



Research Matters



by LAMBERT
ZUIDERVAART

“Ideas have legs.” That’s what Al Wolters told the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) at its annual convention in 1975. According to Wolters, ICS’s historian of philosophy at the time, “Ideas...are not disembodied abstractions of some ivory-tower academic.” They are “real spiritual forces that go somewhere...and have a widespread effect on our...everyday lives.”

“Ideas *grow* legs,” ICS’s professor of philosophical aesthetics, Cal Seerveld, suggested a few years later. Addressing the 1978 family conference of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS), he said, “The best ideas are highly invisible.” That’s why the scholarship ICS pursues is like “open-heart, open-mind surgery.” It implants “a new horizon” for human beings who undergo it.

Wolters’ and Seerveld’s comments give a Canadian echo to Abraham Kuyper’s ringing appeal when he inaugurated the Free University in Amsterdam a century earlier: “Who would say that ideas are unimportant? Ideas shape public opinion; that opinion, the sense of justice; and that sense, the thawing or congealing of spiritual life.” H. Evan Runner shared Kuyper’s conviction. Introducing his 1959 lectures at the

first Unionville study conference sponsored by the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (ARSS), Runner called attention to “the really desperate need...here in Canada for *a centre of scholarly research and university instruction of our own* where...we can quite naturally and happily go from Scripture to our field of research and back again.” From this vision the AACS and ICS arose, proving in practice that ideas do indeed both grow and have legs.

Academic research is central to the idea of reformational scholarship that Runner articulated. It’s no accident that he mentions both “research” and “instruction” but mentions research first. Reformational scholarship requires research that is not simply “pedagogical” or “practical” in intent. It is so, of course, that many of our studies take place in seminars and tutorials – ICS trains graduate students. Our studies also occur in various forms of public outreach, from the ARSS’s study conferences and the AACS’s family conferences to ICS’s more recent worldview conferences. ICS aspires to be a “University for the People.” Sustaining these efforts, however, are research and publications that address a scholarly audience. While sometimes “highly invisible,” as Seerveld says, the ideas developed in such academic research can produce a “new horizon” for both the academy and society.

How does this happen? Reformational scholarship has always aimed at the “inner reformation of the sciences” or, in contemporary language, the “inner transformation of academic fields.” It’s not enough to bring sincerity to one’s academic studies. Nor does it suffice to test existing theories according to one’s religious beliefs. Rather, we need to rethink entire fields of study from

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the inside out, focusing on the hidden ideas that establish their direction. This is what Seerveld set out to do in the philosophy of the arts and culture and what Henk Hart pursued in ontology and epistemology. Such research will be philosophical and interdisciplinary. It will be exploratory and collaborative. And, given the conviction that human life and society flourish when they follow God's instruction and guidance, such research will address normative questions of justice, solidarity, earth-keeping, and the like. Nothing less will satisfy the calling to help transform academic fields from the inside out.

This isn't an easy task. Let me give an example. Public debates in the late 1980s convinced me that hidden assumptions about culture, economics, and politics had derailed discussions about government funding for the arts. It took me more than 20 years to track down those assumptions, figure out how standard social theories support them, and propose an alternative in a book titled *Art in Public*. If I hadn't been in conversation with Seerveld, Hart, and others, I likely would have given

up – or I might not have noticed the hidden assumptions in the first place. It will take many years after the book appears this fall to see whether my effort to continue Seerveld's work helps transform philosophical aesthetics. It may take even longer, perhaps beyond my lifetime, to find out whether the work has influenced public opinion or helped reshape public policy.

Path-setting academic research takes time. It requires persistence.

It calls for congenial partners and sympathetic critics. It also needs to circulate among other scholars if it's to bear fruit. That's why ICS has decided to launch a new research centre. The Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics will provide focus and support for ICS's academic research. It will also bring other scholars into our academic conversations. ICS recognizes that research matters. For the matters of research are matters of the heart. ●



Lambert Zuidervaat with Clarence Joldersma of Calvin College at the Truth Matters conference in August

Giving to ICS

There are many ways you can help sustain ICS into the future. Several such opportunities are described below.

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You reap several benefits by making a bequest:

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For more information about giving to ICS contact John O'Leary (joleary@icscanada.edu).

Between the Sacred and the Secular: Research and Teaching at ICS

At ICS, research and teaching have always been intimately intertwined. From the start, ICS has been conceived as a research *community* in which older and younger scholars have engaged collaboratively – hence the designations “senior member” and “junior member.” The increased opportunities offered by the Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics will do much to strengthen this culture of learning at ICS.

Research is little more than a systematic process of learning; where learning is at the heart of an educational institution, teaching is its servant. Teaching isn't the transmission of knowledge from connoisseur to novice, but a shared voyage of discovery with the more experienced at the helm and all participants equally responsible to listen for God's voice in developing their own understanding.

Parker Palmer says we should put experience of “the grace of great things” at the centre of education: we need to recover the sacredness that is the mystery at the heart of existence. But in *The Grace of Great Things: Reclaiming the Sacred in Knowing, Teaching, and Learning*, he highlights the dangers that arise “when the sacred gets attached to the wrong things”: “We need to have the courage to jump into the midst of that mess. The Nazi story, the murderousness of the Third Reich, is not only about the attachment of the sacred to the wrong things by a political system of power; it's also about German higher education refusing to get involved with those kinds of issues, distancing itself, clinging to logic and data and objectivism as a way of staying disengaged from the social reality of its time. We can no longer afford a system of education that refuses to get engaged with the mess. We must be willing to join life where people live it. And they live



by DOUG
BLOMBERG

it at this complicated intersection of the sacred and the secular.”

Although we wouldn't frame the matter in precisely Palmer's terms, the resonances are evident. The research centre will enable our learning and teaching to focus more explicitly on “debates about social justice, economic sustainability, cultural and religious pluralism, democratic solidarity, environmental earth-keeping, and the like,” as ICS professor Lambert Zuidervaart's report on the research centre states.

Former British prime minister

Tony Blair insists issues of faith will be to the 21st century what issues of political ideology were to the 20th. ICS is founded on the conviction that faith is central to life and to the academic enterprise. The research centre enables us to enter boldly into a public arena in which the recognition of this reality has become widespread. And it will contribute not only to our existing degree programs, but also significantly to our continuing education program as we work alongside Christians facing the dilemmas of daily life. ●

A Storied Tradition: The History of Research at ICS



by RONNIE SHUKER

Over its 43 years of existence, ICS has survived internal turmoil, external pressure, and more than one financial faceplant. Now, after weathering the tsunami of the global recession through some serious cutbacks, it's changing tactics to survive the second decade of the millennium.

For the first time, ICS is going to make research front and centre with the new Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics, set to open its doors next September. It's a revolutionary approach for a school that has never given prominence to research. But if you look at the evolution of research through ICS's history, you'll see the research centre is an idea whose time has come.

Being a privately funded graduate school of philosophy and theology in the Reformed tradition put ICS on the fringe of the postsecondary playground from the get-go in 1967. But that was also a time of great social upheaval, particularly among young people, and ICS became a magnet for students sick of the mainstream academy.

"We were a centre for very intelligent, disaffected students, and it was wonderful," said Cal Seerveld, ICS emeritus professor of aesthetics (1972-95). "They were exceptional students. We had them come from all over the place and you never knew who was going to show up next. It was really quite exciting. It wasn't a regular graduate school."

These students in the early years of the Institute didn't want any of the fancy fixings of your usual university. They wanted an alternative approach and a different ethos, and they greatly affected the way teaching, studying, and especially research were done at ICS.

"ICS opened at the beginning of the counterculture movement, and that meant this issue of research and where it fit was also heavily influenced by students' expectations," said Henk Hart, ICS emeritus professor of systematic philosophy (1967-2001). "The original students at ICS came as people feeling themselves part of the counterculture. They were not interested in a degree; they were not interested in writing exams; they were interested in none of the hated

formalities of higher education. They just wanted to get at it, no matter what the consequences."

It sounds a little like the inmates were running the asylum, but it was with these unconventional and unorthodox students that research at ICS took place. And rather than discourage this environment, ICS encouraged it by partnering professors with students in research, calling professors "senior members" and students "junior members." Over time, ICS built a home for scholars and scholars-in-training where they could carry out research communally and with a shared commitment.

"In each room of the house we tried to set up a project that fit in with the ethos as a whole," said Jim Olthuis, ICS emeritus professor of philosophical theology (1968-2004). "There was an art room in the house, so Cal's research would be ordered in terms of the aesthetics of the house; Henk's was more in terms of the place of reason, science, and logic; and then I would be doing ethics and how it would work out in marriage, family, friendship, and theology. But there was always this common underlying ethos."

The wellspring of this ethos was the work of Reformed scholars Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven from the Free University of Amsterdam. Seerveld, Hart, Olthuis, and their colleagues sought to bring this work to the broader community in North America.

"I worked more with Vollenhoven," Seerveld said. "Henk worked more with Dooyeweerd. Jim kind of bridged us, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. . . . There were different, nuanced ways one worked with the tradition. We were trying to be a community working from the same perspective and then introducing it to the professional societies that we were members of. . . . We were trying ourselves to be a community and then export it."



From left to right, Henk Hart, Jim Olthuis, and Cal Seerveld

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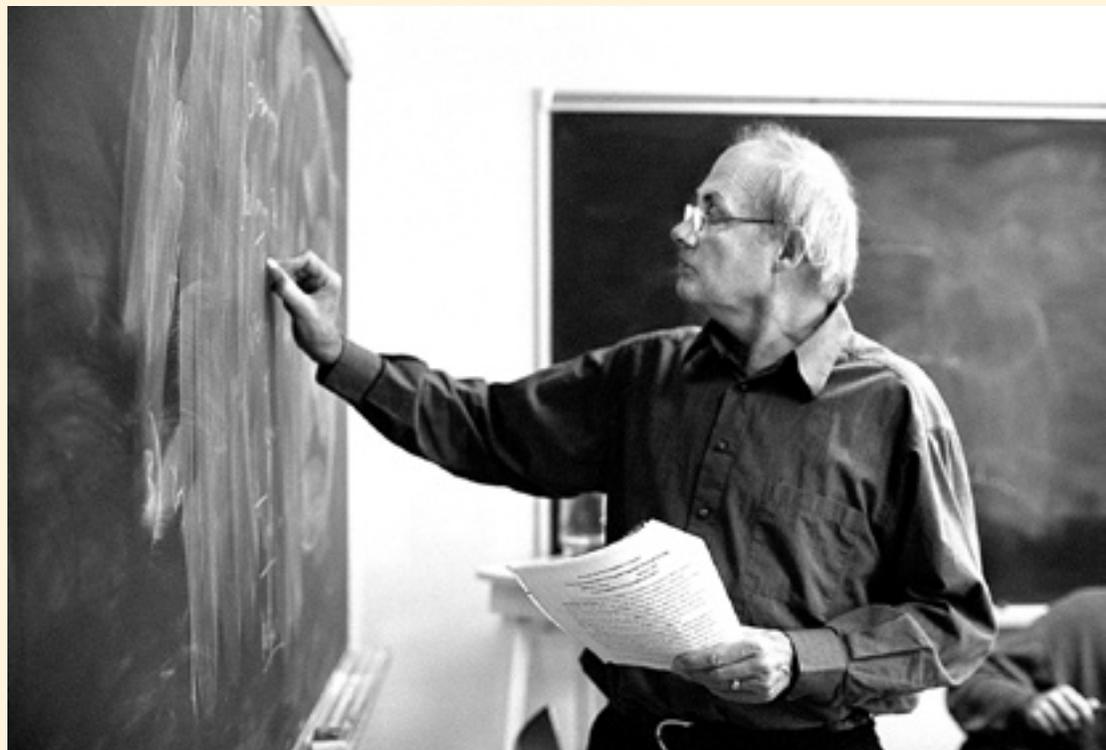
It was out of this communal spirit that the interdisciplinary seminar was born. It became one of the trademarks of the Institute and remains an exemplar of ICS's research style. It's mandatory not only for junior but also for senior members – a practice unheard of at other graduate schools. Each year the seminar either tackles a current hot-button topic or builds on the research of one or more senior members. The past two seminars, for example, came out of ICS professor of philosophy Lambert Zuidervaart's research for his book *Artistic Truth*, and culminated in ICS's most recent conference, called "Truth Matters."

Research has always been an important part of what ICS does, but also the least visible because it has never had much structure. Eventually ICS formalized its teaching – with grades, degrees, and accreditation – and is now formalizing its research. But in keeping with the spirit and history of ICS, it's doing so in a different way.

According to Hart, research at ICS has always remained both important and in need of continual adjustment. "For the first time ICS has resolved the tensions and stresses around this issue with a very radical approach to it," he said. "ICS is going to become a research institute. ...It's placing an emphasis on research that it has never had."

The research centre will be a place for ICS senior and junior members to do research both individually and collaboratively, and will welcome scholars and students outside ICS to take part in that research and help shape it.

"I like the open house arrangement for the research centre," Olthuis said. "The open house means it's our house; we're organizing things in a certain way. But it's an *open* house, and we're inviting other people to come with all their other



perspectives. We'll be good hosts and we hope to invite them in so they feel at home. But it doesn't mean it's not our house, and it doesn't mean the walls are closed and everybody has to kowtow."

The research centre is the newest chapter in ICS's history, one that remains to be written. Whether it becomes the latest chapter in a

continuing story or the last chapter of a storied existence hinges on the success of the centre.

"Either it'll put ICS on the map in a way we've never been before, or it'll be the end of ICS," Hart said. "It's very daring." ●

Ronnie Shuker is the editor of Perspective and a doctoral student at ICS.

Why We Write: A Reflection on Scholarship and the Christian Life

by JON
STANLEY

We all have different ways of gearing up for and ringing in the “new year,” which begins officially in September for those of us who live according to the rhythms of the academic calendar. And it seems to me that part of any good spiritual practice of preparation for a new academic year includes revisiting the question of vocation: of the manifold ways possible to love God and neighbour, why

have those of us who consider ourselves scholars or scholars-in-training chosen a life of research, writing, and teaching?

One of the ways I’m revisiting that question this year is by returning to an essay by C.S. Lewis that I first read nearly 10 years ago. The essay is entitled “Learning in War-Time” and was originally given as a sermon to a group of Oxford students in the fall of 1939. Lewis begins his sermon like this: “A university is a

society for the pursuit of learning. As students, you will be expected to make yourselves...into philosophers, scientists, scholars, critics, or historians. And at first sight this seems to be an odd thing to do during a great war...Is it not like fiddling while Rome burns?”

What follows is a Christian case for the academic vocation in any time, including wartime. Warning against either the elevation or denigration of the scholarly task, Lewis suggests the “intellectual life is not the only road to God, nor the safest, but we do find it to be a road,” and for those who feel called to walk this road “the learned life then is...a duty.”

I’d recommend Lewis’ essay to any Christian, regardless of their vocation. However, I’m returning to it this year because it was specifically a grace to me during a season of vocational discernment, freeing me (in spite of my own self-doubt about my abilities) to take my first steps down the road to which I believed I’d been called. To return to Lewis’ essay, then, is to return to a crucial chapter in the story of my becoming a Christian scholar. The robust vision of Christian scholarship that is not only justified during wartime, but that might serve to end all wars – “turning swords into ploughshares” – is what brought me to ICS. I knew I’d be apprenticed into a tradition that understands the scholarly task as a labour of love, and trusts every scholarly labour done in covenant with God will bless God’s world.

Why do we teach, research, and write? Because we love to, and because it’s one venerable and strategic way we might participate in the performance of God’s will “on earth as in heaven” – in the church, the academy, and the broader culture. ●

Jon Stanley is a doctoral student at ICS and works as a psychotherapist at Christian Counselling Services in Toronto.



Conference Wrap-Up: Truth Matters

What happens when you put about 90 people – from atheist, agnostic, Catholic, Protestant and specifically Reformed persuasions, three different continents, and a variety of backgrounds including philosophy, theology, political theory, science, engineering, nursing, literature, and business – and place them all in a room together to talk about truth? As it turns out, good things.

On August 18–20, ICS hosted the latest in a series of quadrilateral conferences co-sponsored with Calvin College, Dordt College, and the VU University Amsterdam. Supported by a generous grant from the Priscilla and Stanford Reid Trust, this year's conference had as its theme "Truth Matters," and was a resounding success.

The concept of "truth," or even "Truth," has recently come under attack from many different perspectives. Knowing what constitutes truth and what it means for life and scholarship has become more dif-

ficult. Yet despite this skepticism there remains a desire to develop a notion of truth that responds to the criticism against it. Coming out of that desire, this conference aimed to begin a conversation re-conceptualizing truth within the academy and more broadly.

Three keynote speakers set up general outlines for the conference. Dr. Gerrit Glas, a practising psychiatrist who also holds the Dooyeweerd chair in Christian Philosophy at the VU University Amsterdam, was the first keynote, speaking on "Truth, Truthfulness, and the I-Self Relationship." Dr. Matt Walhout, professor of physics and dean of research and scholarship at Calvin College, then delivered his keynote address, titled "The Jelly and the Shot: Laying down the Law for Pragmatism in Physics." Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart, professor of philosophy at ICS, gave the final keynote, "How Not to be an Anti-Realist." In addition to the keynotes there were two plenary sessions, one on truth in teaching and the other on truth and wisdom,

hosting papers by ICS professor of education Doug Blomberg and ICS emeritus professor of aesthetics Cal Seerveld.

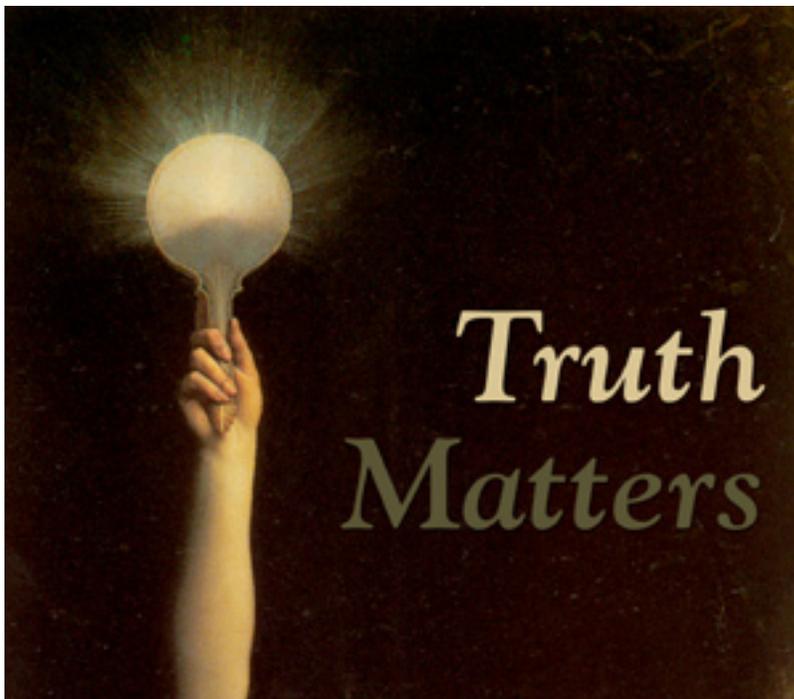
The concurrent sessions too sparked a good deal of discussion, on subjects ranging from truth as understood by medieval figures to truth's social use or the concept of truth in areas suffering great violence. There were papers given on truth as it is being explored in the analytic tradition, literature, and film. Truth in politics or political interaction was the theme of several papers, as well as truth in scientific practice. In addition, several papers explored truth from the biblical wisdom tradition. The presenters came from all across Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, and as far away as South Korea. Attendees were equally diverse, making for a truly inter-traditional and interdisciplinary discussion that many characterized as illuminating, exciting, and friendly.

A banquet on the second night allowed conferees to socialize, spending time with old friends and meeting new people. Discussions across tables were animated as people from different backgrounds and beliefs intermingled and conversed, discussing topics the sessions had raised. During the meal, Zuidervaart handed out two graduate student awards and also introduced ICS's new research centre, the Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics, to open in the fall of 2011. News of the research centre was well received, by scholars both from within the Reformed tradition and from other traditions. All in all, the conference turned out well and has already spurred members to talk about what we can do next. ●

Allyson Carr was the local arrangements chair for Truth Matters and is a doctoral student at ICS.



by ALLYSON CARR





Perspective can now
be viewed online. See
www.icscanada.edu/perspective/

ICS Launches Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics

The Board of Trustees of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) is pleased to announce the establishment of a new research centre at ICS, due to open formally in September, 2011. Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart, an accomplished and highly regarded scholar at ICS, has agreed to be its founding Director.

The name “Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics” reflects the nature of its research – dedicated to the intersection of interdisciplinary philosophy, inter-religious dialogue, and social ethics. The centre opens doors to collaborative research among ICS faculty and scholars at partner institutions such as the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto, the VU University Amsterdam, and sister institutions in the Reformed tradition, resulting in new publications, lecture series, symposia, workshops, conferences, and other events.

Research has always been an important part of the faculty’s work at ICS; the research centre takes it to a new level, giving it greater support and visibility. The centre will welcome other academics and public figures into our scholarship, enriching our work by having new voices join our conversations and showing the relevance of our research for

questions of social justice, economic sustainability, cultural and religious pluralism, democratic solidarity, environmental earth-keeping, and the like.

In establishing the Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics, ICS highlights the research component of its three-fold mission as graduate school, research centre, and source of continuing education for people of faith and a broader public. Teaching and mentoring our students will be richer for the increased research interaction with other scholars and institutions; our “University for the People” outreach will ensure research continues to be grounded and tested by the everyday conundrums faced by ordinary people.

Research by its very nature requires longer-term, multi-year funding. Funding for the organization and launch of the centre will be provided by the legacy gift from the late Lowell Andreas, a decades-long ICS supporter before his death in 2009. We believe the research centre will be attractive to foundations and others seeking to invest in the products of original collaborative research from the faith tradition that ICS and its partners represent. ●

For more information about ICS, visit our website www.icscanada.edu.

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