

forum.



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36



WHY JOHN CALVIN?

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How John Calvin Shaped Modern Seminary Education

BY KARIN MAAG

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Reformed Roots in the Global South: Indonesia's Calvinist Heritage

BY YUDHA THIANTO



forum.

The Calvin Theological Seminary Forum magazine is published two times every academic year. Questions and comments may be directed to forum@calvinseminary.edu.

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In this issue, we ask ourselves, “What’s in a name?” What is in a name? Why is Calvin Theological Seminary named after the reformer John Calvin, and what implications does that naming have for today and for our future?

Admittedly, having pictures of John Calvin with his distinctive beard to use in seminary materials, or on stickers, or even on shirts is nice, even a little playful, but that’s not why CTS is named after Calvin.

So, why John Calvin?

Simply put, the name fits the desire for our founders to note that it was seeking to frame the education, training, and formation of our school in the Reformed Calvinistic tradition that found a new beginning—a reformation—in the ministry of John Calvin.

Throughout his ministry, Calvin emphasized the importance of education for those whose calling led to the role of pastor, preacher, and church leader. He understood the importance of a seminary dedicated to this task and knew future pastors needed to be grounded and fluent in the Word of God to be able to effectively bring that Word to their congregants. He believed in this importance so much that he even raised money for the school he helped establish in Geneva. This runs parallel to our mission to form church leaders who cultivate disciples of Jesus Christ by preparing individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word.

Most, if not all, students of Reformed theology know that the definition of the word “covenant” is a foundational way of describing the relationship between God and his people. That relationship is only possible by the mediating work of Jesus

Christ. The idea of our being witnesses to that relationship or “union with Christ” is the living out of the doctrine of the covenant in the world that God still so loves.

Having served at Calvin Theological Seminary as president and beginning now my fifteenth year in this role, I can confidently say that this idea and theology is integrated into all that is being taught and lived throughout our institution, whether in-person or in our hybrid and online classes.

Our founders honored John Calvin by giving him a namesake in 1876, and though we may not truly understand all their thought process in choosing Calvin as the name of our institution, we can be sure that the legacy and ethos of Calvin’s emphasis on education and Scripture lives on and bears fruit in the work we do here.

In part because of our faithfulness to this ethos, the teaching of John Calvin and others in the Reformed tradition are reaching around the globe. For example, Professor Yudha Thianto will share how the theology of John Calvin is expanding and multiplying in Indonesia. Thanks to modern technology, we have students all over the globe. What a beautiful testament to the universality of the church of Jesus Christ and the impact of biblical teaching.

Calvin’s explanation of complex doctrines in understandable language, his shepherding heart, and his desire for educating future pastors show that naming our institution after him was, in fact, the right choice. I think he would be encouraged to know that an institution, a half world away from his adopted home in Geneva, is carrying on his work.

A recent post we put out on our social media feeds sums it up well: “At Calvin Theological Seminary, we’re passionate about forming servant leaders. Men and women deeply rooted in God’s Word and equipped to serve the church with discernment, wisdom, grace, and humility. Here, calling is nurtured. Community is formed holistically. Learning is integrated. And God is glorified. Come grow with us: head, heart & practice.”

Yes, we reflect on the legacy of John Calvin in the formation of our institution, but we look forward and see how this is just as important today as it was when we began in 1876.

In His service with you,



JUL MEDENBLIK
PRESIDENT

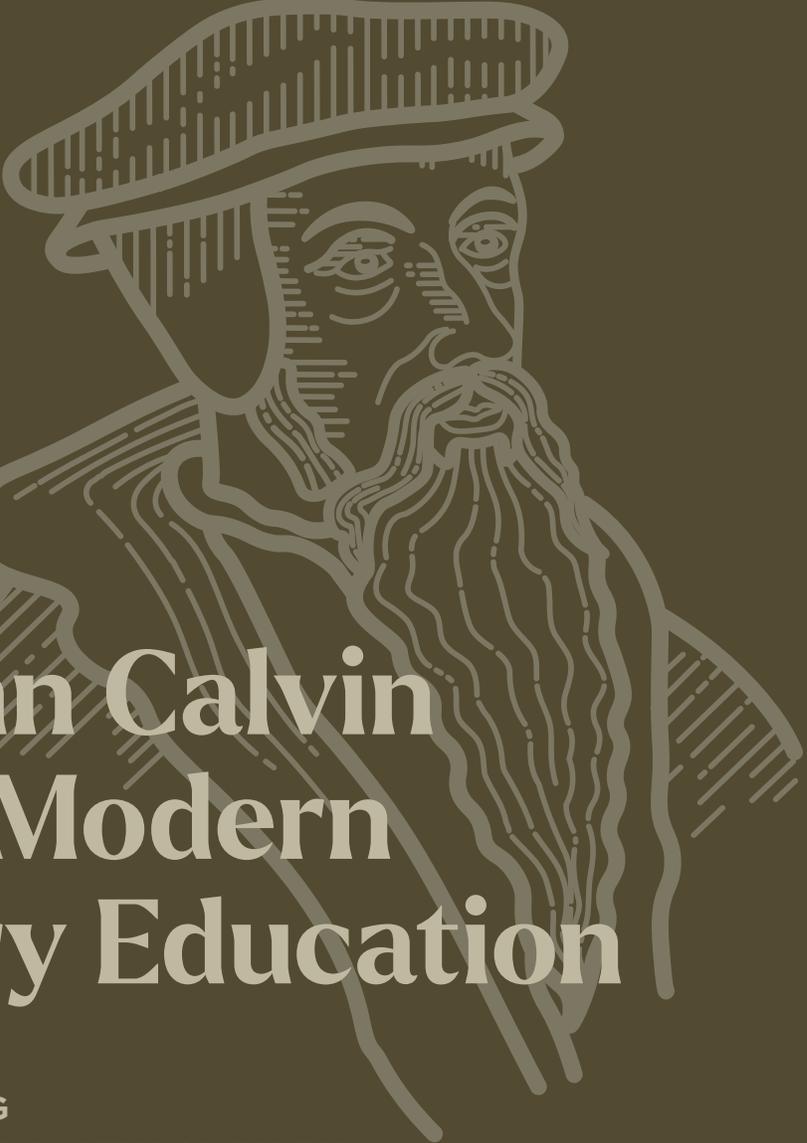




Saint Peter's Cathedral of Geneva, Switzerland - P.C. andreykr



Features



How John Calvin Shaped Modern Seminary Education

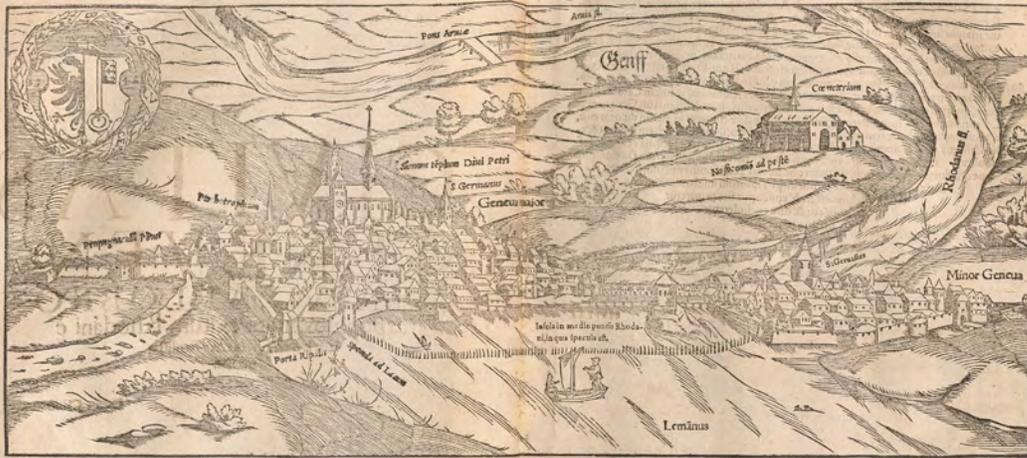


KARIN MAAG

DIRECTOR OF THE MEETER CENTER FOR
CALVIN STUDIES

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

CO-DIRECTOR OF THE MASTER OF THEOLOGY (THM) PROGRAM



Latus septentrionale.

Franciscus Bonnardus Domino

Sebastiano Munstero.

Gratiam salutem & pacem à Domino. Retulisti mihi Domine Munstere, studiosus quidam isthinc rediens, se à me desiderare epitomen earum rerum, quæ nunc Gerbo de Geneuitibus: quod unum tam deest postquam quam libenter desidero, & nunci, & cuius rei ipsius causa, quam silentio obliterari profecto esse indignissimum, quæ præter omne humanum consilium, omniæ humanam expectationem sola diuina prouidentia ad effectum perducta est, quod ex ferie nostre historie post hac satis apparebit: cuius summam quam breuiter poterit tibi per hincgam omnem, omnia præfatione, ne caput amplius sitis: quæ corporis partibus.

Map of Geneva, Switzerland in 1500s

When the still youthful Christian Reformed Church (founded in 1857) decided to establish a theological academy in 1876 to train young men for pastoral ministry, why did they choose to call the new institution Calvin Theological Seminary? After all, they could have named it after Dutch Reformation leaders from the sixteenth century onwards: Gijsbertus Voetius, Wilhelmus a Brakel, Petrus van Mastricht, and more. Instead, denominational leaders chose to go further back in time and steer away from the Dutch orbit. They turned to the sixteenth century Reformation, naming their new school after the Genevan Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564).

In making this choice, the nascent denomination signaled strong connections with Reformed teachings as articulated by John Calvin. Yet may I suggest that the connections go deeper, in that many of the educational aims and the challenges facing Calvin Theological Seminary throughout its 150-year history were already live issues in the Genevan Academy, set up by Calvin and his fellow pastors in Geneva in 1559. By looking back at the Genevan Academy and its training for future pastors, we can bring to light the enduring issues that seminaries face, but also explore how some of these questions have been addressed in past generations and learn from these.

It is worth pointing out that John Calvin's direct influence in the Genevan Academy was relatively limited, since he died in 1564, a scant five years after the Genevan Academy opened its doors. Yet even before the Academy was established, Calvin signaled his own commitment to the importance of theological education by offering public lectures on Scripture, helping laypeople, current pastors, and future pastors learn how to understand the Bible and interpret its meaning. In fact, Calvin's first position in Geneva after his arrival in the city in 1536, was not as pastor but as lecturer in Holy Scripture.

Calvin and his fellow pastors were also the driving force behind the fundraising campaign to get the Academy established, asking the city magistrates to apply the proceeds from fines to the Academy's building fund, and encouraging the city's lawyers to remind those making wills to remember the Academy through legacies and gifts. He also worked tirelessly to recruit the first professors in the Genevan Academy in 1559. All these efforts led the first Rector of the Genevan Academy (Calvin's friend and fellow pastor Theodore Beza) to exclaim in the preface to the Genevan Academy's statutes, "God in his goodness has granted to this republic a privilege which very few have had before her, namely to have the same city as mother of its learning and of its faith."¹ So Calvin and his fellow pastors, like the Christian Reformed clergy in the 1870s, understood the urgent need for education to prepare future pastors as leaders of the church, and were willing to invest time and money to achieve this goal. Today, Calvin Theological Seminary continues to proclaim its story and invest in its mission of "preparing individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word."

Both then and now, questions remain as to the most appropriate avenue for this training to take place. For instance, one fundamental and recurrent concern is to weigh the relative importance of calling (internal and external) versus formal education in preparing pastors. Do future pastors need to study Greek and Hebrew? Do they need to learn systematic theology, church history, apologetics, and exegesis over the course of several years? Or if someone provides evidence of their internal calling to ordained ministry and their spiritual leadership gifts and experience, backed up by support from their community, is that sufficient for ordination? These are not new questions.

Already in the sixteenth century, Calvin and his colleagues had to respond to individuals' requests to be ordained without any period of study or assessment of their academic qualifications.

¹ Theodore Beza, *preface to the leges Academiae Genevensis*, quoted in Karin Maag, *Seminary or University? The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 18-19.





They also had to respond to the urgent need for pastors to serve a burgeoning number of church plants in areas where Reformed communities were growing fast. This combination of congregational requests for pastors and candidates who wanted to serve in ministry without lengthy study was a major challenge. In the end, Calvin and his colleagues stood firmly on the side of a careful vetting of the capacities and abilities of pastoral candidates. As Calvin said in one of his letters about a candidate who wanted to be admitted to the pulpit without any period of study beforehand, “First, our Lord has given us a written rule, that we cannot contravene, namely that we may not receive any man into the ministry without first having properly and carefully approved him. This rule has to be kept in its entirety if we want to have good order and procedures in the church.”² Like Christian Reformed leaders in the nineteenth century and Calvin Theological Seminary today, Calvin and his fellow pastors held that a period of formal study and a structured vetting were absolutely necessary before granting access to the pulpit.

In Calvin’s day, candidates for ordained ministry had to go through a multi-stage process. They had to commit to a course of study that focused primarily on learning Greek and Hebrew, Scriptural exegesis, preaching practice, and gained practical experience in Reformed worship by faithfully attending Geneva’s weekly worship services. The Genevan Academy also began offering courses in systematic theology by the end of the sixteenth century. One of the key ways that students honed their skills was through weekly theological disputations, during which students had to argue for and against specific doctrinal propositions. Because the Genevan Academy did not offer formal degrees, students simply worked their way through the courses and then presented themselves for examination before a mixed group of faculty, pastors, and representatives from the city council.

² John Calvin, letter to the church of Lyon, May 1542, translated and reprinted in Karin Maag, ed., *Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 51.

“*So where can we see evidence of John Calvin’s ongoing influence at Calvin Theological Seminary?*”

The examiners assessed a candidate’s knowledge of doctrine and Scripture and reviewed the record of his behavior during his studies. Professors and pastors could provide personal testimony as to the student’s character because of their close contacts: many of the professors and pastors housed students in their own homes, and could therefore monitor and measure their spiritual and moral development. Candidates then had to present sermons on assigned passages of Scripture and could be sent back for further study if any part of their assessment revealed major weaknesses. Calvin Theological Seminary today still follows similar assessment practices, including having students undergo assessed preaching practice during their seminary studies and passing comprehensive exams in the final year of their MDiv program.

In Calvin’s Geneva, the training and assessment of future pastors focused primarily on formal instruction and classroom work. Internship placements or vocational formation in ministry during one’s studies were not part of the curriculum. A number of students were given placements in rural congregations around Geneva to hone their pastoral skills, but this practice was not consistent, nor were there sufficient slots for all future pastors to gain this practical experience. What’s more, some churches in other countries, especially in France, pushed Geneva not to examine or ordain future French pastors, because the French churches wanted to be the ones doing the assessment and the subsequent placement of these new pastors. These jurisdictional conflicts caused difficulties for the Genevan Academy, as did pressure from individual congregations to foster certain qualities among student pastors. For instance, one of the most desired characteristics for a sixteenth-century pastor was to have a good, loud voice—indeed, soft-spoken pastors trying to preach in churches without sound systems faced an uphill struggle in their ministry. One church in France even wrote to Geneva to say that a particular candidate’s noted academic prowess was of little use to them unless they could be sure that he could make himself heard. This example may seem amusing, but it does highlight the disconnect that can occur between churches and seminaries, one that can only be bridged by regular two-way communication and mutual trust.

So where can we see evidence of John Calvin’s ongoing influence at Calvin Theological Seminary? We can see it in the continued importance of the languages and content of Scripture, in the persistent commitment to providing a seminary education that prepares future pastors with the best possible training for ministry, and in the Seminary’s deep desire to be of service to the church, including the emphasis on vocational formation. I think John Calvin would be pleased to see how his thoughts and theological legacy are honored today at the seminary bearing his name.

WHY CALVIN?

Naming a Seminary After a Theologian of Consolation

SAM HA

THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIAN
CURATOR OF THE MEETER CENTER
PHD CANDIDATE





When a seminary builds a connection with a specific historical figure through its choice of a name, what message does that send? When the founders of Calvin Theological Seminary chose its name, they thought it appropriate to use the name of the Reformer John Calvin. In doing so, they declared a correlation between Calvin's theology and thought with their vision for the seminary that has now been training future leaders of the church and the world for a century and a half. So, who was Calvin, and how did he understand his calling?

In the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, a research institute and special collection that serves Calvin Theological Seminary as well as the wider world, there are dozens of portraits of John Calvin. They include diverse depictions, yet a few common characteristics are observable throughout the collection. Calvin often is viewed as scholarly and authoritative. He sometimes seems aloof and stoic, as if he can't be distracted by the mundane earthly matters that occupy most ordinary mortals. In many pictures, he appears grimly somber, looking as if he's about to deliver a heady sermon or lecture.

He could indeed be somewhat dominant and controlling. He knew that his intellect was quite exceptional. But his pastoral heart for people also was evident to those who came to know him. Those who gathered around his deathbed, deeply mourning his imminent departure, represented the many who came to love and respect his words and his work.¹ Furthermore, many associate Calvin with difficult doctrines such as predestination and election. "Calvin, huh? Wasn't he the one who wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to claim that everything is predestined and humans are like passive and powerless robots?" He is portrayed as "that theologian," who was fixated on God's forceful decrees and humanity's lack of agency. Others regard him as "that scold," who focused on self-denial, making everyone around him feel miserable or guilty.

¹ Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), vii.



Jet d'Eau de Genève - P.C. JFL Photography



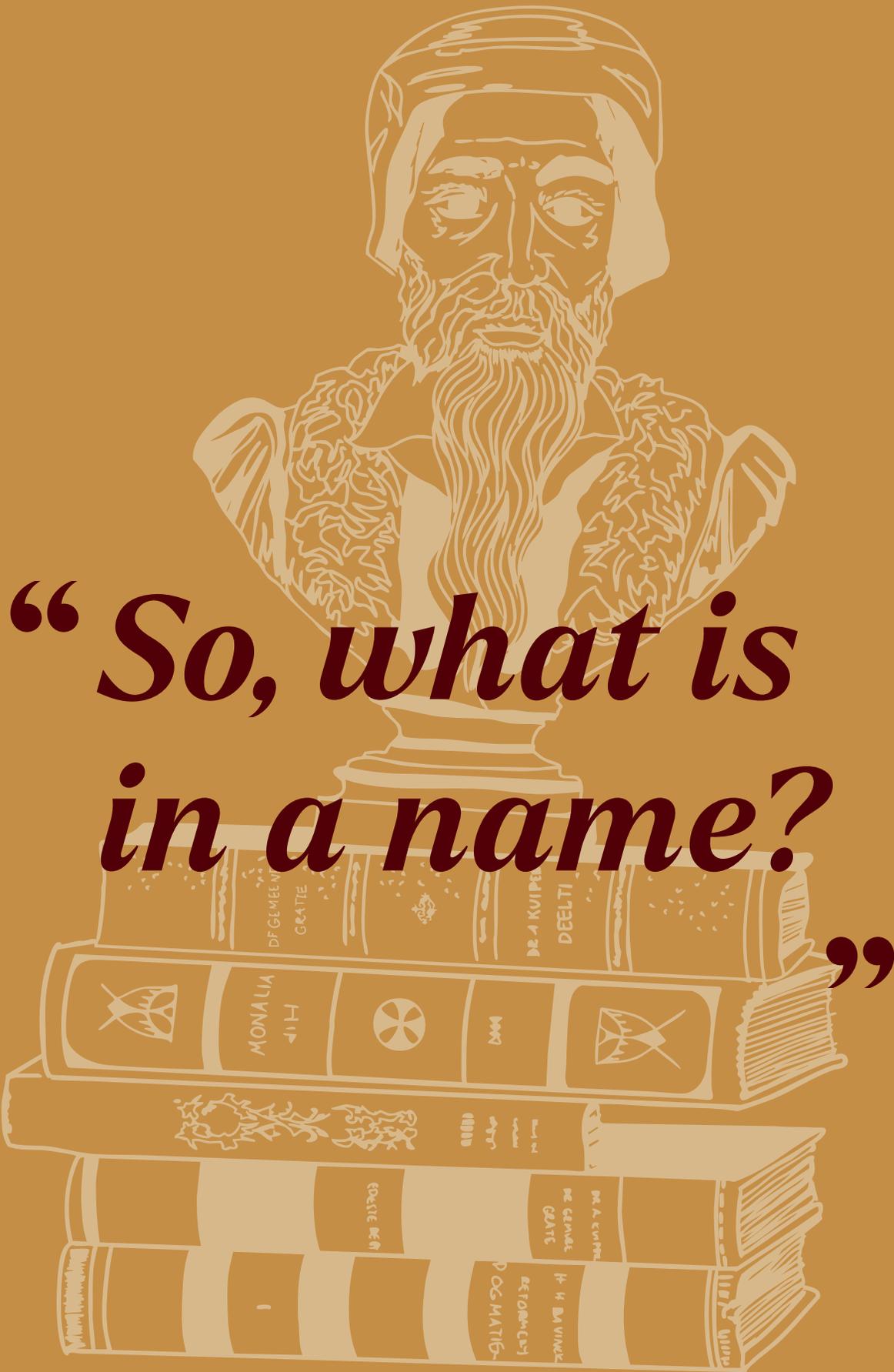
There may be grains of truth to these perspectives. Yes, he did emphasize the sovereignty of God and the fallen nature of human beings. Yes, he did believe that our life should be a continuous striving toward denying ourselves and loving God. Yet that was certainly not all he preached, taught, and wrote. Calvin's theology in sum is a compassionate, warm, and pastoral one. So, how does Calvin define theology and its glorious purpose?

In the first edition of his *Institutes*, published in 1536, Calvin wrote a prefatory letter to King Francis I of France. In it, he explicitly presented the “why” behind this scholarly project, his first ever theological writing to be printed: “My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments.”² Throughout the letter, Calvin focused on the intellectual facet of theology, as he described his mission as helping the French to understand the right knowledge of Christ, encouraging the king to contemplate the truth, and defending the true teachings of the faith. However, he had another purpose, perhaps a deeper impetus that went beyond this transmission of knowledge. His greater aim was to ensure that those who “are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness.”³ For Calvin, theology was not merely about the right sort of theological knowledge. That was indeed a crucial element, but the more profound purpose had to do with edification, elevation, consolation, and transformation.

And Calvin definitely walked the talk. He did not simply say that theology was for transforming the heart. He did indeed write a book that laid out all the right and wrong beliefs, but that was certainly not all he did. In fact, Calvin consistently connected major doctrines to pastoral concerns, showing how they speak into our everyday joys and challenges. Let us look at an example: his doctrine of covenant.

² John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 9.

³ Calvin, “Prefatory,” 9.



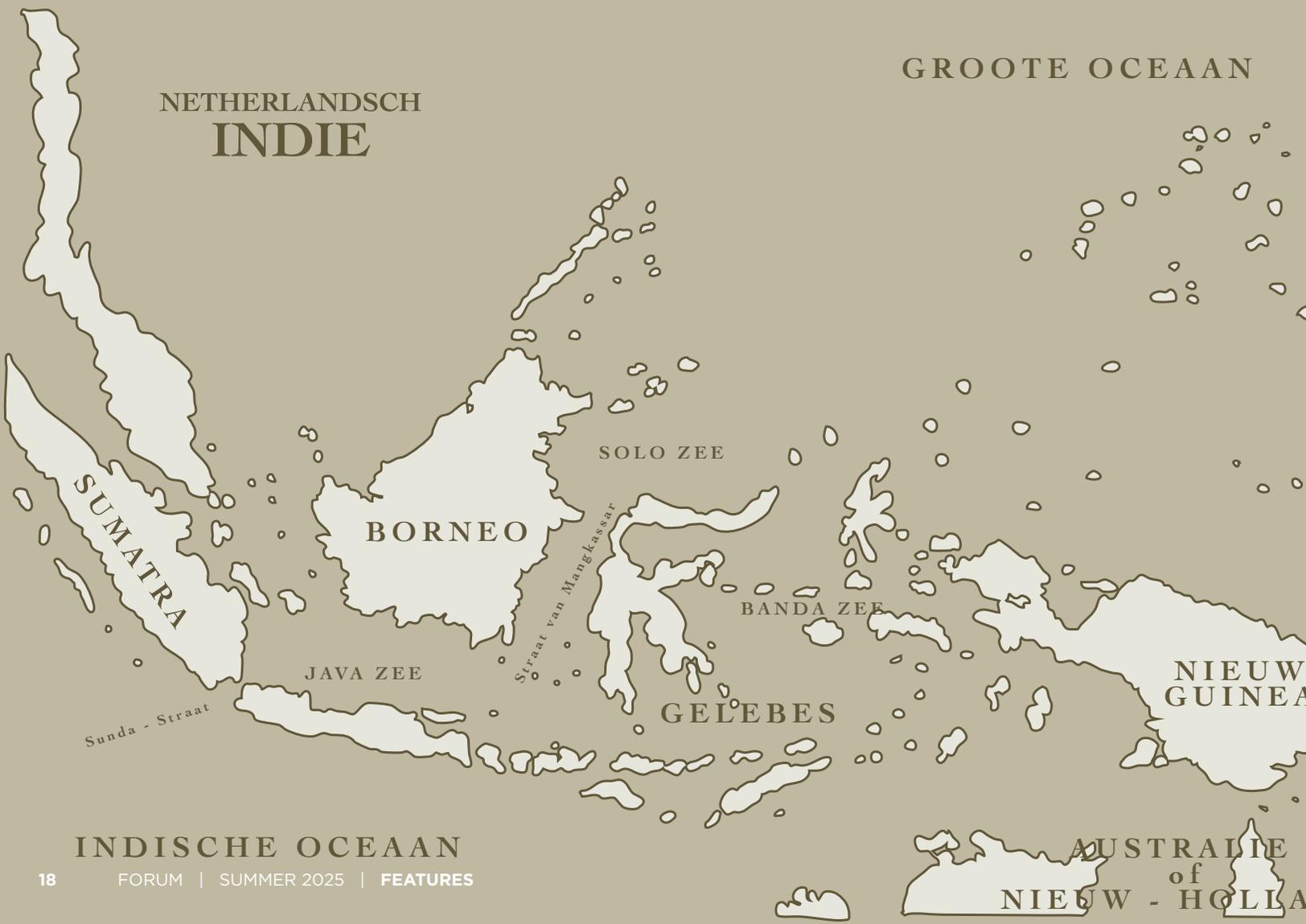
“So, what is in a name?”

REFORMED ROOTS
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:

INDONESIA'S CALVINIST HERITAGE

YUDHA THianto

CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY
AND REFORMED THEOLOGY





Last year, I presented a keynote speech at a conference organized by the Indonesian Calvin Society. Held at Aletheia Theological Seminary in East Java, one of several Reformed seminaries in Indonesia, the conference was built around a key question: “Are the Seeds Still Growing?” For the organizers of the event, “the seeds” represent a metaphor for Calvin and Calvinism. The resounding answer offered by speakers at the conference was yes, the seeds are still growing.

Then in March of this year, Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University, together with the host International Reformed Evangelical Seminary in Jakarta, Indonesia, staged the 2025 Abraham Kuyper Conference. Exploring the theme of “Reforming Always and Everywhere: Neo-Calvinism and the Reformed Tradition in Historical and Global Perspective,” this gathering was attended by more than 600 people from almost two dozen countries. It was the first Kuyper Conference held outside of North America.

These recent events are only two of many such developments that demonstrate the global impact of Calvin and Calvinism, as well as Calvin Theological Seminary’s significant leadership role. There are several other key Reformed commitments in recent times, shaping both the Indonesian churches and Calvin Theological Seminary.

Yudha Thianto - P.C. Guohui Zhang



Indonesian Reformed Evangelical Church

strictly followed this requirement for the people in the East Indies. It continued to be the standard practice of the Protestant churches in Indonesia long after the Dutch left and Indonesia gained its independence in 1945.

Some Reformed churches in Indonesia still use the Heidelberg Catechism, while others have developed their own catechism material. Today, one can still easily buy a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Indonesian language, a language that is deeply rooted in Malay. This continuity with the past is a valuable proof that underscores how extensively the influence of Calvin and Calvinism is still visible in Indonesia.

In 1542, only one year after Calvin returned to Geneva following three years of ministering in Strasbourg, he published a short liturgical volume that also contained a collection of thirty-five psalms and four canticles in metrical form titled *La Forme des prieres et chantz ecclesiastiques*.² According to this Genevan Reformed order of worship, before delivering the sermon, the minister prays to invite the Holy Spirit to guide the people in the reading of the Scripture, and in the preaching of the Word of God. At the conclusion of the sermon, the minister prays again, to ask God to guide the people to apply the teaching of God's Word in their lives. This was the ordinary practice of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, and unsurprisingly it was also implemented in the Reformed churches in the East Indies. All the Malay translations of catechism books, including the Heidelberg Catechism that I mentioned above, contained the prayers ministers offered before reading the word of God and after the sermon.

Churches in Indonesia today continue the liturgical practice of prayers before and after each sermon. Theologically, these prayers are significant. Before the reading of the Bible and before the minister explains the meaning of God's word in the sermon, the entire congregation needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And once the sermon is preached, the congregation needs to ask God to help them live their lives in the light of the Bible's teaching. This liturgical element in the Reformed church in Indonesia is deeply rooted in its history and continues to be a part of the worshiping experiences of many Christians in Indonesia.

These are a pair of examples illustrating how Calvin's practices still shape worship and liturgy in Indonesia, showing how global the Reformation and its influence are. By considering the approaches of early modern Reformed churches in both Geneva and The Netherlands and today's practices in churches in this part of the Global South, the enduring impacts of the Reformation around the world come into sharper focus. Therefore, we can say that we stand on common ground with our brothers and sisters in the church universal.

² John Calvin, *La Forme des prieres et chantz ecclesiastiques, avec la manière d'administrer les Sacremens, & consacrer le Mariage: selon la coustume de l'Eglise ancienne*, (Geneva, 1542).

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—تتقي ساي مېدي كمليكن

بدا دان روح

—دالم كيهيدون دان كيمتيان **FOR FURTHER READING:**

Maag, Karin. *Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth Century Geneva*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016

Parker, Charles. *Global Calvinism: Conversion and Commerce in the Dutch Empire, 1600 – 1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022

Thianto, Yudha. *The Way to Heaven: Catechisms and Sermons in the Establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church in the East Indies*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014

درى پيلام ساي يغ ستيا، عيسى المسيح

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منجمنكن ساي اكن كيهيدون ككال

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اونتوق هيدوف باكي ديا مولاي سگراغ

WHY BAVINCK AND KUYPER AT CALVIN?



Painting of Abraham Kuyper in the Meeter Center
P.C. Brenna Otte



As a scholar, pastor, and theologian, John Calvin left a legacy of educational rigor, theological interconnectedness, and vibrant worship that transcends both continents and centuries. His Genevan Academy remains a model for training pastors and ministry leaders, demonstrating how rigorous theological study can shape faithful ministry. Calvin's theology calls believers to a knowledge of God and self that fosters hope, joy, and love. His example of liturgy, prayer, and worship continues to inspire Christian communities around the world. Since his death in 1564, Calvin's theological vision has remained a formative influence on how Christians live out their faith and engage with their cultural moment.

That vision was carried forward and further developed by Dutch theologians Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper—theologians deeply shaped by Calvin's legacy. Like Calvin, Bavinck and Kuyper articulated a theology that engages the whole of life, affirming God's sovereignty and goodness in every sphere of human activity. Their work encourages believers not only to understand doctrine but to embody it in public life. Today, Calvin, Bavinck, and Kuyper together inspire the training of new generations of leaders at Calvin Theological Seminary. Rooted in this rich, Reformed faith, Calvin Theological Seminary's students are equipped to engage their world with theological depth, pastoral wisdom, and a profound sense of God's ongoing work in every corner of creation.

HERMAN BAVINCK AND THE MISSION OF CALVIN SEMINARY:

THEOLOGY THAT GLORIFIES GOD

"Landscape with a Farm" Vincent Van Gogh
A painting of the Hoogeveen countryside

JESS JOUSTRA

2013 CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY MDIV ALUMNA
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF RELIGION AND
THEOLOGY AT REDEEMER UNIVERSITY



Herman Bavinck was born in 1854, in Hoozevee, the Netherlands, the son of a conservative clergyman. Herman's father Jan Bavinck was a minister in the Secession Christian Reformed Church (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk). Perhaps the denominational name offers us a clue to the shared roots of Calvin Theological Seminary and theologian Herman Bavinck. Shared theological and ecclesial roots run deep, but it is not just these ties that make Bavinck an important voice within the Reformed tradition and to the mission of Calvin Seminary.

Bavinck, as his English biographer James Eglinton describes, was a "dogmatician, an ethicist, an educational reformer, a pioneer in Christian psychology, a politician, a biographer, a journalist, a Bible translator, a campaigner for women's education, and eventually, the father, father-in-law, and grandfather of heroes and martyrs in the anti-Nazi resistance movement";¹ a "household name [and] the finest Dutch theological mind of his generation."² In our own time, too, it is safe to say that Bavinck is having a moment. As a recent *Christianity Today* piece proclaimed, "Everybody Loves Bavinck." But why?

There are many ways to answer this question, but at least one is the nature and posture of his theology. Bavinck's theology is robustly Reformed and deeply catholic; in other words, his theology is biblical, confessional, catholic, and doxological.

Bavinck was insistent that theology be biblical, that is, have Scripture as its source and norm; God is both the source and content of theology. Bavinck also affirmed that theology is confessional; we stand in a living tradition—the Reformed tradition—that has faithfully articulated what Scripture teaches within the Reformed confessions. The "root principle" of these confessions, he contended, is "God's absolute sovereignty."³ But all too often, the church doesn't fully comprehend this, and thus fails to understand the scope of the creedal claim that the church is catholic. In Bavinck's view, not only does this mean that the church is one universal church, bound together in all times and all places, it also means that the gospel "embraces the whole of human existence"; it touches all of life as a "joyful tiding . . . for the entire cosmos."⁴



1 James Eglinton, *Herman Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker: 2020), 291.

2 James Eglinton, "Everybody Loves Bavinck," *Christianity Today* (February 16, 2022),

3 Herman Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, no. 17 (19894): 3.

4 Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), 224.



“*Theology is nothing other than a doxology to all God’s virtues and perfections, a hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, a ‘glory to God in the highest.’*”

— *Herman Bavinck*

God, in his glory and goodness, is sovereign over all. Because of this, theology must be doxological; we ought “not rest satisfied [until we have] traced back everything to the sovereign good pleasure of God as its ultimate and deepest cause.”⁵

Bavinck’s theology exemplifies a love of Scripture, the confessions, the world that God has made, the time in which God has placed us, and—most importantly—our sovereign God. Each of these aspects of his work is no doubt important. But one of the aspects of his work that might be drawing us to Bavinck right now is the third aspect of his theology: his catholicity. Many use the phrase “modern and orthodox”⁶ to describe Bavinck. In other words, Bavinck remained true to the theological and ecclesial claims that had been affirmed by centuries and centuries of Christians and strove to articulate them in his particular—modern—moment in history. He did this in a unique and instructive way, on account of his understanding of God’s comprehensive work, the catholicity of the church.

God’s work, he wrote, “never opposes nature and culture in themselves but only their degeneration.”⁷ Grace isn’t antithetical to culture, it is antithetical to sin. Thus, we can—and should!—engage the social, political, ecclesial, and ethical challenges of our day in the light and truth of the gospel. The gospel, as Bavinck puts it, is not only a pearl, but it is a leaven that “permeates the whole of the meal.”⁸

For Calvin Seminary’s work of training ministry leaders for service in God’s kingdom, Bavinck is an important voice. His theology and witness exemplify a scripturally bound, confessionally rooted, and culturally engaged Christianity, giving us tools for how we, too, can seek to follow Jesus in the particular time and place God has called us, in service to his kingdom and his glory. For theology, writes Bavinck, is nothing other than a “doxology to all God’s virtues and perfections, a hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, a ‘glory to God in the highest.’”⁹

5 Bavinck, “The Future of Calvinism,” 4.

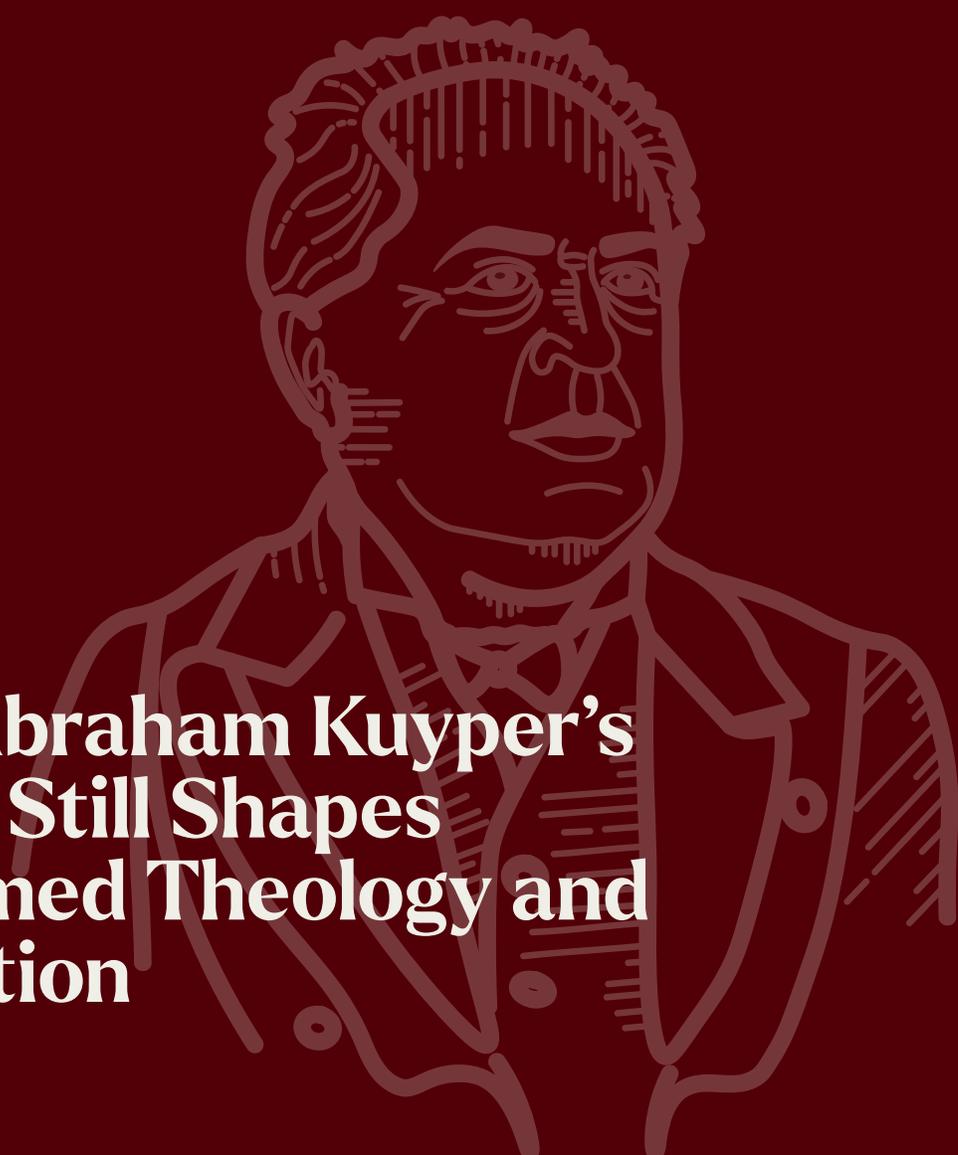
6 See, for example: Eglinton, *Herman Bavinck*, xxii and Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck’s Use of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

7 Herman Bavinck, “The Imitation of Christ II (1918)” in *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi*, trans. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 430.

8 Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 268; cf. Bavinck, “Christian Principles and Social Relationships,” 141.

9 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 112.





Why Abraham Kuyper's Vision Still Shapes Reformed Theology and Education



JORDAN BALLOR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR RELIGION,
CULTURE & DEMOCRACY AT FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE

GENERAL EDITOR OF THE ABRAHAM KUYPER
COLLECTED WORKS IN PUBLIC THEOLOGY

COORDINATOR OF THE KUYPER CONFERENCE AND PRIZE

2015 CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY PHD ALUMNUS

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not call out: ‘Mine!’”

The Dutch theologian, politician, and journalist Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) is best remembered for his rousing declaration: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not call out: ‘Mine!’” Kuyper delivered this statement in his opening address at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, an institution of higher education intended to be free of institutional control by church or state and formed according to Reformed theological principles.

Kuyper rooted his approach to cultural formation and political action in a robust understanding of God’s sovereignty, which he identified as the “dominating principle” of Calvinism, theologically as well as socially and politically. Kuyper professed “the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.” This comprehensive understanding of God’s power and providence led Kuyper to help found an intentionally Reformed university, a daring undertaking in the Netherlands of the late nineteenth century.

And while Kuyper’s “square inch” quotation is justly famous, less well known is the part of the sentence that immediately precedes it. The famous lines appear at the close of a lengthy section of the speech in which Kuyper defends a uniquely Christian view of the human person as having surpassing significance for every branch of scholarship. “Man, be he a fallen sinner or an evolving product of nature, shows up in every department and every discipline as ‘the subject that thinks’ or ‘the object that invites thought,’” said Kuyper. “Not one segment of our intellectual world can be hermetically sealed off from the others,”¹ and he continues by invoking Christ’s kingship over all things.

¹ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *On Charity & Justice*, ed. Matthew J. Tuininga, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 141.

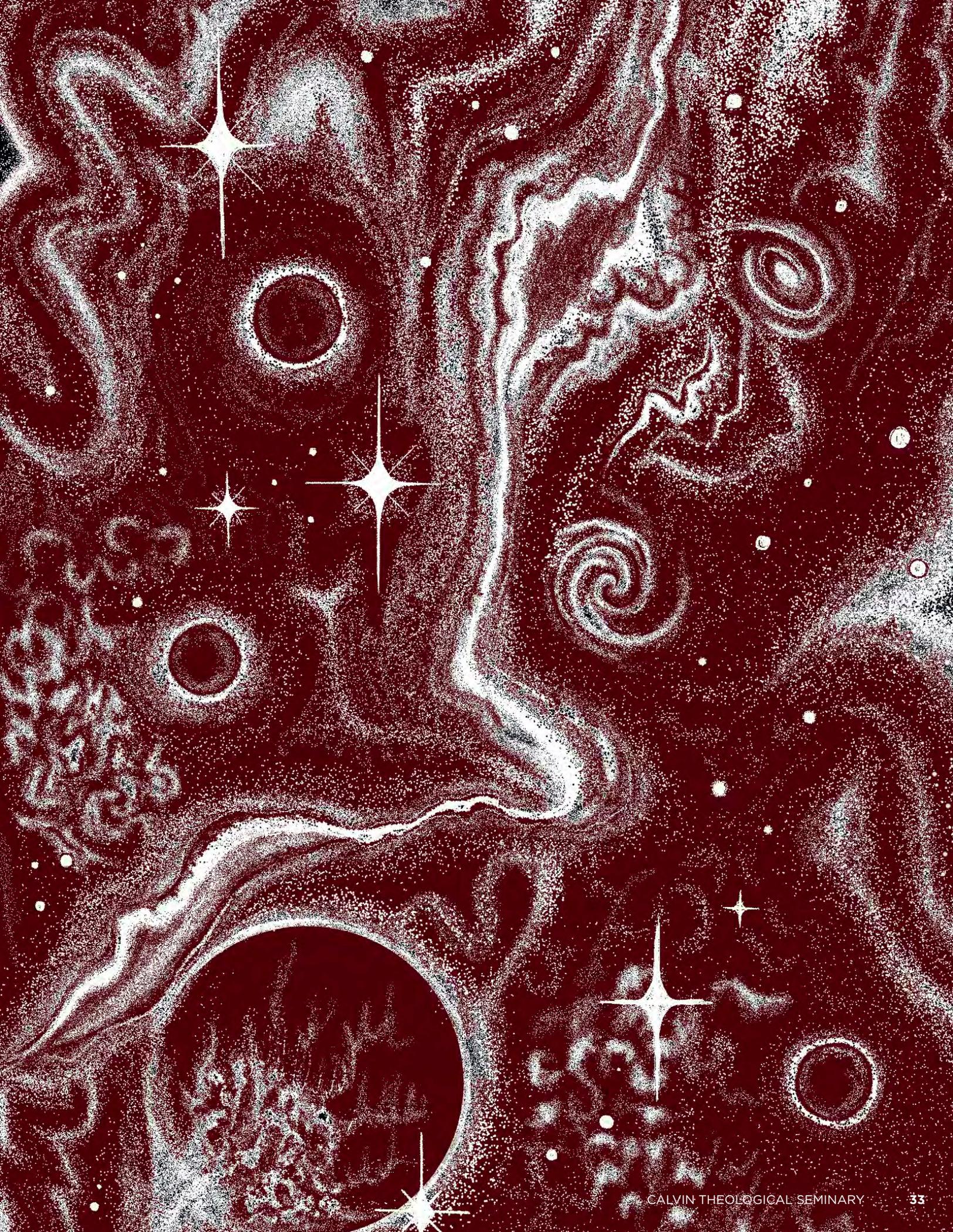
This vigorous view of God’s sovereignty and its implications for Christian scholarship would be enough to explain why Kuyper still serves as a worthy inspiration for any faithful institution of higher learning. But while the Christian Reformed Church in North America would found its seminary in 1876, predating the Free University by four years, the Dutch Reformed in the United States also found in Kuyper a figure who not only spoke a language with which they were familiar, but who also served as a touchstone and guide for their own theological, ecclesial, and institutional development.

Indeed, the ties between the emerging CRC in the United States and Kuyper’s denomination in the Netherlands were strong throughout the end of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. Kuyper paid a visit to America in 1898, giving the Stone Lectures at Princeton but also making a pilgrimage to Grand Rapids during his stay. Over the ensuing decades, many professors at Calvin College (now University) and Calvin Seminary were trained at Amsterdam’s Free University, cultivating strong intellectual as well as spiritual bonds, as well as forging a tight-knit transatlantic relationship between these two nations, churches, and sets of institutions. And late in the twentieth century when the Free University loosened some of its ties to the Kuyperian tradition, Calvin Theological Seminary launched its own doctoral program with a vision to train up generations of leaders in the church and academy who would continue the faithful conviction of God’s sovereignty over all things.

Abraham Kuyper has been an ever-flowing wellspring for the Reformed world and life view from the earliest days of Calvin Seminary to its current moment. In his lifetime, Kuyper heeded the call to “go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the times to come.”² In gratitude for his vision and conviction, we still can find in Kuyper a powerful model and inspiration to recover and apply anew the Reformed tradition and its robust sense of God’s sovereignty over all things in these “times to come.”

² *Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931), 171.*

“*the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.*”





BY LEAH JOLLY

2025 CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY MDIV ALUMNA
THM STUDENT
COMMUNICATIONS WRITER

CARRYING CALVIN'S LEGACY:

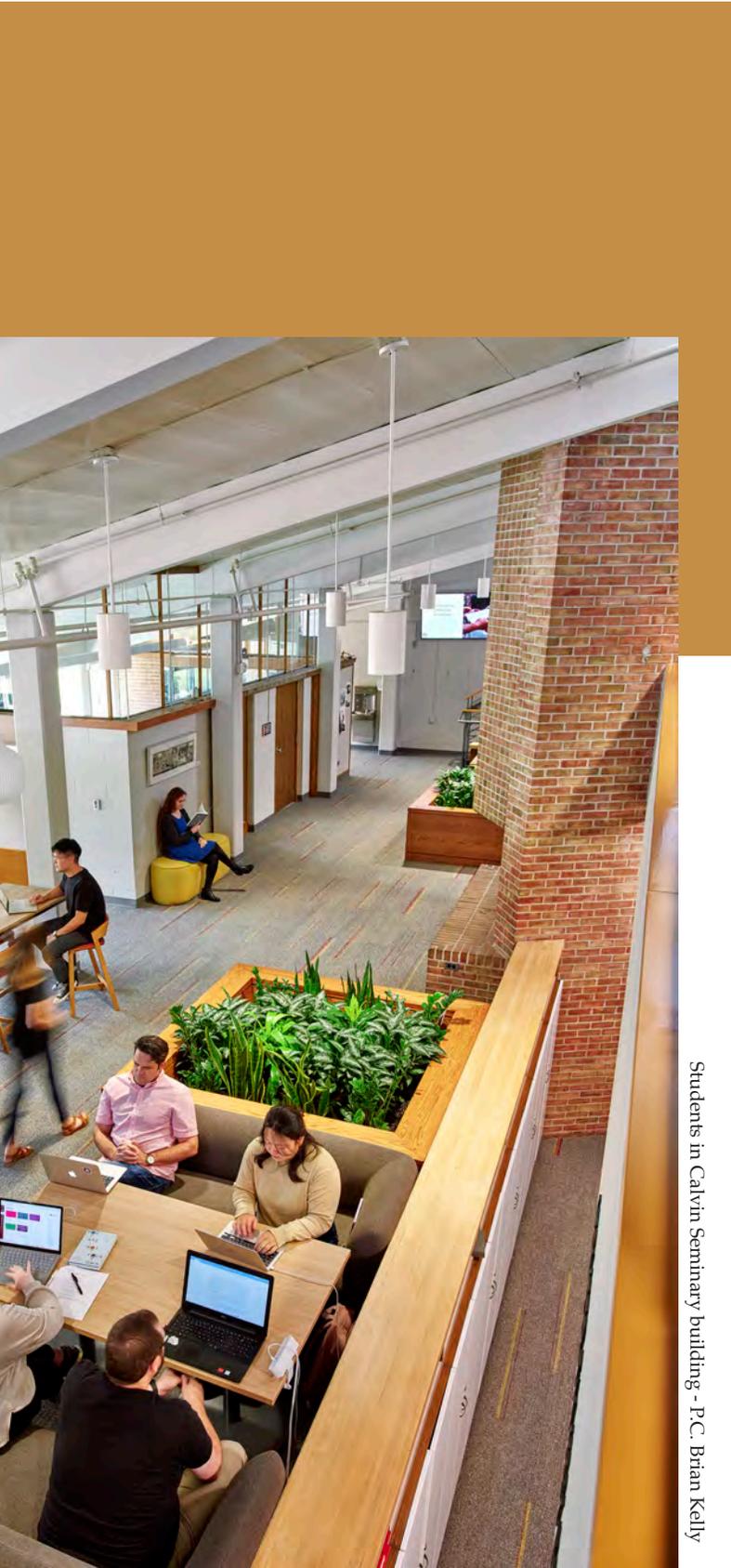
How Calvin Theological Seminary Equips Culturally Engaged Ministry Leaders



When John Calvin opened the Genevan Academy in 1559, it's doubtful he could have imagined the establishment, more than 300 years later and 4,000 miles from Switzerland, of a seminary named in his honor and dedicated to extending his legacy, calling, and passion. Yet, Calvin Theological Seminary not only bears his name, but also carries forward the theological vision he championed: one that integrates biblical scholarship with a deep commitment to Christ's sovereignty over all of life.

Our identity and mission are also significantly shaped by the theological insights of Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, two giants of the Reformed tradition who, centuries after Calvin, embodied a culturally engaged, intellectually rich, and Christ-centered faith. Bavinck's emphasis on holistic and contextualized theology echo through the classrooms, chapel services, and community life at Calvin Theological Seminary. Kuyper's proclamation of God's sovereignty over "every square inch" similarly echoes throughout class discussions, worship, and informal conversations.

In bearing Calvin's name and embodying the theological vision of Calvin, Bavinck, and Kuyper, the Seminary is not merely paying homage to important theologians. Rather, it is faithfully following in their footsteps, edifying and equipping the people of God for ministry in every context and culture. This formation occurs not only in our degree programs, but in all we do and every aspect of who we are. As a recent Master of Divinity graduate (and current Master of Theology student), I experienced this living legacy in the curriculum, emphasizing cultural and contextual engagement, and, above all, the proclamation of Christ's sovereignty over all things.



Students in Calvin Seminary building - P.C. Brian Kelly

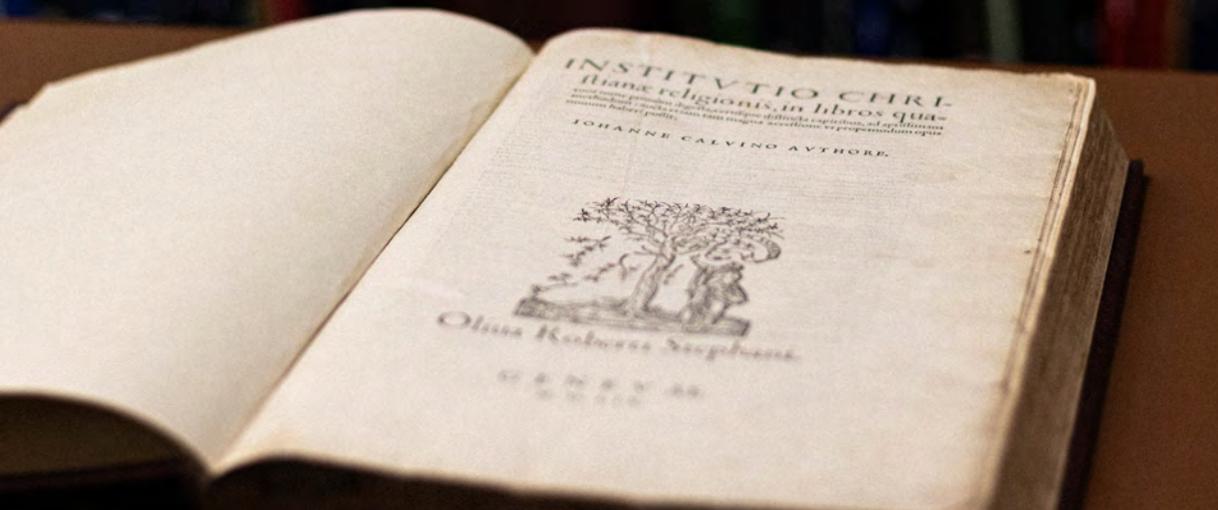
The Genevan Academy gave high priority to the study of Greek, Hebrew, biblical exegesis, and preaching—subjects necessary for the intellectual, practical, and spiritual formation of pastors (read more in Dr. Karin Maag’s article). These same subjects and others—such as church history and systematic theology—were an integral part of my education at Calvin Theological Seminary. Multiple semesters in Greek and Hebrew, combined with the wise guidance of professors, shaped me to become a stronger exegete of Scripture. Courses in pastoral care, preaching, and multicultural engagement equipped me to care holistically for the people of God, both inside and outside of a church building. While Calvin Theological Seminary’s curriculum is distinctive from that of Calvin’s Genevan Academy, it maintains Calvin’s passion for edifying and equipping people for ministry.

In her article on Herman Bavinck, Jessica Joustra notes that Bavinck’s theology promotes a “culturally engaged Christianity, giving us tools for how we, too, can seek to follow Jesus in the particular time and place God has called us.” I’ve witnessed this thoughtful engagement with culture and context in the lives of my current classmates and fellow alumni. I think of Doctor of Ministry graduate Colin Watson, Sr., whose doctoral research and dissertation further equipped him to lead the Christian Reformed Church in North America for several years as its Executive Director. My fellow Master of Theology students, who come from South Korea, Indonesia, India, and other countries, selected Calvin Theological Seminary in order to be equipped for cultural engagement and Gospel-centered ministry.

Students in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program are trained to serve people in need as licensed counselors, engaging a world that desperately needs hope, help, and healing. Each student of Calvin Theological Seminary is a living testament to the “culturally engaged Christianity” that Bavinck modeled, our education equipping us to follow Christ in our respective cultures and contexts.

In his article on Abraham Kuyper, Jordan Ballor remarks, “we still can find in Kuyper a powerful model and inspiration to recover and apply anew the Reformed tradition and its robust sense of God’s sovereignty over all things.” Whether in Bible, systematic theology, or church history courses, my professors consistently point to God’s comforting, powerful sovereignty over all things in life. This sovereignty is displayed in the storyline of Scripture, the cohesive nature of systematic theology, the diversity of cultures and peoples, the shifts in church denominations, and so many more areas.

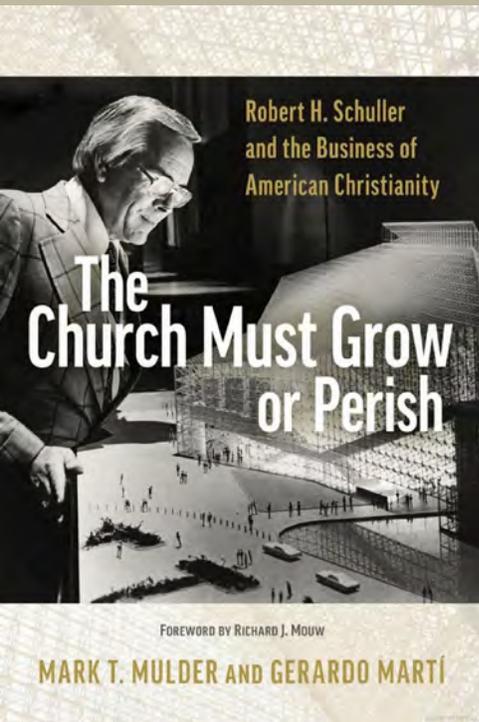
All of what Calvin Theological Seminary does—through curriculum, cultural and contextual engagement, and emphasis on Christ’s sovereignty—seeks to help followers of Jesus know their Savior and themselves better, a knowledge that produces hope, joy, and love, which is so desperately needed in “the world that God cherishes dearly.”



Institutes of the Christian Religion - P.C. Brenna Otte

Seminary News





The Church Must Grow or Perish:

Robert H. Schuller and the Business of American Christianity



BY DR. MARK MULDER - PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
at CALVIN UNIVERSITY

AND DR. GERARDO MARTI - PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
at DAVIDSON COLLEGE

REVIEW BY LEAH JOLLY

In their latest book *The Church Must Grow or Perish: Robert H. Schuller and the Business of American Christianity* (Eerdmans, 2025), Dr. Mark Mulder, along with co-author Dr. Gerardo Marti, trace the life, pastoral training, and business mindset of Robert H. Schuller.

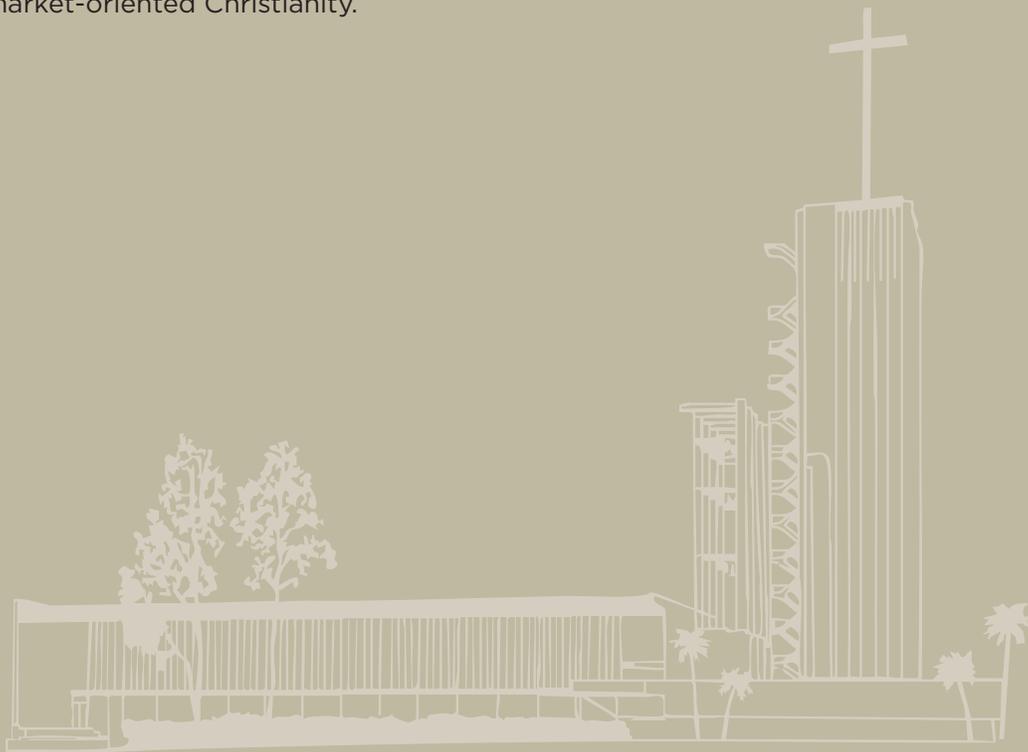
Robert H. Schuller's ministry was marked by a commitment to "fortifying the modern church"(3). For Schuller, rapid social change was to be met with innovation: he "resolved to never sit back and merely watch secularizing elements weaken and blow away houses of faith," and recognized "church leaders would need to acknowledge the devastating path carved by the forces of a rapidly changing culture and then dedicate themselves to deploying innovative methods"(3).

The book chronologically traces Schuller's early life, calling to ministry in the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and construction of a large church and training institute that would garner both applause and extensive criticism. Schuller left his childhood home in Iowa to study at Hope College (38), and Western Theological Seminary (42), where he eventually met his wife, Arvella (47), with whom he would have five children.

After beginning his ministry in Chicago, Schuller and his family moved to Orange County, California (67), where he began a drive-in church, Garden Grove Community Church (74). The drive-in church was rooted in a desire to attract non-churchgoers (99). This model for being a seeker-sensitive church—addressing the “felt needs” of attendees—spread outside of California in churches such as Willow Creek and Saddleback Valley (100).

Despite this visible success, Schuller’s ministry was also fraught with financial concerns and increasing criticism, including from Michael Horton, a well-known Reformed theologian. Though Schuller claimed to hold Calvinist views (206), his presentation of doctrine and beliefs surrounding salvation, biblical interpretation, and sin were deeply misaligned with the views he nominally professed as a RCA minister (204-205). By the time of his death in 2015, Schuller’s legacy was mixed, at best: labeled as successful by some, and heretical by others, his ministry in dire financial straits (266-267).

While Schuller’s ministry was marked by a pursuit of market-oriented Christianity (274), and responding to rapid social change (278), his desire to “fortify the modern church” gives Christians much to ponder as they consider the contemporary landscape of religion in North America today, a landscape still marked by seeker-sensitive outreach, megachurches, and market-oriented Christianity.



THE CORE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN
FAITH



LIVING THE GOSPEL
FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

MICHAEL W. GOHEEN

The Core of the Christian Faith: Living the Gospel for the Sake of the World



BY DR. MICHAEL W. GOHEEN

PROFESSOR OF MISSIONAL THEOLOGY
DIRECTOR OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
MISSIONAL TRAINING CENTER—PHOENIX

REVIEW BY LEAH JOLLY

In *The Core of the Christian Faith: Living the Gospel for the Sake of the World* (Brazos Press, 2025) Dr. Michael Goheen, Professor of Missional Theology, presents a compelling vision of the church's role in God's redemptive mission.

Goheen organizes the book around four key themes: "The gospel of the kingdom, the Bible as the true story of the world, the church as the new humanity for the sake of the world, and the missionary encounter of God's people with their culture" (9). These themes form what he calls the "missional dynamic," essential for guiding the church into covenantal faithfulness.

The book unfolds in four sections. After grounding the gospel message in its biblical and theological context, Goheen dedicates five chapters to tracing the Bible's overarching narrative. He connects its major themes—gospel, salvation, witness—to the church's mission and witness today. He writes, "When we grasp that the salvation of the kingdom restores all of human life, we begin to see that our witness to God's kingdom must be as wide as life itself!" (112)

The third section highlights the church’s mission through the vocations of God’s people. Goheen emphasizes the formative role of Scripture: “Scripture gives us not just the true story of the world; it also equips us with a “toolbox” that we need in order to live in that story” (119). The final section addresses cultural challenges such as postmodernity, economic modernity, and consumerism. He urges Christians to engage culture thoughtfully, to “sympathetically understand the postmodern spirit at work among our neighbors—and among us!—and not react in knee-jerk fashion” (210).

Goheen’s writing is concise, practical, and accessible. Aimed at a popular audience (xi), the book avoids technical jargon and presents concepts in a clear and engaging way. His use of relatable analogies and real-world examples speaks to readers across vocations and life stages. This clarity and breadth of application makes the book suitable for a wide range of readers, from high school and college students to pastors, ministry leaders, and small groups.

The Core of the Christian Faith stands out as a readable yet rich introduction to Scripture and missional theology. It invites readers to see the gospel not as an isolated message, but as the heartbeat of God’s restorative work in the world. With clarity and conviction, Goheen calls the church to live faithfully in light of this mission.



Calvin Theological Seminary Welcomes New Faculty Members

Calvin Theological Seminary is excited to announce two incoming Systematic Theology faculty members: Dr. Jared Michelson and Dr. Jessica Joustra. Both faculty members will begin their work on July 1, 2026. We are grateful to God for providing and calling Dr. Michelson and Dr. Joustra to Calvin Theological Seminary and look forward to welcoming them and their families to Grand Rapids in 2026.

DR. JARED MICHELSON



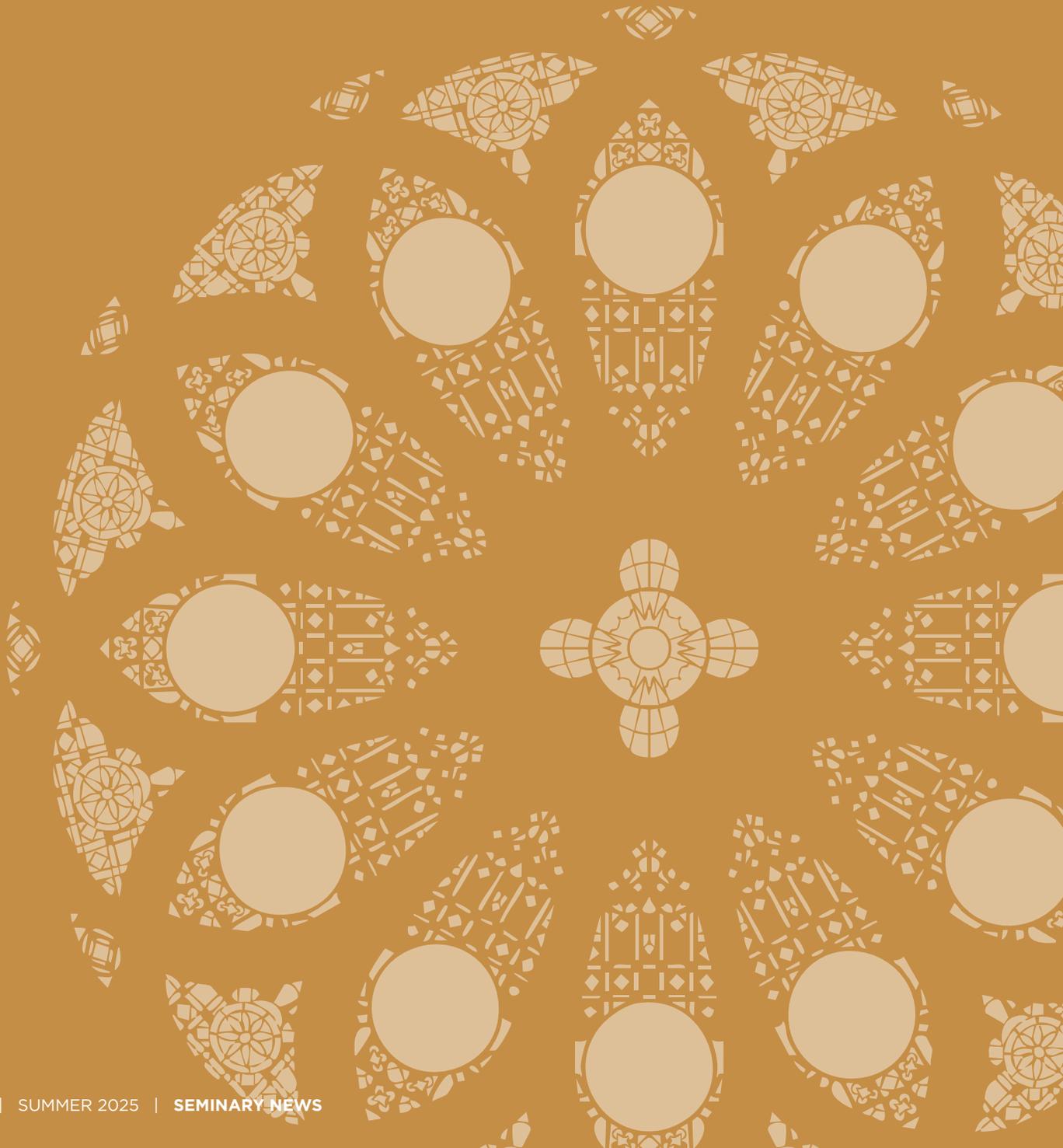
Dr. Jared Michelson comes to Calvin Theological Seminary from the University of St. Andrews (St. Andrews, Scotland). Originally from Northern California, Dr. Michelson received his Bachelor of Arts in Church History and Biblical Studies from The Master's University, and his MLitt in Systematic and Historical Theology and PhD in Systematic Theology from the University of St. Andrews. Dr. Michelson currently serves in research, lecturing, and supervising roles at the University of St. Andrews, and previously served as Lead Minister of Cornerstone United Free Church in Scotland. His notable publications include *The Doctrine of God and the Crisis of Modernity* (T&T Clark) and several journal articles on Schleiermacher, the doctrine of divine simplicity, and other related topics.

DR. JESS JOUSTRA



Dr. Jessica Joustra comes to Calvin Theological Seminary from Redeemer University (Ontario, Canada). Raised in West Michigan, Dr. Joustra received her Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Biology from Calvin College, Master of Divinity from Calvin Theological Seminary, and her Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Ethics from Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr. Joustra currently serves as Associate Professor of Religion and Theology at Redeemer University, where she teaches courses on Reformed theology, worldview, and ethics. Notably, she served as editor and translator of *Herman Bavinck's Reformed Ethics Vol. 1: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity, Reformed Ethics: Vol. 2: The Duties of the Christian Life, and Reformed Ethics Vol. 3: Christian Life in Society* (all with Baker Academic). She also coedited *Calvinism for a Secular Age: A Twenty-First Century Reading of Abraham Kuyper's Stone Lectures* with her husband, Dr. Robert Joustra.

New Staff





MEET

Lisa Walkendorf

Student Life Office Coordinator

I'm excited to be part of the CTS community as the Student Life Office Coordinator, where I'll support our deans and students! I most recently served for six years at Cornerstone University. I completed a B.S. in Ministry Leadership, and I recently completed a two-year program for certification in spiritual direction.

I find joy in relationships, especially interacting with our student body, staff, and faculty. I'm thankful that we get to prayerfully seek God together, participate in intentional spiritual formation, and enjoy fellowship through events like Public Reading of Scripture and chapel. I am passionate about encouraging others in next steps of faith to draw nearer to God, and I find joy in prayerfully walking with others.

I was born in Australia, and our family enjoys traveling. We have visited Israel, the United Kingdom, and Macedonia. My husband and I have been married for 31 years and our daughter lives locally. We are part of Knapp Valley Church, where I serve in the prayer ministry, pastoral care, and first impressions teams.

I enjoy reading, learning, spending time with family and friends, and being outdoors. I delight to pay attention and see God in daily life. I have written devotionals published in *The Secret Place*. While hiking and walking, I often take pictures of whatever makes me pause to say, "Wow, God!" which I describe as a practice of "contemplative photography."



FAREWELL WITH GRATITUDE:

Dr. Danjuma Gibson Follows His Call to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Calvin Theological Seminary is grateful to have been a key partner and the theological and academic home for Rev. Dr. Danjuma Gibson over the last 11 years. His pastoral and professional background combined to help Calvin Seminary both plan and launch the D.Min. degree program as well as the MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. All this, in addition to providing day-to-day training, instruction, and mentorship for a generation of emerging pastors. He served our institution and our students with humility, empathy, and resilience.

Dr. Gibson earned his Bachelor of Arts from Morehouse College, Master of Business Administration from DePaul University, Master of Arts in Urban Ministry and Master of Christian Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Doctor of Philosophy from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. He received his clinical training from the Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago where he earned an Advanced Certificate in Psychotherapy and Religion. Dr. Gibson holds memberships in the American Academy of Religion, The Society of Pastoral Theology, and the Society for the Study of Black Religion.

Dr. Gibson is the author of several books, including *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography: Rethinking Subjectivity in the Western Experiment of Democracy* (2018), an investigation into the formation of Douglass' psychological and religious identity in the context of trauma and the American slavocracy. And his most recent work, *Through The Eyes Of Titans: Finding Courage To Redeem The Soul of A Nation: Images of Pastoral Care and Leadership, Self-Care, and Radical Love in Public Spaces*, examines the self-care practices of four leaders: Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hamer, Benjamin Elijah Mays, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Through introspection and self-work, they became better equipped for their life's work.

Former student Nicole Romero-Johnson recalls Dr. Gibson as an exemplary teacher and mentor: "Dr. Gibson truly was one of my favorite professors. He's challenged his students to think differently and to pursue understanding through listening before speaking. I'm so grateful for Dr. Gibson's guidance and care during my seminary years."

When Dr. Gibson was granted tenure, I wrote this tribute: "It is clear that Dr. Gibson is a gift to us at CTS and to the CRCNA. He brings strengths as an engaging teacher, insightful scholar, and thoughtful pastor."

Our faculty, staff, and students will miss him deeply, not just for his enormous contribution to Calvin Seminary, but as a warm friend and trusted colleague. We sincerely congratulate him on his next chapter of ministry, where he will be focusing on serving the urban church at his new ministry setting at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

In his farewell message to faculty and students, Dr. Gibson shared these words, "It has been an honor and a privilege to have served the Calvin Theological Seminary community over the past 11 years. I have been blessed to work with great colleagues. In some instances, I have been graced with the opportunity of forging lifelong friendships. Lastly, God blessed me with the wonderful opportunity to journey with and learn from many great and exceptional students, who continue to show us and the world who we (and the church) can be at our best. As Calvin Theological Seminary prepares to celebrate its 150th year anniversary, may God be glorified for all that God has done."

Dr. Gibson will continue to serve with distinction at an institution that describes itself as "rooted in the Reformed tradition and in relationship with Christ-followers from other traditions. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary forms and equips people for ministries familiar and yet to unfold and communities present and yet to be gathered."

Godspeed, Dr. Gibson!



JUL MEDENBLIK
PRESIDENT

Nicole Romero-Johnson and Dr. Gibson



A full review of
*Through the Eyes of
Titans* can be read here:



A LASTING LEGACY:

Dr. John Witvliet Says Farewell to Calvin After 30 Years

BY LEAH JOLLY

2025 CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY MDIV ALUMNA
THM STUDENT
COMMUNICATIONS WRITER



After nearly 30 years as Professor of Worship and Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University, Dr. John Witvliet is beginning a new role at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Witvliet and his wife—Dr. Charlotte Witvliet, Professor of Psychology at Hope College—both accepted senior scholar roles at Belmont, effective June 1, 2025. John Witvliet’s transition from Calvin to Belmont marks the end of a rich era of teaching, mentorship, leadership, and theological contributions impacting the Calvin community and far beyond.

Following the completion of his undergraduate degree at Calvin College in 1990, Dr. Witvliet pursued additional training at Calvin Theological Seminary, the University of Illinois, and the University of Notre Dame before returning to his alma mater in 1997. Since then, he has served at Calvin Seminary and Calvin University in several capacities. He has served Calvin Seminary as Professor of Worship while serving Calvin University as the Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Adjunct Professor of Religion, and Chair of the Department of Congregational and Ministry Studies. Dr. Witvliet also contributed to the advancement and development of both institutions by serving on numerous committees and in advisory roles in addition to teaching several courses each semester.





Dr. Witvliet authored, co-authored, or edited over a dozen books, collaborated on six hymnal projects, wrote over 100 articles for internationally recognized publications and peer-reviewed publications. He delivered lectures and led workshops at over 50 colleges and universities in the United States, and in seminaries and churches across the world, including in England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, and Mexico. As Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, he spearheaded their annual Worship Symposium, along with international conferences in four continents. Over the course of Dr. Witvliet’s tenure as Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, he secured over \$55 million in grant funding for the Institute’s efforts from the Lilly Endowment. He departs from Calvin after building a lasting legacy of serving the global church through teaching, writing, research, and collaboration on worship, liturgy, and congregational life.

President Jul Medenblik noted that, “John has served at both Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary and is the only faculty member to be ‘jointly tenured’ in recognition of his contribution. We acknowledge and express thankfulness for John’s gifts and service to us at Calvin Seminary over three decades. We also ask for God’s continued blessing on him and Charlotte as they take up this new challenge. We are grateful for how John will continue to serve the wider church and the connections that we still share.”

In his new role at Belmont University, Dr. Witvliet will serve as senior scholar and program advisor for university missional initiatives and professor of theology, worship, and the arts. He will also serve as theologian-in-residence for the Belmont Formation Collaborative, helping leaders across Belmont’s campus develop strategic plans for campus worship and interdisciplinary collaboration.

As Dr. Witvliet embraces this new opportunity at Belmont, the Calvin Theological Seminary community bids him a fond farewell along with deep gratitude and a blessing for continuing his fruitful ministry. His legacy will live on in the lives of students he has shaped, the scholarship he has contributed, and the Christ-centered witness he has embodied.

A Faithful Professor, Scholar, and Mentor:

Celebrating the Retirement and Legacy of Dr. Mary Vanden Berg



BY LEAH JOLLY

2025 CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY MDIV ALUMNA
THM STUDENT
COMMUNICATIONS WRITER

After 17 years of teaching, writing, and mentoring, Dr. Mary Vanden Berg is leaving the classroom and heading into retirement. Students and colleagues cite Dr. Vanden Berg's pastoral sensitivity, classroom leadership, scholarly work, and mentorship as some of the things they'll miss most.



From Biology Major to Theologian

The daughter of a Christian Reformed (CRCNA) pastor, Dr. Vanden Berg spent her early years in Houston, British Columbia; Oak Harbor, Washington; and Omaha, Nebraska, before moving to Michigan in her teenage years. With a life-long love for science and God's creation, Dr. Vanden Berg studied biology and chemistry at Calvin College, graduating in 1981. Days later, she married her high school sweetheart, Skip.

For the next 16 years, Dr. Vanden Berg focused on family life, raising Charlie, Peter, and Michelle; serving her church; and being involved in her children's activities. Once they were school-aged, she began discerning her next calling. A systematic theology class with Dr. Cornelius Plantinga reignited her academic interests, and other influential professors, including Ronald Feenstra, Richard Muller, John Bolt, Arie Leder, and others, nurtured her love for theology.

She earned her Master of Theological Studies (Old Testament concentration) from Calvin Seminary in 2002, and her PhD in Systematic Theology in 2008. Soon after, she joined the Calvin Seminary faculty, becoming a colleague to the professors who had mentored her.

Called to Serve, In and Out of the Classroom

In addition to teaching and scholarly work, Dr. Vanden Berg's career at Calvin Seminary included serving as Associate Dean. She also taught students globally. Her core courses in Systematic Theology focused on theological anthropology, soteriology, sanctification, eschatology, and the interplay between science and faith.



Looking Ahead: Retirement

Though stepping back from teaching duties, Dr. Vanden Berg’s ministry continues. She is co-authoring a forthcoming book with Gayle Doornbos (a Calvin Seminary graduate and professor at Dordt University), and looks forward to time with Skip, her children, and their spouses—Charlie and Rachel, Peter and Ashley, Michelle and Jordan—as well as their eight grandchildren. Whether camping, hiking, or simply being together, retirement promises new rhythms of joy and service.

Her early course, *God, Creation, and Humanity*, paved the way for seminars such as *Being Human*, *Theological Anthropology in Historical Perspective*, and *Death, Care for the Dying, and Christian Funerals*. Students appreciated the rigor, pastoral tone, and practical applications of her teaching. Dr. Vanden Berg also taught classes at Cornerstone University, Kuyper College, and Western Theological Seminary, as well as in Indonesia, Egypt, and Uganda. Asked what she’ll miss most, Dr. Vanden Berg names Calvin’s international student community. “God has brought the world to my classroom,” she said, adding that such diverse voices and perspectives enriched her understanding of Scripture and the global church.

Though Dr. Vanden Berg’s time in the classroom is coming to a close, her influence will ripple through generations of students, pastors, and theologians shaped by her wisdom, grace, and deep love for God’s Word. Her tenure at Calvin Seminary is one of thoughtful teaching, humble leadership, and a faithful witness to the integration of theology and life. As she steps into retirement, we give thanks for her years of service and trust that the same God who called her to this work will continue to guide her in new adventures ahead.

Departing with a Legacy

Dr. Vanden Berg leaves a legacy of theological depth, pastoral care, and mentorship. Her classes emphasized regular Scripture reading because, as she often said, “The more you know God’s Word, the sooner you’ll hear and discern His voice.” She grounded all her courses in the richness of Reformed theology, encouraging students to see God’s hand in all things. Her reminder to do everything *coram Deo*—before the face of God—was a refrain students will long recall with appreciation.



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA: MARY HULST



Rev. Dr. Mary Hulst (MDiv '95, PhD '06) has built a career as a preacher, teacher, pastoral counselor and campus chaplain that embodies Calvin Theological Seminary's mission of equipping biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry leaders.

Mary was born in Holland, Michigan, the second of four children. Her early life was marked by a love for school, swimming, and participating in church. From a young age, Mary was interested in teaching, specifically the Bible. Her pastor at the time, Terry Lapinsky, regularly spoke into Mary's life and told her in seventh grade she would grow up to be a pastor.

Around this time, the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA) was beginning conversations surrounding women's ordination.

As she contemplated her calling, Mary initially asked questions: what do pastors do? As Mary deepened her participation in church life, the next step on her path became clear: attend Calvin College.

During her time as a Calvin College student, Mary studied Classics, a field of study that helped her engage the New Testament thanks to an in-depth study of Greco-Roman history. In addition to ongoing contact with her long-time pastor and mentor Terry Lapinsky, Mary found a mentor and advisor in Classics Professor Kenneth Bratt, who helped her discern her next steps. After four years at Calvin and much prayer, Mary decided to cross the pond and enroll at Calvin Theological Seminary.

As the Christian Reformed Church continued to debate women's ordination, Mary continued to receive godly mentorship, encouragement, and practical experience that confirmed her calling to ministry. Mentors such as Melvin Hugen, Cornelius Plantinga, and Sidney Greidanus, along with Jim Holwerda, her supervising pastor for a year in Colorado Springs, continued to affirm her call to ministry. During her years of seminary training, Mary experienced timely confirmation of her call: every time someone discouraged her from entering ministry, often asking, "Why don't you be a pastor's wife?" within 24 hours, another person would come along and affirm her call.

By the time of Mary's seminary graduation in 1995, the Christian Reformed Church had begun the final stages of opening ordination

to women, and Mary was invited to serve Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan) as its one-year interim co-pastor. By 1996, Mary was fully ordained and accepted the position of Senior Pastor at Eastern Avenue CRC, where she would serve for eight years. During her eight years there, she honed her skills in preaching, worship planning, neighborhood outreach, and pastoral care, things she delighted to do in service to God and others. As she reached the midpoint of her time at Eastern Avenue CRC, Mary's mentor at the time, Duane Kelderman, encouraged her to consider doctoral studies. After sending several applications and much prayer, Mary enrolled at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign, Illinois), where she received her PhD in Communication Ethics under Dr. Cliff Christians (also a Calvin Seminary graduate and 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient). After earning her PhD, Mary spent two years teaching preaching courses at Calvin Seminary before accepting her current position: University Pastor at Calvin College (now University).

As University Pastor, Mary's days are often filled with the same pastoral duties she enjoyed while at Eastern Avenue CRC: preaching, pastoral care, and counseling. Depending on the day, you'll find Mary in various administrative meetings, preaching at Wednesday chapels, and, most importantly, being present with Calvin University students in the disparate joys, challenges, questions, and highlights of life. Mary describes her pastoral work as having an oral comprehensive exam (a common exam for seminary students) every day. She is regularly walking with students as they ask questions like: Where is God? How can I trust the Bible? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why be part of the church? When Mary reflects on the past 15 or so years as University Pastor, thousands of names, faces and stories come to mind, stories of grateful students who have trusted her with their questions and journeys of faith in Christ.

In addition to her role as University Pastor, Mary has faithfully served Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary as a professor, most often in Calvin Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program. She teaches out of a depth of knowledge and extensive

pastoral experience, equipping doctoral students to handle crises, navigate congregational concerns, and pursue the questions and ideas that drive their research. Mary also contributes to publications such as *The Banner* and *The Forum Magazine*, and frequently serves the global church through preaching, speaking, and other engagements.

Watch Mary's Alumni Feature here:



Mary being recognized at graduation



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS: JAY SHIM



Rev. Dr. Jay Shim's (MDiv '92, PhD '98) journey into teaching and ministry began unexpectedly. Born shortly after the Korean War, Jay was raised in a Catholic household by a single mother. His early years were marked by fatherlessness and a strong pressure to financially provide for his mom and three younger siblings.

When he arrived in California in his early twenties, he wrestled with the challenges of being an immigrant in an unfamiliar place: learning a new language, navigating a new city, and exploring church options, all without the guidance and help of solid mentors. As Jay navigated life in California,

he never would have imagined that his quest for a financially stable career as a graphic designer would turn into a life-long study of Scripture and theology.

After a year of graphic design school in California, Jay sensed God's call to study the Bible and theology. He spent a year studying at a Pentecostal Bible college in Los Angeles, California, before discovering Calvin College. Desiring to be a well-equipped thinker and pastor, Jay spent his time at Calvin College studying philosophers and thinkers such as John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Alvin Plantinga. The faculty at Calvin College not only expanded Jay's intellectual horizons, but came alongside him as mentors, helping him grow personally and spiritually, an ongoing confirmation of his call to study Bible and theology.

With his calling confirmed and still hungry to know God's Word, Jay enrolled at Calvin Theological Seminary. As a Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy student, Jay grew in his ability to wisely engage Scripture and graciously dialogue with people holding diverse viewpoints on theological issues. His time at Calvin had equipped him with the skillset, and deep love for, sharing the Gospel with others, witnessing how it transforms the lives of those who received Christ by faith. By the end of his time at Calvin Seminary, Jay's next steps were clear: equipping the next generation of believers and sharing the joy of the Gospel through teaching at Dordt College (now University).

Jay's first few years teaching at Dordt were a shock. Not only had he relocated his family from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Sioux Center, Iowa, but he was also learning a new group of people, a new set of skills, and new ways of

of helping young believers apply the Gospel to their respective callings and contexts. Having never taken an education pedagogy class, Jay was quickly forced to learn how to teach undergraduate students, often those freshly out of high school. Gone were the days of teaching his peers, fellow graduate students with similar interests. Now, his challenge was to help students—both the interested and uninterested—fall in love with the Bible and Reformed theology. Just as in California and Michigan, Jay’s growth came through the efforts of influential mentors. He quickly recognized the flaws in his teaching methods and consulted colleagues and students for feedback so he could improve.

As Jay’s teaching skills grew—thanks to the gracious, patient mentorship of others—so did his love and capacity for mentoring. The South Korean immigrant-turned-professor became the mentor for hundreds of Dordt students who passed through his classroom. Jay and his family intentionally set aside time, financial resources, and spaces in their home to welcome students. Over his time at Dordt, Jay welcomed students to his home for conversation about vocation, theology, and other topics on their hearts, intent on helping them grow in their love for Christ, theology, and spreading the Gospel in their spheres of influence. In every class, Jay witnessed the joy of the Gospel and a love for sharing it take root in his students.

By the time Jay retired from Dordt in 2023, he knew he was ready for a new challenge. While saying goodbye to the faculty, staff, and students at Dordt was difficult, he was ready to return to the place he came to as a young man: California. Today, you’ll find Jay living in a Southern California retirement community, where many affectionately refer to him as “Pastor Jay.”

Doors continue to open for him to serve churches and organizations through preaching, teaching, and writing. While he may not be in a classroom full of students, opportunities still abound to mentor, share the Gospel, and witness its transforming effect in the lives of others.

Watch Jay's Alumni Feature here:



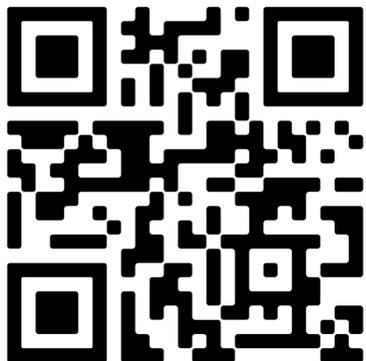
Jay being recognized at graduation



Saint Peter's Cathedral of Geneva, Switzerland - P.C. hectorchristiaen



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