

REVIEW: Michael Reeves's *Delighting in the Trinity* by David G. Graves

New Horizons

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

THE DEVOURER

DEVoured

BY A. CRAIG TROXEL

ALSO: TEN YEARS OF OUR PLEA FOR PRAYER

APR 2013

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NEW HORIZONS

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The staff at the Nozomi (Hope) Center in Yamamoto, Japan (from the left): Yui Hamada, OP missionary Cal Cummings, Marayoshi Ono, Emi Kato. Since a tsunami devastated the area in 2011, about 115 volunteers have helped in the relief efforts through the OPC's disaster response ministry, working in conjunction with our Japan Mission. One of the reconstruction projects resulted in the Nozomi Center, an outreach ministry that is now in full operation. For more information, see the Foreign Missions article in this issue.



A. CRAIG TROXEL

The Devourer Devoured

When Dad died, my brother Scott said, “The world just got a little smaller.” Indeed it did. Death had just devoured my greatest mentor. My father fought back bravely against the cancer that gnawed away at his health for years. But finally the dreaded moment came, and something bigger than any of us closed in on him. Dad was gone, and he was not coming back.

DEATH DEVOURS

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows the frustrating helplessness one feels in death’s unrelenting grip and the overwhelming waves of its sorrow that leave us gasping for relief. At such times, death cruelly reminds us that we too will face him one day. We too will meet the same end. We too will be devoured.

This reality is conveyed graphically in the literature we read. For example, in a famous scene in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the grandiose Kurtz is dying. He was a megalomaniac who had killed countless people in the Congo and then grossly sported their heads on stakes outside his hut. He eventually fell sick, and just before his own death he opened his mouth wide, with a “weirdly voracious aspect . . . as though he wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him.”¹ This demonic man, who once held the power of death, yielded in fear to “the horror” of death and its “ravenous, unreasoning and eternally insatiable nature.”²

Many teenagers have read an echo of this in William Golding’s classic, *Lord of the Flies*, when the character Simon holds an imaginary conversation with the head of a dead pig fixed atop a stake.³ The talking head claims to be the beast that the boys have been hunting. It boasts that it cannot be killed; rather, it will eventually consume them. Simon feels faint as he sees himself falling into the enveloping dark mouth of the pig, a foreshadowing of his own death.

Flannery O’Connor probably alludes to Conrad’s book as well in her well-known story, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” The homicidal figure “The Misfit” has lined up a family near a lone country road. Some distance behind them stands a group of trees where they will soon meet their end. It spreads behind the family like a “wide-open mouth.”⁴ Death devours.

The Bible utilizes this same image, describing death, or “Sheol” (that unseen realm of the departed), as the great devourer. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exults in her” (Isa. 5:14). Or, as the wicked say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit” (Prov. 1:11–12).

Although death has devoured millions upon millions, the Bible warns of its insatiable appetite. It is never full. It is always devouring: “Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20). It keeps company with similarly insatiable vices: “Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples” (Hab. 2:5). Greedily, death craves and death consumes.

Scripture assumes that death is the devourer when it speaks of the doom of people. When the Lord drowned

Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, Moses stated that "the earth swallowed them" (Ex. 15:12). The prophet Isaiah cautioned Israel about the approaching enemies who would overtake them: "The Syrians on the east and the Philistines on the west devour Israel with open mouth" (Isa. 9:12).

When Korah rebelled against Moses, the prophet informed the people, "But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD" (Num. 16:30). Accordingly, this is what happened. "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up" (Num. 16:32; cf. Deut. 11:6; Ps. 106:17). Even the instruments of death, like the sword, are said to "devour" people (see, e.g., Deut. 32:42; 2 Sam. 2:26; Isa. 31:8; Jer. 46:10).

It is no wonder, then, that death is the accomplice of the one who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). The devil himself has the appetite of a stalking beast: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). It is not enough for Satan to destroy. He wants to torment and dominate. Death is his tool to enslave our race in fear (Heb. 2:15).

It is his way of constantly reminding us that we remain connected to our first parents, who fell to his enticement. When Adam and Eve received God's warning, it sounded ominous for good reason. Eating forbidden fruit may not seem like a great crime, but the words "you will surely die" should have clarified the gravity of such a sin. As a result, our race's first transgression secured its wages in death.

Ever since that fateful hour, death has consumed human-kind ravenously, with the last one hundred years of human carnage making the point emphatically. Death is our great and last enemy. It ravages us, overshadows us, intimidates us, and as we feel its relentless sting, we groan and groan. Every child of God knows this groaning, because we possess the down payment of the Spirit and long for the fullness of our redemption—a liberated body that is beyond the reach of death's gaping jaws (Rom 8:23).

The earth groans with us, since it must now do what it was never meant to do. It was created to nurture and sustain our bodies. Now it is corrupted to shroud and entomb our bodies. It was made to engender every new life that enters the human race. Now it makes room to engulf every finished life that leaves the human race. Every burial reminds us of this. Dust to dust. The ground receives our loved one and places its earthen death-shroud over his or her face (Isa. 25:7). Death devours again and our world gets smaller.

DEATH DEVoured

But what is it that makes a Christian's grief over death different from how the worldly man mourns? It is this. Though

ISAIAH 25:6–8

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

we are afflicted, we are not crushed. Though perplexed, we do not despair. Though sorrowful, we are not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8–9). We mourn, but not like the world. We shed our tears, but they are not all tears of sorrow. For, by faith, we have become partakers of a peace and joy that reaches deeper than any sorrow and moderates its pain. By faith, we possess a sure knowledge that, despite appearances, death does not have the final word. This is our faith in Jesus Christ, who has devoured death in his resurrection from the dead.

Paul says, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Victory implies a battle. Battle implies an enemy. That's what death is, our enemy. A tremendous battle has been fought between Christ on the one side and sin and death on the other. Christ took our sin to the cross, along with its curse and condemnation. And there he received the penalty of sin. Death was crying out for satisfaction, demanding that God be held to his verdict. God had declared that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). So this is what Christ paid as our ransom. His blood covered the offense of our sin, and his righteous death quenched God's fiery wrath against us. Christ also destroyed death's power by his death, and he has crushed death's grip on us through his resurrection. Christ has gained a great triumph over death, just as he did over our sin. It is a victory he has won for us.

God has graciously and inseparably united us to our Savior, so that just as we have been crucified with Christ, so also we have been raised with him. Christ has conquered, and we are more than conquerors in him. Christ has overcome, and we have overcome through him. Christ has triumphed, so God "gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Death the devourer has been devoured by our risen King. This holds true whether we think of a Christian who has died or consider the final resurrection of all believers when Christ comes.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1–10, Paul says that while we walk day by day in these earthly bodies, "we are away from the Lord," and so we must "walk by faith" and "not by sight." We soberly recognize that we are not yet what we will be. We long for something better. We look forward to that transformed,

glorified, and heavenly body—a “heavenly dwelling” or a “building from God.” Already we have the Holy Spirit as a down payment of that future glorified body. So we long for more than the flimsy “tent” of our earthly body. This tension between our earthly existence and our desire to be “further clothed” in glory is what causes us to groan and be burdened. We “would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” We know that one day “what is mortal” will be “swallowed up by life.”

This is what sets a Christian’s funeral apart. A funeral gives the appearance that our loved one has been swallowed up by death. But God says that it is just the reverse. Since death is swallowed up by the resurrection of Christ, death is merely the threshold to a Christian’s passing into the immediate presence of God. We mourn, but not like those who have no hope.

This explains why the “resurrection chapter,” 1 Corinthians 15, ends on such a high note. Its tone is triumphant. Notice that verse fifty-five—“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”—is a quotation from Hosea 13:14. This poetic passage enables Paul to make his point even more vivid. It is helpful here to think not so much of the human author, but rather of the divine author. Here God is speaking to death’s face. He is openly taunting death. Ridiculing it. The questions drip with sarcasm and defiance against death’s powerlessness over a Christian. God mocks its inability to harm a Christian.

Death may not lord it over God’s children, but must bow before its master—the God of power, who raises the dead. Death is now subdued by “the living one,” who holds “the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18). Death has been defeated. Our almighty Savior, Jesus Christ, rules over all things, including death. He is raised, and so shall we also be raised.

We look back in faith to what Christ has accomplished for us in his death and resurrection, and we look forward in hope to what Christ has attained for us by the same. With John, we yearn for that great day when Christ will appear and “we will be like him” (1 John 3:2). The day of our unveiling and the final removal of the death shroud. The day when he will transform our lowly bodies “to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). The day when the perishable will put on the imperishable. The day when the mortal will put on the immortal. The day when these mere earthly tents will be further clothed with our heavenly dwelling. The day when God gives us the final victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, because death has been swallowed up in the victory of his resurrection. The day when “a remarkable reversal will take place. The Lord will become the devourer and death, the famed and fearful swallower, will itself be swallowed up.”⁵

Until then, we must walk by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, who is Christ’s gracious gift to us—the earnest

and first installment of our inheritance to come. The Spirit bears witness to who we are now and what we will be. And as we face our great enemy, death, the Spirit also fortifies us with what we need every day, namely faith.

These things call for faith, even a courageous faith (2 Cor. 5:6, 8), because this gospel hope is not readily apparent. These spiritual realities are not visible to the eye. They are not obvious in this earthly existence. So “we walk by faith, not by sight.” This hope, this confidence, this truth of our resurrection is acquired only by faith. Yes, Paul says, of course we would rather be at home with the Lord and away from this earthly existence. Yes, we would rather have our glorified body. Yes, we would rather be in his presence. But until that happens, we are of good courage. We walk in confidence, as we hold firmly to the truth of this precious hope.

In faith, we mock death. It does not mock us. It has no power over us. Death does not reign at a Christian’s funeral. It does not reign in the kingdom of God. It does not reign in our hearts. Christ reigns. And we will reign with him in glory for eternity, with transformed, glorious bodies. We will sing songs of triumph and will praise our conquering King, rejoicing that our faith has become sight. Christ has won the victory, and he shares the spoils of that victory with his people.

Brothers and sisters, let us not fear nor doubt. Let us not fall into unbelief or undue sorrow. Yes, our enemy and our accusers come and line up before us, trying to intimidate us, so that we will shrink back in fear. But let us face death as Christians, and rise up and confront it. Let us defy it in faith.

We have the victory. Christ is raised. No power—not even death—has any hold on Christ, nor on us. We will not be defeated, and we will not be afraid. For we are more than conquerors in Christ, and we have the victory in him. Christ has swallowed up death by his resurrection. The devourer has been devoured. ▣

The author is pastor of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Ill. He quotes the ESV.

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 104.

² William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Perigee Books, 2006), 104, 208.

³ Yes, it sounds gruesome, but it is nothing compared to vampires, zombies, dementors, and what happens at the Cornucopia (ask your kids, they know).

⁴ Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O’Connor* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1971), 127.

⁵ Meredith G. Kline, “Death, Leviathan, and Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1,” in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Ronald R. Youngblood (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 230.



ARTHUR FOX

Using Communications Technology for God's Glory

Isn't the Internet wonderful! You had a wonderful weekend with your friends, and you want to tell all your friends on Facebook about it. So you post a full report and even include moments that might look awkward for you as a believer. Perhaps you "Twitter" short and snarky remarks about someone or something. Your party was fun, and you have some neat close-ups of you and your girl (or guy) or of others that will make everyone laugh—and, sure, there are some questionable moments, but leaving them out would cheat the world of some laughs. So you upload it to YouTube. What harm would it do?

It is hard to remember, isn't it, that when we are taking part in an online social group like Facebook, using e-mail, Twitter, or Instagram, or posting things to YouTube, that it isn't just our "friends" who will see what we have shown them, who will have our information appearing on their computers. Others will see it as well! Often those friends include both Christians and non-Christians. And don't forget that your teacher or your employer or (gasp!) your parents also have access to your Facebook Timeline. How would this information affect your choice of how you describe the aforementioned weekend—or even (to raise the ante just a bit) what you might send to someone by e-mail? The use you would make of your video? What pictures you would post? Perhaps the definitely pre-computer age apostle Paul can help with what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31—"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Sadly, this sort of careful biblical thought as to what appears on Facebook, in e-mail, or on any Internet site often seems to be lacking in the posts of otherwise careful and godly brethren in Christ (yes, even in the OPC!). I have been on Facebook for some years now, and it can get really dark out there! On any given day, I can see, on the Facebook pages of my "friends," profanity, language that approaches profanity,

opinions expressed that seem not to have been passed through the filter of Scripture, angry outbursts, selfish and even abusive speech, and more—all posted by professing believers. There are times when, if I did not know that these dear brothers and sisters are Christians, I would not know it from what they post.

Our faith in Christ is supposed to impact all that we do. That is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10:31. Elsewhere the Scripture exhorts us to "not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil" (Rom. 14:16) and to "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). Jesus tells us to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Love, honesty, discretion, and, most of all, the fear of God (who sees all we write and the condition of the heart that leads to the words we write) should temper what we say and how we say it (Eph. 4:29).

When we post to social networking sites like Facebook, these considerations ought to be the controlling factors, not only determining *what* we post, but the language we use, the descriptions we give, and even whether or not we *should* post. Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and love for our neighbor, but even more, love for Christ, should control

everything we do online.

In addition, we ought to recognize that what we post may not only harm brothers and sisters in Christ (who may stumble at our words, or even be tempted to sin), but also adversely affect our testimony for Christ. What we post provides a glimpse into our hearts to those who read or look at what we post. And if they see something other than our Christian testimony, that is not their fault. It is ours for not being more thoughtful of what we post. Is it too big a leap then to say that the viewer might think, “Oh, so it is not so important to Christ how I live, so why do I need to be saved?” Someone might even be led by what we post to despise our faith or even our Savior. Or is it possible that what we post really does reflect a careless attitude toward remaining sin and the sinful habits in our life? If the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart, what do our Facebook messages, our e-mails, and our videos say about our heart?

Perhaps your boss was unfair or even abusive. You post your complaint on Facebook, or you send around an e-mail to all your coworkers and even some acquaintances of the boss. Maybe you make fun of him or call him names. Or what if a friend has betrayed you, and you want to vent to others? So you send out an e-mail to everyone you know, or tell all your Facebook friends about it. What have you done to the reputation of your neighbor? Do you even know what the ninth commandment says?

It is useful to recall the words of our Larger Catechism:

Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful and equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting; thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of

infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

Our elders over the last few years have discussed the dangers of using e-mail for important correspondence. We have a policy that requires us to be very disciplined in what we say. One elder on our session has a useful warning he gives regularly (and to my shame, I don't always remember it!): it is far too easy to hit the “enter” and “send” buttons. If it is more than general information, then we are agreed that we should pick up the phone or wait till we can discuss the matter in person. Further, members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are familiar with the warnings of the Committee on Foreign Missions not to post sensitive missions-related information online *ever!* People could end up in prison or worse! If verbal gossip has slain its thousands, inappropriate e-mails have slain their tens of thousands.

Scripture instructs us: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:29–32). Does it strike you as hard as it does me that these words are God's will for our use of social media? This passage tells us how we are to use technology to communicate with each other. Does your use of social media pass this test?

For the sake of the body of Christ, and for the sake of the gospel of Christ, let us be very careful what we say and how we say it. If it gives even the impression of sin, has a danger of corrupting, does not build up, does not fit the occasion, or does not give grace to those who will read or see it, then don't post it. Think for a while before sending an e-mail. (Tip: some e-mail programs have a setting that delays sending e-mails for a specified time, to give you an opportunity to reconsider what you are sending!) More positively, to paraphrase Paul, “Whether you write it on Facebook, or write an e-mail, or whatever you do on the Internet, do all to the glory of God.” □

The author is pastor of Calvary OPC in Middletown, Pa. He quotes the ESV.

Ten Years of Our Plea for Prayer

CHRIS WISDOM AND
CORNELIUS JOHNSON

January 2013 marked the publication of the 120th monthly issue and ten years of the *Plea for Prayer*, a publication of the OPC published and edited by ruling elder and US Marine Corps veteran Robert M. Coie. It is devoted to promoting prayer for OP ministers and members who serve chiefly as chaplains and military personnel in our US Armed Forces or as chaplains in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, police departments, and other public institutions.

Why the “Plea for Prayer”? Bob Coie explains that ten years ago the ministry of our chaplains and military personnel seemed to be underreported or not reported at all. As a result, he began to publish the *Plea for Prayer* in early 2003, when military personnel were lining up on the “beaches” of Kuwait, as a private, e-mail prayer letter. The *Plea* was forwarded by several OP members to others and began to be used in some of our congregations. The *Plea* was next picked up by the OPC’s Standing Committee on Chaplains and

Military Personnel (CCMP) in late summer 2003.

What has ten years of prayer wrought, as promoted by the *Plea for Prayer*? One evident answer to ten years of prayer by OP members for our chaplains, our military personnel, and our committee through the *Plea for Prayer* has been the way in which God has increased the number of OP chaplains for the US Armed Forces and in other American institutions. For example, in the year 2000, the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCCMP) endorsed a total of fifteen military and institutional OP chaplains, including “eight Orthodox Presbyterian chaplains serving on active duty, four serving in the active reserves, one serving as a chaplain with the Veterans Administration, one serving as a Federal Prison chaplain and one with the Civil Air Patrol.”

By comparison, the report of the CCMP to the 79th General Assembly of the OPC in 2012 stated that “as of 1 January 2012, the PRCCMP endorses a total of 22 military and institutional chaplains.” This represents almost a 50 percent increase in the number of OP chaplains and chaplain candidates over the last twelve years endorsed to serve in the military forces and institutions of our nation.



Air Force chaplain Cornelius Johnson

But numbers alone do not tell the entire tale. Another visible fruit of this past decade of persevering prayer is how God has used and is using chaplains that he has placed in positions of influence in our military forces. Consider this testimony from US Air Force Chaplain Cornelius Johnson to the power of prayers for him, as encour-

aged by the *Plea for Prayer* and the *Guardian* (a quarterly prayer newsletter published by our chaplaincy endorsing agency, the PRCCMP):

The work of a chaplain does not take place in a local church, but in hospitals, prisons, and on military bases. In the case of military chaplains, they are at times assigned to places where there are no presbyteries or reformed churches nearby. Also, they often minister in places and institutions that are hostile to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, chaplains need the prayers of the church that God’s presence and power would be with them as they perform this difficult ministry. This is why the *Guardian* and the *Plea for Prayer* are such powerful tools, because they allow many churches and people to see our prayer requests and to pray for us.

The *Guardian* and the *Plea for Prayer*



Bob Coie

have been a great blessing to me personally. There are two powerful examples of how God answered his people's prayers on my behalf. I often requested that God would grant me boldness and courage to preach and to stand for the truth. Repeatedly, God gave me the courage to preach the truth, and to be faithful to God's word even when there was pressure on me to compromise. The second example was my assignment to serve as a hospital chaplain. I had no experience in clinical hospital ministry. However God answered prayers, by giving me the ability to minister to people in their great grief and sorrow. He gave me the words and prayers to comfort and instruct the patients, families, and hospital staff. These are two striking examples of how the *Plea for Prayer* and the *Guardian* have been a blessing to me.

Consider also how US Navy Captain Bryan Weaver and Chaplain (Colonel) Jonathan Gibbs were blessed during the last ten years of the global war on terror to serve US Marines and US Army soldiers, respectively, in key senior chaplain leadership roles while deployed in combat in Iraq. In contrasting ministries to officer candidates and cadets, Chaplain (Major) Paul Berghaus has served both as an Army chaplain recruiter and as Chaplain of the Corps of Cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point. In yet other ministries, Chaplain (Colonel) Chris Wisdom and Chaplain (Colonel) Chet Lanious served chaplain and chaplain assistant students as senior leaders at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School from 2007 to 2010. Currently, two US Air Force chaplains are ministering to the command and task force of US Airmen: Captain Cornelius Johnson in Honduras and Captain Phil Holstein in Kuwait. Navy Chaplain John Carter and Army Chaplain Earl Vanderhoff (Armed Forces Radio), as well as our civilian chaplains, also have stories to tell.

Warriors serving their country, as well as their parents, spouses, and siblings, have been encouraged to know



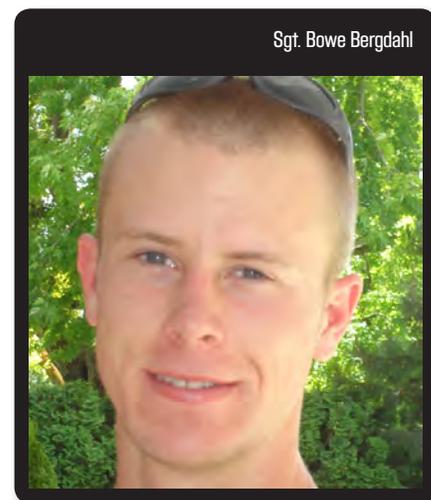
of the prayers on their behalf. It would be an instance of ingratitude to God to fail to note a most notable favor which he has granted to the OPC, a blessing certainly related to the many intercessory prayers offered up by readers of the *Plea for Prayer* for the Lord's protection of loved ones serving in harm's way while stationed in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. That blessing is God's remarkable protection of our OP members who have served in these conflicts since the beginning of our operations in Afghanistan. A single OP covenant son has been killed and fewer than ten have been wounded, even though many have been involved in serious combat. May all praise and honor and glory and thanksgiving be given to Jesus Christ for such abundant mercy, grace, and kindness to his covenant people!

OP chaplains have also been blessed by being able to strengthen PRCCMP-endorsed chaplains from outside the OPC. Since 2011, PRCCMP chaplains are finding encouragement to persevere in a distinctively biblical Presbyterian and Reformed ministry while deployed overseas by taking time for international fellowship. Currently there are more than a dozen PRCCMP chaplains in Europe. They serve US forces in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. In March 2012, ten of these chaplains and their wives were able to come together in a weekend PRCCMP conference organized by an OP

chaplain, led by our PRCCMP endorsing agent, Doug Lee, and hosted by a PCA mission congregation in Germany. This retreat provided an occasion that God blessed for prayer, fellowship, encouragement, and refreshment for chaplain families from each of these PRCCMP denominations. Just as important, it established contacts between chaplain families that have continued to bear fruit in more frequent e-mails, phone calls, and visits to one another.

For these answers to prayer, and for countless other fruits that God will reveal fully only in eternity, we thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank God specifically for the ten-year ministry of Robert M. Coie in his *Plea for Prayer* newsletter, which he continues to publish each month on the OPC's website at www.opc.org/chaplain/index.html.

Finally, as you pray for our chaplains and military personnel, please persevere in prayer for the release by the Taliban of OP covenant son and Operation Enduring Freedom prisoner of war, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, United States Army. Bowe's parents have publicly requested the prayer support of God's people for their son's safety, release, and return to his family and church. As part of this article we renew the plea for prayer for Bowe Bergdahl and the people of war-torn Afghanistan.



Both authors are ministers in the OPC and members of the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel.

Do You Love the Church?

JOHN S. SHAW

Even a brief search of the local Christian bookstore shelves reveals an epidemic of disregard, even downright disdain, for the church among leading theologians. In particular, they despise the local, visible church. Some go so far as to claim that the organized church, far from offering positive help, actually poses a threat to healthy Christian living. Some argue that if we could eliminate organized religion altogether, winning our neighbors to Christ would be simpler.

Of course, these arguments fly in the face of our theological commitments. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “The visible church . . . is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (25.2). In other words, the local, visible, organized church is absolutely necessary for the advance of the gospel. Far from disdaining the visible church, the Westminster divines loved and cherished her.

The Scriptures call Christians to love the church—not only the invisible church, but also the visible church. Here we will focus on three particular biblical reasons why this is so.

GOD’S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

First, Christians should love the church because God loves the church:

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken
formed thee for his own abode:
On the Rock of Ages founded, what
can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation’s walls surrounded, thou
may’st smile at all thy foes.



Worship at Reformation OPC in Queens, New York

In this hymn, John Newton builds on the opening verses of Psalm 87: “On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God” (vv. 1–3). Who speaks glorious things about this city? God does. Our songs simply repeat the glorious things that the Lord teaches us about his people, the church.

Psalm 87 and Newton’s hymn harmonize on one theme. The Lord loves his city so much that he knows her, gives birth to her, establishes her, and satisfies her. The psalm ends with the citizens of Zion proclaiming together, “All my springs are in you.” God loves his church so much that he meets her every need, bringing lasting satisfaction to all the citizens of his kingdom.

To serve God means many things, but it certainly means to love the things that God loves. The Lord loves his church; therefore, we should love his church.

CHRIST’S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Second, Christians should love the church because Christ paid a great price for her.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians includes clear teaching about the church. While the doctrine of this epistle applies to the universal, invisible church, the apostle also writes to and about the congregation in Ephesus. What Paul writes also applies to a local, visible, organized church.

Clearly, Christ loves his church deeply. Paul ends the first section of his letter by describing his prayer for the congregation in Ephesus: “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:17–19). He prays that the Christians in Ephesus would comprehend how much Christ loves them.



In chapter 5, Paul holds up Christ as an example to husbands and describes specifically the love of Christ for his church: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Jesus loved the church so much that he willingly died for her, so that she might be clean, holy, and beautiful (vv. 25–27).

The intimacy of a healthy marriage involves learning about your spouse, finding out what he or she loves, and participating in his or her interests. Many husbands and wives have acquired a passion for sports, music, or literature simply because they have embraced the interests of their spouse. You cherish your spouse by embracing his or her passions.

Christ has claimed every Christian as his bride by paying the price of his blood. As our cherished bridegroom, he calls us to love what he loves. The Lord Jesus loves his church passionately and paid an infinite price for her; therefore, we should love his bride, the church.

OUR LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

Third, Christians should love the church because we love our neighbors.

Remember what the Confession of Faith teaches, that outside of the church there is “no ordinary possibility of salvation” (25.2). The next section explains why salvation comes primarily through the church. Christ gave to his church “the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God”—instruments by which the Lord gathers and perfects the saints. The Lord makes those tools effective as the church uses them in the world. He promises to save and gather the elect through the work of the church (25.3; see also Eph. 4:11–13).

If we believe that a sinful and dying world needs more than anything to know

Christ as Savior, if we believe that the primary means by which the Lord communicates this message are the Word, the sacraments, and prayer, and if we believe that the Lord especially gives these means to the visible church to use in the world, then we should love the church. Our unbelieving neighbors, friends, and family members need to hear the message that the church possesses. To summarize Paul’s instruction in Romans 10:14–17, how shall they hear and believe unless preachers are sent? It’s the church that sends preachers.

To love our neighbors means to bring them the only message that delivers them from the wrath and curse of God that they deserve for their sins, and that message rests in the church. If we love our neighbors, we should love the church.

OUR VISION FOR THE CHURCH

The Scriptures clearly teach that we should love the church, and we should pass on that passion to our children. Children very often learn to love the same things their parents love. My father and I watched sports together, we played sports together, and my parents attended all my sporting events. His love for sports was communicated to me, and I now pass on that same passion to my children.

Similarly, my parents and I listened to music together, we played and sang music together, and my parents attended all my concerts. Their love for music was

communicated to me, and I now pass on that same passion to my children.

But my parents possessed one passion that far outshone their passion for sports or music. They loved the church. We made time for church, we attended church and sat together, and they supported my efforts to take my place in the church. Their love for the church was communicated to me, and, by the grace of God, I now pass on that same passion to my children.

One of my prayers for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is that we would grow in our love for the local, visible, organized church. I pray that we would catch the vision laid out in Scripture: because God loves the church, because Christ paid a great price for the church, and because we love our neighbors, we will love, cherish, and serve the church of Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, we will pass that vision on to our children by making time for church and valuing the work of the church.

As we love the church and cultivate a big vision for what Christ might accomplish through his church, we will have a passion for missions. Planting churches only makes sense if we recognize God’s passion for his church and his plan to build his kingdom through the planting of local, visible congregations. May the Lord give us a passion for his church that produces a grand vision for planting new churches to the glory of God.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date Home Missions news and prayer updates, e-mail HomeMissionsToday@opc.org.
New editions: **April 10, 24.**

A Window into the OPC

PATRICIA E. CLAWSON

Step into many Orthodox Presbyterian churches, and you'll see a table topped with OP books, booklets, and brochures. This literature gives visitors and members far more than something free to carry home. It gives them a window into what the congregation believes.

DAVENPORT, IOWA

The first impression visitors receive when entering Sovereign Grace OPC in Davenport, Iowa, for instance, is a table with the day's bulletin and these booklets: *Welcome to the OPC*, *What Is the Reformed Faith?* and *Why Join a Church?* This material is set out with a purpose. "A lot of people in the Quad Cities don't know the Reformed faith," says Pastor Ken Golden. "When we get visitors, we don't want to bombard them with too much information, but we want them to know where we're coming from. The booklets are a nice introduction."

Golden especially appreciates the church membership booklet because many in today's culture think church membership is a man-made idea. "This brochure dispels that thinking and shows a proper way to handle Scripture," says Golden. He also appreciates the professional look and aesthetics of the OP materials.

The OP literature played a part in his congregation's evangelism outreach at a local street fair last summer. Golden offered a free Bible and the brochure *Get to Know Us Better* to those who stopped for a fifteen-minute gospel presentation. Twenty-five people left their e-mail addresses and phone numbers. One started in the membership class.



Pastor Ken Golden sharing a CCE booklet in Davenport, Iowa

In his leadership training class, Golden uses the matching hardbound volumes, *The Book of Church Order (BOCO)* and *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms*. Golden also has given *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* to new members after they have completed their membership class. While he doesn't think visitors need to be immersed in the OP standards immediately, he thinks it helps new members, who have a different level of understanding. "Here's a *Confession*," Golden says to new members. "Have a crack at it."

REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

Pastor Robert Herrmann displays all nine of the OPC's booklets at Sovereign Grace OPC in Redlands, California. "Most visitors don't have OP roots, so they want to learn more about how the OPC works and our convictions," says Herrmann. "The booklets tell who we are. They are phenomenal. We feel it really explains who we are as a church."

The session's goal is to have the en-

tire church learn the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. "We give all young people from middle school and higher a copy of *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms*," said Herrmann, who estimates the church spends three hundred dollars annually on literature. He hopes the Committee on Christian Education will continue to publish new materials.

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Florida, gives *BOCO* as well as *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* to people taking the inquirer's and officer training classes. "This reflects our desire that our church be self-consciously OP," says Pastor Joel Fick. "We want the people to imbibe the characteristics that make us distinctive. The books are beautifully bound and they sort of signal to the congregation that we define ourselves by them."

BOCO includes the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God.

Fick wants his people to have the Directory for Worship because it “summarizes in one document how we should worship. When they want to think through what we do in worship and why we exclude things, they can see where they come from.” Also, he says, “The Form of Government tells how to be Presbyterian. It isn’t incidental to the Scriptures, but the very point of the Scriptures.”

At first, elder William Montgomery personally funded the gifts of the books. His enthusiasm stems from his time in another Reformed denomination, where many members did not understand Presbyterianism or know their denomination’s standards. “I realize how valuable the standards are,” says Montgomery. “*The Book of Church Order* is who we are and how we do things. We try to give members the ability to be as informed as we can. I have heard the thankfulness of many people.”

These books are also part of their officer training class. “We want our elders to own the OPC as their church,” said Fick. “They are becoming officers in a particular expression of Christ’s church that has fought the good fight. We want that to be inculcated in them and perpetuate this love of the church. The more it is perpetuated in the officers, the more with the people.”

MAYFIELD VILLAGE, OHIO

Pastor Geoffrey Willour, of Lake OPC in Mayfield Village, Ohio, is a big



The literature table at Sovereign Grace OPC in Redlands, Calif.

believer in having good literature for visitors and members. “As a confessional church, we need to be up-front with what we stand for,” he says.

In membership class, Willour uses the booklets *What Is the OPC?* and *Welcome to the OPC*, as well as the brochure *Get to Know Us Better*. New members at Lake OPC now receive copies of *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* and *BOCO*. “When people join, it’s important for church members to have these books in hand, and it encourages a sense of connection (with the OPC),” says Willour.

Willour promotes the booklet *Why Join a Church?* because “there are a lot of Christians in this country who don’t see church membership as important, so we give out the booklet to help them think more about ecclesiology and their relationship to the church.”

When Willour previously was pastor of Redeemer OPC in Toms River, N.J.,

he handed out *Get to Know Us Better* with their church tract, Bibles, and *Welcome to the OPC* at a flea market. The effort gleaned one family that became members. “You have to sow the seed broadly to get much by way of results,” says Willour.

KENT, WASHINGTON

At Emmanuel OPC in Kent, Washington, Pastor Randy Bergquist taught his adult Sunday school class using the booklet *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, by Richard Gaffin. For six weeks, Bergquist read it out loud in the class, section by section, and then they discussed it as a group.

While all fifty copies that Bergquist ordered were used, some class members also downloaded the digital edition of the booklet from the OPC.org website onto their Kindles, iPads, and other devices. “The class was very well received,” said Bergquist. “There was lots of good discussion. It was talked about often in class, but also after class and in the homes.”

The OP literature is available at the OPC.org website under Publications. “Although more people get information through electronic media than print media, I still think print media is important,” says Willour. “I use the materials as a follow-up for visitors, for outreach, to supplement membership classes, and for the literature table.” What better way is there to give folks a window into the OPC?

Congratulations

The Shorter Catechism has been recited by:

- Marcus Reeves (Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Fla.)
- Gabriella Reeves (Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Fla.)

Out of the Mouth ...

Our four-year-old son, T.J., is learning the Children’s Catechism. When asked, “How did God create man?” T.J. answered, “God created man, male and female, bashing his own image!”

—Deborah Gulstrom
Londonderry, N.H.

Note: If you have an example of the humorous “wisdom” that can come from children, please send it to the editor.

Deeds Paving the Way for Words

CALVIN K. CUMMINGS, JR.

The scene was humorous. After feeding a crowd of five thousand men (plus women and children), Jesus withdrew to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd that just had a free dinner was not about to leave this food source alone! Recognizing a good thing when they saw it, the crowd traveled around the lake to ask one thing from Jesus: more food.

However, Jesus did not give it to them. He had not done the miracle primarily for their bellies, but rather to reach their souls. The point, he told them, was that just as the bread had satisfied their stomachs, so he was the true Bread who would quiet the hunger in their hearts for joy, by restoring them again to God. “I am the bread of life,” resound the words through the centuries. “He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.”

This scene from the life of Jesus gives insight into the complex yet necessary relationship between words and deeds in the evangelism of the church. We cannot have one without the other, and yet there are so many pitfalls in doing both that many have focused on deed to the exclusion of word, or vice versa, over the years. Just telling people about Jesus is not loving them, say some, and they end up not telling at all. Just doing things for people is meaningless without telling them why, say others, and they end up with truth that lacks love. In balanced ministry, deeds pave the way for words. In the same way that Jesus cared for people and their needs before telling them the message of salvation, we at the Nozomi (Hope) Center in Yamamoto, Japan, have a wonderful opportunity in front of us



Renovated Sendai Church

to build a bridge for his words of life through abundant deeds of mercy.

Since the summer of 2011, just four months after the Great East Japan Disaster, some 115 volunteers have been sent here through the OPC’s disaster response ministry. The Japan Mission was asked to insure that the efforts of these teams be directed to relief ministries. It has been our privilege to have them share the love of Christ in deeds of kindness and necessity, while at the same time being ready to give an account of the hope that is within us. The disaster has opened up many new places, brought us into the lives of many new people, and provided new (and renewed) opportunities to listen to the Japanese and speak to their lives.

In word and in deed, we are commanded to share the hope of Christ. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” And so we were challenged to be faithful to Christ’s command

to make disciples. In one instance, we helped locals remove rocks from their fields. Each day began and ended with prayer and, with their consent, the people being helped were included. At break times, conversations began with inquiries about why we came or what Christianity is all about. We also learned about people’s circumstances and what their hopes were. Ground was being prepared, and seeds were sown. As burdens were shared through deeds done, conversation and prayer became means of communicating the hope of Christ. It has been nearly two years, and many people are yet groping in disbelief as to how to move forward. Unless we speak, how will they know that there is hope?

With this commitment to word-and-deed ministry, the OPC and its Japan Mission took up three major construction projects: (1) rebuilding the Sendai Church walls, (2) Nozomi Center reconstruction,

and (3) remodeling Ishinomaki Church. All three of these projects have been completed with excellent craftsmanship.

Nozomi Center is in full operation, seeking to meet the needs of the Yamamoto area. With two full-time and two part-time staff members, the Center provides daily programs for children, weekly visits to people living in temporary housing, and frequent special events. Volunteer teams from overseas missions, the Reformed Church in Japan, and individuals supplement the weekly staff ministries and expand the growing number of contacts. God is really blessing our efforts to engage in people's struggles and providing many opportunities to share the gospel.

From 3:00 to 5:00 each afternoon, children come by the Center to talk, play, and read. Once a month, we celebrate that month's birthdays with games, refreshments, and a special greeting with one of God's promises. In December, the Christmas story was told to many who had never heard it before. In February, we began English classes for all ages. With the schools and playgrounds destroyed by the tsunami and limited or no play areas where there is temporary housing, the Center has become a safe place to play, relax, and learn. For the children, it is the first time they have heard of a Creator-Redeemer God who knows them by name.

Within a seven-mile radius of the Center, between three and four thousand people are housed in seven temporary housing projects. All of their homes have been either completely washed away or rendered unlivable. Little by little, people are moving back, but the lack of skilled workers and inflated labor costs have slowed the process of returning. Each week, staff members and volunteers from the Center provide an activity to bring people together and take the opportunity to listen and give counsel to the participants. Many deeper

relationships are being established. It is our privilege to take time to visit the lonely, engage the youth, and assist those who have lost their earthly possessions and need to know the Savior.

In addition to the daily children's program, a number of events are held at the Center each month. The Center is also open to the community for their exercise club. Beginning in mid-February, people could drop by our "café" to socialize or find some quiet time. What is known as Hope Station offers English to all ages and a Bible message geared to each age level. Staff and volunteers are ready to assist and answer questions.

God has given us a unique circumstance in which to be a part of his great work to disciple the nation of Japan. Amidst the great physical disaster that hit Japan in 2011, we were reminded of the greater spiritual disaster that already existed in this beautiful nation of 126 million people, of whom 99 percent are headed for hell. By the year 2015, more than 50 percent of the present pastors of Christian churches will retire from the ministry. More than 50 percent of every congregation is over the age of seventy. The church is dying. How shall they believe unless they hear? How shall they hear unless someone is sent? As we are moved with compassion to help those who have lost loved ones

and livelihood, so we are moved to help those who walk in darkness. In word and deed, we are privileged to point people to the cross of Christ as the reason for the hope that is within us.

Late last November, one of the first people whom we met after the Center was opened in May stopped by to say that her husband had been diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Since then, many hours and days have been spent by staff members accompanying them to the hospital and listening to doctors. Hospitalized for the duration, this man realized that facing death meant facing God. All his past sins came to mind, and, he said, "God is now punishing me." We were there to tell of the great redeeming work of Jesus—the way, the truth, and the life. With tears of repentance and joy, this couple confessed their sins and professed their faith in Christ. Deeds of kindness and words of mercy accompanied by the Holy Spirit have given birth to new hope and eternal life in Yamamoto.

Finally, I would like to note that the Ishinomaki Chapel building was rededicated on January 20, 2013. Some seventy people from other Reformed Church of Japan congregations gathered to give thanks for the kind providence of God that had provided a new beginning for the work of the gospel in Ishinomaki.

Children at Nozomi Center's Christmas program



The Kingdom's Worth

(Matt. 13:44–46)

MATTHEW E. COTTA

Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, our nation was described by some as suffering an economic “malaise.” We were, in other words, in a financial funk. Sound familiar? Yes, it would not be a stretch to say that the malaise is upon us again.

Times like these afford Christians a unique opportunity to reflect upon what is really and truly valuable to us. In Matthew 13:44–46, the parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great price speak very powerfully to the issue of value.

Here Christ presents the reality that with his coming into the world—in shame and humility, clothed in human flesh, assaulted by enemies and rejected by his own—the kingdom of heaven has in fact dawned. The kingdom takes a form similar to that of its king; it is hidden, save to the eyes of faith.

So what does it profit a man to gain this kingdom, veiled as it is in the form of a cross? Through these parables, we come to understand that the kingdom of heaven is in fact of immeasurable worth. Nothing is more practical, more beneficial, or more valuable.

Both men—one a poor farmer, the other a rich merchant—sell everything, all of their worldly possessions, in order to obtain that which is truly the most worthwhile and valuable of all. This treasure, this pearl, is worth more than the combined value of everything else they possess.

Selling everything they have is really a small sacrifice in comparison to the riches they enjoy upon obtaining the field and the pearl. The inestimable worth of the kingdom of heaven is here set over

against the goods, possessions, relations, properties, rights, desires, and loves of this passing age.

Now, as Christians, we sometimes find ourselves in a spiritual malaise. Might we feel this way because we have forgotten to appraise the things of this world in light of Christ and his heavenly kingdom? Might we have forgotten our first love? If our hope and joy are tied to the rise and fall of the stock market or oil prices or our IRAs, there is a recipe for eternal malaise!

As we think about stewardship, about the giving of ourselves, our time, our resources, and our labors to the ministries of the church of Jesus Christ—local, regional, and denominational—we should remember these parables and mark them well. If we value, above all, the kingdom that has dawned in Christ, we have joy in the midst of malaise; we have everything that really matters.

The author is pastor of Grace OPC in Hanover Park, Ill.

Substantiation of Charitable Contributions

Donors must substantiate individual cash contributions of \$250 or more “by a contemporaneous written acknowledgement of the contribution by the donee organization.” Donors cannot substantiate individual cash contributions of \$250 or more with canceled checks. They must receive a written acknowledgement from the church or other charity.

The IRS has clarified that “as long as it is in writing and contains the information required by law, a contemporaneous written acknowledgement may be in any format.” The law specifies that a written acknowledgement must include the following information:

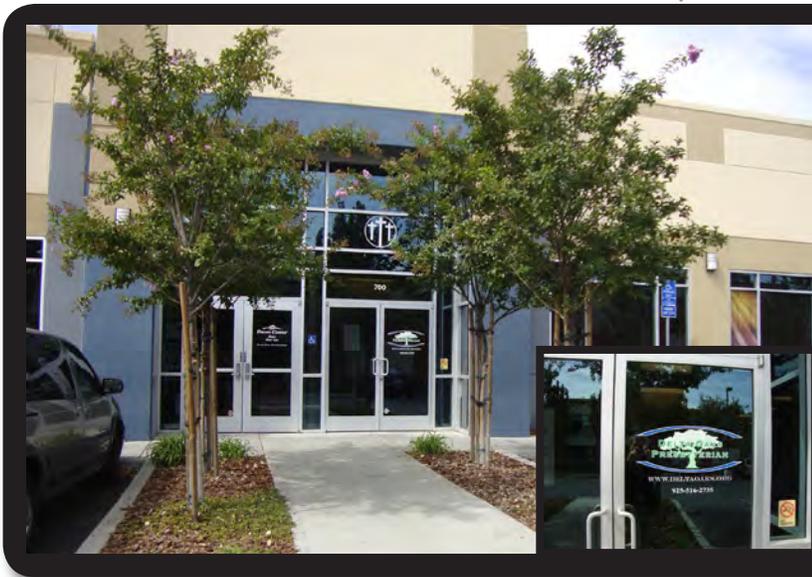
- name of organization;
- amount of cash contribution;
- description (but not the value) of noncash contribution;
- statement that no goods or services were provided by the organization in return for the contribution, if that was the case;
- description and good faith estimate of the value of goods or services, if any, that an organization provided in return for the contribution; and
- statement that goods or services, if any, that an organization provided in return for the contribution consisted entirely of intangible religious benefits if that was the case.

KEY POINT. Although it is a donor’s responsibility to obtain a written acknowledgement, a church can assist a donor by providing a timely, written acknowledgement that meets the requirements summarized above.

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April

1. **Mr. and Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray that more workers will be sent to carry out the work of ministry in this land. / **Carlos and Diana Cruz**, San Juan, P.R. Pray for Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada's discipleship and ministry. / Pray for **Sarah Pederson**, *New Horizons* proofreader, as she works on the May issue.
2. **Tom and Martha Albaugh**, Pittsburgh, Pa. Pray that those who attend Redeemer OP Mission's outreach events will hear the gospel, and that it will reach willing hearts. / Pray for the labors of missionary associates **E. H.** and **Mr. and Mrs. C.**, Asia.
3. **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray that the Lord would use them to develop deep and meaningful discipling relationships with students in the churches. / Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Dick Gerber** as he helps the new general secretary, John Shaw, settle in. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, Christian Education general secretary, as he serves as director of the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.
4. **Robert and Christy Arendale**, Houston, Tex. Pray for the powerful work of the Spirit and for new families to attend Cornerstone OPC. / Missionary associates **E. C.**, **T. D.**, and **T. L. L.**, Asia. Pray that the students they teach will have open hearts.
5. **Eric and Dianna Tuininga**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray that God would bless the work of Knox Theological College, where Eric teaches. / **Roberto and Marieta Laranjo**, Lowell, Mass. Pray that God would bless Igreja Presbiteriana Brasileira with additional families. / Army chaplain **Earl (and Susan) Vanderhoff**.
6. **Jim and Tricia Stevenson**, Tulsa, Okla. Pray that the Lord would add to the number of Providence OPC and raise up officers there. / Pray for new missionary associate **Christi Zekveld**, Mbale, Uganda, as she assists with the homeschooling of the Tuininga children. / Air Force chaplain **C. Phillip (and Melanie) Hollstein III**.
7. **David and Sunshine Okken**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the workers at the mission stations will come to faith in Christ. / **Bill and Sessie Welzien**, Key West, Fla. Pray that God's elect will be brought in at Keys Presbyterian Church. / **Camden (and Erica) Bucey**, yearlong intern at Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Ill.
8. **Jay and Andrea Bennett**, Neon, Ky. Pray that God would bless the outreach and evangelism efforts of Neon Reformed Presbyterian Church. / **Bob and Martha Wright**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for guidance and wisdom in their daily decisions. / **Mark (and Karissa) Soud**, yearlong intern at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Phoenix, Ariz.
9. Pray for safe travel for Foreign Missions general secretary **Mark Bube** as he visits our mission stations in Uganda. / **Philip and Jenny Dharmawirya**, Philadelphia, Pa. Pray that the congregation of Emmanuel Chapel (Indonesian) will live in complete reliance on God. / **Jim Scott**, publications coordinator for Christian Education and managing editor of *New Horizons*.
10. **Todd and Cheryl Bordow**, Rio Rancho, N.Mex. Pray that God would provide a larger and affordable facility for the OPC of Rio Rancho. / **Al and Laurie Tricarico**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for growth in faith and ministry for Lokwii Paul, the Karimojong interpreter. / **David (and Jenna) DeRienzo**, yearlong intern at Second Parish OPC in Portland, Maine.
11. Missionary associates **Erika Bulthuis**, **Emily Phil**, and **Jesse Van Gorkom**, Nakaale, Uganda. / **Everett and Kimberly Henes**, Hillsdale, Mich. Pray for wisdom for Hillsdale OPC as they consider relocating in order to be more accessible to the community. / **Lou Ann Shafer**,



Praise the Lord for how the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Loan Fund has been used to assist OP congregations with their building needs! Delta Oaks Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, Calif., acquired space and outfitted it as an attractive church facility with assistance from the OPCLF. Other congregations assisted in the past year are Grace and Peace in California, Md., the Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod in West Barnstable, Mass., Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada in San Juan, P.R., Covenant in Reading, Pa., Providence in Greensboro, N.C., New Hope in Bridgeton, N.J., and Immanuel in Bellmawr, N.J. OP congregations in twenty states and one territory currently have loans with the OPCLF. To learn more about OPCLF or receive an offering circular, contact David Haney at haney1@opc.org.

music editor of the Psalter-Hymnal Committee.

12. **Christopher and Della Chelпка**, Tucson, Ariz. Pray that there will be unity and fellowship among the people of Covenant OPC. / **James and Jenny Knox**, M.D. and R.N., Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks to God for the clinical officer hired at the clinic. / **David Haney**, director of finance and planned giving for the Committee on Coordination.
13. Missionary associates **Leah Hopp** and **Christopher and Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. / **Chad and Katie Mullinix**, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Pray that Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church will grow in grace, the knowledge of Christ, and the evangelism of unbelievers. / **Kathy Bube**, Loan Fund administrator.
14. Pray for Home Missions general secretary **John Shaw** as he visits churches and presbyteries. / Pray for healing for missionary associate **Debra Blair**, Quebec, Canada, who has chronic pain in her ankle. / Short-term missions coordinator **David Nakhla**. Pray for all the OPC teams preparing for service and ministry this summer.
15. **Ben and Melanie Westerveld**, Quebec, Canada. Pray that God would use Ben's ministry to reach the youth in Quebec. / **Brian and Sara Chang**, Cottonwood, Ariz. Pray for unity and growth within the congregation of Verde Valley Reformed Chapel. / Pray for **Stephen Pribble**, OPC.org senior technical associate.
16. **Mark and Michele Winder**, Collierville, Tenn. Pray for new visitors to come to Wolf River Presbyterian Church. / **Ben and Heather Hopp**, Haiti. Pray for Ben as he works with Octavius Delfils to complete the Westminster Confession of Faith training of men in the Port-au-Prince church. / Pray for the young men who are attending the **OPC Timothy Conference**, held at Mid-America Reformed Seminary on April 17–20.
17. **Heero and Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray that the Lord would raise up elders for the church. / **John and Wenny Ro**, Chicago, Ill. (downtown). Pray that God would bless Gospel Life Presbyterian Church's outreach efforts. / **Carson Ryan**, yearlong intern at Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, Fla.
18. **Drew and Sonya Adcock**, Williamsport, Pa. Pray that the Lord would add several new families to Omega OPC. / **Mark and Jeni Richline**, Uruguay. Pray for the Richline children as they adjust at a local Christian school. / **Doug Watson**, staff accountant.
19. **The Church in the Horn of Africa**. Pray for believers in this land as arrests continue. / **Todd and Julie Wagenmaker**, St. Louis, Mo. Pray that God would bless Gateway OPC's Bible studies and their distribution of a child's Bible story e-book.
20. **Jonathan and Kristin Moersch**, Capistrano Beach, Calif. Pray that visitors will come to Trinity Presbyterian Church as the result of recent Facebook ads. / Foreign Missions administrative assistant **Linda Posthuma** and secretary **Janet Birkmann**. / Army chaplain **Chris (and Virginia) Wisdom**.
21. **Brian and Dorothy Wingard**, South Africa, are thankful for growing faith and godliness in the local church where Brian preaches on Sunday evenings. / **Brad Hertzog**, Queens, N.Y. Pray for leaders to be raised up and brought in at Reformation Presbyterian Church. / Pray for wisdom for **the Great Commission Publications trustees**, who meet tomorrow.
22. **Ken and Cressid Golden**, Davenport, Iowa. Pray that God would continue to bring core families to Sovereign Grace OPC. / Retired missionaries **Betty Andrews, Greet Rietkerk, Young and Mary Lou Son**, and **Fumi Uomoto**. / **Pat Clawson**, Christian Education office secretary and editorial assistant.
23. Affiliated missionaries **Jerry and Marilyn Farnik**, Prague, Czech Republic. / **Stephen and Catalina Paison**, Mifflinburg, Pa. Pray that members of Providence OPC will grow in the grace of inviting others to hear the gospel. / **Jan Gregson**, office manager and assistant to the director of finance.
24. **Ben and Sarah Miller**, Long Island, N.Y. Pray that God would bring many visitors to Trinity Church. / **Woody and Laurie Lauer**, Numazu, Japan. Pray that God would strengthen the faith and commitment of the women attending a weekly Bible study. / **Geoff (and Heather) Downey**, yearlong intern at Trinity OPC in Hatboro, Pa.
25. Affiliated missionary **Linda Karner**, Japan. Pray for guidance as she prepares for her teaching responsibilities. / **Sacha and Martina Walicord**, Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Pray for Knox Presbyterian Church as they seek to bring people under the ministry of the Word of God. / **Charlene Tipton**, office assistant for the Committee on Coordination. Pray for her work on the office database.
26. **Doug and Kristi Bylsma**, Beamsville, Ontario. Pray that God would bless Living Hope Presbyterian Church's outreach efforts with new visitors and growing membership. / **Cal and Edie Cummings**, Sendai, Japan. Pray that many in Japan will find peace with God through faith in Christ. / **David (and Karen) Koenig**, yearlong intern at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, Ill.
27. Affiliated missionaries **Craig and Ree Coulbourne**, Urayasu, Japan. Pray that the Friday afternoon children's club will be an effective outreach to many children and their families. / Home Missions staff administrator **Sean Gregg**. / Pray for stated clerk **George Cottenden** as he prepares the agenda and advisory committee assignments for the 80th General Assembly in June.
28. Pray that Foreign Missions associate general secretary **Douglas Clawson** will give a vision for missions to the churches where he speaks. / **Geoffrey and Sharon Willour**, Mayfield Village, Ohio. Pray for wisdom and effectiveness in outreach at Lake OPC. / **Justin (and Hannah) Rosser**, yearlong intern at Matthews OPC in Matthews, N.C.
29. **Kaz and Katie Yaegashi**, Yamagata, Japan. Pray that Yamagata Chapel members will have many opportunities to share the gospel in their communities. / **Andrew and Billie Moody**, San Antonio, Tex. Praise God for his continued blessing on San Antonio Reformed Church. / Army chaplain **Paul (and Mary) Berghaus**.
30. **Kent and Laurie Harding**, Doniphan, Mo. Pray for strong families and singles to be brought to Sovereign Grace OPC. / Missionary associates **Adam and Sarah Thompson**, Sendai, Japan. Pray for the outreach programs with which they are working.

Short-Term Missions: Pros and Cons

DAVID P. NAKHLA

Summertime! A time for barbecuing, walking in the park or on the beach, cooling off in swimming pools, or participating in a summer reading program. Many families might anticipate a vacation or other excursion not related to work or school. In recent years, another summer activity has started to become very common, particularly in Christian circles. And that is participating in short-term missions.

“Short-term missions” has become quite the buzzword (or phrase) lately. It seems that everyone is talking about short-term missions (STMs for short). The fact is that interest in STMs has exploded in the past two decades into what is now a multi-billion dollar industry! The numbers often quoted are that over 2,000,000 Americans will participate annually in a short-term mission trip at an estimated cost of \$1,500,000,000. Wow!

While it is wonderful to think that there is such interest in missions, whenever an aspect of the church can be described as an “industry,” it will raise one’s eyebrow. And so it should, for, unfortunately, it is becoming apparent that many well-intentioned short-term mission efforts are doing more harm than good. In fact, there are whole books being published on the woes of short-term missions. They refer to “short-term missions, long-term harm.”

CONCERNS ABOUT STMS

One concern that is raised has to do with the effectiveness of STMs. Many critics question how much of a lasting impact a team coming into a city, region, or country for one or two weeks can really have. Most likely, the team does not know the language, the culture, or the people. It is fair to ask if this is really the best use of resources. Some suggest that instead of spending thousands of dollars to send a team to the field, it would be better to send that money to the field for its use. These are certainly valid considerations.

Another concern is that, regardless of whether STMs are effective or not, it seems that more often than not, their net effect on the field is negative. Simply said, it seems that STMs are doing more harm than good. It is argued that many teams come with good intentions, but because there is typically not an understanding of the culture and customs of those to

whom they seek to minister, they actually bring offense rather than help. Again, this is a serious and legitimate concern.

A third concern is that with so much money and interest focused on STMs, they are beginning to drive how mission work is done. In effect, the proverbial tail has begun to wag the dog. Today there are ministries and missionaries that are being funded largely by the revenue brought in by STMs. It has become a classic catch-22. When the ministries realize that the STMs require too much of their energy or that the STMs are doing harm to their long-term mission efforts, they find that they cannot stop having STMs come because their proceeds are paying the bills.

So why would we be interested in short-term missions in the OPC when they seem to be rife with problems? Let us try to balance the concerns after considering the benefits that STMs bring.

THE BENEFITS OF STMS

First of all, STMs help keep the church connected to missionaries and missionar-ies connected to the church. Missionaries sent far away can begin to feel distant from the church that sent them. At the same time, the church can easily feel disconnected from missionaries whose reporting on their work may come infrequently and be read by few. STMs can help bridge that gap. By involving STMs



Participants in a recent short-term mission to Haiti

Time for crafts for the children



with their work, our missionaries develop contacts and learn more about what is happening in the church back home. When the missionaries do come back on furlough, they find that they have connections in many of the churches they visit. Conversely, the short-termers come back with a renewed understanding, concern, and love for the work and the missionaries. If given the opportunity (which I hope they are), the short-termers may report to the church that sent them what they learned from and about the work. This will almost inevitably lead to increased prayer and financial support for the good work our missionaries do.

Additionally, STM teams bring a boost of talent or energy, which the missionaries can use to accomplish a project that they would probably not be able to accomplish on their own. Several Orthodox Presbyterian mission fields, such as Quebec and Ukraine, have determined that an English camp would be an effective means of outreach. But it would be virtually impossible for the missionaries to host an English camp alone. They need a team, and in this case it needs to be an English-speaking team in particular.

Of all the other benefits that could be listed, the most valuable aspect of short-term missions is that it plants seeds for future full-time missionaries. The majority of missionaries on OP foreign mission fields have had short-term missions experience prior to becoming long-term missionaries. Several weeks or months of full-time ministry can often be what

the Lord uses to make clear his call to them for full-time service. It should also be noted that STMs have been used to plant seeds for future pastors (yes, even OP pastors!) and others in full-time ministry.

HOW TO HAVE THE BENEFITS WITHOUT THE CONCERNS

Hopefully we can agree that the benefits presented are valuable enough that we ought not to throw out the baby with the bathwater when it comes to addressing the legitimate concerns that have been raised regarding short-term missions. Here are some suggestions on how we can address the concerns, so that we can retain the benefits:

First of all, preparation and training are very important before sending out short-term teams and individuals. They should gain an understanding of, and appreciation for, those to whom they minister. They need to prepare physically, mentally, and spiritually. This is so easily neglected, yet it is so important for the STM to be helpful to all involved.

Secondly, we need to be honest with ourselves and keep a healthy perspective on the benefits gained from an STM experience. STMs will most likely have a more lasting effect on the ones who go out than on the ones to whom they go. This is not absolute by any means. But when we consider the cost and the impact that is actually made,

we need to recognize that it is probably more of an investment in the individual sent than it is an expenditure on the field. Let's not delude ourselves into thinking that this STM will clearly "change that place for Christ." It is only one seed planted; we'll leave the fruit to the Lord. We need to be OK with it being primarily an incredible learning experience for those whom our churches send out.

Finally, and probably most importantly, STM opportunities ought to be set up and carried out under the guidance of the local missionary or church leaders. Arguably, this is the main way in which STMs have lost their mooring. Often STM organizations organize the STM in such a way that the team is "doing their own thing" without any connection to Christians working locally. If we decide that what we do and how we do it will be directed by "the boots on the ground" (that is, by the missionaries or church leaders who understand the people with whom we will work), we will effectively battle the concerns that STMs are ineffective, harmful, and directing (or misdirecting) our long-term mission efforts.

Admittedly, there is much more to this topic. There are many other concerns, but also many other benefits to consider. May our Savior guide us with great wisdom, discernment, and insight as we seek to bring glory to him in our short-term mission efforts.

The author is the short-term missions coordinator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.

Bible teaching during the Haiti missions trip



HURRICANE SANDY UPDATE

Jennifer Peacock

As I write this in early February, we are bracing for Winter Storm Nemo to bring up to ten inches of snow and moderate coastal flooding to the Jersey Shore. An earlier late-autumn storm already reflooded some homes and businesses hit by Hurricane Sandy.

At the same time, many are fighting with insurance companies to get funds to rebuild. Some are getting news that their homes must be raised anywhere from three to ten feet or pay more than \$30,000 annually for flood insurance. Whether these are primary or vacation homes, many of them belong to working-class folks, retirees, or families who inherited beach houses.

Secondary issues, such as mold, are forcing people out of their homes as well.

Locally, the small congregation of Redeemer OPC had twelve families directly impacted with losses and displacement due to Hurricane Sandy.

Michael and Tracey Letso lost three vehicles and many personal items, including some “personal family treasures” that cannot be replaced. They did receive some assistance from FEMA, as well as friends, family, and NJEA (Michael is a middle school music teacher). They lived on the barrier island, and have found temporary accommodation off the island.

“In comparison to many other storm victims, Tracey and I are doing quite well and are extremely thankful to God for being so blessed,” Michael commented. “We have grown closer to our Lord Jesus through this, as we all do through all things, in him.”

Ann Stabile, along with her husband, Gary, faced devastating losses not only to their primary residence in Toms River, but to three rental properties. “Our first floor was flooded with almost two feet of bay water due to Sandy. It had to be gutted out, and the furniture, appliances, and cabinets had to be thrown out. Thanks to the help of our Christian brothers and sisters, and a lot of hard work from all



Devastation on the barrier island

of us, our first floor is now livable,” Ann said. Furniture was recently delivered.

Other families are back in their homes, while others are waiting for work to start on theirs.

The congregation also lost use of its rental property in Seaside Heights due to major flooding. Providentially, they were able to worship alongside brothers and sisters at Faith Bible Church, an independent Presbyterian congregation in Brick, New Jersey. The two congregations have recently agreed to move forward with a merger (as an OP church)—and will have done so by the time this is published.

Individual volunteers and teams from all over the country (from as far away as Grace OPC in Wasilla, Alaska!) and across denominational lines have poured into the region. They have used their skills, their strength, and their time not only to rebuild homes, but also to show the love of Christ to the hurting in the body of Christ and outsiders. Local churches and parachurch organizations have offered hot meals, hot showers, and overnight accommodations to volunteers as well. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

It’s been three months since the Jersey Shore was devastated by Hurricane Sandy, but prayers, money, and volunteers are still needed. Please go online and visit opcstm.org/hurricane-sandy-response to see how you can help.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Cal Cummings

On January 20, about seventy people gathered to give thanks for labors done and to remind themselves of the challenge of the new beginnings for evangelistic work in Ishinomaki.

Two years ago, the church/manse structure was inundated with three feet of tsunami waters. All furnishings and earthly belongings were ruined. The pastor lost his entire library and files. Entire sections of the outer stucco had fallen off and more seemed ready to follow.

After weighing options, it was finally decided to remodel and accept the offer from the OPC disaster response team to assist in the project. Under the leadership of John Voss (deacon from Orland Park, Illinois) and David Nakhla, four work teams were organized and plans were made. Two months of work commenced October 19, 2012.

Twenty-nine men from five denominations were here as members of these teams. Some were here for a month. Some missed Thanksgiving with their families. The ladies in the local churches prepared meals. Elder Sasaki provided advice and care, especially when Team #4 experienced a magnitude 7.2 earthquake. He was the go-to man for materials and logistics. Friendships were established and the unity of faith in Christ was shared and

Jeff Davis and Tim Loerop (on ladder) working in Ishinomaki



strengthened.

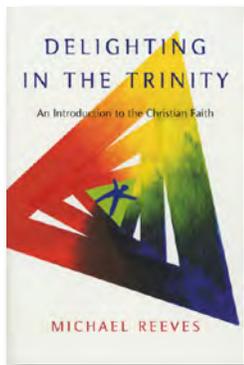
Ishinomaki Chapel was started by OP missionary George Uomoto in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Three tent-making Japanese evangelists have served the chapel. We pray that as the Japanese presbytery and our Japan Mission come alongside the current evangelist, great energy and diligence, accompanied by the Spirit of God, will yield a harvest of souls.

As Mark Palmer, the Team #4 leader remarked, “We have built the physical building of the church, now you must build the spiritual church of Jesus Christ.”

REVIEWS

Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to Christianity, by Michael Reeves. Published by IVP Academic, 2012. Paperback, 135 pages, list price \$16.00. Reviewed by OP pastor David G. Graves.

Michael Reeves’s *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to Christianity* is an enjoyable introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. Reeves argues that the Trinity is the *sine qua non* of Christianity. He writes in the tradition



of C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* and John Stott’s *Basic Christianity*. His writing is vivid and compelling, and there are sidebars containing snippets from orthodox writers ranging from Athanasius to Jonathan Edwards.

Reeves argues that the Trinity is what transforms Christianity from one of a multitude of religions into the religion of truth and

beauty. He notes deficient views of the Trinity and discounts bad analogies that have been used to describe it. At stake is an understanding of the relationship between God and the world. In this vein, Reeves makes frequent references to Islam and other monistic religions in which love is a later addition to the nature of God and therefore easily dispensed with.

The opening chapter explains how the doctrine of the Trinity impacts our understanding of creation, sin, and salvation. Reeves then moves to the practical implications of the Trinity for the Christian life. He says that without the Trinity one has only a “stripped down salvation” consisting “of the watery gruel of religion. Instead of a loving Father, a distant potentate; instead of fellowship, contract. Far from theological clutter, God’s being Father, Son and Spirit is just what makes the Christian life beautiful” (p. 102).

In the next chapter, on the incomparability of God, Reeves notes that in the last two centuries there has been a (causative?) correlation between the decline in the church’s proclamation and affirmation of the Trinity and an increase in atheism. Reeves notes that this growth of atheism is mostly a rejection of a monistic or modalistic god. When one insists on a “modalistic” god, whether Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover or Thor, mercy and love are not his attributes, and thus one is left with a “Stalin in the Sky.” Reeves then demonstrates how the Trinity transforms such

concepts as holiness and glory from terrifying, repellent doctrines to winsome attributes that draw the Christian to love and fellowship with the Father. Only the Trinity delivers one from despair.

Delighting in the Trinity is a great read. It does speak of “mere” Trinitarianism (pp. 37–38), but that is not necessarily a demerit. This book would be useful for working with non-Christians seeking to understand Christianity. It would also serve the Christian who wants a better understanding of why the Trinity was not the invention of “bored monks on rainy afternoons” (p. 12). Rather, as the Athanasian Creed states, “Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary he believe” in the Trinity.

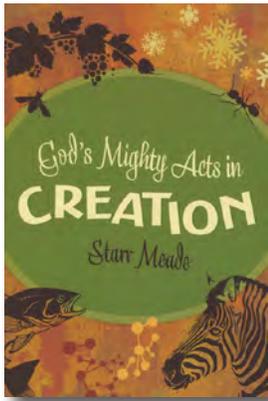
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God’s Mighty Acts in Creation, by Starr Meade. Published by Crossway, 2010. Paperback, 112 pages, list price \$10.99. *God’s Mighty Acts in Salvation*, by Starr Meade. Published by Crossway, 2010. Paperback, 96 pages, list price \$10.99. Reviewed by OP member (and national children’s book contest winner) Celeste Jenkins.

God’s Mighty Acts in Creation and *God’s Mighty Acts in Salvation*, by Starr Meade, are two excellent resources to further a child’s learning about God and what he has done for his people. Both books are geared for children in elementary and lower middle school, but teenagers and adults can easily find interest in, and be blessed by, these clearly written books that dwell upon the greatness of our Creator and Redeemer. Each book consists of approximately forty short readings,

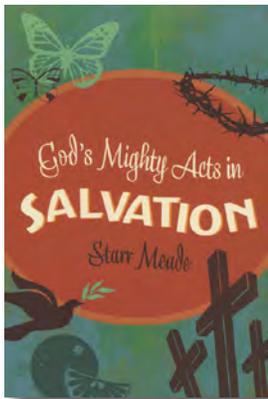
Why did Christ’s death have to be painful and miserable?

For the answer, visit the OPC website opc.org/qa.html?question_id=436



making them easy to use for family devotions. Both books would be appropriate to read aloud to children between

the ages of seven and thirteen; however, siblings as young as four can soak up some of the larger points of the readings. The two books are companion volumes, but it is not necessary to read one before the other.



God's Mighty Acts in Creation walks through the six days of creation to look at what God made and what his creation

reveals about him. In addition to pondering God's general revelation, Meade also speaks about God's special revelation, his Word, to see "how God himself said these created things teach us of him." The book explores what God is teaching us when he says, for example, that Jesus is "the light of the world," "the lamb of God," and "the vine." The book uses Scripture and kid-friendly analogies to get children thinking about God's glory, wisdom, and power.

God's Mighty Acts in Salvation walks through Paul's letter to the Galatians. The readings in this book focus on the glorious, comforting news that Jesus Christ has perfectly and completely fulfilled God's law, and that we cannot add anything to what he has accomplished. Meade reminds the reader throughout the book that there is no other gospel—that forgiveness and life are free to those who trust Jesus. The author encourages children not to be fooled, as the Gala-

tians were, when confronted with false teachings. Written in a simple, conversational style, the book defines such terms as justification, substitute, grace, merit, adoption, and legalism in a way that children can understand.

At the end of each reading in both books is a short section entitled "As for me and my house," which provides additional activities related to that particular reading. This section engages older children, asking them to think more deeply about specific things, do some brainstorming, or think about additional Bible passages.

Meade writes with a solidly Reformed understanding of God's greatness and our need of a Savior. In the midst of today's slurry of legalistic, self-confidence-building teachings, she does a refreshingly excellent job of pointing children away from themselves to the God who has created and saved us.

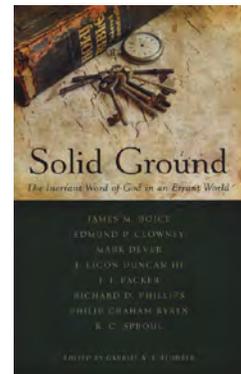
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***Solid Ground: The Inerrant Word of God in an Errant World*, edited by Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer. Published by P&R, 2012. Paperback, 176 pages, list price 13.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Sasha Walicord.**

In a day and age when much of the church seems to have lost its orientation, a call back to the roots of our faith is desperately needed. *Solid Ground* has exactly that objective, namely, to deliver a trumpet blast of truth to the church of Jesus Christ. Well-known Reformed thinkers, like J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and

Travelers and Retreaters

Calvary OPC in Volga, S.D., has a three-bedroom apartment available for free, short-term use. If you are traveling through our area, or if you are a pastor needing a time of retreat, you are welcome to use it. For details, contact Bob or Linda Munich at 605/697-6270, 605/695-0962, 605/651-0840, or boblindamunich@gmail.com.



Ligon Duncan are lined up in this work to awaken the church with essays that originally were delivered at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed

Theology between 1975 and 2007, on the sufficiency, inerrancy, and infallibility of God's Word.

The first blast of the trumpet comes from J. I. Packer, who masterfully describes what a privilege it is for us to be able to know God through his Word and to be known by him. He also deals with the relation between knowledge and awareness of God in a most helpful way. This article alone would be worth the price of the book.

In the second essay, Ligon Duncan makes the case for the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for all areas of life. He

Positions Available

Pastor: Covenant OPC in Mansfield, Ohio, a congregation of over 100 people of various ages and church backgrounds, seeks a pastor. We have the traditional morning Sunday school and worship service and an evening service, and we meet on Wednesday evenings. We hold an annual Conference on Historic Christianity. Our church building is debt-free, and we own property for possible future growth. We are currently active with the development of a church plant. Pastoral strengths preferred: teaching, preaching, shepherding. Interested applicants should contact the clerk of session and director of the search committee at covenantopc@gmail.com.

NEWS, VIEWS, REVIEWS (cont.)

points out, “God’s infallible Word is fully adequate and authoritative for salvation and sanctification, for evangelism and edification, for faith and for life.”

R. C. Sproul then defends Scripture as the carrier of God’s truth and warns us of subjective, relativistic distortions of the concept of truth. He reminds us that “truth is that which corresponds to reality as it is perceived by God.”

“Scripture Alone” is the title of the late James Montgomery Boice’s essay. He reminds us that *sola Scriptura* is an uncompromising and all-encompassing concept for Christians. He ends his challenging essay with an equally challenging quote from J. C. Ryle: “Give me the ‘plenary verbal’ theory, with all its difficulties, rather than [doubt]. I accept the difficulties of that theory, and humbly wait for their solution. But while I wait, I feel that I am standing on a rock.”

Richard D. Phillips encourages us from the great fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah to trust the power of God’s Word. Both preachers and congregations must trust God’s mighty Word.

Mark Dever then elaborates on the centrality of God’s Word for the church today. He makes a quite convincing case for expository preaching as the most important mark of a healthy church.

The perspicuity of Scripture and how it relates to *sola Scriptura* is the topic of Philip Ryken’s illuminating contribution to this collection of great essays.

Edmund P. Clowney concludes the book with an essay on preaching as the means of revival.

Solid Ground is a desperately needed wake-up call for Protestants who have become accustomed to a rather cavalier attitude to the Word of God. We need to be reminded that the Bible is to be our only rule for all areas of life, without exception. The authors have done an outstanding job of reminding us of that fact.

MIDWEST MEN’S RETREAT

Bill Muether

On February 8–9, 2013, men from the Presbytery of the Midwest, including a few fathers and their sons, had the privilege of attending the First Annual Apple Valley and New Hope Men’s Retreat at Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, Wisconsin. The two-day event was sponsored by New Hope Presbyterian Church in Green Bay, Wiscon-

sin, and Apple Valley Church in Neenah, Wisconsin. There were eighty-eight men in attendance from nine churches.

The Rev. Bruce Hollister, pastor of New Covenant Community Church in New Lenox, Illinois, was the speaker for the event. With the theme being “Prayer: Communion with Christ Our Highest Privilege,” Rev. Hollister led the men in an in-depth look at the prayer life of Christ. He stressed our need to make prayer a priority in our life while also seeing it as our highest privilege. In addition, he examined the obstacles that stand in the way of cultivating an effective prayer life and seeing prayer as our doorway to true fruitfulness through our communion with Christ.

The retreat proved to be a great time of instruction, conviction, and fellowship with other men in our presbytery.

Pondering Bruce Hollister’s message at the Midwest Men’s Retreat

