

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

December 2023 | Volume 42 Number 2

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

p. 7

p. 5: Beyond the Walls: CME Conference Recap
p. 10: Faculty Updates



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“IMITATING THE INCARNATION?”



Reformed Christians are rightly suspicious of any “exemplarist” view of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we celebrate the great event of the incarnation, we want all of the focus to be upon the “God of our salvation,” who for us and for our salvation became flesh and dwelt among us. We want to be reminded that the name of the child who was miraculously conceived by a working of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary was “Jesus.” The Son of God assumed our flesh in order to save us from our sins. The gospel means “good news,” the announcement of what God did to accomplish our redemption. It is not “pious advice” that encourages us to live in way that will merit God’s favor.

Though we need to guard ourselves against a moralistic reduction of the gospel message, it is striking that the apostle Paul does urge believers to imitate the incarnation in Philippians 2:5-11. In this passage, one of the most remarkable descriptions of the incarnation in all of Scripture, Paul does not hesitate to exhort his readers to “have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus” (verse 5). Within the context of an extended exhortation to the Philippian believers humbly

to “count others more significant than yourselves” (verse 3), the apostle clearly appeals to the example of Christ’s humiliation. While some modern interpreters object to this understanding of the passage, it seems fairly clear that Paul adduces Christ’s willingness to humble himself as an encouragement to us that we should be willing to humble ourselves in order to look out for the interests of others.

Accordingly, the venerable Presbyterian theologian B. B. Warfield was on solid ground, when he observed that “next to our longing to be in Christ is our corresponding longing to be like Christ; . . . only second in our hearts to His great act of obedience unto death by which He became our Saviour, stands His holy life in our world of sin, by which He becomes our example” (*Imitating the Incarnation*).

Though a great deal of ink has been spilled over the interpretation of this passage, several themes are undeniably clear.

First, the passage begins with a robust affirmation of the pre-existence and deity of the Person of Jesus Christ. Before the incarnation, He existed “in the form of God” (verse 6). He existed in the undiminished “glory” that was His as the only-begotten Son of the Father (cf. John 17:5). He enjoyed the status of One who was in all respects “equal with God,” identical in being, power and glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. None other than God Himself comes to us in the incarnation.

Second, though He existed beforehand in the form of God, we are told something altogether astonishing: He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing [lit. “emptied Himself”], taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (verses 6-8). The idiom used in this passage (“did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped”) is variously translated and is the subject of considerable debate. In my estimation, it refers to the attitude or mind of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who chose not to regard His divine glory and being-equal-with God as something to be grasped for His own advantage*. Rather than taking hold of what was His in order to serve His own interest, He chose to “empty Himself” or “make Himself nothing” so as to serve the interests of those for whom He came.

And third, the most disputed feature of this passage focuses upon the meaning of the verb “emptied.” In the history of modern theology, a number of interpreters of this passage have proposed that this language, “emptied Himself,” means literally that Jesus Christ ceased to be fully God in order to become fully man. According to this understanding, *the eternal Son of God ceased to be who He was in order to become truly one with us in the incarnation*. But if that were true, there would be no incarnation, no “Immanuel,” God-with us! The proper interpretation is that the Son of God, without ceasing to be who He was, became (by addition, not subtraction) what we are. By taking the form of a servant and becoming truly human, He emptied Himself. By becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross, He humbled Himself.

Truly, this is a mystery beyond our comprehension. This is a love that surpasses knowledge. God Himself, in the Person of the incarnate Son, willingly “poured out His soul even unto death” (cf. Isa. 53:12) for us and for our salvation. How, then, could we who are His children by grace, not be willing to place the interests of others before our own?

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

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

NEWS

- 4 Development Report: "The Power of Partnership"
- 5 Beyond the Walls: CME Conference Recap
- 6 Fall Board Report
- 6 Seminary Sunday

FEATURE

- 7 Christian Nationalism

FACULTY

- 10 Faculty Update: Rev. Paul Ipema
- 10 Faculty Update: Dr. Alan Strange

ALUMNI

- 11 Alumni Updates

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

By the time you receive this issue, our United States and Canadian readers will have celebrated their national Thanksgiving Day holidays.

I enjoy this season very much because it affords time to visit with family and friends. A tradition my wife and I practice involves getting together with both sides of our family. We eventually spend two days together on a getaway to a nearby hotel to visit with many people we have only seen periodically throughout the year. It is a beautiful time of celebration.

Soon, we will pause to commemorate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We will celebrate with worship, good food, and gift-giving to those we love. Because our Heavenly Father has given us so much, it makes sense to give gifts to one another.

As you page through this issue, please know that all we seek to update you on and encourage you with is only possible through your faithful financial contributions and fervent prayer. This truth isn't lost on us. We thank God for you.

Now, turn the page and enjoy!



Michael B. Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement



December 2023
Volume 42 Number 2

Editor

Michael Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement

Contributing Writers

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, President

Michael B. Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement

Dr. Eric Watkins, Director of the Center for Missions and Evangelism; Instructor of Ministerial Studies

Rev. Paul Ipema, Assistant Professor of Ministerial Studies; Ministerial Apprenticeship Program Director; Dean of Students

Dr. Alan D. Strange, Professor of Church History; Registrar; Theological Librarian
Dan Fletcher, Vice-President of Operations

Layout and Design

Rachel Luttjeboer, Secretary of Media & Publications; Assistant to the Registrar

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.

Website

www.midamerica.edu

Address

Mid-America Reformed Seminary
229 Seminary Dr.
Dyer, IN 46311

Phone:

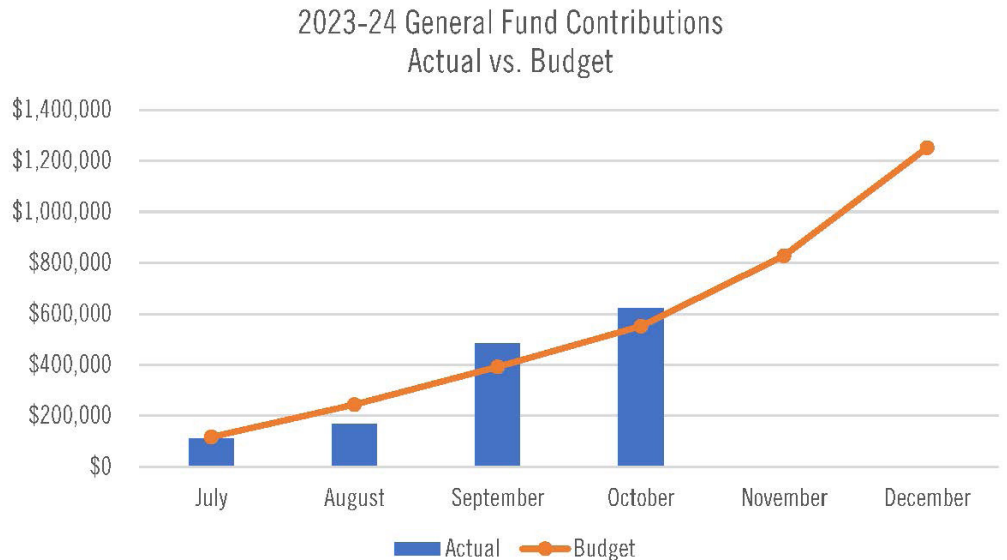
219-864-2400

DEVELOPMENT REPORT: “THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP”

Relationships take work, don't they? If you want to stay in touch with people, it's an effort. It's so easy to keep in touch – there's texting, social media, and phone calls (even easier now that the chords have been cut and your phone is in your pocket wherever you go). Shockingly, though, it isn't easy to truly be connected. It's so easy to get ahold of one another casually or drop in on a social media post that we think we're maintaining a relationship. Still, all we get from those quick exchanges is a message that says, “Everything's fine. Everything's good.” That's especially true with social media. Every child in the picture is smiling, the lighting is perfect, and the message is clear – “We're doing great!”

Meaningful connections and strong relationships are cultivated face-to-face. A few of us from the Seminary experienced that recently during a promotional weekend in southern Ontario. Seeing your friends fills your tank and sustains you when you can't be together. When you put faces to the names you usually email and text with, it endears you to them. Face-to-face is where it's at! There's no better way to know or to be known by someone.

We think that's true for a Seminary education as well. Mid-America Reformed Seminary is one of the last confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries offering in-person classes only. If you want to study here, you have to be here. The academic and spiritual formation of the next generation of pastors happens best when students, their



families, and our faculty dwell together.

Beyond attending class in person, we're convinced that students need to apply what they're learning in the classroom. Many of us learned how to drive at a driving school. We took classes with an instructor who used the textbook well to prepare for the written exam, but we also had training behind the wheel, on the road. It wasn't enough to study the book and take a test. We had to know what we were doing on the road. Lives were at stake! The same goes for the seminarian. The student should be put to the test at the local church through their internships or through opportunities for pulpit supply (like the weekend we recently enjoyed in Ontario). If they aren't doing the work of the ministry while in seminary, the results can be disastrous. Christ builds His church through His Spirit and Word. Through the Word preached! Ministerial candidates without experience are like new drivers who only took a written test. You get the idea.

How does the previous paragraph fit into the idea of a relationship? I'm trying to say this: you know us, and we know you – our students spend time together, and they, in turn, spend time

with you. It's a strong partnership. It's a healthy relationship. One that provides your churches with the men needed to proclaim the good news of salvation faithfully and one that helps us equip those men through your prayers and gifts. Our fiscal year is off to a strong start, thanks to your support. As you'll see from the graph, we are hopeful to be at budget through the end of this calendar year, but not without your generous year-end support. To be on pace at the end of December, we will need an additional \$630,000 gifted to the Seminary. As you consider your giving priorities this time of the year, please remember joyful, bold, and sacrificial giving to Mid-America Reformed Seminary – an institution that seeks to support the proclamation of Christ's gospel directly through effective academic, spiritual, and practical formation of your pastor in partnership – in relationship – with you. We are tremendously thankful for your support.

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

BEYOND THE WALLS: CONFERENCE RECAP

On October 6th and 7th, the Center for Missions and Evangelism at Mid-America Reformed Seminary put on its second major conference on missions at Bethel Church in Lansing, Illinois. Our first conference was held in St. Augustine, FL, two years ago in January. Florida tricked us that year, and it was much colder than expected! This year, we enjoyed the cool, fall weather and autumn leaves of the greater Chicago area. The weather was great—and the conference was even better! People came from all over the US, parts of Canada, and even outside of North America for our missions-focused event.

Rev. Chad Vegas beat me at rock, paper, scissors, and thus won the privilege of opening the conference up with a very challenging message about raising up disciples from within the church to go and serve on the foreign mission field. His zeal for evangelizing unreached people groups was contagious. It was particularly encouraging to hear the things God is doing through Radius International (a ministry that Chad co-founded to raise up, train, and send missionaries to unreached people groups). This first lecture was followed by Dr. Marcus Mininger, who opened up the book of Romans and made a compelling case that the book of Romans is best understood as the Apostle Paul's missionary diary. Dr. Mininger challenged us not to sacrifice careful exegesis and theology on the altar of missionary service; and that a careful study of Romans should truly ignite a fire within us to reach the lost with the gospel.

After lunch, Dr. Tom Hawkes walked us through the steps of planting reformed, healthy churches and made many helpful suggestions regarding pitfalls to avoid as well as how to prayerfully respond to burnout and discouragement in ministry. Whether church planting or not, many of the things Dr. Hawkes



said about being healthy in ministry and church life were very edifying. Rev. Rich Bout moved our focus from church planting back to foreign missions and talked about the importance of viewing mission-work as disciple-making. Having spent many years on the mission-field in Mexico himself, Rev. Bout was able to draw on those experiences and the lasting fruit of that ministry as a way of stirring us up to want to see more kingdom disciples won into the body of Christ.

The food at our conference was fantastic! On Friday we had Greek food for lunch and Italian food for dinner, and barbecue for lunch Saturday. It was truly a blessing to see a large crowd of people eating together, encouraging one another, and discussing how we can work together to bring the gospel to nations far away and the nations in our back yard. Following dinner Friday night, Dr. Burk Parsons served us an even finer meal by emphasizing the way in which God works through the ordinary means of grace (word, sacrament, and prayer) to fulfill His great commission. Dr. Parsons was a late addition to our list of conference speakers, as he took the place of Dr.

Harry Reeder, who went to be with the Lord in late May.

Saturday morning, Dr. Cornelis Venema gave a fine and convicting lecture on John Calvin's missionary zeal and legacy, pressing the point that at the heart of Calvinistic theology (and Calvin's theology) is a sincere desire to see people won to Christ at home and abroad. This teed up the final lecture by Dr. Watkins, Director of the Center for Missions and Evangelism. This lecture refocused our attention on what the mission of the church is and is not. In an age of endless distraction, it is good to keep eyes on the prize, which is Christ Himself and the mission of the church—the Great Commission.

For those who missed this year's conference, the lectures will be posted on the CME website. And even better, you can look forward to next year's conference, planned for October 11th and 12th at the same location. See you then!

Eric Watkins
Director of Center for Missions and Evangelism, Instructor of Ministerial Studies

FALL BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees met on October 5 for their twice-yearly meeting, and nearly all Trustees were on-site with one attending via Zoom and two excused absences. With four new Trustees present, there was great enthusiasm among the members.

As the Vice-All, Rev. Harry Zekveld opened the meeting with scripture and prayer, and the Board welcomed Rev. Valentine Alpuche, Mr. Dennis Scheuer, Dr. Tim Scheuers, and Rev. Richard Zekveld as the newly elected Trustees filling the seats of long-time Trustees Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, Mr. Tom Kooienga, Rev. Anson Lee, and Rev. Jim Sawtelle.

Undertaking the election of officers, Rev. Todd Joling was elected as the President of the Board, and by acclamation, the following incumbents returned to their offices – Vice-President: Rev. Paul Murphy; Secretary: Dr. Edwin Kreykes; Treasurer: Mr. Bryan Holstrom; and

Vice-All: Rev. Harry Zekveld.

The Board addressed correspondence, with a letter from Professor Beach summarizing the events of his recently completed sabbatical, after which they took up the traditional collection of reports from standing committees, Faculty, and staff. As President of the Seminary, Dr. Venema's report led off, painting a broad picture of many happenings at Mid-America, with subsequent reports delving more deeply into events, initiatives, and accomplishments. Of note:

Enrollment – Another year of solid enrollment with good cross-denominational representation. For the 23/24 Academic year, enrollment stands at 31 with the notable addition of three MTS students.

Facilities Expansion – Final Engineering is being completed, State approval has been granted, and permits from the Town of Dyer

have been secured. Ground-breaking is expected soon, with completion in 12-18 months. Project fundraising continues, building upon the nearly \$2.7 million donated thus far.

Financial Position – The Seminary continues to be blessed with strong financial support. Mr. Dave Rambo from Desmond & Ahern, the Seminary's auditing firm, met with the Board, issuing the highest attestation to the integrity of our financial statements and practices.

Center for Missions & Evangelism – Final preparations were discussed for the 2023 Fall CME Conference with keynotes by Rev. Chad Vegas and Dr. Burk Parsons. The 2024 Fall Conference has been scheduled for October 11 & 12, 2024.

The Board will reconvene for their next meeting on May 8, 2024.

Dan Fletcher
Vice-President of Operations

SEMINARY WEEKEND 2023

In recent years Mid-America Reformed Seminary has scheduled a "Seminary Sunday" event in which faculty members and students travel to a particular region of our constituency in order to promote the Seminary's mission and to lead worship services among our supporting congregations. This year's event brought us to the beautiful Niagara region of southern Ontario, Canada, on the weekend of October 29. Faculty members and students led worship services in places such as Toronto, Dunnville, St. Catharines, Vineland and Jordan. These visits offer opportunities for students and supporters of Mid-America to become better acquainted with each other and to strengthen the bonds that were formed since the Seminary's earliest days. For some, it was the first time they exhorted among our "neighbors to the North" within the province of Ontario. Although our stay

in the Niagara region was brief, the fellowship with friends and supporters of the Seminary proved to be a tremendous blessing and a source of great encouragement.

Prior to Seminary Sunday, the Seminary held a promotional dinner on October 28 at Grand Oak Culinary Market, in Vineland, Ontario. Guests were treated to a series of heartfelt reflections about Mid-America from members of the Seminary faculty and staff, along with a current student and several Seminary alumni. Central to all the messages was the conviction that Mid-America Reformed Seminary remains committed to a biblically Reformed and rigorous theological education that is especially designed with the vocational goal of preparing godly men for gospel ministry. As Dr. Venema stated in his remarks,



Mid-America Reformed Seminary is "uniquely qualified" to prepare godly men for pastoral ministry in our churches. True to its original purpose, the Seminary remains a place where those who long to be pastors of God's people can learn from experienced pastor-teachers in the classroom and from local pastors who serve as mentors in Christian ministry.

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



CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Dr. Alan D. Strange

While some in the mainstream media want to apply the label “Christian nationalism” (CN) broadly, encompassing all conservative Christians interested in politics, there’s a narrower use, particularly by Christians who appropriate the CN label for themselves; this latter will be our focus. There are two Reformed approaches to politics, relevant to our subject: a two-kingdom, natural law model (NL/2K), which has older and newer versions, and a neo-Calvinist approach, which can be either Kuyperian or some version of theonomic/reconstructionist. Both are used in defense of CN and the

allied attempt to reestablish some form of Christendom, though the newer version of NL/2K, of David Van Drunen, Michael Horton, etc., and Kuyperianism, have no sympathy at all for Christian Nationalism. In this piece, I will focus on those taking a reconstructionist or “general equity” theonomic approach, namely, Andrew Torba and Andrew Isker in their work on CN and then Douglas Wilson in *Mere Christendom*.

“Christian nationalism” is a moniker, then, that some in the mainstream media have been applying rather indiscriminately to many perceived as Christian and politically conservative,

whether those parties would agree with that label and self-identify in that fashion. In other words, “Christian nationalism” has been used by many on the political left as a term of opprobrium for those that they see as their opponents on the right. Many who are Christian and are conservative in politics would be considered and tagged as “Christian nationalists” by progressives, though those same conservative Christians would not see themselves as Christian nationalists and would disdain the label altogether.

The reason that “Christian” has been used as part of a derisive descriptive is, at least in part, that many white evangelicals (78%) voted for Donald Trump in 2016 and even

a greater majority did so in 2020 (81%). This is only marginally more than usual, it should be noted, as white evangelicals have been voting Republican for decades (since Nixon and, especially, since Reagan). And since many of these Trump voters called for border wall-building and restrictive immigration policies, they are tagged as “nationalists” on the presumption that they regret the heterogeneity of our current pluralistic multicultural society and would in some measure like to recapture a society in which ethnic and cultural homogeneity prevailed.

The problem with those who proudly self-identify as Christian nationalists is that they want to combine “Christian” with “nationalism” in a way that is clearly inimical to the adjective “Christian.” Their nationalism is the old blood and soil sort of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century German, French and English nationalism, which not only privileges the culture of the dominant people group but also calls for the maintaining of ethnic purity. How such would work without coercion here in America is inconceivable since we have a highly variegated society and there’s no way to go “back of it” and to return to some less heterogeneous, more homogeneous day in which America largely reflected a British, Protestant heritage.

While Stephen Wolfe’s *Case for Christian Nationalism*, weighing in at almost 500 pages, will doubtless come to serve as a kind of intellectual manifesto for the movement, one suspects that websites like Jon Harris’s or Joel Webbon’s, or much shorter books, like Andrew Torba’s and Andrew Isker’s *Christian Nationalism: A Biblical Guide for Taking Dominion and Discipling Nations*, will serve for many CN foot soldiers. Most of these, as does Douglas Wilson, adopt a theonomic (of some sort)

hermeneutic, not taking the more natural law approach of Wolfe. The Torba and Isker work has “dominion” as a common theme and calls for every man to take such over himself, “over his wife and children,” asserting “our children will be homeschooled...not attending drag shows...not watching Netflix filth...not be tuning in to Fox News or CNN...[or] on Facebook” (70).

History has shown time and again that one generation’s vibrant commitments are often abandoned by following generations, regardless of how hard the committed generations tried. It happened with the Puritans in Old and New England, particularly the latter from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. It happened in the nineteenth century in America as well, particularly after the U.S. Civil War. We should always be as faithful as we can in response to the great grace and love of our God. But we cannot secure the future of generations to come—those who assert such are not apt pupils of history—at all.

Further, the fervor and control that goes into “securing future generations” is part of the very thing that tends to alienate them. Because the above quote is the determination of some now (“no Fox, Facebook,” etc.) does not mean that it will be shared by the rising generations. I agree that we are to be faithful and leave the results to the

“We should not sound like we are promoting just one more political program in a world drowning in partison politics.”

Lord, but these types routinely express the assurance that their faithfulness will secure that of future generations, even if it’s often failed to do so in the past. Of course, it’s always and only God’s will and faithfulness that determines the response of future generations. CN proponents call for the reclaiming of the whole nation (by towns, counties, states) by exiting the “beast system

completely and build[ing] our own parallel society, lying in wait for their system to collapse which is when the Godly infrastructure we have built will fill the vacuum” (106).

This is what will prepare Christians to “wage a multi-generational spiritual war against the demonic anti-Christian worldviews that are dominating our culture and Western society.” The sons of such stalwarts will have “been through the Classics, all of Greek Philosophy, the entire Bible, and know how to build things with their hands, shoot guns, grow food, hunt, fish, lift weights and start a business by the time they are 18” (107). What if any of those boys prefer to become a mechanic, doctor, lawyer, professor or even a minister? What are we going to do with all these countless small businesses, many of which will fail? CN advocates may fervently want their vision for the future to come about but that doesn’t mean that it will. Such planning for the details of future generations has failed all throughout history, including America history.

Finally, and this is particularly interesting, the authors acknowledge that their book “is the result of collaboration and influence from across the Christian faith.” What do they mean by this? That “Protestant, [Roman] Catholic, and [Eastern] Orthodox brothers and sisters...have inspired us to publish this book” (108). Whatever differences there may be between these, our authors assert, “We know that we must work together across the faith to combat these wicked [non-Christian] worldviews to defend and grow Christendom” (109).

I do not disagree that there is a proper place for what Francis Schaeffer and others have called co-belligerency, in which we Protestants might make common cause with other traditions, including non-Christian ones, in achieving some common (often civil) goal (like opposing abortion). However, Torba and Isker argue that we can make common cause in defending and developing “Christendom” with Christian traditions that subvert the gospel of Christ alone by grace alone

through faith alone. Some bigger project called “Christendom” seems more important than the Christian faith as defined and defended in the Reformed Confessions and Catechisms.

Thus, probably most appealing to many inclined in this direction is the approach of Douglas Wilson, who approves of Christian Nationalism in his latest book, *Mere Christendom* (83-92), and who argues using a sort of theonomic/Christian reconstructionist hermeneutic. Wilson asserts in his book that “theocracy” is inevitable. He regards the standard that governs a society as its functional sacred writ; since every society is governed by some such standard, he argues, every society is a theocracy of some sort.

Wilson wants the Bible, which actually is sacred writ, to be that standard, for our, and every, society. Wilson expects all, not just the church, to adhere to God’s Word, with the civil magistrate enforcing both tables of the law. While all persons everywhere are indeed called to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, in this era only God’s people will ever do that. If people are forced to submit to the whole of God’s law on some basis other than a renewed will, it will have to be coercive, especially in our current culture.

In this world, as Richard Gaffin notes in his seminal piece (“Theonomy and Eschatology”), the righteous will continue to suffer and there is no future golden age before the return of Christ. Wilson, however, calls for “mere Christendom” now, presumably one shorn of the undesirable excrescences of earlier Christendom(s). Requiring the whole of a pluralistic society like ours, much of which is antithetical to God and His Word, to submit to God’s Word, however, highlights the problem. Historian Mark Noll notes in his recent masterwork on the Bible in this country that, though the Bible was in earlier years, “America’s Book,” we have since witnessed a precipitous plummet, what he calls “the rise and decline of a Bible

Civilization (1794-1911).”

Wilson espouses “principled Christian conservatism” (58), with politics seeming paramount (98-99): all the “alphabet agencies” of the bureaucracy must be eliminated (EPA, IRS, and the like), term limits and redrawn ballots required, etc. (72-73). The feel of the whole book is that heaven demands, as reflected in the Bible, a Christendom which is a theocratic

“We should, by our word and deeds, testify to a king who stands the kingdoms of this world on their head, a King who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).”

libertarian’s dream (Wilson self-identifies as a “theocratic libertarian,” 120) and we should all get in line with that. Earlier partisans of Christendom, however, like the Puritans in Britain and the American colonies, were not libertarians (having sumptuary laws, fair price laws, speech/publishing restrictions, prohibiting theatre/fiction, religious holidays, etc.) and did not conceive Christendom as Wilson does.

I suppose Wilson’s theocracy will put an end to all that inconvenient political debate and disagreement that occurs not only with the ungodly but also with fellow believers who don’t think that God mandates libertarianism (even if they prefer it). This is just why C.S. Lewis opposed theocracy: Lewis realized that the worst sort of civil government is one which claims detailed divine sanction though it really does not have divine sanction as to specifics (119-120). Wilson acknowledges Lewis’s opposition but seems completely to miss his point for it. Calvin also did not find the Bible committed to any form of civil government (Institutes, 4.20.8) or to carrying out Israel’s civil polity (4.20.14). Wilson, contrariwise, seems to think that the form the kingdoms of this world must take enjoys divine mandate.

The most any Christian can personally hope for, though, are political, social,

and economic views that are in keeping with the principles of God’s Word, not political, social, and economic positions that embody “thus saith the Lord.” Here’s why: the Bible contains principles that may correspond with different political, social and economic approaches. It is not the purpose of the Bible to furnish us with a detailed blueprint of many things in life but rather to tell us about the Person and work of Jesus Christ, calling us to faith and repentance and to walk in union with Him in newness of life. Wilson’s approach demands more; his “mere” Christendom is not so mere for all that.

Christians certainly may, and should, seek to have biblical principles, whether expressed implicitly or explicitly (garnered through natural law or the Bible) given societal expression. The need of the hour in our highly politicized and polarized time is for Christians, whether called to preach or simply to witness (I Peter 3:15), to hold forth the hope that is found only in Christ and His gospel. We should not sound like we are promoting just one more political program in a world drowning in partisan politics. The last thing the world needs from us is more hopelessness of that sort. We should, by our word and deeds, testify to a King who stands the kingdoms of this world on their head, a King who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).



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

FACULTY UPDATE: REV. PAUL IPEMA

The fall semester is a time of assessment, reflection and growth through the Seminary's Ministerial Apprenticeship Program [MAP]. Students have returned from their summer internships. The gap between the classroom and the pastorate has narrowed; the link between theology and ministry has been strengthened. Now we begin the process of evaluating ministry performance with the goal of refining pastoral abilities and sharpening practical theological insight.

As the MAP Director, I begin this process with an extended personal interview with each student returning from a summer internship. Evaluations from pastoral supervisors, elders and congregational members are discussed with a view to assessing pastoral strengths and weaknesses.

Personal and pastoral habits are reviewed. Has the student maintained the spiritual disciplines of prayer, devotional Bible reading and meditation upon the word of God? As the pastor of his home, how has he cared for the spiritual needs of his wife and children? Has the summer internship affirmed the student's desire to pursue pastoral ministry as a calling from God?

Central to the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program is the conviction that meaningful pastoral experience must also include careful reflection and assessment under the guidance of wise pastoral mentors. To that end, during the month of October our students participated in an exercise called Theological Reflections. Groups of four students submit pastoral scenarios or theological questions related to their summer internships and discuss them at length with members of the Seminary faculty who serve as facilitators. The purpose of this exercise



is to encourage and challenge one another as we seek to apply the gospel to the real-life experiences of God's people in the church, enabling the Seminary to prepare shepherd leaders who will seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. [Ezekiel 34:16]

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

FACULTY UPDATE: DR. ALAN STRANGE



I continue to enjoy teaching at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. In January 2024, I will observe twenty-five years of service

here. I teach all the church history courses, including Presbyterian history and polity, as well as two apologetics courses. I also serve as theological librarian and registrar. I can honestly say that I enjoy my work more than ever and especially interacting with students and

colleagues in and out of class.

Last year, after First Church (South Holland, IL) entered the OPC, Kathy and I became involved there, the church being quite close to our home. I had been an associate pastor at an OPC at a greater distance, and Kathy and I were quite happy to be able to worship and serve in our own town. I was called as an associate pastor there and installed last fall, serving in the same sort of call that I've had at the other OPC since being here at the Seminary.

I am not only involved in my local church but the broader church as well. I have served as the moderator of my presbytery and have been quite active in the denomination, serving on several committees, including Appeals and Complaints and Christian Education.

I've served on the Committee to Update the Language of the Westminster Standards and as the President of the Board of Great Commission Publications.

I have not only taught the OPC's course on church polity but also finished a serialized commentary that I've been writing on the OPC's *Form of Government* and *Book of Discipline*, to be published as a book. Speaking of books, I've published essays on Hodge in two different books this year (both European presses) and have a book with Crossway (*Empowered Witness: Politics, Culture, and the Spiritual Mission of the Church*), due out February 2024.

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

ALUMNI UPDATES



After graduation, **Vic Bernales** (2008) and his family returned to the Philippines. He has

been pastoring his congregation, the Davao Covenant Reformed Church, since 2008. Just a month ago, they started to plant a new congregation in another district of their city. Lord willing, they will be able to organize another Reformed church in the city.

Right now, his family is going through a trial in that their third child, Roi Victor, is battling with bone cancer in his right leg. He has gone through two cycles of chemotherapy, but his doctors thought that a surgery (amputation of Roi's leg) is necessary. So Lord willing, Roi will go through the procedure soon. Please pray for a successful surgery.

Since July 2023, **Stephen Corbitt** (2023) has been serving at Christ the King Reformed Baptist Church in Niles, IL, as a Pastoral Assistant. He also started attending Wheaton College for an M.A. in New Testament Biblical Exegesis.



Santo Garofalo (1996):

“Buonasera!

After serving as a church planter in

Atlantic City, NJ since 2009, I have taken a new call as a Mission to the World missionary to my ancestral land of southern Italy, Mary Ellen and I moved to Baronissi, Italy, this past April to serve in Salerno (15 minutes from Baronissi).

We are coming alongside the young Italian leaders of Nuova Vita church to mentor them in gospel ministry. Italy has about 1% evangelical Christians. To put that in perspective, China is about 6% evangelical.

We are slowly learning the language

(my Mom's parents were from Sicily and her first language was Sicilian but she didn't teach us because she didn't want us to face the discrimination she faced as a child and teen). My Dad's father was born and raised in Torre Del Greco on the bay of Naples, at the foot of Mt. Vesuvio. His mother came from Sessa Aurunca, in the region of Caserta.

Needless to say, it is such an incredible joy and privilege to minister the gospel in the land of my grandparents. Please pray for the Italian people, that they would come to experience the incredible riches of the grace of Jesus and pray for our language study so Mary and I communicate the love of God to them in deed AND word.



Solo a Dio sia la gloria!”

Peter Kloosterman

(1999) and his wife Michelle were blessed with their first grandchild. Ilse Heather

Kloosterman was born to Benjamin and Elysia Kloosterman on September 9, 2023. He is currently serving in the Reformed Church of Hastings from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.



After graduating in May, **David Myhren**

(2023) had the privilege of serving a

three-month internship at Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Vandalia, Ohio. Shortly after that, Classis Eastern U.S. of the URCNA examined and declared him a candidate for ministry. Dave is currently available for pulpit supply and is seeking an official call to ordained ministry.



On Friday, September 29, 2023, **David Voytek**

(2023) was ordained to the gospel ministry and installed as pastor of

Grace Reformed Church (RCUS) in Willows, CA. The ordination and installation service was held at the Willows church with Rev. Frank Walker officiating the service, Rev. Douglas Schlegel giving the charge to the congregation, and Rev. Michael Voytek, David's father, giving the charge to the ordinand. “My wife Rachel and I are thrilled to serve Christ and His church here in Willows. I want to thank the faculty, staff, and student body of MARS for mentoring me as the Lord has led me to this moment. May all glory, praise, and thanksgiving be to our Triune God who loves us and who redeems us from all our sins and miseries. Please pray that I will honor my Lord Jesus Christ in this calling.”



Peter Yoo (2022):

“By God's grace, I have sustained my preliminary examinations in the Re-

formed Churches of New Zealand, and we're currently in the process of figuring out all the details for my final examination, which will likely be at the end of February. Jane and I have just passed our 6 month anniversary and we thank God for His many blessings towards us. Please pray that the Lord would continue to sharpen me and prepare me well for pastoral ministry. And please pray for my upcoming examination and all my study and preparation for it.”



John Ysinga (2019)

is currently serving at the United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay. He and his

wife Kristen moved there in 2020 and have since welcomed their son Owen (1 year old). They have been blessed by the church community in Thunder Bay and have enjoyed the beauty of life in Northern Ontario.

Alumni! Send us your updates at any time to Rachel Luttjeboer at rluttjeboer@midamerica.edu.



MID-AMERICA
REFORMED SEMINARY

229 Seminary Drive | Dyer, Indiana 46311-1069

Tel: 219-864-2400

Fax: 219-864-2410

www.midamerica.edu



NONPROFIT ORG
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
HOMWOOD, IL
PERMIT NO. 130

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Christmas Blessings



FROM MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY