

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Through the Dark Valley of the Shadow of Death ... to Christmas

by J. Mark Beach



“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (Matthew 1:17).

This verse, from Matthew’s Gospel, perhaps seems like a strange way to introduce us to the Messiah. But, think about it, who doesn’t like a family tree, especially when the family tree is yours? Matthew’s genealogy (vss. 1-17) constitutes a covenantal family tree, and it calls

our attention to three principal landmarks on the arduous road to Christmas. The first of these landmarks takes us to Abraham and the promise of the covenant of grace—God will create a people from scratch so that Christ may come. The second landmark takes us to David and the triumph of God’s covenant kingship—here we witness God’s healing reign over His people, and here we are given a glimpse of the royal Christ to come. The third landmark, however, takes us to the Exile and God’s covenant promise in crisis—indeed, God’s covenant and His people look like a chopped down tree, a dead stump. Now what? What remains of the Christ to come? The road to Christmas travels along the dark valley of the shadow of death and now seems to have reached a dead-end. From Abraham as the springboard, to David as apogee, the glory, the roads descend into the gloomy pit of exile—even after the return from captivity the remnant that was Israel suffers centuries of humiliation, oppression, and darkness.

But Matthew isn’t finished; he continues: “and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah” (Matt. 1:16). That is the same as quoting the prophet Isaiah. “Behold, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light ... on them a light has dawned” (Isa. 9:2). Matthew’s genealogy, with its redemptive landmarks, places the red-laser dot on Jesus’ Davidic ancestry, and in targeting the bull’s-eye of the Davidic line, we are showed the One greater than David (see 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isaiah 11), even as that One is greater than Abraham or Moses or John the Baptist (John 8:58; John 1:17; Matt. 11:11).

Christmas commences not when Mary is visited by an angel, not when the Magi see a star, not when an inn-keeper turns away an all-too-pregnant woman and her husband, or when angelic hosts are sounding the most amazing birth announcement in human history. Christmas commences with a promise made to another turned away couple, Adam and Eve—a promise about her Seed (Gen. 3:15).

Christmas emerges from a dead stump—Look! a tender shoot from Jesse’s (King David’s) stem. Through the dark valley of the shadow of death Christmas dawns. But, then again, God’s grace is known to pierce dark places.

Board Report

by J. Mark Beach

The Board of Trustees met at the seminary for its annual fall meeting on October 4 and 5, 2012. The results of Board membership election were as follows: Elected to serve another term—Rev. Richard Kuiken, Rev. Kim Kuhfuss, Rev. Bill Pols, and Mr. Jack Huizinga; elected to a first term—Rev. John Hilbelink, Mr. Harlyn Jacobsma, and Dr. Steven Werkema. The latter group of men, as new Board members, each signed the Form of Subscription. Prior to the meeting, these individuals attended an orientation session with Dr. Venema, Rev. Richard Kuiken, and Keith LeMahieu.

Election of Board officers resulted in the election of Rev. Richard Kuiken as President; Rev. Bill Pols as Vice-President; Rev. Jon Blair as Secretary; Mr. Jeff Huizenga as Treasurer; and Mr. Charles Dykstra as Vice-All. The following are some highlights of the Board meeting: (1) Professor Mark Vander Hart’s request for a Sabbatical (from February 1 to July 31, 2013) was granted; (2) Professors Strange and Minger reported that they are each making good progress on their Ph.D. dissertations; (3) the annual audit shows that Mid-America’s financial statements conform to U.S. accepted accounting principles, and there are no concerns with internal controls; (4) the approval of a Statement of Institutional Effectiveness; (5) an expression of thanks to Mrs. Florence Kooiman for thirty years of service to the school; and (6) grateful acknowledgement of positive feedback from TRACS and ATS regarding Mid-America’s accreditation through each association.

The Board wishes to thank all the supporters and constituents of Mid-America for their financial support and prayers.

Seeing Christ in the Song of Songs



On November 6-7 the Mid-America community heard Dr. Iain Duguid from Grove City College (Grove City, Pennsylvania) give three special Fall

Lectures that focused on “Preaching Christ from the Song of Songs.”

Prof. Duguid first set the context of how to approach wisdom literature. The “fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” To avoid moralism, one must remember that the entire Old Testament speaks of Christ. Proverbs are more closely related to law than to gospel. As such, in the human experience we fail to live in wisdom. Only Christ is the answer to that failure: He places His law’s wisdom in our hearts.

Prof. Duguid then tackled the delicate “greatest Song.” The Song of Songs is about the beauty of marital passion. But everything in its own time: waiting for the right time of love is important. Still, sex and marriage are never just that. There is something beyond the immediacy of marital passion. All human lovers fail, but there is a greater Lover, Jesus Christ, who loves His own Bride passionately. Divine love gives up everything for the Beloved! Our craving for perfect love is answered by Christ, who brings His Bride to His marriage supper (Rev. 19).

Prof. Duguid’s lectures were instructive in many ways. His insights were very well-received by those who had the pleasure of hearing them.

The Mid-America Reformed Seminary community extends its deepest sympathy to Rachel and Josiah Luttjeboer whose infant son Isaac Benjamin passed away on October 16, 2012. Rachel serves the seminary as Secretary of Media and Publications.

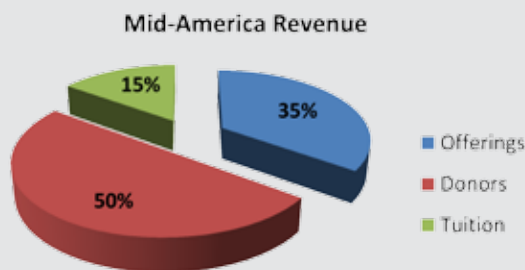
Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Psalm 116:15

Getting Ready to Ring in the New by Keith Le Mahieu

Our lives are a mist that appear for a little while and then vanish. (James 4:14) Do you remember the fuss over Y2K? It is almost inconceivable that it has been thirteen years since the world fretted that computer glitches would send us back to the pre-industrial age. But here we are getting ready to begin 2013.

Year-end brings an inevitable time of reflection and planning – how did we do and where are we going? Good stewardship requires we ask these questions. How do we know if we’ve been good stewards if we have no idea where we’ve been or if we have no plan for how to manage the resources we anticipate God will place in our care?

Mid-America operates on an annual budget in the neighborhood of \$1.5 million. Seminary administrators and the Board of Trustees carefully oversee the implementation of this budget on your behalf. (Did you know that you are an owner of Mid-America by virtue of your financial support and thus membership in the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Association?) Operating revenue is derived from three main sources – tuition, church support and individual giving. The following graph shows the approximate breakdown of these sources:



Mid-America’s revenue stream fluctuates widely depending on the time of the year. Approximately 20-25% of Mid-America’s annual revenue is usually received around the new year as individuals do year-end reflection and planning. A strong financial year-end for the seminary is crucial for replenishing the seminary’s cash reserves and preparing for the lean months in the coming year. To meet our year-end goal we need to receive approximately \$250,000 - \$300,000. That is a lot of money, but as God’s people reflect on His blessings and respond to these blessings we can begin the coming year with confidence. We recognize there are many places your charitable giving will benefit the cause of Christ’s kingdom, but the church, and by extension the seminary, are key to the faithful preaching of the Word of God and thus the well-being of these other institutions. Will you give generously so that Mid-America can continue to provide a high level of preparation for pastors who will shepherd God’s people?

When we think of giving, we usually think about a gift of cash, but Mid-America can accept gifts that come in many forms. As I write this, there is much political uncertainty, but it appears tax rates will increase – we just don’t know by how much and for whom. If you have appreciated property such as land, a second home, shares in stock or mutual funds, or the like, gifting all or a portion of that appreciated property to Mid-America before the end of the year may be a very wise financial move. If you farm, a gift of commodities should be considered, especially if you do not itemize. Grain prices are very strong and many areas of the country saw surprising yields despite the drought. Farmers who take a standard deduction receive no tax benefit from a charitable deduction, but a gift of commodities may help farmers avoid federal and state income and self-employment taxes while still claiming a business deduction for production cost of corn or soybeans, for example. For more information on the tax benefits and procedure for making a gift of appreciated assets or commodities, please feel free to contact me.



Dear Friends of Mid-America,

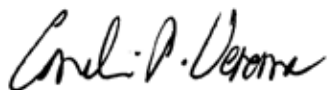
It is my privilege at the end of this year of our Lord, 2012, to extend greetings to you and your loved ones on behalf of the staff, faculty, and students of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. We are very thankful for you, our supporters, and the generous way in which you continue to support our ministry on behalf of the Lord and His church. I remain convinced that the training of students for the gospel ministry is an indispensable part of the church's calling to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Your partnership with us in this work is one that we cherish.

On a recent trip to the beautiful country of New Zealand, I was reminded of the way our work of preparing students for the gospel ministry is bearing fruit by God's grace. Among the Reformed churches in New Zealand, five of our alumni are serving congregations on the North and South islands. In addition, one student from the Reformed Churches in New Zealand is presently studying at Mid-America, and another student from these churches hopes to join him next year. Though the Reformed churches in New Zealand are relatively few in number, their lampstands continue to burn brightly as they testify to the glory of Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord of the nations. Witnessing the work of the Lord among these churches was a special blessing for me personally, since my father served as a missionary among them in the early days when the Reformed churches in New Zealand were first planted. To witness the growth and continued vitality of these churches some fifty-plus years later (and to meet a few dear brothers and sisters who remember those days of "small things") was a great blessing for me and the others who accompanied me.

As you consider your giving to kingdom causes at the end of this year, please remember the work of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in a special way. Due to the economic instability and distress of recent years, we have struggled at times to obtain the revenue needed to cover our operating expenses. Please remember the important work in which we are engaged, and give as you are able by the Lord's blessing.

May the Lord grant you and yours a blessed celebration of the birth of our Savior, and a prosperous new year in His service.

Cordially in Christ,



Cornelis P. Venema
President
Mid-America Reformed Seminary

Reconsidering Romans

This Fall Prof. Mininger offered an evening class for the community that carefully studied Romans 1-3 against the background of those offering a “New Perspective” on Paul that criticizes traditional, Reformed interpretation. Using the work of Herman Ridderbos as a starting point, Prof. Mininger presented a summary of his dissertation research to show the great strengths of traditional, Reformed interpretation as well as areas where it can be strengthened and improved. On the one hand, the Reformation got Paul’s soteriology (ordo salutis) exactly right concerning justification by grace alone through faith alone, which is essential to a proper understanding of the gospel. On the other hand, traditional Reformed interpretation can be strengthened by recognizing Paul’s deep, continuing concern throughout Romans 1:16-3:26, for

the objective revelation of God’s attributes in history (historia salutis). Paul signals the crucial importance of historical revelation to his argument when he announces the revelation of God’s righteousness (Rom. 1:17) and then describes how this revelation comes about in Christ’s cross (Rom. 3:21-26). In between, he also surveys the visible revelation of such things as God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18-32), God’s righteous judgment (2:5-10), and the power of sin (3:9-20), which are all displayed in the condition of various people he describes. By surveying visible revelation, with its salvific center in what Christ’s cross reveals, Paul proves his claim that the gospel is indeed God’s power unto salvation for all through faith alone (Rom. 1:16). By design, reading Paul’s argument in this way helps readers understand it more completely and



also gives a more persuasive response to the objections of recent critics. In the end, many who attended expressed appreciation for how the course helped them better understand parts of Paul’s argument that had confused them before and so take in the argument’s cogency and power.



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Interim Elective
January 3-23

“Christian Spirituality”
Taught by Dr. Craig Troxel
Pastor of the Bethel Presbyterian Church

The purpose of this course is to acquaint students with the distinctive contributions of the Reformed faith to Christian spirituality, and to see the relationship of the Reformed faith to the piety that dominates much of contemporary and post-modern evangelicalism. Ultimately the goal is to encourage students toward a richer communion with God in faith and life, through the gracious work of God’s Spirit, and the means and community of God’s grace.

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229 Seminary Drive | Dyer, Indiana 46311-1069

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Fax: 219-864-2410
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