Dialogue must be a ministry to Calvin College. Various members of the Calvin community received our declaration of principle with suspicion as we went through the application process last year. We said that we wanted to make the magazine more appealing to students by making it less esoteric. But some responded that Dialogue should be addressed to “thinking people,” to students “where they ought to be,” not necessarily where they are. We said that articles should be interesting, or challenging, or even just fun. Not necessarily, they disagreed, Dialogue should print what people ought to read. And when we said that we wanted to meet needs at Calvin, some warned us not to be overly pastoral. One person graciously reminded us that the Broene Center and Chaplain Cooper were supposed to meet needs. In sum, many people thought—and perhaps still think—that Dialogue should focus on certain “idealistic principles,” not on readers.

Focusing on “idealistic principles” sounds profound and noble, but where does it lead us? When speaking of modern poetry, C.S. Lewis answers this question succinctly in his *Experiment in Criticism*: “Unfortunately, but inevitably, this process [of becoming ever more purely poetic] is accompanied by a steady diminution in the number of readers.” Unfortunately, but unquestionably, this has happened to Dialogue. Frankly, very few people read it, which is not really so surprising. Consider Lewis: “The more any instrument is refined and perfected for some particular function, the fewer those who have the skill, or the occasion, to handle it must of course become.” In the past two years precious few people have chosen to handle the “instrument” Dialogue.

A major goal of this year’s staff is to turn this tide of indifference among students, or at least to stem it. We are convinced that we can best accomplish this by fulfilling our mandate to be both “a forum for discussion and dialogue by all members of the Calvin Community” and also “a medium of artistic expression” within a spirit of ministry. Ministry for Dialogue means that we will respect all of our readers: freshmen as well as seniors, “undecided” majors as well as philosophers, athletes as well as professors. Ministry means that we will work to address some of the diverse needs here at Calvin. It means that we will present the Arts and Letters at Calvin in each issue. We will publish a broad range of articles so that we can rejoice together in the multitude of gifts that God has given us, and so that we can learn from one another. *Dialogue* 1981-82 must be a ministry to intellectual, spiritual, personal, and even recreational needs.
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my proud scrap
the torn-off piece of program
with red ink print reads
"VS. CLEVELAND CAVALIERS"
and the scrawled name of John Johnson
means little to anyone else
but what a moment for me
when my two-year
hawkeye hero
made it into the nba
and said i was the first
to ask for his autograph
and talked about the old
best team ever from iowa
and since
when he made the all-stars
or started for the nba champs
i haul out the old scrap
and remember
his pleased new rookie face
when he realized somebody
(besides his mother)
thought he could make it
(and hope he remembers too)

Keith DeRose
Homosexuality:
Eros and Agape

Recently Hilda DeVries and Robert Kamphuis of Dialogue discussed the issue of homosexuality at Calvin College with Professor of Philosophy Richard Mouw, Chaplain Cooper, and a Calvin student who is a professed homosexual. We have honored his request to remain anonymous.

Dialogue: We would like to begin by emphasizing that this article’s main intention is not to be controversial but to be a ministry to both the heterosexual and homosexual communities at Calvin College. Perhaps we should begin by defining what we mean by the term homosexual.

Cooper: I define a homosexual as one whose sexual preference is for a person of the same sex. Probably the key word here is preference. It doesn’t mean that homosexuals don’t have any friends who are of the opposite sex or that they can’t make acquaintances with people of the opposite sex. It means their preference is for someone of the same sex.

X: My own pet peeve is the word preference, which the gays also use. It tends to be misleading to say that a gay male prefers another gay male. In my own case and in the cases of most people I know, sexuality is not a preference. I never got to a point where I could prefer. My sexual orientation is simply a fact.

Mouw: Also, I don’t think the term homosexual, as we use it here, tells us any more than the term heterosexual does. There are all kinds of heterosexuals, which from a Christian point of view is extremely important. There are celibate heterosexuals and there are also adulterous and fornicating heterosexuals. There are other heterosexuals who are reluctant or feel guilty about their sexuality. Obviously, it’s a complex phenomenon.

Dialogue: Do you think the Calvin community has mostly stereotypical responses to this whole issue?

Mouw: I guess the primary thing that strikes me is the total lack of empathy or compassion that I find. Many of our students seem to lack any sense of the genuine sexual struggle that most homosexuals experience. It makes me wonder whether straight students don’t struggle with their own heterosexuality.

There’s a lot of homophobia on this campus. I believe the United Presbyterian Church was right in condemning with equal stridency the practices of promiscuous homosexual behavior and also homophobia. The irrational fear and outright hatred of the homosexual is sinful. In order for us to speak of ministering with regard to the homosexual question, one very important part of our ministry must be to deal pastorally and prophetically with the homophobia that exists on this campus. You can see it all over the place—particularly on the walls in the men’s restrooms. The things said there are just plain sinful—I’m inclined to think at least as sinful as a lot of things done by homosexuals.

I would like to mention some of the things that have helped me a lot on this issue. A couple of years ago I heard Virginia Mollenkott give a lecture on campus. At the end of her lecture she said what I think to be a very important thing: “If you’re a gay person, there’s nothing you have to do about your sexuality before you come to the cross. The same hymn that straight people sing can be sung by the gay community—’Just as I am, without one plea, that Jesus’ blood was shed for me.’ ”

Cooper: You don’t have to wait for a holy feeling.

Mouw: Right. I think that’s terribly important, because very often we impose standards on the community that are simply, if I may say, unformed. We impose a works righteousness—that they somehow have to do certain things before they can accept God’s grace, which means it’s no longer free. I think much of our theology about homosexuality, in fact, is based on misunderstanding.

Cooper: Well, when I look at Scripture, I guess I have to say that the preponderant reading of it is somehow that genital sexual activity between two people of the same sex is, I believe, wrong. But, having said that, a lot of us look at those texts with some of the favorite texts that we choose to back us up, which rather stilt the vision. For example, most of us think the reason Sodom and Gomorrah were finally destroyed was because homosexual activity went on there. But you read in the rest of scripture that that wasn’t the reason. Ezekiel 16:49, 50 says that the reason they were destroyed was because they despised the poor. Point blank, it says it right there. That somehow they despised the poor.

Dialogue: But now, Cooper, on what do you base your position on homosexuality? What texts do you use as a foundation for your view?
Cooper: Well, I find them not only in the Old Testament, which is a bit problematical, but also in the New Testament—in Romans 1, I Cor. 6, and I Tim. 1, among others. It’s clear to me that homosexuality is not something ordained by God, but it is somehow a result of sin. I haven’t been able to skirt those texts. I must say that before I met gay people on campus who introduced me to some of the struggles involved in being gay, I was perfectly easy for me to say I knew exactly what all these passages said and meant. But our understanding of the Scriptures is shaped through the people we meet.

Mouw: I think the thing that has impressed me the most is that there are Bible-believing homosexuals whose whole way of life depends on interpretations of these texts. This forces us to be very careful. To the Christian gay community it is important to define which kind of homosexual activity Paul is condemning in Romans. One possibility is that he’s condemning temple prostitutes, the homosexual prostitutes. This is the position of one of the Dutch churches who took the view that this is a condemnation of homosexuality in the context of pagan, temple worship. Another possibility is that he’s condemning the homosexual activity of non-homosexuals. Some people have suggested that he’s talking about people that are naturally heterosexual, but who become so numbed to any kind of responsibility that they begin to do things which are for them as individuals unnatural. Paul then isn’t even addressing the question of whether two males, Christians, can live together in a loving, supportive, gentle relationship. He is only condemning lustful homosexuality. So, it’s not at all clear to me that Paul is automatically condemning all forms of homosexuality in that passage. I think the Scriptures in the light of Genesis 1 and 2 and all of this say that it is unnatural that all genital contact between members of the same sex occurs and that it’s not within God’s perfect will for human sexuality. But I’m much more tentative about the implications beyond that than I was ten years ago.

Cooper: When you read that thing, I don’t find any reference there to religious idolatry or anything. I find those people giving up on God and as a result of all that, somehow God gave up on them when they exchanged their natural passions for that which was unnatural.

X: Those people giving up on God; I see so much of that. Whether or not they’re Christians, so many of the homosexuals I have seen have given up on God because God, in the form of the Church, has given up on them.

Mouw: This is really where our hypocrisy shows through. Certainly the one thing we ought to offer to all Christian homosexuals is a supportive community. But I would dare say that any CR or evangelical church in Grand Rapids is the last place you would want to stand up and admit you are a homosexual. If that happened in any church, the mothers and fathers would warn their teenage sons and daughters to stay away from the guy. He’d never get to be a Cadet leader or a Boy Scout leader, or anything like that. It would be the end of him in many ways, and until we’re ready to accept them, what in the world do we expect Christian homosexuals to do? Where are they to go, except groups like “Dignity” or “Evangelical’s Concern”? We may not agree with their theology of homosexuality in all areas, but they provide a more healing Christian context for them to grow in than most churches do.

X: I wonder if we could get back to the theological issue; one question I would like to throw out is that is homosexuality a result of sin? I agree with that 100 percent. I’ll make an analogy here. In God’s ideal plan for the world I don’t think there would have been homosexuals. It just doesn’t seem right. It’s not productive—it doesn’t produce more children or anything like that. But the Fall has taken place and therefore many things happened that are the result of sin.

I don’t think a deformed child could have been born in God’s perfect world, but it happens now. And when a couple is expecting a baby and the bay is born deformed, retarded, or whatever, the church doesn’t throw the child out and call it a sinner. The parents don’t throw the child out—it had nothing to say about the way it was born. That’s the way I feel about homosexuals. I think it’s a result of sin in the world. Yet, it’s not the person’s fault and it doesn’t necessarily mean their behavior is sinful. Sure, it may be a result of sin, but I don’t think the behavior is sinful.

Mouw: I think there are a number of distinctions there—until the last couple of sentences there, you were right with the Christian Reformed Report #42, which distinguishes between the condition and the activity. And the condition in itself, they say, is not sinful, right?

Cooper: Right. Something in which she or he may have had little to do.

Mouw: But then it’s a question of whether the condition itself—if it leads to a certain kind of behavior—whether that behavior is sanctified by virtue of coming out of a condition. That’s a very tough question. It’s not at all clear to me that all behavior that flows out of unchosen conditions is right. I don’t mean to draw a strict analogy here, but I mean if somebody is a pathological crook or rapist, it still doesn’t follow that if they don’t have any choice over the condition or activity that therefore the activity also has to be judged right. I think the question of what actions are right or wrong has to be judged independently of whether the conditions they may even necessarily fall out of are right or wrong. Now, I don’t mean to say that homosexuality and murder are the same thing.

X: I think when heterosexuals want to talk about sin in

"So many of the homosexuals I have seen have given up on God because God, in the form of the church, has given up on them."
relation to homosexuality, they’re talking about sex. A sex issue—that’s a big hairy deal, you know. But they’re not talking about love, and that’s what the whole issue is, is love. Don’t even look at the sexual aspect of it. We’re talking about love, and who are we to say that that is wrong? Sure, it’s wrong to kill, and, sure, sex can be wrong, but not the love.  

Mouw: There are, I think, certain things about homosexual activities that I’m sure about, that any Christian has to be sure about. Promiscuous homosexuality is wrong, just as promiscuous heterosexuality is wrong. And the so-called gay scene is a very destructive scene. On the other hand, I think most of us would say that a person who feels a vocation to homosexual celibacy is doing something meritorious. We cannot impose a greater burden on a homosexual than we’re willing to impose on a heterosexual. For me to say to a nineteen-year-old, “Never again, never any genital contact for the rest of your life,” that’s a big assignment. The right or wrong is another issue, but I feel the burden of having to give that kind of advice. That’s a heavy thing.

Cooper: We must always hold out before everybody that human beings are capable of doing superhuman things with God standing near them. I want you to remember, above and beyond everything, that there’s a God, and we ought not to forget that dimension either. I’m not discounting what you say, but there’s another person in this whole thing.

Mouw: But I think the church has to begin to become very concrete in its advice to homosexuals. I want the CRC to get into practical questions. For example, what does the church feel about a person who then eschews all interpersonal genital contact and nonetheless makes it through homosexual fantasy and masturbation? Are we going to say that that’s better than other kinds of things? Let’s be realistic and talk about that. We owe it to the Christian gay community to offer some very specific advice.

Dialogue: It’s been a while since I’ve read Sex for Christians by Lewis Smedes, but in that book he talks about optimum morality. I see him coming close to what Virginia Mollenkott is saying, that at least the relationship should be one of fidelity, etc. What is he saying when he talks about optimum morality?

Cooper: Well, I think he basically says, look, you ought not to, but if you can’t cope, then you ought to approximate what is optimum Christian morality, namely, fidelity, commitment, things like that.

Homosexuality is defined as an abomination before the Lord, but, you know, there are other abominations before the Lord. Leviticus 18 says this is evil, but if you go to Proverbs 6 you will hear other things: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that run toward evil, and other things. Now those are abominations before the Lord, and somehow what we’ve done is to pick out this one thing and somehow make it the worst possible offense.

Mouw: There are more condemnations of gluttony in the Bible than there are of homosexuality. You know, I don’t think we’re ready to be dogmatic about our theology until we become a caring, healing community, which we’re so far from that I’m not sure we even have a right to talk about it. I think Calvin College has a chance to do some good things. But I have been worried in the past about some of the prevalent attitudes; I’m worried about what I read in the last stall toward the wall in the Hiemenga Hall men’s room, for instance. It bothers me. A lot of times what you read on the walls of rest rooms are very good indicators of the public morality of an institution. Really, we’ve got marvelous opportunities to be a supportive, healing community in this regard, but I think we have to work at the healing of homophobia as well as the sins of homosexuals.

I think the language issue is certainly one thing that has to be worked on because, from anybody’s point of view, it’s sinful. It has nothing to do with theological issues or anything like that. It has to do with stupid remarks and cruel jokes. That should never be done again. Nobody should use words like fag, and they shouldn’t tell those stupid jokes about queers, and things like that. In anybody’s theology that’s wrong. We’re not anywhere near to where we can hope to eliminate that, but that’s something to work on.

Cooper: I think dorm settings provide an important opportunity for growing in this respect. I think the thing that really brought us to grips with this whole thing last year was when a gay himself was going to speak before the R.A.’s. He said, here I am, a human being, and I’m telling you that I worked at this whole thing and I struggled with it. I’m telling you that I was present, and once I finally admitted I was gay I had to cross out—cancel—anything having to do with my seminary training and my whole career. Everything was done for. Now, once you see someone like that, once I saw that happen, there was no way I could ever tell a joke about homosexuals again.

Mouw: I think that people don’t realize that when we talk about gay Christians we must include some who are graduates of Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, Calvin Seminary, and Westminster Seminary. We’re not anywhere near to where we can hope to get to Calvin College. I don’t think it’s simply the education department and the phys. ed. department, who are training teachers to go into high schools and junior highs, things like that, because in many ways some of these attitudes are shaped long before they get to Calvin College. I don’t think it’s simply the responsibility of those who head up the dormitories or those who sponsor the Interim lectures. I think it’s going to take a total community approach, and that...
Dialogue: In the dorms the whole matter of homosexuality is threatening to guys. It forces them to question their own sexual identity. They aren't dating, for instance, and they don't feel ready to date or anything, and immediately the question arises, let's say when they're talking, well, are you ___? It's almost a reaction of wanting to put as much distance as possible between themselves and that situation. They just lash out at the very idea of homosexuality, making sure that everybody knows that just because they're not dating they're not in that situation.

Mouw: I think that brings in a very important pastoral dimension of the problem here on campus, and that is that we are also dealing with people who are going through all kinds of struggles with their own sexual identity. It's very hard to expect calm understanding of other people's problems. In general, there's a lot of putting down of women, that kind of thing, that takes place out of that desire to prove themselves. A lot of false witnessing against other people, alleging various kinds of heterosexual patterns as well as homosexual. It's a general problem. This is a bad age to expect calm, reflective, compassionate understanding of the other person's sexuality. My problem is that it doesn't seem to get an awful lot better as they get older. You go to Synod—and I do want this on the record—you go to Synod, and sometimes you get horrendous stuff. I've sat through the divorce questions, the homosexual questions, the abortion questions, and they don't get compassionate when they turn thirty or forty or sixty. And that's what bothers me. I can dismiss a lot of these things as adolescent insensitivity, but the problem is that there's a lot of grown-up insensitivity.

X: I think we're going to have to learn from each other. It's up to the Spirit in all of us, to learn to teach each other. That's where we've got to start.

Cooper: Agreed. We're not holding out before every last homosexual that "You can change." We're not saying that. We're saying, hey, listen, some have changed; never hold before a person the possibility that he cannot. We're saying, I guess—and I'm not just talking about homosexuals here, I'm talking about everybody—that though humans cannot within themselves find the power and the ability to cope, somehow, by God's Spirit, we can be lifted up and be given something of a second wind, so that where you think you can't run any farther, all of a sudden you're given the ability to cope day by day. I don't want to deny that to anybody.

Dialogue: Thank you all very much for participating. Obviously the issue of homosexuality is a painful but significant one. As Christians on a Christian campus we can do nothing less than be open to dialogue between the Christian heterosexual and homosexual. In every aspect of the topic, the final issue must be love. What does it mean for us, as Christians, to love? What does it mean to love our neighbors?
Burdens of Love

—B.E. Pekelder

When last spring the Conference Committee asked me to write, they succeeded in so exciting me by their presentation of their subject that I accepted at once—an alacrity which I often regretted during the summer. But I think most people in the college community would have shared that excitement with me, because it had to do with the contribution each of us could make toward the achievement of our institutional goals. Reflecting on the great potential we have as a Christian college, the committee envisioned community as faculty, administrators, students, custodians, and all support staff; and asked, “How can we be even more effective in building a community that is affirmative, positive, joyful, supportive, compassionate, and reflective of the love of Christ? How can a Christian ethos and warmth pervade our academic endeavor? What obstacles do we face in achieving this? How can we overcome them?”

There was no hint in what they said to me, and of what I say today, of changing the character of the College as an institution which challenges people to diligent study, good scholarship, tough work. But assuming no diminution of our commitment to academic excellence, we still face the challenge of fleshing out more fully our claims of educating students to be mature Christian citizens in the world. We are in the nurturing business, as is any college, and that involves all of living.

Is that broad concern an appropriate one for us today? It certainly should be, because all aspects of the college experience have an educational impact. The Hazen Foundation commissioned a study ten years ago, which concluded that “The young person becomes what he becomes not only because of what he hears in the classroom. His interaction with teachers, his encounter with the structure of college administration, the values he acquires from his culture, the practicality or the spontaneity of operative educational goals of his college—all these have an immense impact on the evolution of the young person’s self view and world view.” To this wider educational influence of the community we devote some attention now.

Is there a need for us to consider the issue of community? I think the recent survey by the ad hoc Retention Study Committee (concerned with why students leave Calvin) shows that there is. We received responses from 430 non-returning students. In one question we listed some of the goals of Christian higher education, and asked how the students thought Calvin met those goals. In response to the question about providing excellence in teaching, 285 said very well and only 3 said not well. Regarding our integration of the Christian faith with subject matter, 253 said very well and 17 said not well. Though our academics and our integration of faith and academics are generally perceived as excellent, our goal of doing this in the context of a vital and supportive Christian community is not reached by a large number of students.

There are subtle and yet pervasive forces which give character to the community, which create a mood or climate that can be impersonal, grim, competitive, cynical, and unfeeling; or understanding, supportive, constructive, and joyful. The factors forming the campus spirit range from intensely personal matters to the nature of relationships we have with one another. The factors are complex, not always easily identified, sometimes apparently remote, yet often very crucial. They combine to create the spirit in a department, the mood of a meeting, the atmosphere of a classroom, the tone of a debate, the character of a residence hall, and the nature of the rapport with a fellow student.

Each of us has a part in forming this ethos or tone, and we are in turn affected by it. Our awareness of and sensitivity to our role in forming a community spirit is crucial. It is not even an option for a concerned Christian to limit his aspirations and efforts to narrowly defined professional goals, e.g. “I am here to run the dorms.” We are doing more, much more, to promote or hinder community than this, whether we

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like it or not. The manner in which we discharge our responsibilities gives character not only to the work, but also determines the type of community we have.

I believe our commitment to building such an affirming Christian community will rise in the measure in which we believe that this place is not here to satisfy our own self-centered desires. It exists to help people mature in Christ—intellectually, socially, emotionally, spiritually—and we happen to be part of that work. But the keynote of that work is servanthood: servants on Christ's behalf for each other. The implication of that servanthood is that we do not seek ourselves first, but the good of others—for His sake.

Since each of us inevitably has a part in shaping the community, the challenge we have is to do the best we can. We have a great potential to provide a caring and supportive community for each other. What academic institution can offer more? We are a people redeemed by Christ sharing the life of His Spirit, rich in a diversity of gifts; enjoying and yet ever seeking to cultivate fruits such as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; and sharing common educational goals. We are members of a community in which Christian virtues and graces are to be practiced, and where the atmosphere is consistent with the goals we affirm. What a power to influence the lives of fellow believers! That is the excitement of our mutual endeavor.

But in assuming that our commitment is building a Christian community, we should then be aware of forces which may help or hinder the achievement of that goal. I select but a few; most are self-evident. My only purpose is to arouse our sensitivity to them.

First, no one of us is simply a teacher, student, or administrator. We are also husbands or wives or singles, friends, parents, children, church members, and involved in social groups community affairs. All of this has significant bearing on the way we function here. The personal hurts, disappointments, uncertainties, successes, and joys with which we live has an important bearing on the way we work. Sometimes, in spite of sincere commitment to high goals, these form subtle influences which can hinder our role in building an affirming community.

During my 19 years here I've come to appreciate in some measure the pressures and stress with which some of us work because of personal or family problems—things which cannot be left behind when we come on campus. There are long-term illnesses of a family member, domestic tensions that at times lead to painful separation, a loved one's rejection of Christ and resultant alienation, the heavy burden of financial obligations, and aged parents who require much help and time. Among those we see in the classroom or residence hall, are the lonely, the hurting, the confused, the angry. Some have been touched by divorce, by death, by alienation from parents. Others are scarred by early sexual or psychological abuse, or live under enormous academic pressures and under unrealistic parental expectations.

These people, too, while establishing something of the mood of the campus, are particularly in need of a supportive community. The majority of them are separated from the support base of parents and older people. Surely a mark of our community should be our sensitivity to their situation.

Such personal matters have a powerful effect on our activity, and the way we create a climate or mood on campus. These personal matters can take the edge off our work; our thoughts, and therefore our concerns, are elsewhere. Sometimes it's hard to be positive, joyful, supportive of others when our hearts are heavy or we face difficult problems. How can you be patient with a friend's petty problem when your world is shaking, or be sensitive to a little hurt when

Bearing one another's burdens is a powerful manifestation of a community of love.

you live every day with lead in your stomach? How can you keep your depressed spirit from affecting the spirit of the campus? How can you be affirming, understanding, ready to walk another mile with someone when you can't even see the next step for yourself?

Now all these things, whether personal or professional, influence the way we function as part of the community. Many of these are inescapable parts of our lives. We cannot avoid the personal crisis, the disappointments, or the cares we have. They touch our lives at the deepest level—our disposition, mood, and relationship with others—and form a part of the ethos of the community. I think we must be sensitive to this and to the part each of us plays in forming it. Though some of the situations of life cannot be avoided, we must individually seek to handle them in a constructive and positively Christian fashion, so that in spite of and perhaps even because of them we contribute to building a compassionate and concerned community.

I allude briefly to one other factor which is important when we consider how to promote community. That is the great diversity found among us: men and women, single and married, young and old; some loquacious, others quiet, some outgoing, others reserved; some self-confident, others timid; some most happy with books, others with people; some gentle, others sharp-tongued; some governed by logic, others more by feeling—yet all of us part of one enterprise. This diversity, which can enhance our mutual mission, also has the possibility of leading to divisiveness. We can be enriched by our differences, or divided by them. This, too, will have a great impact on the type of community we are.

Given three factors, and others not mentioned, how can we maintain and promote an affirming, supportive,
Christian community? It will not happen simply because we work in the same place; it requires a commitment on our part. I suggest a few areas to which we may well address ourselves.

Our own faith in and love for Christ must be strong and vibrant. Without this we will never have a vital Christian community. John 21 is instructive on this score. Three times Jesus asks Peter to affirm his love for him; only then does he commission him to care for the sheep. Love for Christ is the supreme qualification for the service of others. Not love for people, or for our work, but love for Christ. The vitality of the Christian life on campus will not rise above the level of our own spiritual life. We must live close to the Lord, even through the times of personal and professional stress. It is a piety that must be both nurtured and expressed, though the forms of both will not necessarily be the same for everyone. But we cannot take that growth for granted. If we are to be a nurturing and supportive community, we must grow spiritually.

A community of staff and students will develop in the measure in which we are sensitive to one another's situations and supportive of one another. I know that many of us have the support base elsewhere—with intimate friends, in a church fellowship. But we can also provide it here. I recall with deep gratitude the years of our own family crisis, when a colleague's "How are things going?" or "We're praying for all of you" was the source of great strength. Sometimes I wish we could be more aware of one another's needs, because we have so much to offer each other. Bearing one another's burdens is a powerful manifestation of a community of love. It should encompass not only teachers and students, but custodians and secretaries and others of the support staff—people whose work and dedication are too often taken for granted.

Community is built through mutual encouragement and praise. Who does not prize a brief comment from a colleague or student that "made our day"? How little the effort required to speak a word, send a two-line note, make a thirty-second phone call, with an expression of appreciation for a service rendered, or a comment made. We afford to one another an encouraging reminder that we are in this together. The way in which we say things, the sensitivity to the situation of those to whom we speak, the tone of voice, the look on our face, and the spirit that motivates us when we speak should never be done in a devastating way, unworthy of a Christian community; rather, we should act in a sensitive and supportive fashion, as we try to help others find direction and their place in God's world. Preparation for living, as most of us know, requires all the encouragement one can receive.

In promoting community we must learn to respect each other while we live with our differences. Thank God for the variety; what an impossible place this would be if everyone was like you or like me. But we erode community when we confuse a person's position with the person himself and permit a measure of alienation, bitterness, or contempt to corrode our relationship with one another. While it is understandable that we disagree on some issues, it is regrettable when the difference leads us to avert our eyes or refuse to respect or speak to the one with whom we disagree. The conclusion of position and person tears the bonds that should unite us. It is saying to another part of the body, "I have no need of you."

Part of the problem here may be our lack of familiarity with one another, one of the results of a student body of close to 4,000 and a staff of over 250 people. Usually the better we get to know each other, the greater our sense of respect and appreciation. I have found that as I worked closely with some whom I knew only casually before, my respect and appreciation and sense of kinship have grown significantly. A good measure of humility will also help us to better live with our differences—so that we entertain the remote possibility that at some times we might be wrong and another person right. In fact, this may even help us to lose some battles graciously.

We have many differences among us, some deeply rooted. I think that although we are all grateful, there is nonetheless a rather pervasive sense of community. It is a gift for which we give thanks. But we must be alert to dangers of divisiveness, where personalities rather
than positions occupy our attention, and we wage our battles on the wrong field or with the wrong weapons. If this happens, community will surely disintegrate, and those outside the community will soon discern the absence of mutual respect and love among us.

Finally, in answer to the question, "How can we be more effective in building a community that is affirming, positive, supportive, reflecting the love of Christ?" I would say, "Let us not neglect to give expression to our own faith and its bearing on our lives." We have institutional statements about our goal of integrating faith and learning, and I think we are dedicated to that goal. But I have in mind the opening of ourselves to personal affirmations of love for and faith in Christ. We can never overestimate the importance we have as role models; we have a powerful influence on other people's thinking and living; not only by what we say, but by what we are and do. By such openness we have the opportunity to have them know us as authentic, struggling, and sometimes victorious Christians, with no less pain, joy, fear, and success than anyone else. Our taking the opportunity—in the classroom, in the residence halls, or in the coffee shop—to speak of our experiences, our hopes, our prayers, and God's guidance in our lives, will be a powerful force in building a Christian community.

Such openness may prompt others to talk about their circumstances, their problems, their future, and then we have opportunity to assist one another. There is no one who should fear to offer that help, though some of us may feel uncomfortable or unqualified when a difficult situation arises. In almost every case we can be what is initially needed: a concerned person ready to listen. If that is provided by us, we need have no reluctance to suggest that they see someone more qualified. We will have played a crucial role in a community of love and support.

In these reflections on community, I have not spoken of the specific academic and scholarly work which brings us together and is the heart of our endeavor. I have had no intention of minimizing this in the least, or of suggesting that we change our priorities. My purpose has been to emphasize that this is not done in isolation, but in the total context of life. I am convinced that the academic and scholarly goals we rightfully pursue will be greatly enhanced if we take seriously all the factors that affect the educational experience and contribute to Christian growth and maturity.

This piece took a direction quite different from that I had initially planned when first I accepted the Committee's invitation. In fact, I felt obligated to warn them rather early that it was turning into a pastoral, if not hortatory, presentation. But maybe, after 19 years as Chaplain, that was inevitable. In the measure I have preached, I preached to myself, too. God has given us tremendous opportunities to contribute to the promotion of an academic community that has not only the mind, but the spirit of Christ. I think that constitutes the challenge that faces us again this year.
Twenty-one Today

I am twenty-one today.
I bought myself a book of poetry.
It is my birthday after all.
John Berryman exposed his soul to me
and I am depressed.

I didn't bring tootsie rolls for my classmates
and felt guilty when I thought of it;
turned red in my chair;
told myself it wasn't necessary and
it's not my style.

Now I'm sitting alone in my apartment
too tired to go out and get drunk
even for free;
thinking I'm alone tonight and
it's my birthday.

Thinking when I was a kid
twenty-one was grown up.
There's a bubble gum dream for you
burst and stuck to the bottom of a barstool.
Lord knows I was due for a splashdown.

Doug Evenhouse
Contemporary art reflects contemporary society—it is dynamic, complex, and sometimes elusive. Because much of it is abstract and non-representational it is often misunderstood and unfairly criticized. In order to clearly understand and interpret contemporary art, we must have some knowledge of the artist, his background, and his intent. In the next several issues of *Dialogue* we would like to present and explore twentieth-century art in order that we, the Calvin community, may better understand and appreciate it and our world as well.
In his experimentation with various styles, Pablo Picasso is characteristic of his age. Over the course of his life he ranged from Realism to Cubism, touching upon many other styles in between.

_Guernica_, one of his most significant paintings, was inspired by Picasso's revulsion against war as he experienced it in the fire-bombing of the small town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Using a Cubist style, Picasso presents war as a horrible sacrifice of innocent people. He uses stark colors, blacks and whites, and dramatic distortions to express his horror; the agonized expressions and violent contortions of the subjects are also very evocative. One symbol in particular achieves the artist's desired effect—the image of the horse writhing in pain. This symbol is well-known to the Spanish people, who are familiar with the customary slaughter of the horses ridden by _picadors_ in bullfights. In its extreme agony this horse clearly parallels the plight of the citizens killed at Guernica.
At the Edge

Pete walked quickly along the wet sidewalk, balancing his aunt's umbrella above his head and slightly to the front to keep the rain from blowing into his face. He had sat in the hot apartment by himself all day till the rain forced him to shut the windows. His aunt might be angry with him for taking the umbrella, but, at the moment, he didn't care. He needed something to keep the rain out of his eyes.

The storm had made darkness fall early, so that light shone from the open double doors of a building a few blocks away. As he drew nearer to the light, the storm came closer, increasing the volume of the thunder and the brightness of the lightning. Long before, he had been told that lightning strikes the highest object. Holding his umbrella so far down over his head that he could barely see, he ran for the light, hoping the building would be safe and dry.

Between the claps of thunder, he heard singing as he approached. He entered, collapsing the umbrella and without thinking pulled his comb out and combed his bangs straight down on his forehead. He saw benches packed nearly full of people singing and clapping and swaying to the rhythm of their song. Even the man at the pulpit, whose voice rose above all the others, seemed to sway as he smiled over the people.

Pete felt awkward standing in the entryway, so he stepped silently to the back bench and stood next to a family. He had never before heard the song, although everyone else seemed to know it by heart. By the third verse he was clapping and had picked up the first phrase of the chorus, "Where the healing waters flow."

At the close of the song the congregation sat down and Pete put the umbrella on the seat between him and two little girls who wore dresses made of identical red and white checked material. He combed his bangs again and ran the teeth of his comb against the rivets on his jeans. The minister spoke rather softly, so Pete heard the rhythm of the words without concentrating on their meaning.

The tone of the minister reminded him of the church he had gone to during the previous five years, when he had lived with a foster family on the farm. When he had first lived there, except for the sermon, church had fascinated him. He remembered the smell of bread and wine and the glint of light on the cups. And when he closed his eyes, he could still hear the squalling of the babies during baptism.

At breakfast one morning, before he'd ever seen a baptism, his foster mother asked him whether he wanted to be baptized. As he shrugged his shoulders his foster brother Mike started laughing. "Only babies get baptized, Petey," he said mockingly and kicked Pete hard under the table. "You gonna cry, just like all the other babies? And suck your thumb, and drool?" He kicked Pete again, and Pete edged his chair back till Mike kicked at air.

His foster mother didn't mention it again, but he saw a baby get baptized the next Sunday. As it cried the minister touched its forehead three times with fingers dipped in water. Mike elbowed Pete during the service and Pete stared straight ahead at the minister.

When Pete first came that summer, Mike had been nice. He had shown Pete the farm and had let him ride on the tractor with him. But later he'd told Pete to quit following him around and quit watching him. "Why don't

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you do something useful for a change," he'd said, "like drive the tractor?" Pete had walked away and had climbed on the tractor later when no one was looking. He had sat and played with the wheel, but he was seven years old. If he were big like Mike he would try. Mike had muscles so big that Pete could see them. And Mike could lift heavy bales to throw on the haywagon. He was so big he could yell at everyone, even his father. If Pete watched Mike long enough, he thought, maybe he could be strong and yell at people whenever he wanted.

One day after Mike had told him to leave him alone, Pete sat on the fence by the horsetank and watched the water striders. He wondered if he could catch one and crouched on the edge of the tank, holding his breath and waiting for one to come near. He heard a sound behind him, but remained intent on the water striders. Suddenly two hands pushed him from behind and he fell forward into the water, banging his forehead on the far edge of the tank. He splashed and grabbed the edge, slipping on the algae that coated the bottom of the tank. His hair was wet and water was in his eyes and ears. He heard a familiar laugh as he scrambled over the side of the tank and ran to the house.

"Why don't you cry, baby?" Mike taunted after him. "Gonna go tell my mommy on me?"

Pete jerked open the door, slipped inside, and locked it. Breathing hard and scattering drops of water over the floor, he ran to the closet and hid behind the coats. He heard footsteps and the door opened. His foster mother pulled him out.

With his hand clutched over one side of his forehead he shook his head and turned away.

"Has Mike been picking on you again?"

She pulled his hand gently away from his forehead and felt the bump where his head hit the edge of the tank. Holding his hand, she led him into the bathroom, washed his face, and helped him change his clothes. As soon as he finished he put his hand back over the lump on his forehead.

"You'll be alright. And I'll talk to Mike," she said, "You go play near the house where I can keep an eye on you."

He walked outside and sat on the grass. The bump under his hand felt big enough to last forever.

Pete kept his hand over his forehead all afternoon and evening. Mike teased him at supper, but he didn't respond. He slept with his hand on his head, and kept it there the next day, and the next. A week later, when Pete continued to hold his hand over it, his foster mother pulled his hand away and told him the bump was gone. "It doesn't hurt, does it?" she asked.

He shook his head. "It's a scar," he said softly. "I can see it."

"Even if you have a scar, you don't have to hold your hand over it always. You'll forget about it sooner if you leave it alone," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders and put his hand back over it. "It won't get better," he said.

"You know better than that," she said. "Why don't you go play? Quit moping around so much."

He went outside and sat on the steps. He could hear Mike calling the pigs and imagined him pouring the bucket of corn over the fence. The pigs would push each other to get at the food. He wouldn't be there to throw some to the pigs at the edge of the group. He wondered why his aunt had never had him baptized when he was little. Now he wasn't a baby and never cried. Besides, if he got baptized it might make his scar worse. And Mike would kick him and laugh.

A new voice broke into his memories of the farm and he looked around and saw the congregation and stood up with them. The man at the pulpit talked about the healing ministry. He told a story about a deaf person that could hear a clock tick after he prayed for her and a man in a wheelchair that had left walking last Sunday. Then the people sang, "Where the Healing Waters Flow" again and the man stepped down and told them to line up if they wanted to be healed.

A few people came forward and the man continued, "Come up now, now is the appointed time. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and by His stripes we are healed. The man spoke quickly and loudly, gasping for breath in between phrases. "Christ commanded us if any be sick among us we should anoint them with oil and pray for them and they will be healed. If two of us agree on one thing in Christ's name, it shall be done. Come and agree with me tonight. Christ is here; I can feel the power of His Holy Spirit moving tonight. He is healing tonight."

The man paused and prayed aloud for the first person, slipping into words Pete didn't know, and
touched him on the head with his fingers dipped in a vial of oil. Then he prayed for the second and the third. After that he spoke to the people.

"The Lord is speaking to me about young people. Someone here needs healing for both body and soul. The Lord wants you to come to Him."

Pete felt a rush of blood to his head and a sick feeling in his stomach. He touched his forehead and stood up. As he walked to the back of the line, he combed his bangs down neatly over his forehead again without meaning to. A woman came and stood behind him, pressing so close he could smell her breath.

The man prayed for the person in front of him and then asked Pete why he needed prayer. "Can He heal scars?" Pete whispered.

"Yes, He can heal anything," the man replied. "Let's all sing that chorus 'He's More Than Enough' while we go to prayer for this young man."

The sound of the song rose, and tears blurred Pete's vision. He suddenly saw a hand coming toward his face and remembered the vial of oil. He shook his head and whirled and ran down the aisle onto the wet street.

The rain had stopped, but puddles marked the holes in the pavement. He ran, smoothing his bangs over his forehead as he jumped over the puddles. When he got home he fumbled in his pocket for his key and put it in the door, only to find it unlocked. His aunt was sitting on the couch watching television.

"Where'd you put the umbrella?" she asked. "I wanted to go out again."

"It's not here," he said.

"I know it's not here, but where is it?"

"I think a minister took it."

She frowned at him. "If you lost that umbrella, you're going to be grounded again."

He looked out the window at the streetlight and then at the floor. "I think you should ask the minister of that church down there. I went in so I wouldn't get struck by lightning."

"You just come with me then, and we'll straighten this out," she said.

He walked into the bathroom and locked the door. "Do you want to be grounded?" she asked, pounding on the door.

He was silent.

"I'll just take care of it myself then, but you're not leaving this apartment for a week," she said.

He sat down on the edge of the bathtub and waited. The door slammed and he was alone. Standing up, he looked in the mirror. When he pushed his bangs aside the scar was still there. His aunt had never seen it because he kept his hair combed. He picked up the washcloth and scrubbed his forehead, hoping, as he did every night, that it might miraculously disappear. Then he combed his bangs down neatly and went to bed.

When his aunt came home, she told him that the minister did not have the umbrella or know where it was.

Pete pretended to be asleep until she left his room.

A week and a half later, when he was no longer grounded, he walked near the church and paused when he heard the singing. He looked in the door at the people. The morning sun slanted through the windows, illuminating a few flies that had come in the open door to circle around and land in the sun-warmed rectangles on the floor.

Pete looked toward the bench where he had left the umbrella but didn't dare walk in and sit down. He was afraid the man who healed might see him. He stood at the door, about to leave, then sat on the warm steps and listened to the singing.

After Rembrandt
Rick Beerhorst
A threatening wind blows in from the sea, sweeping over an ancient breakwater to scour the rustic village of Lyme and the brooding hills that surround it. Walking against this wind, out on the breakwater, a typical Victorian couple approach a third figure, a mysterious woman standing at the seaward end of "the Cobb." Dressed in black, she looks woefully out to sea until, noticing the people behind her, she turns around and burns them with a piercing stare. Thus we get our first look at—or our first stare from—the French Lieutenant's Woman in John Fowles' book of the same name.

Set in the Victorian era, on the rugged coast of southern England, this novel has all the symptoms of a classic Harlequin-style romance. Charles Smithson, a happily engaged young man with prospects of inheriting a baronetcy, meets Sarah Woodruff, the scarlet woman who is alleged to have had an affair with a visiting French sailor. It is this which has earned her notoriety as "the French lieutenant's whore." Although Charles is pledged to marry the pertly pretty Ernestina Freeman, who is most correct in avoiding all improprieties, he finds himself increasingly drawn to Sarah. Against his sense of honor and duty, he falls in love with her, just as any good romantic hero would, and the novel goes on to tell of their stormy life together or otherwise.

John Fowles goes beyond this conventional framework, however, to focus on some deeper issues underlying the Victorian age and how we view it. As Annette Grant says, "It is difficult...to think of any Victorian writer who failed to write this kind of story "but impossible to imagine one who could have written it as Fowles has." One especially strong theme is that of freedom. Like many in the 1960's, Fowles was concerned with freedom—especially sexual freedom. And in The French Lieutenant's Woman he not only focuses on freedom as the chief theme but employs it, as well, as a stylistic technique.

Fowles first gives us the characterizations of his dramatis personae and begins to set up the novel. After just a few short chapters, though, he lets the characters go on by themselves while he stands back to take a thoughtful look at them. Charles, who by now has come acquainted with Sarah and her history, is beginning to act for himself, Fowles maintains. "It is not only that he has begun to gain an autonomy," Fowles says; "I must respect it, and disrespect all my quasi-divine plans for him, if I wish him to be real." Later on the author includes himself in the story, but only as an inquisitive observer of his own character: while Charles sleeps in a railroad car, the self-identified author sits and stares at him, wondering, "What the devil am I going to do with you?" (p. 317). Fowles accepts the Victorian idea that "the novelist stands next to God" (p. 82), but he has changed the definition of God to mean "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (p. 82). Under this dictum, he says, "I report, then, only the outward facts" (p. 82).

These outward facts seem to change with time, though. As the story draws to its crisis, Charles makes a final decision about whether or not he will leave his fiancee for Sarah. He decides not to do so and returns to marry Ernestina, living somewhat happily ever after. Or at least until the page is turned, when we find that all of this is only how Charles imagined it might be. Fowles breaks in, explaining that for a couple of chapters he gave the writing of the novel over to Charles himself, but goes on to say that in the real story, Charles actually did make a conscious choice to pursue Sarah.

Fowles then gives us another conclusion to the tale, in which Charles is separated from his beloved Sarah, forcing him into exile in America. After many months, though, he is finally reunited with her and the product of their love, a child. But once again the author intrudes to observe that he just couldn't keep himself out of the story, so his own persona sets back his watch and waits for Charles and Sarah to appear again. In the second take of the earlier reunion, we are at last given the final ending. This one is more modern in tone than the other two: Charles and Sarah meet once again but find that they can no longer continue their relationship. Charles then leaves to return to exile in America, where he will endure a total "celibacy of the heart" (p. 365). The book thus concludes with its third final ending.

In this way Fowles extends the freedom of his characters to the limit, letting them decide their own fates by trying each alternative available. "The only way I can take no part" in the decision, Fowles says, "is to show two versions of it" (p. 318). He cannot take himself

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—James Postema
completely out of command, however, because as a novelist he must impose "the tyranny of the last chapter" (p. 318). It is the last chapter which we seize as the ultimate conclusion of the book, superseding the earlier endings. The earlier versions do have their effect, though, by making the last ending more poignant because it is final.

Meanwhile, Fowles, having given his characters freedom in the technical aspects of the novel, gives them freedom on the thematic level, as well. Sarah is first seen doing penance for her alleged sins under the hellishly pious supervision of Mrs. Poulteney. As the personification of freedom, she is symbolic of disobedience confined under the didactical image of Victorian morals. Over the course of the book, though, she is gradually promoted from mere delinquent to full-fledged social rebel. After she and Charles are separated, Sarah becomes associated with Dante Gabriel Rosetti and his sister, Christina, whose poetry possesses "a certain incomprehensible mysticism... a passionate obscurity..." (p. 357). Called "the sobbing abbess, the hysterical spinster" (p. 357), Christina Rosetti, was, with her brother, reacting against the stiff codes of her time. Her work exhibited a certain lack of order, a disorder which was anathema to the average man in Victorian England. Sarah eventually finds her place with these people, growing in freedom under their guidance so that she gains the strength to act for herself in refusing Charles in the final scene.

Charles, meanwhile, has undergone quite a change also. He is, of course, a representative Victorian. Properly endowed with a sense of duty, decency, and honor, he feels constrained at first to settle down with a similarly proper wife and lead an orderly, conventional life. He begins to slip out of this commitment, however, when he becomes involved with Sarah; eventually he comes to see that a conscious choice is possible for him. He can lead a normal life with Ernestina, or he can break away from the rules of society with Sarah. As soon as he sees that this choice does exist, in fact, Charles opts for the route to freedom by pursuing Sarah.

This freedom is not without its price, however. Once he breaks his engagement with Ernestina, Charles is ruined in the proper everyday world of English social life. In his own private world, though, there is also an unsettling air of uncertainty; Charles is happy about his decision but somewhat anxious about the results. This, Fowles informs us, is "the anxiety of freedom—that is, the realization that one is free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror" (p. 267). That terror eventually proves to be well-grounded, too, since Charles is ultimately to be left alone in the world. However, when he finds that he cannot have Sarah—the symbol of freedom that he so badly wants but cannot understand—Charles does gain a measure of strength. At the end of the novel "he has at last found an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build; has already begun... to realize that life, however advantageously Sarah may in some ways seem to fit the role of sphinx, is not a sphinx, is not a symbol, not one riddle and one failure to guess it... but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly... endured" (p. 365).

Thus ends the quest for freedom in John Fowles' book on freedom. Ironically, though, the freedom that the author tries to give his characters is taken away by the manner in which it is given. Fowles has been criticized for his characterization—by forcing his personae to stand as didactical personifications of nineteenth-century values, or their opposites, he has taken away all of their own personal flair. Furthermore, if the author thinks things aren't quite clear enough, he himself explains them to us. Finally, although he claims to give Charles and Sarah autonomy in the story, by marching them through all of his various technical maneuvers, Fowles has erased any real freedom they would have had in a single plot line. This extends itself to the readers, since we no longer can imagine what could have happened but are ourselves confined with Fowles' own tightly knit structure.

The book is not without merit, however. It does give a very interesting view of the less reserved—and seldom reported—side of Victorian life, especially the sexual aspect of it. And, despite some of the questions raised about his manipulation of characters, Fowles has produced a tour-de-force in his working of the plot line. No one has ever written a novel quite like this, with all of its variations of plot line integrated as smoothly as they are into a single story. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is also, again despite the technical maneuvering, very readable and can, in fact, become hard to put down, hackneyed though that description may be. The awesome quality of the multiple plot lines, combined as well as they are to form a smoothly flowing work, leads us to agree with Edward T. Chase when he says that, although the book is not flawless, "Fowles has nonetheless brought off a miracle of sorts."3

**Footnotes:**

The three children's poems on these pages are taken from *Pink Lemonade*, a collection of translations by Dr. Henrietta Ten Harmsel from the poetry of the eminent Dutch writer for children—Annie M.G. Schmidt. The book, published by Eerdmans of Grand Rapids, is vividly illustrated by Ms. Linda Cares, a Grand Rapids artist whose paintings are currently being displayed at the new Bergsma Gallery in the Grand Plaza Hotel. The illustrations here shown were "dubbed in" by Dialogue artists.

"Pink Lemonade" is the title poem, light and whimsical but still touched with the undertones of danger common to fairy tales: the pond is "delicious" but nonetheless "terribly sticky and pink." "Miss Poker" brings inanimate household objects to life in the manner of the "Nutcracker Suite." And "The Time of Elves"—one of Schmidt's finest poems—indubitably affirms the magical world of the child's imagination in the face of adult skepticism. These three poems give a small sampling of the ten volumes of children's poems which has made Schmidt famous in Holland and throughout Europe.

A footnote:
Calvin's English Department will present Miss Ten Harmsel with *Pink Lemonade* in a reading and autographing event on Wednesday, November 4, beginning at 3:30 in the Commons Conference Center.
Pink Lemonade

In a beautiful garden in faraway France
Cool paths curve along in the shade,
And tulips and lilies and roses surround
A pond full of pink lemonade.

The children go rowing around in a boat—
It's never against the law—
And when they're not singing, they take a cool sip
Through a very long, elegant straw.

The pond is bright pink, almost raspberry red,
And sometimes the children may wade
With trousers and dresses pulled up very high
in the pond full of pink lemonade.

If one of the children flops out of the boat,
They rescue him quick as a wink,
And then they start licking so that he won't stay
So terribly sticky and pink!

It really is charming, that garden in France—
The flowers, the paths in the shade—
But still you'll agree that the nicest of all
Is the pond full of pink lemonade.
Miss Poker

"Miss Poker, Miss Poker," said Mr. Tong,
"We're hanging here next to the fire.
We've known each other for such a long time,
I now can say, 'I think you're sublime,
You're the one I love and admire.'"

"Why my dear Mr. Tong, my dear Mr. Tong,
I'll marry you right away,
For I'm made of iron and you are, too.
I'll go through smoke and fire with you!
We'll belong to each other for aye!

Then they danced together, a merry round,
A sarabande by the fire.
The chorus of coals sang a happy song,
And the hanging kettle went ding-a-ding-dong,
And the flames burned higher and higher.

So the Poker and Tong got married last week.
Now they're hanging together, cheek to cheek.
They cuddle each other in all kinds of weather,
And whenever they glow, they glow together.
The Time of Elves

I always hear my father say,
"The time of elves has gone away.
They don't dart now, like long ago
between the flowers along the row;
not in the park, nor do they perch
on flowering bushes by the church.
Not under the willows, night or day;
the time of elves has gone away."
But one night as I lay awake,
the moon shone bright on grass and lake.
A little man under the apple tree
brought a silver-white horse to me.
Pooh, pooh, fiddle dee doo,
nobody knows what's really true!

I always hear my mother say,
"No, elves do not exist today.
Not in the garden, not under the moon,
nor on the very highest dune.
Perhaps in books about queens and kings,
but books can say soooo many things!"
But that same night, I saw his face,
him and his horse—the very same place.
But then he said he'd sell his horse—
for a dime and a copper button, of course.
Pooh, pooh, fiddle dee doo,
nobody knows what's really true!

My father and mother were fast asleep
when over the fence I took a leap.
Away on the silver-white horse I rode
over the bridge and down the road.
Nobody knows or saw me pass
with fairy children along the grass.
And nobody saw me swinging high
in a spider web right up to the sky.
Nobody knows what fun to play
magic tricks with a hawthorn spray,
to play soldier with an elf
or hopscotch with the king himself!
Pooh, pooh, fiddle dee doo,
nobody knows what's really true!
I recall vividly the first time that I encountered my enemy, Death. He was ugly and proud and very frightening. The reality of his existence made my mind a confused mass of reeling, incoherent thoughts. He swept through the door of my house without even pausing to knock or wipe his sooty feet. He strolled through each room of the house as if he were an impressive dignitary from an important country. As he ambled, he let his hand run smoothly over the furniture and walls till everything in the room bore evidence of Death’s presence. I came face to face with Death as he stood resolutely in his place. He was bigger than I had realized.

His presence spanned the entire width of the hall, making it impossible for me to squeeze past him. He stared at me with a cold empty smile in his eyes that made me shudder. Death stood there with his hand outstretched in a ready handshake. I refused to offer my hand, but he ignored all my protests, whether polite or violent. He reached for my hand and grasped it firmly. Even though his hand was warm, I suddenly felt very cold. When he withdrew his hand, the sense of his touch lingered with me, filling me with an overwhelming sense of horror that I had never felt before. I realized that I had met Death.

Throughout the following days and months my enemy remained in my home. But instead of strolling boldly through the house, as he did those first days, he withdrew to lurk in the dark corners and closets. I think he felt uncomfortable in the bright daylight because he seemed to roam about more often late at night after I had gone to bed. Sometimes I would wake up early and hear Death pacing slowly through the sleeping house. Even though Death was quiet and withdrawn, I could never ignore him. I could never get used to the fact that my enemy was living in my house against my will—an enemy that held me hostage in my own home.

Death was indeed my enemy, and I responded to his presence as someone with whom I was at war. But no battle tactics seemed effective enough to kill him. He was subtle, yet devastating. He was violent, even when he was courteous and proper. He was a cheater and a liar. Each time I met Death somewhere in my house, his face and appearance were different from the previous time I had seen him. Nevertheless, I always recognized him. He was a wearer of disguises. Inconsistency and deceitfulness were part of my enemy’s strategy. I could never grow accustomed to living with Death in the house because every time I bumped into him he looked different—he startled me and confused me. If he constantly would have worn the mask that he wore when I had met him in the hall, it’s possible that I would have been able to condition my mind to ignore him. But every time I encountered him he was as frightening to look at as the first time I had met him. He was powerful and evil. He seemed to overpower any sense of goodness or purity that existed in my house.

My battle against Death was exhausting. I could not continue to live as a victim of Death. I began to realize that Death had to help give definition to my life. If things were to change for me, my definition of life had to be revised. And, my enemy had to become my friend. Will it surprise you to hear that Death is no longer my enemy—that he, in fact, become my friend?

Death as a friend is not a common idea in our twentieth-century society. In earlier societies, however, the idea of death as a friend would not have sounded as strange as it does to many of us today. Some of the English poets to the seventeenth century saw Death as a friend, and expressed the view beautifully in their writing. Poets such as John Donne, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan constantly encountered death. In the seventeenth century, scientific and medical technology was limited and largely ineffective against rampant infections and diseases which struck the population such as Black Death. Surrounded by physical suffering and death, the poets were forced to reconcile what they saw with what they believed. Life had to derive meaning from death, its opposite and its enemy.

Each of the poets wrestled with death and its seeming inconsistencies and evil. I think both the poets and death were victims in the match. Although death is a constant reminder of evil and sin, it is also the only means of life. The poets’ lives became more meaningful because of their recognition of his dichotomy in death. The death that surrounded the poets filled them with sorrow and anger. They rebelled against the multitude of “minideaths” which composed their lives. The forces of death were always making themselves evident through change, broken relationships, nature, illness, physical and spiritual death.

Vaughan saw death in his loss of childhood. He mourns the departure of innocence as a child marches along with time and grows into an adult. He says, "Oh,
Death was also evident to Vaughan in nature. He views a forest and is saddened that young branches and new growth are no longer visible and says:

*But thou beneath the sad and heavy line
Of death, doth waste all senseless, cold, and dark;
Where not so much as dreams of light may shine,
Nor any thought of greenness, leaf, or bark.*

("The Timber")

The changing seasons, the birth of new life and the aging and decay of old life, are part of the ongoing cycle of nature. Death is always found in nature. Change is evident to us in nature. But change is probably most evident to us when the death of someone familiar and dear to us occurs. The death of a loved one can bring all our rage and remorse to the foreground of our emotions. Vaughan addresses his brother in "Silence and Stealth of Days!" expressing his sorrow at his brother's death:

*Silence and stealth of days! 'Tis now
Since thou are gone,
Twelve hundred hours, and not a brow
But clouds hang on.*

("The Legacy," p 741)

In all these instances, death is Vaughan's enemy. It is a constant reminder of the sin and evil which has corrupted the world, making it and every living thing on it mortal. But it is also in this reminder that Vaughan ultimately discovers joy, and death becomes a positive influence in his life.

Donne often experienced death through his romantic relationships. The unfaithfulness of love and the pain of broken relationships brought out his anger at death as an enemy. In "Woman's Constancy" he sarcastically remarks, "Now thou hast loved me one whole day./Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?" (p 738). Death is distance and estrangement. "When I died last, and dear, I die/As often as from thee I go..." ("The Legacy," p 741). Donne also was forced to contemplate his own personal death through physical pain and illness. His "Divine Poems" express his despair and rebellion against death and its contradiction of life. He speaks impatiently to God:

*Thou has made me, and shall Thy work decay?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste;
I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday.
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh.*

("Holy Sonnet 1")

The fear of death and the unknown gripped Donne just as it holds us today. Death is dark and unknown; it fills our human minds with terror. Even the Christian feels defeat at the uncertainty of the darkness of death, which is all that we see as peer anxiously at it.

The poets, it seems, considered death most often in spiritual terms. Herbert saw death as an enemy because death is a result of sin and God's disapproval of the corrupt nature of humanity. Herbert speaks of God's "tempest" which brought night and death. They brought about the alienation of the poet from light and life, from God's presence. In order to live in closer communion and become united to God we must die to our sinful human nature. Every experience which draws us closer to God is at the expense of a "minideath" to our former nature. "The Pilgrimage" speaks of the journey of life and the places in which we establish our sense of security. As the Pilgrim traveled,

*At length I got unto the Gladsome Hill,
Where lay my hope,
Where lay my heart; and climbing still,
When I gained the brow and top,
A lake of brackish waters on the ground
Was all I found...*

*Yet taking heart I rose, and then perceived
I was deceived.*

*My hill was further, so I flung away,
Yet heard a cry,
Just as I went, "None goes that way
And lives."*

Our journey to life must be a journey to death. The spiritual implications of death caused the poets to recognize death as much more than an enemy. Death became a dear friend to the poets. Probably more than any other experience, death causes us to question the meaning of life. It fills us with despair at the futility of our human existence. It is at this point that we must look further, that we must begin to see the deeper implications of death, as the poets did. For the poets, death was a necessity for their Christian lives. In response to the voice crying out to the
pilgrim, "None goes that way/And lives." In his "Elegies," Donne welcomes change. Change, the constant reminder of mortality, of time, of the transiency of our happiest moments, is "the nursery/Of music, joy, life, and eternity," ("Change," p. 751). Donne confronts death and says assuredly, "Death be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;" (Holy Sonnet 10," p. 757). And Vaughan openly embraces death saying:

Dear, beauteous death! the jewel of the just,
Shining nowhere but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark.
("They Are All Gone Into the World of Light")

Death gives meaning to life. If we lived eternally, never facing the threat of physical death, we would not understand the true value of life. We, as Christians, particularly understand love in terms of death. Speaking of the crucifixion and its symbol, the Eucharist or communion, Herbert says in "The Agony":

Who know not love, let him assay
And taste that juice which on the cross a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.
("The Agony")

It is through death that we begin to see the depth and wonder of God's love for us and all his creation. This insight also gives new meaning to human relationships. Love is not terminated by death but continues on through it. Vaughan understood this. His love for his brother did not die when his brother ceased to inhabit his earthly body:

Joy of my life while left me here!
And still my love
How in thy absence thou dost steer
Me from above!
("Joy of My Life While Left Me Here!")

Death is essential to Christianity. Death, once the hopeless result of sin, has been redefined through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Death is not an end but a new beginning.

As I cleaned my house the other day I was startled to realize that the "stains and smudges" of Death were actually beautiful drawings! I peered closely at the "dirt" I had long since despaired of washing away. Its intricate design was blossoming with dazzling colors. I caught my breath in awe as I gazed at the artistry on my walls. Eagerly, I walked through the house examining all the "stains." Most of them still appeared to be dirty spots on my walls and doors, but there were others that were changing colors as well! Each one showed promise of an intricately beautiful and different design. As I looked wonderingly at the lovely drawings, I became aware of someone else in the room with me. It was my old enemy, Death. I was surprised to see him walking about during the daytime. I grasped his hand and asked him to explain the drawings and why he had waited so long to put them there. He told me that the drawings had always been there, but that I had never looked at them in the proper light. "But," I insisted, "what do they mean?"

Death shook his head and said nothing. I turned again to the wall to study the drawings—I was captivated by their beauty. Suddenly, I heard the front door close. I turned quickly and realized that after all these years, Death had finally left my home.

Since that day, the drawings have become symbols of hope and encouragement to me. There are still many dark "smudges" throughout my house, but I continue to dust them carefully and study them anxiously as I do my housework. I wait patiently and eagerly for time, Death's handmaiden, to expose these drawings to light. Do not think, however, that I have ceased to rage against death. Every death brings more grief into the world. Every death is a constant reminder of the fruit of the tree in Eden. Every death that touches me leaves more "stains" on my walls which I angrily scour to no avail. He always comes as an intruder and enemy. For some reason, we must first fight against death as an enemy before we can embrace him as a friend.

It is through death that we begin to see the depth and wonder of God's love for us and all His creation.

Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan recognized that death brought about desired changes. For these men, life and time were merely extensions of eternity, a phase in eternal life. They, too, never ceased to rage against death, but, ultimately, they welcomed him. Ultimately they recognized death as the fulfillment of life because death is the door to Paradise restored, to unbroken communion with God.

Each one of us, traveling the human journey of life, confronts death in one form or another. To not wrestle with Death is to be overpowered by Death. It is in the wrestling that we are finally given the strength to submit to Death's inevitable victory and thereby we become victors. As victors, we are given a new understanding of life, a new view of the world around us, and an identification with the cross which is given a new meaning at the empty tomb.

Suggestions for further reading:
2) Hinds' Feet on High Places—Hanna Hurnard.
3) On Death and Dying—Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.
4) A Grief Observed—C.S. Lewis.
5) Love is Stronger than Death—Peter Kreeft.
STAGES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

1. The Gambler's Kindergarten
2. Movie Lessons in Vice and Crime
3. Too Close for Decency
4. Only a Cigarette, but...
5. Attempt at Seduction
6. "Thou Shalt Not Steal."
7. The Bitter Fruit