2-1-1977

Dialogue

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A journal of Calvin College art and commentary published monthly by the Calvin College Communication Board. Address corresponding to Dialogue, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506. Copyright 1977 by the Calvin College Communications Board. Dialogue is printed on 100% recycled paper.

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More Tidings
Randall VanderMey

Editor's note: Because of relentless schedules on our part and bis, Mr. VanderMey's letter arrived too late to be published in the graduate school symposium printed in the March/April issue of Dialogue. We feel that it is far too good a piece to keep to ourselves, however, and so we present it here as a postscript for our mutual entertainment and enlightenment.

Is there life in graduate school? Data collected in manned experiments permits me to answer with an equivocal yes: life-like organisms have been discovered in graduate school, but due to unusual atmospheric pressure, a scarcity of nutrients in the soil, the presence of parasites in the environment, and continuous exposure to noxious effluvia, these organisms do not precisely resemble anything we know on earth.

A graduate “happy hour”: you stand ten feet away from Richard Ellmann, this month’s visiting lecturer and luminary, whose radiance, plus the influence of five or six gin and tonics, stimulates your professors into sudden foliation, an exuberance you never knew they could possess. Questions, aphorisms, anecdotes, les mots justes, a stand-up colloquy on the future of human consciousness, a comedy when seen from this distance—except that Ellmann actually does seem to shine. A first-year student asks for an autograph in his hard-bound copy of Ulysses on the Liffey, which he has just bought for $7.95. Your friend cuts him dead with a few well-chosen words—after all, what kind of turd goes after autographs? You stand by and watch, rehearsing for the time you will tell someone who knows enough to be impressed, that you stood next to Richard Ellmann.

Grad Student A in the hallway: Listen, got a good trick for the 18th century novel course.
Grad Student B: I’m all ears.
Grad Student A: You take your book, right? You haven’t read it, right? Well, you take it like this and you open it in about fifteen different places like so. Bend it go you’ve got to break the spine, really crinkle it. Then when you get to class you lay it on the table. Point spine at the professor. Then you grunt and shake your head whenever he makes a comment.

Grad Student B: You do that, too?!
Grad Student A: But you’ve got to grunt! Grunting is important part or you’re wasting your time . . .

It’s 3:23 a.m. You’re holding your head in your hands. You’re two-fifths of the way through a paper due at 10 tomorrow. A fifteen pager is due in two days. That same day you must have finished reading Paradise Lost. In the next week you take the six-hour exam to qualify for the program; you have to absorb thirty-two books and quadrillion articles by then. You are being evaluated now by a committee who decides whether you become teaching assistant or not—if not, Siberia. You can do it, everything will work out. Just stay calm, give up some sleep, chew glass. You can read The Confidence Man on your lunch break; apply yourself. You can stay up all night and still talk well in class. Of course you can. You are the next Matthew Arnold! You are the Übermensch, to leap off tall buildings. You are St. Stephen. Maybe you should drink bourbon or smoke a pipe, take up squash. Maybe you should do what Alex Greenburn did: buy a carton of Lucky Strikes, throw your clothes and books out of your car and drive till tomorrow night, never come back. You can do it, just relax and keep pushing. Wake up. Drive five stories in the Philadelphia street—-a black gang of choppers roars through a red light. A roach climbs the wall. Your eyes feel like hot cinders.

Dear Belacqua,

When I read the signature (T.A. Straayer) on the letter you sent asking me to create this anomaly for Dialogue, that little voice in my head, always the practical one, whispered “Teaching Assistant Straayer.” The little voice usually has a respectable point to make and this time it thought he was pointing out how tightly circumscribed graduate mind can be. It’s spring, the season when young grad student’s fancy turns to financial aid, and across America young burned out ladies and gentlemen ignoring one another so each can tend his/her own anxiety. As undergraduates, they all swore they’d never come this, and as first year grads they found community in
ring of fellow neophytes and thus were able to mask while the fact that college was actually over and THE FESION begun. Now fellow-feeling is an aberration, mates are walking dollar signs, the professors are tired thinking how they might swing a grant for a year in borough or publish an article to cement that tenure commitment or get a student assistant next fall to check 429 footnotes in their forthcoming scholarly flash-in-brook. Profs differ from students in that they are wielders greater power and thus more enslaved; further, they of 30% less than they know while students, to appear equals, speak of 30% more than they know; further, they see through the ambitions of students as students not see through the cynicism of profs. Yet, except for a few who seem to grow and gain humanity in this enment, everyone talks and acts like a victim of a ac animus, an economic juggernaut, a political serpent. are conscious that they are fit for nothing else. The few who thrive in and redeem this environment are who are intent on forming a world-view, those who at to something, those with enough blood in them to be to love. Judge for yourself whether Calvin makes ple fit for this kind of environment. I do know this, that in a while Calvin produces a real human being and that real human being would walk into most of the graduate ses I've been in and would open his mouth to speak, e would be instant shame and confusion.

I'm aware that I've made grad school look pretty bad, work tougher, narrower, sometimes more isolated from than the kind you'd do at Calvin, the students likewise wealthier, narrower, more isolated, and the profs more didious. If you're thinking, you're probably thinking e must be some great rewards in grad school to offset he spam I've been describing or else no one would stay there for more than a week. That's exactly right. Unfortu-nately, the feeling of maturity that comes from at last submitting to a discipline, the satisfaction of being treated like an adult for the first time in your academic career, the ebullience that comes when you discover one or two or three profs who in some way share your personal vision and let you know they respect you for having one, the solemn awe or unrepressed joy you experience when you study the great works in your field to the point of breakthrough, the feeling of kinship you develop in all-night conversations with friends who are brighter and quicker than any you've known before, are things I'm not able to describe.

To do justice to your sample questions, I should describe both Philadelphia, where I was and will be, and Iowa City, where I am now, but that would turn this letter into a long epistle. Please accept a summary instead:

1) Philadelphia is a doberman pinscher.
2) Iowa City is a cocker spaniel.
3) Students in both places resemble nothing so much as cooked bean sprouts.
4) Teachers in both places are like ground sirloin, charcoal broiled, well done, left out in the rain.
5) Writers are crazy.

Well, it's about time for me to hit the sack—not the Falstaffian kind, alas, but the other. Best wishes to you and all your crew. And thanks for giving me the chance to let some of these thoughts out.

Sincerely, Randy

You get the feeling in grad school you're meeting some wonderful people at a very bad time in their lives.
Unifying Our Liberal Education
A Perspective from the President

Anthony Diekema, Ph.D., became President of Calvin College last spring. Prior to that he served as Associate Chancellor at the Medical Center, University of Illinois, for twelve years. This article is based on his remarks made at the Annual Board-Faculty Conference this past September.

"Furthermore, if liberal learning is to guide societal and institutional change in constructive ways, then it must increasingly develop and use models of an interdisciplinary nature. Most of today's vexing problems require interdisciplinary scholarship and research. They require the knowledge and attention of several fields if satisfactory understanding is to be gained and resolutions are to be found. Most students are enjoying little observation, much less experience, in interdisciplinary study and research . . . ."

"Indeed, if liberal arts colleges are responsible for leadership in concepts and understanding and the intellectual methods guiding social change, then liberal arts colleges must bear heavy responsibility for responding to the present need for leadership. A major dimension of that need and responsibility lies in the search for interrelatedness and unity, a dimension in which we in higher education have failed most notably."

"The physical sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, the arts—all of the disciplines of liberal learning contain the ingredients for a unity of knowledge. Much more by way of interdisciplinary effort must be done before a unity can be achieved and, consequently, before the liberal arts colleges can claim to truly serve their classic purpose of preparing students to understand the world in which they live."

"Calvin College, by the unique nature of both its past and its present, stands on the threshold of providing a new and distinctive contribution to the American higher education community and the society it is called to serve. Christian liberal arts colleges with a strong sense of mission and purpose are well equipped to lead because few other institutions have the special mandate or the resources for molding the whole man and his interrelationships with all aspects of life . . . . It must strive toward a unity of faith and learning and living which speaks creatively and effectively in society as well as academe."

Inaugural Address (March 2, 1976)

In my inaugural address I took special note of what I believe to be a pervasive need for increased interdisciplinary efforts in higher education generally, in liberal arts colleges specifically, and at Calvin College as an integral part of its fundamental mission and expanding scope of service to society, the church, and the broad Christian community. I must acknowledge at the outset that my belief in this regard is based upon my own perceptions of the needs of today's society and, consequently, of today's youth as they prepare to cope in the society. No doubt those beliefs are conditioned by a sociological perspective, for we all tend to see the world through the "eyes" of our own discipline, or profession, or area of specialty. Clearly there are limitations any generalization. But just as the theory of evolution had almost unlimited implications for all of society in the late nineteenth century, so the present debate surrounding theories of growth in a finite world affects the whole of our society, regardless of diversity.

As with Darwinism, theories of limited growth tend to lay bare assumptions about the nature of change in the world. And as I read a variety of authors of diverse backgrounds who have entered the debate whether it be Meadows (ecologist) The Limits to Growth, or Bell (sociologist) The Coming of Post-Industrial Society, or Heilbroner (economist) . . . ."
Inquiry Into the Human Prospect,

---the questions which are not questions which can be answered satisfactorily within the confines of any one discipline or even in several disciplines working together for extended periods of time. New interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, non-disciplinary, or integrated approaches—call what you will—are necessary in debate.

I try to look as far afield from my discipline as possible, it seems to me, that the frontiers of much basic knowledge today (e.g., molecular biology, astrophysics, biophysical chemistry, etc.) are advanced primarily by disciplinary insights and efforts. By some of the most prominent and world problems are multidisciplinary in nature (e.g., hunger, poverty, environment, health, etc.); important for our purposes here, fundamental questions of an intellectual nature must be placed in:

what are the implications of the debate for educators of society's youth?

how can the development of a student's ability to cope in a changing world best be facilitated?

how can the liberal arts, as we know and understand them, be a responsive and creative force in social change?

Should the liberal arts curriculum provide an integrating, “holistic” experience for the student?

What are the critical dialogic questions for a Christian liberal arts curriculum?

Must the disciplinary approach to the liberal arts be altered or revised? Are there better or complementary methods?

Obviously, each question (and there are many others) deserves serious attention. However, the important point is that it is becoming increasingly apparent, in all of the disciplines, that our society and its institutions are under stress as never before in American history. Consequently, we must face new and fundamental questions which get to the very heart of our traditional methods of compartmentalizing knowledge into meaningful packages. Certainly we must ask whether students can be expected to come to some common, or integrated, or unified understanding of it all in such a manner that it does, indeed, educate them for life in its broadest dimensions.

Need for Unification of Knowledge

Certainly liberal arts colleges must provide some leadership in helping to rejoin what clearly are increasingly fragmented portions of our society. We cannot ignore the fact that we unavoidably cast ourselves in the role of intellectual as well as societal leader when we presume to provide students with a conceptual framework that will be valid for a productive lifetime of effective participation in social, religious, economic and political affairs. This is, indeed, a gravely important and responsible task. If we are unable to sustain conversation between the academic disciplines and divisions which presently tend to compartmentalize so much of our teaching and scholarship, then it seems that the demise of the classic goals of liberal education is clearly in sight. All of us, I believe, observe symptoms of this breakdown in the academic world today—perhaps most recently the drive toward vocationalism and extreme specialization in the disciplines and the professions, almost to the complete exclusion of efforts toward unification of knowledge.

In working toward more unification, it seems that the liberal arts must accept major responsibility for making students critically aware, as an integral part of all of their learning, of the impact of the knowledge they are
acquiring on the individual and on society. Because of the fragmented nature of the way in which many of us now perceive our fields of specialization and our disciplines, refocusing such responsibility and carrying it out in a scholarly fashion may take us a number of years of intensive analytic and dialogic activity across disciplinary lines. There would need to be many kinds of collaboration, hopefully carried out in a spirit of mutual inquiry and respect. It seems to me that this is best done within the context of the liberal arts, and particularly in a context in which the liberal arts disciplines are pointed clearly toward service and stewardship in society, rather than in the context of some grand pursuit of reality.

The all-too-common sense of ivory tower isolation from the grim realities of life being experienced by increasing numbers in our society should give us, as academics in the liberal arts, cause for grave concern. Within the liberal arts are some of the oldest skills and insights known to humanity; perpetuation of the civilizing arts has been the primary task of the liberal arts college from its inception. And if the liberal arts are increasingly regarded by society as irrelevant, then one can only contemplate with some dismay what future there is for a society when the liberal arts do indeed become irrelevant to it.

Yet we see all around us the clear signs of avoidance of the very central task of unification of knowledge. We see it in the "professionalization" of many of our liberal arts disciplines and departments in the major graduate universities as well as in a kind of subtle and arrogant superiority or indifference exhibited by certain departments toward pre-professional and professional programs. Much of this is also occurring in liberal arts colleges. And much of this stems, I believe, from the loss of awareness of the college's fundamental task—to provide a critical, comprehensive, and historical perspective on all of life and living—in many of the liberal arts disciplines. If we are to regain a sensitive awareness to that task we now face the difficult prospective of confronting a flourishing "cult of the expert," or "technocracy," or "vocationalism," or other movements away from our primary task.

In moving toward unification of knowledge, liberal arts colleges will need to be careful to avoid the pitfalls of current fads and quick answers. We shall need to be both deliberate and discriminating in the methods we choose. Special attention to complex social systems, to world order studies, and to programmatic expansions of present curricula may serve to bring the disciplines more closely together and may be the basis for a component of liberal education. Ever, careful discernment must also be coupled with a sense of intellectual adventure, and thus we should refrain from linking our knowledge to its wider context and practice. Liberal education for life cannot avoid coming to grips with the useful arts and practical learning. We must recognize that educational preparation for citizenship is much more complex today, perhaps more important, than it was in the early days of this society. We need to be innovative while conserving integrity and essential purpose of the academic enterprise.

Transcending Disciplines and Time

Any unification of knowledge must, of course, take into account both positive and negative facts which exist in the academic world as well as in society at large. In event, such unification would need to show progress in at least two directions which, I believe, presently seem to fragment education. The one dimension is that of subject matter; the other dimension is that of time.

Subject matter, the totality of knowledge, has been subdivided into distinct disciplines and those disciplines in turn have been subdivided into many specialties. Students, as well as society in general, are experiencing increasing difficulty in their search for explanations encompassing the whole. Perhaps a more common denominator which would cast the different disciplines into a single framework would serve to facilitate the process considerably. Such a framework wo
ed to be equally applicable to all the disciplines which constitute the liberal arts.

The other dimension of reform necessary for the unification of knowledge—that of time—entails the development of a comparative historical framework with which to sort and rate the wealth of information from the various disciplines. The inherent length of a liberal education lies principally in its vast fund of descriptive information covering the many aspects of man and the rest of creation—and less so in the way it is packaged and presented. And yet an efficient structuring of this great volume of information in a way which renders it understandable and relevant to the best means of preserving its educational strength. The major deficiencies of contemporary liberal education lie not with a lack of available information, but with inadequacies in aligning it. Currently we give students little assistance, and essentially no criteria, for choosing between relevant and useless information. We need to develop new methods and stems to detail a rational and temporal ordering of available information.

The nature of the task required if we are to improve the "holistic" nature of liberal education seems extremely complex and difficult. However, liberal arts colleges should not make the mistake of assuming that lack of necessary unification of knowledge is beyond their capability; rather, they should accept the challenge as one which calls for leadership and a sense of courage in today's academic world. Although many efforts along interdisciplinary lines are already surging as approaches to the problem, much more is needed in the years ahead. But those who are willing to embark in a new direction must also be willing to take some risks. Experimenting with new courses, reorganizing disciplines toward a new underlying unity and more common discourse, interrelating the fragments of theories which may exist between fields, preparing papers and books on the subjects, and drawing students into the excitement of such a project is extremely difficult and wearing activity. Consequently, I do not expect an overwhelming response to such a challenge. But I am hopeful that some will pick up the spark of interest which may generate the courage and dedication it will take to plow new fields and challenge old beliefs in the academic world. Perhaps the paramount educational task in the years ahead, as suggested by the Stanford Research Institute in a paper about the future of liberal education (Alternative Futures and Educational Policy), "is the altering of dormant basic premises, perceptions, images, and values."

A Unique Role for Calvin College?

I do not expect the faculties of prestigious institutions to rise to the challenge. The elite in the academic world are so busy holding tightly to the status quo that they have little vision for shaping a new future in a far different world. Likewise, too many college administrators have been backed into a "fire-fighting posture" while coping with enrollment decreases, budget deficits, and collective bargaining agreements so that dynamic leadership from them is highly unlikely. The hope, it seems to me, must lie with a small number of institutions which have the stability, the self-confidence, the security, the competence, the courage, and the vision to seek new horizons of intellectual pursuit. Calvin may be one such institution.

There are good reasons to believe that Calvin could provide distinctive leadership in this area. First, as Christians and as Reformed Calvinists, we have long taken a holistic view of knowledge and society (indeed, of the entire universe) as our special mandate in seeking God's revelation to all of His people. What is required in our teaching as well as in our scholarship is a Christian perspective on all of life, a perspective of the interrelatedness of nature, persons, and God. Our accountability to our God mandates our accountability to all of His creatures and creation. Thus, our motivation is strong, and deeply seated in faith and trust.

Second, what our society needs from its intellectual leaders today is a redefinition of universal values, a recreation of the "whole" person, and a unified framework for knowledge. Because of its fundamental commitment to the integration of faith and learning, Calvin has already grappled with these important issues in ways unknown to most faculties. Consequently, we are in a much better position to understand the dimensions of the task and the rewards of the effort.

Finally, Calvin has enjoyed a close-knit faculty, an esprit de corps, an atmosphere of mutual trust and supportiveness, and a dedication to interdisciplinary discussion and interchange which is rarely matched on the American academic scene. All of this militates toward a position of potential leadership in the decade ahead. That leadership seems well within the range of possibility for Calvin College.
He was there, all right. There with an obscenely steaming perfectly round lump of mashed potatoes in front of him on the small table, the crater in the center overflowing with dark imitation gravy; there with the thick rich bowl of chicken soup and inevitable cup of coffee.

He was there later, too, with only his cup of coffee, a cigarette in his hand, and an ashtray half-full with butts, and now he was reading his Faulkner, sitting on the window which showed people hurrying by and snow showers scurrying about on the wind, in the street, on the sidewalks, in the raw gray light of the day, in the brackish, austere, November urban weather that would have been beautiful to watch in a woods or on a seashore. But he was there, now, and it was beautiful to him, now, and serene.

He was there, and he was not there, an anonymous anomaly in the restaurant that called itself the Cup and Saucer. But Harry was an anomaly among anomalies in the Cup and Saucer, in a place where the unconventional was conventional, so he did not look conspicuous sitting there reading a novel, smoking a cigarette, and drinking his coffee in his cowboy boots, white painter's pants and plaid flannel shirt.

The curiously named restaurant was part of, and linked by a revolving door to, the city's largest and oldest downtown hotel. The interior was done in American Diner, straight out of the 1940's. The plain gingham curtains matched the red and white checkered tablecloths. Three U-shaped counters served the stool-sitters, with several small tables scattered between them and the booths which hugged the three walls opposite the kitchen.

A generally subdued, ecumenical mixture of customers occupied the seating, and methodically ordered their food and drink from waitresses who took the orders as methodically. Most of the patrons seemed to be regulars, and several knew each other, exchanging greetings as they came and went.

Harry's waitress returned periodically, always with a smile, to refill his coffee cup and deposit another plastic cream cup on the table beside his cup and saucer. So he read and smoked and read and lifted the cup to his lips and read and watched out the window; but if he were looking to see life passing him by on the sidewalk, he was disappointed, because people had ceased going by, and all life in the world seemed to be gathered in the warm, well-lighted room all about him.

Harry had chosen this restaurant out of all of those hotels because it was well-lighted, and he could read there. And he read, as the minutes and hours ticked away, on his watch, as the waitress returned again and again, always smiling, as the weather weathered the urban landscape. The reading had its effect on him, on his thinking. He mused on the novel, then on himself, as a clear, cool objectivity, a calm detachment, brought on by the singularity Faulkner style, crept into his mind, and he began to regard the stools, counters, tables, waitresses and other patrons and finally even the weather with a bemused indifference. That was when he became unsure whether he was there at all.

A twilight zone of the mind, it was. Faces appeared in his view, but he did not see them. Voices were easily audible, but he did not hear them. "That's it," he thought. "Non-involvement. Of any part of you. With anything. You don't get involved and you stay out of harm's way." He was thinking rapidly now, yet contemplatively. When spoken, he replied smoothly, in even tones. He stared at people with measured gaze. They were all foreign to him, and he indifferent to them. "The way all experience and experience should be," he thought. "Foreign. Extraneous to oneself. Keep yourself for yourself. That way you don't get upsets and surprises don't happen. That's control. That's order in events to your own liking. Just don't betray yourself that part of you that's uncontrollable. Indifference. Good and bad. Take but a disciplined casual interest in everything. In every-thing. In everybody. There it is."

He sat forward out of a slouch, stubbing out another cigarette, suddenly satisfied, if not happy. He saw his reflection in his new cup of coffee which still lacked the cream. "A lot of wisdom there in that coffee cup," he said.

Rodney Blom, an English and history major, is a senior from Modesto, California.
ngratulating himself. Love, sentiment, worry, problems, in, life itself, the living of it, seemed to fade away from n, to stand in front of him watching him, finally to move the way out of the door and into the street, there to sit with the wind-hurled snowflakes against the window, ting to get back into his warm, well-lighted place. But he could not let them.

And Harry sat there for hours, reading and nursing his m satisfaction. He was thinking swiftly now, with an fol clarity. His mind was disembodied, had fled his body, d fled the room. Equilibrium came in its place, suffused n. He gazed with infinite slow patience at everything ·and thing in particular.

His diffidence did not wear off on the waitress, though, kept warming up his coffee with a smile, he not even king at her, only murmuring thankyou's without look­~ up. But he noticed her, noticed that she was pretty, mgh of course he did not allow that to affect him, ticed her faithfulness to him, he who had been drinking f coffee for three hours. Finally ready to leave, he spoke her for the first time, the food having been ordered from waitress of the preceding workshift. “You're a good titress,” he said. “You just keep coming back, always tiling, and you don't ask any questions or give me any range looks about my drinking so much coffee and sitting e long, and all of that just for my cups of coffee.”

It was not sentiment, of course, just simple courtesy and ace, attributes which had gained several pounds of weight his mind on the afternoon. He rose, paid, left the utress a dollar tip, dropped the paperback into his hip ocket, and passed through the revolving door into the tel lounge. Having learned all that he wanted to know out in two minutes, he headed for the elevators, and passed through the revolving door into the tel lounge. Having learned all that he wanted to know out in two minutes, he headed for the elevators, and ok one to the highest floor but one. He stepped out, owly walked the corridor around and around to where it ed in a miniature cul-de-sac, and slowly headed back. e air was close, and he could feel the coffee sweating out him under his arms. He thought momentarily but only f handedly of opening a door into a room, maybe to catch anonymous couple in the love act; not for the cheap sake of prurient interest but simply to prove to them and to himself his diffidence, his imperviousness. So what if he spent the night in jail? He would be impervious to that, too. But the thought was a fleeting one, and Harry continued on, coming to a window overlooking the city. There it lay before him, he thought, with all of its petty meannesses and largesse, its big and small men and women, its squalor and opulence, its love and hate, greed and ambition. He was above it, looking down upon it, removed in body and spirit.

He did not look long, though, soon making his way down the creaking elevator shaft, to disgorge himself into the lounge once more, out of the sterile, impersonal box and again into the world of men and things. He sat down to read again, reading for some time before he noticed a persistent hacking cough coming from somewhere behind him. Without even turning around, he recognized the cough as that of a dried-up old man, someone coughing up phlegm-soon-to-be-blood, someone waiting for the life to wheeze out of him, for the cough to take him.

He read. He read some more, but not more because he was reading the same paragraph over. The persistent cough persistently wore on his nerves, so that he could not ignore it. The man obviously had nothing ahead of him, and likely very little behind him; he was a nameless, faceless hulk in a dilapidated armchair in a dingy hotel lobby. The twilight now was receding in the lobby, as outside the afternoon drew to a close, running along toward real, unpretentious twilight. “That’s me,” he thought. “That’s me back there in forty years. That cough, that bleakness, that despair, that’s all me. No sense of urgency there. But where is his control? He has no control.”

Unsettled, Harry stood, turned, and walked back to the figure huddled in an old, black cloth topcoat. “Wanna get some coffee?” he asked him. No response. “I’ll buy. Coffee and some pie, maybe. Then we can talk. I’d like to talk to you.” The man slowly, so slowly, raised his eyes, stared a full five seconds, then as slowly lowering them again, hacked up a great gathering of phlegm, bent forward, and spat it out on the floor. Harry turned and strode out the door into the still-constant weather.
Sietze Buning plowed straight furrows in Middelburg, Iowa, for seventeen years before leaving home forever (in flesh, though not in spirit) to seek his fortune in the big city. Although he ain’t a city slicker yet, Sietze will be included in an anthology of Christian poets soon to be published by Baker Book House.

Our Calvinist fathers wore neckties with their bib-overalls and straw hats, a touch of glory with their humility. They rode their horse-drawn corn planters like chariots, planting the corn in straight rows, each hill of three stalks two feet from each hill around it, and over the rises. A field-length wire with a metal knot every two feet ran the planter and clicked off three kernels at each knot. Planted in rows east the rows also ran north-south for cross-cultivating. Each field was a checkerboard even to the diagonals. No Calvinist followed the land’s contours.

Contour farmers in surrounding counties improvised their rows against the slope of the land. There was no right way. Before our fathers planted a field, we knew where each hill of corn would be. Be ye perfect, God had said, and the trouble with contour farmers was that, no matter how hard they worked at getting a perfect crop they could never know for sure it was perfect—and they didn’t even care. They were at best Arminian in theology, or Catholic, and at worst secular. Though they wore bib-overalls, they wore no neckties, humility without glory.

Contour fields were the result of free will, nary a cornstalk predetermined. The God contour farmers trusted, if any, was as capricious as their cornfields. Calvinists knew the distance between God and people was even greater than the distance between people and corn kernels. If we were corn kernels in God’s corn planter, would we want him to plant at random? Contour farmers were frivolous about the doctrine of election simply by being contour farmers.

Contour farmers couldn’t control weeds because they couldn’t cross-cultivate. Weed control had been laid on farmers by the curse. Contour farmers tried to escape God’s curse. Sooner or later you could tell it on their children: farmers who didn’t fight weeds also condoned movies and square-skipping. Contour farmers wasted land, for, planting around the rises, they left more space between the rows than if they’d checked it. It was all indecent.

We could drive a horse cultivator—it was harder with a tractor cultivator—through our checked rows without uprooting any corn at all, but contour farmers could never quite recapture the arbitrary angle, cultivating, that they had used, planting. They uprooted corn and killed it. It was indecent and untidy.

We youngsters pointed out that the tops of our rises were turning clay-brown, that bushels of black dirt washed into creeks and ditches every time it rained, and that in the non-Calvinist counties the tops of the rises were black. We were told we were arguing by results, not by principles. Why, God could replenish the black dirt overnight. The tops of the rises were God’s business.
Our business was to farm on Biblical principles. Like, "...et everything be done decently and in good order; that is, keep down weeds, plant every square inch, do not waste crops, and be tidy. Untidy contour farmers were not kingly. They could not be prophetic, could not explain from the Bible how to farm. Being neither kings nor prophets, they could not be proper priests; their humility lacked focus. Suppose they prayed for crops privately. Our whole Calvinistic county prayed for crops the second Wednesday of every March.

God's cosmic planter has planted thirty years' worth of people since then, all checked and on the diagonal if we could see as God sees. All third-generation Calvinists now plant corn on the contour. They have the word from the State College of Agriculture. And so the clay-brown has stopped spreading farther down the rises. And life has not turned secular—

but broken.

For God still plants people on the predetermined check even though Calvinists plant corn on the contour. God's check doesn't seem to mean a kernel in the Calvinist's cornfield. There's no easy way not to tell the difference between Calvinists and non-Calvinists: all plant on the contour; all tolerate weeds; between rows, all waste much space; all uproot corn, cultivating; all consider erosion their own business, not God's; all wear overalls without ties; all their children go to the same movies and dances; the county's prayer meetings in March are badly attended; I am improvising this poem on the contour, not checking it in rhyme.

Glad for the new freedom, I miss the old freedom of choice between Calvinist and non-Calvinist farming. Only in religion are Calvinist and non-Calvinist distinguishable now. When different thoughts about God produced different ways of farming, God mattered more. Was the old freedom worth giving up for the new? Did stopping the old erosion of earth start a more serious erosion of the spirit? Was stopping the old erosion worth the pain of the new brokenness? The old Calvinists said that the only hope for unbrokenness between the ways of farmers and the ways of God is God.

A priest, God wears infinite humility; a king, he wears infinite glory. He is even less influenced by his upward-mobile children's notions of what-to-wear-with-what than our Calvinist fathers were, in neckties and bib-overalls. Moreover, a prophet, he wears the infinite truth our Calvinist fathers hankered after to vindicate themselves, not only their farming. Just wait, some dark night God's chariot-corn planter, the wheels of which drop fertility and fatness, will come over the rises. Will the rider wear a straw hat or a crown? No matter, just so the wheels of that corn planter-chariot churn up all the clay-brown rises and turn them black, just as the old Calvinists predicted. Lord Jesus, come quickly.
On Living in a Not So Holy Land

Bert DeVries

Bert DeVries, Ph.D., began teaching in the Calvin College history department in 1967. He went to Heshbon, Jordan, in 1968 as an architect surveyor and has returned to the site almost every year since then. From 1972 to 1974 he worked in Jordan as an archaeologist while organizing a program for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee among Palestinian refugees. He will return to Jordan this spring for eight months of further study.

A major part of this article was published in the September 13, 1974 issue of the Banner.

We—I, my wife and four children—lived in Amman, Jordan, during the Middle East War of October, 1973. There was something absurd and surreal about that experience. Amman was not directly affected by the war (the battlefronts were in the Sinai and on the Golan Heights). For us it was business as usual. Yet, from our rooftop we could sometimes see Israeli jets swooping up from the cover of the ancient Jabbok River valley on their way to the Golan Heights. The battle front was a mere two hour drive away from us. Can you imagine business as usual in Grand Rapids while Ann Arbor is being invaded by columns of tanks from Ohio? But what if the invasion had been one of a fifty-year long chain of wars, raids and skirmishes? And all in an area no larger than Southern Michigan?

Although we were not directly involved in the battles, our proximity gave us a sense of involvement. We could no longer maintain the callousness that comes from watching these events from seven thousand miles away on television in the comfort of our family room. Our interest could no longer be in the form of the indifferent question asked by Holy Land tourist or archeologist: Is it safe to go this year? What follows is my attempt to come to terms with this conflict. It was written during the last days of the October War and deals with events now three and a half years in the past. I write this introduction, however, with the feeling that not much has changed since then. Then Syrians and Israelis were battling over the Syrian town of Quneitra, just east of Mount Hermon. Today Israelis are backing the Lebanese Christian Arabs and Syrians the Palestinian Arabs in a battle over the town of Marjayoun, just west of Mount Hermon.

Today we are in the land of the Gadarenes, swimming in the hot waters of a volcanic pool. Overhead palm trees rustle in the warm breeze. Beyond are banana and orange groves, fields of potatoes and lettuce, and pastures for cows and sheep. A few miles to the west is the Sea of Galilee. North and south steep slopes tower to the sky.

From one of these slopes the demon-filled herd of swine must have hurtled.

The scream of jets crashes through the peaceful silence. White trails etch the sky from west to east, then dip straight down. Bombs explode off to the north. Our host says with cynical smile: “The background music of our paradise.”

A hundred yards away a mined, barbed-wire fence marks the beginning of the Golan Heights: Israeli-occupied Syria. Last week one of our host’s cows wandered too close to the fence and was blown up.

This morning, during the two-hour drive from Amman to the Yarmul river, we passed the ruins of five New Testament cities with names like Pell and Gadara, cities once teeming with people to whom Jesus preached. We also passed five refugee camps teeming with a hundred thousand Palestinian Arabs cooped up in one-room asbestos huts.

In the past two years the names of the Bible have gained in familiarity: Jericho, Gilead, Jabbok, Bethlehem, the Mount of the Beatitudes. Alongside, the names of recent decades are in our daily experience: The Allenby Bridge, Golan Heights, the October War. On the one hand the image of the shepherd carrying a lamb too weak to walk: peace, harmony, salvation. Or the other hand, the image of a soldier with a machine gun aimed across barbed wire: bloodshed, hatred, destruction.

While we were still in Michigan, it was easy to keep these two streams apart: The first had to do with Bible reading at the dinner table, the second with the eleven o’clock news on television. While living in Jordan, however, the geographic identity between Bible history and current events has prompted us to search for relationships between the two. This quest has resulted in changes in our attitude and approach that are worth relating.
current (October, 1973) fighting, is located in Israel, Syria, or Jordan—and complex bodies of information—the national characteristics of Arabs and Israelis. Knowing that the Arab people comprise a great variety of nationalities and cultures as diverse from each other as the Dutch, French, and Scotch, and that Israeli citizenry includes Moroccan and Iraqui Jews and Palesti- ne Arabs as well as Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and America, completely changes one’s understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a simple two-sided issue to a complex, many-faceted problem. As Christians committed to truth and fairness, we are obliged to base our judgments on information that is as complete and objective as possible.

II

We can no longer divorce ourselves from the conflict over Palestine as a struggle between “those Arabs and Jews” somewhere on the other side of the world. Responsibility for this conflict is to be attributed as much to Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States as it is to the Israelis and the Arabs. The outcome of the October War was determined by imely weapon supplies from the U.S. and Russia as well as by strategy on the battle field. Both Israelis and Arabs are realizing more and more that he conflict is really out of their hands. This has brought both frustration over being at the mercy of outside forces and conviction that a settlement of the conflict has to come from Washington and Moscow, rather than Tel Aviv and Cairo. This makes us, as citizens of an involved power, participants in the conflict and obligates us to exercise our Christian citizenship to help achieve a fair settlement.

III

We can no longer listen passively to those pseudo-interpreters of biblical prophecies who claim to have proof texts foretelling the foundation of modern Israel and predicting the outcome of this and future conflicts. They have manufactured for us a cruel god who creates and disposes of whole nations at the flick of a finger. We live among the people of these nations. We know them as fellow human beings with the same passions—love, hatred, tenderness, and violence—the same needs, the same rights that we have; as deserving of the promises of the gospel as we are. The grand schemes of the “theologians” of prophecy may be appealing when the people involved are lumped into anonymous nations, but they become monstrously cruel when you know the people on a first-name basis.

IV

We can no longer listen with sympathy to the Israeli Jew’s claim based on his right of survival—a sympathy arising from our desire to make amends for the atrocities of Nazi concentration camps and death chambers. We have, however, not listened well to the Palestine Arab’s demands for justice. “Why,” he asks, “should we give up our homes to the Jews? Why should we be punished for the crimes committed against the Jews in Europe?” (The U.N. lists over one and a half million Palestine Arab refugees; over 600,000 of these are cooped up in camps in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.) A Christian sense of justice demands that we listen to all parties in this conflict and avoid the oversimplification of making a partisan choice for one and against the others.

V

We can no longer refer glibly to the region of Palestine as “the Holy Land.” Living in this region has been a wonderful visual aid that has made the events of biblical history more understandable and more meaningful. Yet there is something pathetically warped in the idea of Christians tending and protecting the supposed footprint of Jesus in the rock on the Mount of Olives while they are oblivious of Israelis and Syrians battering away at each other with jets and machine guns. When Jesus walked this land He was constantly involved with its people. Many of His modern disciples are so busy peering at relics that they fail to see the present people of the land, whether they be Jew, Moslem, or Christian (there are a quarter million Christian Arabs in Israel and Jordan). If we western Christians continue to venerate Palestine’s tombs, rivers, and ruins without a gospel-rooted concern for its living people, we share in the responsibility for turning the Holy Land into a spiritual waste, an unholy land.

Mount Nebo, from which Moses viewed the promised land long ago, is now a strategic military position of the Jordanian army. Perhaps some of you who are planning a tour of Palestine will eat your picnic lunch there, as we have done. You will, as we did, feel a tingle of excitement because you are standing where Moses once stood and seeing what he saw. But if, while we stand there, we are blind to that Jordanian soldier and his Syrian, Israeli, Palestinian, and Egyptian counterparts, the hill we stand on will be just another hill, and the River Jordan before us just another muddy river.

We’ll be coming home in three months. The problem of the two streams, however, will travel with us; for the challenge of making the gospel a vital force in our lives has no geographic limits. Whether the hot waters at the pool of Gadara or the cold waters of Lake Michigan...
Winter Reflections
Sheri VanDuyn

Landscape Echo
Nancy VanderLinde
Rosanne Lopers, a senior French major from Drayton, Ontario, attended Ryerson University in Toronto for one year before coming to Calvin. She has been a Chimes writer for two years. Information for this article was gathered during the past interim, which she spent doing an independent study of French-Canadian literature and attitudes in Quebec.

Bienvenu à Quebec: here the formidable Canadian winter forests à la Maria Chapdelaine are realized with a joie de vivre unique to this province. Spreading north and east of New York over nearly one-sixth of Canada’s land mass, with a population that is 88% French-speaking, Quebec offers a refreshing charm and sociability typical of many European countries, making it the grand dame of North American tourist spots.

Recently spotlighted in the news as the center of Canada’s very own crisis, Quebec has played a foremost role throughout Canadian history. Today it is an historic showplace: uniform strip farms line the Saint-Laurent River as clear evidence of the seventeenth-century seigneurial system; the fortress cities of Montreal and Quebec City are reminders that war with the Indians and the English colonies was the rule, not the exception; and countless villages clustered around elegant stone chapels signify the centrality of the Church in the French-Canadian society.

The conservative mood of Quebec, typical of French-Canada until very recent times, is well-established. The fight to preserve the French language, the dominance of Roman Catholicism, and traditional agrarian ways of life in a harsh climate exemplifies Quebec’s collective goal of survival. Despite the struggles of Confederation, British colonial wars, and the forces of urbanism and industrialization characteristic of North American civilization, French-Canadian society has not lost its distinctiveness.

No matter what inclinations you may have as a tourist, Quebec City—the only walled city in North America, and the provincial capital—undeniably qualifies as a most superb city for tourism. Her geographical setting seats her royally above the Saint-Laurent River while the rugged Laurentian mountains to the west provide for picturesque skiing and hiking excursions. The city’s hospitality captivated Charles Dickens and even today it exudes a warmth and openness that entices visitors to return. It lacks the businesslike, twentieth-century metropolitan appearance of Montreal, Canada’s largest city. You can check into any of the numerous rooming houses or hostels inside the city walls for about twenty dollars a week and set out on foot. Quebec City is split-level, located on a plateau of solid rock with very steep, often sheer edges. Walking is much less treacherous than maneuvering cars or bicycles through the city’s network of narrow, winding streets. You can pick up a booklet for a detailed walking tour of Old Quebec or simply follow your whims. Buildings and historic sites are almost hypnotic in drawing you from one place to another. Concierges, proprietors, merchants, and residents welcome questions and tell a more interesting and truer account than tourist guide books.

Old Quebec is at its liveliest in the town square, Place d’Armes. The castle-like Chateau Frontenac dominates the square, architecturally reminiscent of “once upon a time” with its turrets and towers visible from miles off. This distinctive hotel caters mainly to English-speaking tourists and fails to convey the French-Canadian spirit as thoroughly as the smaller and less expensive hotels. In front of the hotel on the Dufferin Terrace stand caleches—quaint horse-drawn carriages that can take you for a ride on the ultimate in romantic tours. In the winter the Terrace is the site of a gigantic toboggan run and small skating rinks, and is the home of Quebec’s famous Winter Carnival, where ice sculptures defy comparison and winter sport competitions are olympic events in themselves.

From the Terrace promenade, some two-hundred feet above the swift-flowing Saint-Laurent, it is easy to recap­ture the early years of Quebec. The promontory, known as Cap Diamant, commands an exceptional view of Lower Town Quebec; its natural harbor; the shore of Lévis; and, farther off, Ile d’Orléans stuck like a giant cork in the Saint-Laurent. Hidden in the rocky plateau sits a formidable citadel with bastions and battlements, a military marvel that used to control water access as far as the Great Lakes but now only hosts military parades in full bloom for tourists. Barracks and thick-walled bastilles have been converted into government offices and fine dining places.

A funicular (a strange and precarious cable car) descends the slope to the lower and eldest part of Quebec City. The heart of Old Lower Town Quebec, along the river front, has deep, narrow streets studded with architectural gems of the
venteenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of this area has recently undergone massive restoration. The focal point of the area is the Notre-Dame-des-Victoires chapel and Place Royale, the ancient market square where Samuel de Champlain founded a French-Canadian community in 1608. That were formerly homes and shops of merchants and adepts are now museums, archives, galleries, or restaurants. Of particular interest is the Maison des Vins with its huge one vaults and authentic wine cellars. “Aristanats” sound here, although the ones in Lower Town, selling manufactured Québécois craftwork, cannot match the more exquisite shops in the upper town, where hand-crafted loathing, wood and stone sculpture, and sketchings in Québécois, esquimaux, and Indian styles are sold. These craft top are frequently found in the salons on the ground floors of rooming houses.

The entire city of Quebec is a monument to the history of French-Canadian civilization. The Quebec Historical Society has undertaken restoration work to rehabilitate this istorial and architectural heritage, producing a coherent and aesthetically improved view of the original urban complex. Bronze plaques on almost every gate and wall mark the homes of leaders of the early community and tell detailed stories of new France. Monuments, reverently dedicated to war heroes and founders of the religious tradition of the community, have become as common as trees in the courtyards, parks, and esplanades. Cannons are planted along the outer walls, alongside monuments, and on the kirts of Parliament Hill. Concern for its heritage has made the rebirth of Old Quebec easy. A dedicated portion of the population seeks to preserve particular architectural features while providing services necessary to adequately fulfill the new functions of these buildings.

Recommended stops include
-the Ursulines Monastery which, founded in 1641, was the first school for girls in the Americas, and today has an enrollment of more than nine hundred girls;
-the museum of Marie de l’Incarnation which houses, among other rare findings, the skull of French General Montcalm;
-the Basilica of Notre Dame and its adjacent seminary courtyard, where an excellent group of seventeenth-century buildings vividly recalls previous generations;
-the Latin quarter, where the Quebec Seminary and its offshoot, the Laval University, have stood for more than three centuries.

The true spirit of the Québécois comes alive in the dead of winter. Temperatures drop to sixty below and storms paralyze the entire region, but Quebec maintains a warm and hospitable social life. The dining is superb. Cafés and avenirs still holding the style of yesteryear, and open long past midnight, offer Québécois entertainment and a congenial atmosphere. It is common for total strangers to sit at your table and amiably join in the conversation. The streets are lively at all times of the day and night, giving the city an ethereal appearance when it is blanketed in snow.

The arts in Quebec enjoy a healthy life. Local talent of all sorts is featured. Taverns and restaurants often exhibit contemporary artists’ chef d’oeuvres on their walls. Craftsmen are protected by government-established guilds; each authentic work of art is labelled and identified by code. The ultramodern Grand Theatre, which stands outside the walls of Old Quebec, has a variety of first-rate concert halls, and is the home of the Quebec Symphonic Orchestra and the Trident Theatre Company. Approximately one in ten of Quebec’s film, theater, ballet, and musical performances is imported, but the rest is home-grown talent.

Not far from the Theatre are the Plains of Abraham, site of the decisive British conquest of the French in 1759. Its wide open spaces are perfect for toboganners and beginning skiers. Further down the Grande Allée, a wide street particularly attractive because of its beautiful churches and eighteenth-century-style buildings, is the Quebec Museum, showplace for Quebec creativity in fine arts and crafts. It frequently features showings from national and international galleries.

For those not inclined to city experiences or tourism of a historical nature, the province of Quebec offers a multitude of other attractions in easily attainable outlying districts. Ski buffs are well-acquainted with the pleasure found at Lac-St. Jean and Mont Ste. Anne. Île d’Orléans, with its old stone churches, tiny wayside chapels, windmills, and gardened farmhouses, retains a genuine old-world authenticity. Further east along the Saint-Laurent coast, past the powerful Montmorency Falls, lies Ste. Anne de Beauprê, a world-renowned shrine which draws thousands of pilgrims every year. The great basilica of Romanesque design, notable for its interior mosaics and sculptured marble, contains pillars covered with crutches and other physical aids rendered useless by “miraculous cures.” The entire rural area also has some rare outdoor bread ovens still in use.

North of the Saint-Laurent plains lies the vast Laurentian wilderness for those who want to get away from it all. For the sportsman or nature lover this is the place to find the color and splendor of all things created. Should the charms of the Laurentians prove too irresistible, villages on the south shore of the Saint-Laurent form a virtual museum of early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treasures. The region is decked with time-honored manor estates, communal mills, churches built of stone and filled with masterpieces of art, and elegant Quebec homes—all reminiscent of the feudal days of New France.

In spite of time and politics Quebec tenaciously determines its own destiny. As one professor at the University of Laval puts it, “Our French-Canadian heritage is a story of survival, but our goals have been realized. It remains now to concretize our tradition and culture so it may never be forgotten or destroyed.”
"Each man is the figment of a poem's imagination; some poems are just silly." — A. Zanzibaar

So I've been reading Dialogue for a year and this clown who's the poetry editor writes a comment for every one and he figures that since he has a soapbox why not stand on it so he does and for issue after issue he bludgeon's us with nothing like any literary criticism I ever read but worse than that he does it all in code so that no one can understand what he's talking about except for Bill Sheldon and G.J. Van Spronsen who probably drink a lot and besides they write poems and can't be trusted and there's this group of those poets who hang out together and talk about the Buddha and William Butler Yeats and how silly T.S. Eliot is and how maybe God is a she and perhaps they will be reincarnated as frogs or something equally slimy and I heard one of them once and he was talking to himself saying "Kwats" over and over again and he must be sick or something or a homosexual and what does "Kwats" mean anyway and what I want to know is who do they think they are because they go to parties and then don't talk to anyone because they don't like the music and they never stay for the discussions after movies and they steal tables from the commons and they never footnote their poems and it wouldn't make any difference if they did because poems don't mean anything at all (Tom Burnham told me and he gets violent if anyone disagrees with him)...  

David Westendorp

Abby

(after seeing the movie Streetcar Named Desire)

I have found a friend.  
She is not a symbol or a myth.  
She cannot be touched through meditation.  
She sat right beside me at the movie Friday night, and afterward, when I began my analysis, she began to cry.  
She told me, "The female lead was so lonely. We all know that inside because we all fear it. And nobody, nobody understands it."  

Chris Campbell
Prayer

on walks in his sleep
the edge of the room
calls out for a carriage

eve see horse drawn carriages
ding noisely through the city
fore dawn
ey are phantoms
those who used to rumble
ross the streets
bs of the wolf
lling in the snow

m. David Sheldon

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Morning Meditation
from Frederick Manfred

No Name at Falling Water
first to drink at dawn
then a goose feather down his throat
He vomits cleansing water
and washes quickly cold
rubbing goose bumps
young skin tight on his muscles
He shivers the rising song
as friends come from the village
No Name calls "The morning is good"

Bob Boomsma
For Creeper

1. During the winter Mr. Timmer is afraid of falling on the ice. He stays in the house and argues with a photograph of his wife. The air around the small man shimmers as he whispers to her, "Eric knows about the High Priestess."

2. "Some things are real," he said gently, "and some things are not. Shepherds are illusions and so are angels." He gazed at the picture. Soft moaning in the room. Mr. Timmer sucked on his cigarette and said, "We have always been sheep." "We have always been virgins," replied his wife.

Duncan

Showing a Friend Around

There is a will-o-the-wisp down by the pond
He stirs up the surface scum and
dances on the slippery tree roots
Grandfather says he talked with him once
I don't know
But I read a news page
that lined the bottom of my bureau draw
It said in 1958
Jimmy Hamilton fell in there

G.J. Van Spronsen
COMING SOON—Fine Arts Issue