



Institute for Christian Studies
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Seerveld, Calvin. 35th Anniversary of ICS Speech. November 15, 2002.

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I should like to tell three personal anecdotes from the 35 year history of the ICS and make a comment on each, thinking about what would be good for the institution in the coming decades.

(1) My introduction to the inner workings of what became the ICS happened when I was elected a trustee of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies in 1965. My plane flight in from Chicago was a bit late. Rev. Peter Jonker picked me up and we drove to Rehoboth Church in Etobicoke where the trustee meeting was already under way. As we entered the empty church building we heard shouting. We walked toward the shouting. Opening the door of the shouting room there were a red-faced Peter Speelman and H. Evan Runner angrily standing and confronting one another. That was my first unforgettable formal introduction to the birthing of the ICS.

What does a charismatic Dutch immigrant bookseller, passionately convicted about providing a Kuyperian vision of serviceable scholarship to christian students at secular universities so they not get lost to God, have to do with an erudite professor specialized in the dated sequencing of the books of Aristotle's *Physics* who, like John Calvin (*Institutio Christianae religionis*, IV,xx,3-7) valued political philosophy, if not Chinese studies, as critical entry points for bright Christians to make a redemptive difference in the world of learning?

Those two persons symbolize for me the wonderful, colourful, improbable blessing God gave the ICS as birthright: the pledge of sustained university-level research and mentoring, with ordinary people of God as watershed, *ho laos* Christ lovingly called them, the disciplined laity whose antennae (*Gereformeerde voelhorens*) can detect whether the wind blowing through the room is holy or suspect.

This mixed blessing of being a free-standing institution of advanced christian learning supported by the prayers and monies of people who don't quite understand and have to trust what is going on-- When Bernard Zylstra was president of ICS (1983-85), out raising money, I heard him say, "Seerveld should be writing articles on Watteau's paintings I can't understand, if it helps redirect art historical studies, and you people should take up offerings for that work!" This double braided complex is a difficult, good set-up, I think, because it is right that professors and graduate students not become free-floating intellectuals, but are to be rooted and active in a community of faith. Scholars need to be able to give an account somehow of their obedience to Jesus Christ in simple ways too, in their concern for the church, in how they conduct contentious discussion--much as Paul advised young Timothy in *I Timothy 4*.

How to make an academic convocation service trustworthily popular? how to be *wissenschaftlich* precise in graduate study yet make the knowledge public? is a conundrum in the praxis of ICS. *Wedge* publications (1972-1981) fractured in disputes over whether it should be a university press or publish popular books. But this is a birthright, I believe, it would be wise not to sell, but to treasure.

(2) As chair of the ICS Curatorium (predecessor of the Senate) for several years (1969-1972) I remember when we curators were asked to meet with a delegation of Junior Members over their causing a bit of trouble locally. Several ICS *habitués* apparently were making a habit of going to CRC church services armed with their large Jerusalem Bibles, sitting in the front pew, and then at the conclusion of the service, as everyone filed out the door, would challenge the preacher on his interpretation of the text.

In our curatorial session with the delegation Robert Carvill was an articulate spokesman in detailing the sins of the churches and clergy, their otherworldly, encrusted, splintering, narrow-minded obfuscation of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. It was an absorbing meeting. I think it was Paul Schrotenboer or curator Jack Vos who asked a final question: does this mean you will have to start a new church which will not succumb to such vices?

There was a time, as James Houston, then president of Regent College in Vancouver, said in a lecture at ICS around 1974, when the Institute seemed bent on throwing stones at the windows of all its neighbours. Houston was one of the first evangelical leaders who braved the hostile consensus at the time toward ICS, to have us, Regent College and ICS, co-sponsor a conference on "The pertinence of the gospel of creation for christian education" held at York University (1975). Robert Carvill went on to become the dynamic writer and editor of *Vanguard* magazine (c.

1970-74), strikingly designed by Willem Hart¹ which helped situate the ICS in a reading public with its fresh, Reformational take on Bible studies and cultural problems of the day, translating christian philosophy into accessible, thought-provoking articles.

I mention this incident because I think the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto has always been the right location for extremely gifted, disaffected graduate students who know Jesus Christ is the Lord but don't fit in well anywhere else. The practical, do-it! answers and training of seminaries and the dour-faced positivism or sophisticated scepticism of secular graduate programs are equally unacceptable to them. The fact that Hebrews 11 is a listing of misfits encourages me to recommend that the ICS never settle into becoming practically indistinguishable from other respected educational institutions, assimilated to the current academic brands of language, foci, policies, pace, but remain an unusual place for gifted Holy Spirited misfits.

I don't mean we should start breaking windows again. Personally I believe "subversive activity" and "being on the cutting edge" are not biblical root metaphors for followers of Christ to adopt. The dove-and-snake policy Jesus promoted (Matthew 10:16-33) means Christians are to be wary of Trojan horses rather than spit venom, and to be vulnerable and without guile in doing good to God's enemies (Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:9-21). Christian scholarship is not counter-espionage, but is giving away faith, love, and hope in concrete deeds of hard-won theoretical insight--which will be radically different from the accepted patterns of much North American life.

(3) During the 23 years I was given the uncommon privilege to serve as Senior Member in Philosophical Aesthetics (1971, 1972-1995), the little Institute for Christian Studies hosted various world-renown scholars. Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) came to lead an interdisciplinary seminar at ICS (25 November 1975) after some of us had worked through *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer was a genial discussant in the colloquium setting. During a brief lull he was asked, "Professor, who is your favourite preSocratic philosopher?" Without a moment hesitation Gadamer said, "Heraklit!" (Heraclitus)--which brought quiet smiles of recognition to every Vollenhovia historian of philosophy present.

Atheist aesthetician Mikel Dufrenne (1910-95) from France gave us three days in January 1977 (so it was possible to lend him to the University of Toronto for a few sessions too). I had arranged accommodations for Dufrenne at St. Mikes, but that had to be changed. Nobody told me Dufrenne usually traveled with a mistress. The Windsor Arms hotel was a lot more expensive. At my farewell private meal with them there I gave Dufrenne my book on *The Greatest Song, in critique of Solomon*.

Al Wolters was able to arrange a brief visit by the almost 80 year old Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905-1999) for 40 minutes, *in camera* with Senior and Junior Members (5 October 1983). Each Senior Member had prepared a question for this towering--as tall as Karl Jaspers--giant of Renaissance studies. As he prepared to leave, having sensed the drift of our varied questions, Kristeller gave impromptu a moving testimony to his Humanist faith in erudition, the riches of languages, the heritage of the West, and how it all could save humankind from chaos, tinged with just a plaintive grace note of sadness that the many Centres for Renaissance and Reformation Studies his work had generated around the world still had not yet brought in the millenium of truly human humanity, but it will come....

And I must mention the vital European Dutch connection: Sander Griffioen taught fruitfully among us for three years (1976-79) and dealt with the catch-22 economics of "dependency theories" before it was fashionable. Johann van der Hoeven taught a full half year at ICS (January-May 1978) and could treat the intricacies of phenomenology, Adorno and Habermas, with amazing, succinct christian clarity. And the princely Bob Goudzwaard came again and again in the 1980s to refresh us with wisdom--

This third cluster of anecdotes only makes the point that world-renowned scholars are humans behind their books, who have head colds, disappointments, foibles. And the Institute for Christian Studies has been a good place to do rigorous study as sinful saintly humans, whose

ing within a particular, robust philosophical faith-thought tradition stemming from the historical Reformation, developed especially in the Netherlands in the line of Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper.

My hope is that ICS remain steadfastly philosophical in orientation as we explore specific areas of knowledge, and not be tempted to take a "theological" shortcut. The Reformational tradition since Dooyeweerd and K.J. Popma needs to sort out better the place of systematic dogmatic theology in the university encyclopedia of theoretical studies. But it would be a categorial mistake, in my judgment, ever to opt for a "theological aesthetics," "a theology of history," "a theological cultural theory," as if you can more christianly understand the nature of artistry, the disjunctive connections critical to history, the complexity of humans' shaping ways-of-life by finessing such matters *per obscurius* in a doctrine of God as Trinity or by analogy to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Rather, because Senior Members in every discipline at the ICS are communally committed to Scripturally directed learning, they need to have the Bible as their mother tongue, so that God's Word written in which one is steeped spires the leading ideas which proleptically shape conception of the field of creatural affairs being examined and continually whisper flexible contours for the direction, criteria and methods one uses to structure our interpretations of God's creational revelation. This biblical orientation toward creation is the non-parochial, innovative genius of the Reformational christian philosophical tradition, which is the *raison d'être* of the ICS. Alasdair MacIntyre's brilliant Gifford lectures (1988) need to be supplemented. Next to the three rival versions of philosophical enquiry he delineates--the cumulative Encyclopedic Rationality, the subversive Nietzschean Genealogy, and his own stable Thomist tradition--there is a fourth alternative: the Reformational creational position.² With this unifying christian philosophical voice giving context to our specialized theoretical services, ready to grapple with Gadamer, Dufrenne, Kristeller and whomever, ICS will be able to follow through on its historical rationale for existence as a community of the faithful thoughtfully, thankfully entertaining angels unaware.

So, in our globalized cultural climate worldwide of self-preserving privilege, fragmentation, and bullied resentment, where laity with the mind of Christ and educated leaders with sacrificial love for the ignorant and misled are more and more scarce, I pray that you Senior Members and Junior Members, Administrative leaders, the ICS Senate, Trustees, the long-suffering people of God, and our academic friends, continue to be joyfully obedient in the task of advanced, Scripturally directed learning, sustained by God's Holy Spirit, aware of and encouraged by the historical cloud of witnesses to the Lord's provident care for what happens at 229 College Street in Toronto, and carry on this critical, delicate enterprise of passing on alive to a new generation a distinct tradition of christian philosophical bread for the world.

With thanks to Maureen Oulton and Yvonne Barber for digging up dates and data from old volumes of archival minutes, to Bob Sweetman for suggesting relevant reading, and to Inès Seerveld for tempering my remarks.

Calvin Seerveld, 15 November 2002 AD

1. Rev. Louis Tamminga originated with John Olthuis a magazine called *Christian Vanguard* while Tamminga led the Christian Action Foundation from a pastorate in Alberta. The Christian Action Foundation merged into work the Christian Labour Association of Canada was doing in its struggle with the Canadian government to become recognized; and the *Christian Vanguard* evolved into a differentiated *Vanguard* in November 1970. Robert Lee Carvill and Bert Witvoet were the first co-editors of *Vanguard* until December 1972. Carvill became editor from December 1972 until February 1974. A committee was in charge after leukemia struck Robert Carvill who died 15 August 1974. After Bonnie Green served as editor from May 1975 until October 1977, Bert Witvoet became editor from June 1978 until December 1981. (Information supplied by Bert Witvoet)

2. *The Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) Alasdair

MacIntyre typifies comport well with the three major orientations D.H.Th. Vollenhoven lays out for possible philosophical conceptions: *Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Geneticistic melioristic progressivism, Mythologizing recapitulating philosophy, and Schematist *philosophia perennis*).

In her ICS inaugural (2000) Adrienne Dengerink-Chaplin coined the good term "creational aesthetics" for philosophical aesthetic theory that has the Reformational christian bent.