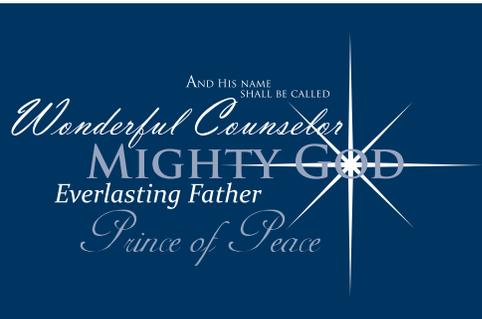


THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

“The Mother Promise of Genesis 3:15” A Christmas Meditation

by Dr. Cornelis Venema



“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

The advent or coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of time always reminds me of the wonderful words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:20: “For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God

for His glory.” The birth of the Savior confirms unmistakably that the covenant Lord is steadfast in His faithfulness, always true to His Word of promise which cannot be broken.

In Christian tradition, Genesis 3:15 is viewed as the first of the promises of the coming of the Savior. It is the “mother promise” (Protovangelium) not only in the sense that it is the first in a series of promises but also in the sense that it gives birth to every promise of God’s saving purposes in Christ that follows in the course of redemptive history. Although this promise is enriched throughout the course of God’s gracious dealings with His people in the Old Testament, it reveals some of the most profound features of God’s good purposes in Christ.

In the first place, we are reminded by this promise that the story of redemption told in Scripture is from first to last a story of God’s marvelous and undeserved grace. In its original context, Genesis 3:15 stands in stark relief against the dark background of the fall of the human race in Adam. The verses preceding pronounce God’s curse upon the serpent and the inescapable judgment that creaturely sin and disobedience deserve. But just when it appears the power of sin and rebellion within God’s creation-kingdom have triumphed, God announces good news: the “seed” of the woman will triumph over the arch-enemy of God (and all his allies) and reverse the consequences of the fall!

In the second place, the mother promise of Genesis 3:15 speaks of a saving enmity that God will establish between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Rather than acquiesce to Adam’s rebellion and unholy alliance with God’s arch-enemy, the Lord of the covenant declares that He will restore a people to fellowship with Himself. Though subsequent history will be marked by an antithesis between God’s redeemed people and those who remain under the tyranny of the evil one, this antithesis will serve the purposes of God’s grace, to gather a new humanity to Himself through the seed of the woman who is the Christ, the last and greater Adam (Rom. 5:18-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49).

And in the third place, the mother promise of Genesis 3:15 teaches us that God’s work of salvation in Christ will entail nothing less than a restoration and perfection of human life in a renewed creation. The curse will be displaced by blessing. Fellowship with God will be restored. A new humanity will begin to enjoy the fullness of life in communion with God. God’s grace in Christ will ultimately triumph. The devil and all his works will be defeated. Creation itself will be regained.

Is it any wonder that all God’s people find themselves uttering their “Amen to God for His glory,” the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth (John 1:14-18).

End of the Year Report

by Glenda Mathes

Mid-America’s past year included many notable highlights. Soon after some Seminary personnel returned from New Zealand, where Dr. Venema spoke 12 times within nine days, Mid-America hosted NAPARC’s annual meeting November 12-15.

January’s interim included Dr. Craig Troxel’s class on Reformed spirituality along with the usual Hebrew. In February, Mid-America held two promotional events in California. During Professor Vander Hart’s sabbatical, the Seminary utilized additional adjunct instructors, including OPC pastors Brent Evans and Danny Patterson, and URCNA pastors Danny Hyde and Paul Ipema as well as Dr. Fritz Harms (Ripon, CA, chaplain) and Ph.D. student Paul Cable.

A promotional dinner was held at Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA, on April 13. An April 16 student conference featured Dr. David Murray on “Depression in the Church.” The OPC’s Timothy Conference took place on campus from April 18-19.

Twelve seniors graduated on May 16. Ten students served summer assignments in the US while another served in England. Adjunct Dr. Nicholas Piotrowski taught summer Greek. Professor Vander Hart made his seventh teaching trip to Latvia. Mid-America hosted URCNA Pastors’ and Missions conferences in June. In August, 13 new students arrived on campus.

On October 3, the Seminary celebrated Dr. Venema’s 25 and Rev. Vander Hart’s 30 years of service. A promotional dinner was held in Grand Rapids, MI, on October 17. Dr. Jason Van Vliet lectured on the Heidelberg Catechism from November 13-14. An Illiana promotional dinner was held in Munster, IN, on November 14 (see articles in this issue on these events).

Please join us in thanking God for blessing Mid-America with so many unique opportunities during the past year.

What is Your Immigration Status?

by Keith Le Mahieu



As we approach the end of 2013, I am reminded how quickly the years roll on. I am also reminded that, as the writer of Hebrews 11 says, we are “strangers and exiles on the earth.” All men are strangers and exiles, whether or not they have been given spiritual eyes to see that reality. What a blessing it is to have been shown this and to desire a homeland not our own and a city prepared for us by God!

How should such wonderful knowledge engage us? Certainly it should cause us to hold on loosely to the things of this world. That is what strangers and exiles do. This year was special for me as my wife and I had the opportunity to spend two weeks abroad. This was our first time in Europe, and the trip exceeded

our expectations. While it was wonderful, we were anxious to return home because in the end we knew we were strangers in a land not our own. We did not desire to hold tightly to the things we enjoyed while we were there.

Christ calls us to be and make disciples. Being disciples includes the recognition that we are indeed strangers and exiles, redeemed from slavery to the devil, the flesh, and the world. The call to make disciples involves walking with each other in love as well as carrying the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have not yet seen that they are strangers and exiles on this earth. This gospel is radically transformational, although I’m not sure we comprehend just how radically transformational it really is. The more we understand this truth, the more enthusiastic we will be for the gospel and its power of salvation to everyone who believes.

God uses the “folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” God uses preaching to radically transform us to see our true identity as strangers and exiles. He gives us Christ, and then He continues to give us Christ through the preaching of the Word. He gives us preachers to bring Christ (the pearl of greatest price) to us and to a lost and dying world. Entrusting this gift to “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” should, at the very least, be near the top of what is essential.

The final two months of each calendar year are critical to the financial health of Mid-America. Roughly 80% of the Seminary’s annual operating revenue is derived from the generous giving of churches and individuals. Over 20% of that giving historically occurs at year-end. Conversely, charitable giving during the summer months is usually significantly less than at other times of the year. To mitigate these fluctuations, Mid-America has established a reserve fund that carries the Seminary through the lean months. This reserve fund is built up at the end of the year when a surplus of gifts is received, and is used to carry the Seminary through the lean months when revenue does not equal expenses.

We appeal to our friends in a special way at year-end because without your generosity at year-end we would be unable to continue operations through the summer months. We need to raise approximately \$300,000 through the end of the year to keep Mid-America on firm financial ground. Would you prayerfully consider how you might give generously to help us reach our goal?

If you are 70½ or older, don’t forget about the IRA Charitable Rollover provision which is set to expire on December 31. This legislation allows you to make a tax-free distribution of up to \$100,000 directly from your individual retirement account. Donating from your IRA may be a way to significantly reduce your tax burden while benefitting Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Board Report

by Rev. Jon Blair

The Board of Trustees met for its annual fall meeting on October 3-4. Officers elected were: Rev. Rich Kuiken as President; Rev. Bill Pols as Vice-President; Rev. Jon Blair as Secretary; Mr. Jeff Huizenga as Treasurer; and Rev. Ron Scheuers as Vice-All. The Board ratified the re-elections of Rev. Ed Marcusse and Rev. Henry Van Olst as well as the elections of Mr. Scott De Jong, Mr. Doug Disselkoen, and Mr. Ben Sybesma.

A significant step taken by the Board was to declare an opening for a sixth full-time faculty appointment in the area of Old Testament Studies. The Faculty Development Committee will oversee this process.

In addition to regular committee reports, the Board received correspondence from Rev. Mark Vander Hart regarding his recent sabbatical, as well as from Rev. Marcus Mininger regarding the progress of his doctrinal dissertation.

Mr. Henry Doorn, Executive Director of the Barnabas Foundation, presented a report on the work of the Foundation and planned giving in relation to the Seminary.

A highlight for Board members was a dinner and program in honor of Dr. Venema and his twenty-five years of faithful service at the Seminary. As always, Seminary hospitality was excellent, and the Board appreciated all the work of faculty and staff. The meetings and fellowship were enjoyable and fruitful, giving cause again for much thanksgiving to the Lord.



Rev. Rich Kuiken welcomes new Board members: Mr. Ben Sybesma, Mr. Scott DeJong & Mr. Doug Disselkoen

Fall Lectures by Dr. Cornelis Venema

Every fall the Seminary community welcomes a guest speaker to campus for the Fall Lecture Series. This year we welcomed Dr. Jason Van Vliet, Professor of Dogmatology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, November 13-14, Dr. Van Vliet gave three lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism to the Seminary community.

Since this year marks the 450th anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, Dr. Van Vliet's lectures were intended to commemorate the catechism and emphasize its continued usefulness for Reformed churches throughout the world.

In his first lecture, "Why Frederick III wanted the Heidelberg Catechism ... and why we should, too," Dr. Van Vliet focused upon the occasion for the publication of the catechism. Elector Frederick III, in his preface to the catechism, identified at least three purposes for its preparation: 1) to unite the churches of the Palatinate in their understanding of the Christian faith; 2) to instruct the young people in the churches and schools in the teaching of Scripture; and 3) to provide a rule for the preaching of the Word of God in the churches.

In his second lecture, "The Comforted 'I' in the Heidelberg Catechism," Dr. Van Vliet presented a fascinating account of the warm, personal character of the catechism. Throughout the 129 Q & A's of the catechism, there is a frequent use of first person singular pronouns.

And in his third lecture, "The Threefold Office of Christ and the Christian in the Heidelberg Catechism," Dr. Van Vliet offered an account of the occasion for the inclusion of this doctrine in the catechism, its Scriptural basis, and its importance to an understanding of the honor and responsibility that is given to Christians who share in Christ's anointing.

The Seminary community enjoyed Dr. Van Vliet's lectures and is grateful for the opportunity to benefit from his teaching.



Breaking Bread with Good Friends by Keith Le Mahieu



Mid-America Reformed Seminary hosted two promotional dinners this fall for friends of the seminary. On October 17, faculty, students and staff traveled to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for an evening of fine fellowship and food at The Bluff Banquet and Conference Center. On November 14, the Seminary hosted a second dinner at the Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Munster, Indiana.

The emphasis for these two dinners was on the ministry Mid-America has to international students. Proceeds from the dinners were used to help underwrite the International Student Aid Fund which provides financial resources to bring international students to Mid-America.

The Mid-America "Glee Club," organized this fall, participated by performing several numbers. At the Michigan dinner students performed "Of the Father's Love Begotten" and "Lord Speak to Me that I May Speak." At the Indiana dinner they sang "Oh For a Thousand Tongues to Sing." At both dinners the students ended the evening with "The Church's One Foundation," asking those in attendance to join them on the last two stanzas.

Promotional dinners are an opportunity for Mid-America to introduce friends of the Seminary to various students, some of whom are from half-way around the world. Albert Couperus, a second-year student from New Zealand, spoke about God's call to pursue the gospel ministry and how he and his family left his native country to study at Mid-America.

The centerpiece of the evening was a keynote address by Mid-America graduate Rev. Valentin Alpuche. Rev. Alpuche, a native of Mexico, is currently serving as the pastor of a Spanish-speaking church plant in Chicago Heights, Illinois. Rev. Alpuche and his wife Betty came to the United States in 2004 when he began his studies in the fall of that year. Upon graduation in 2007, Rev. Alpuche was licensed and called to serve as church planter for El Pacto de Gracia (Covenant of Grace). In his dinner address Rev. Alpuche stressed the need to preach the gospel with boldness and clarity to all people groups no matter their language or ethnicity. Rev. Alpuche spoke of the importance of schools that will properly prepare men for that task, and of his appreciation for the preparation he received at Mid-America.



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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Anniversary Celebrations by Glenda Mathes



To mark the anniversary of Dr. Cornel Venema's 25 years of service at Mid-America, about 55 people of the Seminary community, including several members of his family, gathered for a celebration dinner and program at the Munster Fine Arts Center on the evening of October 3.

Before honoring Dr. Venema, Board President Rev. Rich Kuiken surprised Professor Vander Hart by calling him forward to commemorate his 30 years of service. Rev. Kuiken read the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (from John 13) and complimented Rev. Vander Hart on performing his work at the Seminary with the “humble, self-sacrificing, ‘foot-washing’” Spirit of Christ.

Rev. Kuiken then commended Dr. Venema for his years of service and reflected on the search for the Seminary's first president. He admits to needing to pause due to emotion while reading 2 Timothy 2:1-7. He then related the text's analogies to Dr. Venema's work at Mid-America.

“Dr. Venema, the dedication, the discipline, and the devotion of a soldier, an athlete, and

a farmer well represent the dedication, the discipline, and the devotion which, by God's grace, you have brought to your 25 years of faithful and fruitful service to Mid-America Reformed Seminary,” he said. “And for this we give you our deepest thanks and appreciation, and for this we give God all the glory.”

Dr. Mark Beach read a tribute in honor of Dr. Venema and Professor Vander Hart narrated a Power Point presentation showcasing Seminary events and progress during Dr. Venema's 25 years. The assembled guests also enjoyed singing and fellowship together.

The Seminary presented an engraved pen to Professor Vander Hart and an engraved watch to Dr. Venema in honor of these milestones in their seminary careers.