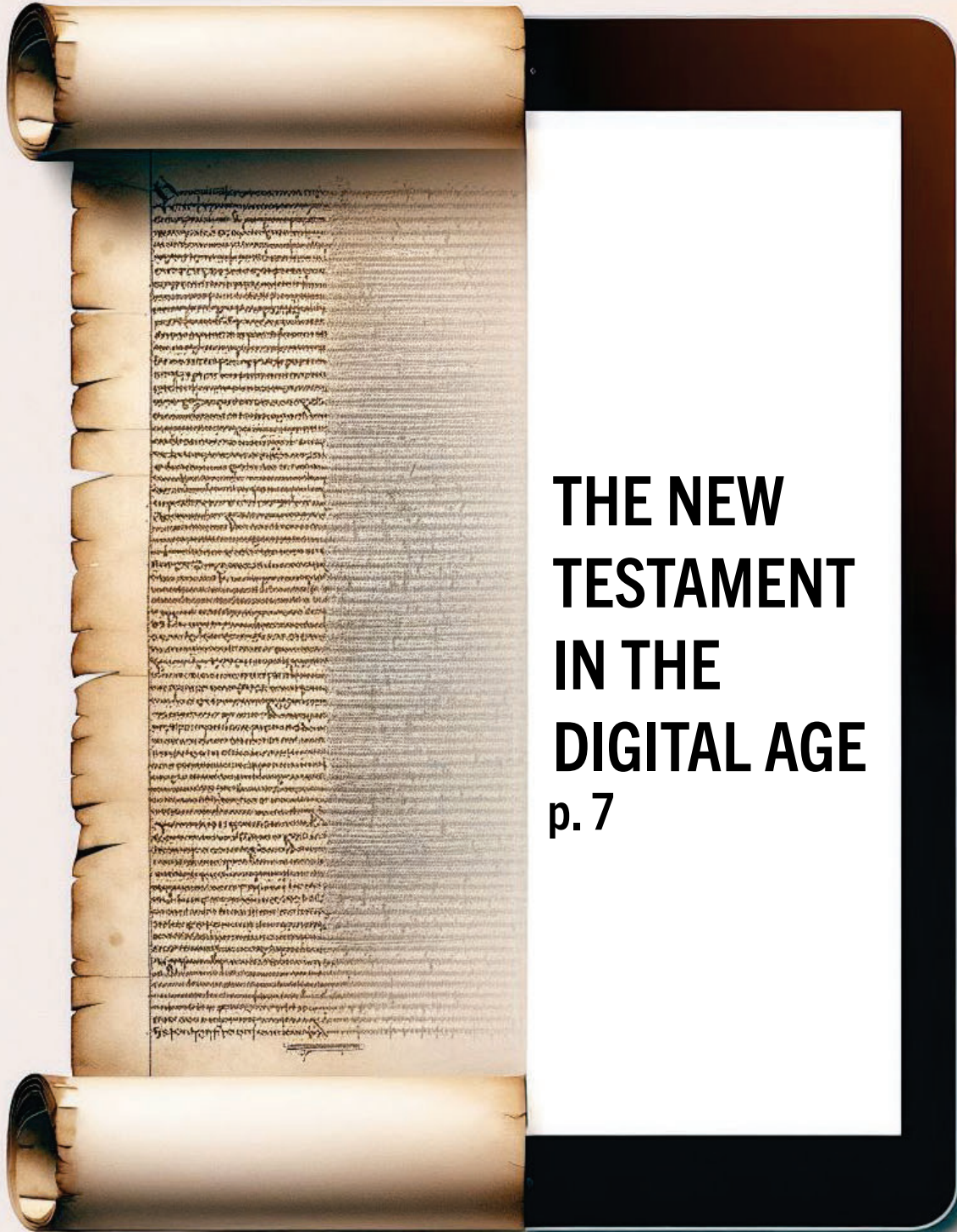


# the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

December 2024 | Volume 43 Number 2



## THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE p. 7



p. 5: The 2024 CME Conference

p. 10: Continuing Education in Service to the Church

# THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

## “ANOTHER LOOK AT THE GREATEST STORY”



As I pray for all of you this Advent season and thank God for your faithful support of Mid-America, the prologue to John's Gospel comes to mind. It gives us, in miniature form, the greatest story ever and the most profound thing ever written. Those eighteen verses describe for us the two most profound and fundamental mysteries conceivable: that of the Trinity and the Incarnation. And we see it right away in the first verse. John writes that the Word (Logos in Greek) was “in the beginning,” not created but always present and that this being was both with God (distinction within the Godhead, affirming the persons) and was God (identity within the divine essence, affirming the one God).

Now, this citation of Logos and its identification with and as the Second Person of the Blessed Holy Undivided Trinity is quite remarkable. Philo, a Hellenistic Jew in Alexandria in Jesus' time, had written about the Logos, an eternal divine principle in ancient Greek culture, as one finds references to it in Heraclitus, Aristotle, the Stoics, and others. Christians picked up on this reference from Philo, Greek philosophy, and here in John's Gospel: Justin Martyr, Origen, and others developed a distinct Logos Christology that appreciated the distinction of the persons within the Godhead, though marred in their construction by some tinges of subordinationism on the part of the Son.

Arius was so determined against the error of the modalists, who saw God as radically one, adopting different faces at different times to suit his purposes, that, in seeking to maintain the distinct identity of Jesus Christ as a person, he erred on the other side of the equation and denied Jesus' eternal deity, seeing Jesus as the highest created being (similar to Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the deity of Christ). This serious heresy necessitated, among other things, the calling of the First Council of Nicea (325), at which Arianism was condemned and the consubstantial deity of Christ affirmed. The church was not yet done with this question, but all the ecumenical councils that followed reaffirmed Nicea and further developed the Nicene Christology of Christ as two natures in one person, without confusion, change, division, or separation.

This theology about the person of Christ, formulated in the fourth and fifth centuries, has been in our passage all along. As noted above, John took a regnant notion in the Greek world about the Logos as a divine ordering principle and used it apologetically to tell the whole world that this eternal one, this divine Logos, was not a principle but a person: a person who could be described as “with God” and God himself. Here we see the mystery of the Trinity, to be sure, but we see even more.

We also see the mystery of the Incarnation, particularly in verse 14. Whatever may have surprised Greek thinkers in the claim that the Logos was a divine person, how much more would they have been surprised by the remarkable declaration that “the Word became flesh.” This ran counter to every Platonic and Gnostic sensibility, which had a low view of the body (seen as the “prison house of the soul”). The Greeks could never conceive of logos as enfleshed.

“The Word became flesh” is a kind of theological shot heard, ultimately, worldwide. This is the great Good News of the advent. Adam, and we in him, had sinned and done our worst, putting us at odds with an ineffably holy God. One was needed who could bridge the yawning gap between God and man. What was needed particularly was one who could be a mediator between God and man, who could answer to all man's deepest needs, by obeying where we never have and by paying for all our disobedience in his death on our behalf. Thus, came our Lord to save his people from their sin and to gather and perfect a worldwide body, his church. All that we do at this season is in service to that great truth and we are grateful for your partnership with us in this glorious kingdom labor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan D. Strange". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dr. Alan D. Strange  
Interim President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

# INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

## NEWS

- 4 Development Report: “The End is in Sight”
- 5 The 2024 CME Conference
- 5 Fall Board Report
- 6 Foundation for the Future
- 6 Steady as She Goes

## FEATURE

- 7 The New Testament in the Digital Age

## ALUMNI

- 10 Continuing Education in Service to the Church
- 11 Alumni Updates
- 11 Faculty Update: Rev. Paul Ipema

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Many who go off to seminary (particularly one who is training for the ministry) think that they’ve just begun the end of their academic journey. While this is true for some, others pursue advanced degrees – Th.M., D.Min., or Ph.D. to name a few. Some pursue academic interests outside the bounds of a formal degree, but their work still furthers their education. Then there’s the “so what,” or the “why” of it all. Do you really need to continue your education once you’ve “arrived” in the ministry?

Some of those questions are answered (though, not directly) in the pages that follow. As you read the rest of this issue, stop and think about the tremendous value there is to the church to have a well-trained pastor who furthers his education, whether formally or not. That may just help you identify the “so what.”

We hope you will benefit from catching up on the academic work being done by our graduates as you read through our feature article and alumni updates, as well as hearing about all the exciting things happening on campus. Now, turn the page, and enjoy!



**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement



December 2024  
Volume 43 Number 2

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### Our Mission

Mid-America Reformed Seminary seeks to serve Christ and His church by assisting in the formation and preparation of servants for the Kingdom of God. Our primary purpose is to train men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Guided by this focus, we are also committed to providing solid theological training for others among God’s people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

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# DEVELOPMENT REPORT: “THE END IS IN SIGHT”

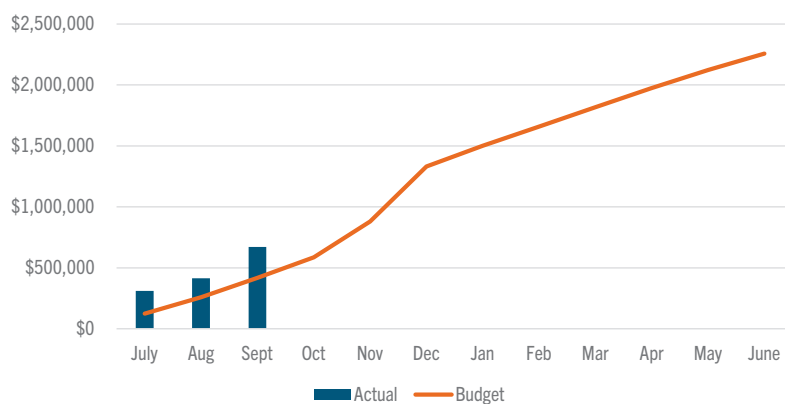
Isn't it interesting how certain annual milestones and calendar dates always seem to sneak up on us? Birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day (a particular struggle for me) – these days seemingly come out of nowhere, even if they've been on our calendars for months!

The same can be said about the end of the year. Summer flies by, the academic year begins, and day-to-day details carry on and slam us into the Christmas and New Year's season. Maybe you can relate. Go back to last year's resolutions – how are they coming along? Did you spend more time in the Word (I hope so!)? Did you lose the 40 lbs. you wanted? Did you vacation more? Did you grow your business or advance your career? Did you leave a larger Kingdom impact through your increased generosity? We're hurdling towards the end of the year, and while some of those things might be hard to pull off now (let me know how to lose 40 lbs. in just a few weeks please), some of those goals are still attainable. Let's focus on the last one I've listed.

It's a common refrain I hear repeatedly. “Mike, I wish I could do more.” First, know this: if the Lord has been pleased to sustain you through another year, and you've been faithful stewards with the resources the Lord has entrusted into your care, consider yourself blessed! Well done! As you give out of gratitude for all you have in Christ, you're making the kind of Kingdom impact you're being called to. Take joy in that! Second, consider how you might “do more” as your communicated desires express. I'm not one to offer investment advice (beyond the good returns your kindness is cultivating in our work), nor am I claiming that you can somehow earn God's favor through increased giving (you already have His favor, brother and sisters). There are ways, though, that you can maximize your impact and benefit your tax returns through careful, thoughtful stewardship.

Let's pause here to plug two different partner organizations of ours: The Barnabas Foundation (U.S.) and Christian Stewardship Services (Canada). Both esteemed Kingdom stewardship organizations can assist you in giving through donor advised funds (a super-smart option for maximizing tax deductions while retaining control over the administration of your gifts), estate planning, gifts of appreciated investments,

2024-25 General Fund Contributions Actual vs. Budget



property, or other non-cash options, and gifts that can provide you with income for life. I would be pleased to connect you with these organizations. You'll be amazed at the tools you have at your fingertips – use them!

A very popular and intelligent option that is being utilized increasingly is a gift directly from an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Many have seen great results as of late in their IRAs, and since there are distribution requirements anyway, consider gifting your required minimum distributions to the Seminary. When you give directly from your retirement account, it doesn't count as income, maximizing your tax benefits. Additionally, others are making pledges. This has been a popular way to help us fund our capital campaign, Foundation for the Future. We are \$2,000,000 and four months away from completion. As we continue to fund this campaign, we need your help! A multi-year pledge could be just the avenue you're looking for to give a larger gift over time rather than a one-time, immediate gift. Please remember that we are not financing this project, which means our need is very urgent. Please prayerfully consider how you can help. The time for bold, sacrificial giving is now.

This all just takes a bit of careful planning, anticipating that the end of the year is near. Let's do great things for the Kingdom together!

**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement

*To make or plan for a gift today, contact Michael Deckinga, VP of Advancement, at [mdeckinga@midamerica.edu](mailto:mdeckinga@midamerica.edu).*



# THE 2024 CME CONFERENCE

By the grace of God, the 2024 Center for Missions and Evangelism (CME) conference was a fruitful time of reflecting on the outward facing ministries of the church. This year, our theme was “Neighbors and Nations: Spreading the Gospel Near and Far.” To our great encouragement, our attendance this year was about double what it was last year; and particularly encouraging was the number of young people in attendance. This was not just a conference for pastors or theologians, but for lay people in the church as well who have a heart to see their neighbors won to Christ and to our local churches. And our speaker line up this year was fantastic!

Rev. Greg Bylsma opened the conference by helping us learn lesson from pastors in the past, as their voices still speak wisdom into the

present. Dr. Andrew Compton gave a very interesting and helpful speech on the use of story as a means of communicating the gospel in a world that is more and more disoriented. Dr. Alan Strange reminded us to keep our focus on Christ and his kingdom amid our every confused culture and dizzying distractions. Lloyd Kim was perhaps the hardest to listen to—as his talked removed nearly every excuse one could make for not wanting to be a missionary! Rev. Paul Murphy gave a fiery talk on the role of lay people in the life of the church and its gospel testimony. Dr. Rob Edwards spoke very helpfully on evangelism in an age of anxiety. The conference concluded with my talk on the Spirit speaking through the church until the end of the age.

Our hope and prayer are that those who came were edified in their evangelistic



task as a church. We are already looking forward to our conference next year and hope you will plan on being there!

**Eric Watkins**  
 Director of the Center for Missions and Evangelism

# FALL BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees met on October 10, convening for the first time in the newly finished Board Room of the east addition. Four Trustees joined by Zoom, two were out with excused absences, and one canceled due to illness.

President Rev. Todd Joling opened with scripture and prayer, and the Board welcomed Dr. Daniel Ragusa and Mr. Gerard Schouwenaar, new Trustees filling the seats of long-time Trustees Rev. Paul Murphy and Mr. Herb Sinke.

Undertaking the election of officers, President Rev. Todd Joling, Secretary Dr. Edwin Kreykes, Treasurer Mr. Bryan Holstrom, and Vice-All Rev. Harry Zekveld were re-elected; Rev. Ed Marcusse was elected Vice-President.

Making his first report as Interim President, Dr. Alan Strange painting a broad picture of the state of the Seminary, with subsequent reports providing additional depth. Of note:

**Enrollment** – Another year of solid

enrollment cross-denominationally. For 2025/2025, total enrollment stands at 32.

**Institutional Assessment** – Led by Dr. Marcus Mininger, Mid-America’s decadal assessment for accreditation will culminate with the onsite visit of the Association of Theological Schools’ delegates on October 28-31.

**Facilities Expansion** – The east expansion and renovation of the existing building completed in late August, and construction has resumed on the Chapel with a completion date of early spring 2025. To date, roughly \$3.8M has been spent of the anticipated \$5.7M project cost.

**Financial Position** – Mr. Dave Rambo from Eifel Rambo Advisory Group met with the Board, summarizing their report



by issuing the highest attestation to the integrity of our financial state.

**Center for Missions & Evangelism** – Final preparations are underway for the 2024 Fall CME Conference with keynotes by Rev. Paul Murphy, Dr. Lloyd Kim, & Dr. Robert Edwards. The Seminary is greatly encouraged by strong response and registrations.

The Board will reconvene for their next meeting on May 15, 2025.

**Dan Fletcher**  
 Vice-President of Operations

# FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

It's been a "beautiful mess" – our remodeling and campus expansion project, that is. Our anticipated completion timeframe is the end of February 2025, and while I'm confident our contractors will get it done by then, my hunch is that it will be completed just barely in time for some anticipated significant use in March 2025 (teaser: Kevin De Young is coming to campus for our Spring Lectures).

That kind of completion in relation to the schedule would be very consistent with how this project has been going. We took back occupancy just days before our students returned to campus in August. We put the finishing touches in our conference room the morning of our Trustees

meeting. In short, we've had what we need, when we needed it – never too far in advance, but always on time.

The same can be said of our funding. By God's grace, you've supplied us with the necessary gifts to keep up with our draw schedule. To date, we've spent \$3.75 million on this project, and we have another \$2 million to go. Friends, we need to raise the additional funds to see our project through to completion. It's time to make bold, sacrificial gifts as the calendar year draws to a close. I'd like to discuss creative giving options that maximize your impact and can even benefit you tremendously from a tax perspective. Contact me at [mdeckinga@midamerica.edu](mailto:mdeckinga@midamerica.edu). Let's have a conversation. To all of you who have supported our work, who plan to do so again, and who are



prayerfully considering what your involvement might look like, thank you!

**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement

# STEADY AS SHE GOES

The Seminary community gathered at Lynwood United Reformed Church on August 28th for the Opening Convocation kicking off the 2024-25 academic year. An annual event which includes a time of prayers for faculty, administration, staff, and students (past, present, and future), this year's event was also marked by recognizing the installation of Dr. Alan Strange as the new Interim President of the Seminary. Dr. Strange publicly reaffirmed the presidential vows which he took before the Board of Trustees in May and Emeritus President Cornelis Venema prayed for God's blessing upon the new president's labors.

Dr. Strange then delivered his installation address entitled

"Steady as She Goes."

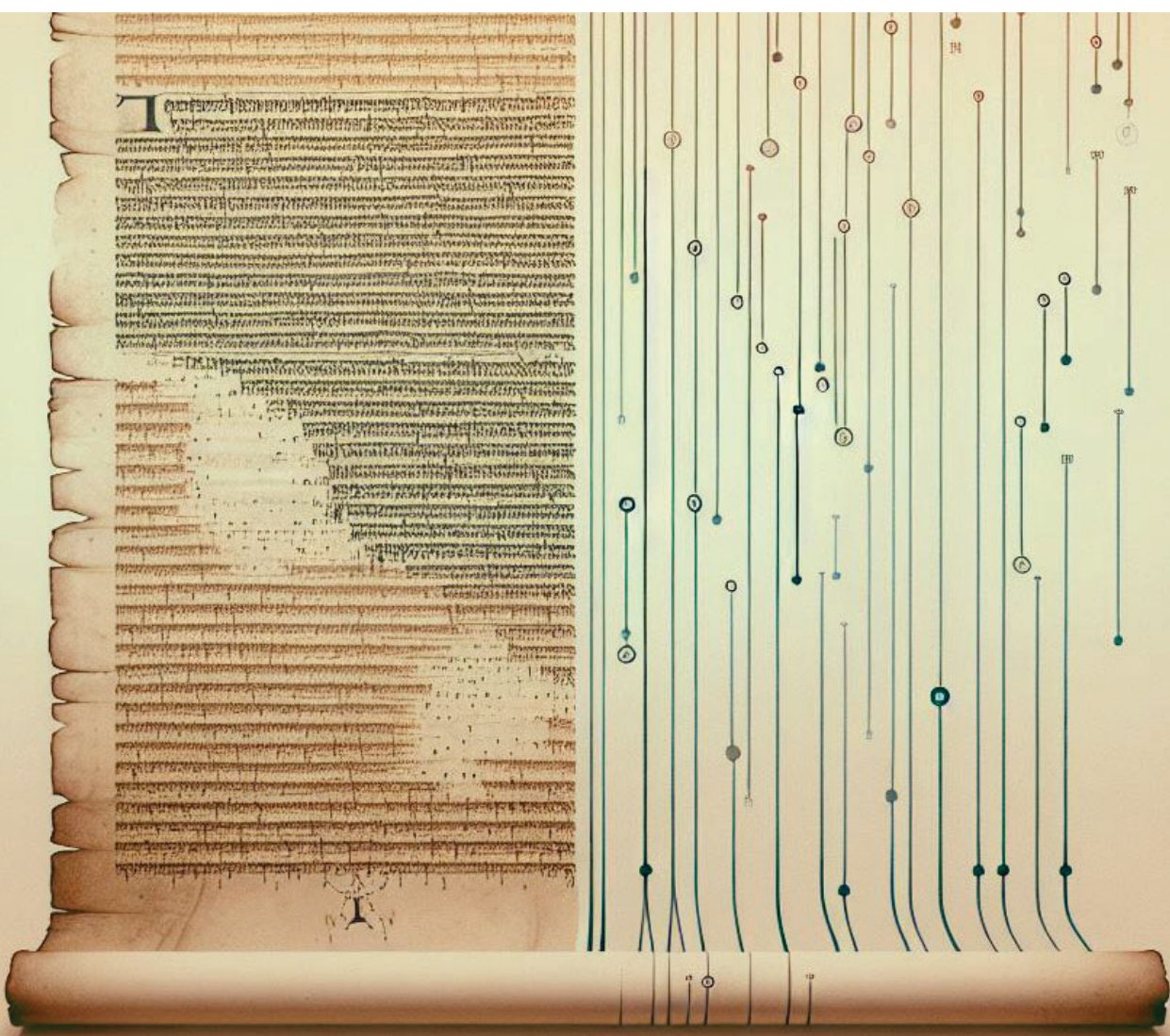
Drawn from Psalm 27, he called upon the Seminary (and all those assembled) to continue steadfast in faithfulness to Christ and to go forward in the training of ministers without veering off course or hitching our wagons to the latest theological fads. While some are urging the church to shift its traditional focus on the gospel in reaction to an increasingly hostile cultural backdrop, Dr. Strange called upon us to not "set our hair on fire," as if the church hadn't faced severe challenges before. Rather, we are to trust in the power of the gospel and wait upon the Lord's work (v. 14), remembering that he will not give us up to our adversaries (v. 12).



Please pray for blessing upon the remainder of the Seminary's current school year, and upon Dr. Strange in particular as he fulfills his duties as Interim President.

**Bryan Holstrom J.D., C.F.P.,**  
Treasurer, Mid-America Board of Trustees





# THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by Nicholas Lammé

In 1957, Life magazine published a story about the first computer-generated concordance of the Bible with 300,000 entries from the Revised Standard Version. The Rev. John W. Ellison produced the concordance on 480 lbs. of punched cards and 800 miles of special magnetic tape on 400 reels. Using the Remington Rand UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer), Ellison reportedly

accomplished thirty years of work in just four hundred hours.

Ellison, an Episcopalian minister and New Testament textual critic, was the first known scholar to apply computing technology to New Testament textual criticism. He began his work in 1950 using collations prepared by the committee working on the International Greek New Testament Project's (IGNTP) edition of the

Gospel of Luke. He analyzed the texts from 309 manuscripts to confirm previously established manuscript groups. In his study, he encoded eight categories of variants (substitutions, omissions, additions, transpositions, spelling of proper nouns, inflectional forms, itacisms, and spelling variations) on punch cards and analyzed the results for patterns of agreement and disagreement with the *Textus Receptus*.

Ellison conducted his pioneering work on computer mainframes, which in the 1950s were large enough to fill entire rooms. As computing power improved, computers were increasingly called upon to analyze ever-growing data sets in editing the Greek New Testament. The personal computer, the PC, would open up new horizons for scholars studying the New Testament's text and transmission.

The challenge for scholars studying the New Testament is that manuscripts were copied by hand over the centuries, introducing many variant readings primarily due to scribal error. Scribes often worked under difficult conditions, with poor lighting and limited resources, leading to mistakes like misspellings, omissions, additions, or changes in word order. Another scribe, called a diorthotes, was specially trained to catch and correct these errors, but many still slipped through and subsequently reproduced in other manuscripts. Based on our knowledge of scribal habits, in most cases, we can usually determine with a high degree of probability which readings are more likely to be the New Testament authors' original words.

The task, however, is complex. There are around 5,700 surviving New Testament manuscripts—a true embarrassment of riches, with more discovered each year. With this abundance comes a complication: among these thousands of manuscripts, an estimated 500,000 variant readings exist. Most are trivial, like spelling differences and word order changes, with less than one percent being both meaningful and significant. Still, keeping track of such a vast number of variants is daunting. This is where modern computing holds promise for the work of New Testament textual criticism.

In 1982, Gerd Mink proposed a

new method for comparing manuscripts at all points of variation to assess their textual relationship. No longer was there a need to use punch cards and mainframe computers, as Ellison did; a personal computer could leverage database-driven software to perform the comparisons. This proposed method, now known as the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM), is a set of database-driven tools for comparing the texts of manuscripts at all places where they differ, keeping track of where they agree and disagree.

The CBGM has ushered in a host of significant theoretical changes. Previously, scholars focused on manuscript “families” or “text types.” Instead, the CBGM emphasizes “states of text” within each manuscript and measures how much these texts agree or disagree (called *pre-genealogical coherence*), providing insight into their relationship. Additionally, for the first time since Westcott and Hort, the CBGM has renewed broad interest in the Byzantine text as a potential carrier of ancient readings. The method also claims to help address *contamination*, where multiple sources have influenced one manuscript, a persistent challenge in genealogically analyzing textual traditions like the New Testament.

The CBGM works with *texts* instead of manuscripts. A text gets copied from one manuscript to another. Manuscripts are physical artifacts in time that bear witness to a particular state of a text. Thus, the CBGM does not speak of manuscripts but *witnesses* because the text of each manuscript is a witness to a particular moment in the text's transmission history. Errors got transmitted in the copying process, and those errors can show us how these witnesses are related, just like genetic markers can relate members of the same family, even distant ones. Working with texts is like working with a person's DNA instead of the person.

Another critical concept is *coherence*. Coherence is the *relationship* between manuscripts. There are two kinds of coherence. *Pre-genealogical coherence*

is the overall percentage of agreement between witnesses. This is an objective measure of the relationship between witnesses at all places of variation. The other kind, *Genealogical Coherence*, is not based on overall agreement but disagreement and assesses all places where one variant can be judged as prior (or original) to another. Witnesses with more prior readings may be potential ancestors of those with more derived (posterior) readings. This approach allows the CBGM to propose relationships between witnesses spanning centuries, even showing that a later manuscript can sometimes contain an older or better-preserved text than an earlier one.

#### How does the CBGM work?

The process begins with transcribing and collating each manuscript—recording all its textual differences or *variant readings*. These differences are entered into a database that the CBGM software uses to compare every manuscript against all others. Scholars used to do this manually, but the CBGM speeds up the process, comparing more witnesses with greater accuracy.

Beyond this, we must decide which readings are original. The basic principle of textual criticism is that the original reading is the one that best explains the rise of all others. When a reading is deemed original, it is considered prior to all other readings. For example, in Jude 9, Michael the Archangel says to the devil, “The *Lord* rebuke you!” but in Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century manuscript, the scribe wrote, “God rebuke you!” The reading *Lord* is almost certainly original, meaning that it is *prior* to the reading *God*. This reading is found in only six other manuscripts, suggesting a genealogical relationship among their texts.

Determining if a reading is *genealogically connective*, meaning it establishes a relationship between two or more witnesses, involves determining if a variant likely arose by coincidence or reflects an intentional transmission. Spelling errors, for example, rarely signify genealogical relationships



because they are too easy to repeat by accident. The CBGM's coherence tools can analyze if a variant reading was likely coincidental or intentional. For example, if witnesses that read "God" agree with each other at a high rate, the shared reading is probably genealogically significant. The seven witnesses reading "God," have an average agreement of 89%, and some individual witnesses agree with each other at up to 98%, indicating that the variant reading is almost certainly genealogically significant.

These tools also allow scholars to analyze all their choices at every place of variation, displaying the resulting relationship among witnesses in diagrams similar to "family trees." Witnesses with more prior readings are potential ancestors of those with more posterior ones. The method is iterative, meaning that we can start with places of variation where it is easy to tell which reading is original and which is derivative. From there, we move on to solve more complex problems by continually applying the tools and analyzing the results. This allows us to test previous assumptions and refine our textual choices.

To summarize, the CBGM provides a set of computerized tools that help us to 1) compare the texts of manuscripts at all places of variation, tracking agreements and disagreements, and 2) use those comparisons to suggest genealogical relationships, allowing us to refine our judgments through an iterative process.

### The Impact of the CBGM

The downside of this new digital toolset is its complexity. The CBGM is still an undiscovered country for most scholars, theologians, and pastors. It has been called the "black box" of textual criticism for good reason. Because of this, it seemingly remains the possession of a select few scholars and professional tinkerers. Moreover, the CBGM is still unknown to most average Bible readers. If they are aware of it, they may not understand what it is or realize how it has already changed

the Greek text upon which most modern translations are based. For example, the editors of the NA28 amended the Greek text of Jude 5 that identifies *Jesus* as leading Israel out of Egypt rather than the *Lord*. This change was based on the results of the CBGM, which, in their estimation, lent additional support to other textual evidence. However, we should note that a decade earlier, the NET Bible (2001) was the first modern English translation to print *Jesus* instead of *Lord*, without the aid of the CBGM. Other translations followed suit, like the ESV, NLT, and LEB.

Understandably, these changes might alarm some people, especially those who do not understand the role that textual criticism plays in taking God's word from the ancient manuscripts to our modern English translations. Like the CBGM, textual criticism itself can be somewhat of a black box. However, the changes being brought to the Greek text underlying our modern translations are no reason to fret. Most of these changes are minor and imperceptible in translation. Some of more significant changes are already reflected in English translations, like the variant reading in Jude 5, and others will not necessarily show up right away. It is more likely that these changes will first be felt by commentators and pastors who work regularly with the Greek text. The textual decisions arrived at using these new tools will inevitably influence their commentaries and sermons, and only after some time, they might or might not show up in an English translation. Nevertheless, since the information age makes both good and bad information readily available to everybody, pastors especially should endeavor to understand how these new technologies work and how they do and do not directly affect the Church.

The CBGM's complexity and relative obscurity have led some to misunderstand it. Some people have imagined that now computers are doing textual criticism. Contrary to what one might imagine, that is simply not the case; the computer is not making the text-critical decisions. Instead, it provides

the editor with a different kind of evidence to consider when making textual decisions. The computer does not replace the critic's judgment or dispense with traditional text-critical analysis; external and internal evidence are still crucial factors that must be weighed. While the CBGM handles much of the "heavy lifting" by organizing and processing data, the scholar still interprets the results and weighs each reading's significance.

Despite its relative obscurity and complexity, the CBGM represents genuinely exciting developments that hold promise for future research into the history and structure of the transmission of the Greek New Testament. In any case, it is part of the modern landscape of New Testament textual studies, and so deserves to be understood by those working with the New Testament text. As technology continues apace, textual critics will continue to find ways of applying these new tools to an old task. Without a doubt, the application of the CBGM and other related digital solutions will continue to impact the study of the New Testament text and its history into the foreseeable future. When used wisely, these tools may continue to shed new light on the nature and history of the text of the New Testament, which might have been difficult or even impossible without them.

**Nicholas Lammé**  
Pastor at Friendswood Church of Christ, Friendswood, TX

#### Further Reading:

Wasserman, Tommy, and Peter J. Gurry. *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.

The Evangelical Textual Criticism Blog (<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com>) has many good articles on the CBGM.

# CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SERVICE TO THE CHURCH

## ALUMNI PROFILE: RYAN SWALE

I serve as the pastor of Immanuel URC in Jordan Station, Ontario. During my time here, I have also been working on a DMin (Doctor of Ministry degree) at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA, with a focus on the imprecatory psalms and their use in pastoral ministry. Much has been written about these psalms and the question of whether or not Christians may use them (*they may!*), but considerably less has been written on the question of how we are to use them and in what way they might even inform pastoral ministry. For example, how do they bear witness apologetically to the justice of God in a world filled with terror and scandal? How can they be employed in pastoral

counseling of victims of abuse who have experienced great harm? Or how might they engage the church in caring about injustice and praying for God to right every wrong? These are the sorts of issues that my project, *The Imprecatory Pastor: A Practical Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms*, aims to address, in the hopes of helping the church to recover this oft-neglected resource for the care of souls and for the cause of Christ's kingdom. Lord willing, I will defend my project in February 2025, and graduate in May, with the prayer that my labors might be of benefit to the church more broadly, both in helping pastors to think through this difficult subject, and in showing its relevance in this "age of rage."

Rev. Ryan Swale ('19),  
Immanuel URC, Jordan, ON



## ALUMNI PROFILE: JAMES SINKE

It's been a few years since I graduated from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, but one of the emphases of my training that has stayed with me since then is the calling of a pastor to serve the church. Following a sabbatical in 2021 that allowed for some focused study and writing, I was keen to pursue further education that would refresh and sharpen my preaching and pastoral abilities in my home congregation, while also working on a project that could benefit the churches more broadly. With the encouragement of our elders at Bethel URC of Woodstock, I began the Doctor of Ministry program in 2022 at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. Among the blessings of this program are the confessional faithfulness and pastoral heart of the professors, and the structure of the program allows me to continue full-time in my

labors as a pastor.

The subject of my project is catechesis in Reformed churches, specifically within the URCNA. After studying the biblical principles of catechesis, my intention is to collate and review the curriculums, published and unpublished, that are being used to train our covenant youth. I will be seeking from pastors, elders, and other catechism teachers reflections upon their own training, preparations, goals, shortcomings, and needs. The hope is that these reflections will serve our churches by providing a clearer understanding of what makes a faithful and effective curriculum, by fostering fruitful evaluations of our churches'



catechetical programs according to biblically defined goals, and by helping catechism teachers prepare and be equipped to teach and apply confessional doctrine. Ultimately, the goal is to serve the maturing faith of our covenant youth.

Rev. James Sinke ('05),  
Bethel URC, Woodstock, ON



# ALUMNI UPDATES



In September of 2024, **Bryce De Zwart** (2019), currently serving the Adoration URC of Vineland, ON, became engaged to Sara Dekkers of Hawarden, IA. They intend to be joined in marriage on November 22, 2024.



**Jonathan Key** (2018) continues to pastor Providence Reformed Church (PCA) in Bakersfield, CA. He, his wife Lorissa, and their daughter Eloise (aged 3) were blessed to welcome Marian Lauraine Key into their family on August 17, 2024. Marian was baptized and received into the covenant community on October 13. They wish to thank God for the life of their two precious girls and for the grace He has shown them and Providence during their time in Bakersfield.

**Christian McShaffrey** (2003) has recently published a book: “A Place to Hide: Equipping Ordinary Moms to Survive a Public Shooting.”

It teaches the principles of situational awareness, mental condition, the use of cover, etc. Also included are “safety audits” of specific locations such as schools, restaurants, and more.

More information, and a free sample chapter, can be found at [aplacetohide.org](http://aplacetohide.org).

**Rev. Mark S. Melton**, retired OPC minister, was called Home to his Savior on October 3, 2024. He was 72 years old. He is survived by his beloved wife, Patti, to whom he was married for 53 years, as well as three children and eleven grandchildren.

In 1987 he and his family moved to Indiana, where he planted a church, Sheridan Fellowship. He attended Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN, from 2003 to 2007 to study Greek and Hebrew. On October 17, 2003, he was received by the Presbytery of Ohio

of the OPC, as was the church he planted. He continued serving as the pastor of Christ Covenant OPC in Sheridan, IN, until 2019 when he retired.

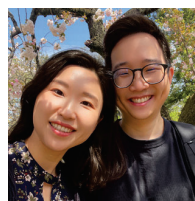
Mark was a faithful minister and a loving husband and father, who will be greatly missed by those who knew and loved him.

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15).



**David Myhren** (2023) has been called as an Evangelist of Covenant Presbyterian

Church (OPC) in Vandalia, Ohio, tasked with planting Bread of Life Church (OPC) in Troy, Ohio. Evening services in Troy started in July. David’s ordination is planned for November 9, 2024, and morning services at Bread of Life will begin on November 10. Please pray for the Lord to bless this fledgling work.



**Peter Yoo** (2022), by God’s grace and providence, has recently accepted a call to serve as the minister of the Reformed Church

of Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand. He and his wife Jane have recently moved into the church property and are slowly transitioning in, but God has been very good, and they’ve experienced much hospitality from their congregation and other churches in Dunedin. Their Synod has recently passed, and all those present can testify that it was one of warm brotherly unity, and they praise the Lord for all those who contributed to Synod. Please pray that Peter and Jane would continue to transition well in Dunedin, and that Peter might grow in being a more faithful minister of Christ in the RCNZ.

# FACULTY

## UPDATE: REV. PAUL IPEMA

Continuing faculty education is essential to Mid-America’s ongoing effort to enhance its educational ministry. Shortly after arriving at the Seminary in 2023, I was permitted to enroll in the Doctor of Educational Ministry program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. SBTS offers a doctoral program that is well suited to my work as a seminary professor and Director of the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program.

The capstone of my doctoral studies will be completing a ministry project that will be field-tested in the seminary. In consultation with my SBTS advisor, I have chosen to develop a seminary course in Christian Spirituality designed to prepare students for pastoral ministry. Seminary education often devotes significant time on the theological and vocational aspects of pastoral ministry, but often at the expense of spiritual formation in the pastor’s life. The result is that many men enter the ministry unprepared for the unique spiritual challenges of pastoral ministry.

The course I am designing for my ministry project focuses on five spiritual qualifications for pastoral ministry, which I have taken from Paul’s Pastoral Epistles. Students will study each of these spiritual qualifications through the lens of various classics of Christian spirituality. The assigned readings will cover a broad range of church history, from the early Church Fathers to contemporary writers of pastoral spirituality. The goal is to develop a biblical, theological, and historical foundation for continued spiritual development in the pastorate. The Lord willing, I will conclude my doctoral program by the summer of 2026.

**Rev. Paul Ipema**  
Assistant Professor of Ministerial  
Studies | Ministerial Apprenticeship  
Program Director | Dean of Students





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