

Columns

Technically Speaking



Derek Schuurman

The academy regained



A colleague at Redeemer University College recently shared the following parable: *There once was an architect who designed a beautiful building. The construction crew came in, dug a big hole and laid a perfect foundation. Then the crew left. A crowd gathered to admire the beautiful foundation.*

End of story.

He shared this proverb as a means to ask a provocative question: Is Christian scholarship and teaching like this? Many of our Christian schools have wonderful mission statements, declaring that that all our learning and teaching is based in a Christian perspective. We all enthusiastically celebrate these statements, but what are we doing to really build on these foundational statements? Are Christian schools simply Christians educating or are we also providing distinctively Christian education?

Ever since I read Al Wolters' *Creation Regained*, I have been inspired by the wide kingdom vision it sketches. In the late 1960s and 70s, many young disciples of Evan Runner, Herman Dooyeweerd and others became excited about Reformational thinking and its implications. Al Wolters once wrote that "ideas have legs," but at time I've wondered why the legs of the Reformational movement haven't taken us further.

Nevertheless, Reformational thinking has borne fruit in several Christian Colleges and organizations and has taken root in far-flung places like South Korea, Brazil and South Africa. Redeemer University College, now over 30 years old, is one example of an institution that was hatched within the context of Reformational thinking. For myself, it has provided a wonderful foundation for thinking about faith and computer technology. Other colleagues have fruitfully applied Reformational thinking to fields as diverse as political science, bioethics and mathematics.

Iron sharpens iron

For several years now, a small yet determined band of professors at Redeemer has met every few weeks to read and discuss Reformational philosophy. The "Reformational philosophy group," as it became known, has waded through a series of readings about Dooyeweerd and Reformational philosophy. Like iron sharpening iron, we have been trying to work out together the implications for our various disciplines.

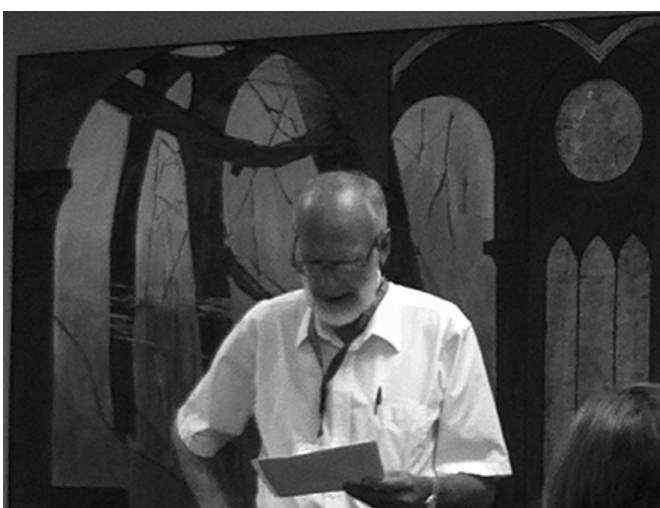
At one point we asked ourselves what we ought to do

with all our readings and discussion, and the idea of a book started to emerge. We began to envision a book that would explore a Reformed perspective with a chapter devoted to each of various academic disciplines. Since then, several more professors from a variety of other Christian institutions have joined the project. The project now includes authors from disciplines as various as music, psychology, engineering, political science, marketing, social work, literature, physics and mathematics. The vast span of the disciplines involved is itself a testimony to the practical applications of Reformational philosophy. Much work remains to be done and a publisher has yet to found, but the book project has steadily moved forward.

On July 28 several people gathered together for a small conference named after the tentative title of the book: *Academy Regained* (in a nod to Wolters' well-known book). The book contributors each made presentations on how they were applying Reformational thinking in their various disciplines. The day ended with a hearty dinner and was concluded with a short pep talk by Al Wolters. He encouraged us to stand firm, because our labour in the Lord is not in vain. He gave us these three comments in closing:

- 1) The reform of the academy is a long process, but it is a worthwhile endeavour.
- 2) Success needs to be measured by *obedience*, rather than success in changing the academy.
- 3) Like the plumb line in the hands of Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:10), God will see to it that his work will bear fruit in its time – whether that be now or in the new heavens and earth.

Like all of creation, the academy, too, needs to be regained. In the end, the work of renewal in all areas is the work of the Lord, and we are called to faithfully build on the foundations provided by Scripture. This September, as Christian teachers across the country return to their classrooms, let us not only admire those foundations but also continue to build on them. ✂



VALERIE SIKKEMA

Al Wolters speaking at the Academy Regained conference.

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