

## The Embarrassment of Riches

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s I gaze around me at this welcome crowd of witnesses, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty and administrative colleagues, distinguished guests, alumni and students, friends and family, and as I think about this occasion — which I scarcely would have considered possible a year ago — I feel a sense of joy and excitement as together we embark upon a new administration, a new stage, in the life of Calvin College. When I proposed the theme of these inaugural activities — “Keeping

a new job, and this job didn't fit my immediate plans. Yet, here we are today. And, upon reflection, I am

fostered the rise of the Dutch Golden Age of the seventeenth century. He describes how this small Calvinistic country became the wealthiest on earth and the “arbiter of the world” by embracing the unresolved dilemma, the enduring tension, between being wealthy and being moral. He concludes that it was the wrestling with the dilemma, the embracing, if you will, of this tension that produced an era of flourishing art and education, republican government, tolerance, and public works projects of unprecedented scale.

Schama identifies what he terms “the moral geography of the Dutch mind” in this tension-packed passage:

[It was] adrift between the fear of the deluge and the hope of moral salvage, in the tidal ebb and flow between worldliness and homeliness, between the gratification of appetite and its denial, between the conditional consecration of wealth and perdition in its surfeit.... To be Dutch... was to live in a perpetual pr

5. *The tension between motivating students and faculty through public recognition of achievement or promise of material rewards and the Calvin community's preference for an egalitarian community environment, modesty, and inner motivation.* The embrace of this tension will help us to avoid the

Former Calvin President William Spoelhof — my president — tells a story that beautifully illustrates what I have been talking about. He begins by recalling his childhood years in New Jersey, growing up in a home with blue Delft tiles hanging on the walls, bearing proverbs. On one of them is painted, “Van het concert des levens krijgt niemand een program.” In English it means “For the concert of life no one gets a program.” This is Dr. Spoelhof’s favorite proverb, but he wisely calls it a “half-good” proverb. For in the concert of life, although there may be no program, there is a Conductor. Dr. Spoelhof understands very well the underlying tension of this proverb. God is the Conductor, and every now and then God allows us to hear, and even play, some grace notes.

This ceremony is a formal acknowledgment of a transition, the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Calvin College. I wish to begin not with the end in mind, but with agreement on the quality and character that our lives and actions should have. I trust, God helping us, that it will be said of this administration that we acted boldly to safeguard what is distinctive and most valuable about this college. I trust, and expect, that our legacy will be one of embracing the tensions, of having the intellectual,