

NEW HORIZONS

— in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

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// by David E. Chilton

MARCH 2022

23 Review: Trueman's
Strange New World
// by Roger Wagner

Self-Care in the Ministry

AN ADDRESS TO THE CHURCH PLANTER
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January's MTI intensive in San Marcos, California, was well attended by church planters and church-planting interns. Church planters receiving denominational field support take three MTI courses: Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, and Reformed Evangelism. Here, Rev. Dale Van Dyke, pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, and member of the Committee on Home Missions, leads the Homiletics students in discussion. (Back) John Wise, Carl Miller, Farrah Wise; (front) Shane Bennett, Jason Vartanian, Andrew Canavan



SELF-CARE IN THE MINISTRY: AN ADDRESS TO THE CHURCH PLANTER TRAINING CONFERENCE



DANIEL F. PATTERSON // I write this as one who, after almost twenty years of ministry, is just now beginning to see the importance of self-care in the ministry. I can't say that I've burned out, but I have certainly flamed out. A few years ago, I had to come to my session and essentially tell them that I needed a break or there

would definitely be burnout in my future. The session and church approved a sabbatical policy for me. In God's providence, soon after, COVID hit. We found ourselves having to suspend almost all aspects of the church's ministry, save public worship on the Lord's Day.

This allowed me significant flexibility and rest, so that, as the country came out of its initial lockdown, I found that I did not need to take advantage of my sabbatical quite yet. While 2020 was in many ways a difficult year for many, it was also a time of refreshment for me and my family.

So, I'm not writing about self-care in the ministry because I've been so good at it, but because I've been so bad at it! And yet the Lord has been gracious to teach me through it.

Is Self-Care Indulgent?

By way of introduction, it is important to dispel one of the most pernicious myths about self-care in the ministry: that self-care is somehow selfish. It isn't. Self-care is actually stewardship of the gifts the Lord has given us, as well as stewardship of our time and energy so

that we can best use them in service to God and his church.

Interestingly, one of the passages in which this is highlighted is Jesus's teaching on the two greatest commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39). Listen to Matthew Henry on this passage:

It is implied that we do, and should, love ourselves. There is a self-love which is corrupt, and the root of the greatest sins, and it must be put off and mortified: but there is a self-love which is natural, and the rule of the greatest duty, and it must be preserved and sanctified. We must love ourselves, that is, we must have a due regard to the dignity of our own natures, and a due concern for the welfare of our own souls and bodies. (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1731)

And if we look at the Westminster Larger Catechism question 135, we are asked, "What are the duties of the sixth commandment?" Among the things

listed are "a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations." In other words, part of keeping the sixth commandment is self-care: feeding our bodies what they need to be fed (including not overfeeding them), getting sleep, and getting proper medical care and attention.

"In Christ," Not Just "in Ministry"

Self-care then, is not only biblical, but vital for a Christ-honoring ministry. With this in mind, here are two vital elements of self-care in the ministry.

First, self-care in the ministry begins by recognizing that we do not, as that which is most dear to us, hold the office of minister, but the office of believer. In other words, we are Christians before we are ministers. Our foundational identity is in Christ, not in ministry. If we are to care for ourselves well as ministers, we must remember that we ministers, because we are Christians, are the object of God's deep, abiding, steadfast love and care.

Keeping that always in view allows God's ministers to be more honest with ourselves about our struggles in

ministry, including our failures and sins. It enables us more readily to confess those sins because we are deeply convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37–39).

However, when ministers forget that their foundational identity is in Christ, their lives will become disordered. They will be crushed under the expectations, criticisms, and disappointments of ministry because they have made ministry ultimate and Christ subordinate. This is not only a theologically dangerous place to be, it is also a sure recipe for ministry fatigue and burnout.

It is imperative for ministers to keep returning to their fundamental identity: “in Christ.” It will keep being “in ministry” from crushing them under its expectations or leading them to an inflated view of themselves and their place in Christ’s kingdom. Even pastoral ministry can be done in the flesh.

Embodied Souls

There’s a second aspect of who we are that helps us to avoid burnout in pastoral ministry. Ministers must remember that they are embodied souls. And this has practical and necessary implications.

First, Christ’s shepherds must come to grips with their finitude. We are created. That means we are bound by time. We are bound by our own creatureliness. We are *not* the unending source of strength and energy. Struggle in ministry will inevitably come when we desire to somehow break these limitations.

Saying yes to everything is not leading a sacrificial life. It is often sacrificing our own health and wellbeing, not to mention that of our families, at the altar of the church, something Christ never called us to do. In fact, one of the things that qualify a man for ministry is the reality that he cares enough for his own family to prioritize them. This simply can’t happen if a minister says yes to everything and is unwilling to come to grips with his creatureliness.

Ministers do the churches they serve no favors when they seek to break through the limits of finitude. It is a

fruitless effort that damages their own souls, the well-being of their families, and ultimately the name of Christ.

Second, we must come to grips with the reality that we need rest. If we are embodied souls, we should not be surprised when a lack of sleep and rest has moral and spiritual consequences. David Murray, in his book on burnout in ministry, *Reset*, quotes Don Carson:

If you are among those who become nasty, cynical, or even full of doubt when you are missing your sleep, you are morally obligated to try to get the sleep you need. We are whole, complicated beings; our physical existence is tied to our spiritual well-being, to our mental outlook, to our relationships with others, including our relationship with God. Sometimes the godliest thing you can do in the universe is get a good night’s sleep. (70)

The Lord has also given us one day in seven to rest. Even though most ministers work on that day, they should have a different dedicated time to unplug from the day-in and day-out demands of ministry—time to rest, be refreshed, and spend time with their families. Christ’s shepherds should be as committed to taking times of refreshment as they are to tending the flock Christ has given them. Not doing so weakens both ministers and the people they are called to serve.

Third, to realize that you are an embodied soul is to recognize, more broadly, that your *body* is important. When God created Adam, he created him soul *and* body; our bodies are not an afterthought to God. It is possible to fall into our own sort of gnosticism in the ministry, treating the bodies as a sort of prison-house of the soul, relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things. But if that were the case, God would not see fit to raise these self-same bodies (in the words of the Westminster Standards) again at the last day. We don’t look forward to redemption *from* the body but a redemption *of* the body (Rom. 8:23).

When the psalmist reflects on the miracle of every human person, he says,

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13–14). Recognizing that God is the source of our bodies reminds us that they are gifts we are called to steward (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Diet and exercise are crucial to stewarding the bodies that the Lord has given us so that we can serve God’s people with all that is in us. A pastor’s ministry does not ordinarily involve physical labor. We are more sedentary. And so, regular exercise is one of the most important things we can do for management of our stress. Exercise helps the systems of our body function better. It keeps our hearts healthier and our minds clearer. And that is just the beginning of the list of benefits: decreased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke; better mood, sleep, and weight control.

The Preeminence of Christ

Remembering that our fundamental identity is in Christ and that we are embodied souls are not the only two aspects of self-care that Christ’s ministers need to pay careful attention to, but they are likely the two most essential. To forget them is to reject, even if unintentionally, the preeminence of Christ and the Creator/creature distinction. To forget them is to weaken both the minister and those to whom he ministers.

In contrast, a minister whose eyes are constantly in awe that he was made to hear Christ’s voice and that he is the object of God’s saving love, and who operates within the boundaries of his creatureliness while seeking to serve God with all that is within him, will certainly find ministry hard, but not crushing. His hope will be built on nothing less than Jesus’s blood and righteousness. Empowered by this truth, he will minister to those God has given him in a way that always points away from him to that true and great shepherd of their souls, Jesus himself. □

The author is pastor of Second Parish OPC in Portland, Maine.

VALUABLE JOB TRAINING



DAVID E. CHILTON // Being a regional home missionary is, to say the least, the most unusual position I've ever held, in ministry or otherwise. Training for the job was particularly difficult because it is so unique. Even people who have done or are doing the job are doing it under very different circumstances (and, I must note, I will

remain forever grateful to Mark Sumpter, regional home missionary in the Presbytery of the Southwest, for allowing me to tag along with him for a week to watch him work). I was certainly given a job description prior to the call, but serving as a regional home missionary with a call to further the church planting efforts within the bounds of a particular presbytery simply cannot be summarized as a series of "how to's."

A Church Planter Training Conference

Providentially, a month after I began my labors, there was an event that jump-started my work: the Church Planter Training Conference, which in 2021 was held in Portland, Maine. For those who are not familiar with it, the conference is an annual event developed for church planters currently on the support program of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. It simultaneously equips and refreshes the church planters and their wives, who are all expected to attend

this free conference. However, as a new regional home missionary (RHM), how was such a conference a help to me? To badly quote Paul in Romans 3, "much in every way."

To begin with, what benefits church planters benefits me as an RHM as well. My position requires me to scout and develop new fields for church planting, and I must always have in mind what will bring success to that potential plant even as I'm looking at things in a preliminary or embryonic way. Like church planters, I have to look at a church plant and see what it might be at all stages.

The structure of the conference supports church planters in multiple ways. Certainly, it reminds (and, in some cases, introduces) the church

planter to the current best practices within our denomination. The feedback loop that is established, largely via general secretary John Shaw and associate general secretary Al Tricarico,



Chilton, Al Tricarico, and Calvin Keller in a breakout session

helps take things that are working well and integrate them more broadly with our Reformed Presbyterian values and practices. The conference itself is part of that feedback loop as peer-to-peer problem solving and networking is facilitated. As a new RHM, it was an extremely helpful way to catch up to

best practices in a short period of time. Throw in networking time with the other RHMs who were present, and it was a great jump-start.

Beyond the sharing and discussion of best church-planting practices, the conference serves as a showcase for the ministry of the OPC as a whole. The general secretaries from Christian Education and Foreign Missions both presented and brought updates on what is happening through their respective committees. Christian Education in particular plays a strong role in church planting because the materials they produce give those who have no background with the OPC an orientation to our history and distinctives.

As an RHM, I meet such people frequently; it was helpful to become familiar with these materials. One of the phrases I heard repeatedly at the conference and afterward was that we are the Orthodox Presbyterian *Church*, not *Churches*. This distinguishes us from other denominations. Our shared identity is reinforced by keeping the whole of the church's ministry before those who are establishing new congregations.

Aside from the core competencies and practices associated with church planting, there was also some important skill building. Among the most valuable resources to any church plant (or any church, for that matter) is their website. Kerri Ann Cruse, video and social media coordinator for the OPC, reviewed the website of each church planter present—a helpful (if, at times, painful) exercise that underscored the important functions of a church website. She also presented principles and strategies for beneficial use of various social media platforms in church planting. As social media campaigns are likely to be crucial components of reaching areas of our presbytery where we have few or no contacts (like Nashville), this was important training for me.

Refreshing Sessions

While gaining competency was a key part of the conference, the confer-

ence also provided refreshment for the church planters.

One key aspect of that is the inclusion of wives of church planters and regional home missionaries. My wife, Wendy, was able to network with other women and gain an understanding of our denomination that she had never had before. It established a foundation for us to minister as a team and be on the same page going forward. Beyond that, the schedule allowed for plenty of free and discretionary time to interact with other couples in a relaxed way.

Hearing from Dale and Joanne Van Dyke on “The Church Planter and His Family” on the first evening set the tone for being refreshed in ministry. Subsequent sessions on “Self-Care in Ministry” by host pastor Danny Patterson and, particularly, a session on the effects of stress by John Fikkert in his presentation from the Committee on Ministerial Care set a foundation for church planters to chart a course that avoids burnout and produces fruit for years to come. That foundation applies equally to my own work as RHM.

Building churches with a distinctively Reformed and Presbyterian character demands doing things differently than other denominations do. OPC church planters enjoy a level of support that is virtually unmatched, combined with a measure of patience appropriate to the difficult task at hand. The Church Planter Training Conference is a key portion of that support for them.

However, it proved to be key job training and support for me as well.



Field trip to Prouts Neck, Maine



Laurie Tricarico leading a women's breakout session



Dana and James Stafford, a church-planting intern in Springfield, Ohio

I certainly do not have all the answers when it comes to the task of seeing new congregations established within our presbytery. Given that, I know far more and am much better equipped for the task because of this conference. I look forward to 2022's conference eagerly. □

The author is regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the South.

USING OPC TRACTS IN EVANGELISM



CHRISTOPHER R. BUSH // When evangelizing, I am often tempted to think that I must fit everything into a single conversation. From experiences with our church's evangelism group, however, it has quickly become apparent that I have a limited number of words with any given person before the conversation is over.

An evangelistic encounter is a matter of directing a conversation to what is most central, the gospel, and then trusting God to work by his Spirit in the hearts of those with whom we speak.

Being able to leave the tract *What Is Truth?* with the person I have just spoken to relieves some of the pressure to fill a conversation with too much talk. The tract can be read later, inviting them to search for the truth from the right source. If I sense the conversation is coming to a close, I'll say something like, "The truth is incredibly important, because if we do not know the truth about God and ourselves, our lives are lived based on a lie. Could I leave this with you for you to read later on?" It is a great opportunity for that person to consider our conversation and read solid content on an introductory level that directs them to Christ and his Word.

During one conversation with a committed Quaker couple, I was left without words by their response to my presentation. After I shared what the Bible teaches concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ, they simply replied,

"We've heard that before, we understand that is what you believe, but that is not what we believe." In retrospect, I could have responded in many helpful ways that pointed to the gospel, but in that moment, I was too stunned. I was, however, able to leave them a copy of *What Is Truth?*

More and more, I encounter similar responses to the gospel, which makes this tract all the more crucial in our evangelistic efforts. In our conversations, people must be confronted with the reality of absolute truth revealed by the absolute God. *What Is Truth?* is



What Is Truth? invites readers to Christ in the context of the local church

a valuable tool to that end because it addresses where the truth is found. A good tract communicates central gospel content, calls people to turn to Christ in faith, and encourages them to read the Scriptures. But the strength of this tract is that it invites each person to search for the truth in Christ, revealed in his Word, *in the context of a faithful church.*

Reformed theology rightly emphasizes the importance of preaching the Word of God, which should certainly impact our approach to outreach and evangelism. This tract is consistent with our theology and practice in that it invites the reader to "come and hear," that they might be welcomed into a church where Christ is faithfully preached from his Word, and the unbeliever is surrounded by those who encourage and nurture him as he seeks the truth. □

The author is pastor of Calvary OPC in Ringoes, New Jersey. A version of this article first appeared on outwardOPC.com. What Is Truth? can be purchased from store.OPC.org.

RESTING AND WORSHIPING IN THE OPC



JUDITH M. DINSMORE // When Sara Drew worshiped at an Orthodox Presbyterian church for the first time, she found a congregation lifting one voice like she had never heard before: “[There were] rich, beautiful, theological hymns that told of God’s deeds, rejoiced in his goodness, and provoked us to holier living—and people sang it like they believed it.”

That morning in 2016 at Faith OPC in Grand Forks, North Dakota, with husband Chris and their three children, was not Sara’s first time experiencing a Presbyterian service. She had been a churchgoer since a child, her parents modeling faithful attendance at a PCUSA in Luverne, Minnesota, and encouraging her involvement in Christian education, youth events, and mission trips “very regularly.” After college, Sara entered seminary and eventually became ordained as a PCUSA minister—not just attending, but leading, church services.

Her first time at Faith OPC, however, the worship “was all new to me,” she reflected.

Chris and Sara Drew, for their part, were something new for Faith OPC. A mission work that had recently entered the denomination from the PCA, Faith OPC was looking for an organizing pastor. When they received a phone call about a candidate named Chris Drew whose previous call had been in the PCUSA—and whose

wife was also ordained!—they were bemused, to say the least.

What they soon discovered was that the Drews’ profound interest in Reformed worship had been a long time coming.

Submission to the Word

As that churchgoing child, Sara explained, she had been confident of her own righteousness: “I grew up thinking that I was pretty much better than everyone else, and more pious than everyone else, because I went to church, and they didn’t.” The Word of God didn’t seem to have anything to say to her. “I had no notion that God’s commands were for me. No, I thought I was doing quite well on my own.”

In college, she took a class with a born-again Charismatic professor who, along with the students in the class, were different: they believed—and acted—like God was real. “And they read the Bible on days other than Sundays,” she said. It was in a chapel service led by that professor, Sara says, that “God

came and met me and made me know that he is God, and I am not. He took the blinders off.”

Pursuing what she believed was a call to preach, Sara met Chris at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, a seminary of the PCUSA. Some aspects of the denominational teaching there reflected assumptions that Sara and Chris had simply never questioned, like women’s ordination. Other aspects were a surprise and troubled them. After they married and graduated seminary, they began to interview for pastoral positions. One early interview shocked Chris. “The first question [I was asked] was whether I believed in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ,” he explained. “I was like, *What an odd question! Don’t all pastoral candidates believe in the virgin birth?*” Unfortunately, the answer to that question in the PCUSA is no, they don’t.

In time, Chris accepted a call, and the Drews moved to Jackson, Minnesota. Sara, who was pursuing ordination, frequently spent Sundays filling local

pulpits. But she began to question this role first for practical reasons, when she was six months pregnant with their first child. “Do I really want to be busy every Sunday morning teaching other people about God while someone who is not this child’s mother or father babysits him?” she remembered. Questioning the theology behind her decision came next as, around the same time, she began to interact with John Piper’s teaching on men and women in the church. “It was the first time that I had heard that God had designed specific and special roles, unique roles, for men and for women. And that they applied to me.”

She started asking around to others in the presbytery and the PCUSA about women’s ordination. “Those in the church who were really trying to be faithful to what the Word of God says had to do some verbal gymnastics” to justify it, she remembered.

It was not an easy time. Shortly before her ordination service, she read about Korah’s rebellion. “I had an immediate crisis of conscience when I realized how seriously God took their power grab.” On the other hand, “all our family and friends were PCUSA.” Their roots ran deep.

As Sara began to sit under Chris’s preaching more regularly, two sentiments became uppermost: sorrow over all the Sundays she had missed his preaching, and sadness that she was missing out on being a member of the local church, rather than of the presbytery. Finally, one last thing, besides Chris’s growing convictions, caused her to consider leaving the PCUSA—“the ever-growing presence of God’s Word in my life, and its authority over me.”

For Chris, the decisive issue became the denomination’s redefinition of marriage. When an overture on that issue was passed by the assembly and came to the presbyteries—without even modifying the secondary standards to bring them into alignment—Chris knew his time there was coming to an end. “It was one of the few times I debated anything in the presbytery,”



Chris and Sara Drew, who journeyed to the OPC from the PCUSA, with their children: Hadassah, Anna, Lydia, Rebekah, and Daniel

Chris said. “I opened up my Bible and started reading from it.” The response was cold.

After resigning from his call, the priority for him became finding a Reformed church where his family could worship.

A Precious Gathering

Chris Drew is now church planter of Faith OPC, a work that is supported in prayer by the denomination’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. When the Drews came to Faith OPC, they were primarily seeking a church with biblical, Reformed worship. “The fact that I happen to be the pastor is, on the one hand, almost gravy,” he said.

“I stand in amazement that God would be gracious enough to bring us into the OPC. When I consider my own life, and how little I deserve anything, the precious gift of having a solid community to be in worship with on Sunday is huge,” he reflected.

Sara agrees. “People take notes on the sermon and talk about it. There’s an earnest desire for growth in faith, openness, and honesty. There’s a real sense of complete dependence on God, and faith-filled trust in him, to sustain the life of the congregation.”

The culture of giving in the church

and the denomination has also not escaped Chris’s notice. The PCUSA, although hemorrhaging members, thanks to endowments still has vast resources. In fact, Chris pointed out, when a local congregation is no longer viable, the denomination often collects funds on its closure through sale of the building and the reversion of the church’s assets. In contrast, “[The OPC] asks a lot of our people, and our people give. They give cheerfully. It’s actually very gratifying to see that.”

Of all the things that the PCUSA does with their resources, Chris said, the one thing that it doesn’t do is faithfully preach the gospel. That gospel preaching has become everything to the Drews.

“The Lord’s Day has just become the focus of our family. All of the energies and rhythm are pointing toward Sunday and toward worship, and I love it,” concluded Sara.

“I have become more and more caught up in the wonder of the Lord’s Day generally; all that is foreshadowed and promised by this wonderful gift that the Lord has given to us to worship him, to fellowship with one another, and to rest,” Chris said. □

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.

HOME MISSIONS

YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN: A TRIBUTE TO JIM HEEMSTRA

// ERIC R. HAUSLER

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Every one of us can look back over our lives and remember those whom the Lord graciously used in marvelous ways to bring us to where we are today. Ruling elder Jim Heemstra is such a man for me and for many others in the Presbytery of the South.

After working twenty-five years as a plumber in Fort Lauderdale and Tallahassee, Jim served as the regional home missionary from 1987 until his retirement in 2013. During those years, Jim and his wife, Sandy, assisted in starting thirty-three churches, some of which were far outside the current boundaries of the Presbytery of the South. (By his own calculation, twenty-five of them are still doing well.) The Heemstras would travel to a new city where there was an interested group, hauling an RV behind their pickup or renting an apartment while the group was formed. Then they would move on to the next place where there was serious interest in a new OPC congregation.

I met Jim during his years as a regional home missionary while I was serving as the pastor of Redeemer OPC in Ada, Michigan. In God's providence, Jim and Sandy were originally from the village of Ada, and they frequently returned to visit relatives. They would worship with us on the Lord's Day, and then he would invite me to meet for coffee at the local McDonald's. I always came away encouraged to press on in the work of the gospel—but also convicted to prayerfully consider moving to South Florida to plant another church: "We need more churches in Florida!" Jim would say.

One of the things I appreciated about those meetings with Jim was his no-nonsense, practical wisdom about church planting. I remember Jim saying to me, as he had said to many



Jim and Sandy Heemstra

others: "You need three Ps to start a church: piano player, pastor, and place," and, "I would rather have one solid Priscilla and Aquila than ten families."

Nuts-and-Bolts Encouragement

Many church planters in the Presbytery of the South had the privilege of Jim's advice and wisdom over the years. Mark Winder of Wolf River OPC in Collierville, Tennessee, remembers Jim's helpful visits: "He was a refreshing 'blue collar' assembly of nuts-and-bolts information and encouragement. He would countenance no complaining and dish out none himself. What he did do was grab you by the hand (or the scruff of the neck, as necessary) and spur you on!"

Eric Watkins, who served as a church planter in the Presbytery of the South and is now pastor of Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California, said that Jim needs to be remembered for his tireless service and frugality. "He worked for pennies—and knew how to stretch them! He and Sandy were warm and hospitable and kept an eye out for strangers. He loved our presbytery's church planters and was very protective of them."



With church planters in the 1990s: (back) Chip Stonehouse, Jonathan Male, Jim Heemstra, Ross Graham, Dick Ellis, Ivan DeMaster, Don Stanton; (front) Wendell Rockey, Jeff Landis, Dan Overdein, Jim Bosgraf, and unidentified

Joel Fick of Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Florida, arrived as the church planter on the scene after the core group had already chosen a name. Jim had strongly recommended to the core group that they be unanimous in choosing a name for the church given the importance of the decision. Now years later, people see the wisdom of Jim's advice as the name of the church is descriptive of the gospel and unique in the city of Gainesville.

Jim Heemstra could articulate well what each member's responsibility is for the culture of the local church. "The church I attend is composed of people like me," he explained.

"We make it what it is. It will be friendly—if I am. Its pews will be filled—if I help fill them. It will do a great work—if I work. It will make generous gifts to many causes—if I am a generous giver. It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship—if I bring them. It will be a church of loyalty and love, of fearlessness, faith, and a church of noble spirit, if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these. Therefore, with the help of God, I shall dedicate myself to the task of being all the things that I want the church I attend to be."

Finding a Shepherd for the Sheep

I asked Jim recently whether he had a favorite memory of his time as regional home missionary. "Ohhh yeah," he responded. He had traveled to Cookeville, Tennessee, where a group of about forty people had come together in someone's home to hear Jim speak about starting an OP church. As they were gathering and talking, a gasp went through the room. A man had appeared at the door, white as a ghost. He was bed-ridden, Jim found out, but had come to the meeting, standing between two men who were supporting his arms.

The three sat down, and the presentation began. "The whole time I spoke, the sick man just stared at me," Jim remembered. When he had finished and opened it up to questions, the two helpers walked the sick man right up to the front: "Mr. Jimmy, I came here tonight for one reason," the man told him. "I came to ask you if you would help these people. They are good people. They need a shepherd. I'm not leaving until you tell me you will help these people find a shepherd." Jim said that he would try.

A few days later, the man died, but a church was born which continues to this day. Finding a shepherd for the Lord's sheep has always been Jim's priority.

"You Lose So Many Things If You Become Idle"

Today, our dear brother has advanced melanoma and is now under hospice care, but Jim has not given up the fight. He has three prayer requests for himself and for Sandy: that the Lord would (1) keep their faith strong, (2) keep their bodies strong, and (3) keep their testimonies strong. Jim and Sandy continue to use their gifts as stewards of God's grace even while his cancer shows no sign of regressing. He preaches once a month at Raybrook-Holland Home in Grand Rapids where he and Sandy live. Jim has had many opportunities to



Celebrating ten years as regional home missionary in 1997 with Larry Mininger (right)

witness for the Lord Jesus and rejoices that although eighteen months of chemotherapy did not slow the cancer, his faith has grown through his suffering.

Jim labored twenty-six years to see churches planted all over the South, the final one being Christ the King Presbyterian Church here in Naples, Florida. After many years of coffee meetings at McDonald's in Ada, in 2013 my wife and I followed the Lord's call (and Jim's invitation) to plant a church in Naples shortly after Jim and Sandy retired to West Michigan.

Reflecting upon his work and influence as a regional home missionary, Jim said, "I never wanted to be more than the guy who comes with a shovel and a wheelbarrow. It's all the Lord's work: Unless the Lord builds the church, we labor in vain."

Amen, dear brother. It *is* the Lord's work. And you have faithfully tilled the soil with that shovel and wheelbarrow to help plant many faithful OPC churches!

Jim's last words to me in early January, the day after coming under hospice care, were that he was slowing down—"which is not typical for me. But I'm in God's hands, sitting at my desk getting ready to preach this Sunday morning at Raybrook. I keep trying to plow ahead. You know, you lose so many things if you become idle."

Keep on serving the King and his church, dear brother, abounding in the work of the Lord as a steward of God's grace to you (1 Pet. 4:10). Your labor is not in vain!

The author is founding pastor of Christ the King Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Naples, Florida.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by emailing HomeMissionsToday@opc.org. New editions released on March 2, 16, and 30.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS

// CHRISTOPHER J. VERDICK



The dry season in Karamoja, Uganda, echoes a spiritual wilderness

We are living in a postcard picture of the wilderness. As I write this (and likely as you read it), we are in as dry a dry season as I can remember in the last decade. The rains were light and inconsistent this year. The brush fires, always a fixture of late December and January, began in early November this year. The ground is hard and cracked wherever I look, and what grass is left waits only to be burned off at any time.

At the same time, modernization is happening all around us. Power lines, solar panels, knockoff designer jeans, smartphones, and even the preparatory grading for a tarmac road, all mean that we are confronted daily with a Karamoja undergoing a radical birthing into the twenty-first century.

While the external elements of our lives are a frenzy of change, the hearts of our neighbors remain, in many ways, a wilderness—wild, untamed, and absent the gardening work of God’s grace. We have been reminded repeatedly in recent months of the time and energy that have been expended on people who failed to produce fruit. The list of those names seems to grow much more quickly than the church rolls.

A Wilderness Experience

With all the upheaval the mission to Karamoja has experienced in the last few years, some might ask: “Is our mission’s wilderness experience a sign that God has not gone with us, that we have failed to follow his leading? Was Karamoja the most strategic location to plant churches?” To be sure, there have been not a few tactical blunders in our history. One may rightly question whether it would be better to focus our efforts on building up the church in more urban areas of Uganda, expecting those churches then to send missionaries to Karamoja.

What we cannot ignore, however, is the fact

that there are Presbyterian churches in every corner of Uganda with the singular exception of Karamoja. With Christian ministries in Karamoja sprouting up and dying off like grass, our mission has maintained a faithful presence for over twenty years. Missionaries have come and gone, but the goal of an indigenous Reformed Karimojong church continues to inch forward. For all our false starts, we should give thanks for this fact, because the wilderness is also a place of transformation. The place least likely to yield any actual fruit has a mysterious way of bearing fruit in God’s kingdom. Jacob wrestled in the wilderness and was made Israel; John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus’s ministry, calling people to repentance in the wilderness of the Jordan; and we are reminded throughout Isaiah that the wilderness will blossom as God’s kingdom reaches the ends of the earth.

Twenty Years of Kingdom Leavening

But how does God’s kingdom come? Like seed in soil, like yeast in dough—invisible even to the sower or the baker. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Matt. 13:33). As missionaries, we simply do not know what is happening in the lives of those with whom we have had contact. The loaf of bread that is Nakaale, Karamoja, may be fifty years rising.

Our list of failures is long indeed, but even this week I spoke with Dangela Joyce, who serves on our church’s mercy committee (we still wait for God to raise a quali-



Dangela Joyce, who has been with the mission for twenty years

fied diaconate). She had been approached by a woman with a sick and malnourished girl, whom she said was her orphaned niece. In my office at the clinic, she asked whether the mercy committee had money for this child to be seen at the clinic. She had already agreed with another committee member that this was the right course of action to recommend, and further said that she would raise the case of the child at the weekly committee meeting on Friday. But given the difficulty of



Angella Paul a few years ago was working for the mission to get school supplies as seen in this photo; now he is teaching others about Christ

finding out the true situation because of the distance to this woman's home, she doubted whether the church would be able to help on an ongoing basis.

After she left, I was amazed at the depth of her thinking. Rather than only considering the immediate need, she was addressing an appropriate short-term response to it, while also thinking about the appropriateness of long-term help. Twenty years of kingdom leavening went into that conversation—it could not have happened even last year. How many more conversations like this might we be able to have with twenty more years of faithful presence in Nakaale!

Temptations to Despair, Reasons for Rejoicing

These bright points in our ministry are like oases in the desert—as refreshing as they are rare. They sustain us in our trials, for the wilderness is also a place of testing. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and there tempted by Satan. We, too, are being tempted in the wilderness of Karamoja—to despair, to doubt that God's kingdom can shine in such a dark place, to think it better to pull up the tent stakes and move to a more strategic location.

As a team, these recent months have been a particularly intense time of testing. We are undermanned, assailed seemingly on all sides (in one case even literally) by those who want to get some benefit from the mission or missionaries. Those not seeking their own gain are simply indifferent to our presence and the message that we bring. For my family personally, these things have been writ large in the last year.

As my wife, Chloe, went this week to visit a former worker, former church member, and former friend, she received a phone call that Angella Paul, a member of our Word ministry team, had been falsely accused and imprisoned. So, she made a brief side trip to visit Angella, a young man now in training for church leadership. She found him in the police station's single cell with several other inmates. And as she spoke with him, he explained to her that he had been trying to share the gospel with fellow prisoners, a claim they heartily confirmed. Sharing the good news about Jesus Christ in a jail cell—wow!

It may look like a wilderness in Karamoja, but the work of the Holy Spirit is wonderful and mysterious. We rejoice to witness it in those who have come to saving faith and are growing in their work and service in the church that God has planted here.

The author is an associate tentmaking missionary from New Life Presbyterian Church of La Mesa (PCA) in La Mesa, California, laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.



Sunday morning worship in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda

REVIEW OF *ETHICS AS WORSHIP*

// DAVID M. VANDRUNEN



E*thics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship*, a massive work, aims to provide a thorough account of Christian ethics from an evangelical perspective. The authors, who teach ethics at Baptist institutions, have a strong commitment to biblical authority, which is evident throughout their text. Reformed readers will find their theological framework and moral conclusions generally familiar and agreeable. There are exceptions. For instance, they treat the crucial issue of sanctification as primarily a human work (in which God’s grace and Spirit provide crucial help) rather than as a work of God, as the Westminster Standards define it. Another example is their conclusion that Christians never have the right to initiate divorce or to remarry after divorce, contrary to Westminster Confession of Faith 24.5–6.

Although Reformed readers will find the authors’ moral conclusions generally agreeable, it’s not as clear whether they will find reading this large book profitable. This conclusion isn’t provoked by disagreement on any particular ethical issue but by a concern that the authors haven’t adequately captured where the heart of the Christian moral life lies or how the New Testament itself describes it.

Lack of Worship Proper

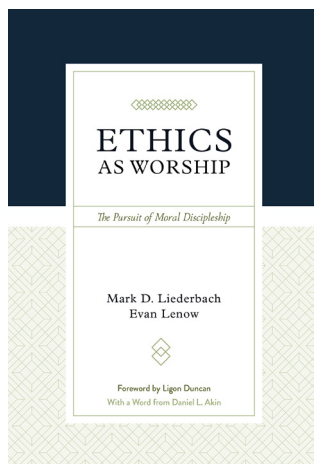
The authors’ goal to treat ethics *as worship* sounds intriguing and even promising. But this promise falls rather flat. It quickly becomes clear that the “worship” the authors have in mind isn’t worship proper—that is, the assembling of God’s covenant people on the Lord’s Day—but worship in the sense of honoring God in all areas of life. Christians of course should seek to honor God in all things, and labeling

this “worship” isn’t necessarily wrong, but a couple of problems emerge. For one thing, while the authors frequently claim to address issues in ways that will “maximize the worship of God” (or similar expressions), it’s seldom clear what this alleged focus on worship actually contributes to their arguments in defense of moral positions. These arguments invariably make sense on their own, and thus the authors’ frequent references to “worshipful behavior” (272), “worshipful motivation” (368), or “worshipful response” (682) are superfluous. Why use ridiculous expressions such as “worshipful sexual relationships” (607) when that simply means marriages that adhere to Christian sexual morality?

But the bigger problem is that this long book gives readers no impression that worship proper is of any great concern to the moral life, or that ordering one’s time around six days of work and one day of rest and worship has anything to do with “moral discipleship” (to borrow the book’s subtitle). This is a major omission and makes the book’s title sadly ironic.

Big-Issue Focus

The book also has a disproportionate focus on *big issues*, as I’ll call them. Part 4, “Application,” is about 60 percent of the book and treats more than a dozen controversial matters, all of which could be labeled “culture-war” issues. These issues are indeed important in their own right, but should a book promoting “moral discipleship” devote so much space to them, especially considering what it leaves out? One problem with this focus is that much of the book addresses issues that have little to do with the actual moral lives of the vast majority of Christians most of the time. Surely the biggest moral challenges most readers of this review have experienced today don’t concern their view of nuclear war or capital



punishment or whether to enter a homosexual marriage or pursue physician-assisted suicide. But I suspect that righteous use of the tongue has been a moral challenge for just about every reader today—and yet that issue is of little importance to *Ethics as Worship*.

Another difficulty with the big-issues approach is that it makes this book's ethical focus look little like the New Testament's ethical focus. The content of chapters 12–14 illustrates. In more than one hundred pages, these chapters consider environmental stewardship, capital punishment, and war. Weighty matters, to be sure, but can anyone read the New Testament and think that these are the moral issues that Christ and his apostles thought were most crucial for the Christian life? Yet the authors overlook an issue such as righteous speech, to which the New Testament (and Proverbs) devotes so much attention. Authors have liberty to address topics they wish, and readers should generally respect their decisions. But it also seems fair to think that the priorities of a book seeking to offer a biblical view of Christian moral discipleship should roughly correspond to the priorities of the New Testament itself.

One thing the authors might have done to alleviate these difficulties is to focus more on the Christian virtues, such as the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Although the authors suggest early in the book that virtue is an important part of ethics, it ends up playing only a small role in their work. Yet the virtues are both a frequent biblical theme and pervasively relevant for the Christian life day by day. Consider chapter 16. In the midst of the authors' long discussion of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, they include a two-paragraph note about hope (542–543). Hope is certainly relevant in considering these big issues, but I wonder if the authors have put the emphasis in the right place. Most Christians will never seriously consider assisted suicide, and yet the authors devote the bulk of a long chapter to it. In contrast, hope is a virtue that ought to shape the attitude and conduct of Christians every day of their lives, and the authors treat hope in less than a page.

The author is an OP minister and professor of systematic theology and Christian ethics at Westminster Seminary California.

[Ethics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship](#), by Mark D. Liederbach and Evan Lenow. P&R, 2021. Hardcover, 784 pages, \$37.50.

☆ Congratulations

The **First Catechism** has been recited by:

- **Hope Pinegar**, *Bethel Presbyterian, Wheaton, IL*

Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 326* “My Song Is Love Unknown”

Joel V. Pearce

The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is filled with beautiful, rich, and biblical hymns, and one of the most poignant is “My Song Is Love Unknown.” This deeply emotional and profoundly personal hymn of love for Christ is framed around Christ's life and death.

“Love unknown” here does not mean an exclusive or secret love but instead is a way of describing the love of Christ for sinners as beyond comprehension or unfathomable (see Wesley's “And Can It Be”). The writer, Samuel Crossman, introduces the theme of the song in the first stanza with the line “love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.” The singer then sings through Christ's incarnation, miracles, triumphal entry, trial, crucifixion, and burial, inserting himself as eyewitness in the drama. The song's underlying grief and even confusion (“Why? What hath my Lord done?”) is resolved beautifully in the final stanza:

Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine;
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine.
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

The text of this hymn was included in the *Trinity Hymnal* (revised 1990), but in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* it is paired with a different tune: John Ireland's “Love Unknown,” written specifically for this hymn text. The flowing, longing melodic line matches the earnestness and conversational aspect of the lyrics wonderfully.

● Out of the Mouth . . .

On the drive home after our fourteenth grandchild was baptized, one of the baby's cousins, my four-year-old grandson, recalled the morning's event: “Uncle Sam and Aunt Bonnie went up to the front, and the pastor put water on my cousin's head to help her hair grow.”

—Barbara Stahl
Wentzville, MO

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

LIVING A CRUCIFORM LIFE

// ADAM A. YORK

Having almost come to the end of a sermon series on the book of Acts, I would like to share my reflections on how Acts, as a whole, relates to the matter of Christian stewardship. A good place to begin is by thinking about the relationship of Acts to all four gospels. How can that be summarized? One way is to say that in the Gospels, Christ embraces the cross in order to merit the Spirit on behalf of his church, and in Acts, Christ gifts the Spirit to his church, in order that she might embrace his cross.

How does Acts bring into view this movement from cross to Spirit and from Spirit to cross? Luke begins by showing the climax of Christ's reception of the Spirit in Acts 1. Christ, who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, who had already received the Spirit in his resurrection while still remaining on earth, advances to consummate possession of the Spirit as he ascends from earth to heaven. This climactic reception of the Spirit is visibly depicted when Christ enters into clouds (Acts 1:9). Peter interprets that event in Acts 2; he declares that through his bodily ascent into heaven, Christ was not only exalted to God's right hand, but also that he consummately received the Spirit (2:33). All of this clearly sets forth an embrace of the cross by our Savior, which merited him the Spirit.

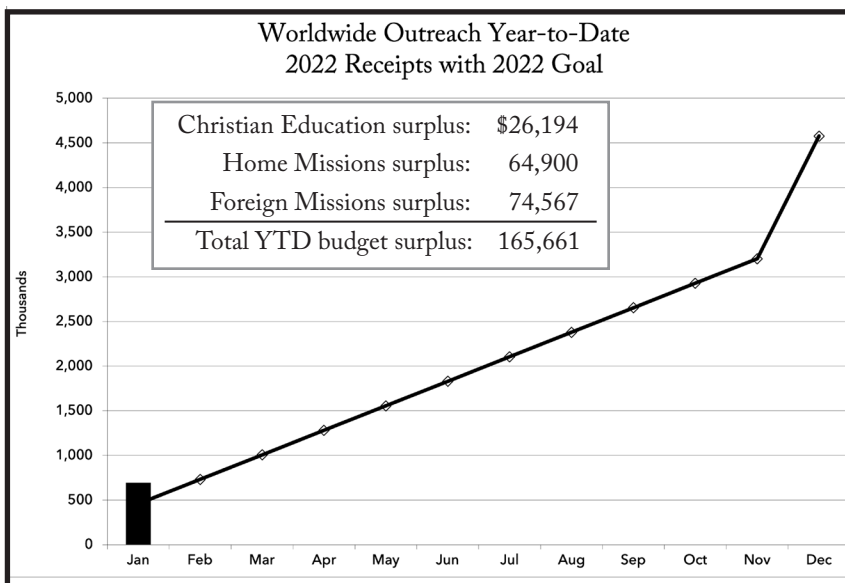
At Pentecost, he who merited the Spirit graciously gifts that Spirit to his bride—but to what end? She is gifted the Spirit that she might be empowered to bear witness to her resurrected, ascended Lord (Acts 1:8). In Acts, this witness-bearing identity is put on display as the church embraces the cross. It's seen as she's empowered by the resurrection Spirit of Christ to bear witness even unto death. In this

sense, the church is gifted the Spirit that she might embrace the cross. While the church's Spirit-empowered embrace of the cross is seen throughout Acts, Luke puts it on glorious display and calls us to embrace the same by zeroing in on one activity of one man from Acts 20–28. Throughout chapters 20–28, Luke shows us Paul's embrace of the cross as he bears witness to his resurrected Lord while being placed on trial by the world.

How does this relate to Christian stewardship? Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, it shows you must use the resources the Lord has given you in a way that bears witness to the resurrection reign of Christ even as you embrace his cross! As Paul was constrained by the Spirit (Acts 20:22) to go to Jerusalem and embrace Christ's cross by resurrection-witness-bearing, so also the church must offer up her whole life, including all her gifts and resources, in an act of resurrection-witness-bearing worship.

The point of your empowerment by the Spirit is to bear witness to Christ through a cruciform life that offers everything back to God. All this is crystallized in Acts 20. As Paul prepared to go Jerusalem and take the offering he had collected from Gentile churches to the suffering Jewish saints in Jerusalem, he addressed the Ephesian elders with tears saying, "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (verse 35). Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, may the Lord grant that we have the very same Spirit-empowered and cross-directed life which is seen in the book of Acts.

The author is pastor of Hope Presbyterian in Grayslake, Illinois.



MARCH



The Lopezes (day 4)



The Walkers (day 8)

1 **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray for three seminarians and their families as they begin study for presbytery licensing exams. / **MELAKU & MERON TAMIRAT**, Clarkston, GA. Pray for Melaku's weekly Bible studies.

2 **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Pray that kingdom generosity would become part of Grace Fellowship's DNA. / Pray for coordinator **JUDY ALEXANDER** preparing for the Timothy Conference, April 20-23, in Escondido, CA.

3 **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray that the Lord would raise up and strengthen more church leaders. / Yearlong intern **A. J. (CHELSEA) MILLSAPS** at Sandy Springs Presbyterian, Maryville, TN.

4 **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Arroyo, PR. Praise the Lord for the safe delivery of Luca Lopez! / Affiliated missionaries **JERRY AND MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. Pray for a stable location for the growing church to meet.

5 **ISAAC (ESTHER) ZHOU**, church-planting intern at Pasadena OPC, Pasadena, CA. / **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for the final steps of the accreditation process for Knox School of Theology.

6 **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for the increase of God's kingdom in this nation as it faces threats of political instability. / **ANDREW MOODY** and **LINDA FOH**, technical assistants for OPC.org.

7 Pray for associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, and **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda. / Pray for **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio.

8 Yearlong intern **MATTHEW (HYOJUNG) WALKER** at Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, PA. / Pray for **DAVID NAKHLA**, Diaconal Ministries administrator, and others preparing for the National Diaconal Summit, June 2-4.

9 Associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for her health research project and its benefits for the community. / Pray for **MELISA MCGINNIS**, financial controller and **MARK STUMPF**, OPC Loan Fund manager.

10 **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Give thanks for Pasadena OPC's growth. Pray that the church would particularize in 2022. / General secretary **MARK BUBE** and associate general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON**. Pray for wisdom as they provide counsel and encouragement to our missionaries.

11 **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, McAlisterville, PA. Pray Pastor Beabout's care for the members of Grace and Truth would encourage their hearts. / Yearlong intern **MARC (RUTHIE) SCATURRO** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

12 Tentmaking missionary **TINA DE-JONG**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the preparation of the fields for planting. / Pray for the **PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COMMISSION ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL**.

13 Pray for **B. A. SNIDER**, marketing director for Great Commission Publications. / **CALEB & ERIKA SMITH**, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray Thousand Oaks Presbyterian would delight in the privilege of worshipping the Lord.

14 **JAMES (DANA) STAFFORD**, church-planting intern at Grace Presbyterian, Columbus, OH. / Pray for **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education, as CCE meets March 14-16.

15 Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Mission can host conferences on the biblical roles of men and women. / Yearlong intern **TAYLOR (SOPHIA) SEXTON** at Heritage Presbyt. in Royston, GA.

MARCH



The Mourreales (day 25)

21 Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. Pray for a new transition home for survivors of human-trafficking. / **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

22 Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**. / Pray for associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti, as they experience separation from their children, in college in the US and Canada.

23 Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / Pray for OPC office manager **ANNELISA STUDLEY** and Christian Education office secretary **ABBY HARTING**.

24 **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti (on furlough). Pray for the Haitian government as they seek to improve the security situation amid gang violence and kidnapping. / **KERRI ANN CRUSE**, video and social media coordinator.

25 **TONY AND KATHLEEN CURTO**, Ethiopia. Pray that Tony may be able to travel to Ethiopia this year to teach and encourage. / **PAUL & SARAH MOURREALE**, West Plains, MO. Pray for a suitable meeting place for Covenant Reformed.

26 **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Pray for continued growth and unity at New Braunfels OPC. / Yearlong interns **BEN (VICTORIA) CIAVOLELLA** at Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, CA, and **KELLE (ALEX) CRAFT** at Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek, OH.



The Richlines (day 28)

27 Pray for the **ETHIOPIAN REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** that the Lord would continue to provide for his people amid rising inflation and political turmoil. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

28 Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER** / **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the Lord would send a second missionary for this field.

29 Pray for **BRUCE (SUE) HOLLISTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbyteries of the Midwest and of Wisconsin & Minnesota. / Yearlong intern **JEREMIAH (ANNA) MOONEY** at Covenant Community in Taylors, SC.

30 Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG AND REE COULBOURNE** and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. / Pray for the CDM's **Refugee Ministry Subcommittee** as it seeks to help churches establish refugee ministries in local communities.

31 **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSEDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for those suffering from hunger due to last year's drought. / **JEREMY & GWEN BAKER**, Yuma, AZ. Pray for Yuma OPC's outreach to local, permanent residents.

16 Pray for **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they support the work of the AYP Clinic.

17 **CHRISTOPHER & SARA DREW**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray for a Faith OPC congregant who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. / Yearlong intern **GRANT (STORMIE) ALLARD** at Christ Covenant, Amarillo, TX.

18 Missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the evangelistic efforts of the ladies Bible study. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 88th General Assembly, June 8-14.

19 Pray that **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada, may be a blessing to the Reformed Church of Quebec. / **SHANE & RACHELLE BENNETT**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray that visitors would become members.

20 **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care and **CHARLENE TIPTON**, database administrator. / **KEVIN & RACHEL MEDCALF**, Cumming, GA. Pray God would bless the ministry of the Word at Providence.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

IN MEMORIAM: C. HERBERT OLIVER

Danny E. Olinger

Former Orthodox Presbyterian minister C. Herbert Oliver died on November 20, 2021, at the age of 94. After graduating from Wheaton College, Oliver married Ruby King in 1948 and moved back to his home in Birmingham, Alabama, where he started to pastor a local church. He was arrested for allowing an integrated youth group to meet at the church. After the arrest, he enrolled at Westminster Seminary, and he and his family began to worship at Calvary OPC, Glenside, pastored by Robert Atwell. Oliver then accepted a call to serve as the church planter of Bethel OPC in Houlton, Maine. During his six years at Bethel Church, Oliver served faithfully and was active at the presbytery and General Assembly, three times serving as a commissioner of the Presbytery of New York and New England. It was also during this time with the encourage-



C. Herbert and Ruby, and children Claude, Paul, and Patrice in 1955

ment of Murray Thompson from Glenside, Paul Woolley and Ned Stonehouse from Westminster Seminary, and fellow PNYNE members G. I. Williamson and

Theodore Georgian, that Oliver wrote *No Flesh Shall Glory*, which demonstrated that there was no foundation for racism in the Bible. Reissued in 2021 by P&R Publishing, and reviewed in the October 2021 *New Horizons*, the sound principles of exegesis and application to social issues put forth by Oliver rightly challenge what is biblical thinking about matters of race and racism.

In 1960, Oliver applied to become an armed forces chaplain and returned to Birmingham but was not accepted for the position. He then served as the secretary of the Inter-Citizens Committee to fight against police brutality toward black citizens in Birmingham. His efforts as secretary of the committee in exposing what was happening helped to stem the tide of the abuse in Birmingham. In 1966, Oliver transferred his ministerial credentials out of the OPC as he accepted a call at Bedford-Central Presbyterian in Brooklyn, NY.

BIGGS INSTALLED AND FRANKS ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN PURCELLVILLE, VA

On January 15, 2022, Kectoctin Covenant Presbyterian in Purcellville, Virginia, held a service both to ordain and install Ben Franks as pastor of Kectoctin Covenant Presbyterian and to install Charles R. Biggs, formerly its pastor, as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.

Biggs was church planter and founding pastor of Kectoctin Covenant, which was organized in 2003, having been overseen by Bethel Presbyterian in Leesburg, Virginia. Ben Franks was the congregation's first intern.

Rejoice with us in God's provision to Kectoctin Covenant Presbyterian and the presbytery!



(back) Andrew Miller, Alex Caulderon, Ken Barnes, Chip Hammond, Chris Cashen, Tom Martin, Dan Clifford; (front) Gerry Taylor, Steve Doe, Charles Biggs, Ben Franks, John Paul Holloway, and Phil Proctor

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On January 15, **Charles R. Biggs** was installed as the regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. He was previously the pastor of Ketocin Covenant Presbyterian, Purcellville, Virginia.
- On January 15, **Ben Franks** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Ketocin Covenant Presbyterian, Purcellville, Virginia.
- **David B. Carnes** was installed as pastor of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian in Fort Pierce, FL, on January 14. Carnes was previously associate pastor of Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, Florida.

MILESTONES

- **C. Herbert Oliver**, 94, died November 20, 2021. Oliver, the author of *No Flesh Shall Glory* (1959; reprint 2021), was formerly an OPC church planter in Maine.

REVIEWS

In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2, by **Cornelis Van Dam**. Reformation Heritage, 2021. Hardcover, 400 pages, \$23.00. Reviewed by OP pastor **Calvin R. Goligher**.

The world's beginning is a point of controversy in the world and in the church. A particularly contentious question is whether the Bible's creation account is historical. More specifically, did God create the world in the space of a historical week? This book answers yes and argues its case well.

The most important part of the book is the second chapter, on the use of extra-biblical data in interpreting Scripture. Those who deny that Genesis is historical are often trying to harmonize the Bible with scientific or archaeological findings. Van Dam skillfully navigates this complex subject, concluding that biblical interpretation cannot be controlled by either kind of outside evidence.

Van Dam goes on to address a range



At the July 23 particularization service of Heritage OPC in Wilmington, North Carolina: (front) John Mauldin, Greg Bebb, Marc Yandle, Ethan Bolyard, Irfon Hughes, Ash Guirgues, Matt Miner, Dan Fincham, and Mark Kirby; (back) Lacy Andrews, David Okken, Joseph Pipa, Ryan McGraw, Jeremy Huntington, Kevin Joyner, and Casey Bessette

of issues involved in interpreting Genesis 1 and 2, interacting throughout with biblical scholars and scientists. He refutes various non-literal views of the creation week (his critique of the framework view is especially effective). The final chapter considers how these questions about creation affect our preaching of the gospel.

Van Dam is clear, fair, and thorough. He also models humility. He offers well-aimed reminders that those who insist on a historical creation week must remember that God's creative work during that week is a mystery far beyond our comprehension.

I disagreed with Van Dam at a couple of small points. He is too negative about the idea that Eden was a temple. There is no conflict between this typological connection and the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2. In a rare slip, Van Dam asserts that we should not read the meaning of later Scriptures into the first chapters of Genesis. In light of the Bible's divine authorship, however, this is a perfectly valid thing to do (from watching Van Dam at work, I think he would agree). These are small faults, however, in a book marked by a high quality of argumentation.

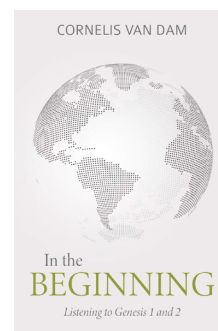
Unfortunately, the book does not give sustained attention to the philosophical conflict between biblical doctrine and

modern materialism. Van Dam shows that he is aware of this conflict, but he gives most of his attention to the authority of Scripture. That is indeed a crucial point, but in my judgment an even deeper issue is that we often unwittingly admit materialistic assumptions into our interpretation of Scripture—even as we confess Scripture's authority.

That said, Van Dam does provide an ideal resource for converting our minds from materialism, in an appendix on heaven and angels. This sober

and eminently scriptural description of the supernatural realm was my favorite part of the book. I recommend reading this section slowly and thoughtfully. It will open your mouth to confess the glory of God "maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." It will inflame your heart with longing for the end of all things, when heaven and earth will be reunited.

One could not hope for more from a book on how the universe began.



Women's Spring Conference

April 29-30 • Green Bay, WI

- Topic: Never Alone
- Speaker: Lydia Brownback
- Location: New Hope Presbyterian
2401 Deckner Ave.
- Details and registration information at www.nhopc.org. Email office@nhopc.org with questions.

Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture, by Gene Edward Veith Jr. Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 320 pages, \$19.46 (Amazon). Review by OP pastor Mike Myers.

Gene Edward Veith wrote *Post-Christian* as a sequel to his 1994 work *Postmodern Times*. The book contains reflection and analysis upon philosophical, anthropological, social, and religious developments over the three intervening decades. Before touching on just some of the content matter of this book, I offer this general description. Carl Trueman's recent tome *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* identifies many of the philosophical underpinnings responsible for driving our society to its present condition. *Post-Christian* takes many of those abstract concepts that Trueman helpfully identified and shows how they are coming into expression in our day. These two volumes complement one another well. In fact, if the reader is daunted by the density of philosophy from Trueman, Veith's book will explain what the results look like without extensive examination of how those results came to be. Regarding the title, Veith does not argue that Christianity has come to an end. Rather, he endeavors to discuss "what we are left with when we try to abandon the Christian worldview" (18).

Post-Christian stands to be of help to

many within the OPC. Veith matter-of-factly introduces his readers to an array of categories and concepts about which there is much naivety and/or ignorance in the church. For instance, he discusses the subject of *transhumanism* in chapter 6. This concept refers to melding humans with machines and technology in an attempt to transcend the natural limitations of humanity. He also addresses the increasing prevalence and moral problems with things like sperm donation (150), pornography, sex robots (111–112), genetic engineering (116–124), and even artificial wombs (124). These words and concepts may shock and even offend readers of *New Horizons*. However, this world in which we live resembles the degeneracy of Sodom more and more. Christians—and especially elders within the church—must at the very least be aware of these issues. While we pray and work for reformation of the church and the good of the places in which we live (Jer. 29:7), we also need to know that these movements and developments will pose serious questions and even threats to biblical Christianity. God's people must seek to be as wise as serpents in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16).

Veith also offers insightful criticisms of feminism and the sexual revolution. He rightly connects feminism to the homosexual and transsexual movements. Regarding transgenderism, he explains how it actually destroys what many have claimed the goals of feminism are: "But once males and females are fully interchangeable, feminism too ceases to exist" (147). Another strength of Veith's work is how he applies the Word of God to these various challenges of our day. In his discussion about artificial intelligence and "singularity" (256–266), Veith exposes the movement to be nothing other than technologically advanced idolatry. Citing from Isaiah 44:14–22, he clearly demonstrates how it will ultimately come to nothing.

Some of the observations Veith makes in *Post-Christian* sound dystopian and

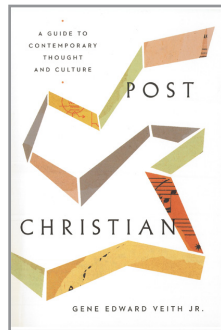
even frightening; many of the facts and statistics he presents are quite disheartening. However, he encourages Christian readers that they have no reason for despair. The bleakness of the "post-Christian world" stands in sharp contrast to the glory of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The book ends on this very theme: "The succession of ages and movements are all in his hands—premodern, modern, postmodern, post-Christian, postsecular, and whatever will come next" (307). As with everything, read with discernment, but I definitely recommend this work.

Man of Sorrows, King of Glory: What the Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus Mean for Us, by Jonty Rhodes. Crossway, 2021. Paperback, 160 pages, \$14.99 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Matthew Holst.

Jonty Rhodes, a minister in the Independent Presbyterian Church in Leeds, United Kingdom, has written a wonderful little work explaining and applying the work of Christ to the Christian. The format of the book follows much of Philip Bliss's 1875 hymn, *Man of Sorrows*, borrowing chapter headings from lines of the hymn. This has the effect of tying biblical truths to words and ideas we frequently confess in our worship.

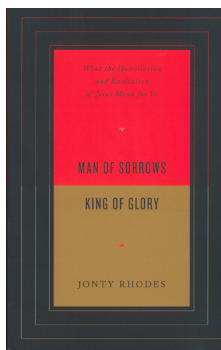
The book is in three parts following the incarnation, humiliation, and exaltation of our Lord, thus providing the layman a sound basis to understand the work of Christ. The book starts with the vital question, "What has Jesus done for you?" and seeks to place the cross of Christ at the center of the Christian faith while reminding the reader that both cross and Christ form part of a larger context of redemption, which includes exaltation. This, Rhodes argues, has profound impact upon our worship, preaching, and upon missions.

Chapter 1 introduces Adam's failed roles as prophet, priest, and king in the garden. However, Rhodes leads the reader to Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly office, and the salvation found in the Messiah—but not the Messiah of mere doctrine, but a true person with whom the Christian has true communion. Chapter



2 deals with the incarnation of our Lord, particularly his two natures, and Rhodes carefully but simply explains the doctrine and its aberrations. Chapter 3 entitled “Bearing Shame and Scoffing Rude” deals with Christ’s humiliation. Chapter 4 expands on Christ’s humiliation in his office of prophet, chapter 5 in his office as priest, and chapter 6 in his office as king. With pleasant symmetry, chapter 7 then deals with Christ’s exaltation, followed by chapters 8–10 reflecting on his exaltation as prophet, priest, and king.

Rhodes is thus providing his reader with an entry level book on Christology. The subtitle of the work is reflected in the chapter divisions, “What the Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus Mean for Us.” Rhodes, thus, applies his teaching. He argues that we are to be “theologians of the cross” presently taking up our cross rather than seeking might and glory



now. But we are also to be Christians of Christ’s exaltation, not just of his cross, thinking in a more rounded fashion of the work of Christ. We are to live under Christ’s lordship not the world’s lordship—“Children belong to parents, not to governments” (149).

The work deals with profound truths in a simple manner. Rhodes does not avoid technical and theological language, but he ably explains it throughout. One of the hallmarks of the book is accessibility—most should be able to understand and spiritually profit from this work. It is clearly written for the average Christian to dive a little deeper into Christ’s work for us and in us. I commend Rhodes’s book to all.

***The Pastor as Counselor: The Call for Soul Care*, by David Powlison. Crossway, 2021. Paperback, 80 pages, \$7.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Richard N. Ellis.**

I always looked forward to time with Roy Oliver, Ed Kellogg, and Larry Vail, three

older leaders I knew best toward the end of their lives. They understood our human weakness and talked regularly of Jesus. They kept the main thing the main thing in their preaching and their personal conversation. They regularly and easily connected Jesus to the everyday details of life and ministry.

David Powlison’s little book *The Pastor as Counselor* is like that: penetrating and realistic, just the wise counsel we need. He reminds pastors to care for souls individually as well as corporately. “Where ministry is strong, pastors practice in private what they preach in public” (36).

Since Jay Adams’s *Competent to Counsel*, was first published in 1970, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation has labored “to restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the church.” In this little book, Powlison, who served as executive director of CCEF, urges pastors to fulfill both prongs of that mission.

In the first chapter, he asks four questions that highlight differences between biblical counseling and value-neutral modern psychology. We are not the “ostensibly well [presuming] to treat the evidently sick” (23). Both counselor and counselee need the shepherd’s voice to quiet the persuasive inner whispers of either despair or self-sufficiency.

The second chapter unfolds five aspects of the pastor’s counseling: our responsibility to counsel, then the opportunity, method, message, and context of counseling.

We all need counseling every day “to awaken, to turn, to trust, to grow and to love God and others” (43). Each of us is susceptible to being hardened by the deceitfulness of our heart’s resident sin (Heb. 3:12–13). We daily need “help overcoming the contradiction between what we

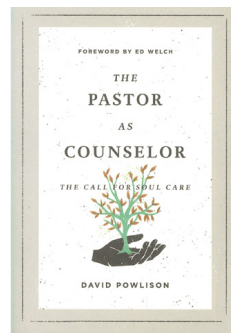
know and how we live” (49).

This seasoned saint reminds us that restoring counseling to the church goes far beyond equipping pastors; “counseling” needs to be restored to the people. As Paul puts it, all are called to build others up, as fits the occasion, so that our words give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29). Pastors work toward the goal of

members gaining wisdom to discern who is lazy, so *they* can admonish; and who is faint-hearted, so *they* can encourage; and who is weak, so *they* can help. Such is the high, and often overlooked, call of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 addressed not to pastors but the “brothers and sisters.”

Pastors, see in your congregation “potential members of your pastoral care team” (56). Are you discipling them so they not only know God’s Word but can apply it aptly, with humble boldness, to help others? Are you providing a context in which disciples are trained and expected to practice effective “soul care” (encouraging, admonishing, helping, and praying for each other)?

The Pastor as Counselor is short, but don’t be fooled by its brevity. An aged saint has given us pearls most of us need so God’s people speak the truth in love to one another and the body grows to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13–16).



Position Available

Pastor: In search of candidates interested in a pastoral position for a family of believers in Bothell, Washington, a congregation of the Presbytery of the Northwest. The pastor of Trinity OPC will preach a gospel-filled/Christocentric sermon, calling sinners to repentance, and will expound Scripture from a biblical-theological, redemptive-historical perspective. We seek a pastor who is a servant leader and will strive to live Ephesians 4:11–16. If interested, please contact Rigo at RTovillaJr@outlook.com or (949) 689-0506.

New Jersey Women's Presbyterial

10 a.m. • April 23 • Bellmawr, NJ

The New Jersey Women's Presbyterial is pleased to welcome Charles and Connie Jackson, OPC missionaries to Uganda, to our presbyterial via Zoom. All are invited to attend either in person (Immanuel OPC, 11 Park Dr., Bellmawr, NJ) or online. For the Zoom link, please email njwomenspresbyterial@gmail.com.

Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution, by Carl R. Trueman. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 208 pages, \$17.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Roger Wagner.

This is an important book. If there is such a thing as “essential reading,” this book should be on the list for most members of the OPC. Parents of preteens and teenagers especially should read this book *with* their children—and discuss it thoughtfully.

Like Francis Schaeffer tried to do in the late 60s and 70s, Trueman here is trying to explain—to a general Christian readership overwhelmed by contemporary cultural realities—*how we got here*. He writes:

Sooner or later every single one of us is likely to be faced with a challenging situation generated by the modern notion of selfhood. And this means that for all of us the questions of how we should live, and what we should do when facing pressure to conform, are gaining in urgency. (170)

It is likely impossible to present a watertight account of why we modern men and women think intuitively about the world in the way that we do. Yet one can certainly offer an account that piles up various necessary preconditions for this and observe how these tend to tilt

us in a particular direction. (108)

First, Trueman lays out the meaning of some of the key ideas he will be dealing with, beginning with the idea of “the self.” Biblically, the “self” is understood fundamentally in terms of human beings being created by the Triune God “in his image.” Traditionally, at least in Western civilization, even non-believers have assumed that the “self” has a fixed nature.

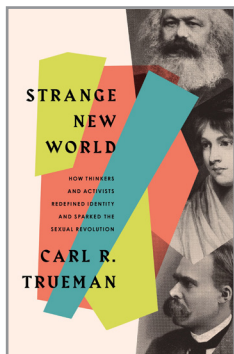
Through the intellectual history that Trueman traces, this idea of “selfhood” becomes increasingly “plastic”—i.e., to be understood in subjective and therefore relativistic terms. The “self” is what each person makes it, without necessary reference to religion, social traditions, or (today) even physical/biological reality.

To challenge this autonomous understanding of “the self,” is to become an “oppressor.” Such oppressors should be sanctioned—socially, and even politically.

In his survey, Trueman traces the collapse of traditional, external anchors of identity, the way in which the loss of sacred order and the rise of technology—not to mention the social influence of powerful political, educational, cultural, and business elites—have contributed to the contemporary situation.

Beginning with Rousseau and the English Romantic poets, he explains the way in which the ideas of thinkers like Marx and Freud, Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse have “trickled down” to shape the “social imaginary” (i.e., how a society collectively and instinctively thinks about the “big issues” of life, often without knowing why) of millions in the postmodern West. It's not a pleasant story . . . but a vital one for us and our children to understand.

Because we are all immersed in this “social imaginary,” Trueman further argues that contemporary Christians are far more influenced by the modern understanding of “self” than we may appreciate. That, in part, is why he's writing this book.



The reader may ask, “Can anything be done?” Some may wish that Trueman had more to say in answer to that question, but that is for another book. For now he reminds us that “God is sovereign, God plays the long game, and God's will shall be done, on earth as it is heaven” (178).

The good news is that the solution is (as it has always been) faithfulness to the God we claim to love and worship. We must deliberately teach “the whole counsel of God,” and live out its implications in our congregations, families, and in our contact with our communities.

The culture is most dramatically engaged by the church presenting it with another culture, another form of community, rooted in her liturgical worship practices and manifested in the loving community that exists both in and beyond the worship service. . . . The church protests the wider culture by offering a true vision of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God. (176)

A final note, *Strange New World* is aimed at a broader audience than Trueman's “big book” (*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 2020), but is sufficiently different in presentation as to repay its own reading.

Benjamin Franklin: Cultural Protestant, by D. G. Hart. Oxford University Press, 2021. Hardcover, 272 pages, \$37.65 (Amazon). Reviewed by Professor George Marsden.

D. G. Hart offers a thoughtful counter to those conservative Christian writers who portray America's founders as essentially Christian despite those founders' rejections of core Christian doctrines. Hart makes it clear that Franklin remained far from any traditional Christian faith. In fact, Hart seems to have a hard time taking Franklin's religious expressions seriously. Characterizing the famed inventor's outlook as “moralistic providentialism” (241), Hart remarks that Franklin is often overestimated as a thinker. He was, in Hart's view, more a tinkerer and dabbler in everything and “his religious reflections, although voluminous, were not profound” (244).

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

Such dismissive attitudes may seem odd for a volume in a series on “spiritual lives.” Hart’s assessment seems to be that Franklin, despite being shaped in many ways by his Puritan upbringing, hardly had a spiritual life. Franklin paid a lot of attention to religion, sometimes attended services, contributed to churches, and supported religious activities such as the evangelical revivals of George Whitefield. Yet Franklin’s expressions about religion, in Hart’s account, seemed largely pragmatic—for promoting morality and the public good.

Hart nonetheless offers a fresh approach to thinking about Franklin and religion. One factor in seeking such an approach likely is that he wanted to offer an account that differed from Thomas Kidd’s recent *Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father* (Yale, 2017). Kidd presents Franklin, despite his lack of orthodoxy, as having a real spiritual life, always wrestling with the Puritan legacy of his youth and seeking for meaningful substitutes. (Disclosure: Kidd is a former student of mine. Hart is a former research assistant. Both are good friends.) Hart mentions Kidd’s book appreciatively, but then turns in another direction.

Rather than dwell on Franklin’s spiritual life or personal struggles with religious questions, Hart emphasizes Franklin’s Protestant heritage. His central thesis is that Franklin can be viewed as a “cultural Protestant” (5). Hart accordingly points out all sorts of things in Franklin’s outlook and career that have Protestant

antecedents. Protestantism had strong urban roots that offered precedents for Franklin’s civic reforms. Protestantism was connected to the rise of science. Protestantism had a close relation to the flourishing of printing. Protestants promoted higher education. Protestants fomented revolution. The most evident and perhaps consequential of these connections is that Franklin’s emphasis on morality echoes Puritan moral rigor. Hart rightly sees Franklin as a paradigmatic figure in the transition from Puritan piety and self-denial to later American moralism and self-help. Eventually views such as Franklin’s became acceptable fare in some liberal Protestant churches.

Hart is a skillful historian, and his biography of Franklin offers compact, fact-filled, and well-informed accounts of the highlights of Franklin’s life and work. He bases these narratives on the best interpretations found in the many previous Franklin biographies, citing these directly in the text. So if readers are fascinated by Franklin’s truly impressive variety of activities and achievements, here is a place to find concise overviews of those, together with reminders of their Protestant origins.

One of the most famous and intriguing expressions of Franklin’s religious interests was at the US Constitutional Convention, when the revered octogenarian proposed that they might succeed better if they opened their sessions with prayer. He reminded his colleagues that the early patriots had often prayed and had seen

success. “Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered”(225). His motion got very little support.

Hart at first seems to dismiss these remarks as “Franklin’s resort to God as a safety net for the new nation” (216). Yet in his concluding two pages, he offers that there is “one exception” to his finding that Franklin’s religious views were “not profound” (244). That is “a Christian doctrine in which Franklin compares favorably to Abraham Lincoln” (244). The unorthodox providentialism of the two men was similar. So, says Hart, “if historians may plausibly claim Lincoln as one of the profoundest Christian thinkers of his era, certainly there is room for Ben Franklin’s membership in the club” (245).

This is puzzling. Having presented so many of Franklin’s religious views as superficial, Hart on the last pages seems to want to rescue something of Franklin’s reputation as a religious thinker who deserves our attention. The problem is that two formally similar versions of unorthodox providentialism may not be equally profound. And Franklin’s version hardly “compares favorably to Lincoln’s.” Historians and many others consider Lincoln’s reflections on providentialism profound because he probed so deeply some agonizing paradoxes, including that of deadly enemies praying to the same God. Franklin’s providentialism, so far as the records show, seems to be mostly of the self-interested sort, as in invoking the divine aid for the success of one’s own nation. Overall, Franklin may have been a less superficial religious thinker than Hart typically gives him credit for, but his “moralistic providentialism” seems no deeper than the rest.

