

Loving God With Our Minds

Rev. J. Mark Beach

Some years ago Os Guinness, a respected Christian author, penned a book with the provocative title *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It*. In this book, Guinness expressed his concern about the growing anti-intellectualism in the evangelical church, noting that it had reached scandalous proportions. Guinness observed that though our bodies are firmer, our minds are flabbier. There is an intellectual laziness among Christians in which secular ideas are rejected but not seriously engaged and refuted. Thus in their anti-intellectualism evangelicals increasingly display a disposition to discount the importance of truth and the life of the mind. Notes Guinness, the failure here is not finally one of orthodoxy but of love; it is a failure to love God with the mind, “with all your mind.” Coupled with this failure is a distrust of intellectuals. Since intellectually gifted persons usually occupy leadership roles in academic institutions, wielding at times a great deal of influence over young minds, and since the repercussions are so large when a person with strong intellectual gifts succumbs to doctrinal error, many conservative Christians have felt it safer, the better part of wisdom, not to place too

much value upon learning, at least when it comes to theology.

Of course, a case can be made, that many errors in the church are actually rooted in half-baked, ill-conceived, or outright misinformed and shoddy theological scholarship, so that the would be scholar, in committing a number of intellectual errors along such lines, proceeds to pawn off upon the church intellectual failure as knowledge or insight. If this is so, then what is needed is not a fear of learning and intellect, but a fear of poor scholarship and learning that is misapplied. What is more, what is needed as a remedy for false scholarship is not a retreat from learning but a recommitment to quality scholarship, to offer to the Lord the best of our intellectual gifts in the service of theology. This means that aspiring young ministers who display extraordinary intellectual gifts, spiritual maturity, and proper groundedness in the church ought to be encouraged to pursue further academic training—that is, to make the further sacrifice by obtaining the training requisite so that they can enter into the wider world of the academy and serve the church according to their gifts of learning. Frankly, conservative churches are in short supply of such individuals, and an anti-intellectualism is perhaps the root of the problem.

That said, it must also be said that a renewed intellectualism is not the solution to anti-intellectualism. Guinness makes this point emphatically! Intellectualism too can be a deadly error. The church's goal in this regard may never be to achieve a respectability in the eyes of the world; rather, her goal

is always a call to faithfulness, to be faithful to our covenant-keeping Lord and so to proceed in the way of Christian discipleship by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. But when we fail in love we also fail in matters that are intellectually driven. As Guinness states: “thinking Christianly is first and foremost a matter of love—of minds in love with God and the truth of his world.”

On the back cover of Guinness's book the publishers included a quip by Bertrand Russell, the renowned British mathematician, philosopher, and atheist, who said, “Most Christians would rather die than think—in fact they do.” Though Russell's rhetoric is over-the-top, I have observed that many evangelicals and confessionally Reformed believers, are squeamish about exercising their minds, reflected in how little interest they show concerning the currents of modern theology. Since I'm the managing editor of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, a good part of each of my summers is taken up preparing the annual issue of the journal for publication. When ordinary lay-folks (and some times even ministers) learn what I'm up to, seldom is there a query about contents and articles, or what sort of theological issues are brewing nowadays. It seems that many ministers and lay-people alike are not interested in theological trends until their own congregation is facing a doctrinal crisis of some sort, then in bewilderment they wonder from whence such errors came.

Even if you are not of an intellectual bent, and do not consider yourself a “reader,” you can still make yourself become a student of the Bible—through a regimented reading program—and use the confessions of the church as part of your devotions. If however you find yourself more curious theologically, then stretch



In This Issue

Introducing the Juniors

Financial Report

Messenger Update

Mid-America Welcomes New

Paul Berghaus

Paul was raised in a Christian home and came to know Christ at an early age. Paul is a graduate of West Point and served as an officer in the United States army for five years. During this time Paul commanded a tank platoon in Germany and also spent six months in Croatia and Bosnia in support of the NATO peacekeeping mission. While in Germany God used various people to call Paul to a desire for the ministry of the Word. While stationed at Fort Knox, Paul joined a PCA church in Louisville, Kentucky where he was introduced to the riches of the Reformed faith. Upon leaving the Army, Paul entered a Master's Degree program in Biblical History at Jerusalem University College. Paul came to Mid-America through a fellow student he met at Jerusalem University College. Paul hails from the State of Virginia.



Jason Stewart

Jason was raised in a Christian home and was taught to love Christ at an early age. While Jason strayed from the faith for a period in his teen years, Christ called him back to a life of devotion and he was introduced to the writings of the Puritans. These writings helped lay his theological foundations and provided a sound interpretation of the Scriptures for all areas of life. Jason

was involved a ministerial internship with the Assemblies of God church but because of doctrinal differences left to pursue affiliation with a church that was more in keeping with his growing Reformational position. Jason and his wife Cynthia became part of an independent Reformed Church in suburban Chicago that encouraged him to pursue a seminary education at Mid-America.

John Westendorp

John grew up in a Christian home where he learned the doctrines of grace at an early age. In his teenage years John discovered that he had an interest in the study of theology. John attended Dordt College where his understanding of God's sovereignty in all areas of life increased. During that time John was influenced by a number of men who encouraged him to consider the ministry. John became a pre-seminary major with a view to attend Mid-America Reformed Seminary. John and his wife Elizabeth are the parents of XX children and are looking forward to serving Christ's church in the pastoral ministry. Dan and Elizabeth come to Mid-America from Ontario, Canada.

Dan Nicholson

Dan was not raised in a Christian home but he indicates he learned loving behavior by seeing it modeled by parents who were devoted to one another. God led Dan to a career as a professional firefighter and paramedic. During this time the Lord led him to faith and also to his wife Mary. Dan grew in his faith through a mentoring relationship with Mid-America Board member Rev. Doug Clawson.

As Dan's faith grew he experienced increasing distance with his co-workers and a growing interest in seminary training. Dan and Mary are members of a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, IN where Dan has a teaching ministry. Dan's wife Mary is a medical doctor and a professor of clinical radiology and Indiana University.



James Grossmann

James Grossman comes to Mid-America from South Dakota. James is the fifth child of a third-generation RCUS pastor and thus has benefited from all the covenant benefits of hearing the gospel from his infancy. James attended Dordt College where he studied electrical engineering but felt a nagging call to the gospel ministry. While James finished his engineering degree, he also completed the necessary coursework for admission to Mid-America. James eagerly anticipates completing his seminary training and serving the church of Christ.



Class of Juniors to Campus

James Sinke

James was raised in a Christ-centered home in Ontario, Canada. The eldest of five siblings, James was active in catechism and the church's young people's society. While James was encouraged to consider the ministry, he was also interested in business and decided to pursue an accounting career. Accounting, however, did not satisfy. In 1998 James heard a sermon where the men were exhorted to consider a call to the gospel ministry and he realized he had not given proper consideration to the idea. James entered Redeemer University College to pursue that call. James and his wife Andrea look forward to pursuing the gospel ministry.



Christopher Folkerts

Chris Folkerts joins his brother James at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He also follows his father who is a graduate of Mid-America. Chris is a graduate of Covenant College and spent two years teaching in Lyon, France before coming to Mid-America. Having been raised in a Christian home Chris has always known the grace of God. Through his high school and college years Chris became increasingly burdened with a desire to preach the gospel to a lost world. This desire has led him to pursue a degree at Mid-America with a view to entering the gospel ministry. Chris and his wife Elizabeth are members of the United Reformed Church in Manitoba, Canada.

Rev. Denis Asooso

Denis Asooso comes to Mid-America from Nigeria where he has been serving the Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST). Denis was raised in a very poor family that did not know God. His mother died when Denis was very young and his father sent Denis to live with his uncle. Denis heard the gospel while attending his uncle's church. Denis's interest in the Scriptures grew very keen and he loved the Bible courses he was introduced to in his secondary education. Denis's Bible teacher encouraged him to further his Bible education and he was admitted to the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria (RTCN) where he was awarded a four-year degree.

Since graduation from RTCN Denis has labored as a Minister of the Word, preaching every Sunday in the local congregation. He has also served as the Assistant General Secretary for the NKST. Denis has come to Mid-America to receive additional training to more effectively carry the gospel to the needy schools and hospitals in his native Nigeria.



Greg Bylsma

Greg was raised in a Christian family in Ontario, Canada where he learned to love and fear the Lord at an early age. Greg responded in faith during his high school years and felt a desire to pursue work on the missions field. Greg attended Redeemer College where he was awakened to the fullness of the Reformed faith and the necessity for missionaries both overseas and in North America. Seeing the need for ministers of the Word, Greg felt called to Seminary training. Greg sees the need for faithful teaching as faithful stewardship of his God-given gifts. Greg and his wife Charity are members of the United Reformed Church. They are expecting their first child in November.



Spencer Aalsburg

Spencer and his wife Julia come to Mid-America from Iowa. Spencer's story is that of many who know and desire to live for Christ. In his teenage years Spencer lived rebelliously and was burdened by much fear and anxiety about life. It was during his rebellion that he began to read the Scriptures. In the process, Spencer started attending church and trusting the God of the Bible. About this time Spencer met his wife Julia and the two of them grew in Christ through the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word. Under this ministry, Spencer began feeling a call to the pastoral ministry. Covenant Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, encouraged Spencer to seek seminary training at Mid-America.

yourself—stretch yourself beyond the typical church paper, and dive into some books (many good ones are written for a popular audience). Even more, stretch yourself to tackle (in bit size chunks) books like Calvin's *Institutes* and a host of standard sources your pastor can point out for you. Along that same line, you might want to look at issues of Mid-America's theological journal, many of the articles are written with the pastor in mind, but are not beyond the reach of the curious layperson. And the book reviews can put you in touch with some of what is "out there" on the theological front. In fact, the upcoming issue will address such topics as the nature and aim of seminary education, the nature of church polity, interpretative issues surrounding Zechariah 14, matters and problems pertaining to the doctrine of the Trinity, and how features of the doctrine of the covenant were treated by prominent Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century (that is, during the pinnacle period of Reformed theology).

Let us love the Lord our God, and let us love Him with our minds!

Financial Update

Much of the financial news at Mid-America since the beginning of this year has been quite disconcerting. Revenues have been running significantly below our budgeted need and we have had to cut spending in some important areas. Our appeals to you have been urgent.

We have seen significant improvement in the financial picture in recent months. A \$50,000 matching gift challenge was given to Mid-America and we have been able to match that gift with the generous help of our constituency. Additionally, we have been blessed to receive several estate gifts that have helped to improve our financial picture.

On the other hand, Mid-America began its new fiscal year with a budget that exceeds \$1,000,000 for the first time in the history of the Seminary. Even though we were able to hold the line on spending in most areas of the budget, rapidly rising costs in areas such as health insurance have caused the budget increase to around five percent.

We are grateful for the faithful support we received over the past six months. You have been most gracious in rising to the challenge of helping us meet our financial obligations. God has richly blessed us with partners who recognize the important work we do in preparing men for the gospel ministry.

We recently completed an on-site visit by TRACS, the accrediting body we are working with to finish the accreditation process. One important aspect the accrediting body looks at is the financial health of the institution. We believe the Seminary must establish an operating reserve to insure its long-term financial health. We hope to establish such a reserve with the help of recent estate gifts.

While it appears the recent financial "crisis" has eased, we continue to need your ongoing financial assistance to avert another such situation. Please continue to remember the financial needs of Mid-America in both your present giving plan as well as your estate plan. If you would like to know how you can remember Mid-America in your estate plan please request an estate planning brochure from Mid-America.