

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Dr. B. Chapell lectures on sermonic application by Ryan Swale



On Thursday, March 9th, the Seminary community welcomed distinguished preacher Dr. Bryan Chapell to the campus to lecture on the subject of application in preaching. Dr. Chapell is the Senior Pastor of the historic Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Peoria, Illinois, President Emeritus of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, and author of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*.

These lectures were student-sponsored and are organized every spring by Mid-America students. Dr. Chapell gave three lectures: (1) The Place & Proportions of Application; (2) The Process of Application; and (3) The Power of Application.

In his first lecture, at 1:00 pm, Chapell argued, on the basis of Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 3, that if the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man, then application in preaching is not optional. A sermon needs clearly to set forth the “what” of a Scriptural text, but the “so what” also must be expounded. He demonstrated how the minister shows compassion for his people by bringing out the personal significance of what he is teaching, and he challenged us to demonstrate this compassion by devoting more time in our sermons to the difficult task of application.

Then at 2:00 and 3:30 he walked us through the process and power of application by showing what it is and what it is not. Sermonic application is not separated from God’s grace to us in Christ, and it is not simply giving people more things to do. That kind of “application” would only be a burden to God’s people. But it is application of truth to struggle in the context of the gospel. He argued that love for God must be the primary motivation for our obedience, and that application is then rooted in demonstrating, first, that Christ is the greatest of all delights. When we hold Him up as such, our people have a reason to apply those very truths to which Christ is calling them.

Sometimes application gets a bad rap, as if it is somehow opposed to doctrinal, Christ-centered preaching. But Dr. Chapell demonstrated that, in fact, this is not the case. It is rooted in the gospel, empowered through magnifying Christ, and is an essential part of the minister’s task. As Calvin once said, “If we leave it to men’s choice to follow what is taught them, they will never move one foot. Therefore, the doctrine itself can profit nothing at all.” Sometimes a minister may neglect to provide sermonic application out of a fear of moralism (a real danger), but fear should never overshadow proper application of all Scriptural truth to the lives of the hearers.

Dr. Chapell’s approach to preaching stands in the line of Sidney Greidanus, Graeme Goldsworthy, and others who see Scripture’s message as one of God’s sovereign grace that unfolds along redemptive-historical lines. His lectures were very much appreciated by all those who heard him speak.

Ron Citlau by Rev. Jeff DeBoer

Ron Citlau understands the gender identity crisis. He’s lived it. And his story affects both his passion for the grace of Christ as well as his desire to see others who are struggling with same sex attraction know that grace.

On the evening of March 21, Pastor Citlau spoke at the seminary about same sex attraction and an appropriate Christian response. Attending the presentation were many from outside the seminary community as well as participants through our live-stream portal.

Pastor Citlau stressed two things in his presentation. First, he made clear the importance of a strong, loving and principled Christian community. Before Ron knew Christ and was struggling with his sexual identity he was invited to a weekly Christian gathering by a friend. In that group he found people who loved and cared for him while leading him through the teaching of the Bible about sin and grace. Being a community of Christians who profess the truth without compromise while also loving those struggling with sin continues to be central to Christian engagement.

Second, Pastor Citlau consistently points those who struggle with sexual identity to their fundamental identity in Christ. He contrasts a culture that tells us we have the right to self-determination with a biblical story that roots our identity in our creation and redemption.

A recorded copy of Ron’s presentation is available at www.midamerica.edu in the video portal found under the “Resources” tab.



President's Message: "The Church's Evangelistic Witness: Preserving the Word of Christ" (1)

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



"I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." Rev. 3:8

I have long believed that conservative Reformed churches often suffer from the idea that they have to make a choice between being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and being fruitful in evangelism and missions. This idea derives from what might be termed a false dilemma between preserving the truth of God's Word in Scripture and propagating this truth to those yet unreached by the good news of Christ's saving work.

The odd thing about this mentality is that it drives a wedge between faithfulness and active witness to unbelievers. However, in the Word of God itself, there is an intimate relation between the two. Faithfulness in the preservation of the gospel is not only a precondition for evangelism, but also the only way to effective evangelism. After all, to "evangelize" is to "gospelize," that is, to herald the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to those who are perishing (cf. John 3:16). You can hardly expect to be able to pass on the good news, when you have lost it by failing to preserve it!

In this respect, we need to listen carefully to Christ's letter to the church in Philadelphia. In this letter, Christ speaks to a small and beleaguered church, which was assailed by fierce opposition to its testimony to Christ, and warmly assures them that He will set before them an "open door" of opportunity to witness to His name. Because of their tenacious grip upon the true testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the witness of the church in Philadelphia will be a beacon of light, drawing them and others into fellowship with the living God and entrance into His temple-sanctuary.

The way Christ, the Author of this letter, identifies Himself provides an especially important background to its message. The words of this letter are "of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open." "Holy" and "true" are divine attributes in the Scripture and in the book of Revelation (cf. 6:10). Christ thus assures the church in Philadelphia that His words have divine authority. Christ Himself is the true witness whose word comes with absolute reliability. The recipients of this letter are assured from the outset that Jesus is the true Messiah and Savior, and their witness to him is therefore true.

With these words of remarkable self-identification ringing in their ears, the letter turns to the promise that Christ extends to the church in Philadelphia. Christ "knows" their works. He is aware that the church in Philadelphia was, when viewed from the standpoint of numbers or social prestige, a church of "little power" (v. 8). Yet, this church had "kept" Christ's word and had not "denied" His name. Their witness to the truth concerning Jesus Christ had remained steadfast and certain, even when those of "the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not" opposed their witness and belied their testimony to Christ.

To this faithful church, Christ promises an "open door" of opportunity to witness to the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the true King of spiritual Israel or the people of God. Because of its persevering faithfulness to the truth, this church, located at a strategic crossroads of the ancient Greco-Roman world, will enjoy the privilege of calling Jews and Gentiles alike to acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord. Inasmuch as the church in Philadelphia has kept Christ's word in patient endurance, it may be confident that, in the "hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world" prior to Christ's coming, it will be spared. This assurance, contrary to the interpretation of some, is not a promise that they will be "raptured" before the time of testing comes, but that they will be preserved through whatever trial comes. Nothing will separate them from God's love in Christ. And so, as they hold fast to their "crown," they are encouraged to look forward to an eschatological future, when they and all who share their faith in Christ will dwell in God's presence forever.

The message of this letter to the contemporary church is startlingly clear. Christ assures his people that faithfulness to the Scriptural gospel in all its integrity is the way forward in witness and evangelism. No message could be more relevant to any church in danger of losing faith in the ancient gospel and its power to transform sinners after the image of Jesus Christ.

Motivation

by Mike Deckinga



"Dad, what do you do at work?" This was asked of me at the dinner table recently by one of my middle daughters. A response is offered. "He sells money...no, I mean, he gives people money..." I now realize my job is hard to describe to toddlers...maybe I should have been a fireman. "No, he asks other people for money," my oldest daughter corrects, with the authority one can only get by turning six. "Dad, why do people give you money?" I decided to answer with a question. "Why do you color me pictures to hang in my office at work? I've never asked you for a picture, but you give them to me all the time." The brief silence is broken. "Because we love you... and its fun!"

To take a good look at generosity (as was suggested in my last article in *The Messenger*) we should begin with motivators. If you look at society at large – from major philanthropists to folks who round up their change at the cash register to help needy children – motivators vary, and can range from "good business" to "doing the right thing" to "a moral obligation."

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, we are encouraged to remember Jesus Christ as the motivator for our generosity towards the Lord's Kingdom. Our Savior left the riches of heaven to come to earth to pay a debt that we owed and could never pay back. Tim Keller, in his book *Counterfeit Gods* puts it this way: "Jesus, the God-Man, had infinite wealth, but if He had held on to it, we would have died in our spiritual poverty. That was the choice—if He stayed rich, we would die poor. If He died poor, we could become rich. Our sins would be forgiven and we would be admitted into the family of God."

Praise God for His generous outpouring of grace to us— may that motivate us to live a life that is truly generous! There are specific ways in which our generosity can be lovingly and joyfully offered. We will take a look at that next time.

Have a comment? Mike Deckinga can be contacted at mdeckinga@midamerica.edu

Senior Profiles by Glenda Mathes

While this year's graduates reflect various backgrounds and life experiences, they all express appreciation for their training and the personal care received from professors. These seniors also share a vision for proclaiming the whole counsel of God and applying it to the lives of needy people. They hope, by God's grace, to do that within multiple denominations and in locations as far as France and Egypt.



Tad Groenendyk will intern part-time this summer at his home church, Faith URC in West Olive, MI. He then anticipates undergoing a candidacy exam in Classis Michigan.

His hope and prayer is for gospel ministry within the URCNA, but he says, "The bottom line is that I hope to serve the Lord wherever He leads in whatever capacity He may call me."

His seminary training laid a "rock solid foundation for continued growth in and love for our Triune God's story of redemption found in the pages of Scripture." His work at Mid-America cultivated a deeper love and greater desire to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, "The gospel flavors every corner of the curriculum," and expresses his gratitude for the labors of professors, staff, and the international support community that made his time in seminary possible.

Tad and Karena, as well as daughters Marijka (6) and Natalia (5), "joyfully" anticipate the birth of a boy in June.



David Jouf came to Mid-America from Matteson, IL, and has served as an adjunct professor at a college in Chicago Heights. He and Laura, with sons Samuel (15) and Joseph (13) are members of Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

At one time, the Jouf family began preparations to serve as missionaries in France, but that plan didn't come to fruition. They still hope to plant or pastor a church in France someday, but are open to whatever work God calls them to do.

David has appreciated Mid-America's "close care," the personal attention of godly professors.

He says, "It's evident they want the best for the student." He feels the Seminary is unique in its balance as it provides not only theological classes, but also practical internships. "This balance makes it far better than other seminaries, and provides good preparation for both preaching and caring for the flock," he says. "It's intense—a lot of work—but it's been great."



Ryan Noha and Wenny, with Joanna (2), belong to Hope OPC in Grayslake, IL. His examination for licensure is scheduled this fall with the Presbytery of the Midwest. He

hopes for a call to a congregation within the OPC, but is also considering further education to obtain an advanced theological degree.

He describes the integration of faith and life at Mid-America as "unparalleled," and says, "The professors not only teach, but also pastorally care for the men (and their families) who are preparing for gospel ministry."

He hopes the Lord uses him, "first and foremost, to love my wife in a sacrificial way and to raise up my daughter in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I am deeply indebted to the men of the faculty who have disciplined me so that, by God's grace, I would be more fully equipped to be a man of God in whatever capacity the Lord would have me serve in the future."



Originally from Egypt, **Moody Wasif** is interested in Old Testament studies and would like to pursue his PhD. His long-term hope would be to start a Reformed seminary

in the Middle East, perhaps in the new Egyptian capital of New Cairo.

He and Dina are dentists, and he has completed his MTS degree while averaging over 60 hours work each week. They have two children: Lily (6) and Elijah (3).

Moody appreciates Mid-America's "solid, biblical teaching and the close interactions with godly professors and mighty men of God."

His desire for the future: "I would like to see the gospel of Jesus Christ illuminate the darkness of

evil that is hovering over the earth. I would love to see people being righted with God through Jesus Christ, and as a result finally be right with each other and find peace in this evil age, and further realize the fulfillment of the ultimate eschatological hope that is yet to be unveiled."



Ruben Zartman was recently licensed by the RCUS, and hopes for ministerial ordination in 2018. He and Heidi soon will move to Shafter, CA, where he will begin an internship for Ebenezer RCUS

in June. While his primary responsibility will be serving as stated pulpit supply, he also looks forward to working with Rev. Valentin Alpuche in developing the church's Spanish-speaking congregation, "Valle de Gracia." Born to missionaries in Colombia and raised in Mexico, he hopes someday to be involved with theological training in Latin America.

Ruben appreciates Mid-America's "consistent emphasis on character and godliness as indispensable for ministry." He says, "The professors at Mid-America were very helpful in providing a quite balanced emphasis on the coordination and harmony of skill, knowledge, and genuine piety for the work of the ministry. That same enthusiasm for balance appeared in the evident concern to correctly distinguish and give proper weight and emphasis to each element in the pactum, historia, and ordo salutis."

Those theological terms reflect Mid-America's sound teaching regarding the eternal plan of salvation within the Godhead, its fulfillment in real events of human history recorded and prophesied in the Bible, and the application of God's saving actions in the lives of individual believers. That comprehensive instruction guides these seniors as they go forward to minister as God calls them.

Keep your eyes open on our Facebook page and website for an upcoming video, profiling the seniors!

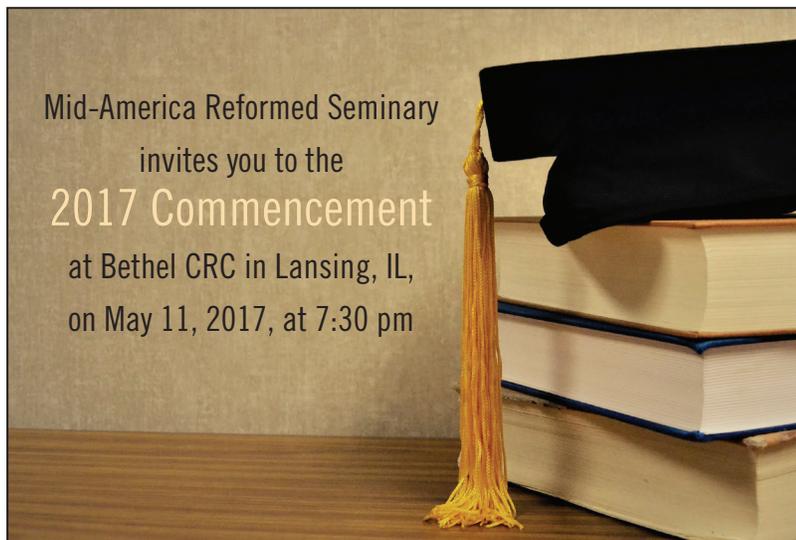
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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

#mars by Mike Deckinga



According to their most recent social media study, smallbiztrends.com states that 68% of all U.S. adult internet users (age 16-64) use Facebook. Daily, 1.8 billion people worldwide log onto the social media giant. Year after year, double-digit increases in participation have been noted. Things didn't start this way. I remember when Facebook first came to the scene. It was a college student networking platform. In order

to participate, the school that you attended had to "opt-in." Once the site became available to you, you could upload a picture of yourself, type a quick bio, and begin connecting with friends. You could then post comments on each other's "wall." There weren't any businesses or schools that had pages of their own, there was no private messaging, and perhaps people had some fun cat videos on their computer that they downloaded from the memory card in their digital camera, but there was no way to assume people cared to view them, let alone share them with the world. My, how things have changed!

Facebook is one of the ways Mid-America stays in touch consistently with many people. As a matter of fact, we recently got pretty excited around here of hitting a milestone – 1,000 page "likes." What does it mean to "like" and "follow" the MARS Facebook page? It means that anytime we post something (nearly daily)

you'll be notified. You don't have to wait for the next issue of The Messenger to come out to get your news. You'll be updated on the "here and now," not just the "there and then." From the news of the day, to events happening on campus and elsewhere, to reformed discussions being held amongst our alumni and friends—you'll see it all. We work hard to bring you this material, and we want it to be enjoyed by many.

On June 1, 2017, we plan to launch a Facebook challenge. We will host a "like, comment, and share" competition. The details of the competition, and the prizes you can win will be in the post itself. To be sure you don't miss the opportunity to participate, you need to log on, and "like" our Facebook page before June 1st. Stay tuned, and keep an eye on your news feed. See you in cyberspace!