

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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What is on Your Mind? What is Your Vision?

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“THE ‘MOTHER PROMISE’ OF GENESIS 3:15”



“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 our Savior confirms unmistakably that the covenant Lord is steadfast in His faithfulness toward His people. His Word of promise cannot be broken. Christ’s coming calls to mind the many promises God made to His people throughout the history of redemption. These promises were fulfilled in the course of Israel’s history and are now ultimately being fulfilled in Christ. They demonstrate the “unchangeable character of God’s purpose” to save His people in Christ (cf.

Heb. 6:13-20). They remind us that the God of our salvation is properly called “Faithful and True” (Rev. 19:11).

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” (*protoevangelium*), 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 original promise is enlarged 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, 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 verse preceding pronounces 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 unexpectedly announces good news: the “seed” of the woman will triumph over the archenemy 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 archenemy, 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, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the last and greater Adam (Rom. 5:18-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). The story that unfolds in redemptive history focuses upon the people who are gathered by Christ’s Spirit and Word, the new humanity who are being delivered from the “kingdom of darkness” and transferred to the “kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13-14).

In the third place, the promise in Genesis 3:15 is ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. We know from the teaching of the apostle Paul that Christ is the “one” seed through whom the promises to Abraham are fulfilled (Gal. 3:15-16). All who believe in Jesus Christ, the true seed of Abraham and of the woman, will inherit the promises made to Abraham and receive adoption as sons: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). Through Christ, the one and only Son of God who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), we are granted the inheritance of life and blessing that was forfeited through Adam’s sin.

And in the fourth place, the mother promise of Genesis 3:15 reminds 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 replaced by blessing. Broken covenant with God will be replaced by renewed communion and fellowship. A new humanity will begin to enjoy the fullness of life in fellowship with God. God’s grace in Christ will ultimately triumph. The devil and all his works will be defeated. Creation itself will be regained and brought to its destiny.

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)?

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

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Last March, our worlds were turned upside down as we encountered a new, strange virus. Out of caution, our governments – both federally and locally – pumped the brakes on our society. Quarantine – a word which went largely unused previously was now on the tips of our tongues. Having to worship with my church from my living room was a real challenge. It was not easy. I longed to be with my brothers and sisters in the Lord, singing His praise and being fed His word in person. As I spent more time away from my church, I began to analyze certain aspects of it. I uncovered some thoughts about my church that I absolutely love, and I also uncovered some unpleasanties I did not know were there. In this edition’s feature article, Dr. J. Mark Beach challenges us to “think about what we think about” when it comes to our visions for our churches. I hope it will encourage you as it did me.



Michael Deckinga
Vice President of Advancement

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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: “PANDEMICS, PURSE, AND PURPOSE”

How many financial appeals have you received lately? How many letters have you read? Fundraisers like to remain optimistic that our correspondence is always poured over and contemplated with the utmost urgency. We know that may not always be the case. In the March 2020 edition of *The Messenger*, I wrote about “Meaningful Messaging.” I compared our attempts to communicate with you in a way that highlights our needs and encourages you, versus the typical “sky-is-falling” language many institutions employ. This commitment remains unchanged, even amidst a global pandemic and the economic effects it is having across North America and beyond.

Studies suggest, and I believe with a great deal of accuracy, that times are particularly difficult financially for higher-educational institutions. I know of a few institutions – even kingdom causes – who are struggling to pay the bills right now. I suspect that many organizations who are feeling that their viability is at stake are going through a process that has been long overdue. There can be tremendous waste in higher education. “Nice-to-haves” disguise themselves as needs, and when an institution confuses these two things, the luxuries become seemingly integral to the program. Trimming back the “extras” for Christian institutions is important – actually, I would suggest vital – to being faithful stewards of what we have been given from God’s providential hand.

One important focal point is the institution’s relationship with

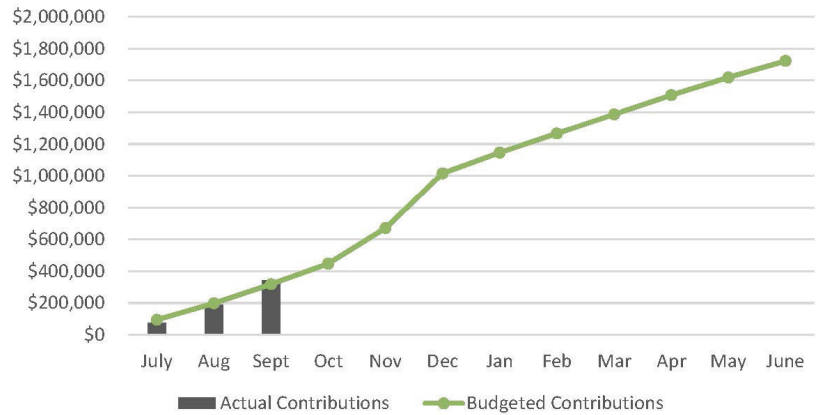
its mission statement. Have you ever read Mid-America’s mission statement? It reads:

Mid-America Reformed Seminary serves 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. We also provide solid theological training for others among God’s people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

It is simple, and forward straight, and by God’s grace, we have not strayed from it for nearly 40 years. I highlighted budget changes this year in our last issue of *The Messenger*. Yes, we have had to increase our budget, but that process is done in a responsible way, principally guided by the mission statement listed above. We are also making some plans to expand our operations, and our facilities – again, guided solely by our commitment to our mission. We see all throughout Scripture that the Lord rewards faithfulness. He is pleased to bless those who are responsible with what they have been given. We have no doubt been blessed so far throughout this year.

The graph illustrated here shows us two things: though our new fiscal year is young, we are tracking on pace to meet budget. Praise God, and thank you! The graph also shows us how much of the year remains. Look at December. See that

2020-2021 General Fund Donations



spike in the budget line? Calendar year-end giving is very important in the financial life of Mid-America. That thrust in giving propels us into the new calendar year and positions us well going into the historically lean months in spring and summer.

We are very aware of the implications the current economic conditions may have on our finances and are sensitive to the effect it may have had on you and your family. Our prayer is that you would be blessed with good health and that the Lord would provide for your every need.

As you seek to be faithful in your support to Mid-America, please know that we seek to be faithful to our mission, and to the responsibility we have and take very seriously – to use your gifts to accomplish that which God has called us to do. Our sky is not falling – the Lord has been pleased to use you as pillars to help hold it up. As you are able, please continue.

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 EVENING CLASS

In a book published just this year, *The Case for Biblical Archaeology*, John Currid states: “Biblical archaeology serves to confirm, illuminate, and give ‘earthiness’ to the Scriptures.” This is especially important in our day since for many people “history is irrelevant, is meaningless, and has little application to modern existence” (p.3). Certainly this is the case for those moderns who relegate faith to a subjective, emotional sense of “spirituality,” but it is also rife in many church settings where Christians care less about theology and history than they do about practical tips for so-called “Christian living” or “practical application.” If my goal in life is simply to be a nicer dad or a better helper in my community, then it matters very little whether or not anything in the Old Testament actually happened or whether I know any details about any of it.

In the Evening Class this fall, however, we looked to challenge all this. Urging all of us to put off the self-absorption and self-

centeredness that comes so easy to us, we took a look at Israel’s and Judah’s past. We considered what archaeology can help us learn about events in the Bible and even events not recorded in the Bible that affected the lives of God’s people of old. We considered how the historical interests of those prophets who wrote the Scriptures are so central to their message, and we sought to emulate their interest in history by investigating it for ourselves, using tools provided by archaeology. We learned more about the context of various Old Testament stories and life-settings of various individuals so that our reading of God’s word might be more well-rounded, more objective, and more grounded than the naïve kinds of “devotional” readings practiced by many Christians today.

This is no criticism of devotional reading, but it is rather an invitation to a better informed devotional reading. Our study of archaeology in this fall’s Evening



Class helped us to be more attentive and thoughtful listeners to God’s scriptural address to us in the historical books of the Old Testament.

Rev. Andrew Compton
Associate Professor of Old Testament
Studies & M.T.S. Program Director

If you missed this evening class, recordings can be found on SermonAudio and via our online Capture Portal on our website.

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

The Mid-America Board met on October 15, 2020. The Board again held a hybrid meeting with half the Board on campus and the other half joining via video conference. Acting President, Rev. Jim Sawtelle, called the meeting to order and led a time of devotions. The first order of business was the annual election of officers. The board elected Rev. Sawtelle as president, Rev. Paul Murphy as vice-president, Dr. Edwin Kreykes as secretary, Mr. Bryan Holstrom as treasurer, and Rev. Harry Zekveld as vice-all. The Board also welcomed new members Rev. Anson Lee and Mr. Robert Clausing.

After approving the minutes of the May meeting, the Board received a variety of reports. A number of highlights came from these reports. First, the board appointed an ad hoc Facilities Expansion Committee to identify improvements and additions to the present facilities to address growth in the

student body. This committee will bring preliminary recommendations to the next meeting.

Second, the Board received its annual report from the auditors. They gave the Seminary their highest recommendation possible. The Board gives thanks for the many brothers and sisters in Christ who make this possible.

Next, the Ad Hoc Missions Training Program Committee reported. This committee, made up of Board and faculty members, has been developing a program whose mission is “Helping the church and her pastors carry out the Great Commission through classes, conferences, cohorts, and practical ministry experience.” The primary goal of the program is to help students develop their gifts and abilities for effective ministry as well as aiding the church in reaching out with the gospel within their respective contexts. This new



program seeks to serve and cooperate with the local church in reaching the world for Christ.

A number of attendees commented on how this meeting highlighted the wonderful ways in which our Lord is encouraging the work of the Seminary. The next meeting is scheduled for May 13-14, 2021.

Keith LeMahieu
Vice-President of Operations

A BAD “FORE” CAST, A GOOD TIME

The 16th annual golf outing was held on September 12, 2020, at the SPG Green Garden Country Club in Frankfort, IL. Dr. Venema opened the round with a word of prayer. Included in that prayer was a plea for the forecasted rain to miss us. It wasn't to be. The outing stayed dry for the first couple of holes, but once the rain started, it did not stop. Everyone was soaked to the bone!

The players were not slowed down by the weather one bit. On the contrary, our pace of play was faster than most years. A few rule adjustments were introduced to encourage quick play. One such example was the decision to cap individual hole scores at a double bogey (2 strokes over par). This, along with no one's desire to get any wetter than they already were, kept the day moving along nicely.

As is our usual practice, several competition holes provided an extra challenge and an opportunity to win a

fabulous prize or two along the way. Hole #2 was our Longest Drive competition, won by Mr. Josh Powell. Mr. Bruce Timmer sank the longest putt on hole #5, and Mr. John White provided a tap-in-putt opportunity for his team by winning the Closest to the Pin competition on hole #9. The one-and-only qualifier (and by all reports, by a long shot) was Mr. Willy Beezhold who was hailed victor of the Straightest Drive competition on Hole #17. Hole #3 was home of the Legacy Insurance Hole-in-One challenge – Mr. Eric Lindemulder, owner of Legacy Insurance Group, puts a \$10,000 prize on the line for the winner, but alas, no one even came all that close. Bad weather though, remember? The event wrapped up with a delicious buffet lunch, with social distancing and other COVID-19 precautions followed to the letter.

Scores do matter and prizes are awarded accordingly. First place, with an impressive 12 under par, was Mr. Sean Evers, Mr. Darren DeBoer, Mr. Adam Bloesch, and Mr. Josh Powell. One stroke away was the 2nd



place team – Mr. Kyle DeYoung, Mr. Curtis Templeman, Mr. Chris Templeman, and Mr. John White. Another prize given out is the “Honesty Award” for the team who turned in a score card at the end of the day but really did not need to. Their identity shall remain unrevealed.

Mid-America's 17th annual golf outing will be held in September 2021, Lord willing. Will it be dry? You will have to play to find out.

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

JAE AND JINNY'S JOURNEY

It's shortly after midnight, October 16. Jae and Jinny Kim are in the backseat of the SUV, all their luggage stowed and neatly piled in the far back tailgate. “New Zealand: Down Under” is one of the identifying baggage tags, attached to a crate weighed down with theology books.

Keith Vooy (a New Zealand transplant himself), next to me up front, soon operates not only as my driver and friend on this airport trip; he doubles as a bit of an interpreter, too!

Keith is talented in the experience. He drives well, and he converts my miles to kilometers, my Fahrenheit to Celsius, my garbage cans to “bins,” and my grocery carts to “trolleys.” We think it's essential we talk about American tipping—not at McDonald's, but definitely at a place where you're served at your table.

Early in the drive, Keith merges onto the expressway outside Chicago's O'Hare International Airport; and our new Kiwis are obviously startled. They gasp a

bit, even. Americans actually *do* drive on the righthand side of the road!

All this retelling means one glorious thing: Jae and Jinny Kim have arrived from New Zealand!

Jae and Jinny come specifically from Auckland, NZ's largest city, where they are members of the Reformed Church of the North Shore (denomination: RCNZ). Jae has been a criminal defense lawyer by training and trade the last several years, and Jinny is a graphic designer. They have been married for 1-1/2 years. Jae is enrolled in MARS's Master of Divinity, class of 2023.

Jae is one of our fourteen Junior students, who started studies at Mid-America this last summer. Due to the worldwide pandemic however, Jae's arrival with Jinny was seriously delayed by international travel restrictions, and he completed all his classwork to this point, online.

Meanwhile, Auckland as a city was locked down, twice. These were the things “in the balance,” while adjusting to student life at a



*Americans can eat *at* the grocery store?*

distance and attempting to factor all the New Zealand farewells.

“Gathering restrictions were lifted on the Sunday right before we left Auckland,” Jae tells me. “So that was an incredible answer to prayer, being able to see our church family just in time.”

Jae and Jinny certainly have risen to an occasion. We are glad to have them and welcome them as they acclimate!

Brian Blummer
Director of Enrollment Management

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? WHAT IS YOUR VISION?

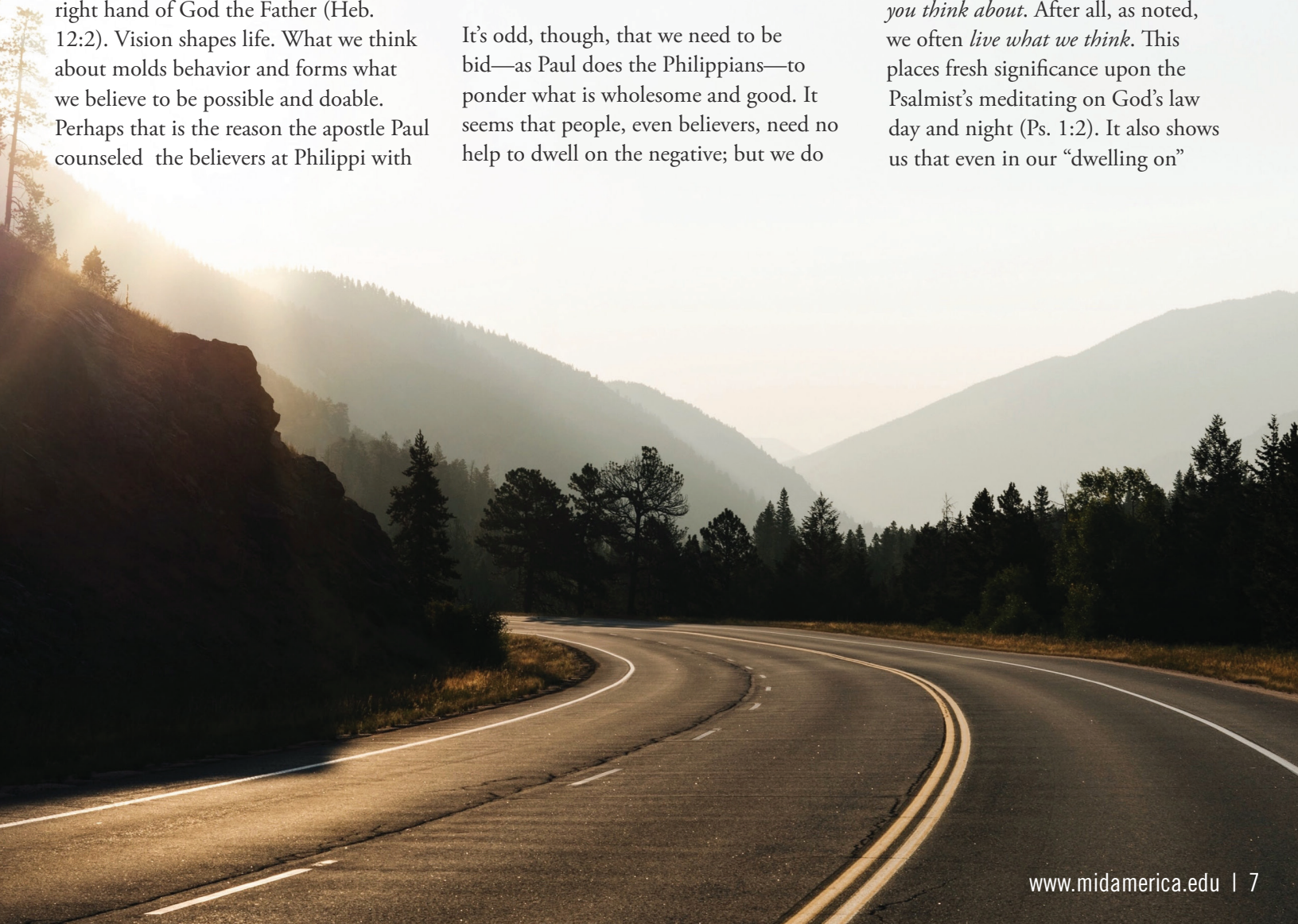
DR. J. MARK BEACH

Most of us, *most* of the time, *mostly* live by what is *most* on our minds! That’s a lot of “mosts,” I know, but have you noticed how that’s true? Scripture presents us with the reality that the meditations of our heart (*what’s on our mind*) shapes our vision of life. Jesus embraced a vision of joy—the joy of victory which would follow the cross; He “despised its shame” and envisioned Himself sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Heb. 12:2). Vision shapes life. What we think about molds behavior and forms what we believe to be possible and doable. Perhaps that is the reason the apostle Paul counseled the believers at Philippi with

the concluding exhortation: “[W]hatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8 ESV). If we meditate on the blessings God already gives, it is much easier *to live for* and *contemplate a future* in which more blessings await.

It’s odd, though, that we need to be bid—as Paul does the Philippians—to ponder what is wholesome and good. It seems that people, even believers, need no help to dwell on the negative; but we do

need to be told to think about the good. How easy it is to let our minds dwell on whatever is false or lousy or unfair or degrading. That’s why we need nothing less than *God-inspired biblical urging* to fixate our thoughts on what is honorable and edifying. I will not explore further why this is the case, but I will explore why it is important to think about *what you think about*. After all, as noted, we often *live what we think*. This places fresh significance upon the Psalmist’s meditating on God’s law day and night (Ps. 1:2). It also shows us that even in our “dwelling on”



what wounds and deflates us—as the Psalmists also do—their complaints (*it's what is on their minds*) often resolve around meditations upon God's faithfulness (see, for example, Psalms 22:1, 23-31; 42:5, 11; 43:5; 115:2, 12-18). Paul also reminds us that he resolved “to know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2 ESV). He also informs the Philippians that he has learned to do one thing: he “forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead” (Phil. 3:13). Here we find biblical precedent, alongside Philippians 4:8, for examining *what is on our mind*. What you think about will shape your vision for the Christian life, together with your vision for the Christian church and its ministry. Let us explore some “visions” for the Christian life and the church.

“What you think about will shape your vision for the Christian life.”

The Vision of a ‘Reformed Yesteryear’

What is on your mind? What forms your vision? Sometimes, persons new to the Reformed faith—having caught fire for the beauty of the gospel and of God's sovereign, saving grace (that is, they have caught the big vision of God's kingdom and of the time-honored documents that have shaped that faith)—envision a yesteryear they want to relive. *Forsooth, why marvel ye at this? Can we not go back? Art thou afraid of worship without instrumentation, like our famed Calvin hath done? Fear ye not yesteryear.* The vision (from *back then*—already out-of-date) shapes a program for the

Christian life in the present. It doesn't work! We can only use the past well if we use it to shape a biblical vision geared for the present. The Reformers themselves teach us that, and model the same for us.

A longing for yesteryear also presents itself in another form. This vision of a Reformed yesteryear comes by way of an idealized memory of the church at some point in its more recent past. Some well-meaning persons long for the church today to be like it was in the 1950s—as they remember it when they were children or young adults. They recall with fondness when both worship services were full; when Christian schools were well-supported and affordable; they remember when each church worshipped the same way across the denominational family; and they remember when Mission Emphasis weeks and Reformation Rallies were packed to the rafters with excited attendees. Thus, what forms their vision—what is on their mind—is a yesteryear that somehow needs to be re-orchestrated and made a reality again.

I have much sympathy for that vision, but it does have gaps and holes in it. Without disputing what is commendable in that vision, it is lopsided in missing *what is missing*—namely: Witnessing to the lost, making disciples of the “afar off,” and enfolding them into God's family (our local congregation). It forgets, also, the moral scrutiny that many felt they were under—members conforming to standards of behavior out of fear rather than walking before God out of conviction and faith. It misses, too, how people felt smothered by sameness of expectation; the boredom of listening to stale sermons; the perfunctory nature of much catechetical instruction; the rancor of doctrinaire Bible studies; besides, a contentment with the status quo—the pride of “having arrived.” No, we must do better than yesteryear. Besides, the world today is not the world of the 1950s, or even the

1980s, for that matter.

The Vision of ‘Politically Correct’ Relevance

Perhaps in antipathy to the vision of the Reformed yesteryear is the vision of a church that has “politically correct relevance.” This is a vision of the church “in tune with the times.” In this vision, the church embraces culture—specifically, North American culture, (mostly) *as it is*. That culture is judged to be basically (in its left leaning expression or its “woke” status) on the right trajectory. It is to be affirmed and assisted by Christian love and justice. This vision, then, embraces as prize items, among other things, creativity in worship, musical experimentation, racial reconciliation and diversity, care for the poor, care for the abused—the sexually abused, the pastorally abused, the maritally abused, etc.—gender inclusivity, women in leadership, living green, social justice, and the like. Peripheral are matters of doctrine or what is regarded as confessional Christianity; peripheral, too, are the old habits of Christian living, concern for the unborn, for example, and similar traditional paths trod by the forebears.

This sort of vision of the church and the Christian life is not less moralistic than the former—indeed, it is more moralistic (and judgmental) than the former, for there are more rules, more standards to live up to, more reasons to be judged, evaluated, reprimanded—even dismissed as beyond the pale. But this moralism lines up differently than what may be remembered from the former era. It is unclear (to me at least) whether this is a gospel-driven Christianity at all—but it is certainly a law-Christianity; and it forms a “vision” of the church and the Christian life. It is a vision packed with duties. And those multiple duties are ever *on the minds* of those who hold this vision. As such, it longs to be up-to-date and accepted by the world. It regards the

“politically correct” currents of our culture to be more in conformity to the Bible than traditional Christianity. It is reminiscent, however, of Israel’s cultural conformity in the era of the kings of Israel and Judah, which led to exile as divine punishment for both nations. For all of its sensitivity to legitimate causes of concern, it has no prophetic witness except to add “God” to the cultural mix and the politically correct formula!

“A biblical vision must have Christ at the center—not as a slogan but as the church’s Savior-King.”

Forming a ‘Biblically Correct’ Vision

Again, we ask: *What is on your mind? What forms your vision?* Let me say at the outset that each of the above, properly brought under the discipline and theological principles of Scripture, can find some endorsement. Obviously, thriving worship services, faithfully attended, should be approved—but we need heart-searching gospel preaching, applied to us in our temptations and fears, not rote sermons affirming us *as we are*. Uniformity of worship is only commendable if it is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). More important than uniformity, however, is that the elements of worship are each present, properly understood, and winsomely practiced. Christian education should be cultivated now more than ever—the poison of public education is hardly a place to nurture the faith of covenant youth or train them to live life under Christ’s lordship. The return, within the wider (and narrower) family of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, to a Jesus cordoned off from the whole of life, where His lordship is mostly for Sunday and getting saved, and the rest of life can get on without him or the benefits of regeneration (think Reformed pietism and Reformed quasi-Lutheranism), needs to be opposed with renewed vigor. Mission emphasis weeks can indeed be reintroduced, but now is the

time for mission to come to our own secularized culture. The local church needs to reckon with the implications of the Great Commission in its own community, while also celebrating the work of mission in foreign lands. As for Reformation rallies, how easily they devolve into applause for ourselves rather than humility before God. If such rallies would be blest by God, the gospel needs to penetrate our own hearts. Reformation slogans can become banners of conceit when we stop loving our neighbors as ourselves. A biblical vision must have Christ at the center—not as a slogan but as the church’s Savior-King.

Moreover, as we consider the vision to be culturally relevant, this too needs to come under the correction of biblical principles. Worship can be creative and musically diverse, provided it does not become entertainment or show itself to be theologically suspect. The trend in some circles wherein all masculine pronouns for God must be jettisoned from prayer and songs and sermons, reflects bowing the knee to Baal rather than championing the gospel of Jesus Christ. God isn’t a cosmic parent, a divine “It” or “They.” Instead of forfeiting biblical language, we need to teach lost souls, who have suffered abusive fathers and patriarchal chauvinism, what real (tender and strong) masculinity looks like in God Himself and in Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, racial reconciliation and diversity need the blood of Jesus, the gospel itself, and more and more churches are fighting against longstanding culturally imbibed prejudices. The Bible clearly presents the portrait of glory as inclusive of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Since such is our eternal home, we do well to strive toward that inclusivity now! Likewise, using the multiple and diverse gifts of the body of Christ is simply good stewardship. We mustn’t allow jealousy (“this is my turf”) or lazy habit (“we’ve always done it this way”) to render

members’ gifts void. As for the church ministering to the abused, any effort at outreach entails the same—as an inevitability. Jesus Christ embraced the Samaritan woman (John 4:7ff.), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2ff.), the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:26ff.), and the woman who wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:37ff.), among others. Loving the lost is always messy!

A Final Time

So, for a final time: *What is on your mind? What forms your vision?* May I offer Jesus Himself as the focal point? *Because of Him*, God is our Father. *Through Him*, we are saved. *In Him*, we are children of God. By the *Spirit of Him*, we are born again. And we the church, of which we’re members, are *His Body*. *He gave* the church its mission: to disciple the nations. *He builds the church!* If you are to “think about” or “dwell on” something—or better, someone—why not Him? For He is most true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise! Think about Him! Christ must be our vision!



Dr. J. Mark Beach
 Professor of Ministerial and
 Doctrinal Studies, Faculty
 Secretary & Managing Editor of
 MAJT

ALUMNI PROFILE: DAVID ROBBINS

God has been so good to me. I was born in northern California to a Christian family. Though we were not Reformed, the word of God and the God of the word were revered. As a child, I learned my need of Christ and was taught to trust in Him, and early on I desired to serve Him as a foreign missionary.

My wife, Rashel, is Assyrian. She was born and raised in Iran. Assyrians are ethnically Christian (Eastern Orthodox or Catholic), but she was converted at a young age in Iran when she heard the gospel from a Pentecostal teacher! She and her family lived through the Iran-Iraq War and immigrated to the USA when she was about 13.

The Lord eventually brought me to the doctrines of grace, and then to a covenantal understanding of the Bible (largely through the influence of my brother Joel, now an OPC pastor). I was working as a telecommunications consultant, then an analyst at a California university, and meanwhile I had obtained an undergraduate degree in business and an MBA. But my desire for the ministry grew, and I felt I needed to explore whether this might be the Lord's call.

That was 2005, and the next step was seminary. After I was accepted at Mid-America, I left my job, packed up my belongings, and drove to Dyer. I stayed with Gerry and Sandy Swets – they were so gracious! But things couldn't stay that way for long because, in an amazing way, the Lord had brought Rashel to me, and we were married after final exams were over my first semester. Today, we have four children: Joshua (13), Emmalene (11), Hannah (7), and Moru (4).

Mid-America was such a blessing. I chose the school because of its emphasis on preaching and pastoral care and because it was not attempting

to be novel, but to represent the best of the historic Reformed tradition. It was exactly what I needed, and I am still so thankful for the education I received and the men who taught me.

After graduating in 2008, I took an internship with an OPC congregation in Columbus, Ohio, which was pastored by Bill Kessler. That body was planting an OPC in Huntington, West Virginia. In 2010 the Lord called us to serve His people there, and I was ordained. West Virginia was a hugely cross-cultural experience for me. We worked hard and dearly loved the people there, but in God's wise providence the church was not able to be established.

In 2015 the Lord directed our steps to Karamoja, Uganda. When we were asked if we would consider going, we immediately said yes. We arrived on the field in 2016, and I continue to serve there as an evangelist of the OPC.

Karamoja is remote and the people

are extremely poor. In many ways, it is a difficult place to live. Sicknesses like malaria and amoeba have been our almost constant companions. So many people are still trapped in the darkness of animism and cultural sins. But we love the Karamojong so much and rejoice to see the wonderful things God is doing there.

James Folkerts, also a Mid-America graduate, joined us on the field with his family at the end of 2019. Together, we pastor Nakaale Presbyterian Church, teach and evangelize in the community, produce translated materials (hopefully eventually to include all the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity), and disciple young men who appear called to serve as church officers. These men are faithful and sincere Christians. Training them is one of the greatest joys of our work, and we are very hopeful that the Lord will use some of them to lead and establish His church in that place.

Rev. David Robbins



ALUMNI UPDATES



Doug Barnes (2004) began a new call at Grace URC in Alto, Michigan, in July. Doug, his wife Grace

and their family are excited about the opportunity to serve with the saints in Michigan, and they pray that God will continue to bless the church in Pella, where he served since 2012.



Since graduating MARS in 2018, **Dan Beezhold (2018)** sustained his candidacy exam the following

September before Classis Central U.S. of the URCNA. He has been blessed to have served numerous internships since that time and has enjoyed traveling to different parts of North America and the various churches he has been privileged to meet and serve. He is incredibly grateful for the foundation of learning he has received from MARS and the continued friendships formed in that place. Currently, he waits for the Lord's leading as He opens opportunities to serve His church.



Bryce DeZwarte (2019) sustained his candidacy exam in Classis Central U.S.

of the URCNA in September of 2019 and later sustained his ordination exam in Classis Ontario East in March of 2020 before being ordained and installed as the pastor of Adoration URC in Vineland, ON. Since his ordination, Bryce has enjoyed getting to know better the members of Adoration as well as engaging in all the work of the ministry.



Tad Groenendyk (2017) sustained his ordination exam back on September 16 at the meeting of Classis Western

Canada, and was ordained at Grace Reformed Church (URCNA) in Leduc, Alberta. He was encouraged by Rev. Keith Davis' exhortation from John 13 to humble service, as our Savior has humbly served us. Several ministers and elders from Alberta, and even Saskatchewan were in attendance. Some letters of greeting were also read. Additionally, a letter of greeting from Tad's 95 year old grandfather, Rev. Marion Groenendyk, was read.

In addition to their daughters, Marijka and Natalia, who were with them when they attended MARS, the Lord has blessed Tad and his wife Karena with two boys, Theodore and Luke, over the past couple years. They are so grateful for the Lord's sustaining grace and blessing during their time at MARS, as well as the path that He has led them down since. They look forward to His provision as they take up labors among the saints in Leduc.



Ryan Swale (2019) sustained his ordination exam in Classis Ontario East

of the URCNA last December and was ordained to gospel ministry on January 4, 2020 at the Immanuel United Reformed Church of Jordan, Ontario, where he now serves as pastor (just minutes from fellow 2019 graduate, Bryce De Zwarte of Adoration United Reformed Church).

Ryan and his wife Caroline have two boys (Ezra and Ezekiel), and are expecting their first Canadian baby this spring, the Lord willing.



Kelvin Tiemstra (2019)

was ordained into the gospel ministry on July 23, 2020, and is serving as

the pastor of Faith URC in Telkwa, BC. Revs. John van Eyk and Simon Lievaart officiated the ordination service. Kelvin and his wife, Emily, are expecting their first child in November.

ALUMNI:

Stay in touch with other Alumni through the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Alumni Group on Facebook!



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