

Introduction to This Issue

As a literary organ of Western Theological Seminary, *Reformed Review* obviously has a vested interest in the contributions faculty members of that seminary make to church and academy. So periodically we invite faculty members to write for us articles on subjects related to their respective areas of teaching and research. Late 2006 we decided that the recent hires at the seminary furnished another good occasion to devote an issue of the journal to these contributions. We did this in the belief that the seminary has succeeded in assembling a good group of new scholars who deserve to be introduced to the wider world through our publication.

Cynthia Holder Rich joined Western in 2003, after fourteen years in parish ministry and six in mission services in Madagascar, to serve as associate professor of continuing theological education. Among her areas of teaching and research include learning disabilities in the lives of youth and young adults, women in ministry, multicultural ministry, and healing divisions in the worldwide body of Christ. Her essay "Seeking a Contextual "Cry From the Heart of Faith:" The Belhar Confession and Race in the U.S." featured here gives poignant expression to her concern for racial reconciliation within the body of Christ.

The Belhar Confession emerged out of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Under the direction of Allan Boesak, it was drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) out of the conviction that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the very truth of the gospel was at stake. In April 1994 the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), composed of the former bodies of the DRMC and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) adopted Belhar as one of its standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism). Subsequently, the URCSA asked the Reformed Church in America (RCA), as well as other Reformed churches worldwide to adopt Belhar as a confessional standard. Rich points out that the response of the RCA to this request has been well under way now. At its 2007 General Synod meeting, the denomination acted to adopt the Belhar Confession for a two-year period of study and discernment. If the General Synod in 2009 moves to adopt Belhar, it will become the fourth confessional standard of the denomination.

Should the RCA make this move? Does the North American context in which most RCA congregations are located bear any resemblance to that out of which Belhar came? Is racism in this context an issue against which the church must urgently take a stand? Rich gives informed and carefully considered responses to these questions, in an effort, as she expresses it, "to assist in the dialogue occurring at this time" in the RCA.

Keith Derrick joined Western in April 2007 as coordinator of continuing education with "Journey." In his essay "A Journey of Continuing Education at Western Theological Seminary," Derrick gives us the story of Journey, the new name recently given to the "center for the continuing education of the church" at Western. Derrick introduces our readers to the creative team behind Journey, describes the values and vision that shape and animate their work, and gives a chronology of continuing education at Western, a chronology that will suggest to our readers that the seminary has made it a priority for a long time to extend its educational resources to those outside its own walls. Derrick concludes his article with a series of interviews with four faculty members who have played an instrumental role in continuing education at the seminary. The momentum that Journey has generated in the churches is reflected in Derrick's energetic prose, which captures for us the mood we wish to convey through our featured contributors. The new faculty members have infused into the seminary a fresh vitality that is finding expression in new and imaginative approaches to the challenges and tasks that currently confront the church of Jesus Christ. We are gratified to offer here the contributions from two of these faculty members. Through them we hope that our readers will gain a deeper appreciation for the good things that are happening at Western Theological Seminary.

– Christopher Dorn