



Research, ecumene and Dutch Herring

International PhD students
visit Kampen

Every spring, the TU Kampen|Utrecht opens its doors to the ATSF programme: *Advanced Theological Studies Fellowship*. During this programme, international PhD students of theology are guests at the university for a month, to learn from the TU and each other. Because of the pandemic, the programme could not take place in 2020 and 2021, but it could take place again this year, fortunately. Tapio Leinonen (33) en Zachary Seals (25) visited the Theological University in Kampen in June 2022.

Text: Matthijs van der Stoep Images: Daan van der Horst

The two doctoral students have very different backgrounds. Tapio comes from Finland and is doing his PhD at the University of Helsinki. Next to this, he has already been active as a minister in the Lutheran church for 9 years. Tapio is studying the theology of Maarten Luther; in particular, he is focussed on Luther's perception of the Biblical figure of Moses. Based on this, he hopes to say something about honest and just Christian leadership.

Zachary comes from the United States and is doing his PhD at the University of Geneva. He, too, is studying the Reformation. Zachary is focussing on the history of reflection on the so-called *beatific vision* (seeing God's face) in the Reformed tradition. 'In other words: what does it mean to see God?' The thinking concerning the *beatific vision* is associated, in particular, with the Roman Catholic church, but, according to Zachary, it also had a place with the Calvinist reformers. 'There was continuity throughout the Reformation', he explains: reformers built on the old church fathers.

Zachary thinks that his research can build bridges between various traditions. 'It increases the oecumenical awareness.' Tapio recognises this: 'Protestants such as Luther did not appear out of thin air. It is, in fact, important to show that these Protestants had the same roots as the Roman Catholics. That can bring

churches closer together.' During their stay in Kampen, Zachary and Tapio have been able to profit well from the similarities between their research subjects, they read Luther and Calvin together and were able to learn a lot from each other's traditions.

The connection with Kampen

Tapio had already been to Kampen once before. 'I worked for a year as a minister at the Finnish Seaman's Mission in Rotterdam.' In that period, he got to know Sabine Hiebsch, connected to the TU as a professor by special appointment for Luther and the history of (Dutch) Lutheranism. When he visited her at the university, the plans for his PhD study were ready but he had not yet started on it. On Sabine Hiebsch's

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advice, Tapio made plans to return to Kampen soon as a participant in the ATSF. But unfortunately, 'the Covid-19 virus had other plans.' So he was glad that the programme was able to continue this year at last. 'I had long looked forward to visiting Kampen again'.

‘Nowhere else in the world would I have been able to find someone who could answer my questions so well’

Zachary had never been to Kampen, but he was already, contrary to Tapio, familiar with the Kamper theological tradition. For Zachary, Kampen is the city where Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) once taught, a theologian who inspired him. Just before the application deadline for ATSF, he was invited to the programme by an American PhD candidate at the TU. He did not have to think about it for long. Zachary, a *Reformed Baptist*

himself, hoped to enter into dialogue with others from the Calvinist tradition. ‘But it also seemed nice to be somewhere else for a bit and further my writing process.’

Experiences

I interview Tapio and Zachary when it is almost time for them to leave the Netherlands. How have they experienced their time here? Tapio is very satisfied. He has done what he had planned to do. But, ‘best of all were the experiences I could not have foreseen: that you all of a sudden read a book or have a conversation that helps you get some completely new ideas. That can happen at home in Finland, too, but in a different context you are more open to new ideas.’ The Reformed character of the university challenged him to place his Lutheran tradition in perspective. Zachary, too, has enjoyed his time here. ‘My time in Kampen was an excellent balance between social, cultural and academic shaping. As a result, there was room for thought. It was also great to be able to present my own research to lecturers and researchers at the TU.’ In particular, Zachary has had valuable discussions with Dolf te Velde, a university senior lecturer of Systematic Theology. ‘Nowhere else in the world I have been able to find someone who could answer my questions so well.’

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Tapio and Zachary also enjoyed the city of Kampen and the Netherlands immensely. With others from the TU, they visited Schokland, Urk and Elburg. They themselves also stopped by in Zwolle and Leiden. They attended an English-spoken lecture on the Reformation in the Netherlands in this last city. Zachary also participated in the *Opwekking* conference and made new contacts there. Last, but not least, they also enjoyed the Dutch food. ‘I ate a syrup waffle every day,’ Zachary states proudly. Tapio adds: ‘Because it was June, we were able to enjoy the Dutch herring quite often.’

