

NEW HORIZONS

OCTOBER 2026

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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MACHEN'S STUDENT FROM IRELAND



CALVIN R. GOLIGHER

In the early twentieth century, a rising tide of liberalism swept over churches in Europe and North America, and the Presbyterian churches were not spared. The leading centers of biblical and theological scholarship, especially in Germany, were shaping church leaders according to prevailing modern trends, which on many points were opposed to Christian orthodoxy. This gathering storm broke in the 1920s, and Princeton Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen emerged as a key leader in the high-stakes effort to prevent liberalism from capturing the American Presbyterian church.

One of Machen's students at Princeton, W. J. Grier, led a similar effort in his home country of Northern Ireland. Like Machen, he combined a brilliant mind with a firm commitment to orthodox Reformed doctrine, which he courageously defended at great personal cost. Actually, Grier's experience in Northern Ireland foreshadowed events in Machen's ministry. A decade before Machen founded the OPC, Grier joined in establishing the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Almost a century

later, this denomination and the OPC are sister churches, seeking to serve Christ faithfully according to the Bible and the Westminster Standards.

THE RISING TIDE OF LIBERALISM

In the early twentieth century, theological liberalism presented an enormous challenge to Christian doctrine. Capitulating to modern intellectual fashions, liberal theologians rejected the supernatural elements of Christianity and refashioned the whole Christian faith along the lines of rationalism and materialism.

Faithful ministers and churches found it difficult to address the problem because liberals redefined familiar Christian terms to fit their agenda. For instance, liberals spoke of "the inspiration of Scripture," though they did not regard the Bible as a supernatural divine revelation. Instead, they used the term "inspiration" to describe the Bible as a product of spiritually exalted human thought. In a similar way, liberals preached about the cross of Christ, but they rejected the traditional doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. They did not see Christ's death as a sacrifice offered to God in the place of sinners to offer forgiveness by satisfying divine justice; rather, they understood it simply as a display of sacrificial love to humanity.

This rising tide of liberalism affected Presbyterian churches and seminaries not only in America but also in Canada, Scotland, and Ireland. While leading ministers embraced these errors, some church members and leaders continued to believe and teach traditional orthodoxy, and many wavered in between. It remained to be seen whether faithful ministers and elders, with the support of their congregations, could keep their institutions faithful to biblical orthodoxy.

GRIER GOES TO PRINCETON SEMINARY

William James Grier grew up attending a Presbyterian church in the little town of Ramelton in County Donegal. He was converted to saving faith in Christ in 1922 while studying at Queen's University, and soon he was interested in preparing for the gospel ministry. Grier wanted to study at a seminary that would uphold orthodox doctrine, so he applied to Princeton Theological Seminary, where Machen was a professor of New Testament. He set out for America in 1923, the same year that Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism*. That work was a clarion call against liberalism, but especially against conservatives who thought it best to cooperate with the liberals. Machen argued that there could be no cooperation, and he called on his readers to bravely defend true Christian doctrine, even at personal cost.

Machen and the other Princeton professors shaped Grier profoundly. From them, Grier learned sound doctrine, along with the skills and insights he would need to lead the church in years to come. Machen's influence on Grier was not only academic. He mentored Grier in more practical aspects of ministry, and he helped Grier find summer ministry internships in Canada. The year was 1925, and a large liberal segment of the Presbyterian Church of Canada had just decided to join the even more liberal Methodist Church in forming the United Church of Canada. This was a major institutional victory for liberalism in that country, even though many faithful congregations and ministers remained Presbyterian. Machen helped the continuing Presbyterian Church of Canada in various ways, particularly with recruiting ministers. Grier's summer internships were an example of Machen's international vision and his personal investment in the formation of future ministers.

Grier completed his studies in 1926 and returned to Northern Ireland. The mutual appreciation of student and professor had grown into a personal friendship, which led them to correspond frequently. This friendship was no doubt all the more important to the two men as they each faced the challenge of resisting liberalism in their churches. It was a modest international partnership in defense of orthodox, Reformed doctrine and ministry.

THE CONTROVERSY IN IRELAND

When Grier returned to Northern Ireland, he was required to attend another year of theological study at the Presbyterian College in Belfast (today, the institution is known as Union Theological College). Grier was deeply troubled by what he heard from the professors, particularly a professor of church history, James Ernest Davey. In class lectures, Professor Davey and others denied the deity of Christ, the infallible authority of Scripture, and other key Christian doctrines.

Grier brought his concerns to James Hunter, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Hunter later recalled this pivotal moment: "A young theological student told me that he had been taught by his professors that the Lord Jesus on the Cross thought He had let God down" (Ernest Brown, *By Honour and Dishonour*, 109). Hunter decided to bring a charge against Davey. In fact, he brought five, alleging that Davey was teaching error related to (1) the doctrine of justification, (2) Christology, (3) Scripture, (4) sin, and (5) the Trinity. The Belfast Presbytery judged Davey "not guilty" on all five charges. Hunter appealed to the general assembly, but Davey's acquittal was upheld. The case was major news in Northern Ireland, and the outcome

meant that the Presbyterian Church of Ireland had clearly advertised its acceptance of serious liberal error within its ranks.

The trial and subsequent appeal were a difficult experience for Hunter, who was almost a lone voice in his presbytery.

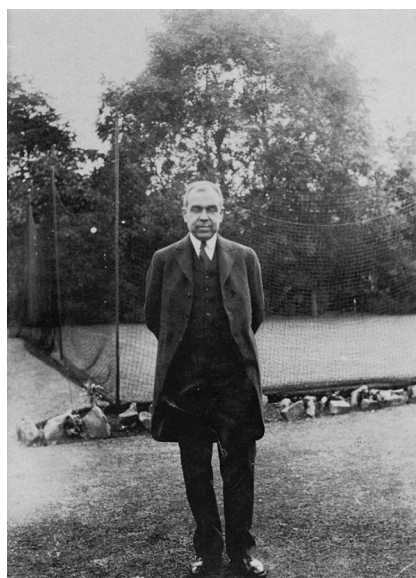
It was also difficult for Grier, because much of the evidence came from his notes and memories of what Davey had said in class. Grier's sacrifices did not escape Machen's notice. He said: "Heroic work has been done by Mr. Grier our Seminary graduate. . . . He has thrown away all his ecclesiastical prospects for the sake of the cause. . . . Most of the pulpits, of course, are closed to him" (quoted in Brown, 161).

Machen had firsthand acquaintance with these events because he visited Northern Ireland in June 1927, just days before the general assembly took up Hunter's appeal. During his visit, Machen spoke at special services on the theme "What is Christianity?" On Sunday, he preached to a large Belfast congregation in the morning and in the evening at a large hall packed with sixteen hundred people from the area. Machen observed that

the ministers (with few exceptions) are standing on the Modernist side in the ecclesiastical fight; but there is a tremendous tide of evangelical and polemically anti-modernist sentiment among the laity. In the last five years a real revival of religion has been going on. It has been discouraged in every possible way by the great mass of the ministers. (Brown)



James Hunter



Machen at Grier's home in Ireland in 1927

A NEW CHURCH

In the aftermath of the appeal, James Hunter resigned from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Machen noted in a letter to Grier that Hunter's decision "was taken because of an unselfish and wholehearted devotion to Christ, which is a rebuke to many of us in these sad days."

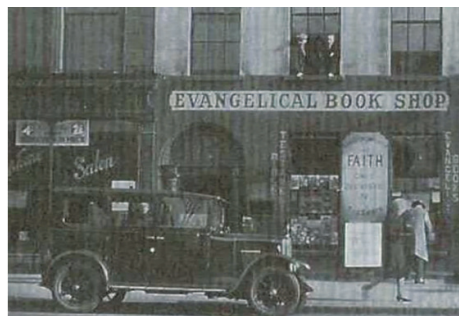
In November 1927, Hunter led the formation of a new church, called the Irish Evangelical Church. The new church was small, with no buildings or money, and few friends. Hunter was the only minister until Grier was ordained in 1929. Instead of the Westminster Confession, Hunter proposed eight brief articles of faith as the new church's doctrinal basis. Hunter was likely reacting against his difficult experience in the Presbyterian Church where the Westminster Confession did not protect the church from being captured by liberals.

Grier had a more balanced perspective, no doubt reflecting the formative influence of Machen and other Princeton professors. From the start, Grier was in favor of adopting the Westminster Confession as the church's doctrinal standard. In 1933, the church faced a controversy over dispensationalism, which it could not adequately address from its brief articles of faith. In that context, Grier successfully moved to adopt the Westminster Assembly's catechisms. By that time, Hunter's thinking had changed, and he now saw the need for a larger confession of faith. Decades later, this maturing perspective was reflected in a name change from the Irish Evangelical Church to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

CONTINUING MINISTRY

In the years since, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has continued ministering God's Word faithfully. It remains a small church, even in the context of Northern Ireland, population two million. The small country experienced frequent political violence during the Troubles of the 1960s to 1990s, motivated by religious, ethnic, and political grievances.

Overall, the spiritual and ecclesiastical trend has not been encouraging in the entire United Kingdom or in the Republic of Ireland. Around the middle of the twentieth century, ministers like Martyn Lloyd-Jones witnessed great spiritual harvests in England and Wales, but the longer pattern has been a rising secularism. Through it all, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has carried on an energetic program of youth ministry, evangelism, church planting, and foreign missions.



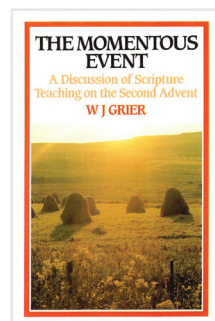
Grier opened the Evangelical Book Shop in Belfast, which served as a meeting place for those interested in Reformed theology, including pastors like Iain Murray.

CONNECTIONS TO THE OPC

In doctrine, ministry, and church leadership, Grier followed a very similar path as his beloved professor Machen. Indeed, at some points, Machen followed a path laid down by Grier. The young student Grier was a witness in a case against a liberal professor who was unjustly acquitted. Machen had it the other way around when he faced charges from liberal colleagues and was unjustly deposed. Both cases revolved around fundamental articles of Christian doctrine that brook no agreement with modern rationalism and materialism.

Grier and Machen shared a commitment to the whole system of Reformed doctrine over against errors like dispensationalism. They imparted that commitment to the churches they helped to establish. In the 1940s, Grier published *The Momentous Event*, an excellent book on the second advent of Christ, no doubt motivated by his experiences with controversy over dispensationalism. Likewise, Machen's call for full-orbed confessional orthodoxy was a major element in the OPC's rejection of dispensationalism in its first few years as a new church.

Machen's ministry came to a sudden end when he died in 1937, just one year after the founding of the OPC. Happily, Grier had a much longer ministry, continuing until he retired in 1979, a few years before his death in 1983. Presbyterians in Northern Ireland and America alike have many reasons to cherish the legacy of these men, forged by their faithfulness and courage in the international Presbyterian controversy with liberalism. **NH**



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

THE OPC IN THE MIDWEST



BRIAN L. DE JONG

The American Midwest as a region is simultaneously significant and under-appreciated. Often derided as “flyover country,” the Midwest holds its own against the culture of the coasts. Stretching from Ohio to the Dakotas, from northern Minnesota to the boot heel of Missouri, the Midwest covers 822,000 square miles—roughly 27 percent of the landmass of the lower forty-eight states. The population of the region is around 70 million, which is 20 percent of the entire US population. In this region, 95 percent of the land is rural—mostly farmland and prairies.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the Midwest as an area of religious liberty from its inception. In section 14, article 1, the ordinance explicitly addresses freedom of worship when it says, “No person, demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner, shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship or religious sentiments, in the said territory.”

In his book *The Good Country: A History of the American Midwest, 1800–1900*, historian Jon K. Lauck documents the Christian foundations of the region. Lauck writes,

Another key to understanding the early development of the American Midwest is the ubiquity of religion. Perhaps the first communal structure erected in every settlement in the Midwest was a Christian church. . . . Christian devotion united settlers of differing stripes who saw themselves entering an “Edenic wilderness, a new Arcadia,” and their beliefs “went straight back to the Book of Genesis.” . . . Christianity shaped personal and communal life, guided reform efforts, sparked commitment to civic endeavors, and permeated public affairs. (23–24)

PRESBYTERIANS ON THE PLAINS

Presbyterians played a crucial role in developing Midwestern culture and identity during the pioneering period. Men such as Jesse Miner, Moses Ordway, Cutting Marsh, David Lowry, Joseph Street, and Gideon and Samuel Pond brought Presbyterianism to the frontier. They ministered to Native Americans as well as to American settlers and European immigrants. By the 1930s there were around twenty-five hundred PCUSA congregations in Midwestern states. In Wisconsin the number of Presbyterian churches had grown from the very first Presbyterian church in 1836 to 220 congregations organized in five presbyteries by 1936.

That led to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church having important roots in the early Midwest, as seen in several high-profile cases of church discipline in the mid-1930s. In Chicago, much attention was paid to Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, president of Wheaton College. He was charged and convicted by his presbytery for supporting the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.

In Wisconsin there were three significant cases. Rev. Arthur Perkins of Merrill, Wisconsin, was put on trial by the Winnebago Presbytery for supporting a Bible camp for the children of rural churches in north-central Wisconsin. Perkins was convicted and suspended from office by his presbytery. He was instrumental in establishing a new congregation and a new presbytery for his new denomination.

John DeWaard was administratively removed from the First Presbyterian Church in Cedar Grove by the Presbytery of Milwaukee, due to DeWaard’s outspoken opposition to modernism. DeWaard then helped to establish Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove and became a key player in the new presbytery and the denomination.

Oscar Holkeboer from nearby Oostburg PCUSA was summarily deposed and excommunicated by the Milwaukee Presbytery in a single day. His offense was refusing to remain quiet about modernism. Holkeboer then joined the new presbytery. The church he established in Oostburg later joined the denomination as Bethel OPC.



John Davies in 1936 with children in Morgan Siding, Wisconsin, part of the earliest OPC home missions efforts

Following the OPC's first general assembly in 1936, presbyteries in the Midwest were quickly established. The Presbytery of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan was approved on July 1, 1936, and convened on July 30, as the third presbytery of the new denomination. The Presbytery of Ohio was organized on September 14, 1936, in Cincinnati. Covenant Church of Indianapolis was included in the Ohio Presbytery.

In fall 1936, two other Midwestern presbyteries were organized. One was the Presbytery of the Chicago Area, led by Dr. Buswell. The other was the Presbytery of Iowa, comprised of just two congregations. Both of these presbyteries left the denomination in 1937 to join the Bible Presbyterian Synod. The other presbytery of note was the Presbytery of the Dakotas, organized in 1937. Originally, this presbytery was comprised of all Midwestern states, but later its boundaries were changed to include Western states.

EARLY DAYS IN THE MIDWESTERN PRESBYTERIES

Yet another indication of the early focus on the Midwest comes from J. Gresham Machen. Though he hailed from the East Coast, Machen maintained connections in the Midwest. In the 1920s he spoke at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago on Christianity and liberalism and was well received. He corresponded with Midwestern Presbyterians such as Buswell and Perkins. He spoke at the organizational meeting of the Presbytery of Ohio in September 1936 and was on a speaking tour in North Dakota at the time of his death. Machen had also been slated to appear at several Midwestern churches in early 1937.

Following the departure of some congregations to the Bible Presbyterians in 1937, the Midwestern presbyteries struggled for years. The congregations were small, poor, and modest. At a Presbytery of Wisconsin meeting on September 24, 1937, the minutes read that "the treasury was found to be empty with a bill of \$2.48 against Presbytery before it." The presbyters immediately took up a collection

to clear the outstanding debt. A year later, in 1938, the treasurer reported a positive balance of two cents in the treasury—things were looking up!

Yet their ministries were significant beyond their size. One example was the ministry of the Rev. John Davies among the Stockbridge-Munsee Native Americans in Wisconsin. During Davies's decades of service, hundreds came into contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ and were introduced to the Reformed faith. This work was among the first home missions efforts of the OPC.

Another indication of the Lord's work in the Midwest comes from denominational statistical reports. When the General Assembly began reporting total membership of the regional churches in 1938, the three Midwestern Presbyteries had 1,140 members combined. By 2025, that number had grown to 7,860 members—an increase of almost 600 percent over the eighty-seven years. The reports show sustained growth in the congregations of the Midwest region over the decades.

The Presbytery of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan has enjoyed the most dynamic growth. In 1938, there were 406 members in a handful of congregations. Within twelve years, the membership of that regional church had almost tripled. Consistent growth over the decades brought the membership to 4,200 by the year 2000, when the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario was born. Combining the membership of the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota with her two daughter presbyteries, she had 5,685 members in 2025.

In a letter dated June 18, 1936, the Rev. Arthur Perkins asked Dr. Machen some questions. "Will there be a Presbytery set up out this way, say in Wisconsin before the next General Assembly? What are the steps necessary for us to take?" Mr. Perkins was insistent that a presbytery should be established to serve Wisconsin and the whole "Middle West." From the day when the presbytery was first organized in Arthur Perkins's living room in Merrill, this ministry has grown to include sixty-six congregations in eight states and one Canadian province. About 25 percent of the current membership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church can trace their beginnings to this foresight and initiative.

This displays the powerful work of Christ in building his church. The growth of his kingdom in this particular corner of his creation is due to his grace and goodness alone, not to anything Midwesterners have been or done. To him be the glory! **NH**

The author is pastor of Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

WHERE ARE THE YOUNG MEN?



EVERETT A. HENES

This year, at Reformed assemblies and synods across the country, we heard a similar concern: There is a shortage of pastors. Churches need men. Presbyteries need men. Mission works need men. Pulpits are opening, congregations are waiting, and the question keeps coming up: Why are young men not choosing the ministry?

In Presbyterianism, a man does not simply announce himself as a minister. His gifts and graces are observed, tested, examined, and confirmed by the church. That has gotten me thinking. Before the church asks why fewer young men are becoming pastors, we may need to ask why fewer young men are being formed into men capable of embracing costly, durable, public, spiritual responsibility.

ONE SYMPTOM OF A SPREADING SICKNESS

In explaining the shortage, some have suggested that the ministry has become too effeminate and that young men who are drawn to masculinity are avoiding the ministry. I think there may be something to consider here, but not quite as it is often stated. Ministry in Reformed congregations is not effeminate. We sing old hymns and psalms. We

preach verse by verse through the Scriptures. We catechize our children. We visit the sick and bury the dead. We stand against feminism, egalitarianism, and sinful male dominance. The work of ministry is not soft. It is not a therapeutic hobby for men who do not want responsibility. The ministry requires masculine boldness to pronounce condemnation of sin, and forgiveness through the gospel.

But there is a deeper question hiding underneath the masculinity argument. The wider culture—and that includes the church—has offered young men several false versions of masculinity. Some are told that masculinity is inherently suspicious and dangerous, something to be apologized for, softened, or managed. Others are told that masculinity is mainly aggression, self-assertion, physical dominance, online combat, sexual conquest, or contempt for weakness. Neither of these narratives forms young men for the ministry, let alone forming them for marriage, fatherhood, churchmanship, or ordinary adult life. This is where the ministry shortage begins to look like one symptom of a much broader cultural sickness.

Young men are not doing well. They are falling behind educationally. They are struggling economically. Many are delaying marriage or avoiding it altogether. Many are lonely, even if they do not always know how to say so. Many lack close male friendships. Many are living in a digital world that rewards passivity, outrage, irony, pornography, distraction, and fantasy.

THE RIVAL LITURGIES OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

This is not simply about screentime, though most of us who use social media excessively would be better off pulling away from it for a while. The deeper concern is that digital life forms young men in rival liturgies. It trains them in habits, instincts, reflexes, and desires that run directly against the grain of pastoral ministry. It trains fragmented attention.

Pastoral ministry requires sustained reading, long prayer, careful listening, sermon preparation, hospital visits, ordinary administration, patience with slow sanctification, and long faithfulness in one place and in the same direction. The digital environment rewards speed, reaction, novelty, and emotional spikes. It is difficult to form pastors in a world that is constantly training men not to attend.

Social media trains what can be called spectator masculinity. Many young men consume masculinity without practicing it. They watch men lift, fight, debate, build, preach, hunt, argue, lead, and conquer imaginary worlds. They consume strength as content; they admire courage from a distance. They can talk endlessly about leadership

while rarely being responsible for actual people. A man does not become strong by watching strength. He becomes strong by bearing weight.

Further, social media trains avoidance of embodied risk. Ministry is intensely embodied. You have to look people in the eye and sit in rooms where grief is thick. You have to preach in public and correct real people, not avatars. You have to disappoint people, forgive people, and sometimes be misunderstood by people you love. Online life allows a man to curate, withdraw, mute, block, perform, or disappear. Pastoral ministry does not.

Online life also trains cynicism toward institutions. A young man can spend years consuming stories of pastoral failure, denominational corruption, celebrity scandal, theological compromise, and online outrage. Some of that criticism is deserved. Churches have failed, and pastors have sinned. Churches have sometimes protected themselves when they should have protected sheep. But there is a kind of constant exposure to failure that does not produce wisdom. It produces contempt. A young man may become very skilled at diagnosing every problem in the church while never giving himself to the patient work of building anything.

THE INFLUENCER AND THE PASTOR

Many young men are drawn to online teachers, influencers, and commentators who appear confident, masculine, and authoritative. Some of those men may say true things, and some may even be useful. But the contrast between the influencer and the pastor is worth considering. Who are young men listening to?

The influencer gathers attention; the pastor gives attention. The influencer performs authority; the pastor bears responsibility. The influencer is rewarded for being interesting; the pastor is called to be faithful. The influencer can move on when the audience turns; the pastor stays with the flock. The influencer speaks to a crowd he does not know; the pastor must speak to people whose sins, sorrows, marriages, children, fears, and graves he knows.

This does not mean that public teaching online is worthless, but we should not confuse influence with office or visibility with shepherding. And we should not be surprised if young men trained to admire the influencer's platform struggle to desire the pastor's burden.

That may be one of the most important parts of this whole discussion. The young man who admires theological combat online may not yet be ready to sit patiently with a grieving widow. The young man who loves the idea of masculine leadership may not yet be ready to serve unnoticed. The young man who wants to preach hard truths

may not yet be ready to love hard people. The young man who wants to be useful in the kingdom may still need years of ordinary formation. That is not a reason to despise him. It is a reason to disciple him.

THE SLOW WORK OF RAISING MEN

Pastors do not drop out of the sky, and seminary does not create ministers out of nothing. A seminary can train a man in Greek, Hebrew, exegesis, systematic theology, church history, preaching, and pastoral theology. It can refine, test, and strengthen him. But it cannot give him what the church, the home, and the communion of saints can.

Formation begins in the home, with family worship. In our Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, we have never thought that Christian maturity appears by accident. Our children are formed as they see their fathers and mothers open the Scriptures, pray, sing, confess sin, speak of Christ, and order the life of the household around the worship of God. Family worship teaches a young man that the Word of God is not merely something handled by ministers in public, but something that governs ordinary life. Not every Christian home has all of this in equal measure, but ordinarily, the home is one of the first places where boys learn whether Christianity is ornamental or central.

Before a man becomes a minister, he must first become a man. He must learn to show up, tell the truth, work hard, receive correction, keep his promises, control his appetites, care for others, pray when he does not feel like praying, and do what is right when no one applauds. He must learn that responsibility is not the enemy of joy—it is one of the forms glory takes in this fallen world.

We need fathers who train sons to see work, worship, marriage, fatherhood, and church membership as honorable burdens. We need older men who do more than complain about young men. They must know them, invite them in, correct them, and give them something useful to do. We need elders who notice gifts early and test them patiently. We need pastors who take young men with them on visits, let them see the hidden parts of ministry, and show them that the work is costly but good.

Some of those sons may become ministers. Most will not, and that is fine; we need Christians in every lawful calling. But if we are not forming men for ordinary Christian responsibility, we should not be surprised when fewer are ready for extraordinary ecclesiastical responsibility. The church does not merely need to recruit pastors. She needs to raise men. **NH**

The author is pastor of Hillsdale OPC in Hillsdale, Michigan.

WAR AND MERCY IN UKRAINE



JUDITH M. DINSMORE

Mark Aharkov directs a food distribution center on behalf of the evangelical and Presbyterian church where he is a member in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city. Aharkov's office is about fifteen miles from the Russian border.

Last spring, David Nakhla traveled to Kharkiv with three others from the OPC to encourage Aharkov and Kharkiv Presbyterian Church and to observe its distribution center, which receives funding from the OPC's Committee on Diaconal Ministries through the Ukraine Crisis Fund.

Nakhla was amazed. "In this city of 1.5 million people, they've become known as the premier ministry—that's their reputation. There's a lot of accountability not only for donors, but with the governing authorities," Nakhla said. "They intentionally seek to dignify the people who are receiving assistance. . . . [and] it's very connected with the church."

GOOD GROCERIES

Families can apply for aid once every three months. If accepted, they receive an appointment between 10 and 4

on Saturdays to receive a bag of food, enough to last for two weeks, and, if needed, clothing and household goods as well. Volunteers from Kharkiv Presbyterian Church explain to clients who they are—not a charitable foundation or a government institution, but a church. They share the gospel and invite clients to attend worship.

"We are helping in the name of Jesus," Aharkov said. "Very often [clients] are crying, and I appreciate our team members who can talk and pray and feel their pain."

Nakhla noted the high quality of the clothing and the food. That sends a message about the church and about Christ, Aharkov explained: "I saw a lot of charitable organizations distribute very low-quality products because they are cheaper." But if he would not buy his own kids the food—Aharkov has three little boys—he does not buy it for the center's food bags. That means they give good stuff: jam, canned fish, ham, and even milk, and not just basic cereals and oil.

Government aid in Ukraine right now relies on foreign aid, which can be clumsy. In contrast, their church's social center has boots on the ground and sees the problem from the inside. "We're not just making reports, but meeting people and sharing the love of Christ," Aharkov said.

BEFORE THE WAR

How did a small Reformed church of around fifty members come to have a food distribution center that is still open when many others have closed and, more than that, is known as one of the best in the city?

When Aharkov talks about the church that has been his home since adolescence, he refers to "before the war" and "now." Before the war, Kharkiv Presbyterian Church, a member church of the denomination begun by MTW missionaries in the nineties, had a young congregation filled with students from Kharkiv's many universities. Before the war, the church was saving to buy its own building.



Nakhla (right) traveled to Kharkiv to visit Aharkov and the food distribution center, which is in need of funds



Aharkov in his office ready to distribute food bags, holding Reformed literature in Ukrainian

Before the war, its efforts centered on education, conferences, and evangelism to students.

Then in February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine. Its military quickly moved to take Kharkiv, surrounding it on three sides. The church put into action its evacuation plan.

Aharkov himself was pursuing a master's degree in Lithuania when Russia invaded, and could have stayed. Instead, within a few weeks of the invasion, he and six other men, including the church's pastor, felt that they must begin to help. They began gathering food and medicine and delivering it to Kharkiv, and then bringing evacuees from Kharkiv back to western Ukraine and other safer areas. Because of the active fighting, pharmacies and grocery stores were closed. There was no public transportation and limited gasoline. The streets were empty; everyone still in the city was hiding in bomb shelters. "It was total chaos," Aharkov remembered. "We just started helping people. We moved tons of food."

In the summer of 2022, Aharkov moved back to Kharkiv full-time. The church bought groceries with the money it had been saving for a new building. They opened a warehouse and the social center. Aharkov was receiving funds from everywhere, and he wrote a daily report to donors with updates on the war and on the church's mercy efforts. He arrived at the center once at 9 a.m. to see over a thousand people lined up, and they weren't quiet. Aharkov set up an appointment system and began to triage based on need, helping the disabled and elderly and displaced. Kharkiv is full of people from the surrounding regions of Donetsk and Luhansk who fled villages that were "wiped off the face of the earth," as Aharkov put it.

A CHANGED CHURCH

In September 2022, the Russians were pushed away from Kharkiv. Today, food, medicine, and gas are available locally again; buildings in Kharkiv are repaired, although boarded-up windows remain on most blocks; and restau-

rants and even the city's famous zoo have reopened. Air raid sirens are nearly constant, yet everyday life continues.

But the church has changed. The average age of church members has "jumped twenty years," Aharkov said. Whereas many younger people have moved to less dangerous cities, the elderly are often not so ready to adopt a new home. ("We have deep roots," as one woman told Aharkov.) Some forty or fifty people who were clients of the center are now members of the church—many of them first-time believers. Long-time church members who weren't involved in ministry before the war are now "very active," helping with the distribution on Saturdays.

Aharkov has changed as well. Before the war, "struggling and pain were far away," he said. "These vulnerable [people] weren't in my focus or attention." But the war's destruction has opened Aharkov's eyes to suffering and made him ask what a Christian response ought to be. "[The war] revealed to me Jesus Christ from a different perspective. He talked about the kingdom of God. But he also fed people."

LOOKING FORWARD

Aharkov and his wife are committed to staying in Kharkiv with their twin two-year-olds and baby to provide help in Christ's name. They were encouraged by Nakhla's visit—only the second group of non-Ukrainians to come since the war began. Aharkov said that the group was brave to visit Kharkiv, and when I pointed out that he is the one who lives in the city, he laughed. "For us, it's just normal," he said.

The church is eager to expand the social center. Even if the war ends soon, economic disruption will continue, and the numbers at their center may even swell. However, the cost of the food bags has grown from twelve dollars to twenty-five, and donations are down. Right now, the center can only provide aid for two hundred families per month. They would like to do much more.

Right before my call with Aharkov, a man had knocked on the center's door. He was a soldier around thirty years old, he was missing an eye, and he was hungry. "This man gave his health for his country, and he did not have food to eat. This is a really big problem," Aharkov said.

But as Mark Aharkov and Kharkiv Presbyterian Church show the mercy of Christ in a time of war, their confidence is that the Lord will provide. **NH**

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.

REVIEW: D. G. HART'S *PROTESTANTS AND PATRIOTS*

C. N. WILLBORN

Over the past fifty years or so, there has been an active discussion about the origin of the United States of America. Often conversations, which sometime slip into debates, revolve around the question, “Was the United States founded as a consciously Christian nation?”

Of course, the topic quickly becomes mixed with the question of church-state relations. Establishmentarianism versus voluntarism may even surface. The proponents for a stout, dark line of separation between church and state would have us believe a purely secular environment is best and what the founders of our nation intended. In today’s ecclesiastical clime, we have the unsettling presence of those who tend to an extreme reaction to the secularist posture. You might call that position a “Christian nationalist” position, but that is a fluid movement and hard to define with its quite broad spectrum of voices. Within that broad movement however are some who sound quite like proponents of a theocracy of some sort. All of this makes for a confused and conflicted public and church.

It seems that much of the conflict and confusion centers on the history of the Revolutionary period and its antecedent history. D. G. Hart’s new book, *Protestants and Patriots*, carefully and lucidly sets forth a history that can sort through the confusion. “This book,” writes Hart, “is about Presbyterian protest, what made Anglophone Reformed Protestants particularly combative and activist, and how political circumstances in England and Scotland colored efforts for ecclesiastical reform” (2). But there is more as the book “completes the story by showing how these committed Protestants became defenders of liberal democracy” (2).

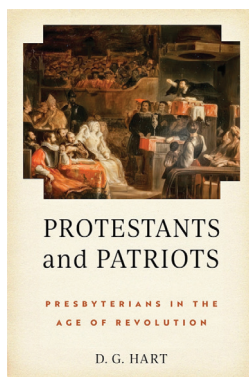
POLITICAL IDEALS, POLITICAL REALITY

These days most people who grope for a Christian nation and wish to restore it *on historical grounds*, miss the historical transition that took place among the Protestants and

especially the Presbyterians. That transition was from “theocratic expectations for a godly society” to a representative governance, civil and religious liberties, and the shift from established churches to voluntary churches (2). Granted there are ironies to be faced as one considers the whole matter of the founding of the colonies, the Revolution, and the constitutional United States. Hart’s argument is that once the dust of the Presbyterian revolution of the 1640s in Scotland, England, and Ireland settled, “Presbyterians became champions of free markets, representative government, personal responsibility, national improvement, and religious liberty” (16). The outliers were those who sought to make transitional figures like Calvin, Knox, and Rutherford isolated models for explaining “the church’s place in modern society” (16). The truth is that Presbyterians’ political ideals were tempered by the reality that was their experience from James I (1604) to William of Orange (1700). This is where part one of the book ends.

Part two sets forth “Presbyterian Modern, 1700–1875.” Here Hart takes the most space and “traces adjustments that these Protestants made to constitutional monarchy and its administration in Britain and North America” (17). The chapters consider the Presbyterians’ compromises and moderate postures necessitated by political victory. These, the author argues, were not considered by the earlier and most zealous Presbyterians. Additionally, Hart shows that Presbyterian involvement in both the American battle for independence and the Irish Rising of the same period was more civil than ecclesiastical in substance. Efforts to avoid or escape civil intermeddling in church affairs became the focus of Protestants in general, but Presbyterians specifically. This did not, however, mean that Presbyterians had no view toward a blessed modern society:

But after the Glorious Revolution, Presbyterians learned by experience and reflection that the same political



Notre Dame, 2026.
Hardcover, 372 pages,
\$45.00.

arrangements that lightened the church's burden from an overreaching magistrate were also among the tools by which modern nations could fashion a generically Christian society. (272)

That generically Christian society on the horizon of Presbyterians is defined by Hart as the blessings of a “good” government. Those blessings included “increase in suffrage, more extensive representation in government, free trade and better distribution of goods for more affordable prices, higher rates of literacy, . . . [and] the separation of church and state” (272).

WITHERSPOON'S WAY

In the end Hart admits how difficult “reconciling old and modern Presbyterian politics is” (302). He illustrates this from Arthur Herman's *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*. Traces of democratic republicanism could be found in Knox and the Scots' National Covenant (1638) where government of the people could be identified. However, according to Herman, “Presbyterians such as the Covenanters were ‘inspired less by their love of democracy than by their hatred of Satan’” (303).

From this admitted historical tension, Hart, trying to properly nuance the “Presbyterian Rebellion” mindset, turns to John Witherspoon. Witherspoon came over from Scotland in 1768 to take up the leadership of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). Ten years prior to his coming to the colonies, “he could highlight the British government's treatment of the Covenanters to argue for the importance of protecting constitutional liberties” (303). Once in the midst of the colonies and the Revolution, he “did not rely on language of resisting tyranny or restoring the ‘crown rights’ of Jesus. Instead, Witherspoon argued from the emerging liberal political and economic world” (303). Even though Witherspoon would engage as a citizen and serve the nascent nation in civic roles, he did so as a citizen who was a Christian. He did not represent the church *per se*. To put it another way, he didn't legislate for the “crown rights of Jesus,” but for rights of the citizenry and for the establishment and maintenance of a representative republic.

The Presbyterian role in the American Revolution is one that is beyond doubt. But how did its role manifest? That is the abiding question. Some want the religious views of Presbyterians to be the justification for the American Revolution and therefore the basis for pursuing a “Christian nation” revival. “This book,” argues Hart, “shows the weakness of that interpretation” (306). This reviewer agrees with the historical case Hart presents and hopes all the readers will agree with the author when he says, “The Presbyterian

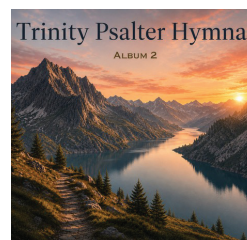
assertion of the church's spiritual independence and its elaborate and sometimes baffling explanation of the spiritual and temporal spheres of Christ's rule were necessary features in building liberal politics” (306).

For those familiar with Professor Hart's previous writings, you will not be surprised to know this book is well researched, carefully crafted, and pointed in analysis. It is good for the church while at the same time appealing to and useful for the general reader who may have no connection to the church. College classrooms, pastor's studies, and Christians who want to rightly consider the church-state issue need this book. *Protestants and Patriots* cannot be commended too highly.

The author is a PCA pastor and professor.

TRINITY PSALTER HYMNAL ALBUM 2 RELEASE

The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* Joint Venture Board (a collaboration of the OPC and URCNA) is pleased to announce the release of its second album, completing a two-album collection of choral recordings from the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. Together, the albums present forty psalm settings, beautifully performed by The Genevans of Geneva College under the direction of Dr. David Smith.



Album 1, released in 2024, brought some of these psalm settings to churches and families around the world. Album 2 completes the set. Both are available for streaming on major platforms and may be purchased at minimal cost, keeping this collection widely accessible to God's people.

These choral recordings are offered as a ministry to the church, not a commercial venture. They are intended to encourage the singing of God's Word, to help congregations and families learn the psalms, and to provide music suited to worship preparation, family devotions, and personal enjoyment.

CONGRATULATIONS

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

- **Edmund Denny**, *Redeemer OPC, Beavercreek, Ohio*

GLASS HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

MICHAEL J. KEARNEY

God has mightily established Knox School of Theology and All Nations Presbyterian Church here in Mbale, Uganda, but these two entities are works in progress. Some surprises and reality checks emerged for me upon my arrival to the field last year. I had—and still have—a lot to learn and am being taught anew to fix my eyes on our Lord and his gracious power and promises as he saves sinners and builds his church through the ordinary means. When I am tempted to see the glass as half empty, the Lord continually reveals that it is half full and reminds me that *he* is doing the filling.

WORK IN THE SEMINARY AND CHURCH

My work at Knox School of Theology began in June and July 2025 with preparations for the next academic year. Fellow missionary Fred Lo and I worked with faculty members and administrative staff to sift through new student applications for admittance. It felt like flying blind. We were blessed to be co-laboring with African faculty who knew more than we did about education in Africa. They acknowledged it was difficult to make sense of transcripts from various countries and letters of recommendation of uncertain value.

When the semester began and I started teaching the first-year students, a few seemed unprepared for the coursework at Knox School of Theology. The glass momentarily looked half empty. I reminded myself that my students were having to reckon with me, cutting my teeth as a new, full-time instructor. As the weeks progressed, some continued to struggle academically, but most settled in and demonstrated great potential. So, I saw the glass was half full.

Meanwhile, All Nations Presbyterian Church (ANPC) was giving Knox School of Theology students the opportunity to join the saints in worshipping the Lord and to see their instructors (missionaries and East Africans) preaching, teaching, and modeling what it looks like to apply theology in the church setting. Some challenges arose as Fred and I sought to come alongside and advise the men leading this mission church towards particularization. Although they needed to take next steps and follow through



All Nations Presbyterian Church members and OPC members at the particularization service

with the Uganda Presbytery of the Reformation Church in East Africa, there was hesitation within the acting session. The tasks to particularize are daunting to those who have never walked this path before—preparing a budget proposal, calling and then facilitating a congregational meeting, presenting the budget, and electing a minister to serve with three elected ruling elders.

At the congregational meeting, I felt a little bit like a coach, sitting near the moderator to assist and to gently nudge the congregation when needed. Then again, I had to remember that these dear brothers and sisters were new to parliamentary procedure. And, when they got going, they showed they were quite capable, as they looked to the Lord and sought to be faithful. By the meeting's end, they had called a pastor, even promising to give towards his material compensation, which is not necessarily common in this part of the world. They had voted to receive a budget. They had signed a petition to particularize.

THE GRADUATES OF KNOX SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

The filling up of the glass would become even more evident to me as time went by. At Knox School of Theology, by the second semester, the progress of those same first-year students was undeniably clear to me. In addition,

I had my first opportunity to teach third-year students, which gave me a glimpse of what students achieve with the Lord's help—after being taught biblical and systematic theology and seeing it fleshed out through godly examples over a three-year period. Some of these brothers got to guest-preach at ANPC as graduation drew near. Their proclamation was rooted in the biblical text; it exalted God and his saving, sanctifying grace; it pointed to Christ at the center; and it applied God's truth to our hearts. What an encouragement! This is what the Mission's work in Mbale is all about—helping to develop those who will serve as leaders and church officers, including pastors equipped to know and understand and faithfully preach and teach God's Word.

I was rejoicing with so many others as these students graduated on May 23—with the confident, expectant prayer that God will greatly use them to advance the kingdom, lift up our Savior's name, and bless his church in East Africa. I am rejoicing that right at this very moment I am seeing progress in the leadership of Knox School of Theology as we come full circle with another academic year. And all of this is happening as the school applies for its provisional accreditation to be made permanent.

PARTICULARIZATION OF ALL NATIONS PRESBYTERIAN

Two months or so after the first congregational meeting, representatives of the presbytery came to ANPC, the elected men were ordained and installed, and ANPC was particularized. It was a milestone for this body of believers. Pray that they will become not only self-governing but more and more self-sustaining and self-propagating.

Another congregational meeting was just held. This time, I only observed. The session called for the nomina-

tion of deacons, and a very solid candidate was nominated. They appropriately reported on difficult pastoral cases, acknowledging that discipline would be utilized if needed and affirming that holy Christian lives are necessary. They presented a strategic plan for shepherding every family unit and individual, with the hope of adding more new members very soon. Moreover, the session of ANPC is asking questions like, "How can we mobilize the congregation to reach out in evangelism? What should our policy be when fielding diaconal requests?" And, while the missionaries' input is welcome, the pastor and elders are doing all of this on their own initiative.

FILLED TO OVERFLOWING

The reality is that in the end, one way or another, the glass will not only be half full but filled, to overflowing. We have the assurances of Scripture, like what we read in the Apostle Paul's words, "that he who began a good work . . . will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). We praise and thank our triune God, our Maker and Redeemer, that there is growth by the Spirit in his church in Uganda and East Africa. Won't you pray with us that such progress will continue? To God alone be all the glory!

The author is a missionary in Mbale, Uganda.

2026 graduates of Knox School of Theology



WHAT'S NEW

Mr. and Mrs. Travis A. (Bonnie) Emmett (Christ Church OPC, Downingtown, PA) along with their children, Clayton, Adalyn, Jackson, Dawson, and Carson, returned to Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, in August.

Missionary associates **Mr. and Mrs. D. Jeffrey (Gloria) Davis** (Redeemer Presbyterian, Ada, MI) and **Mr. Benjamin I. Gifford** (Grace PCA, Hudson, OH) completed their six-month terms of service in Uganda in August.

Miss Miriam R. Sterrett (Calvary OPC, Middletown, PA) and **Miss Emily G. Batten** (Living Hope OPC, Allentown, PA) were appointed to serve as missionary associates in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, for six months beginning in August.

Rev. and Mrs. Stephen S. (Catalina) Payson (Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania) will return to San Carlos, Uruguay, in October, after a two-month furlough.

A SPANISH-SPEAKING CHURCH PLANT

JAMES M. STAFFORD

Alexis had not grown up in a Christian home. Although he did have cousins who were encouraging him to come to church, he would decline their invitations, saying he would attend in the future. But “later” never seemed to come. So how is it that in May 2026, he professed faith in Christ at Alfa y Omega OPC and was baptized?

Alfa y Omega OPC is a Spanish-language church plant in Springfield, Ohio. Its existence, like that of all churches, has come about through the Holy Spirit’s blessing on the faithful labors of previous and present generations. To tell the story of its most recent member, Alexis, is to tell one part of a story that began more than a hundred years ago, which is itself just one part of the biggest story of all.

PRESBYTERIANS PAST

When Mexico opened its borders to Protestant missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, it would still be some decades before the southern regions of the country were evangelized. A native Presbyterian missionary brought the gospel to Las Margaritas, a city on Mexico’s southern edge near Guatemala, and a couple named Julian and Eustaquia were among the first converts in 1923. Hold those names in your mind.

At the same time that Protestant missions were beginning in Mexico, in 1859 the first Presbyterian missionary reached Brazil. That man, Ashbel Simonton, had begun to contemplate the foreign mission field when, as a student at Princeton Seminary, he heard a sermon from Charles Hodge. Hodge insisted that it was contrary to the teaching of Scripture to think the Holy Spirit would convert pagan nations by extraordinary, direct communication of the truth, apart from the church actually sending preachers to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Though Simonton died of yellow fever at the age of just thirty-four, his labors were instrumental in the formation of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, a denomination with whom the OPC enjoys ecclesiastical fellowship.



The congregation of Alfa y Omega OPC, with De Oliveira on the far right

PRESBYTERIANS PRESENT

In 2013, Brad Peppo was ordained and installed as an evangelist at Covenant Presbyterian in Vandalia, Ohio. Within a year, a church plant was begun in nearby Springfield, which eventually bore fruit in the particularization of Living Water OPC.

So how do all of these events relate to each other? While Living Water was still meeting in a rented space, the group met David Domínguez, a great-grandson of Julian and Eustaquia, the converts mentioned earlier. David and other coworkers and acquaintances desired to be part of a Presbyterian church consistent with their own upbringing, but the only Spanish-language churches in the area were Pentecostal or Roman Catholic. They began meeting in homes for prayer, singing, Scripture reading, and lay preaching, but lacked any formal organization or oversight.

When Living Water purchased a building of their own, they invited David and his brother, Serafín Domínguez—himself a Presbyterian pastor visiting from Mexico—to meet and discuss their willingness to share the building and pursue a relationship between the two congregations. What began with periodic bilingual joint worship

services eventually led to the OPC supporting a yearlong church-planting intern to work with the Spanish-speaking group.

Following that internship, Peppo filled the pulpit until he could find someone more comfortable with Spanish to take his place. His search led him to meet the mission work's present evangelist, Rev. Jefferson De Oliveira.

The same year that Peppo had been ordained, De Oliveira had also been ordained—in the Presbyterian Church in Brazil. After entering the ministry, De Oliveira learned Spanish while doing evangelism in Paraguay and Argentina. He went on to minister among refugees in various European countries and in Canada before coming to the United States to pursue a master's degree in historical theology.

Thus, through the initial involvement of the Domínguez brothers from Mexico and the calling of De Oliveira from Brazil as its church planter, the history of Alfa y Omega OPC is an instance of Presbyterian missions to Latin America geographically rebounding into the United States.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Hodge was right. While the supernatural work of regeneration belongs to the Spirit alone, he is pleased to work “by and with the Word” as the church proclaims the gospel. This was the case with Alexis. Long before Alexis ever entered the building, the Spirit had already been at work for centuries. This transpired through the sending of missionaries, the ordinary faithfulness of parents raising their children in the faith for successive generations, and the generosity of saints supporting home missions—all so there would be a church ready for Alexis to enter when the time was right.



Worship at Alfa y Omega



Alexis (right) at Alfa y Omega OPC is the fruit of the Spirit's work through centuries and across continents.

The Spirit used the witness of family members attending Alfa y Omega so that when he experienced a personal crisis, Alexis became willing to recognize God's claim on his life.

At this stage, the congregation of Alfa y Omega enjoys a Saturday night Bible study, Sunday worship, adult and children's Sunday schools, and a monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Rev. Jefferson De Oliveira reflects on the past year and a half:

On May 11th of last year, during a worship service, we received our first members after having been officially recognized as a Home Mission work by the Presbytery of Ohio. We held baptisms for the children and public professions of faith that included an adult baptism. Our group now has about twenty to twenty-five people every Sunday. Visitors are coming to the church, and a very positive change is that the church is now recognized in the city. For many years, they met without ordained leadership, which made it hard for people to join. Now it has a pastor and a provisional session until the time when it will have its own elders and deacons. This recognition by the OPC shows the Hispanic community in Springfield that this group is no longer alone.

As readers might imagine, Presbyterian denominations developing for several decades in geographic, cultural, and linguistic isolation could potentially diverge in their practices. The congregation has responded well to changes, eager to deepen their understanding of what Scripture teaches. “While we still face many challenges,” concludes Jefferson De Oliveira, “we are hopeful because of the promises we find in the Holy Bible.”

The author is associate pastor of Grace Presbyterian in Columbus, Ohio.

OCT 2026 PRAYER CALENDAR



The Paysons (day 7)



The Stewarts (day 11)

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 **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for healing of Mike's back after an injury while on furlough and for his safe return to the field. / Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth) Montgomery**.

2 Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico**. / Pray for GA stated clerk **Hank L. Belfield** as work begins on the 2027 OPC Directory.

3 **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Knox School of Theology's application for permanent charter status to operate as a fully accredited university in Uganda. / Pray for US Army active duty chaplains **Stephen L. (Lindsey) Roberts** and **Jeffrey P. (Jennifer) Shames**.

4 Pray for the director of revitalization for Home Missions, **Steve (Katie) McDaniel**. / Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Benjamin (Heather) Hopp** as he travels to South Korea and prepares for a trip to Turkey.

5 Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / Pray for the **Committee on Christian Education** as it meets today in Willow Grove, PA.

6 **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay. Pray for Jim's new pastoral duties at Salvos por Gracia in Montevideo as the Paysons move to Maldonado. / Pray for ruling elders and congregations to be uplifted by *The Ruling Elder Podcast*.

7 Pray for **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay. Give thanks for the new members added to Soli Deo Gloria and Salvos por Gracia in August and September. / **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.

8 **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for yearlong intern **Greg (Aby) Ritzema** at Christ the King in Naples, FL.

9 Pray for **Ayrian Yasar** and **Robin Bond**, editorial assistants for *New Horizons*. / Pray that the Lord would continue to bring fruit in the lives of those who served in or were served by **OP short-term missions** in 2026.

10 **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Pray for US Army active duty chaplains **Richard (Neva) Brasher** and **David (Jenna) DeRienzo**.

11 **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for yearlong intern **Alex (Hannah) Stewart** at Covenant Presbyterian in Hammond, WI.

12 Missionary associate **Emily Batten**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that she and Miriam (below) would adjust well and quickly to life in Karamoja. / Pray for **Judy Alexander**, administrative coordinator for the Committee on Christian Education.

13 Missionary associate **Miriam Sterrett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that she and Emily would bless and encourage the missionaries in Karamoja. / **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for New Jersey.

14 **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / Pray for yearlong intern **Lance (Amanda) Jones** at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian in Fort Pierce, FL.

15 Pray for associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she returns to Karamoja after her furlough. / Pray that the Lord would guide **OPC deacons** as they seek to put into practice what they learned at the National Diaconal Summit in June.

16 **Chris & Sara Drew**, Grand Forks, ND. Please pray that the Lord would bring new families to Faith Presbyterian Church. / Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray the VBS outreach continues to bear fruit bringing children to church.

17 **Joseph & Christina Wan**, Madison, WI. Pray for a smooth and timely visa process for Pastor Joseph Wan. / Pray for yearlong intern **Frank (Martha) Wang** at First OPC in Sunnyvale, CA.

18 Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they homeschool, care for a newborn, and resume projects in Karamoja. / Pray for yearlong intern **Paul (Sara) Lauer** at Grace OPC in Sewickley, PA.

19 Tentmaker missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for our Karimojong neighbors who fear food shortages and inflation this season. / **Kevin & Cami Godsey**, Peoria, IL. Pray for God to provide a permanent building for Radiant OPC.



The Gaskins (day 20)

20 **John & Katie Terrell**, Moline, MI. Pray for fruitfulness in the ministry of Living Hope OPC. / Pray for yearlong intern **Mitchell (Shannon) Gaskins** at New Life OPC in Montoursville, PA.

21 Pray for **missionary evangelists** for the OP Uganda Mission to labor with a new work in Karamoja and with Knox School of Theology in Mbale. / Pray for yearlong intern **Caleb (Rachel) Grimm** at Providence OPC in Yuma, AZ.

22 **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Buda, TX. Pray for God to bless the evangelistic efforts of Hays County OPC. / Pray that the efforts of the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** in publishing a children's catechism would encourage the Sudanese Reformed Church.

23 **Jacey & Julia Davison**, Grand Rapids, MI. Please pray for Ascension Church as they prepare for fall ministry and outreach events. / Pray for **Charlene Tipton**, OPC accounts manager.

24 Pray for the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** as it assists the Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church with the completion of their worship facility in Addis Ababa. / Pray for Loan Fund executive director **Mark Stumpff**.

25 **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for strength and consolation for church members suffering the losses of homes and loved ones. / **David Myhren**, Troy, OH. Pray for God to raise up officers at Bread of Life Church.

26 **Greg & Ginger O'Brien**, Downingtown, PA. Pray for visitors to experience Christ's love at Christ Church Downingtown. / Pray for **trustees of Great Commission Publications** as they meet today.



The O'Briens (day 26)

27 Pray for the **imprisoned pastors** in East Africa and God's provision for their families. / Pray for *New Horizons* proofreader **Monica Allen**.

28 **Jon & Stacey Jung**, Philadelphia, PA. Pray for God's blessing on the strength and service of the members of Fox Chase Reformed. / **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Ukraine. Pray for qualified men who can be trained to be the church's elders and deacons.

29 **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Please pray that God would help the members of Prince of Peace OPC to reach out well to visitors. / Pray for **Anneke Fesko**, care coordinator for ministers' wives.

30 Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / **Johnny & Berry Serafini**, Marion, NC. Pray for faithful witness among the congregation of Landis OPC.

31 Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / **Wayne & Suzanne Veenstra**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray for God to advance gospel conversations with the visitors of River Presbyterian Church.

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM: IVAN J. DEMASTER

John Shaw

“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” There is biblical wisdom in that saying, which I saw during my internship at Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, with Rev. Ivan DeMaster, who passed into the presence of the Savior he loved on July 2. Rarely a week goes by that I don’t remember something that Ivan taught me during that summer. When I face personal discouragement in ministry, I am reminded of his counsel: not my church but Christ’s church. When I struggle to balance sermon preparation and house-to-house visitation, I remember a question he asked me: How often do you think a pastor should go out on visits in a typical week? His number and his practice far exceeded my expectations.



Ivan J. DeMaster (1937–2026)

When I talked with the people in that church, they knew their pastor to be a humble man who genuinely loved the sheep. And his love for them was proved not merely in words, but especially in time with them where he listened more than he spoke. And for those reasons, when he preached, they hung on the words that came from his mouth.

Ivan was a faithful Christian, husband, father, and pastor—he served four OP congregations for a total of forty-three years. He will be deeply missed by many in this life, but the church has been strengthened by his service, and we look forward to joining him one day in the presence of Jesus.

IN MEMORIAM: LAWRENCE J. SEMEL

Danny E. Olinger

The Reverend Lawrence Semel died on July 11, 2026, at the age of eighty years old after a prolonged battle with Parkinson’s. As a student at Geneva College, Larry attended Calvary OPC in Harrisville, Pennsylvania, pastored by his uncle, George Morton. There he met Ruth Ann Barr, and they were married on June 14, 1969. On June 9, 1972, Larry was ordained and installed as pastor of Nashua OPC in Nashua, Pennsylvania. In 1981, he began church planting in Morgantown, West Virginia, which led to his being installed as the first pastor of Reformation Presbyterian (OPC) in 1985. At Reformation and in the Presbytery of Ohio, Larry was known for his gentle demeanor and his powerful redemptive-historical, Christ-centered preaching. Along with his close friend, OPC Historian Charles Dennison, Larry led a monthly “Vos Monday” fellowship in which OPC and Reformed theologians read and discussed the writings of Geerhardus Vos. In 2025, he published *The Journey: A Redemptive Historical Consideration of the Wilderness Theme in Scripture*. After his retirement in 2010, Larry and Ruth Ann moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where they became key members of the newly formed Redeemer OPC. On March 21, 2024, Ruth Ann preceded Larry in death.



Lawrence Semel (left) with Grace and Ted Hard in 2005



UKRAINE CRISIS FUND

Consider giving to the Ukraine Crisis Fund, which is the Committee on Diaconal Ministries' fund for relief in Ukraine. The fund primarily supports the food distribution center of Kharkiv Presbyterian Church, a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ukraine. See pages 10–11 of this issue for more on Kharkiv Presbyterian Church and director of the distribution center, Mark Aharkov. Visit give.opc.org/diaconal-ministries-summary to give.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On June 1, **Cliff Foster** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Oakland Hills Community in Farmington Hills, MI.
- On June 12, **Jonathan R. Vos** was ordained and installed as pastor of the Armor Bible Church in Orchard Park, NY.
- On June 13, **Christopher B. Cashen** was installed as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod in Cape Cod, MA.
- On July 3, **Thomas W. Garbarini** was ordained and installed as pastor of Living Hope Presbyterian Church in Brunswick, ME.
- On July 11, **Cornelius Johnson** was installed as pastor of Trinity Reformed in Lanham, MA.
- On August 1, **Timothy Brindle** was installed as pastor of Church of the Covenant in Hackettstown, NJ.

MILESTONES

- On May 6, **Jean Marie Tyson**, wife of OP minister Thomas E. Tyson, died.
- On May 8, **Priscilla (née Eyres) King**, wife of OP minister David W. King, died.

- On July 2, **Ivan Jay DeMaster** (89), retired OP minister, died.
- On July 11, **Lawrence “Larry” Semel** (80), retired OP minister, died.
- On July 31, **Bruce Fenton** (82), elder emeritus and former regional home administrator for the Presbytery of New Jersey, died.
- On August 18, **Richard Milton Edwards** (75), retired OP minister and pastor emeritus, died.
- On August 28, **Thomas Dodd Church** (75), retired OP minister, died.

REVIEWS

Orthodox Presbyterian History: An Anthology, edited by John R. Muether & Camden M. Bucey. OPC Committee for the Historian, 2026. Paperback, 270 pages, \$8.99. Reviewed by OPC pastor Robert E. Tarullo.

Understanding our identity as a church has been and remains an important topic of discussion and reflection for our denomination. What events have formed us? How has our God used us? For what purpose do we exist as a church? Many publications have come before this collection teasing differing aspects of our church's history and life with the aim of pinpointing how our history has shaped our identity. This anthology serves the church well by placing key primary source documents in one place, especially as a few of them are hard to find elsewhere, even on the internet.

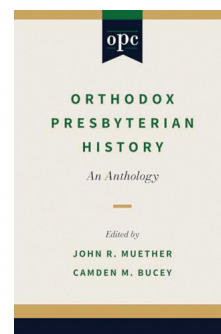
Orthodox Presbyterian History: An Anthology brings together fifteen sermons, articles, and essays used in the OPC History course of the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (MTIOPC). The collection of documents is organized by publication date, which spans from 1922 to 1996. It includes selections from participants in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy—Harry Emerson Fosdick, Clarence E. Macartney, and J. Gresham Machen—as well as the text of the



At Foster's (center) ordination and installation at Oakland Hills Community Church



At Brindle's (center, with Bible) installation in Hackettstown, NJ



Auburn Affirmation. These writings set the stage for the necessity of why we exist as a denomination. John P. Galbraith and Edward L. Kellogg provide early defenses and explanation for the OPC's remarkable separation from the PCUSA. Other contributions reflect on the mission of the OPC with assessments of the OPC's value and place in the Reformed and Presbyterian world.

As a primary source collection, this anthology is not meant to cover all our ninety years. Rather, it is a selection of significant readings to help us to better understand the origin story of our church—as Machen put it, “this little company of weak and sinful folk.” And, with that understanding more firmly grasped, the church is aided in understanding her identity “and her enduring commitment to the Reformed Faith” (from the back cover).

This collection is more than just a parochial hodgepodge of writings limited to students of the MTIOPC history course. There is enough variation of content and writing style within these pages to benefit all the OPC as well as readers from NAPARC congregations. One example of this wider appeal is found in the chapter entitled “Realignment: An Exchange of Views,” which brings together a brief written debate between John M. Frame and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. from *New Horizons* (1989). We read about congregations leaving the OPC for the PCA, and why some thought leaving was a “biblical option,” and others thought not. Another example is provided by Edmund P. Clowney’s “Another Foundation: The Presbyterian Confessional Crisis,” which critiques the Confession of 1967. Clowney analyzes its false teachings on the “Theology of Reconciliation” and the “Theology of Revelation,” showing clearly how this new confession of faith contradicts the Bible and the Westminster Standards, effectively nullifying both.

Of particular interest to me is John R. Muether’s “Confidence in Our Brethren,” a title drawn from J. Gresham Machen’s

address to the Second General Assembly of the OPC amid debates about premillennialism. Although written thirty years ago, his closing analysis of subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms in the OPC deserves continued consideration. “The OPC’s confessional precision and its shared consensus have been challenged in every decade of its life. It must be constantly vigilant in maintaining Machen’s vision of a ‘hermeneutical circle,’ preserving both its heritage, the glorious Standards, and the community that accords ‘confidence in our brethren’” (269).

What a wonderful way for our church to consider one another.

***Decently and in Order: A Practical Commentary on the URCNA Church Order*, by Bradd L. Nymeyer. Reformed Fellowship, 2025. Paperback, 300 pages, \$20.00. Reviewed by URCNA pastor Brian Lee.**

Calvin aimed for *claritas et brevitatis* in his biblical commentaries; Bradd Nymeyer has attained it in his URCNA church order commentary. I was initially surprised by just how brief his comments are—often less than a page per article. Yet the more I read, the more I warmed to his spare style and appreciated the value of Nymeyer’s distinctive approach.

The preface explains that this commentary is not intended to replace the classic work written by Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma on the Dortian church order in 1967 (*VDM*).

VDM explains the genesis and history of each article in fantastic detail, thereby elucidating the motivating spirit of URCNA polity. Nymeyer instead cuts to the chase of applying the church order to our circumstances today. Since our history is unchanged, *VDM* didn’t need an update. Indeed, the fine detail of *VDM* can make it unwieldy and impractical. It

remains the province of polity nerds—normies roll their eyes. In contrast, the direct simplicity of Nymeyer makes this book a useful tool that can and should be owned and read by every officer in the URCNA. The URCNA doesn’t produce a bound copy of its church order, but this book contains one in the appendices, along with our Rules of Synodical Procedure. Getting this book into the URCNA bloodstream would improve the practical efficacy of our polity.

While brief, Nymeyer’s commentary is often rich. He spends less than a page on Article 17, which is a punch line to many polity jokes in the URCNA: “In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be conducted, only in an ecclesiastical manner.” (Granted, URCNA polity jokes aren’t very funny.) But the point of this article, as Nymeyer indicates, is to define the scope of the churches’ work:

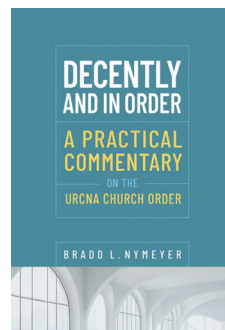
The churches are not to engage in the work of the state. They are not, as churches, to endorse a particular candidate for office. They are not to develop a plank for a particular party platform. Their work is ecclesiastical, not political. . . . Nor are they to intrude into the authority of the home.

This is an early and important witness to the Reformed understanding of the spirituality of the church.

Likewise rich are the brief comments on Article 18, “The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.” “This is to remind the churches of our great dependence on God,” Nymeyer writes.

In addition to the commentary proper, there are 136 pages of appendices, almost half the book. These include practical notes on matters ranging from candidacy exams to congregational meetings. I have already consulted these appendices with great benefit.

In these pages Nymeyer departs a bit from his spare style, sharing wisdom in addition to his explication. This



material, gleaned over a lengthy career as pastor and frequent chair of our broader assemblies, is practical indeed. Young pastors should read with care.

OPC readers who wish to explore continental Reformed polity will benefit from this book, though the focus will be on practice, not theory. For example, you will learn of our distinctive terminology (“federation” and “churches”) and our more local approach to church planting in Articles 22 and 24. Nymeyer makes good sense of these and other continental distinctives.

“We serve a precise God,” one wag at the Westminster Assembly reportedly said. Precisely no one in the URCNA will be surprised that Reverend Nymeyer has written an excellent, practical, and, yes, precise commentary on our church order. It will remain the benchmark for some time.

***A Penitent People: The Doctrine of Repentance*, by Harrison Perkins. Christian Focus, 2025. Paperback, 128 pages, \$13.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Matthew E. Cotta.**

In *A Penitent People: The Doctrine of Repentance*, OP pastor and professor

Harrison Perkins explains that repentance is often misunderstood—as if it were a dreary duty or a preparationistic (legalistic) requirement for grace. Instead, Scripture presents repentance as a saving grace, a divine gift through which Christ frees his people from sin’s enslaving power and draws them into renewed joy. Repentance is not the price we pay to gain Christ; it is the fruit of having already been united to him by the Spirit who also worked faith in us.

Drawing from Scripture and Reformed tradition, the book illuminates repentance as both personal posture and communal practice. Through thoughtful examinations of key biblical passages, Perkins demonstrates that genuine repentance flows from faith, propels us toward Christ, and transforms both individuals and churches. Key passages include Psalm 51, Psalm 38, 2 Corinthians 7, and Luke 3, alongside the Reformed confessions, with attention given to unhealthy distortions of penance and the pastoral challenge of helping people see repentance not as a terror but as a mercy that produces joy.

Emphasized in the book is the classic, Calvinist understanding of the “twofold benefit” of Christ. Namely, rather than focusing on guilt as motivator, Perkins emphasizes how repentance is bound and related to justification and progressive sanctification in the context of our sweet fellowship of Spirit-worked, faith-union with Christ.

A Penitent People is neither a dense systematic treatment nor a superficial popular book, offering genuine theological substance in an accessible, brief, and pastorally warm

register. Its Reformed confessional grounding (Westminster Standards, covenant theology) will resonate strongly with the readers of *New Horizons*, and its core pastoral concern, rescuing repentance from legalistic distortion, speaks in tones that will easily appeal to and benefit a wider Christian audience.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is

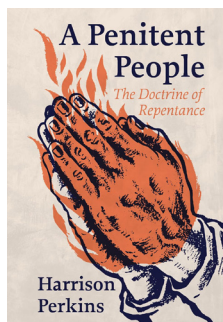
its reframing of repentance as liberation rather than burden, correcting both the antinomian neglect of repentance and the moralistic tendency to turn it into self-punishment or morbid introspection.

In this reviewer’s estimation, the most helpful (because most neglected) topics in *A Penitent People*

appear in chapters 5 and 6, where Perkins delves most deeply into the corporate culture and practice of repentance, a culture and practice that is taught, enjoyed, and reinforced in each and every Lord’s Day service of worship.

The regular practice of a penitent people is grounded in the ordinary means of grace that we partake of together every Lord’s Day—from baptism, where we are definitively severed from the world, sin, the flesh, the devil, in union with the crucified and risen Christ, through confession of sin and assurance of pardon (or absolution) where we confess together and receive mercy together, to the preaching of the Word which summons us to Christ through faith that bears fruit in keeping with repentance, and finally to the table of the Lord where we are strengthened in our repentance.

A Penitent People is a biblically and theologically sound, pastorally sensitive, and timely treatment of a sadly neglected (and oft-misunderstood) doctrine. Great for pastors and small group leaders, it is a “must read” for all Christians who have found the practice of repentance either anxiety-inducing, spiritually stale, or, at best, infrequent.



POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Pastor: Covenant Presbyterian in Mansfield, Ohio, is an intimate and rooted congregation seeking a minister who has a deep commitment to the traditional Reformed understanding of Scripture. The ideal candidate would minister to families and encourage member participation. His preaching would be consistent to Scripture, expository in nature, and focused on the heart of the hearer in order to convict sinners and comfort the elect. If interested, please contact jonathan.diercks@gmail.com.

Pastor: All Saints OPC in Suffolk, Virginia, is seeking a minister of Word and sacrament. To inquire, please contact Daniel Cooke at 757-758-2239 or info@allsaintsopc.com.

First Catechism new edition now available!

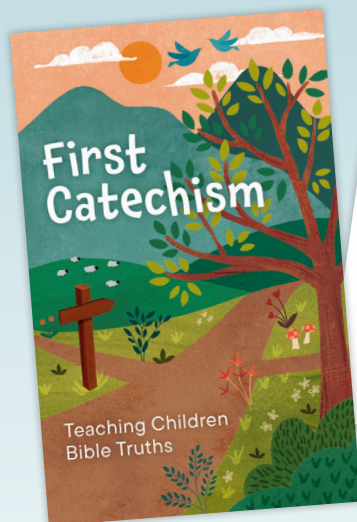


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