Alvin Plantinga, Colin Kaepernick, and the Wide Load of Faith

This past Sunday marked two notable celebrations of religious moral conscience. They could hardly have been more different from each other: one required business attire of all attendees, while the other encouraged sports jerseys and face paint. And yet, each of them affirmed the courageous acts of a moral exemplar who spoke out in the language of faith against institutional forms of injustice.

At the fancier of the two events, a few-hundred admirers gathered at the Field Museum in Chicago to cheer on philosopher Alvin Plantinga as he received the 2017 Templeton Prize. The award honored Plantinga for showing that theistic assumptions and concepts are not irrational starting points in philosophy. His arguments became a big deal in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, because, in earlier decades, philosophy departments worldwide had fallen under the control of logical positivists, who considered religious ideas to be meaningless and therefore ill-suited for consideration in professional scholarship. The speakers at the ceremony described how Plantinga’s work dealt a concussive blow to the academic establishment and opened the doors of analytic philosophy to people of faith.

Meanwhile, just across East McFetridge Drive in Chicago, members of the Bears and Steelers knelt on Soldier Field to honor the moral courage of Colin Kaepernick, the (former) NFL quarterback who last year began kneeling during “The Star-Spangled Banner” in a silent protest against police brutality. Kaepernick points to his Christian faith as the motivation and justification for his public display of moral dissent. Nevertheless, his actions have met with public scorn from those who would rather question his motives and patriotism than recognize the validity and urgency of his statement. But this past Sunday, through demonstrations like the one at Soldier Field, NFL teams nationwide imitated his posture of prayerful protest and affirmed his moral integrity.

On the face of it, Plantinga and Kaepernick were at the center of two very dissimilar events. But at a deeper level, there is an important connection. Both individuals were criticized for not “staying in their lanes.” Plantinga was told to keep theology out of philosophy. Kaepernick was told to keep politics out of the sports arena. Both responded defiantly, insisting that the moral demands of the Christian faith are too expansive to be contained in the narrowly tracked categories of cultural role-playing. Their common message is one to remember: Staying in your lane will be impossible if your vehicle (your worldview) doesn’t fit between the lines.

At Calvin College, this lesson should translate into an educational goal of preparing students to recognize the moral weight and breadth of the Christian faith; to steer thoughtfully through the artificially marked-out world of specialized disciplines, sciences, and professions; and perhaps to help redraw the lines, so that moral conscience gets the space it needs in its pursuit of truth and justice.

Matt Walhout, dean for research and scholarship

Welcome New Faculty

Derek Schuurman has joined the Computer Science Department in a tenure-track position, beginning this fall. Derek completed his undergrad and master’s degrees in electrical engineering at the University of Waterloo. After working in industry for a number of years, he returned to school to complete a PhD at McMaster University, in Hamilton, in the area of robotics and computer vision. His current research interests include issues related to faith and technology. Most recently, he was a professor of computer science at Redeemer University, and he was a visiting associate professor at Dordt College during the ’15–’16 academic year.

Kelly DuBois grew up in southern California and graduated from Calvin College with a BS in biotechnology. She studied cell biology and genetics of neglected tropical parasitic diseases while she did her PhD at the University of California, San Francisco, and during postdoctoral work at the University of Cambridge. She has been
teaching at in the Biology department at Calvin part-time in order to spend time with her three young boys and is now excited for the opportunity to join the biology faculty in a tenure-track position.

**Maggie Caulfield**, her husband, and two-year-old son moved to Grand Rapids in July of 2016 and have enjoyed putting down roots. Both she and her husband completed their PhD studies at Northwestern University and then followed up with fellowships at the Mayo Clinic. She has primarily focused her post-undergraduate studies on the pathogenic immune responses in central nervous system demyelinating diseases such as multiple sclerosis. She is in a tenure-track position in the Biology Department.

### From the Faculty Activity Reports


Be sure to fill out your Faculty Activity Reports regularly. If you have questions, see the FAQ page.

**Note:** FEN activities are called Intercultural Competency Professional Development Activities and are reported via this link. Contact diversity@calvin.edu if you have questions.

### Cross-cultural Professional Development Opportunity

On October 16, as part of UnLearn Week, there will be a panel discussion based on Chris Meehan’s book *Growing Pains: How Racial Struggles Changed a Church and a School*. In anticipation of this event, Michelle Loyd-Paige is sponsoring a lunchtime discussion of the book on October 12 from 12:00 noon to 1:00 pm. The first ten interested people will be supplied a book. Contact Michelle if interested. This counts as CCPD credit.

### Coming Up on Campus

**Monday, October 2**
- Chapel. Reginald Smith, “Old Testament Characters: Joseph.” 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Tuesday, October 3**
- Chapel. Morning prayer with Kurt Schaefer. 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Wednesday, October 4**
- Chapel. Jazz prayers, with the Calvin Jazz Combo. 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Thursday, October 5**
- Chapel. Sounds of gospel worship. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- [Kuyers Institute conference](#), 7:15 p.m. (Plenary 1), Prince Conference Center.

**Friday, October 6**
- [Kuyers Institute conference](#), 8:00 a.m., Prince Conference Center.
- Calvin Center for Innovation in Business event. Live2Lead, 9:00 a.m., CFAC auditorium
- Chapel. Student worship team. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Biology seminar. Brian Harris (Green Collar Farms LLC), “Indoor Vertical Farming in Grand Rapids.” 1:30 p.m., SB 010
- Christian Perspectives in Science seminar. Henry Schaefer III, “Faith of a Scientist.” 3:30 p.m., SB 110