

NEW HORIZONS

JUNE/JULY 2026

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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Christian Education's
Subcommittee on Serial Publications

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Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian
Church. All rights reserved. ISSN: 0199-3518

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Subscriptions: Free to OPC members.
Nonmembers suggested donation: \$20.00
annually; \$30.00 for addresses in Canada;
\$40.00 elsewhere abroad. A free email PDF
subscription is available. Contact: 215-830-
0900; or 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow
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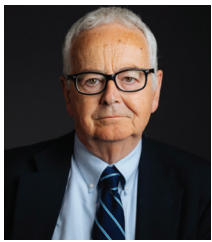
Periodicals postage is paid at Willow
Grove, PA, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *New
Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian
Church*, 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow
Grove, PA 19090-2539.

Views expressed by our writers are not
necessarily those of the editors or official
positions of the OPC.

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ORTHODOX SOTERIOLOGY



ROBERT LETHAM

“He [Christ] became man that we might become God.”¹ What a gross violation of the Creator-creature distinction! This is the gut reaction of most Reformed people, I am sure.

Those were the words of Athanasius in *De incarnatione* (54), written probably in the 330s. He was following a similar statement by Irenaeus in the second century. Deification: it has been and remains central, overarching, to the soteriology of the Eastern church.

WHAT DID IT MEAN?

Athanasius was one of the staunchest defenders of the deity of the Son. He no more intended that we cease to be human than he said that the Son ceased to be God when he became man. Rather, the eternal Son took human nature into personal union, remaining who he is, with the express purpose that we humans might become partakers of the divine nature in union with him. In short, we are enabled by grace to be in union with God, while remaining who we are.

There are various strands of thought on *theosis*, as Norman Russell demonstrates in his definitive treatment of the subject.² Some we would consider unacceptable, since they border on apotheosis; most commonly known in the West is the form originating with Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), popularized in the last century by Vladimir Lossky, marked by large doses of mysticism and reliant on ascetic and moral effort. However, what Russell calls “Alexandrian Tradition II,” advanced by Athanasius and Cyril, is synonymous with adoption, renewal, salvation, sanctification, grace, illumination, and vivification, viewed in holistic terms rather than as discrete elements.

Becoming more like God means becoming more human, since being human is ultimately being in the image of Christ, who is God. In tandem with the Creator-creature distinction is an inherent compatibility, established by God himself in creation. If that were not so, the incarnation would not have been possible.

Over the years, the East became isolated from the Latin West. The Islamic invasions played a huge part, placing draconian curbs on Christians. Events in the west passed the Greeks by; it had no Middle Ages, no Renaissance, no Reformation, no Enlightenment, no Pope, no magisterium. The issues that arose in the Roman church, the debates over the atonement and justification, were far removed. The late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware wrote that in the West the questions asked by Rome and Protestantism are the same, but the answers are different, whereas in the East the questions themselves are different.³

Nevertheless *theosis* was not something strange to the West. John Calvin, commenting on 2 Peter 1:4, famously wrote: “It is the purpose of the gospel to make us sooner or later like God. It is a kind of deification (*quasi deificar*).” Earlier, Augustine, in an unpublished sermon on Psalm 81 (82 in the English Bible), wrote: “God made man. God was made man, and God will make us men gods [by adoption and grace].” Aquinas made similar remarks. Recent work has established that such views were widespread in early Reformed theology, not only in Calvin but also with Bucer and Oecolampadius.⁴ Hymnwriters like Isaac Watts—“the men of grace have found glory begun below”⁵—and Charles Wesley—“changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place”⁶—grasped something of its nature. Wesley summed it up:

*He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near,
and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.⁷*

The main difference here is that in the West *theosis* has functioned as one doctrine among others, largely focused on the future in terms of glorification, whereas in the East it is embrative of the whole of salvation.

BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THEOSIS

Leaving aside the transfiguration, due to word limits, let us consider the biblical roots of *theosis*. In talking of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus promised that to the one who loves him, “my Father will love him and we will come to him and take up permanent residence in him” (John 14:23, my trans.). *Who* takes up permanent residence within us? The Holy Spirit. *Who* is the Holy Spirit? Is it merely some kind of influence or power? No, he is one of the Trinity! Does the Spirit work independently? No, all three persons work together inseparably. Thus, the whole Trinity indwells the church and its members, since God is one and indivisible, while it is the Spirit who is personally, hypostatically involved. Can we remain unaffected?

I have already referred to 2 Peter 1:4, a *locus classicus*, where we are said to have become “partakers of the divine nature.” The following context suggests the fruit of the Spirit is in view, the work of God in the soul of man. Paul wrote that “we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (*metamorphoumetha*) into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18, my trans.). Moses’s face shone after meeting with God on Mount Sinai, even though from a transitory encounter; ours is permanent. John adds his voice in pointing to the return of the Lord, when “we shall see him as he is,” not in that poor lowly stable but in resplendent glory, akin to his appearances to the apostle himself and to Saul of Tarsus (Rev. 1:9–20, Acts 9:3–9). At that time “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:1–2). We shall be changed (1 Cor. 15:50–57), made like the glorified Christ (Phil. 3:20–21).

THE DIFFERENT EMPHASES OF EAST AND WEST

In broad brush strokes, the West (Rome as well as Protestantism) is strongly Pauline; the East is basically Johannine. For the West the main problem is sin, resolved by the atonement and justification. For the East the problem is death, conquered by the resurrection and completed in deification. These are not to be taken as exclusive foci but general emphases.

The West maintains original sin, strongly legal and forensic, but with consequences affecting our whole being. In the East it is called ancestral sin and forensic language is avoided; corruption is transmitted but not guilt. Prior to this, a distinction is usually made between the image

and likeness of God, the image signifying reason, free will, and a connection to God, while the likeness consists in deification, something to be attained. This difference in the Eastern view of sin is portentous, but we must bear in mind that Orthodoxy has no definitive pronouncements on the matter, due to its official dogma being limited to the ecumenical councils, the writings of approved fathers, the Bible, and the liturgy. Moreover, there is no rigid uniformity; Kallistos Ware regarded image and likeness as synonymous.

My friend Dr. Panagiotis Kantartzis, senior minister of the First Greek Evangelical Church in Athens, writes:

Although perhaps an oversimplification, we might say that while the Orthodox need to rediscover the “beginning” of salvation, that is justification by faith, Evangelicals need to rediscover the “end” (telos) of salvation, that is our union with Christ and our likeness with God, that is and in that sense our deification.

After all, he adds, referring to Calvin, “it is the intention of the gospel to make us sooner or later like God.”⁸

If one has difficulty assimilating the second part of Athanasius’s comment, “that we might become God,” it may well relate to a problem we have with the first clause, “He became man.” As Athanasius implies, and others like Maximus the Confessor developed, the incarnation and deification are related. Indeed, there is evidence of such problems in recent evangelical aberrations, which have not left the Reformed unscathed. How could the Gordon H. Clark–Van Til controversy on the relationship between divine and human knowledge have been conducted without primary reference to the incarnation? Many recent proposals betray basic ignorance of the classic doctrine. There are a range of contemporary problems I have addressed in my recent book *The Eternal Son*. Moreover, with our correct emphasis on justification and atonement, is there not a danger of viewing God mainly as a judge who is appeased and losing sight of his being the Father who welcomes us and adopts us in living, transformative union with the natural Son, whose relation to the Father we are given to share in the dynamic power of the Spirit?

SYNERGISM

If this is so wonderful, someone might say, why don’t you go ahead and become Orthodox (with a capital O)? Get chrismated, grow a long beard, wear a black robe and a silver cross! No, there are clear weaknesses, perhaps stemming from the overall balance of Orthodox soteriology and the dominance of deification.

Justification only by faith is not a problem necessarily;

there is no need to renounce it if one converted, no obstacle to a smooth transition. Compared to Rome, Orthodoxy has far fewer obstructive dogmas. But justification only by faith has not played a role in Orthodox faith and life. (Nor has it featured in Rome's thinking in anything like the way it has done in Protestantism.) While Rome opposed it, Orthodoxy missed it. The germ for it is present in the famous Jesus prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"—which is integral to Orthodox piety.

While the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement was common, even distinctive, in the early centuries, in recent times in Orthodoxy it has been marginalized or displaced by the teaching that the cross was a triumph, a conquest of the devil and death. While the latter is correct in itself, the heart of the biblical teaching is on substitutionary atonement.

Nevertheless, the main problem in Orthodox soteriology is synergism, in which human free will plays a central part in the process of salvation. It is seen early in the homilies of the great preacher Chrysostom. Addressing passages that stress the sovereign action of God, he backs off and talks about free will. It was powerfully reinforced in the Greek and Syriac churches in their encounter with Islam. Given that Allah was a unitary deity, not personal, with will and power on steroids (*islam* means "submit"), fatalism was the result, with no room for human agency. Consequently, the Orthodox have rejected categorically the Augustinian and Reformed doctrine of election and predestination, since they misread it through the lens of the Islamic fatalism with which they had been familiar.

To my mind, this synergism follows from Orthodoxy's weaker view of sin and feeds the stress on asceticism and moral effort. Ironically, while deification is something that only God can effect, the Holy Spirit transforming us into the image of Christ, the Orthodox place an emphasis on human action. It follows that there is no prospect of assurance of salvation, for how can we ever be sure that our own efforts are enough? In the liturgy, effectively unchanged since the fourth century, there is frequent repetition of pleas for mercy. Assurance is foreign for the Orthodox; it cannot be present with a synergistic view of salvation. As Kallistos Ware wrote, "I trust by God's mercy I am being saved" and "conscious as I am of my own human frailty, I remain between hope and fear right up to the very gates of death."⁹

SIMPLY TRAVELERS

There is one practical lesson we can learn from the Orthodox orientation to deification. Orthodox iconography

portrays the saints with solid golden halos around their heads. It denotes the fact that they are in the process of deification. If we were to visualize the saints around us in that way, with solid golden halos, it might make a difference in how we treated them, however obnoxious some of them might seem.

More seriously, there is no room for self-satisfied complacency as Reformed Christians. The Westminster Confession and Catechisms are certainly the most comprehensive and thorough statements available. But we have *not* got it all together. We are *not* complete. We are *not* free of faults, weaknesses, or errors. We have *not* arrived at our destination. We are simply travelers. And so too are the Orthodox. **NH**

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Notes:

1. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεωποιηθῶμεν.
2. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
3. Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin, 1978), 9.
4. Carl Mosser, "John Calvin and Early Reformed Theology" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Deification*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer, and Matthew Levering (Oxford University Press, 2024), 317–332.
5. From the hymn "Come We That Love the Lord."
6. From the hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."
7. From the hymn "Let Earth and Heaven Combine."
8. Panagiotis Kantartzis, *The Christian's Pocket Guide to Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Christian Focus, 2021), 80.
9. Cited by Kantartzis, *Pocket Guide*, 86, 94.

THE APPEAL OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY



ALAN D. STRANGE

Some of us find the recent turn to Eastern Orthodoxy among some in our churches quite concerning. This phenomenon is what has led us to conceive this issue of *New Horizons*. There are those in the pews and in the pulpit who have been part of this rather curious movement to Eastern Orthodoxy. We want to explore why Reformed folk would turn away from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to become Greek, Russian, or another form of Eastern Orthodox.

Perhaps the best place to start is to acknowledge that we can understand why broader evangelicals might make such a trek. The broader evangelical world is besotted with much theological pabulum, and, perhaps even more relevantly, its worship is often self-centered, not God-centered, containing no hint of reverence and awe. Little wonder that those enmeshed in the broader evangelical world come to long for something more evidently transcendent, mysterious, and otherworldly.

Worship is not the only question, although it is an important one. The greatest proponents of and apologists for Orthodoxy, as can be seen elsewhere in this issue, see their greatest strengths, especially over against the bulk of Protestantism, as being unbroken continuity with the early church, thus best reflecting today, they argue, what

the church since its inception has always been and done. This has, its partisans claim, netted Orthodoxy doctrinal stability, particularly in its adherence to conciliar theology (though only from the first seven ecumenical councils) and to a liturgical (and sacramental) fidelity and fullness absent in the Protestant world, which they argue is always given over to the latest craze. There are further matters, like Orthodoxy's approach to Scripture and tradition, minus what Orthodoxy finds wrong with Rome, especially papal absolutism, and Orthodoxy's seeing salvation as being too juridical in the West and better conceived as *theosis*, as it is in the East. This is a quick summary of what Eastern Orthodoxy perceives as its relative advantages over the whole Western church, Roman and Protestant.

OTHERWORLDLY WORSHIP

Orthodoxy has great curb appeal for those seeking otherworldly worship, not only among evangelicals but also when what passes for Reformed worship is more evangelical than Reformed in character—perhaps quite contemporary and informal in style. Even when Reformed worship is better conducted, taking its cues properly from Scripture as to what constitutes worship, it lacks the ceremony that some associate with truly ancient worship.

However, while we ought to eschew a kind of worship that lacks reverence and awe, that does not mean Orthodoxy is the answer. The Westminster Confession of Faith makes it clear that worship in the New Covenant era is different and better than that of the Old, making this contrast:

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. (WCF 7.6)

Eastern Orthodoxy perpetuates a misunderstanding of the matter: New Testament worship, according to them, is not simpler or less outwardly glorious. We, however, as Reformed, believe that the kind of worship that marked the life of Israel when it was the church underage, ought not to mark the church now. That's what's in view in WCF 7.6. We believe that our worship should be defined scripturally in terms of its elements, such as preaching, praying, singing, etc. And such is not elaborate and high-flown but something that can be done in any place on the Lord's Day, requiring only a preacher and the Word, and water and

wine for the sacraments, all of which comprises a comparatively simple liturgy.

Certainly, some people like the casual liturgy of evangelicalism. Similarly, some Reformed folks come to find a regulative-principle approach too confining and gravitate toward the iconography of the East, together with all the mystery and pomp of its worship. I've had people ask me whether I like great art and argue on that and related bases for Orthodox worship. Indeed, I do like great art (and architecture), and that's why I regularly visit great museums. I don't look for that in worship, however, because that's not what biblical worship involves or what it properly is.

So why do some seek this in the liturgy of Orthodoxy rather than going to the places I go to for art? I think such art-starved Christians actually make quite an "evangelical" mistake here. Just like some people want the sort of contemporary Christian music they hear played on the radio in the worship service, along with drama, dance, and whatever else might go on in such evangelical worship services, others feel a need in their life for what's represented in Orthodox liturgy—the music, art, and drama—and seek it in church instead of in the concert hall or the museum.

Both the seekers of a casual liturgy and the seekers of a high church liturgy, then, are wrongheaded about what properly comprises biblical worship. Both look for things they like instead of realizing that divine worship is about God and his glory and is to be done in keeping with his directives. We can go elsewhere for great music and art. The notion that what one likes must be in the worship service afflicts both our broadly evangelical friends and our friends who are converting to Orthodoxy. This is why in both cases partisans of such worship urge us who remain Reformed with words like this: "You just have to try it. It feels so right. It feels like I've come home."

LONGING FOR THE EXPERIENTIAL

I think that both responses to worship, in that they both seek comfort and security, appeal especially to us in an age in which all seems so threatening, as society continues to darken, throwing off its Christian past, everything seeming topsy-turvy, and technology advances at an increasingly fast pace. What might make Boomers comfortable—worship with music and the informal approach they like—doesn't work for others, who realize that the church has been around for millennia and want the kind of tradition and antiquity that Orthodox worship brings and the sense that it has been around forever. The experience of what feels like ancient worship may provide the security that folk threatened by our current culture crave. Orthodoxy focuses more on worship, liturgy, and what one experiences,

than on doctrine. It tends to look down on the Western Church in general, as noted, especially on something like the Protestant doctrine of forensic justification by faith alone, finding the transformative at the heart of salvation rather than the juridical.

As the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, Orthodoxy has not advanced theologically much since the late eighth century. In a highly contentious age as ours is, when polarization and politicization have created much dissension everywhere, it might seem safer to abandon mere doctrinal disputes, as the Eastern Orthodox might see them (perhaps even regarding them as rationalistic and obscurantist), for the sheer experience that Orthodox worship provides for the senses and not merely the mind—which is again Orthodoxy's caricature of Protestantism particularly, especially the Reformed faith.

In contrast, for many Reformed Christians, we cannot think of anything more comforting in this life than the assurance that we are as justified now as we ever will be. As the line in Toplady's hymn has it, the saints in heaven are "more happy but not more secure" than we. That sort of assurance is not to be found in Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy, which do not embrace and teach that salvation is all by grace alone through faith alone.

LEARNING FROM ORTHODOXY

Truth be told, all Reformed Christians fall short, even though the Reformed faith, properly confessed, is Christianity come into its own. We do indeed find things among Reformed Christians that Orthodoxy charges us with: rationalism, a downplaying of the sanative aspects of salvation (championing the forensic at the expense of the transformative), low ecclesiology, and the like. I reject that the remedy, however, to all this is to be found, respectively, in an apophatic approach that tends towards irrationalism at points, in salvation by *theosis*, and in a churchianity that swallows up all else, including doctrinal development throughout the history of the Christian church.

We certainly have the things to learn from Orthodoxy—like the proper integrity of the hypostatic union and that rationalism (and hyper-Calvinism) is a problem—but these are not to be learned by giving over to Orthodoxy's understanding of the work of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the church. Let's learn what we can from our Orthodox friends so that we can be better Reformed Christians and, at the same time, labor to convince them of the rightness and joy of the Reformed faith. **NH**

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COVENANT THEOLOGY AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY



LANE G. TIPTON

Both Eastern Orthodoxy and confessional Reformed theology affirm the ecumenical creeds and profess commitment to their doctrinal orthodoxy. Yet within that shared creedal framework, irreducible doctrinal differences emerge—most apparently in the Reformation doctrines of *sola Scriptura* and justification *sola fide*. By *sola Scriptura*, the Reformed confess that Holy Scripture, as the self-authenticating Word of God, stands as the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and life, such that the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture judges all councils, traditions, and human opinions (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.10). By justification *sola fide*, the Reformed confess that God justifies sinners by imputing to them the righteousness of Christ alone, received through faith alone, apart from the good works of the believer, in union with Christ (Shorter Catechism 33).

Without the clarity offered by these two doctrinal touchstones, one risks conflating fundamentally distinct

doctrines under shared terminology and thereby obscuring differences decisive for both Scripture and salvation. Engagement with Eastern Orthodoxy can otherwise become mired in ambiguous categories such as “mystery,” “participation,” or “tradition.” Responsible comparison requires focusing on those topics where both traditions speak with doctrinal clarity.

Eastern Orthodoxy rejects the Reformed understanding of both *sola Scriptura* and justification *sola fide*. Orthodoxy locates Scriptural authority within the church’s infallible interpretive tradition; the Reformed locate it in the self-authenticating voice of the Spirit speaking in Scripture. Orthodoxy construes justification within transformative *theosis*¹; the Reformed define justification as a forensic act grounded in Christ’s imputed righteousness and received by faith alone. These doctrinal differences are substantive, irreducible, and of great religious significance.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION

I have chosen to frame Eastern Orthodoxy for the purpose of this introductory essay initially on *The Confession of Dositheus* (1672), given its historical and polemical function within the Orthodox world, particularly in its direct engagement with Reformed theology. The *Confession* arose from the Synod of Jerusalem (1672), convened in response to the perceived influence of Reformed teaching, especially in connection with the legacy of Cyril Lucaris. It aimed largely to repudiate Protestant doctrines and by contrast to confess the teaching of the Eastern Church at precisely those points under dispute. As such, it stands as a deliberate and self-conscious statement of Eastern Orthodoxy over against the Reformation.

While later Orthodox theologians—such as Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, John Zizioulas, Kallistos Ware, and Andrew Louth—introduce refinements and nuances to Eastern Orthodox doctrine, their doctrine nevertheless coheres with the theological substance expressed in this *Confession* and bears its unmistakable impress. *The Confession of Dositheus* is not an ecumenical or universally binding conciliar standard within Eastern Orthodoxy.² It does not function as a final dogmatic norm in the same way as the Ecumenical Councils, as received within the infallible “Holy Tradition” of the Eastern church. Yet precisely because the *Confession* arises from a polemical engagement with Reformation theology, it proves especially useful for our present purpose. It gives formal, ecclesiastically sanctioned expression to how Eastern Orthodoxy understood and rejected the formal and material causes of the Reformation, namely *sola Scriptura* (Article 2) and justification



Eastern Orthodoxy today has more than 260 million adherents globally. Photo: Russian Orthodox church in Veliky Novgorod, Russia (Irina Balashova via Pexels).

sola fide (Article 13). While not exhaustive of the tradition, it provides a representative and clarifying witness at these principal points.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The divergence regarding the formal cause (*sola Scriptura*) emerges forcefully in *The Confession of Dositheus*. The church stands as the living, Spirit-taught organ of truth. Article 2 establishes the controlling premise: “The Holy Scriptures must be interpreted, not by private judgment, but in accordance with the tradition of the Catholic Church, which can not err, or deceive, or be deceived, and is of equal authority with the Scriptures.”³ Scripture is received as authoritative, yet that authority is not self-evidencing as standing above the church; it is normatively determined within Holy Tradition.

Scripture is therefore known and received within the life of the church, yet it does not stand as a self-authenticating canon apart from ecclesial mediation. Leading Eastern theologian Kallistos Ware expresses this point with clarity:

The Bible is the supreme expression of God’s revelation to the human race and Christians must always be people of the book. But if Christians are people of the book, the book is the book of the people. It must not be regarded as something set up over the church but as something that lives and is understood within the church. That is why one should not separate scripture and tradition. It is from the church that the Bible ultimately derives its authority. For it was the

*church which originally decided which books form a part of holy scripture and it is the church alone which can interpret holy scripture with authority.*⁴

In this formulation, Scripture’s authority is affirmed, but it is accessed and exercised through the Spirit-guided life of the church. As a result, the church functions not only as a witness to the authority of Scripture, but as the decisive context in which its meaning is interpreted and its authority is established. There is no room for the self-authenticating Word of God as the supreme authority by which the Holy Spirit, speaking in Scripture, judges all councils, traditions, and human opinions (WCF 1.10).

At this point, the deeper logic of the Orthodox emerges. The church’s role as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture does not rest merely on institutional continuity or historical succession, but on a theological claim about the nature of the church itself—its sacramental participation in the life of God. Its infallibility, as asserted in the *Confession*, traces in one way or another to its sacramental participation in the “energies” of God in union with Christ by the living power of the Spirit.⁵ Precisely because the church is understood to share, by grace, in the divine life it proclaims, its doctrinal consciousness is regarded as Spirit-formed and therefore infallible. The same participatory union that effects transformation (*theosis*) is also said to secure right judgment in matters of faith (Holy Tradition), so that the church’s reception and interpretation of Scripture carries an authority commensurate with the life of God in which it participates. The church, as a community

undergoing transformation and participation in divine life (*theosis*), becomes the authoritative locus in which revelation is rightly received and known.

JUSTIFICATION WITHIN TRANSFORMATIVE THEOSIS

The divergence on the material cause in Article 13 follows the same principial pattern just surveyed. The *Confession of Dositheus* explicitly rejects justification by faith alone: “Man is justified, not by faith alone, but also by works.”⁶ This affirmation strikes directly at the Reformation’s doctrine of justification *sola fide*. Moreover, Article 14 affirms that “only the works of the regenerate, done under grace and with grace, are *perfect*, and *render the one who does them worthy of salvation*.”⁷

The *Confession* expresses a synergistic and transformative account of justification. It declares that “the faith which is in us, justifies through works, with Christ.” Here faith does not justify as an instrument that receives righteousness from outside the sinner; rather, it justifies as it operates in conjunction with works. Works “worthy of salvation” prove intrinsic to justification itself. They are described as “fruits in themselves, through which faith becomes efficacious,” and even as “meriting, through the Divine promises.” Justification thus involves a proper synergism between divine grace and human response in which justifying righteousness is cultivated and embodied in the life of the believer.

At a still deeper level, salvation for the Eastern Orthodox means “to become god, to attain *theosis*, ‘deification’ or ‘divinization.’ For Orthodoxy our salvation and redemption mean our deification.”⁸ *Theosis* involves two main aspects: “The ontological aspect concerns the transformation of human nature by incarnation, and the dynamic aspect concerns the appropriation of this deified humanity through the sacraments.”⁹ Meyendorff argues that “the humanity of Christ, ‘enhypostasized’ by the Logos, is penetrated with divine energy, and Christ’s body becomes the source of divine light and deification. It is ‘theurgic,’ that is, it communicates divine life to those who are ‘in Christ’ and participate in the uncreated energies active in it.”¹⁰ *Theosis* encompasses justification, shifting focus from imputed righteousness and forensic declaration as found in justification *sola fide* to participatory righteousness through union with Christ’s deified humanity. Justification in Eastern Orthodoxy is therefore a transformative participation in *theosis* effected through sacramental union with the deified humanity of Christ.

The contrast with the Reformation emerges clearly: The Reformed locate both biblical authority and forensic righteousness *extra nos*—in the self-authenticating Word

of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ. Eastern Orthodoxy locates both in various ways within the life of the church and the transformative participation of the believer in *theosis*. These are systematic divergences that permeate and shape each tradition’s doctrinal conceptions.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE COVENANT OF WORKS

Yet these doctrinal contrasts point to a still more fundamental theological issue. The Reformed have accounted for the self-authenticating authority of Scripture and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness by appealing to the basic category of the covenant of works. As summarized in WCF 7.1–2 and developed by theologians such as Francis Turretin, Geerhardus Vos, and Cornelius Van Til, Adam was created in the image of God (special creation) and immediately addressed by God in a covenantal Word from God (special providence). In his voluntary condescension, God’s Word to Adam bore an intrinsic, self-authenticating authority; it did not derive its authority from any external source but stood over Adam as the final standard of truth and obedience. By that same voluntary condescension, Adam was placed under the just terms of the covenant of works, obligated to render perfect obedience according to its prescribed conditions. That obedience, had it been rendered, would have been *ex pacto* meritorious, meeting the terms of covenantal justice, and would have been imputed to Adam’s natural posterity by virtue of his representative headship.

These two features inherent in the covenant of works stand in direct structural parallel to *sola Scriptura* and justification *sola fide*. Both authority and representation in the covenant of works inhere in the special revelation of voluntary condescension, thereby grounding a self-authenticating inscripturated Word (*sola Scriptura*) and the imputation of meritorious obedience (justification *sola fide*). Accordingly, the doctrine of the covenant of works supplies the internal theological rationale for both *sola Scriptura* and justification *sola fide*. In the covenant of grace, God’s inscripturated Word bears self-authenticating authority, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers by faith alone in union with him.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

By contrast, the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* would reject and restructure the entire religious edifice of Reformed theology. It blurs the Creator–creature distinction in *theosis*, forfeits the self-evidencing authority of Scripture as the supreme norm with its doctrine of Holy Tradition, and construes righteousness in terms of a synergistic participation in the divine energies. Accordingly, a right

standing before God no longer rests solely on the finished, meritorious obedience of Christ imputed and received by faith alone, but is bound up with an ongoing process of cooperative deification.

This synergism entails a corresponding loss of assurance—consistent with the Eastern rejection of the perseverance of the saints—since the faithful may finally fall away. In *The Orthodox Way*, Kallistos Ware teaches that salvation depends on the “convergence” of divine grace and human cooperation, both “indispensable.” Yet he also affirms that, because human freedom endures, “so to all eternity it lies in man’s power to reject God.”¹¹ Taken together, these claims entail that salvation is not indefectibly secured and irresistibly applied but remains contingent upon ongoing cooperation with grace—a cooperation that can cease, and with it, participation in the life of God.

The Reformed doctrine of the covenant offers the remedy for such a perilous religious conception: “The covenant of grace has its fixity in God alone, who answers for both parties, and effects man’s willing and working by the Holy Spirit.”¹² Where God stands for both parties in Christ, assurance rests on a completed, unalterable work grounded in the Mediator in his estates of humiliation and exaltation. But where righteousness and beatitude depend upon human cooperation, that fixity is displaced, and with it the unassailable security Scripture ascribes to those justified by faith in union with Christ.

Eastern Orthodoxy, by grounding authority in Holy Tradition and righteousness in synergistic *theosis*, builds religious hope upon sand—unstable and contingent—whereas confessional Reformed theology builds religious hope upon the rock—the firm foundation of the covenant of grace, as the self-evidencing Scriptures authoritatively reveal a finished work and an imputed righteousness, received by faith alone, as both righteousness and beatitude are infallibly secured by Christ and granted in union with Christ to the glory of God alone (*solī Deo gloria*). **NH**

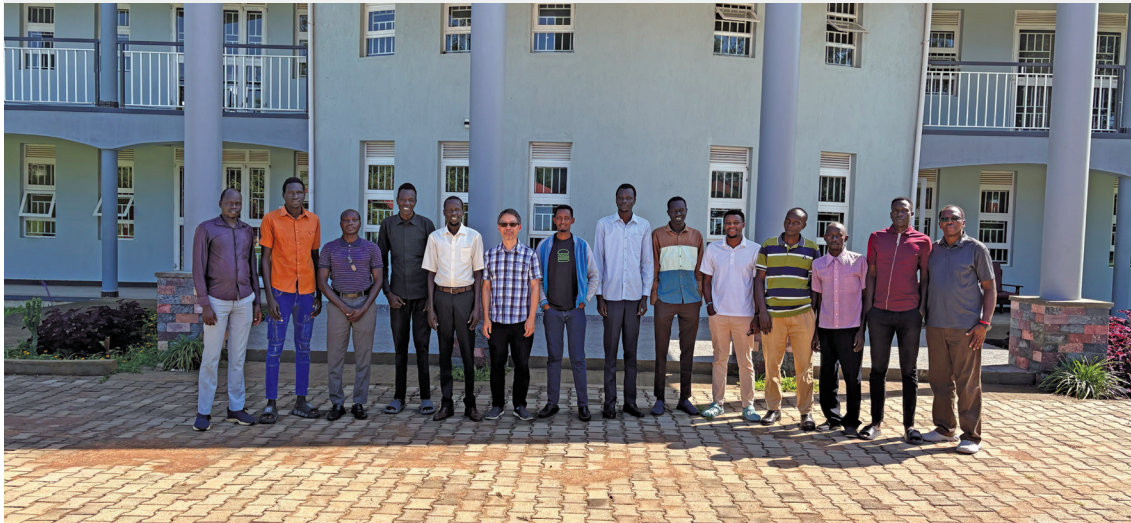
The author is pastor of Trinity OPC in Easton, Pennsylvania, and fellow of biblical and systematic theology at Reformed Forum.

Notes:

1. In Eastern Orthodoxy, *theosis* is the baptized person’s transformative participation in the life of God by sacramental grace through union with Christ, whereby one becomes “by grace” what God is “by nature” yet mysteriously without sharing in the divine essence. Consult Kallistos (Timothy) Ware’s *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*, rev. ed. (Penguin Books, 1993), 226.
2. The eighteen articles were published with some changes in a Russian version in 1838.
3. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds*, vol. 1 (Harper & Brothers, 1878), 63. Schaff adds his own commentary: “Essentially Romish, but without an infallible, visible head of the Church.”
4. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 193. For a contrasting Reformed account of how the church is formed by the canon, see M. G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1975).
5. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 192, 231. The authority of Holy Tradition is rightly apprehended only from within the process of *theosis*, and it is precisely through that process that its truth is recognized, embodied, and transmitted.
6. Schaff, *Creeds*, 64.
7. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
8. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 225.
9. Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Paternoster, 1999), 10.
10. John Meyendorff, “Introduction,” in *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, ed. Richard J. Payne and John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1983), 19–20.
11. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 149–50, 181.
12. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (P&R Publishing, 2001), 257.

LIFE AT KNOX, LIFE IN CHRIST

C. FREDERICK LO



The author, center, with third-year students at KST. KST has four full-time African lecturers, two OP missionaries, and part-time and visiting lecturers from the United States, Australia, and East Africa.

Every day we begin classes at Knox School of Theology (KST) by singing a hymn. Sometimes, the tune is new to our students. Occasionally, they are not familiar with certain words. Still, out of tune and out of depth that we are, we sing praises to our God without ceasing, knowing that our time together is not only theological but also doxological.

KST was founded by our Uganda Mission to train pastors to better serve the indigenous church. It is one of few confessional Reformed schools in East Africa that awards an accredited bachelor's degree. Some students are already seasoned pastors wanting to be equipped with sound doctrine. Others are young men seeking a call to ministry. Our curriculum replicates many of the courses in a typical Bible college or seminary education, and I always emphasize the interlocking importance of both doctrine and life. Sometimes I am not sure whether I can totally distinguish between lecturing, preaching, and giving counsel to my students.

DOCTRINE AND LIFE AT KST

I would like to give you a few snapshots of KST as a school of theological training and of Christian life. The first is of a man I will call Rev. G. He is a good student who missed a few classes and failed to pass others last year, leaving his academic standing in question. Rev. G shared with

me the family problems that led him to take leave and return home—his parents and children had been recently displaced due to civil war. I could tell that disappointment, shame, and uncertainties weighed heavily on him. We are helping him through make-up classes and private lessons so that he may graduate with a diploma this year and re-apply to our bachelor's program this fall. Rev. G now has a better understanding of Jesus, our high priest in whom we find mercy and grace.

Mr. N has been a lecturer here for two years. He grew up in Burundi, southwest of Uganda. Though not as well-known as its neighbor Rwanda, Burundi was also mired in genocide for years. Mr. N's father was killed by rebels, and his family displaced. He told me that there were times when they had to hide in the middle of a field or forest when enemies swept through their villages. It was the gospel of Christ that saved him from fear and changed his mind and life, such that he was able to forgive his father's killers and to commit himself to a life of learning and teaching Christ crucified and raised. Last year, his newborn baby girl died within a week of her birth. Our sadness in seeing the tiny coffin was mixed with the comfort of knowing God. Spending time with Mr. N reassures me that he not only knows the Bible and can teach it, but that he also lives it out by setting his heart on Jesus, our sovereign King who is near and dear to us.

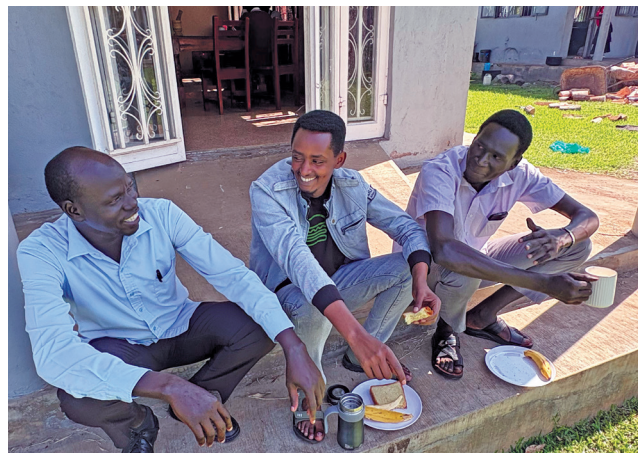
Mr. O graduated last May but was unsure of what he wanted to do. After he returned home to South Sudan, he was quickly called to be an associate pastor in a church plant as well as an assistant lecturer in a local theological school. While he was overjoyed in taking up preaching and teaching, his first ministry duty was to care for a boy who required emergency brain surgery. Although it has been difficult, the church has been helping the family with financial and post-surgery care that is still ongoing. Mr. O told me that the learning and shared life at KST has shaped his thinking and ministry.

SUFFERING AND AFFLICTION AS WITNESS TO CHRIST

While Uganda is mostly Roman Catholic and Anglican, Pentecostalism is growing in adherents and the prosperity gospel in influence. We have students who pastor charismatic or Pentecostal churches. After learning and embracing Reformed theology, they rejoice that they are better equipped to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. Yet some are uncertain how they will be received back in their hometowns and churches with their newfound convictions on worship, ministry, and church government. It is the grace and truth of Jesus that carries them forward.

We not only teach our students biblical doctrines and how to discern and combat false teaching, we also emphasize how an authentic Christian life serves as a witness to Christ. Many of our students have experienced civil war, gang violence, and financial and personal hardship. However, they find that a genuine Christian life is one of knowing and experiencing Christ's resurrection and suffering (Phil. 3:10–11). As it was necessary for Christ to suffer and then enter into glory (Luke 24:26), it is also necessary for us to share the power of resurrection in suffering and afflictions before we receive the unfading crown of glory.

Uganda is surrounded by some of the poorest countries in the world. Some of our former and current students



Students from different countries come together at KST.

pastor while working other jobs but still struggle to support their families and churches. In a region where many live hand to mouth, our students learn that their faithful labor and sacrificial giving to the Lord may not give them worldly comfort. Still, they gladly serve the One who knows them and equips them for the work of his church.

It is a joy to see our students from so many different countries and backgrounds playing volleyball together and breaking bread together. It is a sobering comfort to hear our African lecturers and students recount some of their personal hardships while praising God for his mercy and faithfulness. And it is encouraging to learn that many come to a better and deeper experiential knowledge of Christ through a gospel-adorning life at KST.

At the time of writing, we just celebrated Easter, and I am in the middle of teaching a class on Pauline Theology. I cannot help but think that what I see here is, in a limited way, an intersection of our teaching at KST and the Spirit's sanctifying work in the lives of our students through our union with the resurrected Christ and his church.

We praise God for all the prayers and support of our beloved brothers and sisters in the OPC. You are participating in our aim for our students to become faithful and fruitful pastors, teachers, elders, or leaders of their local and regional churches. Please pray for our students.

The author is an OP missionary in Mbale, Uganda.

Staff and faculty around the front desk at KST



WHAT'S NEW

Uganda missionaries **Mr. and Mrs. Travis (Bonnie) Emmett** (Christ Church OPC, Downingtown, PA) welcomed their newborn son Carson Isaiah Emmett on April 13 in Pennsylvania.

REVIEW: WATERS'S ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

A. CRAIG TROXEL

Guy Prentiss Waters has ventured before into the doctrine of the church with books on the Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, and particularly *How Jesus Runs the Church* (P&R, 2011). With his most recent title, *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, he launches himself into the deep, as the book's subtitle suggests. In this volume, Waters unpacks the scope of ecclesiology in the categories of systematic theology, while grounding his principles in Scripture and honoring the contributions of notable Reformed theologians from the past. The work divides into three parts—"Biblical Revelation," "Doctrinal Construction," and "Truth for Life and Mission"—and a conclusion. Each chapter is appended by an annotated list of suggested further readings.

"YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE"

Part 1, "Biblical Revelation," establishes the foundation for the church as the "people of God" by examining creation and Eden, showing that God intended his image-bearers to live in community, not in isolation. The following chapters compose a succinct survey of covenant theology as Waters discusses the successive covenants God made with Abraham (an "ecclesiastical covenant") and Moses (an extension and expansion of the Abrahamic covenant). In chapter 5 the Davidic covenant is taken up along with the prophets. David and Solomon inaugurate Israel's peace and prosperity, while the prophets bemoan Israel's subsequent decline. Nevertheless, God promises a remnant, through whom he will bring to pass his promises in all the covenants: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

The "climax and culmination" of the prophets and the Law is John the Baptist, whose calling is to prepare the way for the Christ, who ultimately transforms the conception

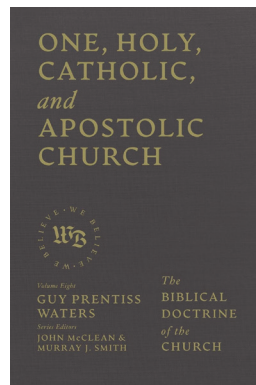
of the "people of God" in ways that revolve around Christ, Christ's work, and Christ's teaching on the kingdom of God. This section closes with a study of the apostolic church, showing how the New Testament writers demonstrated the continuity between the church and the people of God in the old covenant, along with the transformation they had undergone in light of Christ's finished work. The

author explores five New Testament metaphors for the church (vine, sheep, temple, body, bride), which all underscore the point that the new covenant people of God are one and the same with Israel. The chapter concludes with discussions on what the New Testament unfolds regarding the government, worship, and mission of the church.

CLASSIC ECCLESIOLOGY

Part 2, "Doctrinal Construction," presents the topics that one most often associates with the classic categories of ecclesiology, beginning with the church's attributes and marks. Distinguishing these categories and then defining their respective terms is an important task for a proper view of the church. Historical

works on ecclesiology have often used the materials of the church's attributes (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) to construct a theology of the church—even Reformed theologians have done so (e.g., G. C. Berkouwer's *The Church*). The author does not disappoint in his treatment of the attributes, cleansing each term with the waters of the Reformed faith. He then visits the discussion of whether the church has two marks (Word and sacrament) or three marks (Word, sacrament, discipline). He states that Calvin affirms the two marks position. This statement could be nuanced. Tadataka Maruyama makes a convincing case that although Calvin saw Word and sacrament as the two marks of the church with respect to its "title," discipline is



Lexham Academic, 2025.
Hardcover, 310 pages,
\$39.99.

an additional mark with respect to the church's "form" (see his *Calvin's Ecclesiology: A Study in the History of Doctrine*, 388).

Next, Waters addresses the government of the church and begins with its cornerstone doctrine: Christ as the king and head of the church. The church derives its power from the mediatorial reign of Christ, not from its officers (contra Episcopacy) or its members (contra Independency). Thus, the church's power is spiritual in nature, as it is ministerial and declarative, and manifests itself under the three branches of doctrine, order, and discipline. This authority may be exercised "severally" (by an individual elder) or "jointly" (by a plurality of elders). Speaking of elders, when it comes to the classic "two office" versus "three office" debate, Waters throws in his lot with the two office view, believing that there are "two orders" (elder and minister) in the same office. (It does come as a surprise that the entire defense of this view is comprehended by a single sentence.) The chapter ends by an exposition of the courts of the church.

As the author turns his attention to worship, he offers a clear statement of the regulative principle of worship, in both its prohibitive and positive forms, along with material on the elements of worship (Word, sacraments, prayer). The concluding topic of the chapter is a fine defense of the Lord's Day as the biblical day of worship. Chapter 12 introduces the doctrine of the communion of the saints, which naturally leads into the gifts of the Spirit and the mutual responsibilities of church members. No Reformed treatment of the gifts would be complete without discussing whether the gifts associated with the apostolic church have ceased. It is pleasing to see that Waters has profited from his former professor, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., and has adeptly applied the high points of *Perspectives on Pentecost*. Since Scripture emphasizes edification when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit, this provides a logical transition into church discipline. Here, points are made about the lawful exercise of "the keys," the different types of offenses and censures, the necessity for orderly process, and the need to keep the ultimate goal in view: repentance and restoration.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The third part of the book deals with the church looking outward toward the world and the state. The church's mission in the world has become one of the most lively topics in ecclesiology, particularly due to the *missio Dei* movement and its prominent champions, like Christopher J. H. Wright. Waters answers Wright's core ideas and then sets forth an alternative view of the church's redemptive purpose in the world. The same principle guides him as he takes up the relationship of the church and the state. Here he does not stray from the well-worn path of previous Reformed thinkers who have seen the two institutions as equals and free from intrusion by the other. To use Thornwell's image, they are like "planets moving in concentric orbits." Waters makes a quiet case for the principle—in its best form—that is known as the "spirituality of the church."

With this book, Guy Waters continues to undergird our confidence in him as a trustworthy guide of biblical doctrine. This particular contribution will benefit students who seek an introduction to a Reformed and Presbyterian theology of the church. Those undergoing officer training will appreciate the clarity of the material on the attributes and marks of the church. Any reader concerned about contemporary ideas of the mission of the church will value how Waters addresses the *missio Dei* project, and by implication, other transformational projects. Similarly, his comments on church and state suggest how he would engage the current trend of Christian nationalism (but some direct analysis here would have been worthwhile). Last of all, given the influx into Reformed churches of believers coming from family-integration churches with their patriarchal practices, this reviewer would have warmly welcomed Waters's insights on the nexus between the institutions of the family and the church.

The author is an OP minister and professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California.

CONGRATULATIONS

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

- **Grace Stahl**, Knox OPC, Silver Spring, MD

THOUGHTS ON “DAUGHTER” CHURCH-PLANTING

J. MARK SALLADE

Healthy churches don't just gather—they send. That simple truth runs through the New Testament. The early church didn't simply care for the believers in front of them; they were constantly looking outward and establishing new congregations (Acts 13–14; Titus 1:5). Church planting isn't a modern strategy. It's part of the ordinary life of a growing, gospel-centered church.

And yet, for many sessions, the question still feels weighty: Should we plant a daughter church? And if so, how do we do it well?

What follows isn't a rigid blueprint, but a pastoral guide—some counsel for sessions who sense the Lord may be calling them to send.

IT BEGINS WITH THE SESSION

Before there's a seed group, a location, or even a plan, there must be clarity and unity among the elders. And that starts with motives. Why plant? The best answers are simple and biblical: We long to see Christ worshiped in places where he is not yet known; we see communities without ready access to faithful ministry; we want to invest in the long-term advance of the gospel.

Less healthy motives can creep in more easily than we might admit—trying to relieve internal tensions, reacting to frustrations, or hoping to build something impressive. Those things will not sustain a church plant. They tend to unravel it. A helpful way to frame it is this: Plant from health, not from strain.

That means asking honest questions. Is the ministry of the Word central and fruitful? Is there real unity and trust in the congregation? Do we have leadership depth—enough to send some of our strongest people? And financially, do we have the stability to support a work that will likely need several years of help?

One question I've found especially clarifying is this: If we sent thirty of our most committed members, would we still be steady? If the answer is yes, that's encouraging. If not, that may be the Lord's way of saying, “Not yet.”



The seed group of Fox Chase Reformed, a daughter plant of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, at the ordination of its planter Jon Jung (center)

Above all, the session needs to be unified—not just in agreement, but in conviction. That kind of unity is usually forged in prayer, in patient conversation, and often with the wise counsel of presbytery brothers before anything is said publicly.

“WE ARE NOT SHRINKING—WE ARE SENDING”

If the session is ready, the next step is not to announce—but to prepare. One of the most helpful things a church can do is cultivate a *sending culture* over time. That often happens through preaching and teaching—especially walking through Acts and seeing how normal it is for churches to send people out. Gradually, the congregation begins to see that sending is not a loss, but a sign of life.

When the time does come to speak more directly, it helps to frame things as exploratory, to explain the possible phases, and to speak honestly about the cost—because there will be a cost. We will send people we love. Some ministries may feel thinner for a season. There will be financial sacrifice. And so it helps to say plainly: We are not shrinking—we are sending.

Forming a seed group requires particular care. This isn't about gathering the most enthusiastic people in the room. The families who go should be spiritually steady, willing

to serve, and prepared for a long, often slow, work. Excitement is a gift—but durability is essential.

WALKING WITH PRESBYTERY

In the OPC, church planting is never a solo effort, and that's a great blessing. Presbytery is not an obstacle to navigate, but a partner in the work. Involving the presbytery early—often through its committee on home missions—brings prayer, wisdom, and accountability from the start.

The process itself is familiar: an exploratory Bible study, a petition for mission work status, oversight from presbytery, calling a pastor, and eventually organization as a particular church. These steps help ensure the work is stable, accountable, and truly connected to the broader church.

If denominational support is needed, early communication with the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension is wise. Clear planning and strong presbytery backing go a long way.

CHOOSING WHERE TO PLANT

Location matters—but not in a purely strategic, business-minded sense. Often the most fruitful places are not simply where there is “opportunity,” but where there are already relationships—families who live in the area, connections that can be strengthened, a natural foothold for the gospel.

Still, there are practical questions worth asking. Is the area growing? How far is it from the mother church? Are there already solid churches nearby? Is there a realistic place to gather? Can the work become financially sustainable over time? A simple feasibility study can help clarify these things and give both the session and presbytery a shared picture of what's ahead.

THE EXPLORATORY SEASON

The first visible step is often an exploratory Bible study. It's worth saying clearly: This is not yet a church. It's a season of testing, forming, and praying.

This phase is usually best defined from the beginning—perhaps three to six months—and guided carefully by a minister, intern, or elder under session oversight.

What happens in these early gatherings matters more than we might think. This is where identity begins to take shape. Teaching on the gospel, the church, Presbyterian convictions, and the means of grace helps lay a foundation that will carry forward.

Just as important is shared life. Meals together, times of prayer, hospitality, and simple fellowship—these are not extras. They are the beginnings of a congregation.

During this season, it's wise to evaluate patiently. Is



Planter Nathaniel Jeffries with new members of Good News OPC, a daughter plant of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA

there consistency? Are there a handful of committed families? Is there financial participation? Are leaders beginning to emerge? Is there unity? If those things are present, and if there is a clear path toward pastoral leadership, then it may be time to move forward.

COUNTING THE COST—AND THE JOY

Church planting requires real resources. Most works will need several years of financial support, often tapering over time as the congregation becomes more established. The mother church should be prepared to contribute—not only financially, but in time, energy, and prayer. And throughout, transparency helps maintain trust.

But if we're honest, the cost is not only financial. It's the quiet absence of families who once sat near us in worship. It's the stretching of volunteers. It's the emotional weight of letting go. And yet, there is even deeper joy: Joy in seeing new people gathered under the Word. Joy in watching a small group become a congregation. Joy in knowing that, by God's grace, something is being established that may outlast us.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Church planting is slow work. It is not measured in months, but in years—and often in generations. You are investing in something that your grandchildren will enjoy. The goal is not simply to start meetings, but to see a self-governing, confessionally Reformed church established under Christ—one that will, in time, send others.

In God's kindness, planting often strengthens the sending church as well. It clarifies mission. It deepens dependence on the Lord. It reshapes a congregation's instincts from holding on to giving away.

In the end, we rest in a simple confidence: Christ builds his church. We trust that he will do what only he can do.

The author is pastor of Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

SERVANTS, PILGRIMS, STEWARDS

SHANE P. LEMS

Christians are servants, pilgrims, and stewards. These three realities overlap and help us think biblically about sharing our wealth and giving to those in need. Let's reflect on this a moment.

SERVANT

A major part of a Christian's identity is that we are servants. Followers of Christ serve him first and foremost (1 Thess. 1:9). But we are also servants of other people (1 Pet. 4:10). Christians follow in the steps of Christ not by demanding to be served, but by serving others. Serving others includes love, sacrifice, honor, and help.

PILGRIM

Another reality in the Christian religion is that we are pilgrims on earth (Ps. 119:19). Ultimately, this world is not our home (Heb. 11:9–10). Though we are called to love others here, pray for peace, and honor authorities, this world as we know it is not our ultimate place of residence. We look forward to Christ's return, when he will come to make all things new and bring in the final state of eternal glory.

STEWARD

The Bible calls Christians to be faithful stewards of what God has given us. We should be good caretakers of the time God has given us (Ps. 90:12). We should be faithful custodians of the responsibilities the Lord has given us (Col. 3:23–24). And, of course, we are called to be wise stewards of our possessions and finances (Luke 19:17).

APPLYING THESE THEMES

How do these three themes together apply to our finances? First, we should think about our finances with a servant's mindset. We can use our money to serve others. God has given us money and possessions not to serve ourselves, but to serve others by sharing with them (1 Tim. 6:17–19). We can serve neighbors, missionaries, seminaries, and family members by sharing with them and by giving to those in need.

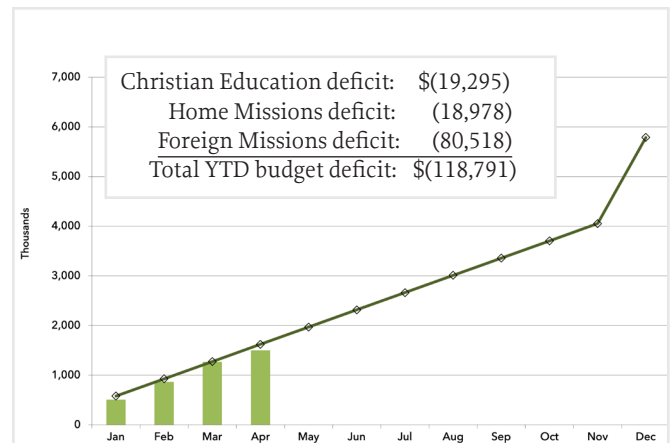
Second, as pilgrims, we realize that our possessions, including money and investments, have no place in heaven and in the age to come. When we go to be with the Lord, we will leave everything we own behind (1 Tim. 6:7). Our retirement accounts and money market funds won't transfer to a bank in the new creation. This helps us hold on to our finances with a looser grip. Our money is only good for the here and now. So we can give to those in need. And we can make thoughtful plans to allocate our estates wisely upon our deaths.

Finally, God has given us everything we have (1 Cor. 4:7). As stewards, we can serve him and others by giving to those in need. As a pilgrim, stewardship means not storing up treasure on earth, but sharing what we have because we can't take it with us. This is one aspect of storing up treasure in heaven.

These themes come together in Christ, the true servant, pilgrim, and steward, who served us by giving up his very life to redeem us. Out of gratitude to him, as pilgrims and stewards, we will (with God's help!) serve others by giving to those who have need.

The author is pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in Hammond, Wisconsin.

WORLDWIDE OUTREACH YEAR-TO-DATE WITH 2026 GOALS



This prayer calendar has two entries per day of those individuals and families supported by the OPC's Worldwide Outreach, to the end that we might support them not only financially but also in prayer.

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- 1 **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay. Pray that the process of attaining residency would go smoothly. / **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Pray that God would provide opportunities for Prince of Peace OPC to reach the lost in the North Shore area.
-
- 2 Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth) Montgomery**. / Pray for stated clerk **Hank L. Belfield** as he handles administrative work during and following the General Assembly.
-
- 3 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay. Pray for elder Matías Blanco as he continues his training and discerns his calling to the pastorate. / Pray for OPC Short-Term Missions **Team Colombia** as they support local Reformed churches in outreach ministries from July 3–13.
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- 4 Pray for **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Pray for the OPC's **General Assembly**, meeting June 4–10 in Beaver Falls, PA.
-
- 5 Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico**. / Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he reports to the General Assembly this week (June).
-
- 6 Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he directs the MTIOPC program.
-
- 7 **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for the OPC Short-Term Missions team serving at an **English Camp** in the

-
- 8 **Czech Republic** over the next two weeks (July 7–21).
-
- 8 **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for the ongoing work at Knox School of Theology on the charter application and policy revisions. / Pray for OPC Short-Term Missions **Team Hungary** as they serve and witness at two English camps for three weeks in July.
-
- 9 **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for wisdom as Knox School of Theology considers applications for incoming students next year. / **Chris & Sara Drew**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray that the outreach efforts of Faith OPC would bear fruit to the glory of Christ.
-
- 10 **Joseph & Christina Wan**, Madison, WI. Pray for a smooth and timely visa process for Pastor Joseph Wan. / Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**.
-
- 11 Pray for Home Missions director of revitalization **Steve (Katie) McDaniel**. / Pray for the **Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel**.
-
- 12 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretaries **Benjamin Hopp** and **Douglas Clawson** as they meet with the committee on June 12. / Pray for ruling elders and congregations to be uplifted by *The Ruling Elder Podcast*.
-
- 13 Pray that the Spirit would continue to use **Mr. & Mrs. F**, Asia, (on furlough) and that the local presbytery would share the good news with the lost. / **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.
-
- 14 **Kevin & Cami Godsey**, Peoria, IL. Pray for God to bless the evangelistic efforts of Radiant OPC. / Pray for summer intern **Chris (Emily) Amberge** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

■ JUN—JUL 2026
PRAYER CALENDAR



The Kearneys (day 9)



Joanna Grove (day 6)

15

.....
Mr. & Mrs. M, Asia. Give thanks for the release of Christians imprisoned for their faith and pray that they can safely worship with God's people. / Pray for summer intern **Uriah Renzetti** at Covenant OPC in Barre, VT.

16

.....
John & Katie Terrell, Moline, MI. Pray for faithful witness among the congregation of Living Hope OPC. / Pray for the OPC Short-Term Missions **Team Uganda** as they leave today to support the OPC's missionaries in Uganda.

17

.....
Johnny & Berry Serafini, Marion, NC. Pray for strength for three Landis OPC members completing two Chalmers Homes. / Pray for OPC Short-Term Missions **Team Japan** as they travel to evangelize and help in Yamamoto for two weeks, beginning July 17.

18

.....
Pray for **Judy Alexander**, administrative coordinator for the Committee on Christian Education. / Pray for summer intern **Clark (Grace) Saltz** at Garst Mill OPC in Roanoke, VA.

19

.....
Heero & Anya Hacquebord, Ukraine. Pray for the church's fruitful outreach among teenagers and young adults this summer. / **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest.

20

.....
Corey & Andrea Paige, Buda, TX. Pray for fruitful officer training at Hays County OPC. / Pray for the



The Davisons (day 23)

.....
staff and leaders at **The Boardwalk Chapel** in Wildwood, NJ, as they begin their 2026 season of training and evangelism on June 20.

21

.....
Pray for the ministry of the Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps and that the Lord would raise three **regional foreign missionaries** for Africa, Asia, and South America. / Pray for summer intern **David (Stacy) Diaz** at Harvest OPC in Yuma, AZ.

22

.....
Pray for **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for New Jersey. / Pray for OPC Short-Term Missions **Team Praha** as they participate in friendship evangelism and lead VBS in the Czech Republic for two and a half weeks in late July.

23

.....
Jacey & Julia Davison, Grand Rapids, MI. Please pray for new families to join the congregation of Ascension Church. / Pray for summer intern **Jack VanDrunen** at Trinity Presbyterian Church in San Clemente, CA.

24

.....
Pray for the imprisoned pastors in **East Africa** and their children growing up without fathers. / Pray that deacons, elders, and pastors would be edified and encouraged at the three-day **OPC National Diaconal Summit** starting June 25 in Chicago.

25

.....
Tentmaker missionary **Tina DeJong, Nakaale, Uganda.** Pray for the Timothy Discipleship young men during their school break in June. / Pray for Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca.**

26

.....
Pray for **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / Pray for **Melisa McGinnis**, financial controller for the OPC.

27

.....
Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick, Nakaale, Uganda.** Give thanks for the mutual encouragement of the mission team as they serve together



The Paiges (day 20)

.....
in the summer's VBS outreach. / Pray for the OPC Short-Term Missions volunteers and staff at the **English for Kids Bible camp** taking place June 27–July 11 in Quebec, Canada.

28

.....
David Myhren, Troy, OH. Pray for visitors to experience Christ's love at Bread of Life Church. / Pray for missionary associates **Ben Gifford** and **Jeff and Gloria Davis, Nakaale, Uganda,** that their love for God and their neighbor would deepen as they serve.

29

.....
Greg & Ginger O'Brien, Downingtown, PA. Pray for the congregation of Christ Church Downingtown to be faithful in discipling to new members and visitors from diverse backgrounds. / Pray for OPC.org technical associate **Stephen Pribble.**

30

.....
Travis & Bonnie Emmett, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for the birth of baby Carson and pray for their return to the field in early August. / Pray for **Anneke Fesko**, care coordinator for ministers' wives.

31

.....
Pray for associate missionary **Leah Hopp, Nakaale, Uganda,** (on furlough) as she reflects on God's work and reports to her supporters in Canada. / **Jon & Stacey Jung, Philadelphia, PA.** Pray for fruitfulness in the ministry of Fox Chase Reformed Church.



Laying on of hands at the ordination of Isiah English (kneeling)

Deacon emeritus Edwin Abrams with pastors Mitch Watson and Tom Martin in Silver Spring, MD



Members of the presbytery, friends, and family at the ordination of Jeremy Chong (center, blue tie)

NEWS

ENGLISH ORDAINED AND INSTALLED

On April 17, Isiah English was ordained and installed as an evangelist at Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, to serve there and at the Boardwalk Chapel. OP evangelist Chris Byrd preached; James Gidley, elder at Grace, gave the charge to the minister; and Geoff Willour, pastor of Grace, gave the charge to the congregation.

CHONG ORDAINED AND INSTALLED

On April 10, Jeremy E. Chong was ordained and installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of the Midwest to plant a church called Reformation Chicago in the city of Chicago. Rev. Dr. Eric Watkins preached on Acts 7:51–60; Rev. Ian Wright gave the charge to the minister.

DEACON EDWIN ABRAMS HONORED

At its annual meeting on March 6, the congregation of Knox OPC in Silver Spring, Maryland, voted to designate deacon Edwin Abrams deacon emeritus in view of his long and meritorious service in the office of deacon in the OPC over a period of more than sixty-four years.

WOMEN'S RETREAT IN CA

Tammy Schroeder

On April 17–19, sixty-five women gathered for the forty-fourth annual Presbytery of Southern California women's retreat at beautiful Camp Maranatha in Idyllwild, California. Speaker Mary York addressed us on "Prodigals, the Hidden Truth" with four compelling messages, giving every woman

the desire to pray with all our hearts for those we know and love while keeping our eyes always on the Lord. Michelle Gregg from Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California, was our devotional leader. Dave Crum, retired regional home missionary and associate pastor of Providence OPC in Temecula, led us in worship on Sunday morning with a message on Luke 15, once again concluding our weekend perfectly. Another highlight was the opportunity for corporate prayer led by Lisa Dorn. Our churches really enjoy this annual retreat to reconnect as sisters in Christ. We returned home blessed and refreshed in God's love.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On December 6, **James J. Jordan** was installed as a missionary evangelist to Uruguay.
- On April 5, **Dr. Hyoun (Jon) Jung** was ordained and installed as an evangelist of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, to serve as a church planter.
- On April 10, **Jeremy Chong** was ordained and installed as an evangelist called by the Presbytery of the Midwest to serve in Chicago.
- On April 17, **John M. Fikkert** was installed as a pastor at Hope Reformed Presbyterian Church in Pella, IA.
- On April 17, **Isiah Paul English** was ordained and installed as an evangelist of Grace OPC in Sewickley, PA, and the Boardwalk Chapel in Wildwood, NJ.
- On April 24, **Dr. David Graves** was installed as pastor of Covenant OPC in LaGrange, GA.

- On April 24, **Alec John Dunlap** was ordained and installed as pastor of Firelands Grace OPC in Sandusky, OH.

MILESTONES

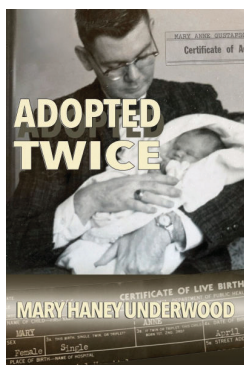
- On April 24, retired OP minister **Mark A. Marquis**, 68, died.

REVIEWS

Adopted Twice, by Mary Haney Underwood. Self-published, 2025. Paperback, 176 pages, \$14.99. Reviewed by OP deacon Brian W. Tilton.

In the spring of 1962, George Haney—then an OPC pastor in Bangor, Maine—and his wife, Grace, adopted a baby girl they named Mary Anne. *Adopted Twice* is Mary’s candid memoir that provides thoughtful insight into the complexities of being raised in an adoptive Christian family and into the ultimate joy of finding true identity through spiritual adoption into God’s family.

The author leads the reader on an honest and heartfelt journey through the adoption process, early childhood struggles, adolescent challenges, adult inner conflicts, and the reconnection with her birth mother. Mary candidly presents the transition from the innocence and beauty



of her adoption story to the realization that earthly adoption has inherent brokenness, hurt, and pain. She emphasizes the critical role that a strong spiritual foundation, provided by her faithful parents, has played in her life, giving her an anchor, guidance, and hope.

Given this strong foundation, Mary was better equipped to handle the challenges that typically arise in the lives of adoptees. She was able to biblically work through the “seven core adoption issues” of loss, rejection, shame and guilt, grief, identity, intimacy, and mastery and control. Using the support of Scripture, she was empowered to face head-on the lies, unfair expectations, and anxiety associated with adoption. By embracing the truth and blessing of spiritual adoption, Mary shows that adoptees are enabled to replace loss, rejection, and shame with triumph, acceptance, and grace. Her flawed personal story was redeemed by God’s flawless plan for her life.

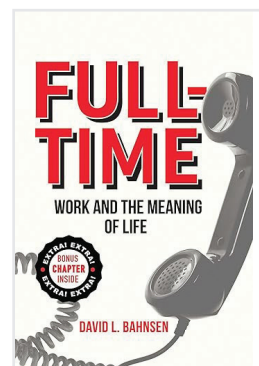
Adopted Twice offers very practical guidance and encouragement to adoptive families, birth mothers, adoptees, and others connected to adoption relationships. It weaves the significance of a personal adoption experience into a broader, universal story that can provide new healing and Christ-centered focus for all readers. Pastors, elders, and deacons will find this book especially helpful as they minister to church families touched by adoption. Scripture is thoughtfully integrated throughout the book, reflecting sound biblical fidelity in

addressing adoptive challenges.

I highly commend this book for its genuine storytelling, readability, and accessibility to a wide range of readers who are looking for a better understanding of the various dynamics of adoption and a faith-affirming testimony of the power of spiritual adoption. As Scripture reminds us, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:17 NIV).

Full-Time: Work and the Meaning of Life, by David Bahnsen. Post Hill, 2025. Paperback, 208 pages, \$18.99. Reviewed by OP deacon Ryan E. Noha.

David L. Bahnsen’s timely book comes in an age disposed to hear its subtitle in the key of Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*, as though work and meaning were set in antithesis. Rather, Bahnsen insists that work stands at the very center of the meaning of life. Grounded in the creation account of Genesis 1–2, he demonstrates that work is not a necessary evil we do unto life but part of God’s good creation and essential to our identity as his image-bearers. As such, what Bahnsen calls our “productive act of purposeful service” (38) bears dignity, joy, and blessing—good news for modern man and his society in crisis.



In the opening chapters, Bahnsen frames the crisis in terms of despair, isolation, and idleness, with work blamed as a source of misery rather than embraced as part of the remedy. He contends that voluntary worklessness has become a culturally accepted “national tragedy” (53), with consequences extending well

POSITION AVAILABLE

Senior Pastor: Cedar OPC in Jenison, Michigan (Grand Rapids area), is a warm, relational church family that loves worship, is committed to learning, engaged in its community, and shaped by gospel grace with healthy, active leadership. We seek a pastor who will preach the whole counsel of God with clarity and, together with the elders, shepherd and equip the congregation for ministry and outreach. Send MIF and resume to pastorsearch@cedarchurch.org.

beyond economics. Against this backdrop, Bahnsen commends “earned success” (37): happiness achieved through service that employs our God-given gifts, reorienting man to dignified activity according to his created purpose.

Drawing from a Reformed anthropology and his experience as a leading wealth advisor, Bahnsen’s later chapters tackle the false dichotomies that prop up this cultural malaise: work versus worship, family versus career ambition, success versus significance, and, underlying it all, the sacred versus the secular. A deep neo-Calvinistic undercurrent runs throughout *Full-Time*, challenging implicit forms of Gnosticism that set the spiritual kingdom of God over against godly stewardship and productivity on earth. As Bahnsen memorably puts it, such divisions arise when we “pit things that God cares about against Him” rather than taking up our responsibilities before him (183).

This same insistence on embodied faithfulness carries over into the book’s personal dimension. Dedicated to the late Greg L. Bahnsen, *Full-Time* serves as a fitting homage, carrying forward his theological commitments to the comprehensive lordship of Christ and the cultural mandate, and unapologetically commending the rigorous work ethic that characterized his ministry.

One fruitful avenue for further reflection suggested by *Full-Time* would be to extend the author’s creational theology toward its eschatological horizons. While Bahnsen rightly emphasizes a work/rest paradigm patterned after the creation week, the Lord’s Day as a foretaste of eternal sabbath rest is undeveloped. Exploring this connection would not undermine his argument, but enrich it, situating our present labors (and the meaning of life) more fully in light of the rest that remains for the people of God.

Full-Time is heartily recommended to a wide audience—from young adults discontent with their “work-life balance” to older workers drawn toward a long

retirement. Though offered with Christian charity and the wisdom of experience, Bahnsen’s work will unsettle. With God’s help, it will spur the faithful to seize their God-ordained callings with renewed purpose. And to those outside the faith, it will offer a compelling apologetic: God’s word about work makes sense in his world.

***Paradox People: Learning to Live the Beatitudes*, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. P&R, 2025. Paperback, 160 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Michael J. Seufert.**

In *Paradox People: Learning to Live the Beatitudes*, Jonathan Landry Cruse en-

courages each of us to ask a humbling question: “When the world seems messed up, could the problem actually be me?” (9). That is a very difficult question to ask and an even harder posture to maintain. We’ve all been there: It’s easier to point to broken circumstances and the sins of others than to wrestle with our own hearts. Perhaps we aren’t just *in* the world, we are too *like* it!

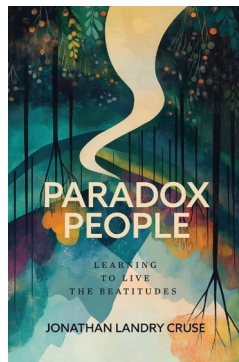
Cruse suggests that the solution to this dilemma is “to recover the genius of

the Beatitudes” (19). To assist the church in this task, Cruse leads us through the odd blessings of Matthew 5 as the vision of what God is making us to be and what we are learning to desire to be. In eight chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, Cruse meditates on each of the nine beatitudes as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel (the eighth and ninth, both concerning persecution, comprise one chapter). For each strange blessing, he clarifies both the kingdom value and the consolation (comfort), continually returning to how Jesus himself perfectly embodied this quietly beautiful life as our Lord and Savior.

The values are strange to us: “The values we are called to won’t seem natural

to us—at times they might seem outright foolish—but blessing is found not by railing against them but by wholeheartedly embracing them” (15). Yet they are all coupled with good hope, both in the current possession of the kingdom and the promises of future consolation and glory. Ultimately, they are all embodied in Christ: “They are a portrait of him. . . . There is no blessedness apart from him. The King is the greatest Kingdom blessing” (16–17).

Pastor Cruse helps us see that these



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counterintuitive veins of life, opened by our King, are not just blessings unto us as we learn to follow Christ in these ways; they are also how God makes us a blessing to this sad world. “It is the church whose guide is God’s Word and whose goal is holy, faithful living that will bring the greatest good to the world” (145). The church announces Christ to the world, but she also reflects Christ to the world. “Holiness is far from nothing. It’s a sad day when Christians think that living like Christ in the world is not enough for the world” (20).

I appreciated this book very much. I found it convicting, challenging, invigorating, and hope-filled, as did my wife, who read it with me. May the Lord use it to bless others in his church as well.

***A Spiritual Checkup: For a Healthy Life with Christ*, by David McKay. Crown & Covenant, 2025. Paperback, 88 pages, \$11.00. Reviewed by OP pastor Stephen Tracey.**

I was a little nervous when the editor gave me this book to review—no one likes a checkup. Well, we don’t like it, but we are glad to have it done. So, I began reading, though I was half expecting a Puritan style list of thirty-two symptoms of spiritual failure, with several remedies to be applied immediately. Strange how we ap-

proach soul health with such guilt-goaded grumbling and fear!

David McKay is a mature theologian and pastoral carer, serving in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland for over forty years. His little book is not to be feared but welcomed. He starts with Scripture, “The Bible’s description of the healthy spiritual life is the essential place to begin” (xi), and he never ventures away from God’s Word. His method is simple, “We need to sit down with [God’s] Word and let him ask the crucial questions” (xi). “Search me, O God,” is a biblical prayer.

McKay covers vital areas such as loving the Lord, feeding on Scripture, giving yourself to prayer, grieving over sin, and worship. What I found encouraging was that he did not start any chapter with a statement of where we might be failing, but rather with a wonderful description of the healthy spiritual state for which we are aiming. So, for example, when he speaks of loving the Lord, he begins with the question, “Do you love him because he saved you?” He quotes Psalm 116:1: “I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.” Then he asks the searching question:

Do you find in your heart a love for God as your Savior, a love that is gradually growing stronger and deeper? If so, be encouraged! Without the Lord’s work of grace, such a love would not be there. (4)

In the same way, in the chapter on grieving over sin, he starts with the doctrine of the holiness of God. Only then does he go on to say, “A mark of grace in our lives is a holy hatred of sin that

reflects the Lord’s hatred of it” (53). Likewise, in a chapter on caring about the unconverted, he says, “If we are to care for sinners as we ought, we have to begin by understanding the true nature of their plight” (66). He goes on to reflect on the deep compassion of Christ for sinners, and then he says, “We should surely

pray for a greater compassion for the unconverted that more faithfully reflects Jesus’s compassion” (68).

This spiritual checkup was thorough and helpful. I agree with Robert McCollum’s introductory commendation: “Pastorally warm, rooted in Scripture, and Christ centered throughout, this book will help every believer in their walk with Jesus.” It is not a guilt-goading book. It is grace-full.

