

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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CATECHISM PREACHING: CHERISHED LEGACY, CONTEMPORARY NECESSITY

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS”



“But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” Romans 10:14-15

The words of this passage have always had a special place in Mid-America’s history. When you approach the Seminary’s main entrance, you will notice a cornerstone with the words, “How shall they hear . . . unless someone preach.” From its inception, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has sought to equip its students to go out into the Lord’s harvest field in order to herald the good news that there is salvation for all those who believe in Christ.

What is remarkable about Romans 10 is that it presents what J.R.W. Stott calls the apostle Paul’s “evangelistic manifesto.” When we as Reformed Christians read Romans 9-11, we think of it as a deep theological treatment of the doctrine of election—which it is. But we often miss the evangelistic heartbeat of the apostle Paul’s handling of God’s purpose of election

in these chapters. Though Romans 10 has often been a battleground for interpretive debates about the apostle Paul’s teaching, three features stand out in the apostle’s evangelistic manifesto.

First, Paul poignantly reveals the *motive* that drives him as an apostle. The language that Paul uses at the beginning of Romans 10 is reminiscent of the way he began chapter 9. Even though he has argued throughout chapter 9 that the unbelief of many of his kinsmen demonstrates that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” according to God’s “purpose of election,” Paul is not unmoved by their failure to respond in faith to the gospel. Not at all! Rather, he expresses his heartfelt desire and prayer to God that unbelieving Israel might be brought to salvation through faith in Christ. In his paraphrase of Romans 10:1, J. B. Phillips captures Paul’s evangelistic motive well: “My brothers, from the bottom of my heart I long and pray to God that Israel may be saved!” The lesson here is clear: evangelism, or the preaching of the gospel, must always arise out of a deep, heartfelt desire that all lost sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike, should come to Christ in faith and so be saved. Paul’s understanding of the doctrine of election does not undermine his evangelistic fervor one whit! The same should be true for us.

Second, the apostle Paul clearly articulates the great *message* that lies at the heart of the gospel that makes it, in the most proper sense, “good news” for all who hear and believe in Christ. Though a short meditation does not allow me to do justice to the riches of Paul’s argument in Romans 10, the message or “word of faith” that Paul proclaims should be well known to all believers, most especially those who are Reformed. The reason many of his unbelieving kinsmen stumbled at the gospel is that they were seeking to find favor and acceptance with God upon the basis of their own works in obedience to the law’s commandments. They had misappropriated the teaching of Moses and sought to use the law as an instrument to justify themselves upon the basis of their own righteousness, not the righteousness of God as it is demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

The clear and accessible teaching of the gospel, however, is that only those who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead will be saved. This gospel makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile, for God grants the riches of Christ’s saving work to all those who believe in Him and call upon the name of the Lord. As Paul summarized it earlier in Romans, the gospel announces that Jesus our Lord “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (4:25).

And third, the apostle Paul offers a compelling argument for the necessity and urgency of gospel preaching, which is God’s appointed *method* of evangelism (Rom. 10-14-15). He does so by asking four successive questions, each of which presses home the *conditions* that must be met in order for anyone to call upon the name of the Lord in faith so as to be saved. Perhaps the best way to capture the force of Paul’s point is to reverse the sequence of these questions, placing them in their temporal order. In order for anyone to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation, Christ first (through His church) sends preachers; those whom Christ sends preach the good news; those who hear the good news and believe are thereby enabled to call upon the name of the Lord.

If you capture the force of this, you will understand why the apostle, quoting Isaiah the prophet, can say: “Beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.” That has always been Mid-America’s heartfelt desire and prayer to God: that the feet of our students, when Christ sends them through His church into the harvest field, will be beautiful to all those whom the Lord is pleased to call to faith through the Word they proclaim.

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

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

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

We’re in a familiar season, even if it’s not a familiar scene here at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Our academic year culminates in commencement, Board of Trustees meeting, and other year-end festivities. You’ll read all about this on the pages that follow.

We’re also prepping for our Synod and General Assembly visits. This is a favorite of mine. What better way is there for the Seminary to stay tethered to and plugged in the local church, than to participate in her broader assemblies? We’re privileged to witness pastors and churchmen labor for the kingdom and are honored to play a significant role in training the next generation of both.

Just in time for “Synod Season,” Rev. Paul Ipema looks at a practice long treasured and practiced in Reformed churches – catechism preaching. Why do we do it? Why should we do it? Why might the practice be dwindling, and what is the consequence?

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is conscientiously and unapologetically Reformed to the core. Our largest supporting federation – the United Reformed Churches in North America – a faithful grouping of reformed churches pastored by many of our alumni – has excellent “Guidelines for a Reformed Theological Education” (URCNA Church Order, Appendix One). Mid-America is the only seminary that satisfies each of those guidelines in our required M.Div. curriculum. One of those stipulations is training in catechism preaching. We address that in our feature article.

Thanks for reading! Turn the pages and enjoy.



Michael B. Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement



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Our Mission

Mid-America Reformed Seminary seeks to serve Christ and His church by assisting in the formation and preparation of servants for the Kingdom of God. Our primary purpose is to train men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Guided by this focus, we are also committed to providing solid theological training for others among God’s people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

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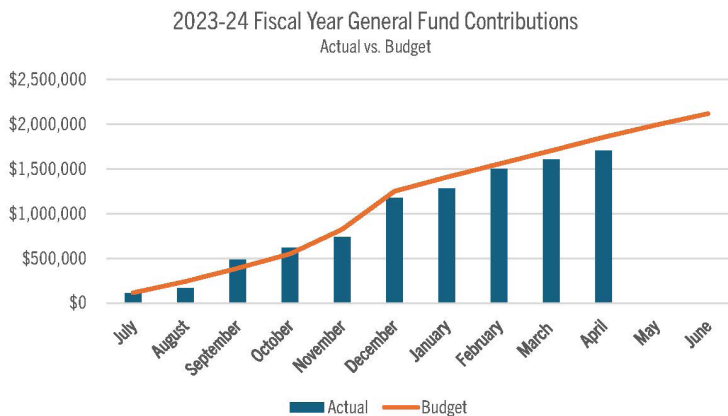
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DEVELOPMENT REPORT: “BRIDGING THE GAP”

We’re settling into the “offseason” here at Mid-America. Usually, things slow down over the summer. Sure, things are “quiet” now, with our students gone, but our construction project is not so quiet. There’s much moving and shaking around here, which will only increase. We’re packing our offices in preparation for our interior renovations to begin shortly. This will be no ordinary summer, but we’re all excited to see our plans come to fruition.

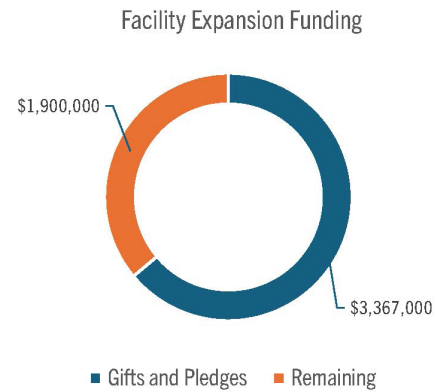
Financially speaking, things aren’t all that ordinary either. I suppose historically speaking, we’re in a familiar place, but for the last four years, we’ve been comfortably ahead of our annual general fund revenue budget in the fourth quarter of our fiscal year. Year to date, we’re trailing our budget by \$148,000, a further deficit than I reported in our recently distributed spring appeal letter. This brings us to an additional \$415,000 needing to be raised for our operating expenses by June 30, 2024. The chart here illustrates such.



There may be a simple and obvious answer as to why we’re “chasing it” this year, and that is because funding towards our capital campaign, “Foundation for the Future,” has drawn resources away from the General Fund. In a way, this causes us to compete against ourselves regarding resource development. If you seek to bless us with a gift this fiscal year to help us stay on track financially, we humbly ask you to consider supporting both priorities. For a long time, we were asking for “money for now, and money for later” since our expansion efforts were still conceptual. Now that we’re under construction, what we’re asking is valid for the General Fund and the capital campaign; we need “money for now.” Full stop. That’s it. The need is urgent.

Funding for our expansion effort is coming along nicely. Like the General Fund, we received much at the end of the

calendar year. After a three-month hiatus, funding is back in action!



You’ll notice I include gifts and pledges. Pledges are helpful for both you and us. They give us a bit of a roadmap so we can responsibly plan as best as possible to fund this project to completion without incurring any debt, and they help you achieve funding goals you may have without parting with all the cash upfront. Some of you often tell me you “wish you could do more.” Pledges help you accomplish that over time. Many give set amounts annually, working towards their intended total gift amount. It is a smart and effective way to participate.

In summary, here are the amounts needed and the target deadlines again:

- **General Fund: \$415,000 by June 30, 2024**
- **Foundation for the Future: \$1.9 million (gifts and pledges) by March 31, 2025 (anticipated project completion).**

I end with a word of thanks. Week to week, month to month, and year after year, you continue to humble and encourage us with your support. The Lord has been generous and gracious with His people, and you repeatedly respond in gratitude and joy with your prayerful and financial support of our work. We remember you often in prayer with thanksgiving.

Can you stretch to help us reach both finish lines? The end is in sight. Please help us get there! Partnering with you in this endeavor for God’s glory is a true privilege.

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

COMMENCEMENT REPORT

On Wednesday, May 8, 2024, the seminary community, friends, and families, gathered at Redeemer United Reformed Church in Saint John, IN, for the Seminary's 39th commencement.

This commencement was a milestone for the school, marking the final ceremony with Dr. Cornelis P. Venema at the institution's helm. After 36 years as Professor of Doctrinal Studies and 23 years as President of the Seminary, Dr. Venema is retiring.

In a fitting capstone to Dr. Venema's tenure, he was invited to give both the commencement address and the charge to the graduates. After an adulatory introduction by Dr. Alan D. Strange, Dr. Venema spoke on Romans 10:1-17, an address entitled "How Beautiful Are the Feet of Those Who Preach the Good News."

Rev. Todd Joling, President of the Board of Trustees, conferred the degree of Master of Divinity (M.Div.) upon six graduates: Johnathan L. Allen (OPC), Brian D. Bowen (PCA), Joshua D. Dykstra (CRCNA), Eric L. Heida (URCNA), Andrew H. Jang (PCA), and Benjamin J. Verdonk (URCNA). Upon receiving their diploma, the graduates were hooded by Drs. J. Mark Beach and Marcus A. Mininger. Applause and celebration followed, a fitting response to each student's hard work and diligence in completing their course of seminary study!

Dr. R. Andrew Compton led those gathered in a litany, followed by a closing prayer by Prof. Paul R. Ipema.

The faculty, graduates and their wives, recessed during the final hymn, "Guide



Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," played on the organ by Mrs. Nancy Venema, who led all the evening's singing. The rest of the evening was spent offering congratulations, well-wishes, and goodbyes to the graduates over refreshments in the fellowship hall.

Dr. Andrew R. Compton
Professor of Old Testament Studies

SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS

Supervised ministry training remains one of the distinctive features of Mid-America's field education program. In addition to working closely with local pastors and congregations throughout the academic year, seminarians also participate in summer internships designed to apply classroom theological instruction and refine practiced ministry skills. The following seminarians will be participating in ministries throughout North America and Europe:

Student	Church	Location
Thomas Bell	New Covenant URC	Twin Falls, ID
Dane Bothun	First OPC	South Holland, IL
Jeremy Chong	Covenant OPC	Orland Park, IL
Kevin Godsey	Bethel OPC	Wheaton, IL
Daniel Hofland	Redeemer URC	St. John, IN
Leo Joewono	New Horizon URC	Scarborough, ON
Bryce Klassen	Reformed Church of Perugia	Perugia, Italy
Zeke McMurtry	Providence URC	Winnipeg, MAN
Alexander Proudfoot	Church Planting [URC]	Mitchell, ON
Christian Ryan	Military Chaplaincy Training Deployment	Fort Polk, LA
Anthony Sato	First URC	Oak Lawn, IL
Josh Savage	Faith URC	Beecher, IL
Franz Stagl	Houston Lake PCA	Kathleen, GA
Joel Trinidad	Peoria CRC	Peoria, IA
Jeremy Vander Lei	Bellingham URC	Bellingham, WA
Jon Vos	Redemption OPC	Gainesville, FL

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

BOARD REPORT

The Mid-America Board of Trustees, under the proficient leadership of Chairman Rev. Todd Joling, conducted their annual spring meeting Wednesday, May 8, with a full agenda. All members were present save one who joined via Zoom.

In customary order, the Board conducted the following business:

Correspondence – The Board approved Dr. Marcus A. Mininger’s sabbatical request for Spring of 2025, during which he’ll focus on projects involving his doctoral thesis and expansion of previous work on Romans 7.

Interim President & the Oath – As part of the report from the Presidential Succession Committee, which will remain active, seeking a long-term president, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, retiring President, administered the Oath of the Office of President to Dr. Alan D. Strange, who assumes the reins as Interim President on July 1. Dr. Venema received a standing ovation from the Board, Faculty, & Staff for his exemplary service to the LORD, the Seminary, and the church universal.

Faculty Appointments – Old Testament Professor Dr. R. Andrew Compton and New Testament Professor Dr. Marcus A. Mininger were interviewed and re-appointed to four-year terms, and Dr. Eric B. Watkins, Professor of Ministerial Studies and Director of the CME, was interviewed and re-appointed to an additional three-year term. All terms beginning July 1, 2024.

Trustees – The Board approved four candidates to fill the vacancies left by retiring Trustees Mr. Herb Sinke and Rev. Paul Murphy, both of whom have served the maximum nine-year duration for a Trustee. Over the Summer, the Seminary Association will vote to select the next Trustees. The Board interviewed and re-appointed Trustees Dr. Camden Bucey, Mr. Bryan Holstrom, Dr. Edwin Kreykes, Rev. Bill Pols, and Rev. Harry Zekveld for additional three-year terms.

Reports – The Board turned their attention to the collection of standard reports. As President of the Seminary, Dr. Venema led off with his report, his last after 36 years of service to the Seminary, with subsequent reports delving into further details. Of note:

Enrollment – 2024/2025 is shaping up solidly with representation across denominational boundaries, with 13 new students confirmed or well along the enrollment process.

Accreditation – Work continues on the decadal reaccreditation process, with the Board reviewing and accepting a draft of the self-study report, which involved nearly every member of the Seminary and several Trustees, and countless hours collecting and validating data, turning it into polished, meaningful prose.

Facilities Expansion – Over the winter, ground was broken, with all utility work completed, and foundations formed and poured. Steel erecting is underway, masons are now onsite, and work continues rapidly. Anticipate the expansion on the east end to be occupied before school starts, with the Chapel being finished in Spring 2025, by the end of the 24/25 academic year.

Financial Position – The Seminary continues to be blessed with strong financial support. The 2024/2025 budget of \$2,691,550 was approved, containing a 4% COLA for Faculty & Staff, and representing an overall increase of just over 4%.

The Board is scheduled to meet again on Thursday, October 10, just before the CME Conference.

Dan Fletcher
Vice-President of Operations

FOUNDATION F

If you’ve been tracking with *The Messenger* for some time now, it will be no surprise that we’ve been raising resources and awareness for our campus expansion plan, *Foundation for the Future*. As I look through files on my computer, I am shocked to see meeting minutes from back in 2021. We have been working on this initiative for quite a while, and I’m thrilled to announce that construction is underway, and our progress has been incredible! In just a few short months, Lord willing, our campus will be transformed into a freshly remodeled workspace suited not only for our current staffing and student needs but also with plenty of space to stretch out and grow into the future.

As I write this article, the campus has a flurry of activities, such as getting ready for commencement, retirement dinners, a board meeting, and many other activities that our campus is home to during the first few weeks of May. Adding to the craziness that is the end of the spring semester, staff and faculty will have to box up all their belongings in their offices to prepare for our renovations. Shelves, desks, and chairs will have to be moved out so that ceiling tiles can be dropped, HVAC equipment can be replaced, the wall covering can be stripped, new paint can be added, and fresh carpet can be installed. Add to this all the various tradesmen who will be in and out of our building as they work to remodel the existing space and all the heavy equipment moving about, and you’ve got one bustling campus.

It’s possible that you, our dear readers, are not as intimately familiar with the expansion project as we think. It would be appropriate, then, to spend a few moments recapping all that our facility expansion project entails and seeks to accomplish.

Chapel

Situated on the west side of campus, our chapel will seat around 140 individuals, providing sufficient space for our chapel services. It will also be

N FOR THE FUTURE UPDATE

suitable for public use for our special lectures, evening classes, receptions, and other events as needs arise. Features and designs will create an inviting and elegant space for prayer and praise, and state-of-the-art audio/visual equipment will complement various uses for our students and the public to utilize and enjoy.

Cafeteria Expansion

With demolishing the cafeteria's northern exterior wall and a rebuild further to the north, the cafeteria will nearly double in size, providing extra fellowship space for our growing student body.

Administrative Expansion

On the east side of campus, two additional staff offices, a conference room, a small meeting space, and a kitchenette will allow current staff to relocate from public to private working spaces and provide permanent accommodations for our board of trustees and its committees to do their work.

Existing Campus Remodel

The school's interior is original to its 1995 construction, and though it has worn well, it needs a refresh. We intend to replace all the flooring, wall covering, fixtures, and ceiling tiles. Additionally, our HVAC system, which has been underperforming for quite some time, will be replaced. The interior design of our current space will be consistent with the interior design of our new space, providing for seamless continuity between existing and expanded areas.

Current Progress

The interior remodel, cafeteria, and administrative expansion will be complete by the end of August. We anticipate the chapel's completion sometime in the first quarter of 2025. It's always challenging to write about a fixed moment when you know that by the time the article is in your hands, so much progress will have been made on the construction. Right now, I'm looking out my window at a giant

semi-truck delivering loads of steel. That steel will be used to frame the chapel, and I'm told the framing of the chapel will begin later today. We've had a temporary wall installed in our cafeteria for several weeks, and our exterior northern wall has been demolished. Our once-quiet campus has been a loud, rattling, and shaking workplace for quite some time. Many building projects are often local efforts, allowing constituents and supporters the opportunity to see with their own eyes the progress being made. While the Seminary enjoys the support of its local constituency here in Northwest Indiana, this project has been funded by our partners across the US and Canada. I should pause here to mention that you can stop by and check things out if you're ever in Dyer, IN. We'd love to have you! In the meantime, the best way to stay in touch and up to date on our construction process is to visit our website often, watch for our emails, and follow us on social media. Throughout the building project, I've posted short videos updating our constituency on our progress. It's an excellent way to "show and tell" for those who can't be here to "see and hear."

Funding

We're thankful for the generosity of many donors and supporting churches who have helped us raise over \$3,000,000 towards our \$5.3 million goal. Your gifts have been a tremendous source of encouragement as we've continued to move this project from concept to construction. Some of you told me you wanted to see this get off the ground before committing your resources to assistance. Friends, if you've been on the sidelines watching to see if we'd run this play, it's time to get in the game. We must secure the necessary funds for our project to continue as scheduled. A one-time or recurring gift or pledge of any amount is helpful and most appreciated. I want to encourage you to consider bold, sacrificial, and joyful giving – the giving that will lay down a firm foundation upon which the Seminary can build for many years. From all of us at Mid-America, thank you!

Michael B. Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement



CATECHISM PREACHING:

Cherished Legacy, Contemporary Necessity

by Rev. Paul Ipema

Catechism Preaching and Mid-America Reformed Seminary

In one of the earliest volumes of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* (1985), the late Dr. P.Y. DeJong embarked upon a three-part series of articles on catechetical preaching. Those articles, “Comments on Catechetical Preaching,” presented a compelling case for reviving this historic Reformed practice. Professor DeJong minced no words when he asserted:

“It’s [The Heidelberg Catechism’s]

message deserves to be heard again and again from every true Reformed pulpit to call sinners to repentance, to strengthen old and young in the true faith and to glorify God for his saving work *for, in* and *through* those who are ordained to life eternal. With that conviction Reformed churches have for centuries mandated that one sermon every Sunday shall ordinarily teach ‘the sum of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism.’ To minimize, ridicule or openly defy this regulation is for Reformed preachers and people the betrayal of a precious legacy won at so great a cost. It is part of a

spiritual birthright which ought never be exchanged for a mess of cheap pottage.”

Nearly 40 years after these remarks were made, Mid-America Reformed Seminary continues to champion the practice of catechism preaching. We do not merely acknowledge its existence or assume that those entering the ministry will somehow learn how to preach the Catechism. Mid-America insists that those aspiring to gospel ministry learn how to preach catechetical sermons.

During the spring semester, middler and senior seminarians participated in the

Catechism Preaching course taught by professors Venema and Ipema, both of whom enhance classroom instruction with extensive pastoral experience. Students learn the history of catechism preaching, its homiletical justification, and a methodology that will enable them to exegete the Catechism with a view to its exposition and application as a preaching text.

Working in a “teaching lab” environment, students present and defend a sermon outline based upon a chosen section of the Heidelberg Catechism or the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. Interaction between students and faculty in these exercises sharpens sermonic focus. It challenges each student to wrestle with the Catechism text so that the meaning of the confession is articulated and pastorally applied.

Catechism Preaching: A Practice in Decline?

Sadly, we may be witnessing the demise of catechism preaching among Reformed churches and denominations that once advocated this glorious heritage. There are several reasons for this demise.

First, many Reformed churches, following the trend of many evangelical churches, have dispensed with the second Lord’s day service. This may be due to chronically poor attendance at the second service or as a means of retaining church members who may be tempted to join congregations with only one Lord’s day service. Historically, the second service in Reformed churches functioned as a teaching service devoted to preaching the Catechism. With the elimination of this service, Reformed churches are forced to incorporate the Catechism into the morning worship service or eliminate catechism preaching altogether. The latter seems to be the decision of many of these churches.

Second, there are churches, even in the

Reformed tradition, that question the legitimacy of catechism preaching. Some view the Catechism as an outdated relic of a previous era. Others find the Catechism divisive and even hostile in its theological polemics. There are even some who believe that catechism preaching elevates a man-made document to the level of the God-breathed Scriptures, thereby emulating Roman Catholic practices that were judged to be idolatrous by the reformers.

Third (and perhaps closer to home), catechism preaching has fallen upon hard times in our churches due to a lack of uniform training among those entering the ministry in Reformed churches. The URCNA Church Order, for example, stipulates in its “Guidelines for a Reformed Theological Education” that candidates for the ministry should receive instruction in catechism preaching. However, neither the manner of instruction nor the preaching methodology are specified. The result is that some candidates for the ministry have only minimal training in catechism preaching or have chosen a method that shies away from the Catechism as the preaching text.

Fourth, in some Reformed churches that practice catechism preaching, we find examples of pastors called from other confessionally Reformed churches that do not practice catechism preaching nor require candidates for the ministry to learn a catechism preaching methodology while in seminary. Given the expectation or Church Order requirement to preach the Catechism regularly, these pastors scramble to learn how to preach the Catechism or choose to incorporate the Catechism into a sermon based upon a Scripture text.

Biblical and Historical Precedent for Catechism Preaching

The practice of catechetical preaching and teaching reaches back to the earliest days of the apostolic era. The epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus clearly show this fact. Paul instructs Timothy to administer

the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ by maintaining “the pattern of sound teaching” (2 Timothy 1:13). Those engaged in gospel preaching are to avoid foolish speculations about myths and genealogies. Instead, they were to guard the good deposit given to the church by preaching and teaching the message of saving grace in Jesus Christ. The result of this kind of faithful catechetical ministry is that Christ would be glorified, and his people would be adorned by sound biblical instruction (Titus 2:10)

In the centuries leading up to the Protestant Reformation, catechetical preaching was closely tied to preparing new converts for membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. Much like the substance of the Heidelberg Catechism, these sermons provided an exposition and application of the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. This practice fell into neglect as the sacrament of the mass became the dominant feature of public worship, and superstitious religious practices replaced instruction in sound Christian doctrine.

Despite the progress made by the Protestant reformers in recovering sound biblical teaching, the average Christian believer remained ignorant of biblical truth and in dire need of sound catechetical preaching. With his characteristic bluntness, Martin Luther observed:

“Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christians, are baptized,

and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's prayer, the Creed or the Ten Commandments; they live as if they were pigs or irrational beasts, and now that the gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty..."

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Protestant reformers placed a premium upon preaching that would provide sound instruction in the Christian faith. However, when they made their plea for catechism preaching, they did not envision it as something novel in the church's history. As with many early controversies with Roman Catholicism, the reformers appealed to Scripture and the practice of the early Church Fathers, who had established a precedent for catechism preaching long before.

When Elector Frederick commissioned the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism, he insisted that it be written so that the people could understand its plain meaning and that preachers could employ it as the basis of their preaching ministry. Protestant leaders came to admire the straightforward, simple elegance of the Heidelberg Catechism. Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Zwingli in Zürich and himself an author of a catechism, had this to say about the Heidelberg Catechism:

"The order of the book is clear; the matter true, good, and beautiful; the whole is luminous, fruitful, and godly; it comprehends many great truths in a small compass. I believe that no better catechism has ever been issued."

Objections to Catechism Preaching

From its earliest practice in the Reformation, catechism preaching

has come under harsh criticism, even from those who confess its truths. Perhaps the most common and enduring criticism is that catechism preaching substitutes the words of fallible men for the infallible, God-breathed words of Scripture. Regrettably, this criticism fails to consider the nature of the church's confession as the Word-of-God-summarized. Catechism preaching that takes the catechism as its homiletical text does so out of the conviction that it is a faithful summary of the word of God. Abraham Kuyper pointed this out years ago:

"Our fathers rightly understood that the systematic proclamation of the basic teachings of our confession is only possible when the truth is drawn from not one but from ten or twelve texts and all of these together. Therefore catechetical preaching for them was not no-preaching according to Scripture, but preaching on all these texts deliberately placed under each answer. The enumeration of texts therefore is not *incidental* but *essential*. It is not: so also does holy Scripture think about this matter, but: *from these and these veins of the Bible this gold has been mined*."

Quite obviously, certain portions of the Heidelberg Catechism quote the Scriptures verbatim. In its treatment of Christian gratitude, for example, the Catechism explains the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. It's difficult to imagine how critics of catechism preaching could fail to see the biblical basis of the Catechism's teaching. The same critics would do well in this regard to remember the words of the Second Helvetic Confession (1536):

"Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is

proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good."

Another common criticism of catechism preaching is that it is dull, dry, and overly intellectual. Any pastor sensitive to the spiritual needs of his congregation will hear in that criticism a plea for preaching that is meaningful, lively, and attentive to the daily struggles of the Christian faith. With its emphasis on personal comfort in Christ, the Heidelberg Catechism naturally lends itself to genuinely pastoral, practical, and personal preaching. While some have criticized the Heidelberg Catechism as overly subjective and man-centered, a careful reading of the text should convince the most ardent critic that the Catechism is not only doctrinal in its content but also doxological in its purpose and catholic in its scope.

Preparing the Next Generation of Catechism Preachers

The legacy of catechism preaching is indeed a treasure that the church should cherish. Do we want to hear strong and vibrant catechism preaching in our churches? Do we desire this for our children and grandchildren? If we do, we will want to ensure that every generation of future preachers receives the kind of ministerial training that will equip them with the skills to preach the Catechism persuasively, passionately, and pastorally. Mid-America Reformed Seminary remains uniquely qualified to fulfill this task of building up Christ's body for the glory of our Savior.



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

ALUMNUS FACILITATES EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

ALUMNI PROFILE: RANDALL KLYNSMA

Rev. Randall Klynsma (1989) serves as Pastor at Omaha Reformed Church (RCUS). One of the projects he has been working on is entitled *The Complete Gospel: Biblical Faith as Summarized in the Creeds of the Early Church and the Heidelberg Catechism*. In the Lord's providence, the project has reached a new milestone.

The Complete Gospel was developed as a low-cost, creedally-based evangelistic tool. It was designed for those new to the faith who want to understand the basics of Christianity and the Reformed Faith. It consists of the three ancient creeds and the Heidelberg Catechism with an evangelistic introduction. The booklet describes what faithful Christians have believed through the ages. The Heidelberg Catechism can serve as an excellent discipleship tool. The Synod of Dort endorsed it when they said, "...the Heidelberg Catechism is in all respects in harmony with the Word of God" and "an admirably composed compendium of the orthodox Christian doctrine."

The Complete Gospel is available in four languages: English, Spanish, Afrikaans, and Ukrainian. The project has facilitated 1000 copies to be printed in Ukraine. One of the goals is to make digital copies of the Complete Gospel available in the top ten languages in the world. They distribute all the translations in open source and facilitate self-printing anywhere and everywhere.

Over 23,500 copies have been printed, some of them for less than \$.50 a copy. Thousands of copies have been sent to foreign countries.



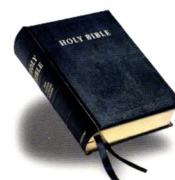
This project has been self-sustaining. The copies are disseminated individually and in bulk for free. Donations have helped cover the cost of production and shipping. Initially, they asked a few individuals to help underwrite the initial cost of printing the first 3,000 copies. By the time they distributed them and needed to print more, they had received enough donations for the second printing of 7,000 copies (5,000 in English and 2,000 in Spanish). The same was true for their third printing. They recently received their third shipment of 10,500 copies (7,500 in English and 3,000 in Spanish). The future is bright for additional funding to print more copies.

To receive more information or order a copy for yourself or your church, please contact Rev. Klynsma at omahareformed.pastor@gmail.

Michael Deckinga
Vice President of Advancement

THE COMPLETE GOSPEL

BIBLICAL FAITH AS SUMMARIZED
IN THE
CREEDS OF THE EARLY CHURCH
AND THE
HEIDELBERG CATECHISM.





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