

WHAT IS
THE
OPC?

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STRANGE



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INTRODUCTION

In a world of constant change, many long for certainty. Some scorn certainty as unattainable and undesirable, while others look for it hopelessly in the things of this world. Many promote their social, political, economic, and other viewpoints as if those were the truth, as if certainty could be found in the passing commitments of this life. Thus, some seem quite sure of their own particular beliefs, while, at the same time, attacking the quest for certainty.

Certainty is necessary, because if it does not exist fundamentally, we are left with relativity and skepticism. Its existence must be transcendent, beyond the ever-changing realities that characterize what we witness in the world about us. We cannot ground certainty in the world around us, because certainty comes only from the unchanging absolute and cannot emerge from the flux that makes up life. Without certainty, we have “no place to stand” and no basis for any true knowledge, since all rational thought is undermined. Whether or not someone admits his desire for certainty, he possesses that desire, being a rational, moral creature, made in the image of God. To eliminate certainty is to eliminate the possibility of truth, and that renders all knowledge and morality baseless and merely one perspective versus another.

This is the irony of the world in its rebellion against God: it acts as if there is, in principle, no possibility of certainty. Everything is merely a matter of perspective. At the same time, the world regards its own social justice and political views as certain truth. In longing for justice, rebellious humanity shows itself to be in the image of God, even though it denies God and cannot account for truth in terms of its commitments.

The desire and quest for certainty persists for all secularists, though they

call it something else and refuse to acknowledge this pursuit. True certainty, however, cannot be found in the transient things of this world. We find the certainty that we long for, and which otherwise eludes us, in the revelation of God.

God has revealed himself to us in nature and conscience (general revelation) and in the Bible (special revelation). While general revelation testifies to the God who is there, fallen man suppresses the truth of such revelation in unrighteousness. Man needs to be renewed and restored by God to reason rightly. This renewal occurs when the Holy Spirit applies to God's people the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ won for them in the Lord's substitutionary life and death. The salvation that Christ brings receives testimony, not in general revelation, but in special revelation, particularly as that revelation finds expression in God's Word, the Bible. It is only in the Bible that we find God's gracious provision for the salvation of sinners described.

The Bible is indeed an old book, but it remains supremely relevant because it is from God himself and tells us about God and ourselves. The Bible instructs us both as to what we should believe and how we should live. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) remains committed to preaching, teaching, and living the message of the Bible, God's Word. The OPC seeks to declare God's timeless truth in our own times, showing in all that we do its sufficiency and clarity.

If you are looking for a local church or a denomination that takes God's Word seriously as a guard and guide even in the twenty-first century, you need look no further than the OPC. We invite you to explore and find out more about the OPC in the following pages, in which we address:

- Where we came from (our history)
- Where we are now (our beliefs and characteristics)
- Where we are headed (our ministries)

WHERE WE CAME FROM

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Many often note that the church founded by Jesus Christ is quite divided, finding its expression variously in Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and a variety of Protestant bodies. This has led some, particularly in recent times, to dismiss the church out of hand and to favor some form of “spirituality” over what they contemptuously call “organized religion.” One might rightly wonder where the OPC fits into this complicated, pluralistic religious landscape.

After the founding and spreading of the church by Christ and his apostles, the church in the first four centuries formulated its doctrine, based upon God’s Word. The church also gave expression to orthodoxy in statements of belief like the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. The OPC shares these great ecumenical creeds with other Christians and churches.

A chasm developed between the church in the East and in the West, leading ultimately to the split in 1054 between the Western (“Roman Catholic”) church and the Eastern (“Greek Orthodox”) church. Despite having “orthodox” in its name, the OPC is part of the Western branch of the church.

The Church of Rome, headed by its bishop, the pope, defended the truth in the earlier centuries, but it became corrupt in several regards in medieval times. Man-made ceremonies and superstition crowded out biblical simplicity. The sacrifice of the Mass dominated, and preaching languished. Ignorance of the true content of the Bible abounded. The Roman Church began to persecute those defending the truth, men like John Wycliffe and John Hus.

By God’s grace, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers in the sixteenth century rediscovered central truths of the Bible that had fallen into disuse or disfavor. Protestants insisted on the supreme authority and infallibility of Scripture alone, over against the Roman Catholic Church, which continued to locate such attributes with the magisterium (the bishops and pope). Roman Catholics, in other words, did not regard the Bible as their sole rule of faith and practice, but looked to tradition as well, leaving it to the teaching authority of the church to mine Scripture and tradition to determine its dogma (doctrine).

Protestants recovered from the Bible the great truth that salvation is a gracious gift from God, received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, made effective by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Salvation was now understood by Protestants to be all of grace and not something dispensed by priestly rituals made effectual *ex opere operato* (by the sacramental actions themselves) or earned by good works to complete God’s grace. These Protestant principles undergird the OPC today.

Confessionally, the OPC embraces the Westminster Standards. In setting forth a Presbyterian church government, the Westminster Assembly, which met from 1643 to 1649, rejected episcopacy (the rule of bishops—i.e., clerical rule without lay governance) and congregationalism (in which each congregation is independent, governed either by all members or by lay governors). Presbyterian church government combines the rule of those called to be ministers, together with those elected by the people representatively, called ruling elders. And rather than each church being autonomous, all churches enjoy a connectionalism that extends to the regional and national level, with the governing body of the regional church being the presbytery and that of the national church, the General Assembly. The presbytery is considered the heart of such a church: this is why, though there were various Presbyterian churches in the American colonies prior to 1706, that date is regarded as the beginning of the Presbyterian church in this country, because that year saw the formation of the first presbytery, the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The first synod was ten years later, and the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, also held in Philadelphia, occurred in 1789.

2. THE FORMATION OF THE OPC

The Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) suffered the New Side controversy (over the Great Awakening, polity, etc.) in the eighteenth century and the New School controversy (and split) in the nineteenth century. The issue of slavery also divided the church, and during the Civil War in 1861 the Southern church broke away. The PCUSA was weakened theologically by the reunion of the Old School and the New School in 1869, leaving it vulnerable

to the onslaught of theological liberalism that swept across the continent of Europe and finally reached American shores and made serious inroads.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the PCUSA had entered into theological decline. Many of its ministers had been fatally infected with liberalism and gave expression to it in the Auburn Affirmation of 1924. Almost 1,300 ministers came to sign the document, a bit more than an eighth of the ministers in the PCUSA. The General Assemblies of 1910, 1916, and 1923 had required ministerial candidates to affirm the so-called five fundamentals: the inerrancy of the Bible, the literal truth of Christ's miracles (and other historical biblical accounts), the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection and physical return of Christ, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. The Auburn Affirmation denied that one must affirm these, averring that these essential teachings were all theories and that the facts admitted of other interpretations. Unbelief continued to spread throughout the church.

Princeton Theological Seminary remained a bastion of Reformed and Presbyterian orthodoxy, though slippage began with the appointment of J. Ross Stevenson as president in 1914. That even Princeton would give way to the siren song of academic respectability that embracing liberalism promised became evident in 1929, when its reorganization mandated the admission of liberal overseers and professors. Four Princeton professors resigned and with the support of others established Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

The prime mover in the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary and the leading opponent of theological liberalism at that time was J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937). Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) to warn that the anti-supernatural humanism (liberalism) that masqueraded as Christianity was something altogether different from supernatural, biblical Christianity. Modernist unbelief had come to expression in many quarters of the church, including the foreign missionary program of the PCUSA, with some PCUSA missionaries embracing the heretical conclusions of the Hocking Commission's *Re-Thinking Missions* (1932), a report that denied the exclusivity of the Christian faith, a deadly error that Machen knew would vitiate missions worldwide. He could no longer support, or advise others to support, the denominational foreign missions agency, so he formed, with others likewise concerned, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933.

The PCUSA General Assembly of 1934 ordered that Machen disassociate himself from the Independent Board and argued that failing to support Presbyterian missions was tantamount to refusing to take communion. Machen would not yield on these matters unless the Presbyterian Church could demonstrate from Scripture and the Westminster Standards that he

was wrong. The PCUSA took disciplinary action against Machen and those who argued as he did, demanding on its own authority that Machen obey it, not on the basis of Scripture. After his appeal to the 1936 General Assembly failed, Machen and 33 other ministers, 17 ruling elders, and 79 other church members met in Philadelphia on June 11, 1936, to constitute what would become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Machen said, “At last we have a true Presbyterian church!” The new church saw itself as continuing the “true spiritual succession” of the PCUSA. They hoped that a mass exodus of Bible-believing Christians would swell the ranks of the new denomination, but it did not happen. Then, on January 1, 1937, Machen’s untimely death dealt a severe blow to the church.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPC

One of the first questions facing the new church was whether it would chiefly identify with other typically fundamentalist and evangelical American churches or carve out a distinct identity as a confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian Church. Machen, in facing down liberalism, had insisted that the church reject modernists who would take away from the Word of God. He also insisted that the church resist those who would add to the Word, as did some fundamentalists, who wanted the church not only to go easy on dispensationalism, but also to forbid any use of alcohol. When the new church, after Machen’s death, proclaimed Christian liberty with respect to those things on which God’s Word is indifferent (though affirming that one must always walk in a godly manner), some of those fundamentalists left for another church, and the OPC made the first of several decisions that clearly marked it as a biblical Presbyterian church that was confessional and Reformed. One might even say that the resolve neither to take away from the Bible nor to add to it became a hallmark of the OPC.

Although the OPC has been careful with the alliances into which it has entered, it has never isolated itself from the rest of Christ’s church. The OPC has energetically promoted the Reformed faith at home and around the world and has been a leader in ecumenical discussions with other Reformed churches, here and abroad, in obedience to the command of our Lord that we love one another and in answer to his prayer that we be one. Some “conservative” churches maintain separation, but do not do justice to all the attributes of the church, which include catholicity and unity, alongside holiness and apostolicity. The OPC is committed to expressing all the attributes of the church. Thus the OPC seeks the peace, purity, and unity of the church, not pitting them off against each other, but holding them together in a biblical balance that honors our Lord’s instructions to the church.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

I. OUR CONSTITUTION

The constitution of the OPC consists of its primary, secondary, and tertiary standards. The primary standard is the Bible, which is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, fully authoritative in all that it teaches, addressing both what is necessary to believe and how we ought then to live. The Westminster Confession of Faith (as adopted by the OPC), together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, serve as the secondary standard. The tertiary standard is *The Book of Church Order*, which includes the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God. Being directly from God, the Bible does not admit of reform, while the Westminster Standards and *The Book of Church Order*, seeking to be biblical, do.

Since the Scriptures are “the rule of faith and life,” the Confession of Faith subordinates itself to them, declaring that “in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them.” It should be noted that the affirmation of “Scripture alone” does not mean that we have recourse as Christians only to the Bible, as if the “Bible only” is our guide. We believe that the church, to whom the inspired Scriptures are given, is also illumined (guided) by the Holy Spirit, and that the church can adequately and sufficiently interpret the Scriptures.

We clearly reference our secondary and tertiary standards as we do the work of the church, but we do so because we regard them to be a faithful witness to our primary standard, the Bible. These express what we believe

concerning all that they address and all church officers—ministers, ruling elders, and deacons—are required to receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC and also to approve the government, discipline, and worship of the OPC. Other members are not required to subscribe to the doctrinal standards or approve of OPC polity. They are called upon, in order to be a member of the OPC, to give a credible (believable) profession of faith (one not manifestly contradicted by their lives). Members answer five vows that articulate their saving faith, notably, that the Bible is God’s Word and teaches the exclusive way of salvation in Christ. While members need not accept all that the Westminster Standards teach, they do agree to be taught from a confessional position.

2. OUR SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE

As noted above, our system of doctrine is commonly called Reformed, emerging from the group of Protestant churches so named (in contrast to Lutheranism). Since Reformed theology was influenced and shaped by John Calvin, it is often also called Calvinism, though the self-effacing Calvin would surely be chagrined to know it. The Reformed faith involves a return to the Scriptures, and seeks to put together the teachings of the Bible in accordance with the Bible’s own approach, that of the covenant. This Reformed and covenantal theology is set forth in the Reformed confessions and catechisms—most fully in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Our system of doctrine is summarized in the following paragraphs:

- The Bible, having been inspired by God, is entirely trustworthy and without error. Inspiration means that God, working through the personalities and gifts of the various biblical authors, so moved them by his Holy Spirit that, what they penned, though truly the words of those authors, was, indeed, the very Word of God. Therefore, we are to believe and obey its teachings. Once the last of the writing Apostles received such special revelation, the canon of Scripture was closed, and the Bible is the only source of special revelation today.

- The one true God is personal and we can know him, by his Word and Spirit, yet he remains beyond our comprehension. He is an invisible Spirit, completely self-sufficient and unbounded by space or time, perfectly holy and just, and loving and merciful. In the unity of the Godhead, there are three “persons”: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- God created the heavens and the earth and all they contain. We regard the creation account of Genesis as historical and not mythical, and are especially concerned to uphold the historical account of Adam and Eve and

all that entails. God upholds and governs all things in accordance with his eternal will. God is sovereign—in complete control—and has ordained everything that comes to pass; yet this does not diminish human responsibility and accountability.

- Because of the sin of the first man, Adam, who represented all mankind in the first covenant between God and man, the covenant of works, all mankind bears the guilt of that first sin, by imputation, and is corrupt by nature, dead in sin, and subject to the wrath of God for original and all actual sins. But God determined, by a covenant of grace, that sinners may receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Ever since man needed salvation, i.e., after the fall (man did not need to be saved before falling into sin), faith alone in Christ alone has always been the way of salvation, in both Old Testament and New Testament times.

- The Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, took upon himself a human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so that in her son Jesus, the divine and human natures were united in one person. Jesus Christ did this so that he might serve as our mediator, and he did all that he did, in his life and in his death, as our substitute. He lived a perfect, sinless life for us, fulfilling, as the second Adam, the covenant of works that the first Adam failed to keep by his disobedience. In doing so, he kept the law perfectly on our behalf. This is often called his active obedience. He also died for us on the cross, taking the wrath of God for all the sins of his people, original and actual. This is often called his passive obedience. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where he sits as Lord and rules over his kingdom (the church). He will return to judge the living and the dead, bringing his people (with glorious resurrected bodies) into eternal life and consigning the wicked to eternal punishment.

- Those whom God has predestined unto life are effectually drawn to Christ by the inner working of the Spirit as they engage the means of grace, particularly the hearing of the gospel in the preaching of the Word. When they believe in Christ, God declares them righteous (justifies them), not because of any righteousness of their own, but based solely on the righteousness achieved for them by Christ in his active and passive obedience, imputed (accounted) to them and received by faith alone. They are also adopted as children of the living God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who not only declares them to be justified and adopted, as acts of his grace, but further works in them, not only having regenerated them, but sanctifying them, enabling them increasingly to stop sinning and act righteously. They repent of their sins (both at conversion and thereafter), produce good works as the fruit of

their faith, and persevere to the end in communion with Christ, with assurance of salvation, which is not of the essence of faith, but an ordinary concomitant of it.

- Believers strive to keep God’s moral law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, not to earn salvation, but because they have salvation in Christ. In other words, believers seek to obey the law of God out of gratitude, because they love their Savior and want to obey him. They don’t keep the law to gain acceptance with God (what Christ did secure that); rather, they keep the law because they have acceptance with God. God is the Lord of the conscience, so that men are not required to believe or do anything contrary to, or in addition to, the Word of God in matters of faith or worship.

- Christ has established his church, and particular churches, to gather and perfect his people, by means of the ministry of the Word, the sacraments of baptism (which is to be administered to any unbaptized adult upon a profession of faith in Christ, as well as the children of those who profess their faith in Christ) and the Lord’s Supper (in which the body and blood of Christ are really, yet spiritually, present to the faith of believers), and the disciplining of members found delinquent in doctrine or life. Christians assemble on the Lord’s Day chiefly to worship God by praying, hearing the Word of God read and preached, singing psalms and hymns, and receiving the sacraments.

3. OUR CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The church is no mere human organization, but a divinely established and defined institution. The church does not serve any lesser human goals, but is meant to give expression to the ultimate purpose of humanity: to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The church is the body of Christ, of which he is the head. As a faithful branch of the true church, the OPC acknowledges Jesus Christ as its only head and his Word as the final authority in all matters of faith and life.

What does this Presbyterianism look like in practice? Beginning at the local level, each congregation is governed by a session, which consists of all the ministers of the congregation, together with the ruling elders elected by the congregation. Ministers are licensed and ordained by the governing bodies of the regional churches, the presbyteries, and are called by congregations to serve in pastoral office in those particular local churches. Ruling elders are elected by congregations, being recognized as those among the people gifted to join a congregation’s minister(s) in governing locally. Other office-bearers, called deacons, are elected by congregations to oversee their ministries of mercy. They are, like ruling elders, ordained and installed, but they do not exercise spiritual rule alongside the ministers and elders in the congregation.

As required by the Scriptures, all officers must be men, not women. Non-ordained persons often sit on committees or individually serve in ways that address important areas of congregational life, but always under the supervision and oversight of the session.

The local church focuses on worship, education, evangelism, ministries of mercy, and godly discipline. The session ensures that the Word of God is faithfully preached, that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are properly administered, and that spiritual care—including, where necessary, the discipline of erring members—is lovingly and effectively provided. Sessions direct and supervise the ministries of local congregations, examine and receive new members, and provide wisdom and judgment when disputes arise within the church. Because of these responsibilities, elders are required to “sincerely adopt and receive” the doctrinal standards of the OPC—the Confession of Faith, along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms—“as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.”

Members are received into a local Orthodox Presbyterian congregation upon public profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, letter of transfer from another Orthodox Presbyterian church, or letter of transfer from a church of like faith and practice (together with a public profession of faith). The session determines who is qualified to be received publicly into membership based on a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, ordinarily ascertained by interview. Believers who have been baptized and who have publicly professed their faith, after being qualified to do so following the sessional interview, are termed “communicant members.” They are admitted to the Lord's Supper and have voting rights and responsibilities within the congregation. Their baptized children are received as “noncommunicant members” of the congregation, and as such do not partake of the Lord's Supper or exercise voting rights.

Congregations are entitled to hold and own their property without right of reversion to the presbytery or denomination in the event of the congregation's dissolution or departure from the OPC. Congregations may choose to incorporate and elect trustees. Although a majority of any board of trustees must be officers of the congregation (elders or deacons), all trustees need not be ordained and, in any case, exercise no ruling authority in the congregation. Congregations may withdraw from the OPC by the affirmative vote of two successive meetings by the congregation, provided that the presbytery has been notified and has had an opportunity to seek to dissuade them from withdrawing.

The congregations of the OPC are currently organized into seventeen regional churches, each of which has a governing body called a presbytery. A presbytery combines the efforts of its churches in conducting youth

ministries, caring for diaconal needs, establishing new churches, and sometimes helping to send missionaries to other countries. The presbytery, which meets at least two times each year, consists of all the ministers and commissioned ruling elders in the regional church. It cares for the health and well-being of its local congregations and provides help and a place for appeal in resolving conflicts in local churches. It supervises ministers and prepares ministerial candidates, and it spreads the gospel in its region through evangelism and church planting.

The General Assembly oversees the ministry of the whole OPC. It ordinarily meets once each year and is composed of an agreed-upon number of ministers and ruling elders representing each presbytery. It provides and publishes training and educational materials for the churches. It arranges internship training, including the Ministerial Training Institute, for ministerial candidates. It coordinates the planning, funding, and prayer support for the efforts of presbyteries and local congregations in establishing new churches. It helps to oversee special diaconal needs. It makes a pension plan available to its ministers. It sends missionaries to foreign lands. And it resolves matters of conflict in regional and local churches, and administers judicial discipline as a court of final appeal.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OPC

Reformed theology, as expressed in our Confession and Catechisms, and as developed by a theologian like Geerhardus Vos, is rich and comprehensive, encompassing the full range of biblical teaching, both in terms of its chronology (redemptive history) and its doctrines (systematic theology). We endeavor to preach and teach this “whole counsel of God,” always holding the gospel, the good news of salvation in Christ, as central in this task. We understand, in other words, the teaching of the Bible to be both historical and theological, forming a system of doctrine, a unity that gives expression to the multifarious writings that make up the Bible.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church stands or falls with the Bible. We are very serious about the Bible being the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and thus our rule of faith and life. As inspired, this means that the Bible comes from God (and is thus authoritative), every word in it being the very word of God. As infallible, it is incapable of error and thus is inerrant, containing no errors in the autographa, the original manuscripts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. God has not only given his Word, but has superintended and preserved its transmission, and we can rest assured that excellent scholarship has given us various first-class translations of it. Since we have this true Word from our God, we are very serious about doctrinal purity. This zeal may at times appear contentious, particularly in an age, as is this one, of

doctrinal indifference. But apathy about the truth must not and does not deter us in our overriding concern to follow our Lord Jesus Christ as he speaks in the Scriptures. We are not monolithic in all our thinking and positions, especially with matters that are extra-confessional, but any divergent views are always examined in the light of Scripture, so that everyone may be convinced that he is following God faithfully.

We follow the Bible wherever it leads us, but we are careful not to add to its teachings. This is one of our hallmarks: in the battles that we had with the liberals in the old church (especially in the 1920s and 30s), we refused to take from the Word, as the liberals typically did. And once we became our own church and then had internecine struggles with the fundamentalists, we refused to add to the Word. If the Bible does not condemn a certain practice or idea, neither do we. We allow Christian liberty in matters in which the Word of God permits liberty. We always acknowledge the need for moderation in the use of God's good gifts, but we also firmly believe, to cite an old Latin phrase, *abusus non tollit usum*: the abuse of something does not mean that it has no proper use.

In the last century, at the time of our formation, many evangelical churches were premillennial, meaning that they believed that Jesus would return and establish an earthly kingdom of a thousand years. While we have allowed liberty regarding such "last things" (eschatology), most of our ministers have not been of that mind, but have believed that reference to a thousand-year kingdom in Revelation 20 is symbolic and coterminous with the age in which we now live, in which God is gathering, by his Word and Spirit, a people from all the nations before the return of Jesus. These "amillennialists," as they are called, do not look for a yet future golden age before the return of Christ, but rather for a continuation of the same work that has gone on since the ascension of Christ to heaven and which will continue until he returns to the earth. Some of our ministers are postmillennial, looking for a yet future golden age before the return of Christ. A few are historic premillennial, but not dispensational, the latter being contrary to the covenantal theology of the Westminster Standards.

Because Reformed theology is rich and comprehensive, we endeavor, not only to teach theology narrowly, but also to promote a Reformed world-and-life view. This reflects the fact that the OPC is not only the product of Old Princeton (1812–1929), but also of the continental influence of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Geerhardus Vos. This dual Scottish/Dutch commitment was reflected in the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary (1929), in which men like Cornelius Van Til, R. B. Kuiper, and others taught alongside John Murray, J. Gresham Machen, and others. Although the OPC has never had its own seminary, early Westminster Seminary was

formative for our church. Our commitment to a world-and-life view means that we believe that all areas of life—both personal and cultural—should be brought under the dominion of Jesus Christ. We don't restrict our faith narrowly to "getting saved," going to church, and observing a list of "do's and don'ts." We are concerned to be good Christian witnesses and also to influence the institutions and culture around us to be more righteous. At the same time, we do not, as the church, ever take partisan political positions, believing rather in the spirituality of the church and leaving it to members as individuals to determine how best to bring their witness to bear on the world in the specifics of whatever political or other action they may choose to take. We strive, in short, to be faithful to Reformed doctrine and to apply it in the whole course of our lives.

We gather together on the Lord's Day chiefly to worship God. Our worship services are God-centered, not man-centered. They tend to be simple, reflecting the dynamic of the new administration of the covenant of grace that has obtained since Christ returned to heaven after performing his saving work. In the older administration of the covenant of grace, in the time of the tabernacle and temple, worship was more elaborate because it had to sensibly set forth Christ to come; now worship need not do that, since Jesus has come. Our Confession says, "Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament." This pattern of simple worship, which is a blessing in its call to liberty from man-made devices, reflects what we call "the regulative principle of worship"—that we worship God in the way that he has set forth in the Bible and not according to the imaginations of humans.

Every member is encouraged to be active in the life and work of the congregation. There are typically a number of opportunities for such in outreach, hospitality, missions, and other areas of service. The gifts of both men and women are desired and used to build up Christ's spiritual body, the church.

Many people in our churches are involved with Christian schools or homeschooling as good ways to fulfill the task that every member of the church has to rear his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is one of the primary reflections of our concern to take our faith seriously and to apply it broadly to all of our lives.

We are concerned that our covenant youth be brought up in the instruction of the Lord. Thus, catechetical instruction is strongly promoted. Some families are quite active in instructing their children in the Shorter Catechism

or one of the children's catechisms based upon it. In some congregations, ministers, elders, or others are quite involved in teaching the youth the faith by such means. In any case, congregations, both through their own teaching or through encouraging families to provide catechetical teaching, seek to fulfill their responsibility to instruct the children in the faith.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

Our churches eagerly seek to fulfill the Great Commission that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us (Matthew 28:18–20). As a denomination, we carry out our mission for worldwide outreach through three program (or ministry) committees of the General Assembly: the Committee on Foreign Missions, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, and the Committee on Christian Education.

The work of each of these committees is administered by a general secretary, an associate general secretary (in the case of Foreign Missions and Home Missions), and a small staff, with administrative offices located in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia (see appendix 1).

These ministries are supported by the generous gifts of God's people and others within and outside the OPC. Under a unified plan of giving called Worldwide Outreach, gifts not designated for a particular ministry or program are divided among the three program committees on a percentage basis set by the General Assembly. Gifts may also be designated for the committees individually or for special purposes.

Other denominational work is carried out through committees of the General Assembly other than the three program committees, including, but not limited to, the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel, and the Committee for the Historian.

The work of the program committees and these four additional standing committees is outlined below.

1. FOREIGN MISSIONS

The OPC, through its Committee on Foreign Missions, sends missionaries throughout the world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to help establish indigenous churches that are self-governing. The OPC currently has missionaries serving on the continents of Asia, Europe (Ukraine), Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea), North America (Haiti, Quebec), and South America (Uruguay). The Committee, through its Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps, also serves Reformed churches in Colombia, Peru, Kenya, India, Austria and Switzerland, Hungary, and South Sudan. For further information about the Committee on Foreign Missions, see opc.org or contact cfmsec@opc.org.

2. HOME MISSIONS

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension works with presbyteries and congregations to help plant new churches throughout North America. On average, the Committee provides financial assistance to over thirty mission works spread throughout the United States and Canada. In many presbyteries, it also employs regional home missionaries—ordained ministers and ruling elders who assist those interested in starting an OPC congregation. For further information about the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, see opc.org or contact ophomemissions@opc.org.

3. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Committee on Christian Education provides resources for the churches and helps with theological training. The Committee produces *New Horizons*, the monthly magazine of the OPC, and oversees opc.org. The OPC, through the CCE, also partners with the Presbyterian Church in America in Great Commission Publications (gcp.org), a Sunday school ministry. For further information about the Committee on Christian Education, see opc.org or contact ccesec@opc.org.

4. DIACONAL MINISTRIES

The Committee on Diaconal Ministries focuses on a word-and-deed ministry of mercy to the members of the covenant community, the church, and earnest inquirers. It does this through assisting local congregations and presbyteries with the resources of the entire denomination. For further information about the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, see opc.org or contact david.nahkla@opc.org.

5. ECUMENICITY

The OPC, through its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, interacts with gospel-preaching churches committed to the Word of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ. The OPC has membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, a network of thirteen churches with over six hundred thousand members, and in the International Conference of Reformed Churches, a fellowship that includes thirty Reformed denominations worldwide. For further information about the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, see opc.org or contact mark.bube@opc.org.

6. CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL

The Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel represents the OPC on the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel, which provides a prayer list for endorsed chaplains. For further information about the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel, see opc.org or contact dickinson.1@opc.org.

7. HISTORIAN

The Committee for the Historian assists the Historian in preserving and promoting the history of the OPC. This includes the oversight of the OPC Archives. For further information about the Committee for the Historian, see opc.org or contact Camden Bucey at hc@opc.org.

CONCLUSION

We are grateful for your interest in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and thank you. We hope that, as you have read about the OPC, our dependence upon and testimony to the grace, love, and mercy of our God has been evident. We pray that you may join us in praising him for his wonderful goodness to his people, even in the face of life's many trials and difficulties, all of which are under his fatherly control. If you are interested in learning more about the OPC or joining one of our local congregations, the appendices that follow will provide you with helpful information.

Although we strive, with the help and grace of God, to be faithful to his Word, both in what we teach and how we live, we are keenly aware that we fall woefully short of all that Christ, our Head and King, requires of those who bear his name. We struggle with sin and weakness in our lives and in our ministries as a church. Our only hope, our only confidence, our only peace, is in him who, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself for us, purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father has given to him. Our true joy is in doing what pleases our Lord Jesus Christ in humble obedience to the whole counsel of his holy Word.

All praise and honor be to our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To God be the glory!

APPENDIX 1

PEOPLE TO CONTACT

The administrative offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are located at 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19090-2539; tel. 215-830-0900; fax 215-830-0350. At this location you may contact the following people (and their supporting staff) about the ministries of the OPC:

The stated clerk of the General Assembly
statedclerk@opc.org

The general secretary for Home Missions
ophomemissions@opc.org

The general secretary for Christian Education
ccecsec@opc.org

The general secretary for Foreign Missions
opforeignmissions@opc.org or ccecsec@opc.org

If you are considering becoming a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, you are urged to contact an OP minister in your area. OP churches and ministers are listed geographically in our annual Directory, which may be ordered free of charge from the stated clerk. A directory of churches is posted and continually updated on our website, www.opc.org.

Ministers or licentiates of other denominations who are considering ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are encouraged to speak with the general secretary for Home Missions, the stated clerk of the General Assembly, and/or the stated clerk of the appropriate presbytery (listed in the printed Directory).

APPENDIX 2

FURTHER INFORMATION

A great deal of information about the OPC can be found at the OPC website (www.opc.org), including, in downloadable digital form at no charge, a growing number of the publications listed below.

The following publications may be ordered by calling the administrative offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Willow Grove, PA, at 215-830-0900. Most of the items (and others) that are for sale may also be ordered at www.opc.org using a credit card. (Prices may change.)

Directory — free listing of all churches and ministers in the OPC (annual editions; directory of churches kept current on website)

New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church — free monthly denominational magazine; \$20/year requested from non-OPC subscribers in the United States; \$40/year required from overseas subscribers (\$30 in Canada); also available as a free e-mail attachment; downloadable in PDF, ePub, and Mobi formats

The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC with Proof Texts — \$12.00

The Book of Church Order — \$10.00

Home Missions Update — free biweekly newsletter at chmce.org

Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church — free at chmce.org

Great Commission Publications (3640 Windsor Park Drive, Suwanee, GA 30024-3897) sells Sunday school and VBS materials, *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, *Trinity Hymnal*, and adult studies. Call toll-free 800-695-3387 to

order material. To find more information, download a catalog, and/or order online, go to www.gcp.org.

The following publications are sold by the Committee for the Historian. For information and/or to order online, go to www.opc.org/historian.html. Orders may also be placed at 215-830-0900 or bookorders@opc.org. There is an additional charge for shipping. (Prices may change.)

The Presbyterian Conflict, by Edwin H. Rian — paperback, \$5.00

Lest We Forget: A Personal Reflection on the Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, by Robert K. Churchill — paperback, \$2.00

Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, by D. G. Hart and John Muether — paperback, \$5.00

Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990, by D. G. Hart — hardback, \$10.00

J. Gresham Machen, by Ned B. Stonehouse — hardback, \$10.00

Choosing the Good Portion: Women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church — hardback, \$12.00

Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church — hardback, \$12.00

For a Testimony, by Bruce Hunt — paperback, \$5.00

APPENDIX 3

HOW TO JOIN THE OPC

If you are an individual or a family ...

We invite you to get to know us better by visiting one of our churches. Members are received into our local churches by the session (consisting of the ministers and ruling elders). After hearing of your desire to join the church, the session will meet with you to learn of your faith in Christ.

You may become a communicant member of an Orthodox Presbyterian church in one of three ways:

1. By transferring your membership from another approved denomination (a church of like faith and practice),
2. By reaffirming your faith in Christ to the session, or
3. By professing your faith in Christ for the first time as the session meets with you.

You will be asked to give your assent to the following five questions before the congregation:

1. *Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?*
2. *Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?*

3. *Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?*

4. *Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?*

5. *Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?*

If you are a group of families or a congregation ...

You should contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for the region in which your group or church is located. (He may be found in the printed Directory or by contacting anyone listed on page 24 above). He will be able to make arrangements for you to meet with presbytery representatives with whom you may explore the process of becoming a congregation or a mission work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The membership requirements are the same as those for individual membership, listed above.

The presbytery will want to know that your official documents will relate your group or congregation to the doctrinal standards of the OPC (the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) and the documents in *The Book of Church Order*. In addition, they will want to know that your pastor and your elders are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Reformed faith, and to the presbyterian form of church government.

Pastors and ruling elders will be examined as to their qualifications and will be required to give their assent to the following questions, among others:

1. *Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?*

2. *Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?*

3. *Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?*

4. *Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord? (Ruling elders: Do you promise to seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church?)*

At a service of recognition and installation, the congregation will be required to respond affirmatively to this question:

In reliance upon God for strength do you solemnly promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

Then the officers of the congregation will be ordained (if necessary) and installed in the usual manner.

If you are a minister of the gospel ...

You should contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for the region in which you currently live or minister. (He may be found in the printed Directory or by contacting anyone listed on page 24 above). He will be able to help you to make arrangements to meet with presbytery representatives with whom you may explore the process of becoming a ministerial member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. They will need to inquire concerning your educational and ministerial credentials. In addition to other requirements, you will be asked to stand before the presbytery for an oral examination of your theological beliefs and of your commitment to the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the documents in *The Book of Church Order*. You will be asked to give your assent to the questions put to all ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as given above.

