

# NEW HORIZONS

JANUARY 2024

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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# DEMYSTIFYING CHATGPT



THOMAS VANDRUNEN

About a year ago, the research firm OpenAI made a version of its text-generation tools available for free use from its website. The chatbot, called ChatGPT, accepts a prompt from the user, such as a question or a request for a piece of writing, and responds with a seemingly original composition. If you have experimented with this tool, you may be impressed with its ability to produce natural-sounding English paragraphs—or perhaps you find it eerie and wonder what changes tools like this will bring.

## HOW LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS WORK

To demystify what language tools like ChatGPT are doing, here's a game you can try at home. To play, you'll need to select a book and pick a letter of the alphabet. I'll play along while I write: I have a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* handy, and I choose the letter *m*. Open your book at random and find the first word on that page that contains your letter. For me, the word is *mind*. In the word that you found, what letter occurs immediately after the letter you were looking for, just as *i* comes next in *mind*? That letter is your new letter.

Now flip to a new page and repeat. The first *i* that I see is in the word *it*, so that means *t* is my next letter. Do it again. On the next page that I turn to I see *t* in the word *delectable*, so *a* is my next letter. So far my letters have been *m-i-t-a*.

On my next turn, I find *a* in *about* and take the letter *b*. I then find *b* in *Beelzebub* and take the letter *e*. Finally, I find *e* in the word *be*, and since it's followed by a space rather than another letter, this ends the game. Looking back, the letters of the game make the word *mitabe*. That's not a real word, of course, but it's not completely random either. The letter-level statistics of the English language led this process to make something that looks more English-like than we are likely to have gotten by grabbing six tiles out of a bag of Bananagrams.

This game becomes more interesting if we level it up. Instead of looking for the first occurrence of our most recent letter, what if we searched for the first time our last two letters occur together? If my last two letters were *be*, then I would need to look for a word like *become* and take *c* as my next letter. The effect is that we are using a larger context as we string out our sequence of letters.

This version of the game is tedious to do by hand, but we can automate it using a computer. Drawing from the text of *Pilgrim's Progress* and using two letters of context, an algorithm replicating this game generates the text

SETTERE HEY IST ING TO WAS NOR HOUT SAY  
SUPOSTIANY

If we sift through the gibberish, we find five real English words—and the rest are at least pronounceable. If we try again, but this time with a context of four letters, we get

WOULD BUT THIS ONE COUNTRY AND SMOKE TO  
HAD KEPT

Although this is nonsense, all the words are real, and shorter strings of words could make sense together. Finally, if we level up the game to use nine characters of context, sentences begin to take shape.

SO CHRISTIAN AND HOPEFUL I PERCEIVE IS  
AGAINST A WALL

Grammar aside, this is remarkably close to real English.

To get a layman's understanding of how technology like ChatGPT works, imagine a great leveling-up of this game. Instead of being played on one laptop, it is run on giant server farms of leading tech companies. Instead of using *Pilgrim's Progress* as a source text, it is trained on humankind's entire digitized corpus. Instead of using a few letters of context, it uses a sophisticated model of human



language. And instead of using a starting letter, the process is induced by a question or request from a user.

When you enter a prompt into ChatGPT, you are really asking a statistical question: Based on information gathered from innumerable digital texts, what is the most likely response to this prompt? I tried giving ChatGPT the prompt, “Versify the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism into common meter so that it could be sung by a congregation.” It responded with,

*In whom is all my trust and joy,  
My comfort and salvation?  
In Jesus Christ, the sinless One,  
The source of my redemption.*

*My only comfort here on Earth,  
My only hope in heaven,  
Is that I am not my own, but His,  
For all my sins are forgiven.*

The meter is forced, but one has to admit that many would-be hymnwriters have done worse.

### **BENEFITS AND RISKS OF TEXT-GENERATORS**

ChatGPT and similar tools that generate text or images are one example of advances in technology that use algorithms built from data rather than being human-hand-crafted. You probably have used some of them: Data-generated algorithms can identify faces in photographs, control autonomous vehicles, make medical diagnoses, and detect fraudulent transactions. One effect of this trend is that the technologies become more difficult to understand, even for experts, since the tools are often shaped by deep patterns in the training data that are beyond human perception. They exude something of a magical quality, especially when they are presented with evocative terms like *artificial intelligence*.

Yet it is important for Christians not to attribute anything magical to unfamiliar technologies. Even without precise expertise in trending technology, we still can develop an informed awareness of the benefits and risks.

For one, technology generated from data is only as good as the data it is generated from. A tool like ChatGPT reflects the attributes of the texts that it is trained on. I gave ChatGPT the prompt, “Explain how the Auburn Affirmation affected the career of J. Gresham Machen.” It responded with a page and a half of text that got the basic facts right and read like an answer on an essay test. But what stood out to me was the uniformly positive terms it used when referring to Machen. He was a “staunch defender of conservative, orthodox Christianity,” to which he

had “unwavering commitment,” making a “courageous stand against the Auburn Affirmation” and founding the OPC, “where he could continue to champion conservative Reformed theology.” No doubt readers of *New Horizons* will be sympathetic to this portrayal. But it is worth asking why ChatGPT would give Machen heroic verbs and adjectives while describing the proponents of the Auburn Affirmation in dry, factual terms. My speculation is that people interested enough in Machen to write about him have tended to be his admirers, and so ChatGPT is imitating the dominant sentiment in material about Machen. But does this pass the shoe-on-the-other-foot test? What would ChatGPT produce if we gave it a prompt for which most of its source material was written by enemies of the gospel?

Furthermore, the fact that these tools produce the most probable response to a prompt, based on the data they are trained on, means that truth itself is not a particular priority. I once asked ChatGPT who was the most famous person to play against the eighteenth-century chess-playing automaton known as the Turk (actually an elaborate hoax). The response mentioned Napoleon Bonaparte and Benjamin Franklin—each of whom did face off against the Turk at one point—but it went on to claim that “one of the most famous opponents of the Turk was the Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,” describing their chess match in dramatic detail. This appears to have been synthesized whole cloth—I can’t trace down any verification that Mozart ever encountered the Turk.

One of my colleagues at Wheaton College, where I teach, described how he caught a student passing off a ChatGPT-generated term paper as his own work. The paper was more-or-less B+ quality, and its bibliography had respectable-looking citations. As it turned out, though, ChatGPT had made the citations up: the claimed authors were real scholars and the journals were real, but the articles themselves didn’t exist. This is what we can expect when the most probable response is not the most truthful response.

This serves to highlight the most obvious risk induced by ChatGPT and similar tools: it provides a new and perfectly convenient way to plagiarize. A student—or a professional writer, for that matter—can whip out a paper in seconds by giving a prompt to a free online tool. At present, teachers can use services that detect AI-origin of text (itself an application of data-driven algorithms), but we can expect that successive generations of text-producing tools will prove to be better at eluding detection. One can imagine an arms race ensuing between text generators and generated-text detectors, with teachers never being able to trust their students again. And what of the

rights of the original authors whose work is used to train these tools?

On the other hand, it is all too easy to bemoan the potential harms in a new technology and to overlook how it can be used for good. Tools like ChatGPT can be used not only as a cheat for writing, but also as writing aides: You can feed it a paragraph you have written and ask it to polish it up—make it more formal, or less formal, or more succinct, or with a more varied vocabulary. It can act, in a way, as a smart thesaurus. Another colleague of mine told of a student who defended the use of ChatGPT in writing a paper as a natural progression from tools that are already accepted: If we use spellcheck to eliminate spelling errors and Grammarly to fix syntax, then isn't it only wise to use the latest tools to improve our rhetoric as well?

One may quibble with this student's logic, but technological changes throughout history have automated menial tasks, allowing humans to focus on things that are more meaningful. After all, some writing tasks are so much drudgery. You do not want your pastor using ChatGPT to write a sermon, but perhaps you wouldn't begrudge a businessperson using an automated writing tool that can turn sales data into a quarterly report.

## A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Text-generation tools are part of a suite of data-derived technologies that have gotten much media attention and that seem to have the power to change society as much as the internet and smartphones have done, if not more. How should we live in light of advancements in science and technology? There are many ways Christians should not respond: we shouldn't idolize technology or make a false gospel out of it—we should not share the world's fascination for the next new thing or hope for scientific deliverance from life's problems. But neither should we approach it with fear or regard it with superstition. I also would argue that it's irresponsible to ignore it.

First, to any extent that we use tools like ChatGPT, we should see to it that we work with complete integrity. This is in the spirit of Paul's exhortation to Timothy that in his ministry of the Word he should be "a worker who has no need to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15)—whatever our calling, our work should be worthy of approval. Students at any level of schooling should note their school's and teachers' policy on writing assistants and follow them scrupulously. The Christian school that my children attend has ruled that no use of ChatGPT is appropriate for any of their schoolwork, and, with admirable consistency, they have banned the use of Grammarly as well. Some of my colleagues have experimented with allowing limited use

of ChatGPT as a writing aide in college courses, but with clearly-defined boundaries, including that students must cite to what extent ChatGPT was used. For any professional or personal use of these tools as writing aides, we should ask ourselves whether we are presenting our work honestly.

Second, we should exercise a healthy skepticism toward material generated by tools like this. One use of ChatGPT is as a replacement for a search engine when looking up information. You can Google "how to keep wasps out of my hummingbird feeder" and receive a list of websites, each website giving advice about bird feeder maintenance; alternately, you can ask the same question to ChatGPT and receive a single, succinct summary of tips that it has synthesized from various sources. There is a pernicious draw to attributing authority to information delivered to us by computers. We should remember, though, that ChatGPT's answers are only as good as the fallible human-produced text it is trained on. Moreover, for the sake of loving our neighbors, we should bear in mind that tools trained on data will reflect, if not amplify, the biases and prejudices of its input.

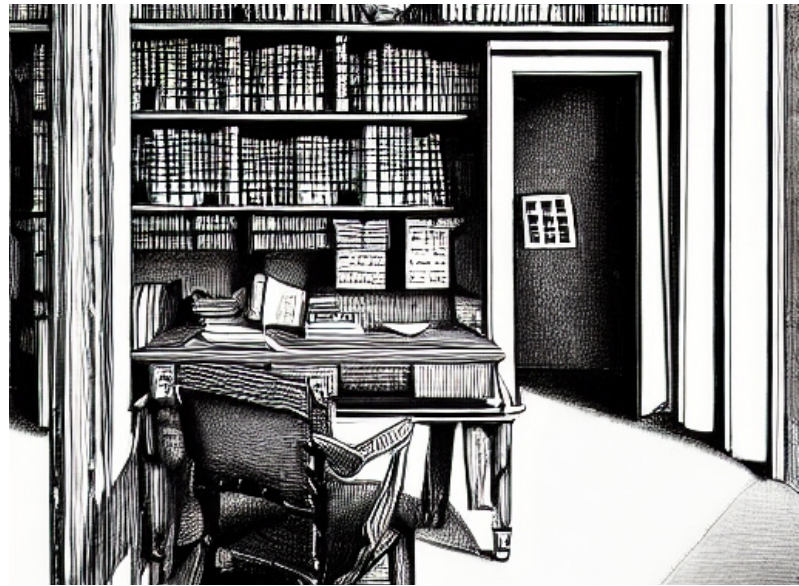
Finally, if we use algorithms to manipulate text, we must treat the holy things of God as holy. In the experiment at the beginning of this article, I sampled letters from the text of *Pilgrim's Progress*. When I do a similar experiment in one of the courses I teach, some students are curious what would happen if we sample from a book of the Bible. But I believe that is not a respectful use of God's Word. Earlier I showed the result of asking ChatGPT to versify part of the Heidelberg Catechism, but I certainly do not advocate using AI-generated texts in congregational singing. One feature of ChatGPT is that it can imitate the style of an author or genre. You could ask ChatGPT to write a story in the style of the Bible, but don't—that would be blasphemous.

I find the Larger Catechism's words about the sixth commandment—that it requires "a sober use of meat, drink, physick, sleep, labour, and recreations"—to be applicable to many other areas. Let's pray for wisdom to discern the sober use of humanity's tools in every age. **NH**

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*The author is a member of Bethel Presbyterian in Wheaton, Illinois, and professor of computer science at Wheaton College.*

An AI-generated image from the prompt, "A pastor's study"



# AI IN THE PASTOR'S STUDY



**JONATHAN LANDRY CRUSE**

**I**n an era defined by rapid technological advancement, the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has captivated our imaginations and transformed our daily lives in profound ways. From autonomous vehicles and virtual personal assistants to medical diagnostics and financial predictions, AI systems are becoming increasingly integrated into our society. While these advancements hold the promise of enhancing efficiency, productivity, and convenience, they also bring forth a shadow of uncertainty and concern. The dangers of AI loom large on the horizon, casting doubts about the potential risks it poses to privacy, security, employment, ethics, and even the very fabric of our humanity.

As just one example of the eerie capabilities of AI, consider that the previous paragraph was completely generated by the online program ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) in response to this prompt I gave it: "Can you write an opening essay paragraph for me about the dangers of AI?"

"Certainly!" came the helpful reply, and then the

program, developed by the company OpenAI, typed out the above in less than ten seconds. (The rest of the article is written by me—I promise.)

The offerings of AI are both terrifying and tempting. Both feelings were expressed in a flippant remark by OpenAI's CEO: "AI will probably, most likely, lead to the end of the world, but in the meantime, there'll be great companies." Less humorous is that various creators of AI have appealed to the government to impose regulations on their own technologies to protect society. These companies know that they are creating something that is inherently dangerous, but they simply can't help themselves. They are asking for others to come in and stop them—illustrating the truth that, more than anything else, we need to be saved from ourselves. For now, it appears, the temptations of AI are stronger than the terrors.

## SERMON-WRITING AND AI

As pastors, we are always called to apply the balm of Christ's peace to the fears of the future. Whether it's Harold Camping and his end-of-the-world predictions, or AI companies and their apocalyptic warnings, we echo Christ to our people, "See that you are not alarmed" (Matt. 24:6). Newfangled technologies are just as good an opportunity as any to remind our congregants that Christ is still ruling and that nothing is happening outside of his control (1 Cor. 15:25).

As sermon-writers, however, pastors have another touchpoint with this new technology. In the summer of 2023, *Christianity Today* published a Taiwanese Presbyterian pastor's reflections on using ChatGPT for six months to help compose his sermons. His conclusion? In preaching, "there is room for the work of AI"—right alongside the

Holy Spirit, he claims. The arrival of this technology has opened up opportunities for busy pastors that never existed before—but are they all good?

I have benefited before from AI in sermon preparation, using it like Google. For example, I might search: “What is a historical episode that illustrates the dangers of greed?” Sometimes the results are helpful, sometimes not. Either way, I’m soon on my way. I find it no different (nor any more helpful) than turning to my bookshelf and looking up “greed” in my copy of *Simpson’s Contemporary Quotations*. I am asking AI neither to interpret nor apply Scripture.

But one could just as easily give AI this prompt: “Write me a thirty-minute sermon on 1 John 1:1–4, with a three-point outline, utilizing insights from Puritan and Reformed scholars like John Calvin, Matthew Henry, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones”—and it will do it!

At one point in time, it was tempting for a minister on a late Saturday night after a chaotic week to pull out an old Keller or Piper sermon and reheat that for his people. But even beyond plagiarizing due to busyness or laziness, I believe there is likely another incentive behind our use of AI: the desire to be like God. AI is a snake in the pastor’s study, offering the destructive lie that we can know all as he does, or at least something close to it. We are called to grow in our knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18), but, thanks to the internet, we have instant access to more information than ever before. Why learn anything if I can just ask Google?

Well, because Google, or ChatGPT, cannot stand in for a transformed heart and mind. God’s Word is to be stored up in our hearts, not the cloud. Neither the internet nor AI technologies can help us gain the knowledge of God’s will that we need to not sin against him (Ps. 119:11). By their alluring vastness, tools like ChatGPT can have the effect of pulling us further from God, not drawing us closer to him.

## **NO HEART, NO POWER**

We might also ask, What sorts of change would we expect an AI-generated sermon to produce in the hearts and lives of our hearers? John Stott famously quipped, “Sermonettes make Christianettes.” In the same vein, if all we are bringing to our people on Sunday is a surface-level insight into the Scripture—something that we grabbed off the internet as hurriedly as my son grabs a Pop-Tart on the way to school—we will produce surface-level Christians. If the message we preach is actually disconnected from our heart, since we ourselves have not marinated in it or meditated upon it throughout the week, how can we expect it to connect with our people? John Owen said, “A

man preaches that sermon only well unto others which preaches itself in his own soul . . . if the word do not dwell with power *in us*, it will not pass with power *from us*.”

As pastors, our message must come from a heart that has been transformed by the sheer grace of the gospel. AI maybe could tell someone, “Go to the cross!” Only a forgiven sinner can issue the invitation, “Come to the cross,” because he himself is already there. People must know that we need the same Savior that we present to them. They need to know we believe the same Jesus we are imploring them to believe. They need to know we love the same Lord we are urging them to love. That appeal cannot be manufactured.

For all that AI can know or access, there is one thing that will forever be beyond its reach, and that is the congregation. The beauty of God’s design in the church is for his people to receive personal care from a shepherd who actually *knows* them. A book that I try to keep open on my desk every week as I prepare sermons is our church directory. What makes a compelling sermon is a prayerful searching of the meaning of the text, as well as a prayerful searching of the needs of the people. I love preaching at other churches, meeting new people, and visiting with my ministerial colleagues in different parts of the world. But it never feels the same, or quite as satisfying, as preaching to *my* people. I feel the Lord is able to use my ministry in a more effective way through the relationships that have been built up between pastor and parishioner over the years.

The same should be true for the congregant. Although listening to a well-known, gifted speaker at a conference or on a podcast can be very beneficial and edifying, your own pastor’s message should hit home in a more special way. He has tailor-made his message with you in mind. He has brought your name before God in prayer, asking that the Lord would bless *this* particular message to *this* particular listener. Your pastor is addressing needs you have and fears you face; he’s presenting hope for your week.

AI can do something that no preacher will ever be able to do: it can produce a sermon in one minute, a sermon that is potentially sound in exegesis and full of some interesting insights. But it will never be able to produce a sermon that speaks to the hearts of God’s people—and that’s the kind of sermon we’re called to preach. **NH**

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*The author is pastor of Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*



# A CHRISTIAN'S TAKE ON DEEPFAKES



**JACK VANDRUNEN**

As technology advances, it is only becoming easier to lie. That statement might be surprising at first glance. With the advent of photography, audio, and video recording, we have gained access to more truth than ever before. We are now able to hear and see events that we were never present at—events that happened decades ago and thousands of miles away. Surely this should only make it more difficult to lie!

## AI ADVANCES

Photos and videos, however, are the perfect media for communicating half-truths. First, they can be altered. And even if they haven't been altered, they are still only a narrow perspective, a sliver of "what really happened." They're an outline from which our mind colors in further details. We are more easily swayed by visuals than by text, because we are used to having other people lie to us, but

we are not used to having *our own senses* lie to us. That is the power of manipulated media.

With better technology, our lies have become more convincing. For almost as long as people have been taking photographs, people have been falsifying photos. The same goes for audio and video. With Photoshop, anyone can paste one person's head onto the body of another. With video editing software, anyone can slap a different audio track on top of a blurry video. Or, with a little more effort, splice together a parody of President Obama's State of the Union address with sound (and video) bites taken out of context.

Artificial intelligence (AI), and in particular "deepfake" technology, accomplish all this with far more sophistication. A deepfake, which is a portmanteau of "deep learning" and, well, "fake," is an AI-generated image or video of anything you want. There was an amusing deepfake of Pope Francis wearing sunglasses and a puffer jacket (the "Balenciaga Pope") which circulated the internet in early 2023. Even this seemingly innocent example deceived many people, in part because it was unprecedented.

The uses of deepfake technology only get darker from there: the aim of the earliest software was to generate falsified pornography "starring" various public figures (and whomever you liked). And now, generating a convincing deepfake of a State of the Union address is easier than learning how to use video editing software: just tell the AI what you want the president to say and twiddle your thumbs while it mints an original video of the "event." In fact, don't write the transcript yourself. ChatGPT can do a better job. We no longer need half-truths—or human imagination—to tell a convincing lie.

## PRODUCERS

Is it wrong to create a deepfake? It depends. They are not categorically off limits and can be innocent and hilarious. It is possible to produce fiction in a manner that builds up.

However, in commenting on the Greek word the ESV renders "crude joking" in Ephesians 5:4, John Calvin wrote that it "is often used by heathen writers in a good sense, for that sharp and salty pleasantry in which able and intelligent men may properly indulge." But, he goes on to say, "it is exceedingly difficult to be witty without becoming biting." When we think about whether it would be edifying to create (or share) a deepfake, we ought to keep in mind that "the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I am only joking!'" is "like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death" (Prov. 26:18, 19).

Additionally, deepfakes—even when used in private and not distributed—are not victimless. It may be tempt-



ing to think that they are. After all, the subject of the deepfake isn't directly involved with the production of the material and may not even know it exists. Perhaps the subject of the deepfake is a public figure whom we feel we are entitled to mistreat. But we must always consider carefully the representations we make of others, both in public and in private.

## CONSUMERS

As AI becomes more sophisticated in producing deepfakes, another danger comes to the fore: the deepfake you don't know to be a deepfake. It seems to me that there are also moral issues involved when we fall for deepfakes unwittingly.

Remember when good old-fashioned fake news was the problem? Typically, these were *textual* false reports, often without any strong audio-visual evidence to back them up. If we were so easily taken by fake news, how are we going to survive in an era of *deep* fake news? The urgent call to the church is to think carefully about who we believe and how we get our news. There are more trustworthy friends and less trustworthy friends. There are well-vetted news outlets and less-reputable ones. This isn't to say that a trusted friend or a newspaper of record will never deceive us; Scripture and life experience both tell us otherwise. And we are not always culpable for the lies we believe. But we are responsible for the friends we keep: "Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Other times we are on the hook, not because of the source of the lie, but because of its *content*. Consider the Westminster Larger Catechism on what the ninth commandment forbids: "receiving and countenancing evil reports," "evil suspicion," and "rejoicing in [the] disgrace and infamy [of any]" (Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 145). Likewise, Proverbs tells us that "he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered" (Prov. 11:13). A report may be accompanied by a convincing video—and come from a trustworthy source—but if it brings shame to our neighbor, whatever his profession, we must still be careful of how we receive it. We should not be too quick to believe ill of others, especially in the church.

Finally, however, we must avoid the opposite extreme: the temptation to be too skeptical. A natural reaction to the dangers of deepfakes would be to adopt the policy of trusting nothing and nobody. But it is also possible to be too *slow* to believe ill of others. If allegations are serious, they warrant further investigation. People are hurt when sin is not addressed. It is wisdom from above that leads to the right balance of credulity and incredulity, that we may be wise to all varieties of attack from the Father of Lies.

## VICTIMS

Every kind of sin claims victims within the church, and it will surely be no different as deepfakes become more common. When a scandalous rumor about a person is false, the rumor still wounds. In the same way, a false representation can still victimize the one represented—doubly so, if it's a convincing false representation.

This is not new to our era: both Jesus and his early followers suffered under the effects of lies told about them. A fake video is the same old problem, with extra potential for damage. This calls for compassion and an affirmation that the hurts experienced are legitimate hurts.

From my present perspective, writing this in fall 2023, it's hard to predict how the technology and its social consequences will have evolved even by the time this article goes to print. The technology for producing deepfakes—photo, audio, and video—will only get better. But the nature of the social threat might turn out to be very different from the one depicted in this article. Perhaps in the coming months AI will present new and unexpected—and more pressing—threats to the peace of the church and our local and global communities, in ways that have nothing to do with deepfakes. That is the nature of grappling with a moving target as swift as AI.

But there is something timeless about the threat of disinformation and rumor-mongering, both on a societal and individual level. As our technology evolves, we must continue to address it wisely. New versions of old threats will require new safeguards for how we go about our lives in this fallen world.

Yet we can rest assured that no force in this world can destroy the church. And nothing will permanently prevent her from completing her mission. There is nothing new under the sun, and we rely on the same God who helped us in ages past for our hope in the years to come. **NH**

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# AI: THE LATEST IDOL?



JAN FREDERIC DUDT

The rapid rate of artificial intelligence's development is sure to produce almost unimaginable outcomes.

Presently, artificial intelligence is recognized in two forms, “soft” (or “weak”) AI and “strong” AI. Soft AI solves problems like voice recognition (think Alexa and Siri), self-driven cars, identifying plants or insects from a photo, or compiling and synthesizing a patient's symptoms to offer a diagnosis. Strong AI takes everything to the next level. It can do math, communicate with you, offer advice, write a poem or a novel, create a sermon, write emails for marketers, and pass the MCAT, all while creating the impression that it is consciously self-aware, as is the case with ChatGPT bots. In short, soft AI focuses on specific tasks. Strong AI is capable of learning and processing in a more humanlike way.

People have been responding to the ethical challenges that strong AI presents. For example, the organization AI and Faith is tapping into a broad spectrum of religions and values in an effort to make the greater AI project more humanistic. While such an organization is a start, it is quite

conceivable that its conclusions will only be vaguely, if at all, Christian. We can follow Augustine's lead: if

they have said (or done) things which are indeed true and well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. (*On Christian Doctrine*)

Christians have also been weighing in on AI. Derek C. Schuurman, a computer science professor at Calvin University, thinks Christians should “help discern a responsible road forward in obedience to God. Left on its own, AI will likely veer in the wrong direction” (“Artificial Intelligence,” *Perspectives on Science and Faith*, June 2019). A more alarming perspective comes from British writer Paul Kingsworth, who suggests a raw, aesthetic approach to AI with “the Amish as our lodestone” (“AI Demonic,” *Touchstone*, November-December 2023).

## AI AS UTOPIAN FUTURE

It is true that AI can gather and synthesize information more thoroughly and quickly than humans. Attractive outcomes include analyzing folding options in proteins, discovering new antibiotics that humans have missed, or diagnosing diseases from test results that humans could not perceive. It is no wonder that so many are excited about the AI future. However, what is striking is how ChatGPT bots reflect the values and thoughts of the programmers who have created them. Schuurman is right to think that humans are quite capable of making AI the latest option in idol development

Elon Musk has scored points among some Christians for his views on free speech and Twitter, renamed X, after he bought it for a cool \$44 billion. However, his views on AI are rather disturbing. In a recent interview reported on by *The Atlantic*, Musk tried to make the case that the AI future will be like heaven: you won't have to work, all diseases will be cured, and you won't die unless you want to. In an April 2023 interview with Tucker Carlson, Musk mentioned that we need to ensure that AI will see humans as we see chimps—worth keeping around. Clearly, Musk sees the loss of human dominion as inevitable and only hopefully survivable. When Carlson asked him whether AI will have a soul like humans and be able to discern things like beauty, Musk replied that he wasn't even sure if *he* had a soul. He says he thinks about it scientifically and that having a soul “may be an illusion.”

His perspective is not unusual among the big players and the architects of AI. At this point, I am not aware of a tech giant, such as Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, or Bill

Gates, who is a committed Christian with Christian vision, hopes, and assurances. Instead, they are largely in the spirit of the pioneer AI-utopian thinker Ray Kurzweil and echo the message of the Humanist Manifesto of 1933: “There is no God to save us. We must save ourselves.” Kurzweil envisions a future where the conscious machine linked with human neurobiology will spawn an era of radical life extension and continuous upgrades to eventually achieve immortality.

The first step in this naively optimistic vision is Elon Musk’s Neuralink brain chip that was approved by the FDA last spring for test trials. It links brain activity and thoughts to the computer. The expectation is that AI will eventually be able to upgrade itself, as it can now in a limited way. Humans’ slow reproductive rate will not be able to keep pace unless we link with the AI. Atheist physicist Laurence Krauss fully expects computers to become conscious and supersede humans within two hundred years. In a 2013 debate sponsored by the Science Network, he said, “It is not a good thing or a bad thing. What’s possible is what is going to happen.”

### **A CHRISTIAN’S HOPES AND DREAMS**

What these thinkers and scientists have in common is a profound lack of a biblical definition of reality. They play into the hand of the serpent, who seeks whom he may devour. There are a number of naïve assumptions that they operate under: 1) AI will be conscious and will challenge human dominion unless humans merge with it; 2) immortality is possible if humans physically merge with the conscious AI to beat death by continual upgrades; 3) biblically defined moral regeneration is unnecessary.

They all reject, implicitly or explicitly, the need for human renewal by repentance and forgiveness through the sacrificial work of Christ. Last but not least, they circumvent the promise of the ultimate upgrade: the resurrection of the dead, ensured by Christ, the firstborn among many brothers.

The tech giants’ gauzy, AI-utopian prospect typically does not include transformed bodies and spirits. Their assumption seems to be that extended life without physical suffering answers all questions. However, the reality is that extended life without transformed desires and motivations in line with a perfect allegiance to the Creator of all things



looks more like eternal damnation than it does citizenry in the new heavens and new earth. Such hope in AI is another expression of the idol factory of the human heart.

Christians need to be aware of the hopes and dreams of the mainstream culture. For believers in Christ, AI, like any technology, has great potential. If it gets to the point of eroding divinely appointed human domain or becomes a human hope that circumvents the promise of the gospel, we know that it is playing into the hands of the one who seeks to devour us. However, we know it will not spell the end of the human race, as some concerned dystopians claim.

Presently our government has not given us much reason for optimism concerning where this will lead. It has been reported last September that Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer, organized a private forum of two dozen tech executives, including Musk, Zuckerberg, and Gates, to consider legislation to regulate artificial intelligence. However, The Colson Center’s Breakpoint Commentary indicated that the meeting was conducted without an ethicist and certainly without a Christian presence. If the ethics of the tech giants prevail, you can be assured that the outcome will not resemble one informed by Christian sensibilities. Christians will need to be biblically informed, vigilant, and wise as we selectively use the technology appropriately, or appropriately distance ourselves from its use. By God’s grace, we will be salt and light to our desperate culture. **NH**

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*The author is an OP elder and professor of biology at Grove City College.*

# LOSING COMFORT, GAINING CHRIST

JUDITH M. DINSMORE



Jeremiah Montgomery, the new general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, is a bit uncomfortable. And he's OK with that.

Not uncomfortable to be around, as his warm smile quickly belies. Rather, he's uncomfortable like Eustace onboard the *Dawn Treader*, or like Bilbo walking out of the Shire. "One of the things that's always been a live factor for me is the verse in Luke 14 where the Lord says, 'To whom much is given, much is required,'" Montgomery reflected.

Having grown up in the OPC, he, along with his wife, Beth, feel that they were given much. The caliber of the teaching at Montgomery's childhood church meant that when he went to college, fellow students at campus Bible studies would express surprise at the depth of Christian insights he shared—truths learned simply by being part of the OPC.

Although Montgomery had an interest in the "deeper things of life," he wasn't confident of a call to ministry. He and Beth were married soon after graduating college, and he took a job as a software engineer. But after a few years, when the opportunity came to go to seminary full-time, they took it. "It was not a comfortable transition," he explained. "Engineers make a lot more than pastors. But we felt like we had a responsibility." To whom much is given, much is required.

*New general secretary of Home Missions and Church Extension Jeremiah Montgomery*

## CHURCH-PLANTING AND MISSIONARY SERVICE

The church that sponsored him as a long-distance student at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary was the church he grew up in: Westminster in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. The plan was that, upon graduation, Montgomery would be called as associate pastor there to serve with Mark Brown. But then Westminster became the mother of a new daughter church that was beginning in State College—and that daughter church was in need of a planter.

"After Beth and I talked about it and agreed, I went to Mark and volunteered to be their church planter," Montgomery remembered.

The plant involved a seed group of less than twenty people in a college town flooded with students whose exposure to regional pastors was mostly limited to what Montgomery called "drive-by evangelists" on campus: "They'd come from out of town, they'd stand up, they'd make a lot of noise, and then they'd go home, leaving the wreckage to everyone who's actually trying to pastor in this area," he said.

Once a non-Christian friend of Montgomery's recorded an angry tirade from one of these evangelists. At the end of the video, the friend turned camera onto his own face and said with sarcasm, "Because he's so full of the love and joy of Jesus."

When Montgomery watched his friend's video, his first reaction was to agree; the evangelist was a poor representation of Christ. But immediately a second thought came to his mind: How was he going to do it better? "That was not a comfortable thought at all, but I became convinced that we had to try," he said. Montgomery did open-air preaching as part of the church plant's evangelism efforts. After three years, the church plant particularized as Resurrection OPC.

The Montgomerys' experience in State College has given them a love for church-planting inside the OPC.



But after six years in State College, the family prepared for another transition—this time overseas. The Committee on Foreign Missions had approached Jeremiah and Beth about becoming missionaries to a country that held interest for them, a country whose language they had already begun to learn. As Jeremiah and Beth talked, and as Jeremiah discussed the matter with his session, they all agreed that they had to take the opportunity seriously—that they might say no, but they couldn't say no just because it would be hard.

"We've never allowed comfort to be an excuse to pull back from something the church is asking us to do," Montgomery said quietly.

When they left for missionary service in 2017, they left as a family of seven. Their size made them a spectacle in their new home, Montgomery laughed. Strangers would film them, or ask for selfies. Some would be more subtle, ostensibly pulling out their phones to check their hair but really taking pictures of the Montgomery family. Once at a wild animal refuge, while sitting eating lunch, they received so much attention that Jeremiah turned to Beth and said, "I think *we're* the exhibit."

## DISCOMFORT IN OUR HOME CULTURE

Jeremiah and Beth resigned from missionary service in 2019 due to health reasons and spent four fruitful and blessed years in Vandalia, Ohio (a northern suburb of Dayton), where Jeremiah was one of two co-pastors at Covenant Presbyterian. And now, although no longer a foreign missionary but instead serving the Committee on Home Missions, Jeremiah is convinced that he, along with all OP church planters and regional home missionaries—indeed, along with all of us—is still engaged in cross-cultural ministry.

*Jeremiah and Beth Montgomery  
with their children*



"In the twelve years I've been in ministry, I've noticed just how the secularization of our society has increased," he said. There is reason for concern, he acknowledges. But Montgomery also sees a profound opportunity for all Reformed Christians now to think more like missionaries—even in their native society: "The greatest border any human being ever crosses is not the border between the United States and China, or the United States and Iran, but between faith in Christ and non-faith in Christ," Montgomery explained, paraphrasing one missiologist.

In other words, even though we may live in our culture of origin in the United States, rapid secularization has alienated us from that home culture. We're not at home in our home. We may be more uncomfortable than we think.

That perspective, Montgomery said, opens us up to Christ's kingdom-building work. "We can now look at even our home culture as a mission field. That gives us reasons for optimism because we serve a missionary God; we serve a God whose gospel penetrates the nations and crosses those cultural boundaries. We can move from concern and fear, however warranted, to faith and evangelism in a way that is biblical and rooted in the promises of the gospel."

As general secretary, Montgomery wants to bring this cross-cultural understanding to gospel communication. Scripture is to be translated into the vulgar, or common, language of every nation into which the people of God come, according to Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8. We can take that principle of putting the Scripture into the vernacular and apply it to our gospel communication, Montgomery said. "Not in any way watering down our orthodoxy or our confessional commitments, but in every way making sure we are making our orthodoxy and our confessional commitments maximally accessible."

## A NEW SEASON

Montgomery is eager to witness what the Lord is doing throughout the OPC in his new role. "I'm looking forward to getting to know our church planters and regional home missionaries—getting to know them personally and getting to know them well," he said.

The family will move from Dayton to Philadelphia still as a family of seven, but with their oldest two children studying at Cedarville University in Ohio. The youngest three will attend Phil-Mont Christian Academy. "Our family has always been along for the ride," Montgomery said. "It will be interesting to hear their stories in twenty years."

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*The author is managing editor of New Horizons.*

# A LONG STORY OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

CHRISTOPHER J. VERDICK

Not many weeks back, I heard for the first time the testimony of Angella Paul, a young man in training for church leadership. The genesis of his faith, he said, was when he dropped out of school and became a shepherd. In God's good providence, he was watching his cows on a hillock near where our Mission was having one of its weekly Bible studies. As he tells the story, Pastor David Okken, then a missionary in Uganda, came over to him and encouraged him to come and hear the teaching. At first, he was hesitant to leave the herd, but in the end, Dave prevailed upon him, and he came to listen. After the study, Dave asked Angella his thoughts and encouraged him to come to church on Sunday.

As testimonies go, it's not particularly dramatic, and as he was recounting it at length, I couldn't help but think that the telling could use a little polish and a good editor. But then, Karimojong are fond of telling and listening to stories—even comparatively dull stories—in minute detail. In that spirit, I want to supplement the bare-bones summary I've given above with a few more details that, to my thinking, are crucial to its telling, not as Angella's testimony, but as the Mission's testimony.

The Bible study where Angella's testimony begins was being held in Naturukan, a village not far from the Mission compound. As a freshly sprung-up home, it had been identified as a potentially fruitful location for ministry, and the Mission had decided to drill a community well there as a work of mercy to accompany the gospel ministry we were undertaking. As with many of the Mission's strategic attempts over the years, this particular site for ministry soon dried up (although the well is still producing water).

The strategy looked good on paper but failed to live up to its promise. For ten years, every time I have driven past that well, it has looked to me like another failed endeavor of the Mission—until I heard Angella's story.



*The ministry team: Emmy, Alebo Moses, Pastor Julius, Lomokol James, and Maruk Mark*

God's ways are so often inscrutable to us. Angella is not from that village. In fact, he is from another village where the Mission had years of active ministry—none of which had any apparent effect on him. In God's providence, Angella was following his cows past a different village, on the right day, at the right time, when God captured his heart.

## THINKING AS A CHRISTIAN IN KARIMOJONG CULTURE

Several months ago, I went along with Angella and several other members of our Mission's ministry team to teach the



Karimojong translation of the Children's Catechism at one of the local schools. When we arrived, we found out that the school had sent the children home for the term's end a week early, and thus there was to be no ministry that day. As we rested before riding our bicycles back to Nakaale, I asked a question. Another member of the ministry team, Locap Emmanuel, had given a message on James 2 in church on Sunday, and he had been unequivocal in stating that it was a sin for a Christian to show favoritism in any circumstance. Showing favoritism is a deeply ingrained part of Ugandan society, so his message was sharply countercultural. I asked, "If I attend a Ugandan wedding and am shown special honor by the host because I'm a missionary and a foreigner (not a hypothetical situation), is it a sin on the part of the host to show me that honor, and is it a sin on my part to accept it?"

The effect my question had far exceeded my expectations, lighting off between the five young men present an intense discussion that occupied not only our respite, but our entire journey home. It grew in several directions to include questions of what it means to show honor and whether some of our local political leaders, who are antagonists of the Christian faith and corrupt in their official duties, are still worthy of honor and to what extent.

Since I was not guiding the discussion, I cannot report that any consensus was reached. What most caught my attention was that these young men who are spearheading the Mission's current evangelistic activities are thinking critically about the manifold implications of the Christian life in their own cultural context to an extent that was unthinkable for most, if not all, of our church members just a few years ago.

Recently, my wife, Chloe, and I gave a loan to another church member to help him start a small shop in a nearby trading center. Several weeks after he opened for business, I asked how things were going. He was generally positive, but he wanted to ask my opinion on one matter that had been bothering him: "Customers keep demanding that I sell booze. Is that right or wrong for me to do?" he asked. What a question! Everyone knows that selling alcohol is the fastest way to turn a profit in Karamoja. The Mission, since its inception, has been consistent in saying that drinking is not sinful (contra most Christian churches in Uganda) but that getting drunk is sin (contra the culture)—to little effect, however. Pessimistically, I have often thought that, along with polygamy, drunkenness is one of the Karimojong culture's besetting sins that will take generations to be overcome. But here is a man not only wrestling with the issue in his personal life—a hopeful enough step on its own—but also wrestling with

his agency in the culture of drinking and considering what effects his participation has for his witness and the good of his community.

## GOD'S PATH TO GROWTH

It strikes me that what these late breakthroughs have in common is that none of them are the results of a grand strategy, successfully planned and executed. They can't be plotted on a chart of church growth; they aren't a box to be ticked off in a five-year plan. Each of them is a single stem rising from that strange alchemy of dogged missionary work and Holy Spirit power.

We must not forget the man who went out to sow whose strategy veered from the commonsense approach of maximizing return with minimum outlay. He scattered widely and wildly so as to be sure that no possibly promising corner of the field would lie fallow. As a farming method, or a way of balancing the books, or a path to providing for one's family, the idea is farcical. But in the growth of Christ's kingdom, it bears the divine endorsement. Missionaries are given no more assurance than any other Christian that our efforts, however well-conceived and carried out, will be successful. We are only given, together with all believers, the promise that God remains faithful.

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*The author is an associate tentmaking missionary laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.*

## WHAT'S NEW

On September 30, 2023, the **Quebec Project** came to an end, and the Committee on Foreign Missions entered into a new cooperative agreement with the L'Église Réformée du Québec [Reformed Church of Quebec] to assist it with the education of men who are being prepared for the gospel ministry.

The Committee on Foreign Missions designated the **Rev. Dr. L. Anthony Curto** as Missionary Emeritus and dissolved its call to him effective December 31, 2023, with thanksgiving for his full-time service in Uganda, east Africa, and Ethiopia (1995–2004), and part-time service in Ethiopia and Austria/Switzerland and with churches in many other nations with the Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps (2004–2023).

# SPRING MTIOPC COURSES

DANNY E. OLINGER

The Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC) is pleased to announce its Spring 2024 courses: Ecclesiology and Book of Discipline. Additionally, MTIOPC will be offering a seminar focused on preaching on the book of Jeremiah.

Classes begin Monday, February 5, with online reading and writing assignments. The classes conclude with mandatory in-person Intensive Training sessions May 21–23 at Grace Presbyterian (OPC) in Columbus, Ohio. Orthodox Presbyterian ministers, ruling elders, men licensed to preach, and men under care of presbyteries have until January 31 to register.

## ECCLESIOLOGY

The Rev. Dr. A. Craig Troxel, professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, is teaching the Ecclesiology course. The purpose of the course is twofold. It seeks to enable pastors and ruling elders to be able to defend (thoughtfully and winsomely) the conviction that the church visible is “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ” (WCF 25:2) and the “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). It also seeks to familiarize students with the theological foundations, principles, and practices that embody the Reformed faith’s understanding of the doctrine of the church. This will be done through engagement with biblical, systematic, and historical theology. The course will also examine the relationship between the church and the state, the world, and the kingdom of God.



A. Craig Troxel

The main text for the course will be Stuart Robinson’s *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel*. The class will also read and discuss select passages on the church from such Reformed theologians as Herman Ridderbos and Geerhardus Vos. Students will have the opportunity to read material and write papers regarding the ecclesiastical contributions of such theologians as John Calvin, Charles Hodge, James Thornwell, and J. Gresham Machen.

## BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

Mr. Mark Bube, ruling elder at Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pennsylvania, is leading the Book of Discipline course. With four decades of experience as a ruling elder, Mr. Bube will share with the class “real life” situations that occur in the church at the local (session), regional (presbytery), and national (general assembly) levels that involve church discipline. An emphasis of the course will be to understand that a primary goal of church discipline is to shepherd wandering sheep in love. The goal is to restore those who have strayed in order that Christ might be honored. Ministers and ruling elders will also be reminded of what they agreed to in their ordination vows as they handle church business. In wisdom questions, students will be encouraged to submit to the decision of the brethren even if it wasn’t what one thought best.



Mark T. Bube

Particular topics that will be studied include the post-Reformation development of discipline, the principles of Matthew 18, the reasons for church discipline, the



power of church courts, and how to handle appeals and complaints.

### JEREMIAH SEMINAR

The Rev. Dr. Matthew H. Patton, pastor at Covenant Presbyterian in Vandalia, Ohio, is conducting the seminar on the Book of Jeremiah. The seminar is a byproduct of Dr. Patton's work for a planned 2025 commentary on Jeremiah that will be included in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the Old Testament.



Matthew H. Patton

The goal of the course is to show how a close reading of the book exalts the crucified and risen Christ in distinct ways. It will address the pastoral and homiletical issues raised in the book, to the end that believers might be motivated to a deeper faith in Christ and to a greater love of God and others.

The course will meet an hour each week online for eight weeks. Approximately four hours of work per week will be needed to complete the seminar. Students who attend the online classes are required to participate in the in-person training sessions at Grace Presbyterian. The size of the seminar will be limited to eight participants.

### REGISTRATION

All students must pay a \$50 registration fee, which is fully refundable upon successful completion of the courses and/or seminar. Travel scholarships up to \$400 are available. An additional \$100 in travel reimbursement is available if the student's session or presbytery matches that amount.

Applications are available at OPC.org under Christian Education, then MTIOPC. Contact Judy Alexander, the MTIOPC coordinator, at alexander.1@opc.org, if you have general questions about the courses or the seminar.

APPLY FOR MTIOPC AT OPC.ORG

Email alexander.1@opc.org with questions.

## ON READING OLD BOOKS

*"It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between."*

—C. S. Lewis

### *Elijah the Prophet* by William Taylor (1878)

Dr. William Taylor wrote a wonderful series of biblical biographies that were published in the later nineteenth century. After reading several in the series, I'm currently enjoying *Elijah the Prophet*.

William Taylor was born in 1829 in Kilmarnock, Scotland, into a Covenanter family. He was ordained to the pastorate in the United Presbyterian Church in 1853 and became known for his energy, advocacy of temperance, and his preaching. In 1872, he accepted a call to Broadway Tabernacle Church in New York, and for the next twenty-two years he remained their faithful pastor.

Taylor's biographies are based on a sermon series that he preached; they read a little like sermons but have been edited for the reader rather than the listener. Each chapter of the biography deals with events in the person's life as recorded in Scripture. Taylor takes the biblical account and links it to the history of the time as well as the geographical setting. In *Elijah the Prophet*, he takes the time to locate the valley of Cherith, as best can be done, and then takes us on Elijah's journey to Zarephath, which would have been a long trip requiring secrecy because Elijah was a hunted man.

These biographies, while full of facts both biblical and historical, are also full of practical, pastoral wisdom. The death of the widow's son, found in 1 Kings 17:17–24, is presented with a clear understanding of human suffering and how God uses it to bring us closer to himself. Finally, Taylor also links Scripture with Scripture and ends each chapter with a focus on Christ.

This series of biographies is profitable for understanding the great men and women of the Bible as well as for understanding where they, and we, fit into God's overall care and plan. I was pleased to learn that Dr. Taylor's books (he wrote many more than these biographies) are still available as classic reprints.

—Linda Finlayson

# JAN 2024 PRAYER CALENDAR



*The Sloans (day 1)*



*The Freires (day 26)*

1 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that the fear of the Lord may bring evildoers in Haiti to repentance. / **Will & Lauren Sloan**, Eastern Shore, VA. Pray that members of Good Shepherd OPC would be bold in evangelism.

2 **Melaku & Meron Tamirat**, Clarkston, GA. Pray for Redeemer Mercy Ministry. / Disaster Response coordinator **David Nakhla**. Thank the Lord for bringing us through this past hurricane season unscathed.

3 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Haiti. Ask God to give the saints renewed confidence in the Lord's protection this year. / Three-month intern **Caleb (Abigail) Burkhart** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

4 Pray for **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the Lord to call qualified missionary evangelists for the Uganda team.

5 **Matt & Christine Ezzell**, Wake Co., NC. Pray that the Lord will bless Zion OPC's outreach in the community. / **Stephen Pribble**, senior technical associate for OPC.org.

6 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for perseverance and unity for the whole team. / Yearlong intern **David (Hope) Garrett** at Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Franklin Square, NY.

7 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for physical and spiritual fruit from the outreach of the Community Health Team. / Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**.

8 **Bradney & Eileen Lopez**, Guayama, PR. Pray for Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura's growth in the Lord. / Pray for general secretary **Danny Olinger** visiting seminaries as the intern director.

9 Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, as they await the arrival of their new baby and prepare to move to Uganda. / Yearlong intern **David Wright** at South Austin Presbyterian in Austin, TX.

10 **Caleb & Erika Smith**, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray for the officer candidates at Thousand Oaks Presbyterian. / Missionary associate **Jed Homan**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for blessed relationships with local people as they work with him on maintenance projects.

11 **Dave (Elizabeth) Holmlund**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for stated clerk **Hank Belfield** and others coordinating logistics for the Ninetieth General Assembly to be held June 19–25.

12 **Charles & Connie Jackson**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for the truth of God's Word to truly transform the students at Knox School of Theology. / Yearlong intern **David (Jasmine) Rios** at The Haven in Commack, NY.

13 Missionary associates **Nathan & Elisabeth Bloechl**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for the Bible studies and Sunday school classes connected with the church plant. / **Christopher & Sara Drew**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray that the Lord would bring in his elect at Faith OPC.

14 **Paul & Sarah Moureale**, West Plains, MO. Pray that Covenant Reformed would reach the lost in the Ozarks region. / Yearlong intern **Joe (Melody) Gehrman** at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

.....  
15 Pray for **retired missionaries** Cal & Edie Cummings, Greet Rietkerk, Young & Mary Lou Son, and Brian & Dorothy Wingard. / Pray that the **Ruling Elder Podcast** would bless listeners.

.....  
16 **Tyler & Kara Jackson**, New Castle, IN. Pray that Redemption Life OPC would continue to be conformed to Christ and his Word. / Pray for affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne** and **Linda Karner**, Japan.

.....  
17 Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray that the Lord would prepare individuals to serve through **OPC Short-Term Missions** opportunities this year.

.....  
18 Pray that the Lord would raise more ministers and officers for the **Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ)**. / Yearlong intern **Andrew (Noel) Davis** at Covenant Presbyterian in Marina, CA.

.....  
19 Pray for the **Ethiopian Reformed Presbyterian Church** and for the persecuted church in **East Africa**. / **Micah & Eileen Bickford**, Farmington, ME. Pray that Grace Reformed Presbyterian would grow in their love for evangelism.

.....  
20 **Mark & Lorie Wheat**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray for Good Shepherd OPC as they seek to publicly proclaim God's Word. / **Kerri Ann Cruse**, video and social media coordinator.

.....  
21 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the women in Catalina's discipleship group to grow in the Lord. / Yearlong intern **Brennen (Tiffany) Winter** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

.....  
22 Pray for **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / **Mark & Jeni Richline**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the development of a core group and new work in Maldonado, Uruguay, this year.

.....  
23 **Nate & Amy Jeffries**, West Norriton, PA. Praise the Lord for providing a worship space for Good News OPC. / Thank the Lord for a successful and inspiring **Presbytery Diaconal Summit** with sixteen of the seventeen presbyteries represented.

.....  
24 Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Pray for the Lord to bless the outreach events for youth. / *New Horizons* proofreader **Sarah Pederson** and cover designer **Chris Tobias**.

.....  
25 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** and administrative assistants **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / **John & Katie Terrell**, Dorr, MI. Praise God that Living Hope OPC is now a particularized congregation.

.....  
26 Pray for **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest & the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota. / Yearlong intern **Tyler (Jeanna) Freire** at Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek, OH.

.....  
27 Affiliated missionaries **Dr. Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for the churches in Cambodia to be grounded in God's Word. / Active duty military chaplains **David (Jenna) DeRienzo**, US Army, and **John (Linda) Carter**, US Navy.



*The Bickfords (day 19)*

.....  
28 **John Paul & Corinne Holloway**, Manassas, VA. Pray that Acacia Reformed Church would have greater compassion for the lost. / **Mr. & Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray for Mr. M. to make progress on his ThM while also teaching and examining men for the ministry.

.....  
29 Home Missions administrative assistant **Allison Groot**. / **John Dunahoo**, Interim Executive Director of Great Commission Publications.

.....  
30 **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray that non-believers will respond to invitations to the good news. / **Annelisa Studley**, office manager.

.....  
31 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for young families to grow in faith and love. / **Chris Byrd**, Westfield, NJ. Pray for the evangelistic efforts of Grace OPC.



*The Hacquebords (day 31)*



At the November 18 installation of Christian Repp at Allentown, PA



At John Terrell's installation



At Vroom's ordination: Wayne Forkner, Calvin Goligher, Nathaniel Vroom, Garry Vanderveen, Nathan Trice, Jim Ohannesian



## NEWS

### LIVING HOPE PARTICULARIZED AND TERRELL ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT MOLINE, MI

*Stephen W. Igo*

On October 20, 2023, Rev. John Terrell was installed as pastor of Living Hope OPC in Moline, Michigan, upon its particularization. The meeting was moderated by Rev. Vern Picknally, moderator of the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario. Rev. Steve Igo, chairman of the presbytery's Church Extension Committee, preached a sermon on Mark 7:24–30, "Who Is Welcome at Your Church?" Rev. Vern Picknally issued a charge to the new officers—John Terrell, Dan Barbrick (elder), and Chris Van Beek (deacon)—entitled "He Must Increase" from John 3:22–30. Rev. Adrian Crum, associate pastor at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, which is Living Hope's mother congregation, issued a charge to the new congregation entitled "Receive with Meekness the Implanted Word" from James 1:22. Refreshments following the service were graciously provided by the presbytery's newly organized congregation, Living Hope OPC.

### VROOM ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT SUNNYVALE, CA

*Calvin R. Goligher*

On November 3, Nathaniel Vroom was ordained and installed as associate pastor of First OPC in Sunnyvale, California. Vroom is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, and a former pastoral intern at Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Matthews, North Carolina.

The service was led by Rev. Wayne Forkner, moderator of the presbytery. Rev. Nathan Trice, senior pastor of Resurrection Presbyterian Church, preached the sermon. Mr. Jim Ohannesian, ruling elder at First OPC in Sunnyvale, prayed. Rev. Garry Vanderveen, senior pastor of Christ Covenant church in Langley, British Columbia, gave the charge to the new minister. Rev. Calvin Goligher, pastor of First OPC, gave the charge to the congregation.

## UPDATE

### CHURCHES

- On October 20, **Living Hope** in Moline, MI, a mission work of the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario, became a particular congregation of the OPC.
- On November 10, **Bay Haven Presbyterian Church** in Tampa, FL, a mission work of the Presbytery of the South, became a particular congregation of the OPC.

### MINISTERS

- On October 20, **John E. Terrell** was ordained and installed as pastor of Living Hope OPC in Moline, MI.
- On October 20, **David J. Robbins** was installed as an evangelist to serve in southern Europe with Mission to the World of the Presbyterian Church in America.
- On October 28, **Darryl C. Kretschmer** was installed as pastor of Sovereign Grace OPC in Redlands, CA.
- On October 29, **Richard B. Brasher** was ordained as a military chaplain by the Presbytery of Southern California.
- On November 3, **Nathaniel T. Vroom** was ordained and installed as associate pastor at First OPC in Sunnyvale, CA.
- On November 10, **Ryan D. Woods** was



installed as pastor of Merrimack Valley Presbyterian in North Andover, MA.

- On November 10, **Daniel J. Halley** was installed as pastor of Bay Haven Presbyterian Church in Tampa, FL.
- On November 18, **Christian Repp** was ordained and installed as associate pastor of Living Hope OPC in Allentown, PA, to serve as organizing pastor of Park Church OPC church plant in Plumsteadville, PA.

## REVIEWS

***Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age*, by Samuel D. James. Crossway, 2023. Paperback, 208 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP elder Joshua A. Klein.**

By this point in time, anyone who has been paying attention can see that there are ramifications of the technological way of life in which we all are enmeshed. The proliferation of books on a given subject is often a reliable indication of the concerns of the day, and amidst recent trends in Christian publishing, there are two subjects that seem to be growing in tandem: anxiety and technology. Though correlation is not causation, Samuel James's new book, *Digital Liturgies*, convincingly shows us that the convergence is no coincidence.

Whereas most writers remain bogged down in the tech-optimist/tech-pessimist dichotomy, and as a result fall short of a satisfactorily robust framework for thinking about such a complex subject, James offers what he calls a "tech-realist" perspective. But his reframing is anything but middle-ground fallacy. James argues that although it is true that technological development is part of the cultural mandate, it does not follow that all technologies we develop will be conducive to human flourishing. An essential part of faithful technological stewardship is an honest assessment of our tools and the ways they shape us. And in fact, calling the internet a "tool" isn't even all that correct, he argues. It's

better thought of as an "epistemological environment—a spiritual and intellectual habitat—that creates in its members particular ways of thinking, feeling, and believing" (9).

Inspired by James K. A. Smith's insights into the "liturgical" formation of human life, the book is structured around five "digital liturgies" (authenticity, outrage, shame, consumption, and meaninglessness) that are commonplace in current social media experience. What I appreciate about James's analysis is that he brings together several important emphases which are often neglected: the given goodness of embodied creaturely existence, the formative and ritual nature of human experience, the judicious insights of media ecologists, and an earnest call to develop Christian wisdom. Although one might assume these emphases would be staple fodder for such ruminations, most Christian technology theorists make the misstep of focusing exclusively on technological "content" rather than "form," and in so doing they limit themselves to thinking either in terms of Christian liberty ("tools are neutral; it's all about how you

use them") or legalistic prescriptivism ("taste not, touch not"). But both of these perspectives miss the fact that our daily habits are soul-forming, and therefore, we are talking about issues of wisdom, not specific biblical prescriptions.

Being as brief a book as it is, *Digital Liturgies* doesn't say everything that can (or should) be said about the topic—say, for example,

the biases and intentions of the social media companies (for that, see Chris Martin's *Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media*) or the economic context that propels the tech industry's continued developments (which can be found in Craig Gay's *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal*). Nevertheless, I do believe that James's emphases are precisely what most twenty-first century evangelical and Reformed believers need to understand most clearly: by divine design, we are ritual creatures formed by our daily habits, and therefore we must submit our whole selves to the Lord: heart, soul, mind, and strength. From now on, when I'm

asked about the faithful use of technology, this is the first book I will recommend.

***The Unfolding Word: The Story of the Bible from Creation to New Creation*, by Zach Keele. Lexham Press, 2020. Paperback, 203 pages, \$24.45. Reviewed by OP pastor Z. Bulut Yasar**

The Bible is the greatest and the most wonderful story on which all other good stories find their footing. Yet, understanding and internalizing this grand story can be a challenge. We need help to improve our understanding of God's Word and to develop our appreciation for it. OP pastor and professor Zach Keele's *The Unfolding Word* is a welcome resource and a helpful contribution in this regard. Keele has been teaching English Bible Survey at Westminster Seminary California since 2004, and he shares his knowledge and years of experience as a pastor and a teacher with us in this valuable work.

Keele's main goal is to guide us over the hurdles that stand in the way of reading the Bible well. He achieves this by emphasizing several things: First, throughout the book, Keele focuses on the big picture, the grand story of the Bible, while also paying attention to the details, hence appreciating both the forest and the trees of the Scriptures. He constantly "zooms in and out," as he puts it. He sees slow and fast reading as essential to understanding the Scriptures well. Second, Keele emphasizes that the Bible is a historical book. It includes real people, real kingdoms, and real places, so Keele includes many maps, pictures, and tables to accentuate this feature of the Bible. Third, as Keele points out, "The Bible is an ancient story, which means, in order to understand the texts written in a world that is different than ours, we need to know the culture, people, and the time." And lastly, Keele wants to keep in mind the culmination of the revelation of God—Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of all the promises of Yahweh. In every section, the reader encounters Keele's theological and contextual precision and also his emphasis on the ultimate object of all the stories in the Bible.

The thirteen chapters are historically and thematically arranged. For instance, while Keele covers the books of the Bible that predominantly focus on the Mosaic Law in a single chapter, there are separate



chapters that follow Israel's formation and journey to Egypt, and Israel's journey to and settlement in the Promised Land. What distinguishes Keele's work from similar Scripture surveys is that, as he unpacks the story of the Scriptures, he brings together the history, the cultural context, the covenantal framework, the redemptive historical progression, and the telos and content of the Bible, Jesus himself. Therefore, we naturally find Keele comparing other creation accounts with the Scriptural testimony while discussing Genesis 1–3, or informing us about the Ancient Near Eastern treaties and their forms while unpacking the Mosaic Covenant. Similarly, it is not surprising to see Keele cover topics such as repentance and reconciliation while following the line of Jacob, or focus on both the fulfillment of the great promises of God and the missionary journeys of Paul while discussing the acts of the apostles.

One wishes that there were footnotes included, as it is apparent throughout the book that Keele shares a wide range of resources and wonderful gems from his study; its use of endnotes instead, however, makes it more suitable for a broader audience. Regardless, this is a great resource and a deep well for anyone who desires to learn to read and understand the Scriptures well. It can be especially helpful in a group study setting, since it includes study questions at the end of each chapter. Undoubtedly, this book will whet the appetite of every reader who would like to see the beauty of the Scriptures and delight in them more.

***Worthy: Living in Light of the Gospel*, by Sinclair Ferguson. Crossway, 2023. Paperback, 128 pages, \$11.81 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Robert Arendale.**

"The title of this little book—*Worthy*—cries out for explanation for one obvious reason: generations of Christians, stretching back into Bible times, have always

affirmed that while God is worthy, we are not" (xv). Indeed, God is worthy, and we are not. Thus, how are we to understand the Bible's call to the believer to let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ? (See Phil. 1:27.) Such is the central theme of Sinclair Ferguson's *Worthy*. This book is the first in a projected four-book series edited by Michael Reeves on "the basis of Paul's words in Philippians 1:27–2:3" (xvii). In a brief ninety-seven pages, Ferguson, with his typical clarity and profundity, explores several themes related to the Christian's call to live a life worthy of the gospel.

A few themes to highlight: first, Ferguson helpfully connects the term "let your manner of life" to the idea of "citizenship." That is, Paul's call to the Christian concerns our heavenly citizenship. We are to live in light of our true identity—as citizens of heaven. As the author puts it, "But to live worthy is much more a matter of living the life of the heavenly world while you are still here on earth" (16). Such a reminder is refreshing and needed in the church today, particularly in light of the prominence of many "this world" approaches to the Christian life.

Second, after a review of the grammar of the gospel (for example, the indicative/imperative), Ferguson highlights the role of the Christian's union with Christ in his death and resurrection. "Deconstruction and Reconstruction is the pattern of transformation" (45). Moreover, the author zeroes in on the role of God's providence and God's Word in the transformation of the Christian. With respect to the role of God's providence, what is particularly in view is God's providence in leading the Christian to and through times of suffering. As Ferguson puts it, "God employs friction to shape us into his Son's likeness" (52).

Finally, after an important chapter treating the topic of humility in the Christian life (Phil. 2:5–11), Ferguson focuses on the character of Paul. What made Paul tick? What was the key to Paul's zeal for Christ? The most interesting part of this chapter, at least to this reviewer, is the connection made between Stephen and Saul. He highlights the unique, "Christlike way" that Luke describes Stephen. Thus,

before Saul was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he was confronted by the aroma of Christ through the character of Stephen.

The readers of *New Horizons* will likely find no new ideas in the pages of this brief and helpful book. However, the themes treated here are of the utmost importance to the church today. And they are themes to which we must return regularly. *Worthy* would be

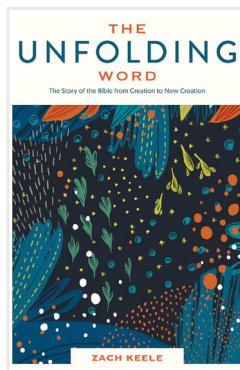
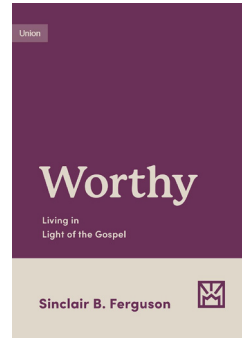
an excellent weekend read—or perhaps a discipleship resource for a small group. Indeed, may we all seek by the power of the Spirit to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ!

***The Shepherd's Toolbox: Advancing Your Church's Shepherding Ministry*, edited by Timothy Z. Witmer. P&R, 2023. Paperback, 168 pages, \$17.09. Reviewed by Jonathan Landry Cruse.**

Thirteen years after the release of his best-selling *The Shepherd Leader*, retired professor and pastor Timothy Z. Witmer has blessed the church again with a follow-up volume entitled *The Shepherd's Toolbox: Advancing Your Church's Shepherding Ministry*. This time around, Witmer has assembled a team of pastors, elders, and other ministry leaders to each contribute a chapter that addresses various aspects of implementing the principles in *The Shepherd Leader*. The result is a helpful resource guide, and ministers who feel that

## POSITION AVAILABLE

**Associate Pastor:** Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Kent, Washington, is seeking an associate pastor. We are a congregation of 104 communicant members in a city of 136,000. We seek an associate pastor to assist with leading worship services, including faithfully preaching the Word, administering sacraments, shepherding the flock, praying, teaching, and administrating. Interested candidates should submit their MIF, including a link to three recently preached sermons, to: [scott.hunter@eopckent.org](mailto:scott.hunter@eopckent.org).



their current efforts to “shepherd the flock of God” are falling short would do well to read it carefully.

I appreciated the book’s concern not only for the care that each *member* should receive, but also for the care that each *shepherd* should receive. Many elders know the experience of a session that is stretched too thin or weighed down by the burdens of the congregation. One elder quoted in the book expressed the stress of dealing adequately with the various families in his charge: “Am I to care for my whole flock [continuous care] or to care for the one member in trouble [crisis care]?” (56). Without intentional and proactive measures, elders can become burned out or disillusioned to the idea of doing ministry.

Another recurring theme that I took note of in the book was the call to utilize technology to benefit the shepherding ministry within a congregation (see especially chapter 5). One contributor provided a list of church management systems (e.g., software, apps) that could be implemented to streamline member care and store and share information amongst the leadership of the church. Even something free (like Google Docs) could be a way of easily sharing and recording information for pastors and sessions to ensure every member is kept track of and every need met. This is an example of how immensely practical the book is, as it gets into the nitty-gritty of things like administration, attendance, and spreadsheets. Furthermore, each chapter is followed by a “user guide,” offering questions for elders to discuss together and homework for them to try out in their local context.

The book addresses how to implement an effective shepherding model in a variety of contexts: women’s ministries, small groups, and church plants. However, most of the chapters were written by leaders in churches of more than a thousand members. While some of the struggles that elders face are universal, a wider readership would have benefited if there was included an entire chapter devoted to effective shepherding in a smaller church context. For many pastors in the OPC, the stresses faced by the church planter (e.g.,

not having enough volunteers for Sunday ministries) will hit closer to home than those faced by the megachurch pastor!

Finally, I want to note that the opening chapter by Dr. Witmer, “Motivation for Shepherds,” is worth the price of the book. Walking us through Jesus’s interactions with Peter, particularly in John 21, Witmer draws out rich truths that remind us that our love for the sheep must come after a love for the Shepherd: “The strength to persevere in your calling is found in the renewal of

your first love for Christ” (12). Some of us pastors and elders may need to revamp our shepherding ministry; some of us may simply need to return to the Shepherd. In either case, this book is helpful.

***Your Father’s L’Abri: Reflections on the Ministry of Francis Schaeffer*, by Gregory E. Reynolds. Monadnock Press, 2023. Paperback, 105 pages, \$12.00 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP minister Jonathan B. Falk.**

*Your Father’s L’Abri* is a collection consisting of one article and five book reviews that originally appeared in *Ordained Servant* over a period of seven years.

D. G. Hart, who wrote the foreword to this book, took a semester off from college to study at L’Abri, the study center in Switzerland founded by Francis and Edith Schaeffer. Gregory Reynolds, the author of this slender volume, spent six months in residence at Swiss L’Abri. My wife and I stayed at the newly formed English L’Abri for one month in 1972. Along with many others of our generation, I concur with the author’s summary statement in his preface (12), “Although I do not entirely agree with Schaeffer’s apologetics, these differences pale in comparison with the good I believe he did in the lives of so many of my lost generation.” When I entered Westminster Seminary in 1975, Professor Harvie Conn asked his class the question, “How many of you are here as a result of the influence of Francis Schaeffer?” As I recall, about a

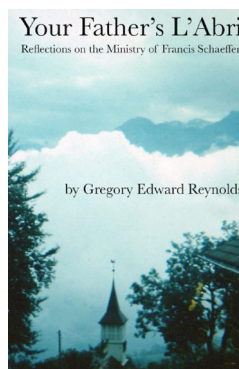
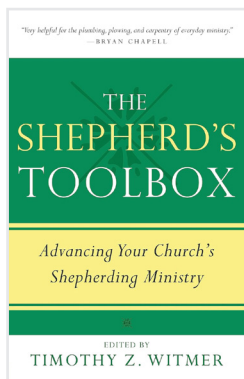
third of the class raised their hands.

Since Reynolds lived at Swiss L’Abri from August 1971 to early 1972, his opening chapter is a “first-hand reflection” of his time there. He begins with his memories of living as an architectural student in Boston as a child of the 1960s counter-culture and his conversion to Christ in the winter of 1971. When Reynolds moved to L’Abri, he discovered a community “with love,” a community “living out a shared truth” (20). He points out that its weakness was its ecclesiology. There was an absence of “the importance of the confessional Reformed church” (36). I found this same absence of confessional identity to be true at the English L’Abri.

The first chapter and, indeed, the title of Reynolds’s book was prompted by an article in the March 2008 *Christianity Today* by Molly Worthen entitled “Not Your Father’s L’Abri.” Reynolds responds to the

reports of a growing concern with the current ministry of L’Abri. There is evidence of “the presence of an apparently postmodern epistemology among the staff” (27). The statement he cites from John Sandri (one of Schaeffer’s sons-in-law), taken from Worthen’s article, is indeed troubling: “I’m not an errantist, but I’m not an errantist either’ . . . The modernist agenda is behind them

both” (27). Despite the author’s alarm over the apparent drift of the present day Swiss L’Abri, and his regret that Schaeffer failed



## NEW HORIZONS

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to consistently employ the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, Reynolds expresses his gratitude “for the shelter provided by L’Abri as it pointed me to the only final shelter found under the wings of the Almighty” (28).

The remaining chapters consist of five reviews of books written about the ministry of Francis Schaeffer and L’Abri. Notable among the reviews is the one on William Edgar’s *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, “the best all-around introduction of the life and ministry of Francis Schaeffer.” Reynolds concludes this review, and his book, by acknowledging his debt to Francis Schaeffer. I, too, am in his debt.

***The Most Unlikely Missionaries: Serving God’s Kingdom in the Middle Kingdom*, by J. M. Gurusy. Christian Focus, 2023. Paperback, 224 pages, \$15.99. Reviewed by OP pastor David A. Okken.**

This account by J. M. Gurusy (pen name) of his family’s brief foreign missionary tenure for a confessional Presbyterian denomination in North America includes his honest and understandable questioning of the value of their service. He states that he does not regard himself as having made a “good return” on the church’s investment.” He is unsure “what was the Lord’s deep purpose” in sending them overseas for such an unexpectedly brief period. This reviewer believes that we have in our hands part of the answer. The Lord purposed to give us a true treasure of a resource in this book. It is filled with interesting content and many valuable gospel lessons.

We learn about discerning a call. Missions is not the work of only indi-

viduals or families, but of the church. In this case, the decision to serve in China involved counsel from many. It involved patiently waiting for the Lord to work through the church’s committee on foreign missions. It also involved the elders where Gurusy had served as pastor. I appreciated the thoughtfulness given to how to shepherd the congregation through the process.

We also learn about the importance of family. For Gurusy, at every step, decisions were made with his wife. And together they wisely shepherded their children and cared well for them both through the process of preparing to go and in serving on the field. It was God’s wisdom that enabled them to make the right albeit difficult decision to return to the States.

We are given a wonderful look at their life and ministry in China. Though their time was shorter than planned, they poured their hearts into labors for which the church can give thanks and praise to God. Reading the book helps us to do just that.

We also learn much about China, the nation where they served: its history, geography, language, rich culture, and beautiful people. Very helpful was the identifying of “Five Key Events in the History of Chinese Missions.” There and throughout the book we are given to appreciate our sovereign God’s great work in establishing his kingdom in this fascinating land.

The words of the hymn “This Is My Father’s World” ring true in China even

among unbelievers. The effects of the curse do not undo God’s common grace. Sadly, missionaries can sometimes focus on the negative aspects of the countries where they serve and adopt a disparaging attitude about them. Gurusy’s tone in this book is quite the opposite. He shows us that the Chinese are a kind, patient, gracious, and helpful people.

Yet, like all peoples, they desperately need Christ. We learn about the challenges and the blessings of finding creative and winsome ways to communicate the gospel—and about doing so where it is illegal and must be done covertly while teaching English.

We are helped to appreciate what life is like for our dear Chinese brothers and sisters who suffer for the gospel in ways that we do not. We learn of missionaries who serve in a place where there are the heartaches of seeing beloved friends, teammates, and partners in ministry suddenly forced by the government to leave.

From beginning to end, the book is wonderfully pastoral. It provides valuable wisdom to those considering foreign missionary service as well as to the church as it supports its missionaries. I also appreciated its Christ-centeredness. As a thread that runs throughout, we are well reminded not to strive for the attainment of some measure of “success” as we may define it. The true treasure is Christ himself. Read this book, and it will help you grow in sharing the author’s conviction that, indeed, “Jesus is *still* worth it!”

