

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Martin Luther the Pastoral Counselor

by Ryan Swale



On Thursday, March 8th, the seminary hosted Dr. Robert Kellemen to lecture on Martin Luther and Pastoral Counseling. The theme of the afternoon was “Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life,” and his 2 lectures focused on “Applying the Gospel to Suffering” and “Applying the Gospel to Sin and Sanctification.”

Kellemen’s 4 pastorates, 16 books, and 17 years as a professor of Christian counseling uniquely qualified him to speak on the topic of applying the gospel to suffering, sin, and sanctification. But the topic of his PhD dissertation, “Martin Luther as a Case Study in Christian Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding,” also enabled him to skillfully address these topics through the eyes of the great Reformer.

His first lecture demonstrated how one of Luther’s great passions was ministering to those who suffer. Many people know about his 95 Theses, Three Treatises, or commentaries on Galatians and Romans. But not as many are familiar with his Fourteen Consolations – written to the Elector Frederick who was ill and near death – or his many letters written to bereaved parents and grieving spouses. He comforted them with the surprising and relieving truth that their feelings of sorrow were not displeasing to God.

It can be tempting for pastors or counselors to jump straight to the truth of God’s sovereignty, calling people to see how God is at work even in their trials. But Kellemen illustrated how Luther sought to first enter into his peoples’ suffering, even as God has done for them in Christ. It is important for people to know their pastor’s care, and even more important that they recognize how much God cares. Luther sought to leave no doubt in his peoples’ minds about either one of these.

But biblical soul-care consists not only of comforting the sufferer. Sometimes it requires that sin-patterns in our lives be addressed. So, in his second lecture, Kellemen showed how Luther used that same gospel to minister to those caught in besetting sins. “Grace is Christ’s prescription for our disgrace – forgiving medicine for sin, preventative medicine for victory over temptation, and cleansing medicine for victory over Satan’s condemnation,” he explained.

He showed how Luther’s gospel-oriented counsel called God’s people to recognize that “God’s love is stronger than the dirt that clings to us” even as “mother love is stronger than the filth and scabbiness on a child.” And, so, because we don’t live under the shadow of God’s frown, but His smile (to borrow a phrase from Dr. Beach), we’re free to keep pressing on even in the midst of failure and temptation. For, “the conscious awareness of being loved by the Father through Christ is the only power capable of changing us.”

In both counseling the sufferer and the sinner (and often some combination of the two), God’s people are to bear in mind that the most effective prescription in every case is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s good news that He suffers with us. It’s good news that He grants us His righteousness. And it’s good to be reminded that this same good news which worked 500 years ago for Luther, still works for us today.

Evening Class

Mid-America’s spring evening class, entitled “Marriage: Its Challenges and Delights,” was team taught by professors Beach, Compton and Strange. Dr. Beach focused on five aspects of the marriage relationship: (1) the need to bring the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) to marriage; (2) how marriage, especially, puts on display our sinful propensities and habits, so that the mask we might wear before others is inevitably taken off with our spouses; (3) that such exposure in our sinfulness also offers opportunities to practice grace (Heb. 12-14); (4) how we must watch our words, for they are powerful to bless or to harm (Eph. 4:15; James 3:5-6); and (5) how problems in marriage can take many forms, such as pride, anger, and the refusal to forgive.

Prof. Andrew Compton surveyed several Old Testament themes related to marriage. He showed how marriage is part of the creation mandate, allowing humanity to fill the earth and subdue it. He also explored the way in which marriage is affected by the fall, but subsequently renewed in redemption. He also noted that unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament details with considerable attention the beauty of sexual intimacy in marriage and challenged Christians to reclaim the cultural discourse about sexuality. Finally he noted the way in which marriage is utilized as a metaphor for God’s own relationship to his chosen people.

Dr. Alan Strange focused on the roles of men and women in the marriage relationship by examining key Bible passages that provide instruction for both men and women using Ephesians 5 and I Peter 3. He discussed man’s role as “servant/leader,” and how the woman is to relate to her husband in the fashion that the church is to relate to Christ.

Videos of all these lectures are available on the Mid-America website.

The President's Message: "Inviting Others to the Wedding Feast"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid in the resurrection of the just." Luke 14:13

In the Gospel of Luke, chapters 14 and 15 include several kingdom parables that present a remarkable portrait of the church's evangelistic calling. In these chapters, the kingdom of God is compared to a (wedding) banquet to which guests are graciously invited.

What is most noteworthy about the first of these parables (Luke 14:7-14) is the way it describes the table "manners" or "etiquette" of kingdom citizens. Now we all know that there are proper and improper ways of behaving, when we are invited to someone's home for a meal. Since the king in Jesus' parable is the one who prepares the banquet and invites the guests, he is also the one who decides what etiquette is appropriate.

In Luke's account of this parable, we are told that Jesus was prompted to tell it, when "he noticed how they [the Pharisees] chose the places of honor" (v. 7). Upon seeing this, Jesus says, "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place" (vv. 8-9).

What is Jesus teaching by this rule of seating etiquette in the kingdom? The answer is not left to our imagination: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 11). Kingdom citizens consist of a company of unworthy sinners, who know that they owe everything to the grace of the King who invites them to eat at His table.

In the second part of the parable, Jesus turns his attention from etiquette on the part of the guests, to what might be called etiquette on the part of the king's servants. Now the focus is not upon how we should take our seats in the kingdom banquet, but whom we should invite to the banquet.

To this question, Jesus gives a striking answer: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (vv. 12-14).

With these words, Jesus warns us against a kingdom elitism, which only invites to the banquet those whom we know, with whom we are familiar, from whom we receive as much or more than we give. Kingdom citizens, like the King himself, are those who seek out and graciously welcome lost sinners to join them—perhaps even at the head of the table!

Thank you, Glenda Mathes

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



One of my favorite chapters in the book of Romans is the sixteenth. In this chapter, the apostle Paul identifies a number of people who worked hard with him in the Lord, and who were well-known to the church of Jesus Christ in Rome.

What I find remarkable about this chapter is that Paul does not hesitate to identify these people by name, and to express his profound thanks in the Lord for their contributions to the progress of the gospel.

I mention Paul's apostolic example in Romans 16 as a kind of apologia for what I was asked to do in this short piece. The editorial committee of *The Messenger* was recently informed by Glenda Mathes that, for various reasons, she would no longer be able to write articles and continue as a member of the committee. Due to other writing projects and the impending retirement of her husband, Dave, Glenda has informed us that she will no longer serve the Seminary in this way.

For more than sixteen years, Glenda has willingly and cheerfully written countless articles for *The Messenger*. On several occasions, she traveled by car or train to the Seminary in order to be present at meetings of the editorial committee. Two of these travels included navigating a harrowing snowstorm and dealing with a van that chose to die in the middle of a busy intersection.

Thank you, Glenda, for all of your contributions to *The Messenger*. We are grateful for the way you have "worked hard in the Lord" (Rom. 16:12) on our behalf.

Senior Profiles

by Jared Luttjeboer

We thank God for the hard work of these students and pray for them as they go on to new places and ministry. On May 3, at 7:30 pm at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Lansing, IL, Mid-America will be graduating (D.V.) the following eight students.



Joel Irvin has received a call to be an associate pastor at Michiana Covenant PCA in Granger, IN. Following Michiana's May Presbytery, he will then be ordained as a teaching elder.

Part of his labors will include the possibility of planting a daughter church in his home county of Elkhart in eastern Indiana.

In expressing his appreciation of the work here at the seminary, Joel says he is "most grateful for the opportunity to sit under wonderful professors who truly understand pastoral ministry because of their involvement with the church." He is also thankful that he could receive a top-notch education so close to home.

His wife of ten years, Jamie, is equally excited that he will be done with schooling in due time, particularly as they look forward to being able to work together in ministry to needy children in their community.



Jared Luttjeboer, one of our graduating MTS (Master of Theological Studies) students, has been more or less behind the scenes with a lot of Mid-America's marketing

publications these past few years, while simultaneously maintaining a rigorous schedule as a student at the same time. The combination of work and study has been profitable, however, as he sees his undergraduate degree in digital media production enabling him effectively to communicate not only the great truths of what he has been studying in seminary, but also the caliber and quality of Mid-America's

seminary education and training of those who seek to enter into the ministry.

He is pleased to announce his continuing with Mid-America as Manager of Marketing, Digital Media, and Publications, and looks forward to seeing what the Lord has in store for him and his wife, Maria, as they settle in the greater Chicago area.



After graduation, Pablo Martinez (MTS), his wife Sarah, and three children (Ellena, Benjamin, and Gracey) will stay in the area while Pablo goes through the process of examination for licensure in the Chicago Metro Presbytery of the

PCA. His hope and desire are “to serve in the gospel ministry in a Presbyterian or Reformed context, locally or in other parts of the United States.”

Pablo came to Mid-America for solid reformed teaching in theology and practical training in pastoral ministry and, in his estimation, that is exactly what he received. Furthermore, Pablo is grateful that his seminary training has transferred from the classroom into the home. It has not only influenced his life, but the life of his family. He says, “I look back at my time at MARS and I am grateful for how the Lord has used the seminary faculty to prepare me to serve him in gospel ministry. I thank God that he brought our family here. It truly has been a unique opportunity of a lifetime.”



Since Glem Melo and his family (wife – Aymi, and children – Yanan, Giona, and Rosh) moved from the Philippines to attend studies at Mid-America, he has been thoroughly engaged in mission work, specifically church

planting. While sustaining course work and pulpit supply on occasion, Glem has served as a church planter under the Chicago Partnership for Church Planting. This past January, Glem and his family moved to Chicago’s Devon/Little India neighborhood, where they will continue to train church planters and remain involved in a house church planting ministry among Muslims

in the surrounding area. Long-term, Glem hopes to send out other church planters in order to reach not only Muslims in the United States, but also in the Middle East.

Concerning his studies at Mid-America, Glem is thankful for solid biblical and reformed-confessional teachings. He has held his classes in high regard, particularly the Doctrine of God, Christology, and Hermeneutics courses, as well as a “Biblical and Reformed wisdom approach in pastoral ministry.”



Paul Freswick will be doing a two-month internship with the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling (IRBC) in Hudsonville, MI. He hopes “this will be an exciting time for learning and growing in more ways than one,

as my wife Victoria is due with our first child at the end of May.” Following the internship, he anticipates to do some pulpit supply and to prepare for a candidacy exam at the October meeting of URCNA Classis Michigan.

Reflecting on his time in studies, Paul has “deeply appreciated the well-balanced reformed education here at Mid-America. Our professors seek to utilize the best of reformed thoughts and writings, rooted in the eternal Word of God, from over the centuries and from today in our lectures and readings.”



Jon Beall hopes to follow graduation with hospital classes to prepare him for the chaplaincy as an extension of the hospital. This will involve taking a number of classes over a period of years, but he feels “that this will be a

great way to demonstrate the encouragement and comfort of the Gospel in a variety of situations.” His wife of 13 years, Kimberly, and two sons, Elias (4) and Ira (1 in July) are currently based in Illinois, which is where he will pursue taking chaplaincy classes.

Jon has appreciated the preparation of seminary training, particularly in apologetics.

He says, “Reading the writing of Van Til is what

prompted my interest in seminary study, and I learned in my apologetics courses how to present a defense of the faith in a variety of settings. I imagine that this will be particularly resonant in preparing for the chaplaincy, as I will encounter a range of beliefs in that environment.”



Daniel Beezhold’s plans after graduation are to serve as a minister of Word and sacraments in the URCNA, Lord willing. He also hopes to continue to exhort God’s Word this summer as he undergoes preparations for candidacy exams.

What has been the most valuable for Dan is MARS’ focus on understanding and exegeting the Word of God. “When I enrolled to MARS my goal was to learn how to teach and preach the Word of God, ‘rightly dividing the word of truth.’ Each class at MARS aims to further unravel that theme ... and presents a unique angle for how God’s Word shapes both my heart and the pastoral ministry.” Now that he is graduating, he is “incredibly grateful for having been given a wider vision of God’s redemptive work in history through the cross, and a greater burden to see Christ’s kingdom flourish in his people and this world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”



Ehren Gaebler believes it is important to be led by one seasoned in the ministry, and to be able to impart wisdom gained from experience in the ministry to those who are inexperienced. In keeping with the importance of seminary

education, Ehren’s plans after graduating from Mid-America include finding a year-long internship “designed to help develop the gifts of a post-seminary graduate.”

One of the things he appreciated most about his time here at Mid-America is that the seminary training taught by the faculty “takes particular interest in developing more than purely academic gifts, and takes pains to involve in its education a distinctly pastoral focus.”

Ehren anticipates getting married to his fiancée, Elyssa, on November 9.



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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Not Applicable



Back in February, I had the opportunity to attend the Development and Institutional Advancement Professionals Conference hosted by the Association of Theological Schools in Houston, TX. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is one of our accrediting organizations. ATS deals exclusively with seminaries, so most of the content presented in the plenaries and break-out sessions can be directly related to our work here.

One of the group meetings was conducted by the Senior Director of Programs and Services for ATS. His presentation was entitled “Trends, Explorations, and Learning in Theological Education: the Education Models and Practices Project.” This isn’t the most “edge-of-your-seat title,” but the content was very interesting. All of the data and statistics he presented came from numbers that we, and other peer institutions,

by Mike Deckinga

submitted some months back.

One particular slide in the presentation caught my eye. It was entitled “Average Educational Debt Incurred in Seminary.” This is a disturbing topic, but even more disturbing (and the presenter agreed) was that this debt was incurred during the student’s time at seminary. He classified the debt-incurring students into two categories. The first was “borrowers only,” and the second was “all graduates.” “Borrowers only” incurred an average of \$35,625 of debt, and all others totaled \$17,842. These numbers are averages from 2014 – present day, and are based on three year completion dates. The next slide featured payback plans by the graduates. The majority planned to repay their debts with their salaries, followed by their spouse’s salaries. No one gets into ministry to get rich, so given most church pastoral salaries, this poses a significant, life-altering problem.

“Not so at Mid-America Reformed Seminary!” This was the message I was able to deliver to the

group during some Q&A time. In my remarks, I focused on the importance of maintaining a close relationship with the churches we seek to serve, as well as with individual donors who sacrificially provide so generously for our needs. I hope that each of you are experiencing the same sense of gratitude to our Lord for sustaining our students financially as I am. Your financial contributions to this institution ensure that our graduates can enter gospel ministry without the shackles of financial debt.

Will you help keep our students from incurring educational debt while they are studying at Mid-America, by responding to this article with a gift of any amount? This will allow us to continue to submit this answer to the debt question: not applicable.

To learn more about student aid and scholarship funding opportunities available, send Mike a note at mdeckinga@midamerica.edu