

NEW HORIZONS

≡ *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ≡

6 Reformed Confessionalism
v. The Genius Theologian
// by J. V. Fesko

JANUARY 2023

8 Learning from Mars Hill
// by John R. Muether

GO BIG OR GO HOME?

THE OPC AND EVANGELICALISM

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New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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Matthew Walker (center, blue suit) at his November 11 installation as organizing pastor of mission work Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian in Yorktown, Virginia. Next to him on the right is his father, OP pastor Timothy Walker.



GO BIG OR GO HOME? THE OPC AND EVANGELICALISM



D. G. HART // Orthodox Presbyterians have a long history—as long as their existence—with figuring out the relationship between being Reformed and being evangelical. This dilemma was baked in to the communion’s batter thanks to so many leaders of the neo-evangelical movement having ties to J. Gresham Machen as

professor both at Princeton Seminary and then at Westminster. Important figures, like Harold John Ockenga, in the new institutions that gave organizational coherence to neo-evangelicalism—the National Association of Evangelicals [NAE] (1942), Fuller Seminary (1947), and *Christianity Today* magazine (1956)—had either studied with Machen or took inspiration from the conservative theology and tradition of scholarship that Westminster Seminary inherited from Old Princeton. As George M. Marsden observed in his history of Fuller Seminary, the first generation of evangelical scholars had a zeal for scholarship that owed to the influences of Calvin and Augustine, but, most notably, they had remained “vigorous in Princeton Seminary and Machen’s intellectual fundamentalism” (*Reforming Fundamentalism*, 51).

A Distinct Identity

Because of these affinities in the world of conservative Protestantism—

that is, the churches and networks that perceived the mainline Protestantism to be unreliable (or worse)—Orthodox Presbyterians needed to decide whether to join interdenominational organizations like the NAE. If “evangelical” simply meant “being a conservative, Bible-believing Protestant,” who were Orthodox Presbyterians, with a church membership of under ten thousand, to be choosy? Yet, the OPC did refuse to join the NAE, but not necessarily out of feeling superior. Rather, Reformed orthodoxy as summarized in the Confessions and Catechisms posed a barrier to joining evangelicals in various evangelistic, missions, and educational endeavors. Because the NAE had a number of member denominations that were clearly Arminian in theology, Orthodox Presbyterians thought the better part of wisdom, not to mention of integrity, was to remain separate from organizations that defined evangelicalism as a broad alliance of conservatives who were not liberal.

Objections to evangelical alliances went beyond Calvinism versus Arminianism. The question of liberalism in the mainline Presbyterian Church, the battles that Machen and other conservatives had waged against modernist compromises, and the sordid church politics played to rid the PCUSA first of Princeton Seminary’s conservatism and then of Machen’s persistent efforts to shed light on the liberal drift of the denomination’s agencies, would not permit some Orthodox Presbyterians to jump on the evangelical bandwagon. For E. J. Young, for instance, the inspiration for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was sufficiently distinct from that of the evangelical movement for him to decline a position on the editorial board of *Christianity Today*. As he explained to Carl Henry, the presence of ministers from the PCUSA on the new magazine’s masthead was objectionable. By virtue of their ongoing standing in the mainline denomination, they were being negligent of their “most solemn”

ordination vows that required officers to “defend the peace and purity of the church,” no matter what the opposition.

When *Fighting the Good Fight* appeared in 1995, memories of these earlier debates and decisions seem to have faded into the background for some who had grown up in the OPC. Also in the background was disappointment over the failure of Joining and Receiving with the PCA. In the foreground was a sense of the culture wars in the United States. Pervasive moral relativism called for alliances that might give conservative Protestants a bigger voice in national debates than a tiny denomination like the OPC could marshal on the strength of its Presbyterian convictions. *Fighting the Good Fight* had appeared just a year after the first initiative of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” an alliance led by Richard John Neuhaus and Chuck Colson and forged to promote a common set of conservative religious and cultural convictions. No one in the OPC advocated cooperation religiously with Roman Catholics. But at least, some assumed, Orthodox Presbyterians could find common cause with other conservative Protestants who of course went by the name “evangelical.” Critics of the book, which featured the Reformed (and polemical) character of the OPC, took issue with an interpretation that seemed to celebrate an isolationist, even sectarian, understanding of Reformed Protestantism. Those critics could well argue on the basis of recent scholarship on evangelicalism by George M. Marsden and Mark A. Noll that much of born-again Protestant history was Calvinist. By implication, Orthodox Presbyterians could enter the network of evangelicalism, let their Reformed convictions be heard, and recover the Calvinistic side of evangelicalism stretching back to Jonathan Edwards and the Puritans.

The Lure of Breadth and Numbers

Questions about definitions aside, a feeling of inferiority because of small church membership has always been a factor among American Protestant communions that do not readily find

a home in the Protestant mainline (whether liberal or evangelical). In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, German Lutherans and German and Dutch Reformed saw the direction in which evangelicalism was heading under the influence of Charles Finney and the moral reform agencies of the Second (so-called) Great Awakening and steered clear of involvement in those endeavors. The reason was that the awakenings and related organizations were indifferent to matters of doctrine, worship, and church polity. As nineteenth-century evangelicalism formed a big tent—running from low-church Episcopalians and Methodists to Baptists and Congregationalists (and Presbyterians)—Lutherans and Reformed saw evangelical breadth as a threat to the depth of witness and ministry won through the struggles of Reformation and post-Reformation church history. Some American Presbyterians, namely Old School, also worried about evangelicalism swallowing up Presbyterian convictions and remained on the borders of pan-denominational evangelicalism even while supplying some of the most explicit criticism of lowest-common denominator Protestantism.

The lure of breadth and numbers increased during the last decades of the nineteenth century as the interdenominational cooperation of the 1840s turned into the ecumenical movement and the Social Gospel. From 1870 on, the moral reform tenor of earlier evangelicalism provided inspiration for ecumenical agencies such as the Federal Council of Churches (1908). These cooperative Protestant endeavors explicitly embraced ideas of preserving a Christian America as a way to protect the nation from alien religious groups like Roman Catholics and Mormons. Part of the logic was that Protestant denominations on their own could not be as effective as Protestants pooling their resources in larger, national agencies. This ecumenical movement culminated in the 1920 plan to create a United Protestant Church of America—a plan that failed for lack of support, even though Canadian Protestants were suc-

cessful when Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans formed the United Church of Canada (1925).

Many Orthodox Presbyterians may be surprised to know that the seeds of their communion are Machen’s discovery of these ecumenical plans at the 1920 General Assembly of the PCUSA and his efforts to defeat the plan for union. That opposition led to arguments against liberal theology and battles over denominational agencies that eventually in 1936 produced the OPC as a communion dedicated to maintaining a Presbyterian witness over against cooperative endeavors that inherently weakened such convictions. The result, of course, was a small denomination with few resources to sustain a Presbyterian communion. The lack of social, institutional, and financial capital was one reason to join other conservatives—the evangelicals—and cooperate in education, publishing, chaplaincy, and missions. When Paul Woolley tried to calm fears in 1944 about the OPC’s size by contrasting a church that could either have a “growing revival” of the Reformed faith or have “many members,” “much money,” and be in newspaper headlines, he was obviously aware of how insignificant the OPC seemed (and maybe was). What he likely missed was the question of how hard it was to go it alone. (Of course, the Christian Reformed Church, one of those ethnic Protestant communions ambivalent about evangelicalism—some of the Dutch called it “Methodism” for its methodical manner—supplied the OPC with great aid through personnel [i.e., Westminster Theological Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til] and institutional resources [e.g., Calvin College as a home for Orthodox Presbyterians].)

Whither the Ones Who Stayed?

The need for allies and resources is partly the background for conservative Presbyterians who did not follow Machen but remained in the PCUSA. The recent publication of *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries:*

The Presbyterian Story in America (by Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart) is indicative of the plight faced by those on the conservative side of the Presbyterian controversy who stayed in the church. The book is odd by Orthodox Presbyterian standards (see “One More Time: If Presbyterians Are Evangelical, Why Aren’t Evangelicals Presbyterian? A Review Article,” *Ordained Servant*, Oct. 2022) because the authors give more attention to Harold John Ockenga, who was Presbyterian for about one at bat, than to Machen, a lifelong Presbyterian. The authors do not even mention *Christianity and Liberalism*. This could be the consequence of not wanting to admit that the conservatives who left the PCUSA had a point. More likely, it reflects where evangelicals in the mainline church found comfort in a world dominated by either modernist or neo-orthodox theology (such that doctrine actually mattered). Conservative pastors and teachers in the PCUSA who needed support and assistance (fellowship and intellectual agreement) would have had trouble looking to Westminster Seminary’s faculty—it might mean leaving the church. A better source, one less threatening to claims that the PCUSA was a healthy communion, was to cultivate scholars who taught at evangelical seminaries like Fuller and Gordon-Conwell.

Aligning with evangelicals was not merely a question of numbers, though evangelical institutions could marshal more resources than small places like Westminster because evangelical constituencies were (and remain) bigger than Presbyterian ones. As the authors of *Reformed and Evangelical* assert, “It is a simple matter of fact that myriads of evangelical Christians have called themselves Presbyterians, and as many Presbyterians have called themselves evangelicals!” Presbyterians looking to evangelicalism as opposed to a small denomination was also a way to identify with a Protestantism wider than the Westminster Confession, church

polity, and the Directory for Public Worship. For these authors, biblical authority, cultivating spiritual awakenings (i.e., revivals), sending out foreign missionaries, and cultural transformation have been hallmarks of “Presbyterians as evangelicals.” The authors also include “theological seriousness,” though they would likely concede that Presbyterians have been more so than evangelicals (think Charles Finney or Billy Graham). To back this observation up, the authors point to the influence that Princeton Seminary had on generations of American Protestants. “Presbyterian thinkers and biblical scholars at Princeton and beyond earned the trust of Christians in American and elsewhere,” they write. The words “and beyond” are key because, in addition to Hodge and Warfield, they add the Protestant modernist who taught at Union Theological Seminary, William Adams Brown. Blurring lines and even rewriting history happens when you combine Presbyterianism with evangelicalism.

A Grand Faith

Feeling small and marginal can be part of the motivation for finding a home within evangelicalism. On the other hand, few evangelicals, from Pentecostals to Baptists, are going to resonate with Machen’s quip at the end of his life, “Isn’t the Reformed faith grand?” He was thinking, of course, not about numbers, since the OPC at the beginning of 1937 was tiny (about five thousand members). Machen was considering Christ’s work of redemption and the clarity with which Reformed theologians and churchmen had interpreted and defended the gospel and the importance of church polity for nurturing faithful witness.

But he could have also had in mind, as Orthodox Presbyterians still can, the many communions in the world of Reformed Protestantism. That branch of Protestantism is a many-splendored thing. Presbyterianism itself has a rich heritage that ranges from England and Scotland to Ireland and Canada, from

Thomas Cartwright and Andrew Melville to Samuel Rutherford and Henry Cooke. Beyond Presbyterianism, the French, Swiss, German, and Dutch Reformed communions also comprise vigorous and learned expressions of the Reformed faith.

Orthodox Presbyterians know this better than many other American Presbyterian communions, if only because of the strong ties between the OPC and Dutch-American Reformed churches. The recent publication of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* with the United Reformed Churches attests to the OPC’s historic ecumenism (though not in flashy ways). If Presbyterians prefer to align with evangelicalism, a branch of Protestantism not known for its commitment to Reformed theology, reverent worship, or rigorous church polity, it could be that they have lost sight of how rich, old, varied, and wide the Reformed tradition is.

This does not mean that evangelicalism is a corruption that Presbyterians need to avoid (though certainly some evangelicals would qualify as such). It does, however, remind Presbyterians that the places where people will understand and support convictions about catechesis, keeping the Lord’s Day holy, and the need for oversight through elders and assemblies are among Reformed and Presbyterian believers.

For a Presbyterian to be an evangelical is a little like immigrating to the United States from Geneva. The new arrival to America will have to speak English, learn American customs, and obey state and federal laws. She may well hold on to certain authors, recipes, decorations, and personal ties to the old world. But the culture and practices of Geneva will not make much sense to her American neighbors or coworkers. Presbyterians more often than not experience a similar form of dislocation among evangelicals, for which numbers cannot compensate. □

The author is an OP elder and professor of history at Hillsdale College.

REFORMED CONFESSIONALISM V. THE GENIUS THEOLOGIAN



J. V. FESKO // Forces of culture influence and shape our thoughts. In turn, what forces shape evangelicalism and the Reformed faith? Two different forces have shaped each theological movement: the Romantic idea of the genius on one end of the spectrum and the doctrine of the church on the other.

The two forces produce very different outcomes—in evangelical churches, the genius theologian looms large as the one who molds a theological movement. Reformed churches, on the other hand, have a commitment to a scripturally subordinated confessional authority, or confessionalism, that shapes the church. Herein lies a significant difference between evangelicalism and the Reformed faith. When we understand these different shaping forces, we can seek to pursue the path of confessionalism rather than that of a genius theologian. In confessionalism, a person commits to a corporate confession of faith written by the church throughout the ages, whereas in the genius theologian approach, a lone individual creates a school of thought that people try to emulate and replicate. In what follows, I explain the origins and nature of the genius theologian and contrast it with the confessional approach of the Reformed churches. Realizing Reformed churches are liable to fall into genius theologian mode, I conclude by spelling out the dangers of this pitfall.

The Romantic Idea of the Genius

Noted historian of philosophy Isaiah Berlin observed that Romantic philosophers of the eighteenth century shaped modern culture in ways that many people forget or are unaware of. Were we able to transport ourselves back to the sixteenth century and ask a Roman Catholic, “Factoring your disagreement with your Protestant foes, don’t you admire Protestants for their zeal, skill, and intellectual rigor with which they have carried out their program of reformation?” The Roman Catholic would respond, “No! They’re schismatics!” Berlin makes the point that admiring the *way* someone does something while ignoring *what* they’re doing is from the influence of Romanticism. In other words, *how* you do something is more important than *what* you do, according to Romanticism. This illustrates its nature, a philosophical movement that encouraged people to prioritize feelings over intellect. One of the thrusts of Romantic philosophy was the creation of the idea of the genius.

Under the sway of emotion, French *philosophe* Denis Diderot claimed that the genius was an artist, a rule breaker, one who transcends the bounds of civilized man to blaze his own path. In his nineteenth-century *Essay on Original Genius*, Scottish Presbyterian William Duff argued that the indispensable characteristic of genius is an unrestrained imagination because this is what makes the genius unique and creative. This sets the stage for the Romantic influence on evangelicalism and the genius theologian.

The multi-branched tree of evangelicalism has no root in a single theological confession but in a coterie of theologians. Evangelicals typically look to big names as the lodestars for their understanding of the Christian faith. People are drawn to the genius and creativity of a theologian or pastor based upon their own interests. Are you interested in Christian Hedonism? Then you turn to John Piper. Are you trying to live your best life now? Then Joel Osteen is your genius. Do you believe that all theology is eschatology? Then

Wolfgang Pannenberg is your instructor. Are you concerned about having a bombastic voice in the culture wars? Then Doug Wilson is your cup of tea.

People herald these so-called geniuses for their insight, their creativity, and the unique way they present the doctrines of Scripture. The problem is, apart from a confessional anchor, the individual theologian or pastor becomes the bar of doctrinal orthodoxy. People measure doctrinal veracity by the unique fingerprints of the genius. The degree to which one emulates the genius is the degree of his success. The degree to which churches echo the genius's doctrinal distinctives is the degree to which they are faithful to Scripture. The problem with such an ethos is that nowhere in Scripture do we ever see the church looking to one person to define belief unless, of course, that one person is Jesus Christ. Under the powerful influences and culture-shaping powers of Romanticism, large portions of evangelicalism allow celebrity to shape their doctrinal convictions, rather than the church.

The Doctrine of the Church

Contrary to the celebrity culture of evangelicalism, Reformed churches have an ecclesial root in Scripture and confession. Two important caveats are necessary. First, all Reformed churches recognize that their confessions and catechisms are subordinate to the authority of Scripture (e.g., WCF 1.10). Second, as a group, evangelicals are committed to the authority of Scripture, but celebrity culture filters the Bible's voice through a cacophony of different individuals rather than the unified voice of the church. All Christians (at their best) look first and foremost to Scripture, but when they seek guidance, evangelicals typically look to their geniuses, whereas Reformed and confessional Christians, ideally, look to the church. The current cadre of confessions were typically written by and adopted by church bodies. The Reformed confessions have roots that reach back to the ecumenical councils in the fourth

and fifth centuries (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon). Despite the popularity of the term *Calvinism*, initially a term of derision and effort to tag the Reformation as sectarian, Reformed churches have no lodestar theologian but instead a body of confessions. In their great wisdom, our forebears recognized that no one person should shape the church's doctrine, but that only the church throughout the ages guides us as we seek to understand the Bible's teachings.



Despite the popularity of the term Calvinism, Reformed churches have no lodestar theologian.

A Potential Pitfall for Reformed Churches

As committed as the Reformed churches are to their confessions, the siren call of culture and theological genius beckons us away from our anchor. I suspect we see evangelicals touting their geniuses, and, with good reason, we want to showcase our own: Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, Ursinus, Olevianus, Turretin, à Brakel, Witsius, Owen, Boston, the Hodges, Warfield, Machen, Bavinck, Kuyper, Murray, Van Til, and the like. There are common and unique features in the theologies of all these men. But we should recognize that what binds these theologians is not their theological distinctives but their commitment to Scripture and confession. If we begin to take their unique features and make their distinctives the mark of what it means to be Reformed, then we fall

into the pitfall of theological genius—defining doctrine by the cult of personality rather than through the church's careful and prayerful deliberation on Scripture in dialogue with the church throughout the ages.

Many are aware of Calvin's minority view regarding the precise nature of how to explain the Son's deity in relation to the Father, and yet some have claimed that Calvin's view is what makes one truly Reformed. Nevertheless, aware of Calvin's views, the Westminster divines were silent regarding his formulation. The Westminster Assembly decided that the Reformed faith should not be defined so narrowly as to make Calvin's minority position normative. His position is within the bounds of the Reformed confessions, but they do not make it the sole mark of trinitarian orthodoxy. Exceeding the boundaries of our confession and trying to press the church into the mold of the individual will sideline the church and replace it with the genius theologian.

We can have our theological heroes and gravitate towards certain pastors and theologians. We can and should follow those whom we believe most clearly point us to Christ. However, through the work of the Spirit and Word of God, the theological spine holding the body of truth upright is the doctrine of the church. Apart from church and confession, people have nowhere to turn but to the biggest and brightest theological celebrities. If we make the theological genius's unique distinctives the hallmark of what it means to be Reformed, we are swimming in the stream of Enlightenment Romanticism and individualism. Individually, we are free to hold distinct theological positions, but when it comes to defining the church's corporate faith, our confessions define what it means to be truly Reformed. We must never allow, therefore, the genius theologian to displace the church and the role of its scripturally subordinated confession. □

The author is an OP minister and professor of systematic and historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary Jackson.

LEARNING FROM MARS HILL



JOHN R. MUETHER // A year ago, *Christianity Today* magazine ran a twelve-episode podcast on the “[Rise and Fall of Mars Hill](#),” the improbable story of Mark Driscoll and his Seattle church. It documented the rapid transformation of a small home-group Bible study into a fifteen-thousand-member megachurch (nearly half the

size of the OPC!), in one of America’s most secular cities, followed by its equally spectacular collapse, all in the space of less than two decades (1996–2014). Though I am not in the habit of podcast-listening, this series quickly gained my interest, not least because producer/narrator Mike Cosper, a former Mars Hill staff member, told the story so well. His extensive interviews included pastors, theologians, historians, sociologists, experts on abuse, and former members and staff of the church.

Pastor as Brand Image

Driscoll is not the first celebrity pastor, nor did he invent the megachurch. What makes him distinctive is that he is the first social media celebrity as a pastor, and this is the story of the creation and curation of a mediated image. His edgy style beguiled the church into accepting his many outlandish claims (did he really read a book a day?), and allowed him to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of church funds to game the system that registered him as a *New York Times* best-selling author.

Church members look back with

pain and regret at their uncritical participation in what they describe as the toxic culture of Mars Hill. But the podcast rightly notes that many beyond the church failed to exercise discernment, and some were equally willing to ride on his celebrity and profit from his coattails. The Acts 29 church-planting network quickly provided him funding and a prime leadership position. Evangelical publishing companies competed to get him under contract, uncritically committing his views to print. One prominent Reformed voice mourned the abuse-laden dysfunction of the church, a condition he was abetting by serving on an inattentive “off-site church advisory board” that was, to say the least, irregular. One former staff member, while ruing the platform the church created for Driscoll, still could not keep himself from recalling how “cool” it was to meet John Piper and Tim Keller on an elevator at an Acts 29 conference. The craving for celebrity dies hard.

The podcast’s accounts were certainly colorful. Driscoll threatened in a sermon to “go Old Testament” on his

critics (referring to Neh. 13:25). The wood-chipper was his occasional metaphor for church discipline (more Coen brothers than Pauline). Theologically, Driscoll embraced and then abandoned (four-point) Calvinism, which he had come to see as “garbage.” Episode five, details of which we shall spare readers, documents how, in Cosper’s words, “sexuality was at the core of the church’s identity and mission.”

Bonus episodes set the Mars Hill story in the broader context of American evangelicalism. One looks at Joshua Harris, the former wunderkind of Sovereign Grace Ministries who authored *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. After his parallel rise and fall as a Reformed celebrity, he is now a divorced agnostic. Cosper insightfully observes that “ex-evangelicals” like Harris remain evangelical in their missionary zeal and commitment to celebrity. Another episode takes a deeper look into toxic cultures by comparing Mars Hill Church with Indiana University basketball under coach Bobby Knight, the once acclaimed basketball genius. In both cases, money and power lead the mission astray; the

playbook is altered to support the leader in order to protect the institution.

Privileging Personality over Character

Some listeners have dismissed the podcast as a progressive evangelical hit-job on complementarianism that descends into tabloid journalism. But that judgment seems misplaced. The series is generally even-handed. A reference to Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Church acknowledges that misogyny can manifest itself also in egalitarian circles. Cospo repeatedly urges listeners against finger-pointing, advising instead that all look in the mirror to ask why these patterns of spiritual abuse recur: “Maybe we all killed Mars Hill.”

Still, Orthodox Presbyterian listeners may find this of little value except to fuel their evangelical celebrity schadenfreude. But this podcast will reward listening for more noble reasons. It prompts reflection on the state of contemporary American evangelicalism and the temptations that confront a church striving for faithfulness in our age. It is a reminder that churches need to consider more carefully the matter of sustainability and the problem of scale: at what point is a church simply too big to shepherd? Further, it points out how technology can misshape a community. Mark Driscoll quickly found himself discontent with merely pastoring a church, even a megachurch: the internet was his parish. Under these conditions, church leadership will limit its authority to controlling disaffected members while disregarding pastoral overreach. After all, Driscoll was the franchise. When the church’s mission becomes the success of his platform, it should come as no surprise to hear from the pulpit: “There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus. By God’s grace, it’ll be a mountain by the time we’re done. Either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus, but those are

the options. The bus ain’t gonna stop.”

The call of the pastor is no longer to be a faithful teacher and gentle shepherd; now he is the centerpiece of the show. And here Driscoll is not alone. Cospo adds that Driscoll “said things very loudly that are said quietly in all kinds of churches related to power and celebrity. At some point, I think the church needs to have a reckoning with its relationship to power and weakness.”

Mars Hill happens because we end up with the leaders we want when we privilege personality over character. American evangelicalism has created structures for church ministry that offer leaders

affirmation without accountability. In the last days of Mars Hill, friends urged Driscoll to find someone to whom he could be accountable. He responded that he could not possibly find the likes of John Piper a mentor, or anyone else who served a church smaller than Mars Hill. As arrogant as that may sound, one might understand Driscoll’s confusion at the rules suddenly changing. Within two years of resigning from Mars Hill, Mark Driscoll moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, where he launched a new church. He still retained many online followers, and much of his old messaging is now available on his new website.

Escaping Celebrityhood

Orthodox Presbyterians may be tempted to imagine that this can’t happen to us, because we have the polity that protects us from such ecclesiastical dysfunction. However, churches that draw that conclusion will render themselves even more vulnerable to the problems that beset Mars Hill. That is the warning given in Michael J. Kruger’s new book, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Crossway, 2022), which I would commend as a helpful companion to the podcast. Not written with Driscoll and Mars Hill particularly in mind, Kruger reminds us that spiritual abuse comes in

all church sizes and theologies. We may trust our “plurality of elders or higher levels of accountability,” he writes. “But these forms of government don’t magically solve the problem. Indeed, many of the abuse cases I’ve seen come from precisely these circles.” Pastors become heavy-handed tyrants, Kruger observes, and repeat the pattern of abusive behavior when they seek to protect their own power: “such fear of loss is idolatrous. It puts something else—in this case, our own glory, power, and success—above the good of God’s sheep and above the glory and honor of God himself.”

Is it possible to escape the idolatry of celebrityhood? In one episode, Andy Crouch commends the late Presbyterian pastor, Eugene Peterson, as a counterpart to Driscoll. Peterson’s popular paraphrase, *The Message*, established his celebrity status, but Crouch contended that Peterson wore it humbly, avoiding the limelight. He continued to pastor a small church before teaching at Regent College. As Peterson reflected on his calling, he could have been describing the Mars Hill Church when he wrote that “North American culture does not offer congenial conditions in which to live vocationally as a pastor.” It is a “way of life that is in ruins. The vocation of a pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs.”

Peterson set out to be a fierce voice of dissent, guarding “my vocation from these cultural pollutants so dangerously toxic to persons who want to follow Jesus” in a way of life “shaped by God and the Scriptures and prayer.”

As a mainline Presbyterian, Peterson may be as far from our tribe as Mark Driscoll. But I was gladdened to learn, in the past year, of three Orthodox Presbyterian ministers who have found Peterson’s books to be an encouragement for faithful perseverance in pastoral ministry. His memoir, *The Pastor*, would be a refreshing read after listening to “The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill.” □

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THE PRESENT CHALLENGES TO ORTHODOX PROTESTANTISM



CARL R. TRUEMAN // It is a hardy perennial of church history that every generation believes itself to be living in a time of terminal spiritual decline. Whether it is Luther in 1527 lamenting in his own inimitable style that the Reformation gospel had merely given people the excuse to live like “irrational pigs,” the Puritans

complaining of the empty formalism of establishment Anglicanism, or Baptists railing against the evils of alcohol and movies, the world—and the visible church—are always apparently on the verge of destruction. Yet, amazing to tell, the church is still here, people still believe the gospel, and Jesus still finds people who gather Sunday by Sunday to praise and honor his name.

Thus, when commissioned to write an article on the present challenges facing orthodox Protestantism, it is important to begin by acknowledging that God is still sovereign, that the promises of victory to the church are still sound, and that the temptation to despair is not new nor well-founded.

But if abject despair is not an option, it is still the case that a prudent reflection on the changes that are occurring in our world, and the particular and novel challenges they pose, is in order. The church of Christ will win. But that may not be our congregation or our denomination unless we act faithfully and wisely. And that requires a degree of understanding how the times are changing.

Private No Longer

Perhaps the single most important shift in our culture in the USA is one from where religious differences were essentially located in the private sphere and the public square was neutral, to one where religious differences are highly contested in the public sphere and the private square is rapidly vanishing.

The classic constitutional embodiment of the old world that is dying were Article VI, with its insistence that there be no religious test for public office, and the First Amendment, with its right to freedom of religion. Both clauses worked well at a time when there was a broad consensus on the morality needed to underpin society. This may not have been an explicitly Christian morality, but it broadly tracked with such. Murder, stealing, adultery, and homosexuality were all assumed to be wrong by most people, even if they had never read the Bible, read Kant on ethics, or wrestled with virtue theory. Thus, the things that distinguished religious people from the rest were not matters that made a practical difference to the smooth functioning

of society as a whole: one could either believe in or deny the Incarnation and resurrection, for example, but still be a good mailman, an effective shop owner, or a competent physician.

The challenge facing Christians today is that the moral consensus has collapsed. This means that issues that do distinguish Christians from the rest—beliefs about homosexuality and abortion, for example—are matters that are now contested in the public square. We might say that everything is now political. And that places huge pressure on the church of a kind not seen in the United States before, even during the struggles over slavery. How do you keep politics out of the pulpit where everything is political? What does the spiritual mission of the church look like in a time when Christians might be asked to attend an office celebration of the engagement of two gay coworkers? Or when somebody's employer decides they will no longer do business with a particular company that has adopted a pro-life stance? These are real questions that will affect more and more people—people who will want guidance and help

from the pulpit, from their elders, and from their friends at church.

Further, the loss of the private sphere, fueled in part by the politicization of previously private opinions and in part by the rise of social media and the notion of all of life as a subject for public performance, merely exacerbates this. Where once somebody's views on, say, transgenderism could be safely confined to the dinner table, now the cultural demand for the performance of public virtue—the inclusion, for example, of the rainbow flag or the black square on social media accounts—makes conscientious objection to such, or mere refusal to make the cheap identification between cost-free signals and real sacrificial virtues, look seditious and bigoted.

Temptation to Extreme Reaction

This is the first big challenge to the church: how does she pursue her spiritual task when the world has now decided that the implications of the spiritual strike at the very heart of the politics of the modern public square?

And this connects to the second big challenge. One of the major differences I notice as an immigrant to the USA is the speed with which the church believes it is losing its grip on society. There seems to be a deep-seated aspect to American Protestant culture that has assumed it owned the country. Certainly, Protestantism set the tone for American civic religion. Now that influence is disappearing at what many Christians consider to be a frightening rate of speed. Where Europe sloughed off Christianity over a period of many years—that slow, receding roar of the tide of the sea of faith, as Matthew Arnold described it—in America one might be forgiven for thinking it has taken a mere twenty years. Or at least it seems that way.

At such a time, the temptation to extreme reaction can be almost overwhelming. The rise of racism and segregationist philosophies and attitudes on the left and the right are a case in point. Anger and recrimination now characterize much on the web that claims the name of Christian. The recent contro-

versy over Christian nationalism and Kinism, sparked by the exposé of the headmaster of a Christian school as a true, self-conscious white supremacist is a case in point. Christian advocacy of critical race theory is another. Numerous things tie the two phenomena together but perhaps most significant is the lack of any note of forgiveness that typically characterizes these things. Identity politics demands repentance but doesn't do forgiveness, nor grace. As such it is not an option for Christians, whether on the left or the right.

Both of these phenomena—the fact that Christian morality is now highly contested in the public at almost every point, and the temptations presented by the rapid decline of Christian influence and the rise of polarized identity politics—also share one other thing in common: at root, they reflect society's confusion or lack of consensus about what it means to be human. Yes, we all rolled our eyes at Justice Jackson's inability to answer the question, What is a woman? But she is hardly to blame. Her confusion arises out of a deeper confusion that permeates our culture, a confusion over what it means to be human.

Given all this, the orthodox Protestantism of the future will be more political, not in the sense that its message has intrinsically changed but in the sense that that message—of what it means to be human—now stands at the heart of what our culture has decided is political. Preaching that is faithful will thus at least be vulnerable to accusations of being political.

This will have various consequences. We can expect the church to be increasingly and explicitly decried and despised. We can expect it to be harder to be a Christian in public because it will not really be possible to be a Christian merely in private—not necessarily that we will be persecuted, but that we will be mocked and reviled. It is one thing to affirm the resurrection in a world that regards that as a silly belief held by an otherwise harmless and genial person. To reject the chaotic anthropology of our culture, whether we are talking

sexuality, gender, or race, is to become the object of accusations of bigotry, evil, and even, in our psychologized world, violence. It will also require discipline within our own ranks: the church of Christ should have no place for those advocating sexual immorality, race-baiting on the right or the left, or gender confusion. And we cannot assume that none of these things are happening, or will happen, in our own ranks in the OPC. Extreme and polarized political times make it all too easy to excuse sinful and divisive attitudes. And we are not immune to that merely through our adherence to the Westminster standards and presbyterian polity.

This also means that the exile/pilgrim nature of the church will become much clearer. Protestants may have thought that they owned the USA, but they never did. The time in which we live is thus apocalyptic—not merely in the popular sense of catastrophe and chaos but also in the technical sense of unveiling or revealing. What we see becoming real before us is a truth that has been buried for generations under the outward success and prosperity of the American experiment: the church's home is not in this world but in the next.

In the meantime, however, that does not mean she can focus exclusively on the next. If she is also the in-breaking of the kingdom, then her people need to know how to behave as servants of the king here and now—with respect to the office celebration of a gay marriage, the company's policy on abortion, the advocacy by the local school board of this teaching or that. In short, teaching our people to be exiles involves teaching them how to live in the here and now in light of the hereafter. That has always been the church's task. Today in America it is perhaps more complicated and difficult than for many generations. Praise God, then, for his promises, his unchanging nature, and the power of his grace. □

The author is an OP minister and professor at Grove City College.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

GETTING SHORT-TERM MISSIONS IN MOTION

// ALLISON L. HILL



A 2019 short-term missions team in Karamoja, Uganda

You may not have even realized it, but OPC Short-Term Missions has been a victim of Newton's first law of motion. Short-Term Missions was in motion and gaining momentum until it met the tenacious force of COVID-19 in early 2020. For three years now, it has come close to a halt. Now the obstacle has been removed, but many would-be travelers may find themselves standing still, forgetting about the winter planning, forgoing the spring preparation, and losing the excitement about short-term missions. Why build up momentum again?

Since 2010, the OPC has been sending teams across the country and around the world to take part in short-term mission trips with the goal of assisting churches and mission fields as well as encouraging churches to grow in service. In 2017, OPC Short-Term Missions reached a peak with 411 individuals from 106 churches serving across twelve fields, both foreign and domestic. The years 2018–2019 saw only a slight decrease in participation. Not only were various congregations across the United States engaging in service to one another through domestic trips, they were also serving alongside one another around the world. There was great anticipation leading into the year 2020.

The Ball Stopped Rolling

As with just about everything else in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic postponed or canceled many trips in spring 2020, just as short-term teams were being formed. At first, issues arose as international fields reported that their governments were prohibiting entry because of what was then termed an epidemic. Soon, however, even domestic trips were canceled because of state-to-state border restrictions.

As 2021 drew near, it became apparent that, due to remaining widespread travel restrictions across the globe, organizing international trips would once again be near impos-

sible. While a select few domestic trips remained available, short-term missions was, for the most part, curbed for yet another year. In 2022, there was renewed hope, but still many (particularly international) plans seemed to stagnate due to pandemic concerns.

A Benefit to the Mission Fields

OPC mission fields have been managing without the assistance of STM teams for the past three years. What conclusions should we draw—are the teams superfluous?

Not according to Benjamin Hopp, OPC missionary to Haiti since 2007, who expressed the blessing short-term teams provided and how specialized short-term teams were a great asset to the mission work: “construction teams, pastors, and people who enabled us to host bigger programs like vacation Bible school were a gift.”

Since 2020, not only have individuals been unable to participate in short-term missions, but churches and mission fields have also lost the opportunities to introduce their



OP missionary Mark Richline (left) with OP pastor and short-term mission team member Mike Dengerink in 2017

mission and enjoy the fellowship and love from their denomination. Whether it is realized or not, members have likely become more disconnected from OP mission fields, and those on the field sense it.

“Over the years of ministry in Haiti, the payoff from hosting over one hundred teams has proven to be a benefit to the ministry and to me personally,” Hopp explained. “Our family has gained much from the connection with churches in the United States, from interactions between visitors and our children to the realization that there are many people praying for and with us. We were particularly thankful to be able to pray with groups of people in our native language. These are all things we have lost over the last three years.” (Unfortunately, the political turbulence in Haiti has removed any possibility of short-term missions there at this time. Please continue to pray with us for the safety of believers in Haiti and peace for their country.)

A Benefit to the Short-Term Missionaries

Hopp then identified a second, more implicit, benefit of short-term missions. He believes that although it is helpful to have people willing to advance the ministry, it is equally exciting to see those individuals interact with the work of the mission and see the Lord grow and strengthen *their* faith and character.

Joanna Grove was once a “short-termer” herself, serving four weeks in Asia before traveling to Uganda to serve the OP Uganda Mission in a long-term capacity. She shares how those trips influenced her and brought her to where she is now: “Participating in short-term missions allowed me to see that living overseas wasn’t impossible for me! While overseas, I was struck by the privilege it is to serve the Lord in places where he is not as well known. It’s such a joy to share spiritual truths with people who have never heard them before!”

In Grove’s case, as well as that of several other long-term missionaries, what began as a time of individual development ultimately resulted in the commissioning of a new long-term missionary to the field. David Nakhla, OPC Short-Term Missions Coordinator, suggests that this may be one of the loftiest goals of the STM program— “that seeds would be planted in the hearts of future foreign missionaries, which are suddenly a rare commodity in the OPC.”

A Benefit to the Whole Church

Yet there is a third, very significant benefit of short-term mission trips: the relationships it enables between our own denomination’s local bodies and its mission works.

Christopher Verdick, long-term missionary to Uganda, states it aptly: “A wonderful goal of short-term missions is that those who participate would return to their home congregations with a wider vision for the worldwide church, a more substantive interest in missions, and a closer connection to a particular mission field that will result in more informed prayer and more thoughtful giving, which would ideally percolate into



A short-term missions team in Haiti in 2017

the whole congregation. This is why it is critical for not only teens and young adults to participate, but for congregations to prioritize sending pastors, elders, and deacons.”

Joanna Grove also pointed out that visiting missionaries on the field adds richness and fervency to one’s prayers. “When you visit and go home, it’s much easier to pray for the missionaries who remain on the field because they have become your friends, not just names and pictures. You gain a better understanding of how God is working in that place and a desire for it to continue. This inspires prayer,” she said.

The relationships fostered on the field become the causeway for informed prayer, invested interest, and indwelling excitement in local congregations for the work being done around the world.

Reviving Short-Term Missions

In many ways, short-term missions is vital to the health and connectivity of the whole church. It is the link between the local church and the foreign field. It is a means of informing the prayers of the saints in support of those around the world. It is an experience of education and exposure for the young people of the church. And yet, it is in need of reviving.

“Short-term missions may be more important now than it has ever been,” reflected David Nakhla. “It seems that a significant impact of the recent pandemic is that it has turned us inward. Could it be that we’ve bought the lie that our own personal safety is the most important thing? Have we lost sight of the Great Commission?”

The structure is in place, and the plans are in motion. OPC Short-Term Missions is beginning to roll forward, but we need the support of the church. Pray with us that the Lord would use OPC Short-Term Missions in 2023 to rekindle our minds and hearts to missions once again. Then join us in this mission by visiting a field, being a blessing, and receiving a blessing. Look through OPC short-term opportunities at www.opcstm.org/opportunity/.

The author is administrative assistant for Short-Term Missions.

WHY MISSIONS? PART 2

// DOUGLAS B. CLAWSON



Children in Karamoja watching Jed Homan and Christopher Verdick repair a water pump

In *“Why Missions? Part 1,”* the author argued that missions is glorifying God by doing what Jesus has commanded us to do and by speaking the words that Jesus has given us to speak.

Missions is far more than an item on a checklist, given as an assignment to the church or to a disciple, like this:

- ✓ Worship service
- ✓ Sunday school
- ✓ Diaconal assistance
- ✓ Neighborhood outreach
- ✓ Missions

Rather, having been united to Jesus, we are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). It isn't simply that we are to *live* as if we are no longer part of this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2). It is in fact, that we *are* no longer part of this world. Jesus says not once, but twice, that we aren't part of this world in his prayer to the Father (John 17:14, 16). We are not from here any longer. United to Christ, we have died to this world (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 6:14), have been raised with him, and have been seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Now, we as a body and its members are sent by Jesus into this world. We have been sent on a mission given to us by him. That mission is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Let us consider three aspects of your missionary life.

Your Missionary Life: Glorifying God in Everything

We glorify the Father by bearing much fruit, fruit that is seen in our keeping of Jesus's commandments (John 15:8–14). Since glorifying God is something that we are to do in everything, from the use of the gifts we have been given (1 Pet. 4:10–11) to our eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31), then unlike the worship service, Sunday school, diaconal assistance and neighborhood outreach, which each have their time and

place, there is no time and there is no place where we are “off mission.” There is no time when we are not seeking to glorify God. There is no place where we are not seeking to glorify God. There is no activity in which we are not seeking to glorify God.

As we read in *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* by J. H. Bavinck (P&R, 1960):

The work of Missions is too broad and too all-inclusive to be limited to the actions of the church in its institutional form. Missionary activity takes place in life in its entirety, including both the organized and the unorganized activity of believers. (68)

Of course, this is not an easy perspective for us to maintain. Sometimes we like to think of ourselves as only being on-duty for set periods of time. Or we ask: “When am I going to get some ‘me time?’” While “me time” for the weary mother of small children may mean having a few minutes when she doesn't have to share the room with a toddler, that is very distinct from the desire of most of us at our worst moments, when “me time” is an opportunity to sin. And it is in the very context of writing to believers who are considering what they may and may not do in their Christian lives that Paul writes “Flee from sexual immorality. . . . You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

Your Missionary Life: Glorifying God in the Details

While glorifying God means that there are some activities that I may not do, it also means that the way that I do “right” activities is to also glorify God. We glorify God in the doing, but only when the doing is done in a way that also glorifies God. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove moun-

tains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Like the portrayal we find in the life of Israel that was delivered from its service to Pharaoh into service to the Lord (Exodus 4:23), the Scriptures portray us as those who have been delivered from our former service to sin, the flesh, and the devil, into the service of Christ. In his service, we are given everything we need to serve our Savior, God, and King (John 3:27; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 4:7; James 1:17; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). The gifts we have been given, the knowledge we have, our body, the abilities that have been developed in us, our words, our thoughts, our actions, the way that we do something, and our attitude, are all part of what we use in our mission from Christ. Everything is to be used to glorify God.

While there may not be a break from our being on the mission for which Christ has sent us into this world, and while there should not be a break from our glorifying and enjoying God, understanding *that* everything in our life is to be taken up with glorifying God does not help us to determine the details of *how* we are to glorify God in all that we do. There have always been those (including church fathers who gave instructions on appropriate outer garments, footwear, and hair dye) who have been eager to define what glorifies God and what does not for the rest of Christ's kingdom. But the same Scriptures that warn us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12–13), also ask us, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

Jesus was not only glorifying the Father when he taught, healed, and cast out demons, he was glorifying the Father when he went to a quiet place to pray, when he rested in the boat, and when he ate with Pharisees on the one hand or with tax collectors and sinners on the other.

Our being a missionary, on the mission for which Jesus has sent us into the world, encompasses everything from the time of our new birth to the time of our being taken "off the field" of this world. Glorifying God is something that we are doing in everything that we do and with everything that we say both in specific tasks and in nonspecific tasks, like travel, rest, and eating. We are never off duty as missionaries sent by Jesus into this world because there is never a time when we are not seeking to glorify God.

Your Missionary Life: Becoming a Better Missionary and Helping Others to be Better Missionaries

The work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace makes us better disciples. It is a work that Christ will bring to perfect completion in the resurrection (Phil. 1:6; 2:12–13; 1 Thess. 5:23–24). It is a work that he does in us but also through us as he uses us to teach others to do the things that Jesus has commanded. Teaching is not only through instruction; it is also done by our setting an example.

Disciples grow in understanding through the knowledge and wisdom given to them by the Spirit and received through biblical instruction. That understanding is also observed in the godly example of other believers, and lived through daily trials (including the sins, which are committed in thought, word,

and deed daily), joys, and suffering. In this way, the Spirit works to sanctify them to do and speak what Jesus has commanded, bearing the fruit that brings glory to the Father.

Believers are engaged in missionary activity every day, both as its object and as part of the disciple-making process. Mothers and fathers are engaged in missions when they are making disciples through the instruction and the example they give to their children. Believing employees are engaged in missions and disciple-making not only as they may have occasion to speak of Christ but also as they live according to Christ's commandments in being hardworking, honest, caring, and just.

You may, by the grace of God, live in and be citizens of a nation where you can enjoy everyday comfort and safety, but you are here only because Christ has sent you to be here. He was not of this world and neither now are you. He was sent from the glory of heaven to live in this world and share in all the impoverishments that are the result of sin. Likewise, you have been sent into a world from the glory of heaven to live and share in all the impoverishments that come from sin. To go from one place to another in this world is simply a matter of going from one part of the world of which you are not a citizen to another part of the world of which you are not a citizen.

Therefore, when we more particularly speak about the making of disciples (including teaching them to do all that Jesus has commanded), we are not talking about an extra activity. It isn't something you add to what you are already doing. It is part of the purpose or chief end of the church. It is part of your glorifying God and teaching others to glorify God. It is your mission.

The author is general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions.

"You may, by the grace of God, live in and be citizens of a nation where you can enjoy everyday comfort and safety, but you are here only because Christ has sent you to be here. He was not of this world and neither now are you."

UNTO THE CITY, BY THE CROSS, FOR GOD'S GLORY

// NATHAN P. STROM



A worship service at Breakwater Church

I hope you will indulge me for a moment as I complain. I promise to make it pious. My task is to update you on the Lord's work that has brought about Breakwater Church, a mission work in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Yet the space constraints drive my mind to the words of Hebrews 11:32—"time would fail to tell of. . . ." Time would fail to tell of the work done by a past generation in Oostburg and Cedar Grove who left established churches and facilities to build new ones during the Great Depression and as World War II loomed. Time would fail to tell of the leadership and evangelistic work done by OP ministers Donald Stanton and Jim Bosgraf. Time will only permit me to tell you that the legacy of the past has been a mighty gift from the Lord.

The Soil Tilled

The Lord began to till the soil for a new mission work by giving the congregation of Bethel OPC in Oostburg, Wisconsin, a vision for home missions. Pastor David Veldhorst returned to Bethel OPC as senior pastor with a dual emphasis in his ministry—discipleship and evangelism. Bethel's mission statement is to reach the lost and disciple the found. Pastor Veldhorst has capably demonstrated to us all that love of learning and love of the lost belong together. If we purport to be mature disciples and we do not actively seek the lost, then something is misfiring. We do not yet understand as well as we think we do.

In 2019, Veldhorst contacted me to see if I would consider becoming the associate pastor at Bethel. He mentioned that the session had a desire to plant a church

but that no concrete plans had been made. The combination of pastor Veldhorst's vision, the mature congregation's gifts and graces, and a stated commitment to the work of church planting, made the opportunity irresistible. Then, six months into my time in Oostburg, a global pandemic hit and tabled any talks of church planting. We had stalled.

The following May, however, Al Tricarico visited our session. He helped us to identify questions we should be asking about where to plant a church. "Where is there a need?" and "Where are you seeing fruit?" he encouraged us to ask. While I wondered if the pandemic had killed the commitment or motivation, God was quietly bringing members to Bethel who lived in or around the city of Sheboygan. These members also had passion for outreach and a desire to reach their neighbors. God was preparing the way.

Our Mission and Our Vision

The congregation of Bethel voted in fall 2021 to send me and a core group to plant a church in Sheboygan. My call would be changed from associate pastor to evangelist in May, and the group planned to begin worship services in June. In the meantime, congregation members prayerfully considered whether they should participate in the core group. God stirred the hearts of forty-five people, comprising ten families, to serve in the core group of Breakwater Church.

Our marching orders were becoming clear, eventually formalized into a mission—*Unto the City, by the Cross, for God's Glory*. Each phrase is key.

Unto the City: Particularity puts muscle on the skeleton of biblical missions. When asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded by telling a story about particular people



At a fall fellowship meal

and particular cultures. The city of Sheboygan is the field God has given our small flock. The implied verb is conspicuous by its absence. We must *go!* Missions requires a gentle aggression or invasiveness. Practically, this means spending time in the city, intentionally choosing to patronize businesses and frequent “third places” in the city. It means politely initiating conversations and starting new friendships.

By the Cross: The cross is not only our message, it is also our method. The message of the cross can be emptied of its power if its appeal is couched in terms of worldly significance or wisdom (1 Cor 1:17). This emptying can have an irreligious form—as in the crass consumerism in Corinth—or it can have a religious form—as in the zealous and empty religiosity of the Pharisees. To quote Martin Luther, “That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.” And also, “He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross” (Heidelberg Disputation Thesis 22, 20). The cross, in all of its moral excellence and beauty, becomes the lens through which we view ourselves and others. Practically, we publicly rejoice in God’s crucifying our most precious religious achievements, and we glory in God’s exalting us in light of our most embarrassing failures (James 1:9–10).

For God’s Glory: As fuel for the work, Breakwater Church aims to keep central the promise that we know Christ best when we share in the sufferings of his mission (Phil. 3:10). This was Paul’s motivation and purpose in considering his achievements—religious and otherwise—as rubbish. It must be ours too if we are to run our course well. God is all the more glorious because he saves sinners like us. To truly exist for God’s glory alone, we must be a church who embraces our cross daily. This is our mission.

What’s our vision? While we have a desire to see all kinds of people reached, we give special attention to two groups. We aim to reach the unchurched and to reclaim the de-churched. Many people assume they understand the Christian message—Jesus died on a cross to save sinners. Simple enough. But Jesus pressed people beyond glib statements of fact. He told parables about ungrateful servants, jealous older brothers, and righteous “sinners” like a Samaritan. The fastest growing religious group in America is the “religious nones.” Asked what their religion is, they respond, “None.” They have been to church, heard the story of Jesus, and walked away. Why? Because they missed the most obvious truth about the church: it is the gospel made visible. The mess of the church is part of God’s design. We aim to



At a block party hosted by Breakwater Church

reach those disillusioned with church, or who have never given church a chance, because in their disillusionment, they aren’t far from the kingdom. Disappointed with the achievements of human religion, they are close to discovering the beauty of biblical religion. The fields really are white for the harvest.

What Comes Next?

Breakwater Church began worship services in June, and God has been gracious to us. Meeting in a park fieldhouse has been an unexpected blessing—with many friends playing in the park during our worship service and occasionally joining our fellowship meals. After several block parties and one church picnic, we have seen our numbers grow modestly. Six adults attended our recent membership course. We have seen a steady stream of visitors and newcomers. Our older-sister congregation in Sheboygan has lived up to her namesake—Grace—in showing us prayer-filled hospitality with occasional visits to encourage us. We are overwhelmed by God’s kindness to us.

We hope to close on a permanent meeting location soon. The building is located in King’s Park neighborhood and was previously occupied by a Boys & Girls Club. It comes with built-in relational capital. It is hard to contain our excitement about the opportunity to identify with and serve the neighbors around us. This is one of the least-churched parts of our city. There is so much potential that the greatest difficulty will be staying disciplined and not starting too much too soon.

As I began, so now I end. Time has run out too soon and failed to tell of Mickey, the man whose loneliness has been alleviated by the story of Christ and by a band of sinners, our church, singing in the park next to his house. It has failed to tell of the beginning of small groups and disciples growing in love for one another after the pattern of Acts. Thank God that we will have eternity to rehearse the working of his grace. Please join us in praying that God would add to the number of saints rehearsing with us.

The author is a church planter in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by subscribing at CHMCE.org or by scanning this QR code.



A NEW PODCAST FOR ELDERS

// STEPHEN TRACEY



Ruling Elder Podcast

Elders,” with Stephen Tracey and CCE president Dr. A. Craig Troxel, available at <https://repod.opc.org>.

The author is pastor of Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine.

The OPC is served by hundreds of godly ruling elders—1,103, to be exact. Their work is vital for the life and liveliness of the church. Thinking about ruling elders, David Dickson said,

What a noble army for the Prince of Peace . . . If all these elders used their office well what a network of Christian influence would be woven around all our families! What a harvest of blessing in every generation would be gathered in from our beloved land! (*The Elder and His Work*, 1–2)

The CCE believes our ruling elders do use their office well. Expanding on the excellent work of *Ordained Servant* we desire to continue to equip and strengthen every ruling elder and hope this podcast will be of use to the church.

The OPC Form of Government reminds us that “Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to *lead the church in the service of Christ*” (emphasis added). Leading the church in the service of Christ involves:

- visiting the people, especially the sick
- instructing the ignorant
- comforting the mourning
- nourishing and guarding the children of the covenant
- praying with and for the people
- particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word to help him in his labors.

For many reasons, this can be hard and sometimes discouraging work, perhaps increasingly in our times. Yet ruling elders are one of God’s gifts to his church. As Samuel Miller reminds us, “the ruling elder is Christ’s officer. He has a right to speak and act in his name” (*Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church*).

The podcasts will be released on the fifteenth of each month. Please listen to our first podcast, “The Gift of Ruling

SPRING MTIOPC COURSES

The Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is pleased to announce its Spring 2023 courses: OPC History, Form of Government, and Greek Refresher. Classes begin on Monday, February 6, with online reading and writing assignments, and conclude with mandatory Intensive Training sessions from May 16–18 at First OPC in South Holland, Illinois. OPC ministers, ruling elders, men licensed to preach, and men under care of presbyteries have until January 27 to register. Travel scholarships are available for qualified applicants.

OPC historian Camden Bucey and past OPC historian John Muether are team-teaching the OPC History course. The focus of the course seeks to answer the question, “Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” Alan Strange, professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, teaches the Form of Government class. Among the many subjects that the course covers are the meaning, history, and polity of the OPC; church government and church officers, governing assemblies, ways to amend the constitution; and the use of Robert’s *Rules of Order*. David Noe, pastor of Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, teaches the Greek Refresher course. The class attempts to aid pastors in refreshing and expanding their understanding of Greek that they might be helped in their presentation of the whole counsel of God.

Applications are available at [OPC.org](https://opc.org) under Christian Education, then MTIOPC. Contact Judy Alexander, the MTIOPC coordinator, if you have general questions about the classes at alexander.1@opc.org.

JANUARY



The Smiths (day 2)



The Bakers (day 11)

1 MARK & JENI RICHLINE, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the training of elders and deacons for the Salvos Por Gracia congregation. / **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray for particularization for Pasadena Pres.

2 CALEB & ERIKA SMITH, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray that the Lord would bless the church's leadership training class. / Praise the Lord for generous giving to the **THANK OFFERING** to fund World-wide Outreach.

3 STEPHEN & CATALINA PAYSON, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the Lord would guide the relationship with Brazilian presbyterian missions in Uruguay. / **OPC COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL**.

4 CHRISTOPHER & SARA DREW, Grand Forks, ND. Pray that Faith would be a light to the University of North Dakota. / Committee on Ministerial Care asks prayer for **ANNEKE FESKO**, care coordinator for ministers' wives.

5 MARK & LORIE WHEAT, Sugar Land, TX. Pray for the children's programs at Good Shepherd. / Yearlong interns **ZACHARY JOHNSON** at Immanuel in Bellmawr, NJ, and **COREY (ANDREA) PAIGE** at South Austin OPC in Austin, TX.

6 HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for the Spirit's work in people's hearts through humanitarian aid and in preparations for church plants. / Pray for Christian Education general secretary **DANNY OLINGER** as he directs the intern program.

7 MR. AND MRS. F., Asia. Pray for the ministers to persevere in faithful ministry and for ministerial candidates in their studies for licensure. / Pray for **LACY (DEBBIE) ANDREWS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

8 PAUL & SARAH MOURREALE, West Plains, MO. Pray for Covenant's new outreach opportunities. / Yearlong interns **CHRISTIAN (HANNA) REPP** at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA, and **JOHN (ERIN) NYMANN** at Reformation in Virginia Beach, VA.

9 MR. AND MRS. M., Asia. Pray for Mr. M. as he teaches church history courses and prepares men for ministerial exams. / Committee on Christian Education asks prayer for those planning the new **RULING ELDER PODCAST**, beginning this month.

10 MARKUS & SHARON JEROMIN, gathering-minister in Battle Creek, MI. / Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. Pray for the work of Dahlia Dorm, a transitional housing project for those rescued from trafficking. / Pray that the witness of **OPC DISASTER RESPONSE** volunteers to the community in Neon, KY, will grow and show fruit.

11 JEREMY & GWEN BAKER, Yuma, AZ. Pray for more year-round permanent residents to visit Yuma OPC. / Affil. missionaries **JERRY AND MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic, as they travel to teach biblical counseling.

12 Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, financial controller, and **MARK STUMPF**, Loan Fund manager.

13 BEN & HEATHER HOPP, Haiti. Give thanks for the progress in training elder and deacon candidates for the Port-au-Prince congregation. / **CHARLES (MARGARET) BIGGS**, regional home missionary for the Pres. of the Mid-Atlantic.

14 MILLER & STEPHANIE ANSELL, Waco, TX. Pray for the Spirit to work in the evangelistic efforts of Trinity Presbyterian. / Database administrator **CHARLENE TIPTON** and office manager **ANNELISA STUDLEY**.

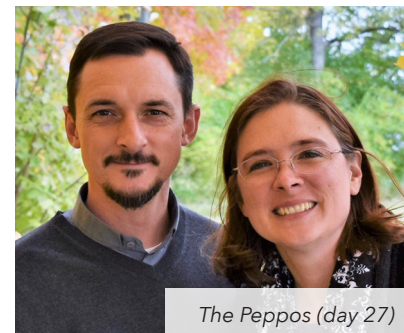
15 Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray for the spiritual and physical needs of the churches. / Yearlong intern **SAMUELIS (MILDA) LUKOSIUS** at Covenant Presbyterian in Barre, VT.

JANUARY



The Barnards (day 17)

21 Pray for tentmaking missionary **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the Timothy Discipleship men as they transition into a new school. / Yearlong intern **NATE (SARAH) CROFUTT** at Redemption in Gainesville, FL.



The Peppos (day 27)

22 **JOHN & KATIE TERRELL**, Moline, MI. Give thanks for the growing membership and unity at Living Hope. / Assoc. missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the discipleship of young men.

23 **CHRIS (MEGAN) HARTSHORN**, regional home missionary for the Pres. of Southern California. / MTIOPC intensive training in apologetics, January 23-27; coordinator **JUDY ALEXANDER**; and instructor **WILLIAM DENNISON**.

24 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for the church plant in Mbale, that the teaching would bless Knox students. / **ALAN STRANGE**, president of the board of trustees of Great Commissions Publications.

25 Associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the spiritual growth of each member of the Community Health Team. / **JOHN PAUL & CORINNE HOLLOWAY**, Manassas, VA. Pray that the Word would go forth in power.

26 Home Missions administrative assistant **ALLISON HILL** and Christian Education office secretary **ABBY HARTING**. / Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing lasting change in the hearts and lives of the people of Karamoja.

27 Pray for the young men nominated by their sessions to attend the **TIMOTHY CONFERENCE**, April 19-22. / Pray for **BRAD (CINNAMON) PEPPO**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio.

28 **CHRIS BYRD**, Westfield, NJ. Pray for the evangelistic efforts of Grace OPC. / Missionary associate **JED HOMAN**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that his work would be a witness to the mission team, the local staff, and the church.

29 **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray for Corona Pres. as they seek to speak of Christ with neighbors. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 89th General Assembly, June 7-13.

30 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for development of online Reformed education material. / Pray that churches and individuals would be moved to engage in upcoming **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS**.

31 Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG AND REE COULBOURNE** and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. / **TYLER & NATALIE DETRICK**, Dayton, OH. Pray that God would draw people through the ESL program of Light of the Nations OPC.

16 Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**. / **COMMITTEE ON DIACONAL MINISTRIES** asks prayer for refugees in eastern Europe and those who remain in Ukraine as the war continues and winter sets in.

17 **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray for the newly received members and families of Grace Reformed. / Yearlong intern **CHRISTOPHER (LAURA) BARNARD** at Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, FL.

18 Pray for associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she returns to the US and prepares for her wedding. / Yearlong intern **RICHY (NEVA) BRASHER** at Escondido OPC in Escondido, CA.

19 Assoc. missionaries **CHRISTOPHER AND CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for fruit in the hearts of children being taught catechism and Bible stories. / Intern **NATE (AMY) JEFFRIES** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

20 Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**. / Yearlong interns **DOMINIC (MARTHA) SILLA** at Living Hope in Allentown, PA, and **JACOB (LINDSAY) CASH** at Redeemer in Beavercreek, OH.

NEWS, VIEWS & REVIEWS

WAN AND PASCHALL ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN MADISON

On October 7, 2022, pastors and elders from across the county came together in Madison, Wisconsin, to participate in a momentous and joyful occasion. Joseph Wan and Nate Paschall were both ordained as ministers and installed at Providence Presbyterian Church. Joseph Wan will serve the Chinese-speaking congregation, and Nate Paschall the English-speaking congregants.



Joseph Wan and Nate Paschall

WOMEN'S PRESBYTERIAL MEETING

Monica Allen

This year's Presbytery of the Midwest Women's Presbyterial was a wonderful time of prayer and reflection on great truths. Women from Missouri and Iowa to Chicagoland and Wisconsin came together in October 2022 to worship God, become more informed on various mission works, pray, and fellowship with one another.

Using passages in Joshua, Matthew, and Acts, speaker and OP missionary Mike McCabe compared and contrasted the commissions given in the Old and New Testaments. It was a much-needed reminder that in light of God's transforming work in our own lives, we are called in Matthew 28:19–20 to "make disciples—going, teaching, and baptizing." For most of us at the presbyterial, the "going" is back to our homes, neighborhoods, and local churches. But for some,

"going" means overseas missions. Regardless of where we "go," our responsibility is to make disciples.

Our time together at the 2022 presbyterial also included fellowship, meals, prayer, singing, raising funds for Neon Reformed OPC in Kentucky, and a business meeting. Grace OPC graciously hosted the gathering in Sheboygan, with Arenda Onnink serving as president. During the afternoon session, prayers were lifted for each OPC missionary by name. Next year's meeting, to be held at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, Illinois, will include women from both the Presbytery of the Midwest and the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota, although in the future the Women's Presbyterial, like the presbyteries, will "multiply."

Our hope is that more women across the two presbyteries will be aware of the Women's Presbyterial Conference and attend in future years to be edified by education, fellowship, and encouragement.

IN MEMORIAM: ARCHIBALD (MAC) LAURIE

David Winslow Jr.

Archibald (Mac) Laurie went to be with the Lord November 12, 2022, at 97. Mac was ordained as a ruling elder in the PCUSA in the early 1960s but soon came into the OPC under the ministry of Lawrence Eyres at the Long Beach, California, church. He served as an elder in three OPC congregations for fifty-one years, most notably forty years at El Camino OPC, in Goleta, California, from 1976–2016. Mac loved and respected his presbytery and the general assembly, even when he felt the need to file a complaint or sign a protest. He was very much against church politics. At one GA he took a young elder with him down into a basement laundry



Mac Laurie (center) with Francis VanDelden and David Winslow

room to privately confront a church leader about the appearance of politicking for a slate of candidates for one of the standing committees. He was kind and persuasive. Mac served on the Committee on Foreign Missions for several terms and was a commissioner at twenty-nine assemblies up through age ninety.

Mac loved good gospel preaching. After a particularly fine sermon he would enthuse with a Scots growl, "The best preaching I have ever heard!" He said that of a few OP ministers including Roger Wagner, but he also said it of his last pastor, a PCA minister whose preaching brought Mac and his wife, Virginia, to the gates of heaven at the very end of their earthly sojourn.



Presbytery of the Midwest Women's Presbyterial

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On September 23, the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic ordained and installed **Jeffrey David Corbett** as teacher of the Word, serving as a chaplain for the Maryland Army National Guard.
- On October 7, **Nathaniel L. Paschall** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Providence Presbyterian in Madison, WI.
- On October 7, **Chunning (Joseph) Wan** was ordained as a minister and installed as director of Chinese Ministries at Providence Presbyterian in Madison, WI.
- On October 21, **Michael D. Dengerink** retired as pastor of Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, CA, and was designated pastor emeritus.
- On October 21, **Benedict R. Ciavoella** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, CA.
- On October 21, the Presbytery of the Southeast dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Kevin L. Medcalf** and Providence OPC in Cumming, GA, with their mutual agreement.
- On November 11, **James M. Stafford** was ordained as a minister and installed as a pastor of Grace Presbyterian in Columbus, OH.
- On November 11, **Matthew Walker** was ordained as a minister and installed as organizing pastor of the mission work Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian in Yorktown, VA.
- On November 18, **Jeremiah Mooney** was ordained as a minister and installed as a pastor of Covenant Community in Taylors, SC.
- On November 19, the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania erased from its roll **Jeffrey C. Waddington**, previously the pastor of Faith OPC in Fawn Grove, PA.
- On December 2, **William M. Wood** was ordained as a minister and installed

as teacher of the Word at Christ OPC in Marietta, GA. Wood is a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta.

MILESTONES

- **Archibald (Mac) Laurie**, 97, died November 12. He served OP congregations in CA as an elder for fifty-one years.

LETTERS

OPC IN PORTLAND IS NOT ALONE

Editor:

It was very encouraging to read Mr. McConnell's article (December) about how First OPC in Portland is seeking to serve their community in their time and place. These dear brothers and sisters are not alone in facing the struggle to shine for Jesus in the place where the Lord has placed them. Their example of courage and compassion strengthens all of us to try to focus on the death and decay around us more with the eyes of Christ. It also causes us to ask: why is our church here and what are we bringing to our community that offers true life, peace, and hope?

David Winslow Jr.
Westminster, CA

REVIEWS

A Practical Theology of Family Worship: Richard Baxter's Timeless Encouragement for Today's Home, by **Jonathan Williams**. **Reformation Heritage, 2021. Paperback, 152 pages, \$13.50. Reviewed by Terry Johnson, a PCA minister and author of Understanding Family Worship (2022).**

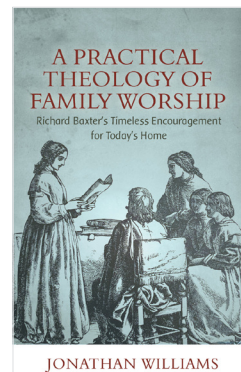
The late Hughes O. Old likened the work of our generation to that of grandchildren going into the family attic, dusting off priceless antiques, and putting them back on display. This has been the case with historic Reformed worship, catechizing, and psalm singing, as well as family worship. Tried and true practices of the past, lost in the early twentieth century, began to be revived in the last de-

cadecades of the twentieth century. Many of us who entered the Christian ministry in the 1970s and 80s had to scour secondhand bookshops to find resources to help us lead worship, introduce psalm singing, advocate for catechizing, and practice family worship. Helps were few and far between.

Thankfully we have seen a revival of interest in the antiques. The past twenty-five years have seen an explosion of articles and books promoting all of the above, not the least of which includes family worship. Jonathan Williams's exposition of Richard Baxter's "timeless encouragement" of family worship joins the resources that are now available. He guides us through Baxter's broader Puritan context (chapter 2); his biblical case (chapter 3); his practical case, highlighting the benefits of family worship along the way (chapters 4–5); its practice in the setting of public worship (especially preaching); and its relationship to pastoral visitation, catechesis, counseling, and writing (chapter 6). The final chapter and appendices provided concluding encouragements for the practice of family worship.

I offer these criticisms: the historical section is weak; John Frame is not the optimum authority to cite for a definition of the regulative principle; the diversity of Puritanism should not obscure the fact that the vast majority of Puritans were Presbyterian (the author is a Baptist); he denies (or claims that Baxter denies) that household baptisms included the baptism of infants. Still, aside from these minor quibbles, I recommend Williams's work for those looking for an overview of the historic Puritan, Reformed, and Protes-

tant practice of family worship. Readers today may find it surprising to learn how aggressively and persistently Baxter and the Puritans promoted family worship. Williams's treatment of Baxter helps us to escape the narrow limits of family religion as practiced in our own era. He joins an important chorus of voices calling today's Christians back to the biblically required, theologically rooted, and historically proven practice of family worship.

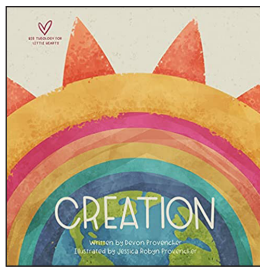


Creation, Big Theology for Little Hearts series, by Devon Provencher, illustrated by Jessica Robyn Provencher. Crossway, 2022. Hardcover, 22 pages, \$9.99. Reviewed by Becky Hartlaub, a member at Park Church mission work in Doylestown, PA.

Creation is a delightful way to gently share a familiar retelling of creation while introducing some deeper meaning and theological truths to our covenant children, ages one to five. Devon Provencher's subtle but poignant wording makes the theological reality and truth of God and creation come across quite clearly, while also being digestible and appealing to such a young audience. Jessica Robyn Provencher's illustrations are simple and engaging, with fun textures and colors that delight the eye. Some illustrations are symbolic, and others are more literal. Young children will enjoy seeing the animals portrayed in the pages, as well as the familiar depiction of marriage with wedding attire, and even a small baby growing in a womb. There is a more conceptual drawing for bearing God's image: it simply shows a blank mirror, which should get their minds working as they discern what exactly that means.

Some of the big ideas presented in the book include differences in gender roles, God's command to be fruitful and multiply, and Adam and Eve's sin and the fall (complete with serpent and fruit imagery). The gospel provides a happy ending, as the book finishes with a message of hope in what Jesus has done for us, along with the promise of a new heaven and new earth.

I believe this book can answer a lot of "why" questions that our little ones might



come up with as they grow, and hopefully it inspires thought and new questions as well. It's great to have a picture book that reinforces concepts that typically go over their heads. My three-year-old son enjoys this series so much, and I can't wait to hear his own thoughts someday.

***Forty Favorite Hymns of the Christian Faith: A Closer Look at their Spiritual and Poetic Meaning*, by Leland Ryken. P&R, 2022. Hardcover, 152 pages, \$11.04. Reviewed by URCNA pastor Derrick J. Vander Meulen.**

Have you ever sat down after singing a song in worship and wondered what it was you had just sung? That can easily happen when the song was moving along at such a pace that you were not able to give meaningful thought to the words. Or because you were so focused on the beautiful music that the words just slipped by. Or, of course, it might simply be because your mind was wandering elsewhere. This happens to all of us.

Dr. Leland Ryken, emeritus professor of English at Wheaton College, understands this reality and has authored several helpful anthologies to encourage us to take the time to read, understand, and savor the poetry of hymns. His earlier anthologies are *Forty Favorite Hymns of the Christian Year*, and *Forty Favorite Hymns of the Christian Life*. Added to these is his most recent *Forty Favorite Hymns of the Christian Faith*.

In this latest anthology, the forty hymns that Ryken chose include such beloved ones as "Great Is Thy Faithfulness,"

"Jerusalem the Golden," "The God of Abraham Praise," and "Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven." For each hymn, he briefly tells about the poem's author and the real-life situation that motivated the author to write. In addition to this historical background, he discusses those features that make the literary work poetic, including its meter, phrasing, and stanzas.

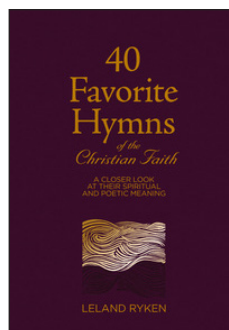
In addition to the fact that I personally appreciate good hymnody, I enjoyed reading through this anthology because I found the diversity of the poets fascinating. They include men and women, homemakers, pastors, and even a couple who were converted under George Whitefield's ministry. They include well-known names, such as Charles Wesley and Fanny Crosby, and others with whom I was unfamiliar. While most lived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ryken included Bernard of Cluny who authored "Jerusalem the Golden" and lived sometime around the twelfth century. Several wrote their poem in the

midst of suffering and trials. But whether through personal illness, a loved one's death, or unrequited love, these poets found comfort and solace in the great truths of Scripture and in the faithfulness of God.

Ryken helpfully unpacks the wording, phrasing, themes and sub-themes of the poetry. He shows how the poet skillfully strengthened and

augmented the main theme with each successive stanza. As the book's subtitle indicates, Ryken truly gives us a closer look at the spiritual and poetic meaning of these hymns.

Such helpful information that Ryken relates for us is sufficient in itself to recommend this work. However, it is because he is able to relate that information devotionally that I heartily recommend it. Ryken not only tells us where the poet found comfort, solace, joy, and peace, but he brings us there. For each hymn, he ties the main theme of the poetry to a specific passage of God's Word so that we, with heart and voice, want to join in and sing to the glory of God.

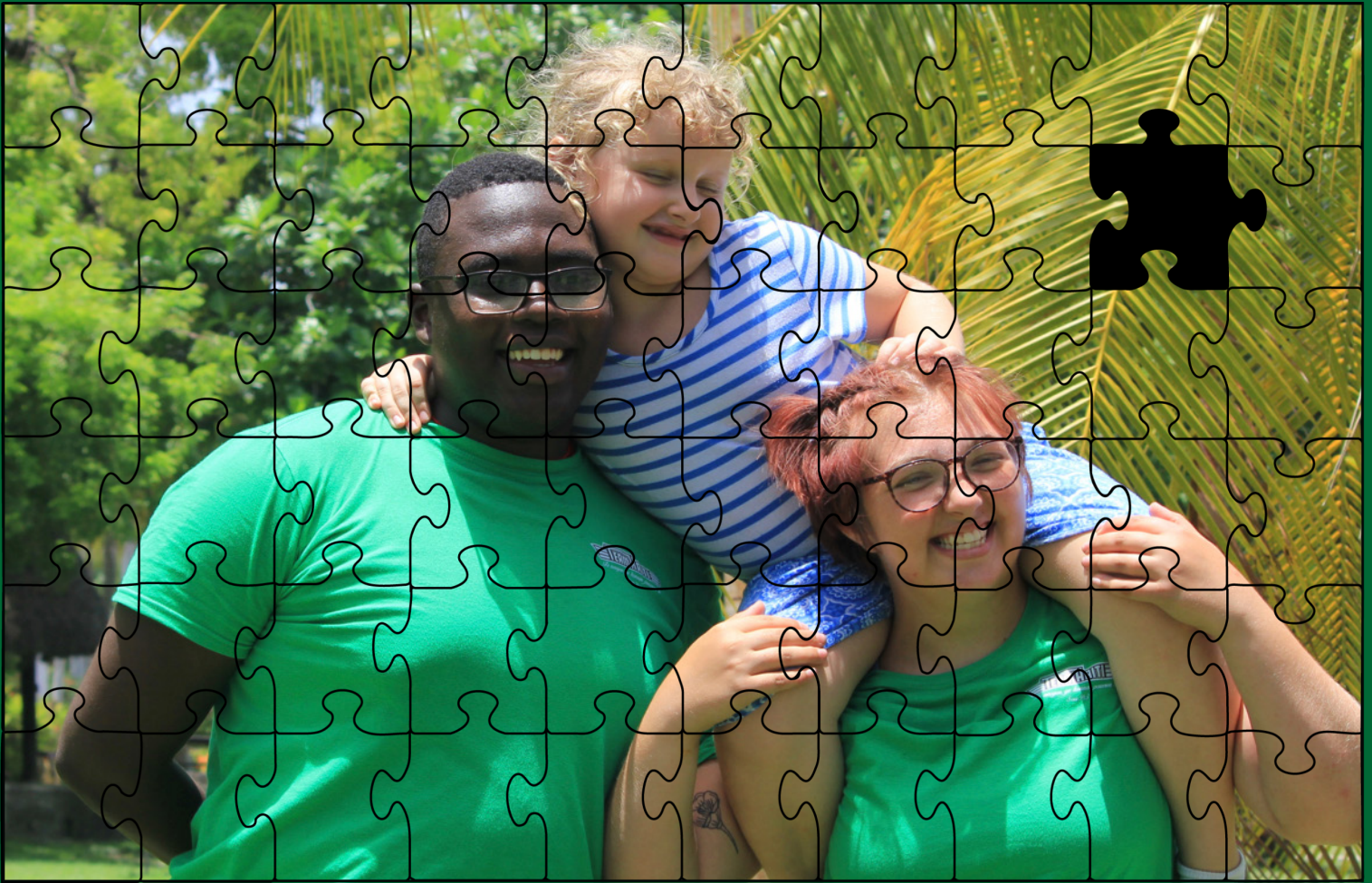


Corrections

In the December issue's Update, Jason P. Vartanian, who has been called to a pastorate, was incorrectly listed as having already been ordained and installed.

And in its News, Kim Hankins should have been listed as author of the story on the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada women's retreat.

Are you the missing piece?



**Short-Term
Missions**
opcstm.org

CoVID-19 jumbled OPC Short-Term Missions for three summers! By God's grace we're putting the pieces back together. Prayerfully consider being a piece of the puzzle in 2023. Scan the code with your phone to find out more.

