

NEW HORIZONS

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2026

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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SHOWING THE MERCY OF CHRIST



DANNY E. OLINGER

On June 25–27 over 220 deacons, deacons-in-training, ruling elders, and ministers participated in the fifth OPC National Diaconal Summit sponsored by the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM) and held in Wheaton, Illinois. Those gathered were from the seventeen presbyteries of the OPC, the Presbytery of Southern California leading the way with thirty-six men from thirteen different congregations. Covenant OPC in Orland Park, Illinois, sent the most men (deacons Hal Hamstra, David Pontier, John Stob, Steve Voss; deacons-in-training Ryan Keane, Deddy Nababan, Jensen Sorensen) from a single congregation. Some deacons such as Geno Altiery (Bayview in Chula Vista, California) and John Stahl (Emmanuel in Wilmington, Delaware) had participated in all four previous summits; other deacons newly ordained such as Joshua Tracey (Lakeview in Rockport, Maine) and Thomas Kinney (Grace in Sewickley, Pennsylvania) were attending their first summit. But in the midst of such wonderful



(Top) Peter Stafford (left) and David Haney in Louisiana in 2005; (bottom) Bob Keys speaking at the Summit

variety a shared theme permeated the gathering, namely, showing the mercy of Christ to those in need.

A DIFFERENT-HEARTED PEOPLE

This tone was set in the opening plenary session when deacon Bob Keys, a retired member of the CDM, proclaimed that the diaconate is not simply getting things done, but helping the church become shaped by the mercy of Jesus.

Keys shared a powerful example of such mercy in action. When Hurricane Katrina struck the region surrounding the Gulf of Mexico on August 29, 2005, Keys worked with ruling elder David Haney (Faith in Pole Tavern, New Jersey) to see what could be done by the OPC in disaster relief. An eighteen-year-old member of Grace Presbyterian in Columbus, Ohio, volunteered to go with Keys to Louisiana to assess the situation, help with the clean-up, and share the gospel with those who had suffered great loss. That young man was Peter Stafford, the missionary doctor in Africa, who, in a much-publicized incident, contracted Ebola this past May when serving the afflicted in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Keys's message was clear: Christ by his Spirit makes us a different-hearted people and provides us with the opportunity to engage others with Christ-centered, gospel-shaped mercy that changes lives.

Following Keys's address, many men assembled around firepits located on the campus for fellowship. This warm fellowship is a priority at every summit. In a personal way, deacons meet other deacons. The talking, laughing,



Fellowship around the fire

and even comforting lasts into the night as the brothers share both the blessings and challenges of diaconal work in their local settings. One of the fun ways that the CDM encouraged men to strike up conversations with those whom they had never met before was to find out which person at the summit had visited all fifty states. On the last day, CDM Administrator David Nakhla revealed that the answer was Stephen Larson, pastor of Concho Valley Church in Concho Valley, Arizona.

“LIMPING” DEACONS

The second day of the summit opened with Committee on Christian Education General Secretary Danny Olinger speaking on OPC diaconal ministry through the decades. Olinger highlighted the roots of the CDM ministries both past and present, including ministry to those in need internationally in Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Eritrea, and Uganda; ministry to those affected by flooding in 1937 in Newport, Kentucky; ministry to Jewish refugees at the start of World War II by Rev. David Freeman; and ministry through short-term missions from the mid-1980s into the twenty-first century led by Rev. Dave Crum in Baja, Mexico.

The summit-goers then separated into three breakout sessions. Stephen Tracey, pastor of Lakeview in

Rockport, Maine, spoke on deacons helping to provide respite for families affected by disability in the local congregation. Matt Butler, ruling elder at Redeemer Church in Winter Garden, Florida, addressed safety concerns in the church. Eric Watkins, evangelist of the Presbytery of the South, addressed diaconal evangelism.

CDM member Chris Cashen was then joined by deacons Alexander Patocs (Providence in Scottsdale, Arizona), Len Richards (New Life in Williamsport, Pennsylvania), and Rich Duggan (New Hope in Bridgeton, New Jersey) to discuss “The Heart of a Deacon.” The men sought to answer such questions as: How does a deacon deal in his heart with a lack of faith? What is a biblical response to a situation where the mercy given is not well received? How is a deacon’s heart encouraged? In each scenario, the panelists came back to the abundant mercy and forgiveness found in Jesus.

A second round of workshops followed with Mark Winder, pastor of Wolf River in Collierville, Tennessee, speaking on the essential ministry of service; Brian De Jong, pastor of Grace in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, talking about caring for the elderly; and retired pastor Gordon Cook and Logan Murray, ruling elder at Living Hope Presbyterian in Brunswick, Maine, bringing those gathered to tears of compassion with their presentation on ministry to the sick.

The full day of talks and workshops closed with Mike Schout, pastor of Grace Fellowship in Zeeland, Michigan, giving a heartfelt address on why healthy churches need “limping deacons.” According to Schout, limping deacons are those who are honest about their brokenness before the Lord. Such a disposition of humility builds up trust in the congregation and creates a culture that strengthens



Deacons Rich Duggan and Alexander Patocs discussing the deacon’s own spiritual life

YEAR	OP DEACONS	ACTIVE	OP MEMBERS	RATIO
2025	980	751	33,941	45 to 1
2020	930	708	31,809	45 to 1
2015	879	686	31,200	45 to 1
2010	835	647	29,842	46 to 1
2005	767	573	28,019	49 to 1
2000	700	510	26,008	51 to 1
1995	572	419	21,131	50 to 1
1990	402	301 (est.)	18,164	62 to 1



Speaker Mike Schout

the body of Christ. Schout further declared that churches should be intentional in developing men to be those who limp. He advocated instituting a diaconal internship program, which in his view has been a “game-changer” at Grace Fellowship. An internship is not a guarantee that a man will be ordained as a deacon, but allows the church to see a man’s character and humility in ways that a congregation would not be able to do otherwise. He closed the talk with this pointed take-away to those gathered: Maybe your limp is what qualifies you to be a great deacon, for when you are weak, Christ’s power is made perfect in you to help others.

BLESSED BY THE SUMMIT

The summit’s last day began with three more workshops. Tim Hopper, previous CDM member, spoke about fitting service into a busy life; Jim Berry, ruling elder at Reformation in Morgantown, West Virginia, discussed the mental processes of those suffering from addiction and how to help such individuals, and Lowell Ivey, director of prison ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America, talked about ministry to the incarcerated. CDM member Joe Troutman then delivered a devotional about man made in God’s image, that image maimed, and the image restored through the work of Christ. Pointedly he told those gathered, “You can’t save anyone; only Jesus can.”

In his closing remarks, Nakhla thanked CDM members and staffers, especially Trish Duggan (New Hope, Bridgeton, New Jersey) and Rachel Kinney (Grace, Sewickley, Pennsylvania), for their tireless work before and during the three days of the summit. He also thanked Zach Meadows, deacon at Bethel in Wheaton, Illinois, and Meadows’s team of drivers in bringing the men to and from O’Hare and Midway airports. Before the closing prayer, Nakhla asked for a show of hands of those who had been blessed by the summit, and then how many would be willing to recruit their fellow deacons to attend the next summit in four years. Nearly every hand in the room was raised. **NH**

The author is editor of New Horizons.



Attendees of the National Diaconal Summit V in Wheaton, Illinois

A PANORAMIC VIEW: THE NINETY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY



KEN B. MONTGOMERY

Many well-paved mountain roads have pull-over vista points for drivers to park, pause, and take in the scenery of surrounding peaks and valleys. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's annual general assembly is like a vista point—it's a time to enjoy a prolonged look at the big picture of the life of the whole denomination. What is in view is even more lovely than soaring summits and pristine rivers: The under-shepherds at general assembly are overseeing and appreciating God's work within those who are on the pilgrimage to the heavenly Zion. "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Ps. 16:3).

The Ninety-Second General Assembly met at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, from June 3–9. It is fitting for Orthodox Presbyterians to meet at a place called "Geneva," because in the sixteenth century this was the city in Switzerland where the form of present-day Presbyterianism began to take shape, the lakeside republic in which the three pillars of Reformed doctrine, worship, and church government were honed.

The opening worship service of the assembly was led by outgoing moderator Rev. Brian L. De Jong, who



Everett Henes, moderator, receiving the gavel from Brian De Jong (right)

preached from Luke 17:7–10 on the importance for officers in the church to count themselves as but "unworthy servants." Those who have a due reverence for the Master, who are at the beck and call of the King, are content simply with carrying out the will of the Lord. In obeying him, we have only done our duty, but one of the marvels of life in the kingdom is that the Lord is pleased by his grace to invite his servants to sup with him. God in Christ makes us to "sit with princes, with the princes of his people" (Ps. 113:8). The message set the tone for the assembly, as the fathers and brothers were duly reminded to speak as fellow humble servants, one to another.

Rev. Everett A. Henes (pastor of Hillsdale OPC in Hillsdale, Michigan) was elected moderator. The Hebrew word *zakein*, which is customarily rendered as *elder*, originally meant "the bearded one," and the moderator this year certainly met this qualification. Mr. Henes served with aplomb, injecting moments of levity at seasonable times but conducting himself with due solemnity and prudence, given the gravitas of the matters before the assembly.

Each general assembly follows the same basic path and protocols, as found in the OPC's *Book of Church Order*, the *Standing Rules and Instruments*, and *Robert's Rules of Order*. Visitors are often struck by the formality of the proceedings. But the procedures ensure that only one commissioner speaks at a time, and that each side of a question (that is, topic) is given room to be fairly represented. Ours is known as a *deliberative* assembly, meaning that determinations are not made ahead of time, but only after deliberation from the representatives sent by the seventeen presbyteries of the OPC. Though there might be strong disagreement on certain issues, there is overall a tone of mutual respect, as the commissioners understand the purpose of the meeting is to uphold the standards of the church while seeking to advance the "peace, purity, and unity" of the body.

One of the highlights of the assembly is hearing from fraternal delegates. These are representatives from like-minded, Reformed, sister churches in our nation



Commissioners to the Ninety-Second General Assembly at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA

and other parts of the world. Along with bringing the commissioners up to speed on the life of their churches, the brothers from other communions shared their warm affection for the work and witness of the OPC. Several testified regarding acute challenges in countries where secular authorities are instituting laws that target pastoral counsel and proclamation from the Scriptures. Prayer, wisdom, and courage is needed for those churches.

WORLDWIDE OUTREACH

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) rejoices that almost 15 percent of OP congregations meeting for worship on the Lord's Day are church plants (the OPC had 297 established congregations and 43 church plants at the end of 2025). Recent visitors to a fledgling congregation were struck by the simple act of the church members singing together in worship. The Word overflowing through the choir of the saints "making melody to the Lord" (Eph 5:19) is itself a testimony to the unifying power of the gospel in a splintered society. Regional home missionaries continue to have a front row seat to the Spirit's work in multiplying the fruit of gospel proclamation. Church planters in the OPC benefit greatly from the training provided by CHMCE and are thankful for the regular prayers of the saints on their behalf. The prayer of the committee is that the OPC "would grow as fruitful in reaching the lost as we are in welcoming the found."

In the report from the Committee on Foreign Missions (CFM), the inextricable connection between sacrifice and fruitfulness in the work of gospel growth was highlighted. Two missionaries testified to the hardship and the joys of laboring in planting and watering gospel seed, showing how at every turn all who spend themselves for the name of Christ must do so with a keen sense of dependence upon the strength of the Lord. Alarming, as the CFM

reported, there were zero applicants for full-time foreign missions service received in the past year. The CFM was thankful to report that financial giving to the committee has been very generous, and there is an eagerness to use these funds to send those whom the church may call in the near future, servants who follow the Isaianic footsteps: "Here I am! Send me!" (Isa. 6:8).

Both CHMCE and CFM brought to the attention of the assembly the significant shortage in ordained ministers to serve at home and abroad. The assembly approved the calling of our churches to a season of prayer and fasting beginning the week of September 13, seeking for the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers for the fields.

The Committee on Christian Education (CCE) reported on the continued effectiveness of the Timothy Conference, which has assisted many young men in the OPC as they consider the work of gospel ministry. Mr. John Dunahoo from Great Commissions Publications reported on the longstanding and profitable partnership of the OPC and PCA in the work of providing Christ-centered Sunday school materials. General Secretary Danny Olinger conveyed the value of the intern program in helping

OP pastors Ethan Bolyard, Mike Myers, and David Graves at work





Former OP missionaries with Douglas and Pat Clawson (center) at Clawson's retirement reception honoring twenty-four years of service

candidates gain experience under seasoned ministers and sessions before launching into ordained ministry.

The retirements of Dr. James S. Gidley (thirty-six years of service on the CCE) and Rev. Douglas B. Clawson (twenty-four on the CFM) were recognized with a standing ovation and a resolution of thanks, respectively.

SUPPORTING COMMITTEES

The work of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM) shows continued growth in diaconal partnership and coordinated labor at the local, presbytery, and denominational levels. The CDM is working to provide resources in the area of training prospective deacons. Mr. David Nakhla, CDM administrator, reported on a recent visit to Ukraine, where he and a small team from the OPC met with representatives of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine to see how funds from relief contributions are being used to assist those in the church and their neighbors during the last four years of war. Mr. Nakhla also conveyed the benefits of Short Term Missions teams in the States and abroad: Both the team members and the missionaries on the field are encouraged by working together.

The Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) seeks to support the full-orbed care of ministers and their families. In addition to helping with pastoral sabbaticals and retreats, the CMC oversees the Obadiah Fund, which makes an annual disbursement to assist retired ministers and their widows. The CMC is also hosting Refresh 2026, a retreat for ministers and their wives in Atlanta, Georgia, at the end of September, the first of its kind for the OPC.

SABBATH REST

In the evening, the commissioners gathered for worship on the campus of Geneva College, overseen by Grace OPC in Sewickley. Pastor Jeremy Jones (Covenant OPC in Grove City, Pennsylvania) preached from Mark 10:35–45,

reminding us that vainglory and self-aggrandizement have no place in Christ's kingdom. Rather, greatness in the church is patterned after Christ himself: We are to be "servants of all." The terms of our ministry (Greek: *diakonos*) are dictated not by the whims of those we serve, but instead by the law of love revealed in Scripture.

OVERTURES

Presbyteries (lower judicatories) may send a formal communication to general assembly requesting the assembly to consider taking particular actions. These are called "overtures." This year, one overture requested the formation of a special committee to study church and state relations, with attention given to Christian Nationalism. This overture was granted, and Messrs. Darryl Hart, David Innes, Alan Strange, Lane Tipton, and David VanDrunen were elected to serve on the committee, with Messrs. Zachary Lautenschlager and David Noe as alternates.

Under the Roman emperor Constantine (300s A.D.), the church and state had more or less entered into a partnership; the sword-bearer (the civil magistrate) and the stewards of the kingdom keys (church ministers and elders) sought to coordinate their efforts in the beginning of what is known as Christendom. This Constantinian arrangement of a sacral conception of the state in a Christian framework lasted at least to the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648), and arguably persists in, for example, Great Britain, where certain churches receive special recognition from the state. Questions regarding whether the civil authority ought to operate upon a particular religious/confessional basis, as well as the implications of the 1788 American revision to WCF chapter 23, and a bevy of others, continue to invite careful consideration.

Another overture related to the church's response to what is known as Kinism and Race Realism was considered, and the following was adopted:

That the 92nd General Assembly join with our sister churches from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, our brothers in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church in America in their public commitment to condemn without distinction any theological or political teaching which posits a superiority of race or ethnic identity born of immutable human characteristics and . . . call to repentance any who would promote or associate themselves with such teaching, either by commission or omission.

The assembly also granted the formation of a special committee to "study all forms of racial prejudice and



related matters and report to the Ninety-Third General Assembly.” The Moderator appointed Messrs. Daniel Cooke, David Graves, Zachary Keele, Filipe Schulz dos Santos, and Eric Watkins to the committee, and Messrs. Michael Myers and Z. Bulut Yasar to serve as alternates.

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

In the pilgrim journey of the church, we recognize that we are still sojourners on the way and not yet those who have been transferred to the rolls of the church triumphant in Zion. One of the features of life in the wilderness setting is the need to deal in a godly manner with sin or disorderly actions within the body of Christ. There is an inevitable sort of messiness that must be acknowledged in this vale of tears (Ps. 84:6)—including in the church, where we must “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), individually and corporately. I find great encouragement for such presbyterian labor of love in Proverbs 14:4: “Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.”

Much of the assembly’s time was spent working through appeals and complaints. What are appeals and complaints? The Book of Discipline 7.1 states, “An appeal in a judicial case is the removal of the case to an appellate judicatory by the filing of a petition asking that the final judgment of a lower judicatory be reversed or modified.” Then in chapter 9: “A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency or error.”

Recognizing that judgment in these matters carries significant ramifications, the assembly takes care not to rush to conclusions. At the outset, appellants and representatives from each judicatory are invited to meet with an assigned advisory committee. These advisory committees read the pertinent background material and then hear from and ask questions of each party in the specific

cases. There are two sides to every pancake, as the saying goes, which is a colloquial way to frame Proverbs 18:17: “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.” A patient and good faith interchange is a necessary step toward reaching a decision that honors the Lord.

After hearing from the appellants, complainants, and presbytery representatives on the floor of the assembly, the recommendation of the advisory committee is presented to the body. The advice of the advisory committee is considered, but in the end, it is up to the assembly to reach a final determination. Seeing that the approximately thirty-six hours of business spread over four full days and two partial days of meetings would not be sufficient to work through the thorny matters of the appeals and complaints, the assembly this year went into overtime for three hours on the penultimate night of the schedule and recessed that evening at 11:30 p.m.

LED BY THE GREAT SHEPHERD

Each year, the actions in the “joint power” of the church are recorded in the minutes of the General Assembly, and OP members and friends are most welcome to peruse the archives at opcminutes.org. But during the seven-day span of the assembly, there is genuine boon to be found too in what flies under the radar of what is written in the minutes: informal counsel sought and given around tables at mealtimes, the interactions with the young people who serve as volunteers throughout the week, and the hearty camaraderie and laughter shared around the campfire. The commissioners at the “vista point” that is the general assembly are themselves part of the pilgrimage of the church, led by Christ the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20). **NH**

The author is pastor of Christ OPC in Marietta, Georgia.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON KREEFT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY



RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.

The author, Peter Kreeft, of the brief autobiography *From Calvinist to Catholic*—written, he says, not on his own initiative but at the behest of the publisher—has enjoyed a distinguished, decades-long career teaching philosophy at Boston College. A prolific author, he is widely regarded as a leading Roman Catholic philosopher and apologist.

Born in 1937, Kreeft was raised in a closely-knit ethnically Dutch community in the Paterson, New Jersey, area, where his family also belonged to one among several local confessionally orthodox Reformed congregations. His primary and secondary education was in Christian schools with a Calvinist basis.

Still appreciative today of his roots and with many positive memories from these early years, questions nevertheless began to form for Kreeft even as a child. Among

these, why his and other Reformed denominations, if they were so right, were so small compared, for instance, to the Roman Catholic Church, and why Catholics, as he was taught, were so wrong.

Revealing is an incident he recounts on entering Saint Patrick's Cathedral as a pre-teen during a visit to New York City:

I had never been in a cathedral before, and as soon as I stepped inside, I felt I had entered another universe. It was glorious, elaborate, mysterious, . . . wonderful, and otherworldly . . . It was extraordinarily extraordinary. I thought that this must be what Heaven looked like. It was literally miraculous, it was supernatural, it was not of this world. (37)

With questions and reservations that began forming in childhood and adolescence persisting, he went off to Calvin College. There sympathetic exposure by “my favorite teacher” (Harry Jellema) to the thought of Thomas Aquinas proved especially decisive. This encounter with Aquinas, the person he regards “as the most intelligent, clear, correct, complete, and comprehensive thinker who ever lived” (144), was pivotal in resolving his questions and leading to his eventual conversion to Catholicism soon after his graduation (whimsically, the young woman he asked to be the godmother for his baptism eventually became his wife after the Church granted them a necessary dispensation).

Of particular interest to some may be a meeting with Dr. Van Til not long after his conversion. This meeting was one among many conversations, primarily with his father, who, with his mother, was understandably distressed by his conversion. Of these, “a few of them [were] enlightening, including one with the great Calvinist theologian at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Cornelius Van Til, who was very gracious and intelligent, but not persuasive. Like Karl Barth, he was suspicious of my heroes: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas” (162). This confused affinity Kreeft finds between Barth and Van Til is an indication of his failure to see the profound difference between the two and his misunderstanding of the latter's Calvinism.

CHRISTIAN FIRST, EVANGELICAL SECOND

Assessing this book fairly has proven to be challenging. Its title, as Kreeft himself says, is “a bit misleading,” for before becoming a Catholic, being a Calvinist was not all that significant for him: “I was a Christian first, an Evangelical second, a Protestant third, and a Calvinist fourth” (9). With this sort of prioritizing, a few pages later we

read, “I am more Evangelical now as a Catholic than I was as an Evangelical Protestant” (13).

This co-opting of *evangelical* for and to include Catholicism—at odds with its usual and established contra-Catholic, Protestant sense covering various, though often diverging theological views and ecclesiastical developments stemming from the Reformation—is in effect a central strand of this autobiography. Throughout Kreeft is at pains to make clear that he sees his conversion not as abandoning false for true religion but as moving from a relatively impoverished and often erroneous Protestant, especially Calvinist, grasp of the truth of the gospel to its fuller and enriching embrace found only in the Catholic Church.

This raises a question for clarification, as obvious as it is pressing: How is Catholicism—not just at this or that point but with its doctrine, worship and piety, and outlook on life as a whole accepted, as Kreeft clearly does—“more Evangelical”? How are the following, for instance, truer to the truth of the gospel: the apostolicity of the Church understood as tied to and manifested in the supreme authority of the Pope, vested in personal papal succession, and entailing along with the infallibility of Scripture the infallibility of Church-sanctioned tradition (both to be received “with equal affection of piety and reverence,” Trent); the Eucharist of the Mass as a sacerdotal sacrifice; devotion to Mary; and purgatory? Kreeft advocates for these and other Catholic dogma and does so with undeniable facility and engaging winsomeness.

DOES “OUGHT” IMPLY “CAN”?

The case Kreeft makes for becoming Catholic and his rejection of Calvinism, while obviously of one piece, are distinct. My attention here will primarily be on his reasons for the latter rejection.

Kreeft does value Calvinism for its “strong affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of God” and “its most famous corollary,” predestination (179), and he says, “I love the beginning” of the Heidelberg Catechism, with the first question and the first sentence of its answer in mind (180). Still, the target of his most stringent criticisms of evangelical Protestantism is Calvinism.

Among these criticisms uppermost as much as any, apparently more than any other, is Calvin’s and subsequent Calvinism’s denial of free will. Preoccupation with exposing this denial with its perceived harmful implica-

tions and affirming the necessity of free will surfaces at a number of places throughout.

Before addressing this issue further, a general observation: It is disappointing how little interaction we find with the writings of Calvin and other important Calvinist and other Reformation sources. Kreeft, I assume, is capable of providing the kind of extensive and amply documented critique of Calvinism he has perhaps made elsewhere and which this autobiographical sketch is not

intended to provide. However, with the contrarian agenda signaled by the book’s title, it is fair to expect that we would find more direct and detailed dealing with the writings of Calvin and other influential Calvinists and the Reformed confessions than Kreeft provides.

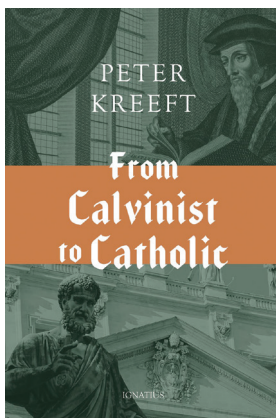
Toward the book’s close (172), listed are the names of two groups: those who in his interactions over the years are “my friends” on the one hand, and “worthy opponents” on the other. The latter group begins with the Greek Sophists and ends with Freud, Nietzsche, and Sartre. That Calvin or other important Calvinists (Bavinck, Warfield, for instance) are missing is noticeable. At any rate, the chapters on “The Five Points of Calvinism” and “Luther’s Three ‘Solus,’” for

instance (not to mention here Calvin on free will, see below), leave me wondering about the adequacy of Kreeft’s understanding of the Calvinism he has rejected.

The denial of free will is “Calvinism’s great falsehood”; with this denial specifically in view, “Calvinism is a heresy” (182). Here forthrightly and one final time Kreeft levels a key charge made or implied a number of times earlier. His supporting reasoning, expressed repeatedly in various ways, is this: “If we are not free, we are not morally responsible;” “‘ought’ implies ‘can.’” In willing and doing what pleases him God does not expect or require of me more than I, freely seeking his enabling help, am of myself capable of willing and doing. Put formally, for Kreeft and the Catholic anthropology he represents, ability is the measure of responsibility or accountability.

It does not overstate to say that no more fundamental difference between Rome and the Reformation is at stake than here, a difference that is closely akin to and in its way as basic as the *solus*, particularly Christ alone, by grace alone, by faith alone.

The magisterial Reformers understood all too well that for sinners *coram Deo*, ability is *not* the measure of responsibility, that ought does *not* imply can. For them, the



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inescapable dilemma confronting sinners is that, faced as we are with the demands of God's holy hatred of our sin, our accountability far exceeds our ability to satisfy or alleviate those demands.

The Reformation's renewed recovery of the truth of the gospel—how it is that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, the revelation of the saving righteousness of God in Christ received solely by faith—this recovery brought with it a deepened recognition of the abysmal depth of human sinfulness.

For the Reformers this gospel-truth was so liberating because they grasped that it alone was adequate for the salvation of sinners who, of themselves and left to themselves, are nothing less than “dead in [their] trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). As such, inexcusably guilty and hopelessly corrupted, we are utterly helpless to do anything about our condition. They came to recognize that the inability of sinners is so total that more was needed than prevenient grace enabling a weakened but supposedly still freely functioning will, that the notion of the willing, grace-assisted, self-help use of the sacramental system of the Roman Church did not save but left sinners unreconciled to God.

They grasped that nothing less was adequate to change the deadness of the enslaved will of sinners than a work of grace that was nothing less than a work of resurrection—the regenerating, enlivening, and as such faith-creating work that God, rich in mercy and of great love, did in uniting them to Christ by faith to share in his righteousness and resurrection life (Eph. 2). With good reason Luther's grasp of this truth and that the integrity of the gospel was at stake in maintaining it, prompted him to respond to Erasmus's *The Freedom of the Will* with *The Bondage of the Will*.

William Barker (WTS, emeritus)—with thanks for his valuable input in preparing this review—has reminded me of Calvin's treatment of free will in Book 2, Chapter 5 of his *Institutes*. A couple of things at least are noteworthy there. For one, the Catholic arguments for free will that Calvin effectively rebuts are in substance no different than the view maintained by Kreeft. Further and significantly, in doing so Calvin repeatedly finds support in Augustine. This at one point is Calvin's summarizing statement:

Therefore we must keep in mind what we have elsewhere cited from Augustine: in vain, people busy themselves with finding any good of man's own in his will. For any mixture of the power of free will that men strive to mingle



Kreeft's first experience inside a cathedral, St. Patrick's in New York City, was for him “extraordinarily extraordinary.”

with God's grace is nothing but a corruption of grace. It is just as if one were to dilute wine with muddy, bitter water.
(Section 15)

It would be difficult to be more pointed and unsparing.

At a number of places throughout, including his comments about free will, Kreeft stresses that grace perfects nature. This expresses a valid and important principle, but only as nature, grace, and their relationship are construed biblically. Here, as far as its anthropological and soteriological implications are concerned, specifically where fallen human will is in view, the principle is bound to read: Grace perfects nature only as in doing so it first renovates nature. The Westminster Shorter Catechism's answer on effectual calling, for one, provides a succinct, biblically faithful statement of the comprehensive dimensions of this saving renewal:

Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. (WSC 31)

On the issue of free will, Kreeft's view is akin to Arminianism. He says as much in effect:

And the either/or of Heaven or Hell is equally certain and not up to our choice. But which of these two it is, is our choice [his emphasis]. As one Southern preacher not quite accurately but memorably put the dogma of free will, “God casts his vote for you and the Devil casts his vote against you and yours is the deciding vote.” (184–185)

TRUSTING IN CHRIST

Earlier I expressed my difficulty in assessing this book fairly. As already noted, Kreeft appreciates Calvinism's emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God and predestination, yet he denies double predestination. He loves the beginning of the Heidelberg Catechism, yet, though Romans 8:28, he says, "is my favorite verse in Scripture" (180), it's not clear to me that beyond that first sentence he holds to the rest of the answer as it is to be believed and confessed. He clearly rejects much of the rest of the Heidelberg Catechism and the other Reformed confessions.

At the same time, however, pervasive throughout the book is an undeniable emphasis, however much it is sometimes obscured, that saving faith is "personally trusting in Christ" (75). In countering the objection that Catholicism teaches justification by works instead of justification by faith, which he denies, he recognizes that is the understanding all too many Catholics have. He relates the following (75):

I often ask my "Catholic" students at Boston College to answer questionnaires about themselves, and I sometimes include the question "If you died tonight and you met God and He asked you why He should admit you into Heaven, what would you answer?" And well over nine out of ten begin with the word "I" ("I did my best", . . . "I am a kind person", etc.). About half mention and appeal to God's mercy, but fewer than one in ten even mention Christ.

In a video of the publisher's interview about the book, he makes the arresting statement to the effect that when all Catholics become as Christ-centered as most Protestants, then all Protestants "will come home."

No matter how this emphasis on the centrality of Christ and of saving faith as trusting Christ for salvation might be compromised and obscured by Roman Catholic error, I don't want to be guilty of minimizing it. "My only hope," he says, "my only plea, is Jesus Christ; it is not me" (187).

Still, a final reservation surfaces. The focus of the last chapter ("Prospective: What's Next?") is largely on purgatory, about which Kreeft, now facing death in his late 80s, is not only preoccupied with but also quite positive. The gist of his outlook is this: "Justification was finished by Christ alone on the Cross, but sanctification is an ongoing process that requires our free cooperation" (186; note again the accent on free will). He knows himself to be a sinner and recognizes that he will continue to be one until his death, so he is looking forward beyond death to

purgatory to finish the process of sanctification and make him ready for heaven.

This outlook is at odds with official Roman Catholic dogma. For Rome, justification is clearly seen as based on sanctification, and thus as an ongoing process never complete in this life. This view, as articulated in the sixteenth century by the Council of Trent against the Reformation, persists. For instance, on justification the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes for support this declaration of Trent: "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man" (article 1989). For Rome, purgatory is for Christians who are not yet fully justified because they are not yet fully sanctified.

If in distinguishing justification and sanctification as he does, Kreeft is looking in faith to Christ's finished work on the cross for his completed justification, then he is a happily inconsistent Catholic. But as he continues looking beyond this life to purgatory for sanctification, that sadly deprives him of the comfort of Scripture that "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory" (WSC 37).

A recent review of this book, exemplary in its balance and making substantive criticisms I share (Kevin DeYoung in *First Things*), is entitled "Enjoyably Evangelical." That may be a fair assessment; though at the same time it also has to be said that if Kreeft is to be regarded as an evangelical, it is not because, as he says, the Catholicism he has embraced has made him "more evangelical." **NH**

The author is a retired OP minister and professor emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary.

GOD'S MISSIONARY IMAGINATION

JEREMIAH MONTGOMERY

I first met Ricardo in October 2012. I was a church planter in State College, Pennsylvania. He was an engineering student at Pennsylvania State University. The fall semester was well underway at the university, and so was our church's weekly evangelistic outreach to the Penn State campus. Through the modest efforts of our small mission work, Jesus changed Ricardo forever—and through him brought salvation to his household. With his permission, here is the story as best we can remember it.

COMING TO FAITH

Our open-air evangelistic ministry at Penn State began in spring 2012. Every week, I and a team of student volunteers would set up a sign in the Penn State free speech zone during the lunchtime break between classes. I would preach a brief evangelistic message, and while I spoke my teammates would offer evangelistic material to those who paused to listen. When I finished, we invited those interested to stay and talk. We called this ministry “Discuss Your Faith.”

Our goal with Discuss Your Faith was to raise spiritual self-awareness. We began each week by emphasizing three key points. First, every life has something at its center, something most important—a functional god and savior. Second, admitting this reality is good and wise even for non-religious people. Third, we ought to evaluate our functional gods: Will they save us, or destroy us? In connection with this last point, we asked our hearers to compare their functional gods with Jesus—the only One who can forgive us, fulfill us, and rescue us.

On the day I met Ricardo, the Discuss Your Faith message asked, “What is real love?” From 1 John 4:8–11, we answered that real love is personal, supernatural, honest, and sacrificial—and that this love is offered in Jesus to all who trust him. We encouraged those who were uncertain to investigate Jesus.

After I sat down, one student remained. Ricardo did not say much that day, but he gave me his number and expressed interest in meeting. Six days later, we got some food and sat outside to talk.



Ricardo (center) with his parents (left) and the Montgomerys

Ricardo's family is from Mexico, and he had grown up culturally Roman Catholic. With this background, he was already familiar with some of the foundational points of Christian doctrine such as the Trinity and the incarnation. What was new to him—good news!—was the idea that he did not have to earn points with God. Why not? Because Jesus had already earned all the points we need to be forgiven and go to heaven. That very day, in our first meeting, Ricardo gave his heart to Jesus in prayer. From that moment, he was a new man.

GROWING IN FAITH

As a new believer, Ricardo needed support. My Discuss Your Faith teammates made sure he had rides to church, and I began meeting with Ricardo weekly. We began by reading Mark's Gospel together. As time went on, we also began working through some catechetical material. The Elizabethan language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism was a challenge, but Ricardo was eager to learn. We persisted.

One of my recurring joys in working with Ricardo was his sweet delight in the gospel promises. Growing up Roman Catholic, he had been taught to pray to Mary and to trust the Church—the Church, not Jesus, was presented as savior. The good news that we can trust Jesus directly, and

that we can be certain that his work gives us everything we need, always lifted his heart. Ricardo is quiet by nature, but I remember how he would close his eyes and nod his head. Trusting in Jesus gave him an assurance Rome couldn't offer.

Ricardo joined Resurrection OPC in State College by confession of faith in March 2015. By the time he made his public profession of faith, he was well known and much loved by the congregation. His church family walked with Ricardo through almost the entirety of his undergraduate years, including one very difficult circumstance. Like a true disciple of Jesus, Ricardo was ever teachable. The life of Christ was growing in him.

SHARING THE FAITH

Because Ricardo was a convert from Roman Catholicism and a member of a close-knit family, it was inevitable that his family would become aware of his new faith. He and I discussed this early on, and I encouraged him to be both proactive and gentle in telling them. It was important that his parents and siblings know that Jesus had changed him; it was also important that he communicate with gentleness and respect.

Ricardo told his family about his conversion during the break after the fall 2012 semester. Both of us were somewhat apprehensive. Neither of us expected what actually happened.

First, Ricardo's family did not reject him. They were surprised, perhaps even confused, but supportive. Their Catholicism was cultural, not polemical, and so the news that their son and brother loved Jesus and was getting involved with a Protestant church was not perceived as a threat. This was encouraging!

But even better things were to follow. In time, as Ricardo shared and lived his faith before his family, Jesus began to save them, too! First one of his sisters, then his mother, and then also his father began to trust Jesus. God used one new Christian to make three more!

LIVING BY FAITH

My close contact with Ricardo lasted less than five years. He graduated from Penn State and moved away from State College. My family moved to the far side of the world into a new and sensitive ministry context. Ricardo and I never lost touch entirely, but our ability to communicate was limited—and the Lord's providence took us in different directions. I was no longer his pastor, and we were no longer living on the same continent.

In God's goodness, Ricardo and I reconnected in 2025 after my family moved to Philadelphia. As we sat down



Ricardo (second from right) with the Discuss Your Faith group at Penn State

to our first shared meal in a decade, the years of distance melted away. Ricardo's faith had faced a number of challenges, including a struggle with church attendance. But he was still following Jesus, still sharing his faith, and he wanted to reconnect with the visible Christian community. Ricardo now worships with us at an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation in the Philadelphia area—a congregation pastored by one of my original Discuss Your Faith teammates!

Christ's work in Ricardo continues to bear fruit. One Lord's Day last summer, Ricardo brought his parents to worship with him. As we spoke together in my living room after church, our hearts filled with the thrill of seeing how God had worked—not just in Ricardo, but through Ricardo! Ricardo's parents regularly visit friends and relatives in Mexico. When they are there, they attend an evangelical church and seek to share the gospel promises with those they know.

God's missionary imagination is so much bigger than ours. When I and my teammates shared the good news about Jesus with Ricardo, we could never have guessed that God was using us to open a fountain of grace not just for Ricardo, but also for his family—and even for their home country. We could never have imagined that a gospel promise first shared on a Thursday afternoon in October 2012 would be echoing in Mexico fifteen years later.

How many more new Christians will God make through Ricardo and his family? Only time will tell, and perhaps only heaven will reveal.

The author is general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

HOPE AGAINST ALL HOPE

OCTAVIUS DELFILS



The morning service on the Lord's Day had just ended one Sunday last May in Port-au-Prince. As usual, my wife and I remained in the church during the afternoon to participate in the youth meeting as well as various other ministries of the church. Because of the security situation, we concentrate ministry activities on Sundays rather than asking members to travel several times a week along the dangerous roads that lead to and from their homes.

We were finishing and preparing to return home when one of our young people, who works at the school, told me that bad news was circulating on the school's WhatsApp group. I immediately checked my phone and learned that the husband of the cook at Adoration Christian School—a ministry partnered with our church and the place where our congregation meets—had just been shot and killed.

Manise, who has worked at the school for more than twenty years, had suddenly lost her husband. He had left home to buy ice. On his way back, he was struck by a stray bullet during clashes between two armed groups engaged in a battle for control of territories west of the Port-au-Prince airport, where several major businesses are located.

Hundreds of people are wounded or killed in similar circumstances. Among them was also, on that same Sunday, a brilliant mathematics professor from the State University of Haiti.

Those who had time to flee that Sunday left their homes without being able to take anything with them. Near the church, about a ten-minute walk away, there are approximately ten thousand displaced persons, according

to press estimates, living along the roadside in makeshift camps without basic necessities. When they can return, whenever that is, they risk finding their homes looted or burned.

Others, who do not have time to flee, are trapped in the crossfire. They remain prisoners inside their homes and live daily under constant danger. Three people from our church are in this predicament.

GANG VIOLENCE

Such is the current situation in Haiti. These events are taking place not far from our church and, sadly, are no different from what is happening in many other parts of the country. The security situation remains extremely alarming and is gradually drawing closer to our area. We humbly ask for your prayers for the protection of our people, the church in Haiti, and Adoration Christian School, where our Port-au-Prince congregation meets.

In response to the crisis in Haiti, the United Nations sent a mission to Haiti led by Kenyan forces. The deployed forces, however, were understaffed, and little changed here. Another unit, called the Gang Suppression Force, has begun arriving since April. Haitians remain doubtful because of the previous mission's failure.

The Haitian government itself appears either powerless or lacking both will and strategy to combat these armed groups. Such is the terrible situation in which we find ourselves today. The gangs are heavily armed and ready to kill, loot, and burn. We still see no solution to this crisis, which has only grown worse since the assassination of Haiti's president in July 2021. Nevertheless, our hope is in the Lord, and our eyes are fixed upon him.

"OUR EYES ARE ON YOU"

It is a situation similar to that of King Jehoshaphat when the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites marched against him to wage war against the children of Israel. This great multitude inspired fear. Jehoshaphat turned to God in prayer and declared, "O our God, will you not

execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chron. 20:12).

This is also an excellent opportunity for Christians in Haiti to put into practice the teaching of God’s Word, which calls us not to seek revenge and not to harbor hatred in our hearts, but to overcome evil with good. More than ever, this is the time to learn to pray for those who do us harm, such as those gangs:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. . . . Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14, 17–21)

A HEDGE OF PROTECTION

Despite this terrible situation in Haiti, there is every reason to bless the name of the Lord. He has cared for the church and the school by placing around them a true “hedge of protection.” He daily protects the families of the church and the school. As the psalmist says: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me” (Ps. 139:5).

The church continues to function regularly, without missing a single Sunday for more than two years. Many children and teenagers faithfully attend our new Sunday school classes, and several visitors participate in our worship services.



Sunday school in Port-au-Prince

The Christians on the island of La Gonâve are also facing their share of hardships. Gang attacks at sea have become so frequent that boats are scarcely traveling anymore. They have also endured a long period of drought that has severely affected the crops. Yet despite all this, the churches continue to gather regularly.

Since 2019, it has been impossible for us to gather our presbytery physically. Nevertheless, we are now able to communicate through a WhatsApp group and continue holding our meetings regularly through the benefit of the technology that God has graciously provided for us. There is therefore hope in the midst of suffering.

This is what the prophet Habakkuk expresses. Faced with a disastrous situation, he declares:

*I hear, and my body trembles;
my lips quiver at the sound;
rottenness enters into my bones;
my legs tremble beneath me.
Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.*

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls.*

And in the midst of this desolation, the prophet nevertheless finds the strength to say:

*Yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
He makes my feet like the deer’s;
He makes me tread on my high places. (Hab. 3:16–19)*

Even in the most difficult circumstances—lawless executions, drought, deprivation, or injustice—the believer can already rejoice, for our God is the God of salvation, here and now. The joy and praise of God’s people do not depend on the outward circumstances of this life, but on the faithful and saving presence of our Lord.

Against all hope, we continue to hope that God will keep building his church through every storm and trial. Above all, we hope because our hope rests in Jesus Christ, our Savior, the victorious Christ, through whom the church remains more than conqueror.

The author is an associate missionary in Haiti.

NEW TRAINING FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AVAILABLE FROM GCP

B. A. SNIDER

Great Commission Publications (GCP) is privileged to provide Sunday school curriculum for our parent churches in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, along with other Reformed congregations around the country. GCP has over 600,000 lesson engagements per year with children across the country—praise God! This means that over 600,000 times a year, a child and a teacher are opening God’s Word together, reading and learning the stories of the Bible, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and, as Psalm 78:4 says, “the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”

Knowing that the best teaching comes from teachers who are studying the Word on a regular basis and that only the Holy Spirit can work in a child’s heart, we desire to help our teachers be ready to teach each week out of the fullness of their hearts. We want to spark wonder as children learn about our big God; we want kids to be taught heart-to-heart, disciplined in relationship; and we want a covenantal framework, so that kids see Jesus in the unfolding story of salvation.

TRAINING FREE OF CHARGE, EXPANDING IN 2027

GCP is excited to announce free training opportunities for all of our churches—those who use our curriculum, those considering, and everyone who wants to faithfully disciple the next generation. GCP has always believed that training teachers is an important part of curriculum development. Most of the teachers using our curriculum are not trained in education but are nurses or businesspeople or college students or plumbers or realtors, and, because of that, the curriculum is easy to use, clear for volunteers, and includes teaching aids and tips to help teachers of any level.

By God’s grace, GCP has always offered in-person training, but we have never had more than one or two people available to lead that training. Now as a result of the wonderful Lilly Endowment grant that GCP received in 2025, we have developed a network of trainers available to go into churches across the country, free of charge.



With funding from the Lilly Endowment, GCP now has regional Sunday school trainers available to visit churches and presbyteries to provide workshops.

In 2025 we recruited our first five trainers from the southeast region of the United States, where our largest number of churches are located. In 2027 we will be adding to our team of trainers in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, the Northeast, and the West Coast. As the director of training and outreach, I and Kristy Mitchell, our discipleship engagement coordinator, will be available from our Atlanta office to go to locations not covered by the rest of the team.

There are three simple steps to get free training in your church:

- Request Training: Contact me (ba.snider@gcp.org) or a local trainer to ask about training at your church or in your presbytery.
- We Connect: Together we will work on a date and time that works for all involved.
- Get Equipped: We will customize your training for your church and your context.

TRAINING SPECIFIC TO YOUR CHURCH

Each training is fully customizable to meet the unique needs and context of your ministry. In-person training comes to your church for a hands-on, interactive session with your team of teachers. Online training is perfect for

remote teams gathering from multiple locations. Roundtable workshops are available for bringing multiple churches or presbyteries together in-person for collaborative learning and networking.

Not sure where to start? We offer five workshops that are great for a church of any size:

- *Show Me Jesus* overview—Discover our Christ-centered curriculum for toddlers through middle elementary, which points to Jesus through every story from the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New. Understand the scope and sequence and how the curriculum is designed to teach the Bible to our children at each age level.
- Preschoolers—Teach preschoolers God's Word in a way that sticks.
- Elementary—Teach elementary students how to study and understand God's Word for themselves.
- Covenant—Consider how children are part of God's covenant plan for the church and learn how to teach those covenant promises to children.
- Curriculum—Dive into the *Show Me Jesus* curriculum and learn how to disciple kids heart-to-heart.

On-demand video training is also available online for every age group at vimeo.com/channels/gcptraining/.

Our goal at GCP is for our teachers to faithfully open God's Word with children each Sunday. We pray that through the ordinary means of grace, the Word, and prayer, the Holy Spirit would work powerfully in the lives of our covenant children and anyone in the classroom that they may know the gospel of Jesus Christ and walk with him in new obedience each day of their lives.

The author is director of training and outreach for Great Commission Publications.

MTIOPC 2026 FALL ONLINE COURSE: DEFENDING THE FAITH

The Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC) is offering an online course in fall 2026: Defending the Faith (Presuppositional Apologetics). The deadline for applying is August 24. The class starts online on August 31, with mandatory online intensive training sessions the week of November 16. Defending the Faith is taught by Rev. Dr. William D. Denison, pastor of Emmanuel OPC in Kent, Washington.

SUFFERING UNTO GLORY

Excerpts from the *New Horizons* archives of saints alive in Christ while tasting the futility of this world.

New Horizons vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1983)
by Gary and Margaret Brownlee, OP members

We weren't looking for another ministry, since we were already heavily involved in church and Christian school activities. But God had some people to whom we were to exhibit his love and care, and those people were in prison. . . .

When I received notice of jury duty, I looked forward to it with anticipation, expecting that this firsthand knowledge would aid me in teaching my U. S. Government class more knowledgeably. When it became evident that I would sit on a murder case, the responsibility weighed heavily upon me, especially since the death penalty was still in effect at that time.

The defendant was Manuel Cortez, and he was found guilty on both counts of murder. During the course of the trial, I had been impressed with his demeanor, and I'd heard claims that he had come to know Christ. At the completion of the trial I expressed in a letter that my hope was that his conversion was genuine, and that he was, in fact, trusting in Jesus as his substitute. A few days later, a long letter arrived filled with confirmations of a clear and deep faith in God. The following is an excerpt from that letter: "Reality is that, humanly speaking, I have no hope . . . but I place my only hope and my undying faith in God's Word, which never fails."

Phone calls and visits have ensued which have cemented our relationship as fellow believers.

OPC ministers, ruling elders, licentiates, and men under care are eligible to apply. All students must pay a \$50 registration fee that is fully refundable upon successful completion of the course. Ruling elders must also pay a tuition fee of \$50.

To apply, visit www.opc.org/cce/MTI.html. For more information, email MTIOPC coordinator Judy Alexander at judy.alexander@opc.org.

SURPRISED BY THE JOY OF GIVING

NATHANIEL VROOM

When Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in the parables of Matthew 13, one of the images he uses is that of “treasure hidden in a field.” The treasure is not common, but one of staggering value; the man who finds it “goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44). The great value of the treasure is obtained through great sacrifice, a kind of sacrifice rarely seen in our world: A man sells *all* that he has.

This kind of sacrifice has always surprised the watching world. It is foreign to the natural man that one might give up his money, his possessions—even his life—for the kingdom of God. But that is Christ, who laid down his life willingly for the sake of sinful men. It is the same surprise one discovers in the testimony of the martyrs, who went to their deaths not with wails of regret, but willingly, refusing to recant.

THE JOY THAT IS SET BEFORE US

However, there is something more surprising than the sacrifice: the joy of the one who gives it. Jesus says of the man who finds the hidden treasure, that “*in his joy* . . . he sells all that he has” (emphasis added). The man sells all *gladly*, and examples of such gladness multiply throughout the Scriptures and Christian history. The martyrs are not only willing to die, but they *sing* as they do. Paul and Silas are imprisoned, and do the same (Acts 16:25).

In his spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis narrates his lifelong quest for the elusive experience of joy, a pursuit that came to an end when, “I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” Lewis discovered joy, and he describes it not as a thing we possess directly, but as a longing awakened by something greater, as a signpost pointing beyond ourselves. Joy, he says, is “a desire . . . turned not to itself but to its object.” It is the response of the soul to a greater reality—a treasure, a kingdom, and a King—worth selling all to obtain.

Here is a picture: Imagine a bride coming down the aisle toward her bridegroom. On this their wedding day,

the couple is not calculating the cost of what they are giving up—time, money, independence. Those costs may be real, but they are irrelevant compared to joy that the bride and groom have. They gladly give everything because they know what they are gaining: the treasure of a life together.

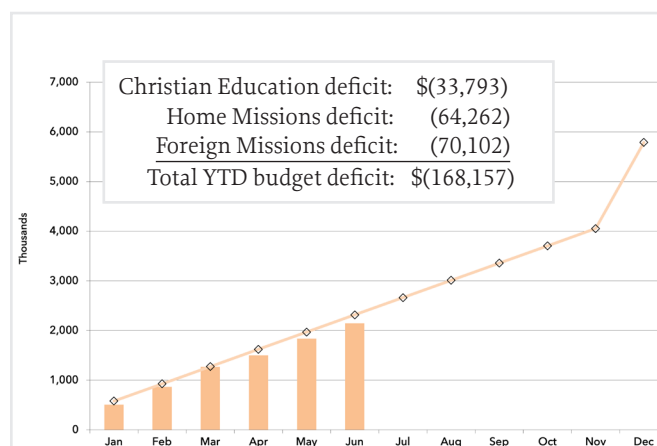
So it is with the Christian life. There is much giving that happens in the Christian life, many sacrifices to be made, many things to say “no” to. But these are not great burdens, because they come not from duty alone, but from the delight we have in the kingdom.

The man, in his joy, sells all he has to buy the field. In this, he is like our Lord, who “*for the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2, emphasis added). Christ had a great treasure before him, and in joy he sold all that he had to possess it.

When we see the treasure of Christ’s kingdom for ourselves, we too shall be surprised, not by the cost, nor by the sacrifice, but by overwhelming joy.

The author is a pastor of First OPC in Sunnyvale, California.

WORLDWIDE OUTREACH YEAR-TO-DATE 2026 RECEIPTS WITH 2026 GOALS



AUG-SEPT 2026 PRAYER CALENDAR

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.

1 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Ukraine. Pray for effective follow-up for their church's student English camp and VBS this summer. / Pray for **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

2 Pray for **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for the stated clerk, **Hank L. Belfield**, as he and his staff handle administrative work following general assembly.

3 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that the children's Sunday school program may continue and that the Lord may bring these children to him. / Pray for managing editor of *New Horizons*, **Judith Dinsmore**.

4 Pray for **Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota. / Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, and their family as they return to the field on August 5.

5 Pray for **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, editor of *New Horizons*.

6 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough). Pray for the Karamoja team as it welcomes new students in the Timothy Discipleship Program. / Pray for active duty US Army chaplains **Cornelius (Deidre) Johnson** and **Kenneth A. (Mandy) Kruchkow**.

7 Missionary associates **Jeff and Gloria Davis**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for fruit from the summer VBS outreach in Karamoja. / Pray for **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada.

8 Pray for **Nick (Rosie) Lammé**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* would be edifying and encouraging to elders and the congregations they serve.

9 Pray for associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda, and daughters Carmel, Zion, and Olive, preparing for a new year of homeschooling. / Pray for summer intern **Durell (Danielle) Grisebaum** at Covenant Community in Greenville, SC.

10 **Connor & Danielle Underseeth**, Carlsbad, CA. Pray for the fruitful ministry of All Saints Presbyterian Church. / Missionary associate **Ben Gifford**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for a job and a place to live after he returns from his term of service in August.

11 **Jefferson & Ellen De Oliveira**, Springfield, OH. Pray for visitors to experience Christ's love at Iglesia Presbiteriana Alfa y Omega. / Pray for summer intern **Clark (Grace) Saltz** at Garst Mill OPC in Roanoke, VA.

12 Tentmaker missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for contentment and joy in the Lord. / Pray for summer intern **Jack (Eunjung) VanDrunen** at Trinity Presbyterian Church in San Clemente, CA.

13 **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay. Pray for language learning and cultural adaptation for their family. / **Sam & Milda Lukosius**, Springfield, OH. Pray for the students of Cedarville University to grow in maturity and wisdom.



The Grisebaums (day 9)



The Saltzes (day 11)

14

Christian & Hanna Repp, Doylestown, PA. Pray for the Lord's guidance and provision for Park Presbyterian Church's property fundraising campaign. / Pray with **Disaster Response** that the Lord would continue to protect the OPC from major disasters.

15

Pray for **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay (on furlough), as they visit OP churches in August and September. / Pray for summer intern **Garrett Hopkins** at Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek, OH.

16

John & Grace Jee, Columbia, MD. Pray for Word of Life OPC to respond to God's great mercy through gratitude, compassion, and hospitality. / Pray that the faithfulness of the **imprisoned pastors in East Africa** would testify of God's grace to their captors.

17

Matthew & Hyojung Walker, Yorktown, VA. Pray for fruitful officer training at Peninsula Reformed. / Pray for summer intern **Uriah Renzetti** at Covenant Presbyterian in Barre, VT.

18

Pray that the Lord would raise up missionary evangelists for the **OP Uganda Mission** to labor in Karamoja and with the Knox School of Theology in Mbale. / Pray for summer intern **Devin (Brianna) Baker** at Faith Presbyterian in Silver Point, TN.



The Sibleys (day 24)

19

Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee** as they prepare for committee meetings (September). / **Nate & Amy Jeffries**, West Norriton, PA. Pray for God's blessing on the health, strength, and service of the members of Good News OPC.

20

David & Leah Vogel, Kannapolis, NC. Pray for the evangelistic efforts of Kannapolis OPC. / Pray for summer intern **Chris (Emily) Amberge** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

21

Pray for Foreign Missions general secretaries **Douglas Clawson** and **Benjamin Hopp** as they report to the committee September 22–23. / Pray for summer intern **Tom (Lorelei) Laaman** at Christ OPC in Marietta, GA.

22

A.J. & Chelsea Millsaps, Athens, TN. Pray Zion OPC would reach young families in the community. / Pray for the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** as it supports theological education in the African Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Kenya.

23

Paul & Rachel Johnson, Laveen, AZ. Pray for the faithful witness of Laveen Presbyterian Church. / Pray for summer intern **Daniel (Celeste) Dye** at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Vandalia, OH.

24

Mr. and Mrs. F., Asia. Pray for opportunities for intern MH to share the good news. / Pray for summer intern **Benjamin (Kara) Sibley** at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Ambler, PA.

25

Mr. and Mrs. M., Asia. Give thanks for opportunities to share the gospel with US college students and those in a local retirement home. / **Eli & Esmé Hirtzel**, Kapolei, HI. Pray that Covenant Kapolei would warmly welcome the increasing number of visitors.

26

Pray for Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth)**



The Bakers (day 18)

Montgomery. / Pray for the **Committee on Diaconal Ministries** as they meet August 25–27.

27

Fred & Kaling Lo, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for incoming Knox School of Theology students as they adjust to a new school, and, for many, a new country. / Pray for summer intern **David (Stacy) Diaz** at Harvest Presbyterian Church in Yuma, AZ.

28

Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico**. / Pray for **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda, and their daughter **Joanna** as she enrolls in a Christian high school in Kenya this fall.

29

Pray for **Steve (Katie) McDaniel**, director of revitalization for the Committee on Home Missions. / Pray for summer intern **Corey (Jill) Alderman** at Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, TX.

30

Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / Pray for fruit from the **Short-Term Mission** efforts, on the fields and in the lives of participants.

31

Pray for the work of the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** in teaching church leaders at the Presbyterian Church of the Reformation in Colombia. / Pray for **Lauren LaRocca**, administrative coordinator for Home Missions.



Participants in Reeves's (center) ordination and installation: Craig Troxel, Wayne Veenstra, Everett Henes, Christian Repp, Jonathan Cruse, and Harrison Perkins

NEWS

REEVES ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT KALAMAZOO

On May 22, Zac Reeves was ordained and installed as a pastor of Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he had previously served as a yearlong intern. OP pastors Christian Repp prayed, Wayne Veenstra preached, Harrison Perkins prayed during the laying on of hands, Dr. Craig Troxel gave the charge to Reeves, Jonathan Cruse gave the charge to the congregation, and Everett Henes served as moderator.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On April 18, **William Shishko**, previously pastor of The Haven Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Commack, NY, was installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York.
- On April 24, **Alec J. Dunlap** was ordained and installed as pastor of Firelands Grace OPC in Sandusky, OH.



At Joseph Gigante's May 15 ordination and installation in Oviedo, FL

- On May 2, the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Joshua D. Valdix** and New Life OPC in Montoursville, PA.
- On May 15, **Joseph J. Gigante** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Reformation OPC in Oviedo, FL.
- On May 22, **Zac Reeves** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, MI.
- On May 24, **M. Connor Underseth** was installed as an evangelist to serve All Saints Presbyterian Church in Carlsbad, CA.
- On May 29, **Jeffrey H. Shirley** was ordained and installed as a pastor of South Austin Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX.
- On May 29, the Presbytery of the Southwest installed **Nicholas G. Lammé** as an evangelist to serve as regional home missionary of the Presbytery of the Southwest.
- On May 31, **Paul O. Johnson** was installed as an evangelist to serve Laveen Presbyterian Church in Laveen, AZ.
- On May 31, the Presbytery of the Midwest dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Iain A. M. Wright** and Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL, upon his retirement.
- On June 1, the Presbytery of Northern California and Nevada dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Dale T. Hanaoka** and Reformation Fellowship in Roseville, CA, upon his retirement.
- On June 6, **Renato Menegaro** was installed as a pastor of Igreja

At Renato Menegaro's June 6 installation as pastor of Igreja Presbiteriana Brasileira em Melrose



The Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic's 2026 pastors' retreat was held at Machen Retreat and Conference Center in Highland County, Virginia, on May 18-19.

Presbiteriana Brasileira em Melrose (OPC), in Melrose, MA.

- On June 12, **Dane Bothun** was ordained and installed as pastor of Heritage OPC in Springfield, MO.
- On June 19, **Johnathan L. Allen** was installed as pastor of Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

LETTERS

EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Editor:

The June-July issue of *New Horizons* was a timely one. Many of us have experienced people leaving our churches for Eastern Orthodoxy. As we talk with them, it is important to understand where Reformed Christianity really differs from Orthodoxy and not merely engage in knee-jerk responses to the unfamiliar. I appreciated Dr. Letham's article and his explanation of *theosis*. Few Protestants understand *theosis* and its biblical roots and falsely fear that it blurs the line between Creator and creature. Dr. Letham's expertise in this area shows through his short article.

George C. Hammond
Wheaton, Illinois

Editor:

I am grateful for the issue on Eastern Orthodoxy. As our congregation has seen several families leave for that tradition, we all need instruction on this topic. And the writers did a fantastic job. However, I struggled with how difficult the articles would be for most of my congregants to understand. For example, one sentence reads, "*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." Other articles used historical references like the seven ecumenical councils and technical expressions like *extra nos*, *ex pacto*, *theosis*, and *locus classicus* without providing definitions. I am not asking that *New Horizons* dumb down its content.

What I am asking is that the principle of preaching be applied to the teaching in this magazine—namely, that writers "[apply] themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers" (WLC 159).

Matthew Patton
Tipp City, Ohio

REVIEWS

Presbyterianism, by Sean Michael Lucas. P&R, 2025. Hardcover, 136 pages, \$15.99.

Reviewed by OP pastor Jonathan B. Moersch.

One of my favorite responsibilities as a pastor is leading a new members' class and teaching believers who are new to Christianity or to the Reformed faith the major doctrines of Scripture, the flow of redemptive history, and ultimately what it means to belong to the church, specifically a Presbyterian church. This sentiment seems to be shared by Dr. Sean Michael Lucas, and his version of a new members' class is essentially what we find in his small

book, *Presbyterianism*. As part of the Blessings of the Faith series, it serves as a short and accessible introduction to Reformed doctrine and practice that you could give to just about anybody or have in your literature section at church. Lucas's goal in his book is not simply to explain *what* Presbyterianism is, he wants to demonstrate *why* it is good for you.

With a title like *Presbyterianism*, one might expect Lucas to jump right into ecclesiology and explain the form of church government that makes Presbyterianism unique; after all, the Greek word for "elder" (*presbyteros*) is in our name. But he doesn't do that (at least at first). Instead, Lucas prefers to first explain Presbyterianism by its key *beliefs*, before going on to explain its *practices*. This is fitting because unlike Baptists, Anglicans,

or the whole host of nondenominational churches, confessional Presbyterians identify themselves with particular doctrines. The three doctrines Lucas highlights in this book are God's sovereignty, Christ's kingship, and the Holy Spirit's use of the means of grace. One clearly sees the Trinitarian contours of the book.

Using the familiar hymn "This Is My Father's World," Lucas traces God's sovereignty displayed in creation, in providence (including common grace), and in our election unto salvation.

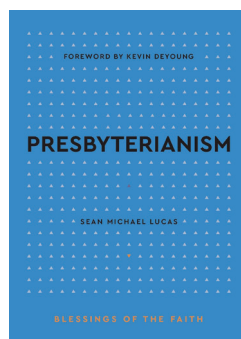
It is in his chapter on Christ's kingship that Lucas explains and defends from Scripture the form of Presbyterian government. He argues that Christ as the only King and Head of his church has told us in his Word *how* he would have his

church to be run, mediating his authority through a plurality of elders who are called as servant-leaders by the vote of the church. Lucas also stresses the importance of "connectionalism," where we see local churches coming together to form regional and even national church courts. Lucas

describes the main principle of Presbyterianism as: The parts are in the whole, and the whole is in its parts.

The chapter on the Holy Spirit explains how God uses ordinary means to do extraordinary things in the hearts and lives of his people. Chief among these are the "outward and ordinary" means of grace: the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. Through these, the people of God are built up in their faith and bring glory to God in their ordinary lives.

The book closes with a chapter of FAQ's that Lucas has been asked throughout his ministry. Although Lucas, a PCA minister, strives to present a "generic" Presbyterianism, his answers and explanations inevitably reflect the distinctions of his denomination. One also wonders if there are other doctrines besides the



ones mentioned above that help define Presbyterian belief and are worth mentioning (justification by faith alone comes to mind). That said, there is only so much one can say in a book of this length.

***The Heidelberg Catechism: A Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Commentary*, by R. Scott Clark. Lexham, 2025. Hardcover, 1080 pages, 59.99. Reviewed by retired OP minister John Wiers.**

The Heidelberg Catechism is part of the confessional tradition of the Dutch, German, Swiss, and other continental Reformed churches. It is much beloved in that tradition, and those in the OPC with continental roots are likely familiar with it—it is used appreciatively in a number of OPC congregations. The Heidelberg Catechism is based upon the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, with an extended introduction on the gospel.

Scott Clark's massive commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism should be of interest to all within the OPC who savor sound Reformed theology. Clark is professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California and a minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Clark is well-versed in the theology of the Reformation, both in its Reformed and Lutheran versions. Throughout the book he interacts with the authors of the catechism, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevian, and makes the case that Olevian's influence has often been overlooked. He masterfully draws upon their other theological writings to put the catechism in its historical context. Clark's fine historical work is recognized not only by those in the Reformed tradition but by highly regarded Lutheran historical theologian Robert Kolb, who commends Clark's work. It is in this historical work that Clark's commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism especially shines.

One important characteristic of this book is Clark's basic theological stance.

He stands in a strand of Reformed theology that emphasizes a strong law/gospel dialectic and hermeneutic along with a strong commitment to a two-kingdom view of the church's relationship to cultural life. This perspective is clearly stated in Clark's commentary as the preferable and most authentic approach to Reformed theology, an approach shared by many of the faculty at Westminster Seminary California. Even if not committed to those perspectives, readers will still find Clark's commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism of immense value.

Among the many positive aspects of Clark's large volume are his emphasis on justification by faith in the finished work of Christ as the believer's hope, an emphasis on the Reformed understanding of grace, some valuable critiques of theological liberalism, and an emphasis on the Apostles' Creed doctrines as what must be believed for salvation. He contrasts this to the somewhat fuzzier view found among some of our evangelical and fundamentalist brethren, while emphasizing the catholicity of mainstream Reformed doctrine. Above all, he emphasizes that the Reformed tradition sees Jesus "as a Savior and not a facilitator" (194).

Some might be surprised by Clark's downplaying of a moment of conversion, stating that we were "saved at Calvary," unlike some in the more pietistic strands of Reformed theology. Such statements have long roots in some versions of the Reformed tradition, especially among German Reformed theologians. He is also critical of "biblicism," saying that it is related to rationalism.

Even though Clark's subject matter requires technical discussion, his writing is accessible. That's important when he discusses such topics as the eternal generation of the Son and the strong historical roots of the covenant of works in historic Reformed theology, long before it became a

part of the Westminster Standards.

Some of Clark's discussions are more detailed than others. His discussion and commendation of amillennial eschatology is rather brief and he includes a nice, but short, discussion of the difference between Reformed and charismatic piety.

Following the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism, Clark includes

a rather full and helpful commentary on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, which parallel, but in some cases do not duplicate, what the Westminster Catechisms emphasize. These sections would be valuable to anyone teaching on these portions of the Bible, just as the extended commentary on the Creed

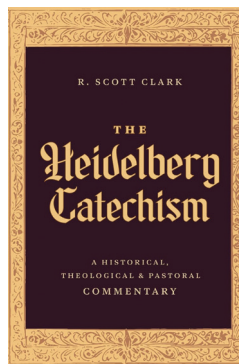
would be helpful to anyone teaching or preaching on the Creed.

I do have a clear point of contention with Clark in his evaluation of professors Richard B. Gaffin Jr. and Gregory K. Beale. According to Clark, Gaffin and Beale teach a view of salvation somewhat akin to N. T. Wright and the Roman Catholic Church because of the way they handle the role of good works at the final judgment. It is my opinion that Clark has simply misread them and missed their nuanced discussion of the issues.

Overall, though, this is a fine volume on the wonderful Heidelberg Catechism and a valuable piece of theological writing that I can commend to anyone wanting a full and historically informed discussion of the Reformed faith.

***Holy Ground: The Importance of the Body, Posture, and Liturgy in Worship*, by L. Charles Jackson. Wipf & Stock, 2024. Hardcover, 212 pages, \$29.00. Reviewed by OP pastor Tyler C. Detrick.**

Holy Ground by L. Charles Jackson is a challenging reminder that we are embodied worshipers who must account for the physical aspects of the praise we bring to



God. As Reformed believers—often labeled the “frozen chosen”—we tend to leave this aspect of worship untouched. The invisible Presbyterian forcefield keeps our hands below our heads during corporate worship, and I think I speak for many when I confess that we feel more comfortable that way. However, Jackson doesn’t let us off that easily. In a controversial yet conversational way, he forces us to reconsider our practices: “If God has recommended a posture, we should not fear it but find the most appropriate place for it in our worship services and worship God in faith” (13).

Reformed readers will be encouraged that Jackson insists upon the regulative principle as the biblical basis for our worship. His chapter titled “What Does God Want?” is excellent in its clear denunciation of man-centered worship and honest admission that Reformed worshippers still have much work to do in faithfully handling both the elements and circumstances of corporate worship. This latter

half is when readers will start squirming. Jackson takes up the distinct elements of worship one chapter at a time, considering the embodied aspects of each, including the kinds of songs we sing, the postures we take in prayer, the frequency of the Lord’s Table, and the elements we use in Holy Communion. Jackson holds back few

punches, and readers will find themselves cheering as he critiques charismatic excess in one sentence and then cringing as he calls out shortcomings in much of Reformed practice in the next sentence.

Careful readers will also notice that *Holy Ground* takes a particular approach to what believers can apply

from Old Covenant worship. Although Jackson cites New Covenant examples whenever possible, he encourages practices like kneeling in confession and clapping hands based on their presence in Israel’s worship of God. Jackson considers it obvious that these practices carry forward past the time of types and shadows while

others like incense and priestly garments are suspended along with the ceremonial law (37). An assessment of this issue amongst Presbyterians, including attention to relevant themes of ceremony and fulfillment in the Epistle to the Hebrews, does feel lacking given the topic at hand.

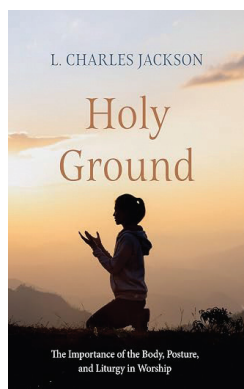
Nevertheless, Jackson’s book offers our churches a well-stated challenge. We need

to consider whether our worship includes all the postures recommended to us in God’s Word. Our intellect-heavy tradition may be susceptible to downplaying the body if we’re not careful, but Jackson will help us to be on the lookout for Reformed Gnosticism and passivity in the pews. To this end, elders and pastors in particular would do well to read this book, perhaps discussing its insights as a session. This question from the author is a great place to start: “Why couldn’t we structure our worship and liturgy upon theological excellence that is intimately and simultaneously linked with thoughtful and scriptural postures and liturgies?” (3).

***The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary* (four-volume set), by Christopher Ash. Crossway, 2024. Hardcover, 2480 pages, \$159.99. Reviewed by retired OP minister D. Leonard Gulstrom.**

I first came across a commentary by Christopher Ash on the book of Job when I was a pastor in Maine. It is called *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*. I started reading it and could not put it down. It was a Christ-centered commentary, and I read it from cover to cover, which was not my usual practice when it comes to commentaries. When I heard that Ash was publishing another commentary on the Psalms, I pre-ordered it as soon as possible.

The first volume is his defense of his Christ-centered method of interpreting the Psalms. The other three volumes contain his commentary, with fifty psalms per volume. This is a set that every pastor should have, and anyone who is serious about studying the Psalms should read and devour. It is not too scholarly, but rather insightful and devotional. He gathers quotes from great biblical scholars of the past as well as the present. I have acquired a deep appreciation not only for Augustine but also Athanasius, from Ash. At the end of each psalm, he has a devotional reflection and response to consider, which is very helpful in applying the psalm.



POSITIONS AVAILABLE

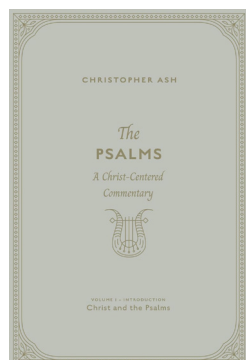
Pastor: Bethel OPC in Leesburg, Virginia, seeks a pastor to shepherd her congregation and lead the weekly worship of God with praise and thanksgiving. We are a small, close-knit church seeking to glorify God in all we do. Located in an ever-changing and growing area near Washington, DC, we look forward to meeting the man who will spiritually lead and guide our efforts to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Contact pastoralsearch@bethelpres.com.

Church Planter: Providence OPC in Louisville, Kentucky, is a warm, energetic church plant seeking a planter committed to a Reformed understanding of Scripture, preaching, and worship. The ideal candidate would model Christ’s compassion for the lost and possess a desire to both gather in and perfect the saints through bold evangelism and a commitment to the ordinary means of grace. If you are interested, please contact us at ProvidenceKYOPC@gmail.com

But none of those things are the main reason why I commend this commentary to you. I commend it to you because it is a Christ-centered commentary. For over eighteen hundred years, the church looked at the Psalms through Christ, but for the last few centuries, we have been increasingly taught to look at the Psalms through our own experience. How does this apply to me? is the first question that we ask almost instinctively. We seem to have forgotten that Jesus himself said, These are the Scriptures that testify of me! Now it is not that these Scriptures don't have something to say to us, or that the Psalms don't apply to us and what we go through in this life as we seek to serve our Savior. But it is to say that this is not the primary interpretation, but rather secondary, or maybe better, a derivative interpretation. You see, as the Word of God speaks of Christ, it therefore speaks of our experience as we are in Christ, *and only* as we are in Christ. It is our union with Christ that is essential. And because of that union by faith, all that is his now becomes ours. This is the essence of our salvation. We are in him, and he is in us. He takes our sin and our guilt upon himself, and we receive from him his righteousness and share in his inheritance. What a blessed exchange is ours in Christ!

Now I have to say that after I started reading Ash's commentary, I really wondered if I had ever read the Psalms correctly. By going directly to myself, I missed out on so much of what the Word of God revealed about my Savior and Lord. Jesus read these psalms. Jesus sang these psalms. And he did so knowing that these were the psalms that spoke of him. You see, the Psalms are not about our experience as a faithful believer. They are about Christ's experience as *the* Faithful Believer. I am sure that we have probably read some verses in the Psalms and wondered if we could actually say these words ourselves

with a clear conscience. When the Psalms speak of the righteous Man, do we really think that we are the righteous One? Or do we realize that we are only righteous in Christ? How many of us really want to ask God, Try me and see if there is *any wicked way* in me? That would not take very long, would it? Only Christ is the Righteous One. And that is not to put us down, but



to lift Christ up where he belongs and to comfort us because we know our salvation is all in Christ, and Christ alone! Now you may say, What about the psalms that speak of sin and the need for forgiveness? Again, the Psalms remind us who Christ is! It is Christ who bore our sin; it is Christ who became sin for us, that we

might become the righteousness of God in him. And as the Sin-bearer, as the One who bore our sin, as the One who became sin for us, he could, and he did, speak these words of the Psalms. He fulfilled them to the full! The point here is that the Psalms speak words of Christ, or words to Christ, or words from Christ, or words to the Father, or from the Father! And so, I submit to you, as the church has believed for hundreds of years, that Christ is the key to our understanding of the Psalms. If you or your pastor doesn't have this set, I recommend them to you heartily. It will give you a deeper understanding of God's word to us in Christ in the Psalms.

***The Ministry of Small Things: Wisdom for Those Who Serve the Church*, by Reuben Bredenhof. P&R, 2026. Paperback, 144 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Christopher Drew.**

The OPC consists almost entirely of small congregations. Many are very small. Just over one-third of all our congregations are church plants. In almost all these congre-

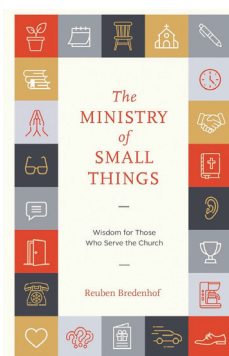
gations, the pastor is required to take on certain tasks he may not have anticipated while in seminary, or while completing a pastoral internship in one of our larger OPC congregations, tasks like managing the church website, cleaning toilets, or helping with building repairs.

Certainly, the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, are essential to the vocation of the ministry. However, when taken together with the many other tasks that demand a minister's attention, there is one area in particular that can be easily neglected: pastoral care. And it is this portion of the pastor's job description that Reuben Bredenhof emphasizes in his very helpful volume *The Ministry of Small Things: Wisdom for Those Who Serve the Church*.

The book's thirty chapters, each a few pages in length, divide into three major headings, corresponding with three general phases of a pastor's ministry. The first major heading is "Beginning the Work" and focuses on the pastoral care tasks that are most appropriate when entering the ministry for the first time (or undertaking a new call). The emphasis here is on settling in, getting to know your people, and showing them that you love them. The next heading is "Doing the Work." One of the most helpful chapters in this section is titled "Just Show Up." When a crisis hits, our people expect us to be there. The act of being present with God's Word during a family emergency,

a medical crisis, or a death, will often be what someone remembers about a pastor more than the quality of his preaching. This section also contains important reminders to "Ask the Questions You Don't Want to Ask," to "Pray with Your People," and "Know What to Do with Praise."

The third section is "Pressing On with the Work." Here we get gems about how to remain steadfast in our



pastoral care over the long haul. Again, the chapter titles give you the sense of what is meant: “Love the Hard Ones,” “Know What to Do with Criticism,” “Believe That People Can Change,” and “Keep Going Until the Work Is Done.” One of the standout chapters in this section is called “Thank God for the Faithful,” a wonderful encouragement based on God’s gracious work in his people, something pastors can miss because more difficult pastoral care responsibilities take so much time.

The chapters themselves are intended to be standalone. You can read the entire book in a relatively short time, but a pastor is advised to keep this great little volume right at his desk so that when he wonders, “What should I be doing right now to serve the sheep God has entrusted to my care?” he’ll have a bevy of excellent, accessible chapters to consult. Highly recommended.

***As It Was Written: How Jesus and the Church Fulfill God’s Promises to Israel*, by Michael Shingler. Self-published, 2025. Paperback, 282 pages, \$16.00. Reviewed by RPCNA pastor Brian Coombs.**

OP pastor Mike Shingler has written a helpful book that shows how Jesus and the church fulfill God’s promises in Scripture to Israel. Shingler writes from personal experience with the topic. Earlier in his ministry, Scripture study led him to interpretive questions about his theological view of dispensationalism (a term he defines initially, and then sprinkles variants at suitable places throughout the book). In time, he saw that Reformed, covenant theology is instead Scripture’s teaching. The Lord

then led him to his current ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *As It Was Written* is the fruit of Shingler’s journey.

He introduces the book by weaving some of his story with the interpretive principles regarding promise/fulfillment, continuity/discontinuity, and dispensationalism/covenant theology. Other relevant Bible themes are noted—Israel, church, temple, and kingdom—which along with a couple others (land, seed), will get fuller attention in their own chapters. His introduction briefly relates how he came to his new “paradigm shift” (his words) concerning these themes. His overall purpose is that the reader come to grasp the Bible’s message and unified parts as he did. He prayerfully seeks to guide the reader to “see Christ, with the eye of faith, as he is revealed on all the pages of Scripture.”

To accomplish this, the book unfolds in two parts: The Big Picture and Tracing Prophetic Themes. A first chapter sets forth crucial principles of Bible interpretation to see it as the story God himself is telling his way. Another outlines the entire Old Testament, focusing on major characters from Eden to the exile, culminating in Jesus Christ as the end of the Old and main figure as the New gets started. After these chapters, Shingler points to all the above-mentioned themes and shows why they are in the Old Testament landscape as they are for reference to Jesus Christ.

I especially found the author’s treatment of covenant theology as “expansion theology”—rather than the common, inadequately termed “replacement theology”—much more fitting and enlightening.

The author admits that the book is not intended as a detailed explanation of covenant theology; nor is it a formal apology against dispensationalism. Even so, Shingler adroitly does both as he sets Scripture beside Scripture, Testament beside Testament, showing “this” is indeed “that.”

As It Was Written is useful to the average reader interested to see how very rich God’s one plan of salvation for his people really is. The book is largely non-technical, readable, and plain, almost as if the author is explaining the Bible from his favorite chair with you in his living room. Most chapters have no more than a handful of endnotes. This helps with pacing. Also helpful are the relatable illustrations that sometimes accompany the denser discussions.

For pastors, the book will serve as a fine theological refresher and reinforcement. Certainly, Jewish readers will have their Testament opened widely for them and evangelistically be shown their Messiah. Even a large swath of modern evangelicals will be shown an inviting landscape to enter. All sincere readers will benefit from seeing how the covenant God of his people has fulfilled his saving promises for them in Jesus Christ, just as it was written.

