as being lazy Latin, or Italian as being immoral Latin.

But suppose for the sake of argument that all dialects are examples of linguistic depravity. No amount of inveighing against mistakes will make France at this late date go back to a pure form of Latin, for all the mistakes have long since been standardized. The standardization of mistakes is exactly what is involved in a dialect's becoming language.

When Renaissance Englishmen began to pronounce *my* as we know it rather than as our *me*, when they began to pronounce *me* as we know it rather than as our *may*, and when they began pronouncing *may* as we know it rather than as our *my*, these new pronunciations were all mistakes. Nor will it do to argue that they were changing them from a wrong pronunciation to a right one. Saying *my* as we say *me* was as right for medieval Englishmen as our saying *my* and *me* and meaning by them what we mean.

Or take folk etymologies—mistaken pickings-up of words—that have become correct: Englishmen misheard the Dutch *donderbuss* ("thunder box," said of a kind of gun) as *blunderbuss*, misheard the French *appentis* (for a house attached to another building on top) as *penthouse*, and the Hindi *tipai* ("tripod") as *teapot*, now a stand for a tea service. Would it be worth the effort to correct the mistakes, to purge the language from error?

_Sum man haef de twegen suna_ was the correct way to say *A certain man had two sons* in Old English. At least twenty mistakes in language had not only to be made, but to be standardized in order to make the latter sentence possible. The declension for dual number in Old English—very useful for distinguishing "we two" (with) as *we are*—fell away when Anglo-Saxons made the mistake of using the plural for both. Objective, dative, and instrumental cases in Old English all fell into one case, the objective, because Anglo-Saxons made mistakes. Any sentence we say in English is the result of conventionalized mistakes, no matter how rigorously it conforms to the rules in *Harper's Handbook*. Mistakes and dialects are the means by which languages change.

The first prescriptive English grammars were written in the eighteenth century, the most famous and influential being Robert Lowth's. Bishop Lowth knew nothing about the history of the English language, but he knew Latin grammar well. He applied the grammar of Latin to English whether it fit or not. It is impossible to use a preposition at the end of a Latin sentence, and hence he made it a rule never to end an English sentence with a preposition. Bishop Lowth did not realize that prepositions had been used at the ends of English sentences since Old English times as well as in all the other Germanic languages.

_*Ik kan er niet bij* being a Dutch example. It is impossible to split an infinitive in Latin, the infinitive form being a single word in that language; all right, infinitives would
no longer be split in English even, though both Chaucer and Shakespeare had done so. Lowth also formulated six tense for verbs on the Latin model, though English since earliest times had only two tenses, present and past, with a large group of modal auxiliaries, each giving a certain temperature to the verbs. And so I shall go is future tense in Lowth's system, though, arbitrarily, I should go is present, should being a modal auxiliary and go an "understood" infinitive. I shall have been being seen has never, I am sure, occurred in English discourse, but Lowth made a slot for the future perfect passive progressive to round out his diagram. He also made the rule against double negatives, as though language were mathematics, ignoring the fact that from Beowulf through Shakespeare as many as three negatives pile up in a row reinforcing each other. Without consulting anyone, Lowth also fabricated a purely arbitrary distinction between shall and will, though they had been used interchangeably until his time.

Though he gave passing tribute to Latin as the ready-made universal grammar, Lowth's real purpose in writing his grammar was etiquette: giving citizens of the rising middle class, many of them not having studied Latin, access to a method of self-improvement. My intention is not to minimize Lowth's achievement. Using Latin grammar to describe the English language works surprisingly well. The trouble with Lowth's nonce system is that it got institutionalized over the next two centuries as the very system that God had delivered at Babel, and any deviation from it was seen as a weakening of the absolute.

The authority of Lowth's system went unchallenged until the twentieth century. Lowth's system described much about English, but not everything. It worked best for people who already knew the English language, but is was virtually useless for foreigners, especially non-Europeans.

Descriptive linguists—Bloomfield, Fries, Pike, Trager and Smith—make up the first major school of linguists to challenge Lowth's system. These descriptivists and structuralists deny the existence of linguistic universals; they begin and end the study of each language with the application of stimulus-response theory to that particular language alone. Behavioristic in their psychological theory, these linguists concentrate on describing the melodies of English sentences. Using terms like pitch, stress, and juncture, with precise definitions for each, they manage to describe in print what spoken English sounds like, so that non-native speakers of English can learn to speak the language without an accent. This school of linguists has phenomenal success in applying its theories to foreign languages too, preparing spies during World War II and preparing missionaries after World War II. The Wycliff Bible Translators work largely by this method. And yet, as our own late Dr. Zylstra never tired of pointing out, any theory of language based on behaviorist psychology is a denial of the Christian view of man, regardless of how many converts to Christianity it chalks up. Arguing against descriptivists and structuralists philosophically, Zylstra's only appeal practically was to the traditional grammar of Lowth's kind.

And so a book that had been designed to help up-and-coming merchants and their wives to speak more like their new neighbors than like their old neighbors—the book itself already forgotten, but its precepts still observed—became our only defense against structural linguistics.

Zylstra died before the transformational-generative grammar of Noam Chomsky came into its own. Working with meaning and syntax, regarding traditional grammar respectfully while demonstrating its weaknesses, Chomsky developed a system of linguistic rules for generating every conceivable kind of sentence out of a simple kernel sentence. Behind the empirical evidence of particular languages, Chomsky sees a universal grammar which must still be discovered. Descriptivists gleefully bring up languages in which subject-predicate sentences do not occur, like Turkish, to prove that each language is totally separate from every other once it has achieve language status. Chomsky argues that Turkish has subject-predicate relationships, though not expressed by word order or by inflectional endings. For behind the empirical structures of language Chomsky sees what he calls deep structure, the structuring of human rationality being implicit in anything a person says. At its deepest level, says Chomsky, this rational patterning is universal.

While descriptive linguists had only scorn for traditional grammar of Lowth's kind, Chomsky has appreciation for how well it works and for its concern with universals. True, traditional grammar does not give a complete description of any language; traditional grammar simply proclaims itself the universal grammar without doing its homework. But those limitations are no more severe than the limitations of the descriptive grammar.

And so we are left with three grammars: 1) Traditional grammar is the least complete, though by far the most easy to master in a short time, especially for native speakers of English. 2) Descriptive-behaviorist grammar, though a complete statement of the sounds of English, remains weak on syntax and on the relationship of meaning to form. 3) Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar, strong on syntax, remains weak on describing sounds and does not have the Gee-Whiz kind of success that the descriptivists can claim. Philosophically, the descriptivists are so far removed from the transformationalists that it will be a generation or more until a unified grammar is written.

Choosing among partial grammars is difficult, especially since both descriptive grammar and transformational grammar keep adjusting their systems to accomodate what each considers salvagable in the opposite system. The grammars will not stay put long enough to teach; by the end of the course the course itself will be obsolete. Traditional grammar, with all of its incompleteness and arbitrariness, is at least definite. I continue to teach it in English 100, especially since only part of a semester is allowed for grammar in that course. It can be mastered in a short time, it contains enough description of sentence patterns to allow
students to experiment with unfamiliar styles, and one knows exactly what one knows having studied it. Choosing among partial grammars is difficult, which is why most high-school teachers teach no grammar of any kind.

An so pragmatically—exactly the rationale Zylstra so abhorred in the self-defense of descriptive grammar—I choose traditional grammar, though without any illusions that in uncovering the structures in English that are similar to Latin structures we have probed beyond Babel to a linguistic absolute. I am sure that the Chomsky approach to language is sounder, but it takes at least a full-year course for students to feel free with, and one cannot know when one has mastered it finally, because it is still a system in the making.

Much as I admire Zylstra's opposition to descriptive linguistics, I must deplore his defense of traditional grammar as an absolute. Chomsky too opposed descriptive grammar, and his opposition became transformational grammar. I immediately forgive Zylstra, of course, for not being Chomsky. Literature was Zylstra's concern more than language, and it is unfair to require that, in addition to doing Shakespeare and contemporary poetry and Reformed Journal on campus, he should have done all the work of Noam Chomsky too. And yet, wonder why Noam Chomsky did not appear among us? We had the anti-behaviorist bias, the impatience with descriptive linguists, an interest in linguistic universals, and the philosophical-intellectual equipment to do the job. How odd that we did not beat Chomsky to it. Is it because when threatened by a new idea hostile to our Christianity we turn instinctively to reiterating a conservative position rather than developing a new one? I keep thinking that it will need one of us—somebody with a lifetime to give to the project—to decide what is salvagable in descriptive grammar, to integrate in into Chomsky's system, to produce the most complete English grammar ever, and perhaps even to get a handle on that universal grammar that Chomsky so hankers after.

I have said that I teach traditional grammar on pragmatic grounds. I conclude with a word on how I try to teach it. I teach traditional grammar as the dialect of educated people, which company anybody who enters college presumably is eager to join. To make it in academia, one needs something more expressive than a dialect that a student brings from home. Non-standard Black you all, for example, allows a clear and useful distinction between second person singular and plural; Yankee Dutch under through allows a distinction between and under-and-staying-there. Useful as it is to know standard English, especially in academia, there is no reason why the Black student and the Yankee Dutch student, having mastered academic dialect, should not continue to use their folk dialects at home. The more dialects a person masters, the greater the variety of communities open to him—just as knowing more than one's own language opens a greater variety of cross-cultural experiences. What snobbery it is to say that once a dialect has achieved language status it is worth study, but before graduation to language status a dialect is worth only contempt. We admire bilingualism, in and out of academia; it is time we admired bidialecticalism too.

A student's folk speech must be marked wrong when it intrudes into an essay in standard English, but the mistake lies in getting the dialects confused, not in knowing a wrong dialect that never should have happened. In fact, to the extent that a teacher is interested in the phenomenon of language, that intrusive dialect is more intrinsically interested than the standardized grammar text. The history of any language is the history of dialects turning into languages and of mistakes being standardized. The history of language sudden conflict with every other language. The story is an interesting as ever, except that now we ourselves are actors in it, new dialects and languages forming all around us. True, the old version of the story regarded languages as static and absolute; linguistic relativity can be hard to live with, especially for teachers of English. I have been questioning in this essay whether linguistic affairs have ever been as absolute as the old version of the story implied. Misconstruing the absolute as relativity is the risk I run, and another name for it is blasphemy. But misconstruing what is in fact relative as though it were absolute is the opposite error, and another name for that is idolatry.
Lee Doezeema  Break
Heiman Dullaert: Dutch Metaphysical Poet

Henrietta Ten Harmensel

During the last two decades various Dutch Protestant poets of the seventeenth century have become known as "metaphysical poets." Jacobus Revius (1586-1658) and Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687) have been translated into and widely read and analyzed in English. Two of their successors, now greatly admired by Dutch critics and readers, certainly merit equally careful translation and analysis in English. Jeremias De Decker (1609-1666) is best known for the long poem Good Friday, a deeply moving, baroque portrait of Christ's Passion. At the end of the Dutch metaphysical period, Heiman Dullaert (1636-1684) refined and rejuvenated some of its peculiar characteristics in his unique lyrics. The following sonnets by Dullaert demonstrate the general metaphysical phenomena of paradox, intellectual conceits, conversational intimacy, and the resolution of apparent contradictions within a unifying religious vision. They reflect also the intense passion, extravagant wit, and aesthetic integrity peculiar to Dullaert as well as the typically Dutch coalescing of Biblical events with the poet's personal religious experience.

Dullaert's sonnet on Gethsemane compares the blood, sweat, and pain of Christ in the garden for countless sinners with the tears He shed over one wicked Jerusalem. In the macabre closing metaphor of the Saviour's pores as eyes, Dullaert seems desperately to reach for some figure by which he may measure the extent of Christ's compassion:

Christ in the Garden

What clots of red besmear this fertile ground?
Are you undone by hell, death, law, and sin?
Has love consumed your heart in its hot glow,
Your melting heart, pressed out through clothes and skin?

Has God's wrath sent an arrow through your bowels,
An arrow which so sharply twists and wrings
That, oh, its wound bleeds out in countless bursts?
That from each pore a purple fountain springs?

But since, dear Lord, with sympathetic cries
Two streams of water sprang from your two eyes
For one Jerusalem, one wicked town,

No wonder that to take away our sin–
The horrors of so many thousand men–
Now thousand bloodstream from a thousand eyes flow down.

Christus in 't Hofken

Wat rode klonteren besmeuren deze gronden?
Wordt gij van zonde en wet, van dood en helle omringd?
Zeg, heeft de liefde uw hart in haren gloed verslonden,
Uw hart, dat smeltende door huid en kleedren dringt?

Heeft u Gods toorn een pijl in'tingewand gezonden,
Die uw beangst gemoed zo vinnig praamt en wringt,
Dat zijne wonde, ooi mij! bloedt uit ontelbre wonden,
Dat uit elk zweetgat, ach, een purpere ader springt?

Maar hebt gij eertijds, Heer, uit teder mededogen
Twee waterstomen uit twee zielbeminnende ogen
Om een Jerusalem, die gruwelstad, verspreid,

Is 't wonder dat gij dan, in onze schuld getreden,
Om zo veel gruwelen van zo veel duizend steden
Nu duizend stromen bloeds uit duizend ogen schreit?
On the Spear Which Pierced His Side with its conversational immediacy also combines the searing reality of Christ’s pain with the poignant awareness of the Christian’s participation in its cause:

On the Spear Which Pierced His Side

Stop it, demented Spear! Stop piercing his pure breast,
For my ungratefulness, alas, has done it, too,
And by its worldly lust anticipated you
And in that anguished heart has pierced the heart of God.

But now I feel Remorse remove that sword again:
See here what blood my heart is sweating through my eyes—
Such healing dew that I can hardly realize
Whether these fountains rich have blood or balm in them.

O Savior, bleeding so! O sinner, weeping so!
Combine this fount and fount, unite this heart to heart,
What bitter sweetness then! What comfort pain imparts!

O Spear, the sign of love that sets my faith aglow,
Come, open up that breast; I’m longing for the day
That I may melt in it, in it may glide away.

The Blessed Draught of Fish reflects something of George Herbert in its fervent devotion to the church, something of Richard Crashaw in its hyperbolic “sea of tears,” and something of John Donne in its concluding paradox. In its telescoping of the Biblical scene with the poet’s religious yearnings, however, it is typically Dutch and typically Dullaert:

The Blessed Draught of Fish

You who go fishing in the wet seawave,
And to those thankless tongues that long to eat
Present your hook and line with tempting bait
To give their death through food to those who live;

Who now have set yourself to fish for men
On awful oceans, rocked with violence,
And ply your fishing with such diligence
That there the very dead find life again;

O, skillful fishers, come, row over here
Where my sad eyes send out a sea of tears,
Present my longing heart with holy bait.

Cast out to me your blessed gospel net;
Draw me into the church, that holy boat:
To be forever free, I must be caught.

De Zegenrijke Vangst

Gy die ter Visschery door’t zeenat pleegt te streven,
En voor d’ondankbre tong, die naar den wellust helt,
Den weerhaak aan de lyn door list hebt toegestelt,
Om aan den levenden de dood door spys te geven:

Die nu, op menschenvangst verwonderlyk bedreven,
Op eenen oceaan van gruwlen en gewelt
Het vischtuig van uw ampt met zulk een aas verzelt,
Dat door d’onthouding zelfs de dooden doet herleven.

Ervare Visschers komt, komt herwaarts aangeroeit,
Daar uit myn boetgraag oog een zee van tranen vloeit,
Verschaft uw zalig aas myn afgevast verlangen.

Werpt hier het heilzaam net van uwe leere eens uit.
En haalt my in de kerk, klie geestelycke schult.
Om eeuwig vry te zyn laat ik my tydig vangen.

Dr. Ten Harmsel’s translations from Dullaert and the accompanying commentary will form part of an article which she is presently writing for a special “Dutch issue” of Review of National Literatures, a journal which devotes each of its issues to the literature of one particular country.
By the Sea of Crystal, Saints . . .

in the beginning
God turned Plato's
cave inside out and
before the dust settled
man
was,
completeness sealed by
sabbath
service
God lacked
nothing.
man full of God
glided easy in that
glow of
truth
until
the whisper
whisked
eden's rug out from
under
and the
truth tower became
thin and
snapped,

war wracked heaven and
earth and God puzzled with
worried
wonder.

man empty of God
full of self
picked himself apart
and in
pieces
drifted off to find that
tower
again.

. . . meanwhile

the altar
struck with God's
gavel
startled the
prophets into taking
minutes,

the problem simply put . . .

how to dust off man's
self
alive yet dead
to make
dead
alive.

the word came weakly back
from man through the
prophet

. . . send us a king.

the
advice was taken
the
vote was tallied
the
Father sends
Spirit
Flesh
building in His castle shop
a vessel of infinite
emptiness which
soaks up all the
fullness of man
until
the last gavel rap
signaled that
God again was
full.

Lambert Van Poolen

David Versluis
another goodbye

my parent's bed is empty
mine is full
i am a woman grown
with strong legs
not wide but adequate hips
and breasts
full for a child's need
i am a woman quiet
shadowed
with eyes that see
a tongue unafraid to say
and ears that hear dark whispers
my bed is warm
my parent's lies untouched
i am a woman grown

we are daughters of prominent men
we slip through back doors
of closed places
we have potential
for what ever we wish to be
can dream
and create reality

we are our father's daughters
will inherit legacies
we sleep with unknown artists
live
independently
in old city houses
are connoisseurs of fine wine
and cheap whiskey

we are daughters of promise
and we hold
everything that has meaning
in our capable hands

we are daughters

for Judy

M. Edmund
Earlier this month, Dialogue interviewed Dr. Anthony Diekema, president-elect of Calvin College. The following is an edited transcription of that interview.

Dr. Diekema, considering the fact that you are currently successfully associated with a public university, why are you anxious to take on the difficult job of the presidency at this school which has to work for its money?

Well, that's a question with many dimensions to it. Incidentally, state institutions do indeed have to work fairly hard for their money, although it comes from another source. There are many similar structures, many of the same procedures for raising money in the sense of having to relate to state legislators, governor's staffs, boards of higher education and so forth...much as a private institution, and particularly an institution like Calvin, needs to relate to
a constituency. So, just by way of introduction, there are many more structural similarities between private and public institutions than appear on the surface.

But, more importantly, I think your question is focused on my own rationale for making a shift from a major, well-established, prestigious university to a sound, private, Christian liberal arts college. There are many reasons for that, but, putting it into brief perspective, I have always had a continuing interest in Christian higher education, even though I have been a part of public higher education. I have always followed Calvin with considerable interest. There have been occasions prior to this one when I debated very seriously whether to join the staff in one capacity or another. So, Calvin has been a continuing part of my life, in a sense.

In addition to that, I was a part of the Trinity Christian College establishment serving on its Board of Curators for a period of time. I was chairman of that Board, and that involved me in the problems of private, Christian higher education. But it is true that I have now spent twenty years in public higher education, resulting in a vision of higher education which suggests the strategic importance of what Christian education has to offer in the decade ahead. We're entering into a decade of very serious problems. The student enrollment is beginning to stabilize, and institutions will increasingly be called upon, I think, to establish their own distinctiveness in terms of the unique contribution they can make to the total educational enterprise. I think many institutions are in deep trouble in that regard, and many institutions are scurrying around trying to find their own distinctiveness. Many of them are almost destroying themselves in the process because they're trying to be everything to everybody, and they're failing.

Along with that phenomenon, there's also a general disenchantment with higher education in American society. A decade ago higher education was the dream, and no one really attacked it. Then came the late sixties and quite a shift in societal attitudes toward higher education. This included student disturbances, faculty discontent, and a general surfacing of dissatisfaction which, I think, turned higher education into something entirely different from what it was. That has dissipated somewhat, but education hasn't returned to the included student disturbances, faculty discontent, and a general public against higher education. That has dissipated somewhat, but education hasn't returned to the status in American society it once had. Consequently, higher education is being called upon to account for itself in ways that it never has before, and I think the decade ahead is a strategic time for the sound Christian institution to make its unique mark in higher education, and, in doing that, make a considerable contribution in the entire higher education arena.

Then would it be correct to say that you don't perceive the role of Christian colleges as a retreat from the secular world?

Right. It's an extending outward of what these institutions have had for a long time but have been keeping to themselves. It's now looking outward and saying to oneself as an institution: "What can we be contributing to that larger community that we are not contributing today?" I think there are many opportunities to do that, and those will become increasingly apparent in the days ahead. One of the reasons for this is that institutions—and I've alluded to this earlier—are looking for purpose. They're looking for meaning, and they're looking for a reason for being. This has been the strength of Christian higher education; it's clearly been the strength of Calvin College. There's never been any doubt about the purpose of Calvin College: the attempt to articulate and to implement the Reformed world and life view, if you will, trying to respond to the mandate of Scripture to place Jesus Christ at the center of life. This doesn't mean that we're going to be able to sell the Christian perspective to all of higher education; I'm confident that will not be the case. But it will have an impact, and that Christian perspective will have a broader distribution simply because they will be looking at us to see what makes Christian institutions so stable, purposeful, and timely at this stage of higher education development.

We should, as Christian institutions, continue to put increasing numbers of our graduates in public higher education—where I spent the last twenty years of my life. We also ought to mobilize those people who are already in public higher education, and see if we can, as a community of scholars and Christians in the business of higher education, identify where these contributions can best be made, and how they can best be realized. We have been fairly good, I think, at articulating the purpose of Christian higher education; but perhaps less effective in really implementing it outside of our somewhat closed Christian community. We must now address implementation more intensively.

How can you as Calvin's president implement this vision?

I don't think I can do it alone as Calvin's president. As president, I would see the challenge as trying to bring together that critical mass of faculty and others who have a vision and who are similarly inclined to address some of the issues. I would hope that kind of leadership would be well received. With that kind of orientation we can collectively get on with the difficult task at hand.

How do you perceive your relationship with the faculty
right now? Do you feel as though you have their support?

I don't really feel anything at the moment about faculty support because I'm not on the scene, and, until I am, I can't assess the kind of support I'll really get. I have no reason, however, to think that the faculty will not be supportive. In the presidential search process, while I was still trying to make a decision about whether this was an appropriate move for me, and the search committee was in turn assessing me, I had some intensive interaction with a number of faculty members. Out of those experiences, I would have no reason to think that the faculty is not oriented toward many of the same objectives and goals for Calvin that I am. Only if I as a person would alienate the faculty in some way, would I expect a lack of support.

It seems that because President Spoelhof has been here so long, and because so much has happened during his tenure that the change in presidents becomes more important than it would be otherwise. Do you have any specific plans for building rapport with students, with constituency, and with faculty?

I don't have a detailed plan of how this is to be accomplished, but I have some general notions of how this needs to be done. I think what simply has to be established very early is an open, honest relationship with mutual trust and mutual respect. I have for a long time admired the faculty that has gathered at Calvin, so I respect them highly. Therefore, I'm not concerned about their being less than open and tolerant. But I do think the fact that President Spoelhof has been here for twenty-five years does cast a different light on developing that relationship, simply because most of the faculty were recruited during President Spoelhof's presidency and know only his style of leadership.

Looking at it from the outside, I can see where there would be a degree of anxiety about any new president, particularly someone from the outside. The uniqueness of this event has placed a certain significance on it. So I have a feeling for the need to establish early routes of communication and rapport with the faculty. The same, of course, holds true for students and constituents. But I won't structure it highly; as a matter of fact, I think one could very easily structure it too highly.

What is your philosophy of administration? Will it vary much from President Spoelhof's style?

I guess I'm not the best person to assess that, simply because I don't know as much about President Spoelhof's style as I would if I had been on the scene. But I do know something about the style in which I feel most comfortable. That style is essentially one that consults fairly broadly on most issues among faculty, constituency, students and others. In other words, I like to approach problems from a broad base with fairly wide deliberation, but, then, I'd also like to force some direction out of that process.

Deliberation can go on forever, and I think one of the roles of an administrator is to determine when the point of decision has come. When the decision is made, the expectation is that everyone will support it—everyone puts a shoulder to the wheel and gets on with it. My style has never been defined, at least from what people have been willing to tell me, as an authoritative style or as a directive style; but rather as one of broad consultation, then pressing forward toward implementation. I don't expect that style to change.

As president, do you feel that you are ultimately responsible to the constituency, to the faculty or to the students? This question has come up in the past when, for example, a constituent complains about a poem published in Dialogue.

You've used the word "responsible," and I think that the role of president is one that carries considerable responsibility—not necessarily personal responsibility for the act, but responsibility for explaining perhaps the circumstances surrounding an event or its overall rationale. Certainly the responsibility to articulate the purpose of the institution and how certain events contribute in one way or another to that purpose is the responsibility of the president. Constituents often have different expectations and visions of what the institution should be. Again, that's not unique among private institutions or church-related institutions; it's also true in public institutions.

There are many constituents to whom a president must relate who have quite varying views on what the role of that institution is and what it should be doing. Therefore, a president has to be able to relate to the various dimensions of the constituency and must be able to respond to conflicts that arise. The president must also realize that there will always be events that may not contribute to the positive development of the college, and which may indeed be the subject of legitimate criticism.

In recent years there have been a number of controversies that have arisen regarding the freedom of artistic expression in student publications, in plays, and in the visual arts. What are your feelings regarding limitations of student expression? How will you approach these kinds of questions?

I guess I don't know enough about some of the ways in which student groups are currently organized to respond well. But I would expect the role of the faculty in a community of Christian scholars to be a constant consultative and advisory group regarding—if you're referring to student publications—what kind of artistic material should or should not appear. I would hope that this not become censorship but, rather, a dialogue—if you'll forgive the pun—a dialogue within that community to try and gain an appreciation of what are the implications of a certain mode of expression. I don't think you can structure it too highly because then it's going to become censorship, and it's going to become less than effective. But if we can maintain a
spirit of mutual responsibility within the broader Christian community which includes students, faculty, staff and constituency, we ought to be able to accomplish a broadly-based and responsible approach to these questions.

A great deal of the problems in the past have arisen over the place of the artist within the Christian community. There seems to be new consciousness of the place of arts in the church and in Christianity. Does a work of art have to be explicitly and selfconsciously Christian to be acceptable within the realm of Christian art? Do you have any personal opinions on art and Christianity in regard to that specific point?

Let me address that question from a little different direction which I think is particularly illustrative and appropriate when talking about art, about appreciation of art and about what constitutes Christian art. It’s almost inevitable that these kinds of issues first are raised within the confines of a group of scholars and artists, and, consequently, Calvin College and its campus community is a logical place for it to surface. But what it suggests to me is the responsibility of that group of artists and of Calvin College and of the Calvin community to begin to share some of that appreciation with the broader constituency; because, you see, you can easily be out in front of an important part of the Christian community if you ignore them and do not try to bring them along in the understanding and “appreciation” of new cultural phenomena.

What just recently happened to this campus—a conference relating some of the arts to the liturgy and to the church—is to me an excellent approach to addressing some of these concerns, recognizing that there is always going to be some healthy controversy. But that kind of exposure to a broader base of the Christian constituency is vital to gaining an appreciation of their views as well as to really address the issues together.

Does there have to be some immediately perceptable Christian dimension to a piece of art in order for it to be Christian? I’m not sure. That takes dialogue; that takes a lot of interaction; and the artists have to do that among themselves. But they shouldn’t, in doing it, ignore those who probably aren’t at the same point. And so your question really prompts me to say that one of the important responsibilities of a Christian academic community is to be looking constantly for contributions it can make to its constituency which will broaden appreciation and broaden horizons—culturally as well as in many other ways.

So the college is once again in the leadership role that you mentioned earlier: the institution leading the community. This relationship seems paradoxical because certain elements in the constituency would not see this as leadership but would see it as going too far.

I think that’s always a precarious balance. There is no kind of leadership, it seems to me, that doesn’t have to deal with that problem; because if you’re really leading, there are always some people who are reluctant followers. And that always creates an almost inherent point of conflict at which some precarious balance has to be maintained. I think we’re often inclined in academic communities to cast negative implications on the willingness of a larger constituency to follow in certain areas without always accepting the responsibility for entering into meaningful communication with them. That takes patience. That takes tolerance. And inherently, I guess, we’re not all as patient or tolerant as we would like to be.

Given the present high enrollment at Calvin, do you feel that it should maintain its traditional “open door” policy of admissions for members of the Christian Reformed Church? If this policy affects academic quality, should Calvin more actively recruit non-members of the Christian Reformed Church based on scholastic ability rather than on religious affiliation? The question also comes up in regards to minorities.

Well, I think admissions policy must always be related to the academic program that’s provided. In other words, you shouldn’t have an admissions policy that’s unrealistic relative to the degree of intensity of an academic program. My own attitude about Calvin is that its standards are high and that it certainly has to be responsible about admitting only those students who are likely to be well-served by what Calvin has to offer. It’s irresponsible to admit those who are unlikely to succeed. But I don’t think that, in practice, presents an immediate problem.

Certainly, students from other backgrounds who meet those academic criteria and who have a sincere interest in what Calvin has to offer from its Christian perspective ought to be extended the privilege of entering Calvin College. And I think that’s been fairly true. I think there ought to be efforts to admit an increasing number of students from other than the fundamental reformed tradi-
tion. This again, I think, is part of the challenge of the decade ahead: extending what we have to offer beyond a more limited constituency.

I'm impressed by the responsible way in which many students in high schools are evaluating colleges for their purposes—for their perspective—far beyond what students in my day looked at. When I came out of high school and selected a college, students were not analyzing a college like they are today. There are a lot of students out there who are looking for colleges with direction, with purpose, and I know Calvin has a great deal to offer to these students.

I think Calvin must continue to address itself to the education of minorities for a number of reasons. I think the Calvin community, having come out of a fairly close-knit, ethnically-oriented larger community, has much to gain from input from minorities. I mean in many dimensions—culturally, sociologically and spiritually. I think in that process we can contribute a great deal to the Christian Reformed Church. If these minorities are attracted to what Calvin has to offer—the Christian perspective, the world and life view—they are potential members of the Christian Reformed Church who then go out into society with a very strong commitment to the view that all of life is centered around Jesus Christ and serving Him. To me, that is a tremendous contribution to the church and to the constituency.

How would you respond to the increasing demand from Calvin's constituency for programs stressing paraprofessional skills (so-called "salable" skills), especially since this can come at the expense of the liberal arts education? For example, what would you say to a Calvin supporter whose son wants to be a bookkeeper, who has to send his son to a secular institution and who then wonders why he should continue to support Calvin?

Calvin is distinctive as a Christian liberal arts institution, and it should not be willing to compromise that distinctiveness and that strength in liberal arts for paraprofessional programs in some of these occupationally-oriented fields. Otherwise, Calvin may fall into the same trap that many other institutions are falling into: that is, trying to be everything to everybody. However, I don't think there is the paradox that one can hypothetically construct because there are areas of professional education that require a sound liberal arts background and core. I don't think Calvin ought to be about the technical business of training occupationally-oriented people in "how to do it" terms because that's very likely to be destructive to some other efforts that Calvin ought to be making.

On the other hand, I think there is the potential for new program development in a number of fields that might be called professionally-oriented, as opposed to occupationally-oriented. Let's take as an example mass communications, because there's been some discussion on campus about a program in mass communications. It seems to me that to produce a professional in mass communications, you must provide a fairly sound liberal arts background. Mass communications, broadly conceived, must deal with the psychology, the sociology, the art of communications, and it gets you into many of the fundamental liberal arts fields. Yet, there has to be a certain clinical orientation in that you must get out into the mass media arena, and you must learn some things about what's going on out there. That means you must probably strike out a bit beyond what has traditionally been called liberal arts. I think Calvin ought to pursue that; I think we ought to at least address that question—"What does it take beyond the sound base of liberal arts to produce a good mass communications professional?" And will that do violence to the liberal arts strength and distinctiveness of Calvin? Perhaps not. In any event, it's a good example of an area in which Calvin can perhaps make a distinctive contribution. I see communications as a field where Christians have to be. Now one of the best ways to get them there may be to bring them to Calvin College, to give them the expertise they need, and to put them back out there. I believe the payoff could be tremendous.

That's as opposed to the example of the bookkeeper. Now, on a broader base, probably we ought to address the question: "Is there any merit in a Christian bookkeeping institution?" I don't mean to restrict that to bookkeeping; should we have a technical institute that offers bookkeeping and any number of other things—two year programs, one year programs? I'm not sure that we should. But if we should, perhaps it ought to be a separate, self-standing organization.

Trinity Christian College is developing programs in business, for example, and they're giving it emphasis. Perhaps there are some areas where Christian higher education can and should get involved, but let's not all get involved in it. I guess what I'm saying is if Trinity goes increasingly in that direction, then perhaps Calvin ought to be cautious in developing in an identical direction. Somehow Christian higher education institutions are going to have to take an increasingly cooperative and complementary stance, rather than a competitive stance. Competition is going to get very severe in the decade ahead unless we pay attention to distinctiveness in what we can do well.

That leads into the question of this new institution in Canada, and the whole Toronto movement with some of its
concomitant criticisms of Calvin for not being Christian enough, of not being explicitly Christian enough in their education. Do you see it as fruitless to set up this institution which should most likely compete with Calvin?

I don’t know enough about the institution that’s being planned in Canada to speak intelligently about it. I think it may be a little different, in the sense that it’s across national boundaries, and there may be some quite different reasons for establishing it in Canada which I’m not aware of. I guess the first question I would ask is in addressing that would be, “Is there something that Calvin should be doing for its Canadian constituency that it has neglected to do?” I would be very quick to say let’s look at that question, and let’s see whether there’s something we can do to make Calvin be more responsive to them.

Now I don’t know that it is a problem. But if that were the reason for establishing a separate institution in Canada, then I think it’s probably the wrong reason. Certainly, as the president-elect of Calvin College, I would hope that we can continue to attract Canadian students to Calvin. And from that simple practical perspective, I wish they wouldn’t start that new institution. But that’s an uninformed view; there may be some very good reasons for starting it. Historically, Calvin has emphasized teaching above scholarship. There has even been a negative attitude towards advanced scholarship—saying that professors are here to teach, not necessarily to be good scholars and to do a lot of research. What is your attitude towards that?

I would hope that we could, at Calvin, place some renewed interest in research. I’d like to encourage more faculty research of various types. I know Calvin’s faculty has the capability of doing high-level research. Some, I think, have been impeded from doing that because they do have heavy teaching loads; there’s no question about it. I would not want to promote research at the expense of teaching, because I think that quality teaching is a distinctive feature of Calvin which should not be diminished. On the other hand, there’s a potential for research in the Calvin faculty that we must tap.

However, if you’re going to do good research, it means that you’re going to have to have lighter teaching loads. When there are lighter teaching loads, it means it’s going to cost more to run the institution. Therefore, we have to find resources to do research. There are ways of doing that, which I’ll say more about later. I also think there’s a good deal more research that can be done which deals directly with the issues facing our society and constituency. I’m talking about research on some major issues of the day: hunger, environment, energy, all of those things. Looking at those problems from a Christian perspective can make not only a unique contribution to the discipline at large, but also to the Christian community. I think these are some important efforts which can make a pretty broad-based contribution to the fundamental purpose of Calvin College.

Research in higher education generally gives a status to faculty and institution that’s appreciated by funding agencies. Good research will attract funding of research. Therefore, if you have established researchers who are doing good research work, they will also attract funds to do research. Perhaps a place to begin would be to think about the organization of a kind of “research center” where faculty could do research for well-defined commitments of time. Perhaps one could take a year in which he teaches only one course and works on a major research project the rest of the time. Perhaps the project could be funded by an outside agency or organization which is interested in that research. A considerable amount of research coming into the institution could essentially pay for itself.

With a minimal contribution from the institution, perhaps we could administer an increasingly sophisticated research center. But, you see, it’s cyclical. One has to have productive researchers to draw funds; one has to have funds to pay for research. It’s a chicken-egg kind of relationship. So, I think there should be some commitments made to research efforts by faculty with that persuasion and with that capability. If that can happen, the potential payoff is many-faceted. It’ll make contributions to the constituency; it will make contributions to the higher education community; it will make contributions, internally, to students; and it will have a positive payoff in teaching. I’m persuaded it will, because I’ve found, despite what some people may tell you, most good researchers tend also to be good teachers. They may not do as much teaching as you would like them to do, but they generally are good teachers. I think where a faculty member is so inclined, doing some research is likely to also strengthen his teaching. For that reason also, I think research ought to be given increased emphasis within the constraints of cost which will be with us throughout the next decade.

Finally, the previous question leads into the question of the judging of the competence of the faculty. There has been, I believe, for the last two years, a small booklet issued by some students purporting to judge the quality of a certain faculty member in a course as a guide for students. Do you have any feelings toward student evaluation of faculty or towards the ideas of relating wages to quality?

I think student evaluations can be useful for the teaching effectiveness of faculty. But they do have to be interpreted cautiously, in the sense that the evaluation really must be directed to the manner of teaching and to the content of teaching, as opposed to some personality quirks. I’ve been a part of a couple of institutions which have published booklets as you described. Many of them are deficient in the sense that they often pick up on little personality variables and tend to evaluate a faculty member negatively because of a fringe characteristic rather than the real content and structure of the course. So I think there are certain limitations to it.

But on the other hand, I think student evaluations can be useful. They’re the most useful to the faculty member himself. I think any evaluation of faculty from an administrative perspective must be multi-faceted. In other words, that evaluation has to come from a number of directions, and student input to that is an important part, but it also has to come from colleagues—from peers who can judge his scholarly ability as well as his ability to present the material. If the student evaluation is used for nothing more than to give the faculty member feedback as to how he’s being viewed, it’s already priceless. I think student evaluation has to be one dimension of faculty evaluation.