

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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Spirituality of the Church

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“MARY’S PLACE IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY”



During the fall semester of 2021, I am once again teaching a course on the doctrine of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Christology). Early in the course, I summarized the confession of the church regarding Christ’s person as it is set forth in the several early church councils. As is often the case, some students exhibited some hesitation at the decision of the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) to designate the virgin Mary the “Mother of God” (literally, “God-bearer”). Their legitimate Protestant and Reformed instinct to resist an exaggerated view of the role of the virgin Mary in the accomplishment of our salvation prompted them to do so.

When students question this language, I remind them that this language was not used in order to exalt inappropriately the role of the virgin Mary in our redemption. It was used to oppose a view of Christ’s person that unduly separated or divided the divine and human natures of the incarnate Son. In this view (often associated in Christian tradition with the teaching of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople in 428 A.D.), the incarnation amounted to an act whereby the eternal Son of God came to “indwell” the man Jesus. The divine Son of God entered into a sort of “association” of friendly intimacy with the human Jesus. In theological shorthand, it amounted to a “two-person, two nature” Christology. To express this view, Nestorius insisted that the virgin Mary was not the “Mother of God,” but only the “Mother of Christ.” The child born to the virgin Mary was not the Son of God, now become human or incarnate, but a human being whom the Son takes into fellowship with Himself. Upon this understanding, it was not possible to say that the *One who was born of the Virgin Mary* was the only-begotten Son of God (cf. Apostle’s Creed).

While I do not aim to sort out the difficult questions of Christology in this brief message, I am convinced that the worry about designating the virgin Mary as “the Mother of God” may well express a failure to do justice to her legitimate place in the story of the incarnation. By the standard of many of the leading theologians of the Reformation (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Bullinger), modern Protestantism often betrays an impoverished understanding of her role. More importantly, however, an impoverished view of Mary’s place in the Christmas story also does not do justice to the Scripture’s testimony regarding her.

In the Gospel of Luke, we find an account of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptizer. After Mary greets Elizabeth, Luke recounts how Elizabeth, being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” exclaimed: “Blessed are you [Mary] among women . . .! And why is this granted to me that *the mother of my Lord* should come to me? . . . And blessed is *she who believed* that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Luke 1:42, 45, emphasis mine).

Two themes regarding the virgin Mary are clearly set forth in these *inspired* words of Elizabeth. First, the virgin Mary enjoys a blessedness that is exceptional and unique among women. Though there are many remarkable birth narratives recorded throughout the history of redemption (remember, e.g., barren Sarah, who gave birth to Isaac in her old age; barren Hannah, who gave birth to Samuel in answer to her prayer; Ruth the Moabite, who gave birth to Obed), no mother in Israel ever enjoyed the unparalleled blessedness that Mary was given by God’s favor. What blessedness could surpass that of being the “Mother of God” according to the flesh!

Second, the virgin Mary herself testifies to her blessedness, but does so in a way that focuses our attention exclusively upon what God has done by His grace and undeserved mercy shown to her. With a humble, childlike, and joyful faith, she believes the word God spoke to her. She sings the *Magnificat*, which begins with the memorable words, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant” (Luke 1:46-48).

As Protestant and Reformed Christians, we are justifiably distressed when in Christian tradition lofty and inappropriate titles are given to Mary (e.g., “Advocate of Sinners,” “Queen of Heaven,” “Mediatrice of all Graces,” etc.). But we should have no objection to calling her “blessed.” Nor should we fail to be moved by her humble faith to join in praising the God of our salvation for the unspeakable gift of His Son, who was conceived in her womb.

Our celebration of Christ’s birth this year (and every year thereafter) ought to be patterned after than of the virgin Mary. Let us magnify the Lord and rejoice in our spirits, even as she did.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cornelis P. Venema".

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema
President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

We're acknowledging "time" here at the Seminary in several ways over the last several issues of *The Messenger*. Perhaps you've picked up on this theme. We're going to spend 2 years celebrating our 40th anniversary, after all. In this issue, we are announcing the retirement of Mr. Keith LeMahieu – my predecessor in the development office and our current Vice-President of Operations. Keith spent a few moments with Dr. Cornelis Venema and mentions some of the highlights of his work over the last 20 years. Keith is such a fixture here, it's hard to imagine a Mid-America Reformed Seminary without him. It's been a privilege getting to know and work alongside of Keith the last 5 years I've been here, and I'm sure many of you who have met Keith would echo my appreciation for the man and his work. He'll be missed, and we trust in God to provide the right person to fill that vacant role at the appointed time.



It's also the time of year we commemorate our Savior's birth. Praise God for the Christ – that He willingly came to dwell with mankind, to be a once-and-for-all Redeemer for His people. Our prayer is that God would bless and sustain you and your families during this season, and into the new year.

Thanks for reading. Turn the page and enjoy!



Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

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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:

“40 YEARS: WE’RE JUST GETTING STARTED”

*“The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps.”*
Proverbs 16:9.

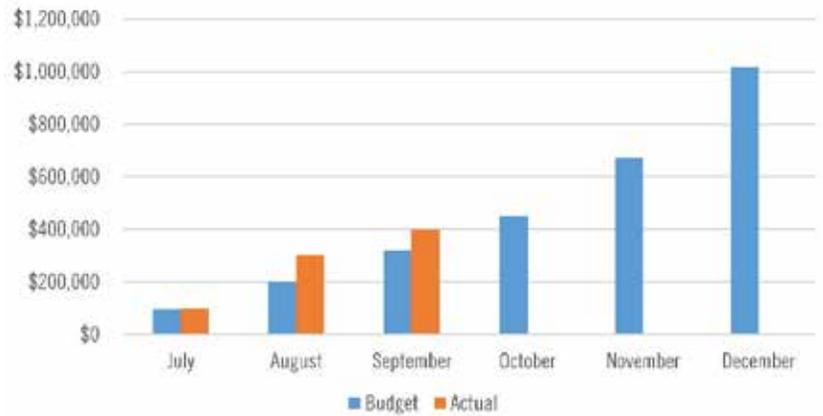
It always amazes me how quickly an academic year can progress here at Mid-America. It’s an old saying, but time does in fact fly when you’re having fun. I guess when I say “fun,” I’m referring to the true joy that exists in doing my work on behalf of the Seminary. I’ve been here 5 years now, and the time I’ve spent investing in the lives of our students, working with the staff and Faculty, interacting with some of you, and our churches has been time well spent. On the whole, this point in time at Mid-America Reformed Seminary features some of the most exciting developments and plans in the last 40 years. These include:

- Our fall semester began in August, welcoming 12 new incoming students, bringing our total enrollment to 32 students. This is a true blessing! It wasn’t long ago that our enrollment was a little under half of this number. What’s more, our students are quite capable academically, and are maturing spiritually as they study the Word of God daily. A blend of Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, as well as several nations, are represented in this group.
- Given the recent trend in our enrollment, a full recruitment funnel for several years to come, and through implementation of our current strategic, long-range plan, we are making plans to expand our campus! In fact, renovations have already begun with the installation of state-of-the-art mobile shelving in the library, providing for increased study space. Immediate plans include a chapel/auditorium

with seating for 125, additional faculty and staff offices, a board conference room, and an enlarged cafeteria. Phase II of this project, which will likely follow quickly after the aforementioned projects are complete, will be on-campus student housing. It would be a tremendous blessing if you would begin reflecting upon how you can impact this work in a special way with gifts to our future capital campaign.

- The Center for Missions & Evangelism (CME) has now been established, under the direction of the Board of Trustees in consultation with several pastors and missionaries in the URCNA and other denominations. Dr. Eric Watkins, part-time faculty, OPC minister, and experienced church planter is the CME’s Director. The CME will rest on four pillars – Classes, Conferences, Cohorts, and Internships. On October 14, 2021, the CME was inaugurated at Redeemer URC in Saint John IN. You can watch the full program on our YouTube channel. You can find more information about the CME online at www.midamerica.edu/CME. Our first conference will be held in late January 2022 in St. Augustine Florida, Lord willing.
- When our fiscal year closed in July, we were in a very healthy financial position – all thanks to you! As we progress through this fiscal year, the Seminary continues to trust in our good God to move your hearts in remarkable ways to continue your partnership with us in this important

YTD Actual vs. Budgeted Financial Contributions



work. As you can see from the graph, our year is off to a great start. I’ve included the budgeted amounts for November and December so you can get a glimpse of our goal. At the time this article was written, data on actual contributions for November and December were not available.

There is so much to be thankful for, but I would be remiss if I didn’t mention how humbled and encouraged we are through your support. We are tremendously thankful for all you have done for us, and so, to close this final development report for 2021, I ask that you prayerfully consider a generous gift to Mid-America to ensure that the next generation of pastors and church leaders is prepared to proclaim the Truth and offer the comfort of the gospel God’s people so desperately need to hear. I also ask that you keep the important plans and initiatives I’ve outlined here in your prayers. May the Lord be pleased to establish our steps.

May God bless and sustain you and may your awareness of His love and care increase as you grow in faithfulness.

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

To make, or plan for a gift today, contact Michael Deckinga, VP of Advancement, at mdeckinga@midamerica.edu

FALL BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees met for their semi-annual meeting on October 14-15. As the era of COVID persists, the meeting was again a hybrid meeting with two-thirds of the Board being on campus and the rest joining via teleconference.

The Board welcomed Rev. Bill Pols of Edmonton, Alberta, as a newly elected member and then proceeded to conduct its annual election of officers. All incumbents were returned to their respective offices – Rev. Jim Sawtelle (President), Rev. Paul Murphy (Vice-President), Dr. Edwin Kreykes (Secretary), Mr. Bryan Holstrom (Treasurer) and Rev. Harry Zekveld (Vice-All).

The Board received a variety of reports from standing committees and employees of the Seminary. The report of Seminary President, Dr. Cornelis Venema, included an update on preliminary work being done for a proposed expansion that

includes additional classroom and administrative space.

The Board was encouraged by how the Lord has blessed the Seminary with both strong enrollment and financial resources. It also expressed its gratitude for the good work being done to increase awareness of the Seminary and its mission through marketing and digital media efforts.

Dr. Alan Strange reported on the upgrade of movable shelving and a re-carpeting in the library. The installation of movable shelving gives the library significant additional space to grow the collection for many years to come.

A new report came from the Oversight Committee for the new Center for Missions and Evangelism. The Board expressed its excitement and appreciation for the work of the



NEWS

Director, Dr. Eric Watkins.

Finally, the Board received a report from an independent auditor hired to audit the Seminary's financial operations. The auditor commended the Seminary and issued the highest possible recommendation to the Board.

Keith LeMahieu
Vice-President of Operations

THE HARVEST IS STILL PLENTIFUL

On Thursday, October 14, the Board of Trustees, along with the Faculty, staff, students, and many supporters of Mid-America Reformed Seminary gathered to celebrate the Seminary's 40th anniversary and witness the inauguration of the Center for Missions and Evangelism (CME). This historic event, entitled "The Harvest is Still Plentiful," was held at Redeemer United Reformed Church in St. John, IN. The evening began with introductory remarks from Board of Trustees President and Pastor of Redeemer Reformed Church (RCUS) in Golden Valley MN, Rev. James Sawtelle. It continued with a brief overview of Mid-America's history, as well as a current-day analysis by Seminary President, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema. Following Dr. Venema's remarks, the audience sang "Great is Thy Faithfulness" before being introduced to Dr. Eric Watkins by the URCNA Missions Coordinator, Rev. Richard Bout. Dr. Watkins provided the

context for the development, purpose, and launch for the Center for Missions and Evangelism. Dr. Watkins serves as the lead Pastor at Harvest OPC in San Marcos California, and also as the CME's Director. Next at the podium was Rev. Paul Murphy, Mid-America Trustee and Pastor of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in New York City NY. Rev. Murphy linked the faithfulness of the Seminary and the faithfulness of the church, and challenged attendees with words from Scripture and drawn from experience in church planting to partner with Mid-America Reformed Seminary in the start of this new initiative. The audience responded in song, singing "How Sweet and Awesome is the Place." Rev. Mark Vander Hart, Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies, and Mid-America's longest-tenured Professor, concluded the evening with a word of prayer, and an invitation to participate in fellowship following the



event.

The Center for Missions and Evangelism is a new initiative at Mid-America, offering a new set of classes, conferences, cohorts, and internships focused on the areas of evangelism, church planting, discipleship, and foreign missions.

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

IMPENDING RETIREMENT OF KEITH LEMAHIEU

Recently, Keith LeMahieu informed myself and the Board of Trustees that he planned to retire from his service at the Seminary as the Vice-President of Operations. Keith has ably served the Seminary for twenty-plus years, first as our Director of Development and then as Vice-President of Operations. In order to give our readers an appreciation for his many contributions, I asked Keith several questions about his work:

What prompted you to take the position of “Director of Development” at Mid-America?

I was involved in insurance and technology businesses for twenty years before coming to Mid-America. I was blessed to have had the opportunity to be involved in a computer software startup at the dawn of the personal computer revolution. It was great fun and very exciting, but I always told my wife there were two things that would draw me away from the business of technology – getting paid to fly (which is my hobby) and doing something directly “kingdom related.” The Lord provided an opportunity for me to do the latter.

Describe your responsibilities as “Director of Development.”

When I came to Mid-America, the Director of Development (DOD) wore “many hats.” My primary responsibility was friend-raising (fundraising) for the Seminary, but I was also responsible for student recruiting, advertising and marketing, and a variety of other miscellaneous tasks.

What did you like best about your work as “Director of Development”?

Meeting people from around North America who loved the church and were committed to the notion that

there is nothing more important than proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. I met so many fascinating people with amazing stories of God’s grace. Some of these stories could be made into a Hollywood movie.

When did you become the “Vice-President of Operations” at Mid-America, and what prompted you to assume this position?

After fifteen years as the DOD I came to believe that the Seminary would benefit from some new ideas and enthusiasm in the area of advancement. I think this has been confirmed with the hiring of Mike Deckinga who has done a wonderful job. I also believed that my previous business and technology experience, as well as the institutional knowledge I gained as DOD, could benefit the Seminary.

What changes have occurred during your tenure?

The primary mission of preparing ministers for confessionally reformed churches has not changed, and there have been few personnel changes during my time at the Seminary. I believe this is indicative of the commitment of the Board of Trustees and the faculty and the staff to the mission of the Seminary. I think it is also indicative of what a great place this is to work. The biggest changes I have seen is the deployment of new technologies to support the mission of the Seminary (i.e. livestreaming, digital media, etc.) and the hiring of a full-time Director of Enrollment Management and Director of Marketing and Digital Media.

If you were seeking to convince someone to apply for the position of Vice-President of Operations at Mid-America, what would you communicate to a potential applicant?

Mid-America is a terrific place to work. The staff and faculty are all outstanding to work with and it is a great joy to participate in the mission of preparing students for the gospel ministry.



Tell us about your plans for retirement.

Lauren and I are moving back to my hometown of Oostburg, Wisconsin. We will live a 10-minute walk from Lake Michigan and we’re looking forward to all the benefits that involves. I anticipate continuing service on several committees for the church, Lauren hopes to continue teaching piano, and we look forward to being able to spend more time with our family.

Keith’s work at the Seminary coincided with my appointment as president in 2001. At the time, I said to him, “my success as president will depend upon how well you do in this position.” As I look back at his service over the years, I am profoundly grateful for his presence and service to the school. We thank him for his tireless and devoted service. And we pray that the Lord will bless him and Lauren as they begin a new chapter in their service to His church.

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema
President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

Dr. Alan D. Strange

FEATURE

My evening class this fall is on the Spirituality of the Church (SOTC), based on a good deal of work that I've done, including a published Ph.D. dissertation on the subject and an upcoming book with Crossway (working title: *The Church's Spiritual Calling*). This new work is intended to be an examination of the relationship of the church to other institutions (like the family and the state), in which we see that the church has a distinct spiritual calling, a calling that only it can carry out. We will see historically that the church has at times claimed a supremacy that she does not have—over the state, especially—and that she has, at other times, allowed the state to dominate her. Part of the genius of the Reformation was the rediscovery that the state is not over the church or vice-versa, but that all institutions are properly under God. The spirituality of the church then could be helpfully recovered for the on-going dialog of how the church is to relate to the world in which it finds itself, both in how it distinguishes itself from the world and how it gives itself to the world.

The highly charged partisan political currents can impact the church as well as civil society, especially when it comes to the temptation of those on both extremes—left and the right—to bring

social, economic, political and like agendas into the church. The church as church may have something to say about present concerns (e.g., abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.), which is to say that God's Word may address such, usually in principle though, not in detail; in any case, not in a way that renders the church just another voice in the current cacophony of shouted political slogans, but that contributes a proper faith perspective to vexing moral questions in the public square. We need to be salt and light, to witness to the power of Christ and His gospel in an unsavory, dark world in a way that does not avoid the moral issues of our time, bringing a clear prophetic witness to them, but also does not allow them to swamp the boat so that the gospel gets sunk in a sea of cultural concerns.

The SOTC is today either forgotten as a concept or remembered only for its abuses, e.g., justifying the church not addressing American slavery and the racial hatred that especially developed in its wake, including iniquitous Jim Crow laws. The doctrine of the SOTC, however, is connected, first, to the development of the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit that was underdeveloped, or overleapt, in the Middle Ages and given extensive

“The spirituality of the church then could be helpfully recovered for the ongoing dialog of how the church is to relate to the world in which it finds itself, both in how it distinguishes itself from the world and how it gives itself to the world.”

treatment only in the Reformation, especially by John Calvin and his theological heirs. The SOTC relates to the reality that the church is supremely a spiritual institution (not a biological one, as is the family, or a civil one, as is the state) and that its power is moral and suasive (not legal and coercive, as is state power), ministerial and declarative (not magisterial and legislative, as is power in the Roman Catholic Church). Thus, the church is an institution gathered and perfect by the Spirit,

having chiefly spiritual concerns, carried out in a spiritual fashion, by a Spirit-indited use of the means of grace.

In the Old Testament, Israel had a theocracy. However, her theocracy was unlike that of the nations about her. Theocracy in Babylon or Egypt, for instance, meant that the king was divine or semi-divine, ruling as an absolute potentate, and did not necessarily clearly distinguish the civil ruler from the priestly caste. The king in Israel was clearly limited and did not rule absolutely. Additionally, the priesthood and the kingship were clearly meant to be distinguished. Thus, even in the OT theocracy, there was limits placed on the civil power and a distinction made between the civil ruler and the priesthood. When the church was given its Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), our Lord did not call on it to Israelize the world (made clear in Acts, particularly in the Jerusalem Council), even as Islam saw its task at the Arabization of the world. He did call on it to go into every nation and teach obedience to Christ, her Lord and Savior. That there was a distinction between the church and state as institutions became immediately clear, however, in the ten waves of persecution experienced

role that he had not had in the church and much strife followed. Augustine, in *City of God*, unlike Eusebius in his Constantinian triumphalism, argued that the kingdoms of this earth, including the Roman Empire, rise and fall and that only the heavenly kingdom is eternal. Later in that century, the Empire fell in the West (476 A.D.). Into this power vacuum entered the church and particularly the rule of the Bishop of Rome, who comes to be called the Pope, unrivalled as a ruler in the West until the rise of the Holy Roman Empire, with Charlemagne, Otto I and others, in later centuries. In the Middle Ages, the Pope and the church came to claim authority over the state. The continuation of the Empire in the East (Byzantine) and the East/West split of the church (1054) witnessed the rise of Caesaropapism, in which the emperor claimed primacy and the state claimed authority over the church. The Reformation rejected both the models of church over state (Western) and state over church (Eastern), embracing the notion that both institutions are under God, along with other spheres (like family, education, etc.; to use the terminology of Abraham Kuyper). The Scots, particularly, in rejecting Arminianism, Episcopacy and Erastianism (a Protestant version of state over church) argued for the spiritual

and Aquinas testify to this, with Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* moving from the doctrine of the person and work of Christ to the doctrine of the sacraments (as part of his doctrine of the church). The sacraments, to be efficacious in a context without confessing a robust work of the Holy Spirit, require something like an *ex opere operato* affirmation. While Luther, in developing Augustine's doctrine of justification to be punctiliar and definitive, rather than a process, advances a proper soteriology, the doctrine of the work of the Spirit, more broadly considered, remained underdeveloped until Calvin in his *Institutes*, in which the Spirit is seen as the one who brings us to Christ and Christ to us and in so doing applies all the merits and mediation of the Savior. Thus, Calvin's ecclesiology is clearly preceded by his pneumatology. It is this developed doctrine of the work of the Spirit that marks the church as a spiritual entity, charged to carry out a spiritual task in the world. Charles Hodge and Princeton are the heirs of this, and Hodge links his doctrine of the work of the Spirit with his doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

It is well known that the SOTC in the American context became, in some hands, code for justification for chattel slavery, insofar as it was argued that the SOTC forbade the church as the church from addressing an institution established as part of civil society. Such a claim merits a review of the question of slavery and race in America, noting the iniquity of the institution and its attendant racism (as unfit for those made in the image of God, especially to be treated this way by fellow Christians, which most Americans professed to be). At the time of the U.S. Constitution, slavery seemed to many on its way out, before being given new life by the cotton gin and other developments. Whereas many in the Presbyterian Church had a negative view of it in colonial times, and even as late as 1818 condemned it wholesale with a remarkable statement by the PCUSA General Assembly (especially so in the wake of the decision deposing the abolitionist George Bourne), many Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and others capitulated to the tenor of the

“The SOTC relates to the reality that the church is supremely a spiritual institution ... and that its power is moral and suasive, ministerial and declarative.”

by the ancient church as she took the gospel to the world. Christianity was regarded as an illegal religion and the church had to develop her life separate from the state.

With the conversion of Constantine (312) and the Edict of Milan (313), Christianity went from being illegal to most favored and even established (by the edict of Theodosius I in 380). This thrust the emperor into a

independency of the church, what would become known in the 19th c. American context as the doctrine of the SOTC.

Even as the early church developed the doctrine of the person of Christ, chiefly, with the work of Christ awaiting medieval development, especially in the atonement theory of Anselm, so the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit remained underdeveloped in the theology of the Middle Ages. Lombard

times. Slavery went from an institution that was viewed as a necessary evil in the colonial and early American nation days to morally neutral in the 1820s and 1830s to a positive good on the part of its supporters in the 1830s and 1840s.

Though the Assembly never officially repudiated its 1818 statement condemning slavery, it took important action in 1846, noting that the desire to have the Presbyterian Church act more decisively in opposing slavery was tantamount to asking the church to dissolve itself. Significantly, the Free Church of Scotland responded critically to this action of the Assembly. This is significant because it was this church that had pioneered the arguments for the spiritual independency of the church that became the doctrine of the SOTC in the American context. It is also the case that the Covenanters had always argued against slavery and forbade its members from slaveholding. Charles Hodge was dubious about the claims of the SOTC as forwarded by James Henley Thornwell and some others at the 1859 and 1860 General Assemblies of the PCUSA. However, at the 1861 Assembly, Hodge was the chief architect of the opposition to the Gardner Spring Resolution, which Hodge rightly argued sought by its statement of support for the Lincoln administration to decide the political question. Hodge embraced a doctrine of the SOTC that did not muzzle the prophetic voice of the church and at the same time protected the church from being engulfed by and giving way to political concerns. Hodge did not think that the actions of the church, including the pronouncements of her pulpits, should be narrowly political, about matters that would divide good men who had the same doctrinal confession

Hodge continued to distinguish that which the church as the church ought to address, respecting the civil magistrate and society more broadly. He witnessed to his dismay the Presbyterian church go from being arguably squeamish about addressing civil matters to a too-ready willingness to politicize both the church's judicatories and her pulpits. The Civil War contributed greatly to this politicization, as those that fought



together on the same side came to feel that they had more in common with each other, even if divided by historic Old School/New School concerns, than they did with the other side. So, reconciliation talks began between Old and New School, which had divided in 1837, slavery having played a minor role in that division. Hodge supported reconciliation between Old and New Schools, but not on the grounds that it was being pursued. Hodge regretted that the union talks between the two schools placed a premium on aping the civil reunion that had occurred in the aftermath of the War, fearing that in the ecclesiastical context the unity of the church was being stressed at the expense of her purity. The Old and New Schools reunited in 1869 on a political rather than a theological basis, a reunion opposed by Hodge, who insisted that the theological issues that had divided the two schools be dealt with and not marginalized. The history of the PCUSA subsequent to that was one in which that politicization contributed to theological liberalism, the social gospel and other problems that came to plague the PCUSA.

The SOTC, as noted in the conclusion to my Hodge book (my published dissertation), has been, and can be,

used for good or ill. Too many churches today allow the political to dominate the spiritual: mainline churches may be an “us too” chorus for a variety of liberal causes, while conservative churches may sound like the Republican party in worship. The church as the church, as an institution, as opposed to Christians living out their callings in the world, is not a political institution and ought to resist such. It is right that any given congregation be composed of those of various political views (some believing that tax rates should be higher for the wealthy; others insisting on gun rights), while the members agree on fundamental biblical doctrines. This is because the church is a spiritual institution, and its core of agreement builds upon truths that transcend the more ephemeral matters that concern politics. The church needs to agree on what the Bible teaches, but the Bible does not give a detailed blueprint for civil society, and Bible-believing folk should be able to have political differences while maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Dr. Alan D. Strange
Professor of Church History,
Registrar & Theological Librarian

ALUMNI PROFILE: JEREMY BAKER TO MARS AND BACK AGAIN

Leduc, Alberta, Canada is just around 2700 kms (1700 miles) straight north of Phoenix, Arizona, USA. Both places are land locked and share a time zone. A lot of Canadian snowbirds make their way down to Phoenix to avoid some of our more harsh and lengthy winters. I'm pretty sure that the Edmonton Oilers have played the Phoenix Coyotes on some NHL ice. But what really makes these two areas particularly special to me is that one was once my home and the other was once a home to Rev. Jeremy Baker.

In the summer of 2013, Jeremy, his wife Gwen and their three daughters, Daisy, Lily and Dahlia packed up and moved to Highland Indiana, right next door to Dyer, the home of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

(MARS). While there, Jeremy pursued and completed their Master of Divinity program. He and I graduated in the spring of 2016.

I asked him recently to reflect upon his experiences while studying. He shares the following:

"MARS helped prepare me for ministry in countless ways.

The relationships I had with professors, staff, and classmates helped me to continue to grow as a man. The focus on solid redemptive-historical hermeneutics in every biblical studies class helped me to become a better interpreter of the Scriptures. The preaching component of every biblical studies class helped me develop my preaching in content, delivery, and with application. The doctrinal

courses helped me to solidify and grow in my understanding of what the Bible teaches (and has taught throughout the ages through the church creeds and confessions). The history courses helped me to appreciate that the Lord has always preserved and been working in His church (I especially enjoyed Dr. Strange's section on Presbyterian History). The practical theology courses gave me a foundation and good place to start when it comes to leading worship and shepherding the congregation. Lastly, the internships, preaching requirements, and the local mentoring pastor program (mine was Rev. Iain Wright at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL), was invaluable in that when I graduated, I already had a great deal of experience in preaching and leading worship. It also helped me have some idea of where to start with most aspects of pastoral ministry that were not addressed in the coursework.



ALUMNI UPDATES

In summary, I loved my time at MARS and it is my conviction that it is the best and most well-rounded Seminary to train solidly-reformed pastors that can handle the Bible well, preach in a way folks will be edified, and prepares students for the rigors of pastoral ministry.”

The Bakers were the first seminary family that we had met after leaving Leduc. Feeling a little shell-shocked from the move ourselves, they welcomed us into their home, bringing comfort in what I can only describe as a western hospitality, familiar to us both. Together, the Bakers learned all about snow and the Van't Hoff's learned all about southern smoked barbecue. I'll leave it to you to figure out who was blessed more, by the other. The Baker's presence, in our lives and particularly Jeremy's presence, while we studied together, was a gift and a blessing. His pastoral heart and their love for God's people was a good match for the training we received.

After graduating in 2016, we both headed west (and back again). I returned to Leduc to wait for God's call to Bethel United Reformed Church of Brockville, ON. Jeremy went a little further west to Yuma, Arizona where he has been serving Yuma Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the last five years.

Studying with Jeremy at Mid-America Reformed Seminary has only confirmed the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is bigger than the particular federations we serve. Where else can Orthodox Presbyterian and United Reformed men come together, lean upon one another, learn about one another, study well and return to serve God's people faithfully? Such is the unique gift offered here, at MARS.

Rev. Pete Van't Hoff

Pastor at Bethel URC of Brockville,
President of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Alumni Association



Bob Holda (2016) and his wife welcomed their third child into the world on May 5, 2020 - Allen Michael. Their mission work at Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, WI, was organized as a particular congregation of the OPC on October 22, 2021. And on Reformation Day 2021, they began to add regular evening worship services to their ministry profile.

Matthew Judd (2001) recently received a call from First Church of Merrimack (OPC) in Merrimack, NH to be their next Senior Pastor. The Presbytery of New York and New England (OPC) placed this call into his hands at their most recent meeting on October 22nd. Lord willing, he will be installed in March of 2022 to coincide with the retirement of the current minister of First Church, the Rev. Dr. Allen Tomlinson. He and his wife, Becky, eagerly look forward to this new opportunity for service in Christ's kingdom. "May He grant us a great measure of His Holy Spirit to serve Him and His people faithfully in this new chapter of our lives."



James Roosma (2014) and his wife Jeni had a son born on April 14, 2021. His name is Isaiah Keith Roosma and was 6lbs 5oz and 19 inches long.



Roger Sparks (1985) and wife Diane completed 15 years of service at the Luverne, MN, Christian Reformed Church and are serving in an interim role at the Bethel CRC of Waupun, WI.

Joel ten Brinke
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Joel ten Brinke (2007) has received his full registration as a psychotherapist in Ontario. He and an associate are beginning a private practice together, in which they can already see God's guidance. Joel says, "He has walked with me in this process and I am deeply grateful for the grace He has shown."

Alumni!

Feel free to send us your updates at any time to rluttjeboer@midamerica.edu.



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