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Reformation Reflections

What can Catholics and Protestants learn from one another today?
Articles

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On November 1, 1944, a woman from the Christian Reformed Church married a man from the Catholic Church. The wedding took place in Roseland, Illinois. Even before their wedding, the couple had resolved that they would honor each other’s faith and seek to find a church where they both felt at home. They did so and a number of years later, they became parents to Jackie, who is my wife of over thirty-five years.

Jackie grew up in a home where the religious background and heritage of both her mother and father were known and appreciated. Her faith story — which included knowing about first communion and midnight mass as well as profession of faith — was one that resonated with the diverse group of people who entered into the new church that we were privileged to help begin in the Chicagoland area many years later.

Our last Forum issue looked back to what came to be known as the Five Solas of the Reformation. It is out of that biblical and theological framework that we present this issue — “What Can Catholics and Protestants Learn From One Another Today?”

Are there still differences? Absolutely. But we need to ask what can we learn from one another and see as points of convergence in an increasingly secular age. Jesus Christ himself desires for us to exhibit as much unity as possible with those who also acknowledge him as their Lord and Savior.

Along with these articles, I invite you to visit vimeo.com/239693144 to watch a video of an October 5 event held at the Calvin College Chapel of the same title as this Forum issue where a Catholic Professor from Hope College and the Catholic Bishop of Grand Rapids brought their own voice to this important topic.

Thanks for taking the time to listen in and also learn from our faculty who have been a part of such conversations for many years. We all benefit when we humble ourselves to listen to other brothers and sisters.

In His Service With You,

Jul Medenblik

We all benefit when we humble ourselves to listen to other brothers and sisters.
A few years ago, at our end-of-year celebration at the Friendship for people with cognitive impairments, jointly run by Woodlawn CRC and St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Grand Rapids, MI, two of our Friends, Greg and Paul, decided that they wanted to sing. After some back and forth, they decided to sing the setting of the Lord’s Prayer that they heard every Sunday at Mass.

Blessed with enthusiasm above all else, they sang out with deep faith and great vigor and reduced many of us to tears. Together, Reformed and Catholics and everything in between, we joined in worship of our God who had brought all of us together in that holy moment. Yet even today, these points of convergence in worship seem few and far between. Why?

At the outset, we should note that in spite of the very clear differences in worship practices that emerged five hundred years ago in the Reformation era, Catholics and Reformed Christians share a common worship heritage that predates the Reformation. Enduring points of connection have persisted over time in spite of the doctrinal divide over the past few centuries. Whether Catholic or
Reformed, believers attend worship in consecrated buildings dedicated for that purpose. Catholics and Reformed alike hear Scripture read and proclaimed, join in corporate prayer, and celebrate the sacraments of baptism and communion. Although theological understandings differ, especially regarding the sacraments, the two communities of faith continue to share these worship practices.

For many sixteenth-century Christians, however, the points of convergence were lost amid the growing wave of differences in worship that, for most Christians, surfaced most visibly at church. Roman Catholic worship took place in Latin, was oriented around the celebration of the Mass, and featured images, incense, and vestments. Reformed Christians worshipped in their mother tongue in church buildings largely devoid of religious images. Their communal worship centered around preaching, so much so that when Reformed folk spoke of going to church for a worship service, they said they were going to “sermon.”

Reformation-era church leaders on either side reinforced these differences in worship through education and church discipline. Genevan consistory members, for instance, sought to eradicate any remnants of Catholic devotional practices, such as use of the rosary, prayers for the dead, or recitation of the Hail Mary. Meanwhile, Catholic church leaders prohibited Catholics from engaging in Reformed worship practices such as singing psalms in the vernacular or reading Protestant vernacular translations of the Bible.

Over time, these worship practices and prohibitions became hallmarks of identity, shaping the worship experiences of each faith community over the decades and centuries. Yet today, after five centuries since the Reformation began, are Reformed and Roman Catholic congregations still so far apart when it comes to worship? What if any points of convergence are emerging?

Yet today, after five centuries since the Reformation began, are Reformed and Roman Catholic congregations still so far apart when it comes to worship?

Although it is still rare for Catholic and Reformed congregations to worship jointly, steps are being taken to highlight areas of common agreement or to resolve past theological disagreements that made any attempt to find points of convergence well nigh impossible. For instance, in 2013, four Protestant denominations, including both the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America formally signed the “Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism” with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This agreement does not mean that Catholic and Reformed congregations will start holding joint baptismal services, but the promise to recognize each other’s Trinitarian baptisms as valid is a starting point that moves away from any reflexive rejection of each other’s sacramental acts.

One of the healthiest and most encouraging signs of the increasing willingness to learn from each other when it comes to worship is the number of conferences and workshops on worship attended by a wide section of Christians from across the denominational spectrum. The annual meeting of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, for instance, regularly brings together hymn-writers, composers, church musicians, clergy, and lay people from a wide range of confessional backgrounds. The 2017 meeting, with over 350 participants, took place in Waterloo, Canada. There, participants from many denominations attended plenaries and workshops that introduced the most recent Roman Catholic hymnal put out by GIA Publications. During the same conference, in a strong example of cross-confessional collaboration, Emily Brink, the editor emeritus of Reformed Worship led a joint plenary on Psalm-singing with Tony Alonso, a Cuban-American Roman Catholic. In Grand Rapids, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship holds its

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annual Symposium on worship every January, bringing together Christians of over thirty denominations who want to learn from each other about worship in its various forms, from art to music to liturgy to preaching. In 2016, alongside both Catholic and Reformed respondents, I participated in a panel discussion on how to commemorate the Reformation. Many of the suggestions from the panelists were tied to worship. Building on this encounter and others, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has put together a very helpful worship resources page for those interested in marking the anniversary in their churches, whether Catholic or Protestant: http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worship-resources-for-the-500th-anniversary-of-the-protestant-reformation/

At the congregational level, most Roman Catholic and Reformed encounters in worship take place during ecumenical prayer services during the National Day of Prayer, or the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, for instance. Other joint Roman Catholic and Reformed prayer services have taken place during times of national or international crisis, as was the case after 9/11, or following the shootings in an African-American church in Charleston, or after the recent confrontations and violence in Charlottesville. Some Catholic/Reformed worship opportunities are very local and are the product of long-running partnerships. For example, in the Woodlawn/St Paul Friendship group each week, the gathering begins with worship: praise songs, prayer requests, and a time of communal prayer. Here confessional differences shrink away in the light of faith-filled prayer requests and heartfelt singing.

Speaking of singing…it is this aspect of worship, it seems, that is bringing Catholic and Reformed congregations closest together, as a considerable part of the repertoire of hymns and songs of praise has become joint. The Lift Up Your Hearts hymnal issued by Faith Alive in 2013 and used by many CRC congregations includes a range of hymns written by Catholic hymn-writers, including Bernadette Farrell (“Christ, Be Our Light”), David Haas (“You are Mine”, “Blest Are They”) and Marty Haugen (“My Soul in Stillness Waits”, “All are Welcome”). Meanwhile, the second edition of the Roman Catholic hymnal Ritual Song published in 2016 features Genevan Psalm 100 (“All People That on Earth Do Dwell”) and a range of traditional Protestant hymns, such as Isaac Watts’ “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” and “Jesus Shall Reign” as well as John Newton’s “Amazing Grace.” Another option that has garnered support over the past years is Taizé worship, centered on meditative prayers and repeated sung refrains. The Taizé community in France is an ecumenical group started in 1940 by Roger Schütz, a Swiss Reformed church leader. The Taizé repertoire has found a home in both Reformed and Catholic church worship.

So we sometimes worship together in informal settings, we learn from each other at conferences and workshops, some denominations recognize each other’s baptisms, and we increasingly sing each other’s songs. These may seem like very small markers compared with the number of aspects of worship that seem to keep Reformed and Catholics apart. Arguments over who is more faithful to the teachings of Scripture and the practices of the Church throughout the ages tend only to reinforce divisions. The unresolved challenge is how to remain faithful to the fundamental teachings of our faith while at the same time locating and celebrating points of convergence in worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

May God give us grace to continue to pursue this path.
During the fifty years since Vatican II, Roman Catholic and Reformed Christians have engaged in significant ecumenical dialogue. I have been privileged to be part of some of that dialogue during the last twenty years. This article focuses on three ways in which dialogue with Roman Catholics has deepened my understanding of the sacramental meal we call Communion, the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist.

**Remembering as Making Present**
First, dialogue has helped me see sacramental remembering of the past as a way of making Jesus’ death real to us in the present.

At a Passover meal on the night before he was crucified, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, saying, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24; Lk. 22:19). Jesus also took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me,” to which Paul adds, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:25–26; Lk. 22:20). Reformed Christians have rightly emphasized this meal as both a remembrance and a proclamation of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us.

Dialogue with Roman Catholics has taught me deeper dimensions to this remembering. The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that the events of Christ’s sacrifice are not only remembered and thereby proclaimed in the

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Eucharist, but also “become in a certain way present and real” (CCC 1363). The act of remembering not only proclaims Jesus’ sacrificial death but also draws us into the reality of Christ’s sacrifice and calls us to live Christ-like and Spirit-empowered lives of discipleship. The meal calls believers to undertake the journey of faith and discipleship shaped by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

**Spiritual Food for the Spiritual Journey**

Second, dialogue has taught me to appreciate the sacramental meal as spiritual food for the journey of faith. The Christian life of discipleship is like a journey. We are traveling from one place to another: from the city of this world to the city of God, from a life ruled by the powers of sin to a life empowered by the grace of God, and from death to new life in Christ.

The Bible describes many journeys, including the journey of God’s people from slavery in Egypt to the land promised to Abraham. During their journey, they suffered shortages of food and water. In response to their complaints, God provided food and water during their forty-year journey (Ex. 15:22–17:7).

Similarly, Jesus during his ministry fed large crowds of hungry people (Matt. 15:29–39; Mk 8:1–10). The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the bread of life: like manna, but more life-giving and more essential to true life (Jn. 6:25–59).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that the eucharistic meal provides the pilgrim people of God nourishment for growth in the Christian life—nourishment “for our pilgrimage until the moment of death” (CCC 1392, 1344). In addition, this meal reminds us that we “live by the bread of the Word of God” and that our daily bread is “the pledge of God’s faithfulness to his promises” (CCC 1334).

Seeing the communal meal as spiritual food for our spiritual journey and as a reminder of God’s faithfulness meets an important need in the Christian life. Like the journey undertaken by the ancient people of Israel, the Christian journey includes times of difficulty and trial as well as times of redemption and joy. When troubles arise, we sometimes doubt God’s goodness or faithfulness. But then, like manna in the wilderness, God provides spiritual sustenance in the form of a sacramental meal—a meal that serves as a means of grace to sustain us along the spiritual journey from slavery to sin to new life in Christ.

**Foretaste of the Future**

Third, dialogue has taught me to appreciate the sacramental meal as a foretaste of the future.

The Christian journey of life has a goal: new life in Christ lived in community with all of God’s people in the presence of the triune God. When he instituted the sacramental meal, Jesus suggested that it anticipates the coming fulfillment of the kingdom of God (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; and Luke 22:16,18).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights this dimension in a quotation from Vatican II: “In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God” (CCC 1090). Moreover, the Eucharist unites us with “the heavenly banquet, when all the elect will be seated at the table of the kingdom” (CCC 1344, 1326).

In a key passage, the Catechism says, “The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God” (CCC 1352). According to the Catechism, “The Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church in heaven and on earth, the living and the dead” (CCC 1354). In this way, the Catechism notes that the Eucharist is not only “the memorial of the Passover of the Lord Jesus” but also “an anticipation of the heavenly glory” (CCC 1402).

Viewing the sacramental meal as a foretaste in which the church on earth joins in praise with the church in heaven provides helpful insights into difficult questions about how Christ is present at the meal. The traditional opening of the liturgy for the Christian meal gives a hint. The worship leader says, “Lift up your hearts,” to which the people respond,
“We lift them up to the Lord.” Dialogue with Roman Catholics helped me see the invitation to lift our hearts as an indication that in this meal we are spiritually lifted up to be with Christ. The church that meets on the corner of First and Elm Streets is spiritually transported to be with the ascended Lord. When we enter his presence, we join believers who have already died and are already present with him. There, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), we commune with one another and with the Lord. In this event, then, the meal is a foretaste of the final banquet of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6–9).

The sacramental meal is often called “Communion,” emphasizing both the communion we share with one another in the meal and the communion we have with the ascended Lord. Both dimensions of communion anticipate the final goal of life, when we are united fully with the triune God and with one another in the new heaven and new earth. So in a world in which people are often alienated from one another and alone, the sacramental meal provides fellowship for today and a taste of the life to come.

In summary, dialogue with Roman Catholics has taught me important ways in which the sacramental meal makes Christ’s work present, provides spiritual food for the journey of faith, and provides a foretaste of life with God. Through dialogue, I have come to appreciate more deeply the spiritual nourishment in the meal Jesus provides. For that, I am grateful to my Roman Catholic dialogue partners.

(This article is based on a talk given at an ecumenical event sponsored by Calvin Seminary on October 5, 2017.)
The Reformers broke dramatically with the Roman Catholic Church when it came to the doctrines of salvation and ecclesiology. They did not do so with respect to ethics. In fact, in some ways, their views are closer to traditional Catholic ethical thought than they are to much of the Protestant tradition that has followed them. On any number of ethical and political topics, the thought of John Calvin is closer to that of the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas than either of them are to any number of Protestant ethicists today.

For many years Protestant theologians preferred to contrast Protestant ethics with Roman Catholic ethics. Protestant ethics was centered on biblical authority, they argued, while Roman Catholic ethics, because of its natural law tradition, was far too enamored with the powers of human reason. Protestants emphasized the consistency of the Bible’s moral teaching, summarized in the Ten Commandments, while Roman Catholics wrongly contrasted the new law of the gospel with the old law of Israel. Protestants called all Christians to the same level of righteousness, while Catholics...
taught that certain Christians—clergy, monks, and nuns—are called to follow the higher evangelical counsels of Christ’s teaching.

In some ways, to be sure, the Reformers themselves paved the way for this contrast. While they upheld the traditional Christian teaching that God’s moral will is written on the human heart and in the creation order (i.e., natural law), they expressed fresh skepticism regarding the capabilities of human reason. While they insisted that Christians were to interpret the Ten Commandments in light of the law’s fulfillment in Christ, they downplayed any meaningful contrast between the ethical teaching of the Old and New Testaments. They emphasized the vocational ordinariness of the Christian life and softened the radicalism of Christian discipleship.

Over time, however, many evangelical Protestants virtually abandoned the concept of natural law altogether, in favor of an emphasis on biblical authority. And because of their emphasis on the Ten Commandments as the perfect expression of God’s moral will, they largely ignored the distinctiveness of the New Testament’s virtue-oriented, Christocentric approach to ethics. Thus one could look far and wide for any meaningful Protestant study of Christian virtues akin to that of Aquinas.

The conflict between Protestant and Catholic political theologies grew even sharper. Protestants embraced political liberalism, religious freedom, and natural rights quite early, while the Catholic Church fiercely rejected all such modern political ideologies as alien to the one true faith of Catholicism. In the age of brutal religious wars that ripped apart Europe and rippled throughout the world, Protestants identified the papacy as the antichrist, always fearing that Catholics sought to rob them of their liberties and force them into submission to the pope.

Convergence among theologians and academics is paralleled in culture and in the public square.

Two major forces began to change all of this in the latter part of the twentieth century. First, the Roman Catholic Church opened itself ecumenically to Protestantism after Vatican II. Second, Protestants and Catholics alike came to view secularism and the increasing abandonment of Christianity as the far graver threat. Catholic thinkers sought to learn from the Protestant tradition’s embrace of political liberalism. Protestant theologians became interested in the ways in which the Reformers stood in continuity with pre-Reformation Christian tradition. Catholic social thought began to emphasize the ideals of liberty and equality, while Protestant ethicists began to rediscover the value of the natural law tradition, with its rich potential for moral reasoning in pluralistic contexts. Catholics came to appreciate the active role of the Bible in Protestant ethics, while Protestants sought to glean from the Catholic liturgical tradition a fresh understanding of the role of worship in moral formation. Catholics looked to Protestants for a sense of the virtue of ordinary Christian vocations, while Protestants looked to Catholics for insight into the nature of a Christian virtue ethic. The result has been a growing convergence among Reformed and Catholic ethicists, even as important differences remain.

Convergence among theologians and academics is paralleled in culture and in the public square. The U.S. Supreme Court’s legalization of abortion-on-demand in 1973, in Roe v. Wade, brought Catholic and Protestant clergy together like never before as they struggled to witness to the sanctity of human life. Similarly, the sexual revolution, with its ever more radical conclusions regarding sex, gender, and marriage, has reminded Catholics and Protestants just how much they have in common as heirs of a Christian understanding of the meaning of the body. The late Pope John Paul II’s brilliant reflections on the sanctity of life and the dignity of human sexuality has arguably made him more popular among Protestants than any pope in history.

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And yet, the ecumenical convergence has only begun. Profound differences remain. Most profound, perhaps, is the continued Catholic insistence on a higher, more evangelical ethic for clergy and for Christians who have taken vows, well-known because of its implication that Catholic clergy, monks, and nuns may not marry. Also of practical significance are the absolute Catholic prohibitions of birth control and divorce.

Yet even here, as Protestants we have much to learn from our Catholic brothers and sisters. For example, the Catholic church has long promoted and protected Christian celibacy as an alternative to marriage, in line with the example and teaching of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Likewise, the Catholic church has held faithfully to the sanctity of marriage, insisting that divorce is profoundly incompatible with the sacramental meaning of marriage as an analogy for the unity between Christ and the church.

In stark contrast, Protestants have tended to overemphasize marriage as the only ideal life plan for all Christians, while at the same time tolerating and even defending the prevalence of divorce.

Protestants also have much to learn from Catholic social teaching as it pertains to poverty and oppression. Classic Christian thought taught that God has given the world to human beings in common. It affirmed the legitimacy of property subject to the requirement that those who have what they need share with those who do not, in order that the poor might receive justice. This has evolved into the modern Catholic concept of solidarity, which calls Christians to bear the burdens of those who are poor and oppressed. This “preference for the poor” can be found in a Reformer such as John Calvin as well, but it has long since fallen by the wayside among many Protestants. Protestants would do well to emulate the Catholic conviction that the sanctity of life requires vigorous protection at every stage and in every form, like a “seamless garment” from beginning to end.

It is precisely for this reason that so much fruit might come from continuing Catholic-Protestant convergence in ethics. The more Protestants and Catholics converse with and engage the best of each other’s traditions, the more we discover just how rich, broad, and consistent is the long tradition of Christian moral and social teaching. The questions we wrestle with regarding marriage, human dignity, and care for the poor are not fundamentally new questions, even though we find ourselves asking them in quite different circumstances. The gospel of the kingdom and its righteousness remains the same as it did one thousand and two thousand years ago, and faithful Protestants and Catholics of all denominations will increasingly find that, as pilgrims on the same journey, serving one Lord with one faith, they will come much nearer to their goal if they walk together than if they walk separately.
Mary and Martha. I think we all know the story as related in the tenth chapter of the gospel according to St. Luke. After telling the parable of the good Samaritan to a testy lawyer, Jesus entered a village and was invited to dinner at the house of Mary and Martha. Mary sat before Jesus and listened intently to his teaching, while Martha was busy in the back with food preparation. Overwhelmed, Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping out in the kitchen. Jesus responded by saying that Martha was anxious about many things but Mary had chosen the one thing necessary.

To this day, people who busy themselves in the kitchens of the church are often tagged as “Marthas,” the busy bees of the congregation. But what was Jesus intending to teach here? Should we all be in the sanctuary prior to the fellowship hour?

One way to reflect on the questions this story raises is to compare the historical difference between the Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards work and vocation, as clearly revealed in the commentaries on this passage by Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.

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Thomas stood in a long tradition of interpreting Scripture by way of allegory. He thought that even the historical passages of Scripture should be read, in effect, as parables. Their meaning would be unlocked only by discerning what each figure in the narrative stands for. In Thomas’s reading of the Mary and Martha story, Mary stands for the contemplative life, while Martha stands for the active life. In recommending Mary over Martha, therefore, Jesus was in fact recommending the contemplative life over the active life.

Thomas’s comments on the Mary and Martha story are part of a larger argument he develops in the Summa Theologiae for the superiority of the contemplative life. One part of that argument draws upon the authority of Jesus, as Thomas understood him. The other part draws from the philosophy of Aristotle.

Aristotle made a distinction between three kinds of life a human being could live: the productive life, the political life, and the contemplative life. Between the three, Aristotle considered the contemplative life to be the most excellent. The productive life of work is tied to the natural necessities imposed upon us by the body. Like the animals, we—or some of us, at least—must work to meet the body’s incessant needs for food, clothing, shelter, and the like. The political life of rule is better, but it is still conducted for the sake of ends that lie outside itself. The contemplative life is best, because it relates to reason, the highest faculty of the human soul, and it is pursued for its own sake. Furthermore, this kind of life makes us most like the gods, which Aristotle thought of as distant minds, serenely contemplating the truth for all eternity. Work makes us like the animals; contemplation, like the gods.

Called out of the world to a contemplative relationship with God; called by God to serve others in the midst of the world. That was the contrast between Catholic and Protestant views of vocation at the time of the Reformation.

The theologists of the early and medieval church inherited much by way of Greek philosophy. And in Thomas we can see an agreement with its ranking of the contemplative life over the active. The specifically Christian element Thomas added to this philosophical tradition was the identification of God as the highest object of human thought. The contemplation of God constituted the “beatific vision,” a vision all the saints were to enjoy in the afterlife. In this life we can anticipate the final fulfillment of human life by withdrawing from the activities of the world and devoting ourselves to the contemplation of the divine. That life was lived to the fullest in the monastery. Therefore, monks, called out of the world to a life of the spirit, lived the best kind of life. They had received a vocation. The rest of us are left behind, evidently, compromised by the manifold distractions of the active life. Mary had indeed chosen the better part.

Let us now turn to Calvin’s commentary on the Mary and Martha passage. I will quote Calvin at some length in what might be considered a free and abridged translation—but close enough to deserve quotation marks. “As this passage has been basely distorted into the commendation of what is called a contemplative life, we must inquire into its true meaning, from which it will appear that nothing was farther from the intent of Christ, than to encourage his disciples to indulge in useless speculation. It is, no doubt, an old error, that those who withdraw from the active life, and devote themselves entirely to a contemplative life, lead a life of the angels. For the absurdities which the Sorbonnists [note: Aquinas taught at the Sorbonne] utter on this subject they appear to have been indebted to Aristotle, who places the highest good, and the ultimate end, of human life in contemplation, which,
according to him, is the enjoyment of virtue. On the contrary, we know that we were created for the express purpose of being employed in labor of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each person applies diligently to their own calling, and endeavors to live in such a manner as to contribute to the common good.”

In Calvin’s view, Martha was corrected by Jesus not because she worked, but because she worked at the wrong time. When he paid a visit, bringing the words of life, one listened to what he had to say; the other did not. There is a time to work, and a time to listen.

Calvin was in many ways extending Martin Luther’s positive view of everyday work as a divine vocation. Luther set human work in the context of a doctrine of creation. God has so created the world that when human beings pursue their work they are in fact participating in God’s creational “delivery system,” through which the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed, and the weak are protected. By working we participate in God’s ongoing providential care for the human race. Work has religious significance in itself. It is not a distraction.

Called out of the world to a contemplative relationship with God; called by God to serve others in the midst of the world. That was the contrast between Catholic and Protestant views of vocation at the time of the Reformation.

500 years later, however, things have changed. The Catholic position on work and vocation now much more closely resembles the Protestant. In its 1986 statement entitled Economic Justice for All, the U.S. National Council of Bishops stated that Catholics “have much to learn from the Protestant tradition on the vocation of lay people in the world.” In the Vatican II document, Gaudium et Spes, we find an appreciation of the religious significance of earthly work: “When men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the Creator, as service to their fellow man, and their personal contributions to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan.” This theme was picked up by Pope John Paul II in his 1981 encyclical on work and vocation, Laborem Exercens. Beginning with the creation account in the book of Genesis, and the creation mandate to exercise responsible dominion over the earth, he writes that “man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of resources and values contained in the whole creation.”

In our work we cooperate with God in the development of creation and the distribution of its good gifts to others. Work is not a distraction from our relationship with God. It’s an expression of it.

What we have witnessed the last fifty years is a remarkable convergence in Catholic and Protestant views of the religious meaning of work and vocation. Mary and Martha have a place in both traditions.

**Work is not a distraction from our relationship with God. It’s an expression of it.**
As a part of a larger series of events and programs planned for Fall 2017 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Calvin Seminary hosted an evening of talks titled “What Can Catholics and Protestants Learn From One Another Today”, bringing together four speakers to discuss the evolving relationship between Catholics and Protestants.

These four speakers, two Protestants and two Catholics, spoke about the ecumenical unity they have observed in their ministry and work between Catholics and Protestants, while also commenting on continued differences. The speakers shared a range of experiences and expertise on the topic of Catholic/Protestant relations. The two Catholic voices, Jared Ortiz, Assistant Professor of Religion at Hope College and Executive Director of the Saint Benedict Institute, followed by the Most Reverend David John Walkowiak, Bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, began the night. After their remarks Karin Maag, Director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies spoke, and the evening concluded with Ronald Feenstra, the Academic Dean at Calvin Seminary, as well as participants in two decades of official Roman-Catholic-Reformed Dialogue.

These speakers presented a clear theme for the evening: Catholics and Protestants have worked towards creating a more ecumenical
relationship, especially over the last 50 years since Vatican II, and these efforts have paid off. Today it is not unusual to see Catholic and Protestant individuals and churches collaborating and connecting in ways they typically weren’t over the last 500 years. The speakers noted shared beliefs and values between the two sides, around areas such as education and worship, and even around religious beliefs and practices such as the concept of Justification or the observation of the sacraments. They observed how this common ground has created new opportunities for ecumenical work.

The presenters also noted the key differences and divisions between the two sides. While there might be a shared heart for a unified church, theological differences create divisions that will be difficult to overcome. These differences, however, make these conversations worth having. As Ortiz noted, “True unity can only be unity in the truth.”

The evening concluded with the hymn “The Church’s One Foundation” and a shared blessing from Jul Medenblik, Calvin Theological Seminary President, and Bishop Walkowiak, an appropriate end to a rich time of shared conversation, reflection, and worship.

**Preparation for Reaccreditation**

Calvin Theological Seminary is preparing for a comprehensive evaluation visit by the Association of Theological Schools. The ATS evaluation committee is scheduled to be on campus in March 2018. If you have any comments concerning Calvin Theological Seminary’s qualifications for continued accreditation, please send them in writing to the President or Board Chair of Calvin Theological Seminary (3233 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546) and/or to the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh PA 15275-1110).

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**Introducing Calvin Seminary’s new Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership**

Calvin Seminary is excited to announce a new model for our professional M.A. program. **Launching in the Fall of 2018**, this new program is designed to suit the educational needs of future ministry leaders. This 39 credit program can be completed in residence (in Grand Rapids, MI) or through our distance program (now available to all International students).

*Pending ATS approval*
After nearly three decades, John Bolt is approaching his impending retirement from Calvin Theological Seminary with admitted ambivalence, grateful to be liberated from long faculty meetings and other academic tedium but wistful about closing a long and lively chapter of engaging students with a bracing seminar on Reformed dogmatics.

“I feel incredibly privileged when I reflect on what’s transpired in my life and career,” Bolt said.

“Sometimes people ask me, ‘Do you like your work?’ and I tell them, ‘This is what I do — I read books and I talk to people and they pay me for it.’ Even better, I’m reading books that lead me to think about God, and then I get to talk to people about that. Shoot, I would do that for free.”

Bolt joined the seminary faculty in 1989 following pastoral postings in British Columbia congregations and undergraduate teaching stints in the religion departments at Calvin College and Redeemer College.

“I loved teaching at the college level, but I had a very strong sense of call about teaching at Calvin Seminary,” Bolt said. “I was persuaded that God in his providence brought me here for a reason.”

That divinely orchestrated reason became evident early on in Bolt’s tenure at the seminary, when he was selected as the lead editor for the translation of Herman Bavinck’s epic reflection, Reformed Dogmatics. That assignment touched off a monumental 16-year project that has made accessible in English and other languages the theological insights of a titan of Dutch Reformed thought and introduced his masterwork to a new generation of scholars and lay leaders. To Bolt’s everlasting astonishment, more than 15,000 sets of the four-volume series have been sold thus far.

“The Bavinck project really provided a focal point to my work with students,” Bolt noted. “Having this as the center of my scholarship and passion — and seeing
such rewards from it — has been invigorating. My Bavinck seminars are always well-populated, and I’ve been pleased to see a number of my students go on to do impressive PhD work elsewhere. And the fact that Reformed Dogmatics sold incredibly well in English meant that it’s subsequently been translated into Korean, Portuguese and Indonesian, and it’s currently being translated into Mandarin by two of our Chinese students.”

“**I feel incredibly privileged when I reflect on what’s transpired in my life and career.**”

For the past five or six years, Bolt has been working on yet another epic Bavinck project, translating a recently discovered 1,100-page manuscript from Dutch to English for a multi-volume work entitled Reformed Ethics. The first volume in that three-volume set, based on hand-written notes from Bavinck’s lectures at the Reformed theological school in Kampen, will be published in the fall of 2018.

Bolt was born in the Netherlands, in the tiny village of Sebaldebur in the northern province of Groningen, and moved with his family to Canada as a young boy. He grew up in an observant Christian Reformed family and after flirting with a chemistry major in his first years of college at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Bolt enrolled at Calvin College in order to pursue growing interests in theology and philosophy.

“At home I learned about the world of Abraham Kuyper and the influence he had,” Bolt recalled. “I came to learn of Bavinck a little later when I was studying at Calvin Seminary. One of my professors, Anthony Hoekema, was such a big fan of Bavinck’s dogmatics. He had translated some segments of his dogmatics for us, so it was Professor Hoekema who first hooked me into Bavinck. Bavinck was to me the true theologian in the Dutch Reformed tradition.”

Bolt’s education at Calvin College and Calvin Seminary provided both breadth and depth for a young man whose intellectual interests had been piqued by his family’s discussions and devotions around the dining room table and by reading the encyclopedias his parents purchased.

“Calvin was wonderful for me, very liberating,” he remembered. “I took a history class that opened my eyes. I took an economics class with Tony Brouwer and he made me think. It was broad. I was exploring other things beyond the narrow sciences. From there, it was all providential leading as doors were opened and there was ongoing confirmation of what I was doing and where I was going.”

After graduating from Calvin Seminary, Bolt served two small Christian Reformed congregations in British Columbia for a few years before returning to the seminary to earn a ThM degree and then launching into his career as a teacher and scholar.

“For me,” Bolt said, “the joy of teaching has been to see some of my students go on to do work that makes me stand back and say, ‘Wow!’ The goal at the graduate level is that they begin to become conversation peers with us. Teaching in the doctoral program has been really rewarding. I think I surprise quite a few of my students. They come in and they’re thinking, ‘Hey he’s a pretty conservative, orthodox, theological person.’ And I am, but even so I encourage them to do something that’s their passion, even though it might be out of the box.”

Bolt will retire from his classroom and faculty obligations at the end of the 2017 calendar year without hesitation or regrets.

“I can honestly say that the last three or four years have been some of my best years of teaching, but after 37 years of college or seminary teaching it’s time to play with the

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Recent Events at CTS

Calvin Prison Initiative Convocation

The Calvin Prison Initiative Choir performs at the CPI Convocation service in September 2017. CPI is a joint effort between Calvin College and Calvin Seminary, providing college education and degrees at Handlon Correctional Facilities in Lowell, MI. (Photo Credit: Deborah Hoag Photography)

Karin Maag speaks at this year’s Convocation service, September 2017. Her talk on 16th-century theological education versus today’s experience helped kick-off the 2017-18 academic year. (Photo Credit: David Chandler)

UnLearn Week 2017

Dr. Mika Edmondson speaks to a town hall gathering during UnLearn Week 2017. His talk, titled “What has Wittenberg to do with Ferguson?” addressed how traditional reformed theological thought lends itself well to the conversations around race and justice needed in today’s culture. (Photo Credit: Matt Cooke)

2017 Fall Book of the Semester

Lyle Bierma interviews Karin Maag, the author of the Calvin Seminary 2017 Fall Book of the Semester ‘Does the Reformation Still Matter?’. (Photo Credit: Matt Cooke)
grandkids and travel more often and spontaneously.”

He hopes to visit more of the National Parks in the United States, and the major league ballparks scattered around North America, in addition to his ongoing editing and translating work.

“When I’m done with Reformed Ethics, I might be interested in writing a new history of the CRC,” Bolt said. “The last serious history of the denomination came out in 1935 and the research that’s come out since then has helped us see things that were going on that weren’t even known when I was in seminary.”

As he moves into the next phase, Bolt noted that he leaves the seminary with “an overwhelming sense of gratitude” for his experiences and the collegial relationships he’s forged through the decades.

“I’m profoundly aware of having been a steward of a very rich and very important tradition,” he said.

“I’m profoundly aware of having been a steward of a very rich and very important tradition”

“But I’m also keenly aware that each new generation has to chart its own way, God guiding us.”
Faculty Publications

The Embrace of Buildings
by Lee Hardy, Adjunct Professor of Philosophical Theology

*The Embrace of Buildings* provides an overview of the key factors, topics, and issues in Anglo-American urbanism: the origins and development of the suburban ideal, the role of federal policies and spending priorities in shaping the built environment, the rise of the private automobile as the primary mode of transportation, the effects of functional zoning laws, the relation between the public realm and the quality of civic discourse, the influence of modernism on city planning, the impact of low-density development on public health, the connection between development and city budgets, the impact of urbanism on the environment, and the problem of gentrification.

In a culture long enamored of the suburban ideal, Lee Hardy invites his readers to reconsider the many advantages of living and working in walkable city neighborhoods—compact neighborhoods characterized by a fine network of pedestrian-friendly streets, mixed land uses, mixed housing types, and a full range of transit options. In addition, he investigates the role religion has played in defining American attitudes towards the city, and the difference church location makes in Christian ministry and mission.

Hidden Prophets of the Bible
by Michael Williams, Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior Professor in Old Testament Studies

From an expert on Bible translation and interpretation comes a revealing look at the Minor Prophets of the Old Testament. Michael Williams, Johanna K. and Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior Professor in Old Testament Studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, takes readers on a journey from Hosea to Malachi, uncovering their messages about Jesus and the gospel. Making these often overlooked books accessible, Williams gives you insight into each one, exploring:

- Little-known facts about the prophet
- The gospel according to the prophet
- Why the prophet should matter to you

Though the Minor Prophets may have been hidden to you in the past, you will discover the profound significance of these short books and their continuing relevance for your faith. Questions at the end of each chapter prompt you to reflect on what each prophet’s message means for you.

Does the Reformation Still Matter?
by Karin Maag, Director of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Editor of Calvin Theological Journal, and Adjunct Professor of the History of Christianity.

This book offers a concise and highly readable explanation of the dramatic changes that took place during the Reformation and helps readers understand the deeper impact of the Reformation beyond its own time period. Changes in theology and in worship, in the status of lay people and clergy, and in the relations between church and state reshaped Christians’ views of themselves. Early modern Christians had to rethink their relationship with God and with other Christians based on these new realities. As contemporary Christians grasp the Reformation’s dramatic impact in its own time, they will find resources for understanding and responding to challenges and conflicts today.

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In Calvin’s Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church
by Matthew J. Tuininga, Assistant Professor of Moral Theology

In Calvin’s Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church, Matthew J. Tuininga explores a little appreciated dimension of John Calvin’s political thought, his two kingdoms theology, as a model for constructive Christian participation in liberal society. Widely misunderstood as a proto-political culture warrior, due in part to his often misinterpreted role in controversies over predestination and the heretic Servetus, Calvin articulated a thoughtful approach to public life rooted in his understanding of the gospel and its teaching concerning the kingdom of God. He staked his ministry in Geneva on his commitment to keeping the church distinct from the state, abandoning simplistic approaches that placed one above the other, while rejecting the temptations of sectarianism or separatism. This revealing analysis of Calvin’s vision offers timely guidance for Christians seeking a mode of faithful, respectful public engagement in democratic, pluralistic communities today.

“Tuininga’s line of interpretation will be much discussed.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale University

“This is an outstanding piece of intellectual-historical scholarship. It will appeal to historians of medieval and early modern political thought regardless of their personal faith or political commitments.” Barbara Pitkin, Stanford University.
It is a joy and a privilege to join Calvin Seminary's faculty this fall. I recently completed 25 years on the faculty of Wheaton College where I taught New Testament to both graduate and undergraduate students. There are many similarities between the educational ethos of Calvin and Wheaton. Wheaton students are seriously devoted to their studies and deeply committed to their spiritual development. I sense the same thing at Calvin Seminary. Academic excellence and a deep commitment to faith formation are central to our identity and mission.

My own history begins in California where I was born into a Lutheran family whose celebrated identity was Swedish (we ignored the other bits of European DNA in the family tree!). I even am heir to the pocket watch of my great grandfather who made the voyage from Sweden to Ellis Island in 1895. But “Swedish” we were (especially at Christmas) and till I was 25, I was immersed in the world of Lutheran life and faith. I am grateful for this. This heritage laid a foundation that still forms me today: a reliance on God’s grace alone for the totality of who we are.

I studied at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena and there recognized that reformed theology resonated with me immediately. And Presbyterian leaders at Fuller encouraged and shaped me further leading ultimately to my ordination in the Presbyterian Church, USA. I was then invited to enter a PhD program in New Testament in Aberdeen, Scotland, working with I. Howard Marshall. I will be forever grateful to him for his mentorship and friendship for many, many years. Howard died in 2015. But another shaping influence for me was Kenneth E. Bailey whom I met in Beirut, Lebanon, when I was young and he became a lifelong friend. Ken died in 2016. The passing of these two great men now reminds me that one of my tasks is to invest deeply in the next generation just as I was shaped when I was young.

I have now been in the classroom for quite a few years. And it strikes me today more than ever, that what we are doing is not transferring information to our students but forming their reflexes. They inherit who we are; not just what we say. When we invite them into our lives, when we become transparent mentors, they begin to see what maturity, wisdom, and knowledge we do or do not have. It inspires us to grow and in that growing, our students (hopefully) see how growth works.

My wife, Carol, has had a long career in psychology as a counselor and today would like to write a new chapter as a spiritual director. We have two adult daughters, one single and one married. The oldest lives in Grand Rapids with her husband and two children who now get to visit us every week. It has been a new joy for us that I can barely measure.
Young Ahn Kang joined Calvin Seminary last summer as Visiting Professor of Philosophical Theology. After having retirement in 2015 from his long time workplace, Sogang University (Seoul, South Korea), he has served, until just before coming to Calvin, as President of Kosin University and Korea Theological Seminary Board of Trustees. He was raised in a Korean Presbyterian Church that had a close relationship with the Dutch Reformed tradition. As a college student, he began to read the works of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Herman Dooyeweerd, Henry Meeter, Henry van Til, and others. He studied philosophy and Dutch language and literature at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Seoul, Korea) and continued to study philosophy at Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) before receiving his PhD from the Free University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands). Earlier in his career, he taught philosophy at the University of Leiden (The Netherlands) and Calvin College. During his teaching career in the Netherlands, Korea, and the United States, he published articles and books on East-Asian philosophy, Modern and Contemporary European philosophy, and Christian philosophy.

Currently he is working on two subjects: the philosophy of God and the philosophy of everyday life. His work on the philosophy of God is related with current streams of contemporary philosophy both in the Continental Europe and Anglo-American Analytic tradition, which surprisingly shows a willingness to speak again about God after a long silence in academic philosophical circles. This change was influenced by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff on the American side, and by Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Marion on the Continental side. Kang’s work on philosophy of everyday life is part of his project to develop a philosophy of life from a Christian faith and worldview. He thinks that God puts us in this world to live our life on an everyday basis as a gift given to us to enjoy and to be thankful to the Giver. God has also given us our life as task to fulfill for the sake of our neighbors, who are co-recipients of God’s gifts. He hopes that his philosophical dealing with everyday life is instrumental to equip future church leaders to serve the people of God and to lead them to live in His reign.

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KENZIE KRUMM

Kenzie Krumm joined Calvin Seminary this September as an Academic Services Coordinator. She is a recent graduate from Calvin College with a degree in Organizational Communication, and is excited to start her career in a place that already feels like home. Having grown up in Okemos, Michigan with her parents, three siblings and favorite dog Sergeant, Kenzie is now excited to start her career on Michigan’s west side. In her free time Kenzie enjoys reading, watching documentaries, swimming and traveling, especially to the Traverse City area where both her sets of grandparents live. Last fall Kenzie spent a semester in Budapest, Hungary, and loved immersing herself in Hungarian culture. Kenzie considers herself a lifelong learner, and is happy to be working in a place where faith and academics combine.

MATT COOKE

Hi, my name is Matt Cooke and I am the new Director of Communications and Enrollment Management. I’m excited to be serving the seminary in this new role!

This isn’t my first time working at Calvin Seminary; I have served as the Director of Admissions from 2011-2014 before spending the last three years working with my parents in the family business in the Detroit-area. Before my first go-around at Calvin Seminary I served for 10 years in a variety of roles at Calvin College in Admissions and Student Life.

In this new position, I am looking forward to telling the story of Calvin Seminary through written-story, video, photography, and any other outlets we can think of. Calvin Seminary is a vibrant community with a rich history and an exciting future. The work and mission of the seminary is compelling to me, and I am looking forward to contribute in whatever way that I can. Outside of work I enjoy spending time with my wife Megan and our three kids. I like to read and enjoy playing basketball. My future goals include playing shooting guard for the Detroit Pistons.

MARGARET MWENDA

Margaret Mwenda joined Calvin Theological Seminary in July 2017 to serve as the Chief Operating Officer. Margaret was born and raised in Kenya. After completing her undergraduate degree in Secondary Education, she studied in the United States, where she received a Master of Business Administration degree and a Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies. Margaret has held a number of administrative positions in post-secondary institutions, the most recent of which was her post as a faculty member and Interim Associate Dean at the Donald W. Maine College of Business at Davenport University, Michigan. Margaret’s breadth and depth of work experience spans approximately 20 years in higher education. Her current role at Calvin Theological Seminary includes operations and administration, with responsibilities over several functions including Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities, Community Culture, Communication & Events, and Finance. In her own words, “I feel privileged serving in my role to advance the mission of Calvin Seminary and I am already enjoying working with a great team of colleagues.”

Margaret is married to Mwenda Ntarangwi and they have two daughters. The family attends Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids.
Gerone Lockhart joined Calvin Seminary and Calvin College as Theological Librarian.

Since he was in grade school, Gerone has been interested in the teaching, training, and formation of followers of the Way. The son of a Church of God in Christ pastor, he grew up in an African American Pentecostal home that instilled both fierce independence and a commitment to community. His mother drew on her Presbyterian heritage and passed along her passion for education and exposure to the broader culture. The mixture of intense training, tightly bounded community, personal piety, and openness to the larger culture has been his constant companion over the years and helps explain in part his attraction to monasteries, outdoor action, and martial arts.

Gerone completed his AB in Religious Studies at Princeton. Later, he went on to complete an MDiv at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. Following Columbia, he entered doctoral studies in Sociology at NYU and later Practical Theology at Boston University. His studies focused on the history of punishment, the global economy, and the formation of moral sensibilities. Gerone withdrew from doctoral studies at BU to pursue more directly how he might present strategic information about our world to communities of disciples who are non-specialists. During his MSLIS program at the University of Illinois, Gerone focused on user experience, information organization, and information processing.

Gerone’s current research interests center on creating spaces – flexible and intelligent – where teams of disciples can explore issues of the common good in light of Jesus’s teachings on the reign of God.

Travel to New Testament sites connected with Jesus’ life: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Herod the Great’s harbor in Caesarea, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi, and the major biblical sites in Jerusalem. Other exciting activities include a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, floating in the Dead Sea, and visits to Masada, Qumran, and the Herodium. This tour also uniquely involves key sites in Jordan: Bethany, Machaerus, Mount Nebo, and the amazing city of Petra. Most days conclude with an evening study session that involves an inspirational lesson about Jesus’ life and ministry or the background of the NT.

Join host Jeff Weima, professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary and leading biblical scholar, for this life-impacting tour!
Distinguished Alumni Awards

Each year Calvin Theological Seminary is pleased to honor two alumni who have made significant ministry contributions in the Kingdom of God and have reflected positively upon the values and mission of CTS.

You are invited to submit nominations (with brief statement of rationale) by January 15, 2018 to: Rev. Jul Medenblik, President, Calvin Theological Seminary (email: sempres@calvinseminary.edu).

The recipients will be honored at the Seminary’s Commencement on Saturday, May 19, 2018.