

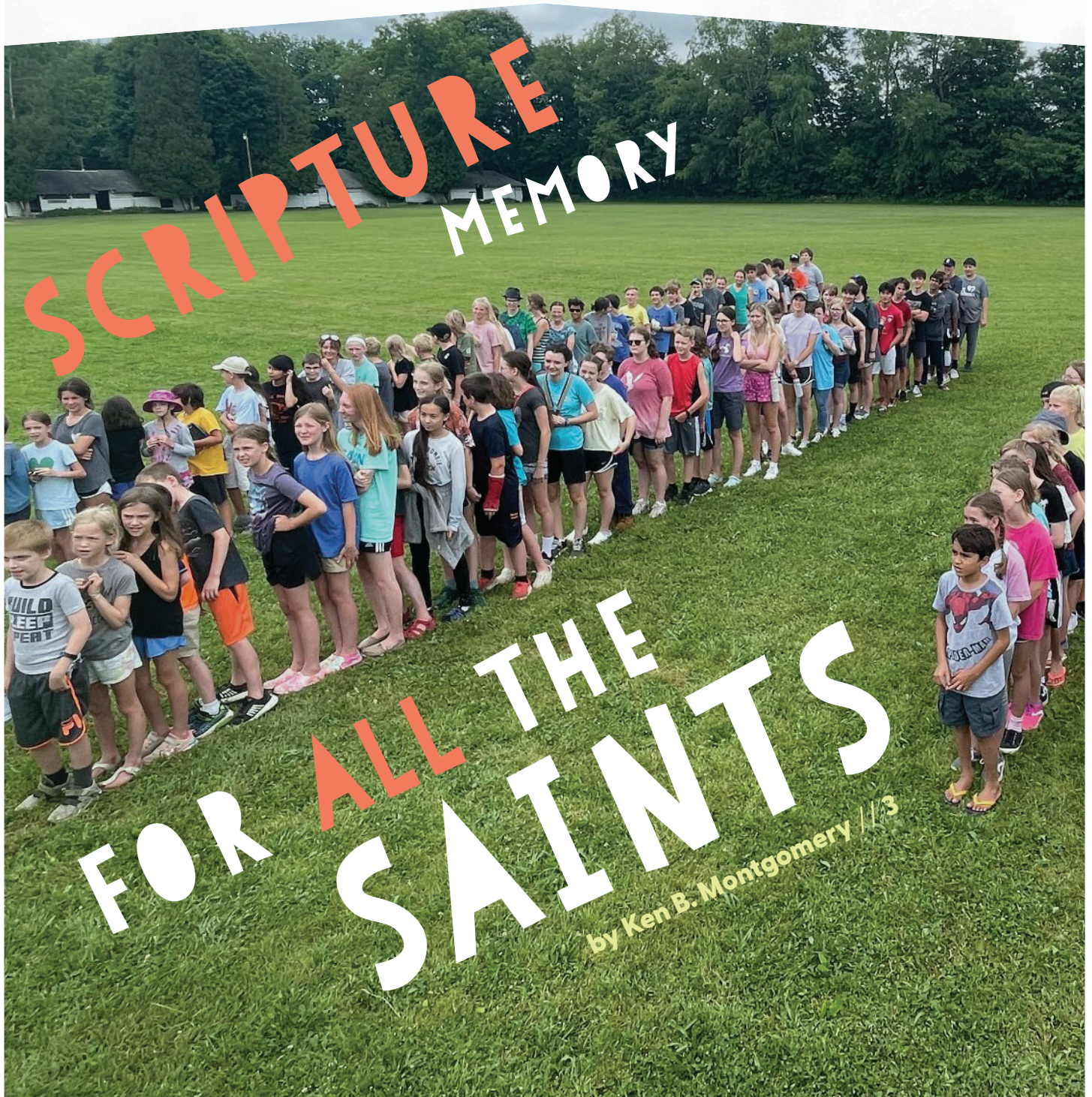
NEW HORIZONS

— in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

5 The Shorter Catechism
for Today
// by *Judith M. Dinsmore*

JULY 2023

9 Review: Hansen's
Timothy Keller
// by *John R. Muether*



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New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Editor: Danny E. Olinger
Managing Editor: Judith M. Dinsmore
Editorial Assistants: Ayrian J. Yasar, Diane L. Olinger
Proofreader: Sarah Pederson
Cover Designer: Christopher Tobias
Editorial Board: The Committee on Christian Education's Subcommittee on Serial Publications

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Articles previously published may be slightly edited.

New Horizons (ISSN: 0199-3518) is published monthly except for a combined issue, usually August-September, by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19090-2539; tel. 215-830-0900; fax 215-830-0350.

Letters to the editor are welcome. They should deal with an issue the magazine has recently addressed. Their language should be temperate, and they may not charge anyone with an offense. They should be brief, and they may be condensed by the editor.

Send inquiries, letters to the editor, and other correspondence to the editor at danny.olinger@opc.org.

Send address changes to ccesecretary@opc.org. Allow six weeks for address changes.

The digital edition (PDF, ePub) and an archive of previous issues are available at www.opc.org.

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

Copies are distributed free to members and friends of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Nonmembers are asked to donate \$20.00 for an annual subscription (USD \$30.00 if sent to addresses in Canada; \$40.00 elsewhere abroad). A free e-mail PDF subscription is also available. Requests for a subscription should be sent to ccesecretary@opc.org or the address below.

Periodicals postage is paid at Willow Grove, PA, and at additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19090-2539.

On May 13, the Presbytery of New York and New England held its first deacons conference, organized by the presbytery's committee on diaconal ministries. David Nakhla spoke on the important role of that committee, and Rev. Richard Dickinson spoke on "The Privileges and Challenges of Being a Deacon." About half of OP presbyteries have held a deacons conference in the past decade, said Nakhla.



SCRIPTURE MEMORY FOR ALL THE SAINTS



KEN B. MONTGOMERY // On a sticky summer afternoon in the Buckeye state close to a decade ago, about 110 young campers were lined up for lunch on the hillside lawn next to the lake. But before they were given the green light to proceed into the dining hall, each team in the Presbytery of Ohio summer youth camp had

to recite 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. This text is a crystallized summary of the gospel message, which Paul emphatically states as being of “first importance.” After commending them for their memorization work, I mentioned offhand that it would be impressive if one of them would endeavor to recite the whole chapter.

The next year around the campfire, a young woman named Joelle Dirksen (now Carnes, married to Pastor David Carnes of Covenant Reformed in Fort Pierce, Florida) proceeded to recite the great “resurrection chapter” (1 Cor. 15) before the campers and staff. This was one of the highlights of the week and warmed the cockles of the heart of this camp director.

Unafraid to Commit

Joelle Carnes has continued committing larger Scripture passages to memory: subsequent to rising to the occasion at camp, she memorized Psalm 19 and Romans 8. “One of the encouragements I’ve found in memorizing Scripture is how it is applicable,”

she said. “I’ll find myself in a situation where verses I’ve memorized will come to mind and apply to the things I’m dealing with at that moment.” Indeed, internalizing various texts from the Word of God is akin to having a Swiss army knife: you are equipped (see 2 Tim. 3:17).

Carol Horton of Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California, began intentionally memorizing Scripture later in life, at age fifty-nine. During a Bible study, her pastor at the time, Mark Schroeder, asked the participants, “Now where is that in the Scripture?”

“It frustrated me that I didn’t know the verse’s location,” Horton remembered. “I had been a Christian since I was a teenager, yet I could never remember the references to Scripture. So I figured if I memorized an entire chapter with the reference, I could

actually begin to know where verses are found in the Bible.” She observed that the initial work of engaging in Bible memory “was super hard” but that after regular practice “it is much easier now.”

Horton recently led her Sunday school class of six-to-eight-year-olds in reciting 1 Timothy 6:6–12 in front of the Harvest congregation: “I was trying to teach the children that it’s possible to memorize large sections of Scripture. Their parents were very happy, and the children realized they could learn significant portions of God’s Word.” Her current memorization projects are Matthew 7 and Hebrews 12.

Reciting the Word can bring it to life for listeners. The congregation of Christ OPC in Marietta, Georgia, recently hosted PCA pastor Drew Archer for an outreach event. On a Saturday afternoon, church members and friends and visitors



Joelle and David Carnes

from the community heard Pastor Archer give a dramatic recitation of the entire Gospel of Mark. He had seen the Christian dramatist Max McLean present the book of Mark and was “struck by how powerful it was.” Thus began a journey for this former actor in memorizing and reciting large portions of Scripture. In one such presentation, the event “brought in several unchurched, unbelieving theater friends who came out of curiosity and because of our friendship. It really opened my eyes to how God might use this for evangelism,” Archer said.

How-Tos for Memorizing

Archer sounds like an ideal companion if one were ever to be in a place without a written copy of the Scriptures, as he has thus far also memorized Galatians, Romans, Colossians, James, and Jonah. “Don’t give up!” Archer encourages prospective memorizers. “Scripture memorization is like a muscle; the more you work it, the more you build and the easier it gets.” He recommends memorizing large chunks or whole books, but perhaps starting with just one or two verses a day and then building onto that.

Carol Horton also advises starting small. “Begin with a short psalm that is not too long, like Psalm 73,” she said. As with many edifying habits of the heart, consistency is key. The little-by-little approach has a powerful cumulative effect. As Horton observes, “I think it has caused me to trust the Lord more and to love him more because his Word is truly hidden in my heart.”

Joelle Carnes admits a proclivity to distraction that many of us likely share: “My brain tends to wander a lot, and it can sometimes be hard to focus. It takes a lot of self-discipline for me to be able to concentrate on what I’m trying to memorize.” She emphasizes that regular review is of the essence for the memorization of larger passages. “Don’t rush memorization. Some people are able to memorize quickly, while others may have to work more at it. Focus on consistency and memorize at the pace

you are able to go.” Writing out verses by hand can be another helpful way to nail down the texts.

And you don’t have to memorize alone. “When I memorized 1 Corinthians 15, my friend and I would go to the park and walk together and work on the section we were memorizing for that week. My family and I are currently working on memorizing Hebrews 1. Since we don’t live in the same town anymore, we schedule a weekly check-in to see how we’re all doing on memorizing the assigned verses for that week,” Carnes said. Certainly, committing portions of the Bible to memory with others can be a tremendous way to encourage one another in the body of Christ.

My daughter Claire has memorized the epistles of Philippians and Colossians. It is gratifying to have a venue for a recitation, along the lines of a music recital: for Claire, it was having some friends over to hear the culmination of her memorization project and then going out for Chick-Fil-A afterward. Currently she is working on the book of James. Claire spends about twenty minutes each day working on Bible memorization, and she shares that this means of meditating on God’s Word “makes me stronger in my Christian walk and reminds me to have my speech ‘seasoned with salt’” (Col 4:6).

Led by Christ

Philip Henry, father of the well-known Bible commentator Matthew Henry, once remarked, “All grace grows as love to the Word of God grows.” Philip directed his sons to study one verse of Psalm 119 every other

day, thus working through the entire psalm in the course of a year. The psalmist certainly cherishes God’s Word: “I will meditate on your precepts” (v. 15); “I cling to your testimonies” (v. 31); and “when I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord” (v. 52). Truly the Lord Jesus, the fulfillment of the servant of Psalm 119, demonstrated the storing up of God’s living Word as he responded to the temptations of Satan in the wilderness with several passages from the book of Deuteronomy. Thus Christ was sharpened by the sword of the Spirit (see Eph. 6:17), through

which he was able to engage in kingdom combat with the adversary.

Thomas Cranmer’s prayer in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* is an apt one to accompany our memorization of the Word:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given in our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. □

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



The author with his daughter, Claire

Recommended Resources

- Paul Settle, *Memory Work Notebook* (Great Commission Publications)
- *Versify* (iOS and Android App for tracking memorization progress)
- *Topical Memory System* by The Navigators
- Albums of Scripture songs:
 - Hide 'Em in Your Heart* (Steve Green)
 - Go to the Ant* and *Blessed: Songs for the Beatitudes* (Judy Rogers)
 - Selections from the Book of Psalms for Worship* (Crown and Covenant)

THE SHORTER CATECHISM FOR TODAY



JUDITH M. DINSMORE // Although it was a long process with many ups and downs, Marcus and Chandra Mininger had all three of their children recite the Shorter Catechism, start-to-finish, landing their names in the small “Congratulations” box on the Christian Education pages of this magazine.

But it didn't happen haphazardly. Neither Marcus nor Chandra, members of New Covenant Community in Joliet, Illinois, where Marcus is associate pastor and professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, could cookie-cutter from their own experience—as the third of five children, Marcus laughed, he only made it partway through the catechism. So they crafted their own system through the years.

The Shorter Catechism Inside One OP Home

Before their children could read, the Miningers would work on First Catechism questions during family worship. “They love it at that young age, it's a fun challenge,” Marcus said. “It provides even young kids with a sense of dignity.” As parents, they worked to have a “positive tone and give lots of praise, lots of hugs and excitement, but also structure.”

Then, when their children were old enough to read the language of the Shorter Catechism, the Miningers typically left the First Catechism behind and began to incorporate the Shorter into the homeschool day. Catechism

memory took about fifteen minutes: ten minutes for learning new questions and five for reviewing old ones. Periodically, “so that it's not all isolated,” the kids would review with their parents after family worship—or in the car on the way to church.

Chandra used printed cards that had the question on the front and the answer on the back. (Great Commission Publications sells a pack at their website, gcp.org.) She gave her children three envelopes: one for questions “they knew cold,” one for questions that needed review, and one for questions they were actively working on.

For each child, the process took about two years. The Shorter Catechism, which has 107 questions, begins with considering God, Christ and the atonement, and the application of redemption. Then the catechism turns to the Christian's duty as found in the Ten Commandments—questions 42–81.

That, Chandra said, is where each of her children struggled. The questions on the commandments don't have any “clues” as to what the answer is, Marcus pointed out. Instead, they read mostly

the same for each commandment. Their youngest, Chandra said, “got so bogged down and frustrated that I said, ‘let's come back to this section.’” They finished the rest of the catechism first, then circled back.

Each child memorized differently. Their oldest is a kinesthetic learner, Chandra explained. She would encourage him to “literally walk in circles and say the answer over and over.” Their second is now a music major. “I would encourage her to get a rhythm to each phrase and say it the same exact way each time.” And their youngest is a visual learner—Chandra used hand motions and symbols to help her learn. Inevitably, some kids also need less oversight once you get them started, while others do best with more follow-up.

Tailoring the material to fit the needs of each child was already “the air we breathed” as homeschoolers, Chandra explained. But tailoring doesn't mean changing the goal. “Some kids will be really verbal, some less so,” Marcus observed. “But to know the truths of God's Word isn't a personality trait. Memorization goes against the grain for

some and with the grain for others, but we need to have a common denominator with regard to knowing core truths.”

The Shorter Catechism Inside Two OP Church Programs

Those core truths can be reinforced at church. Wendy and Bryce Morthland began working through the catechism during family devotions thanks to an initiative by a young couple in their church home of nine years, Covenant OPC in Tucson, Arizona. “They organized a catechism program for those that wanted to participate,” Bryce explained. Two Morthlands—Hazel and Dean—did. Every week, they would find the couple after church, hand over the card that showed which question they were working on, and recite it. If successful, that question was initialed by the couple. After a year or two, they had worked through the entire Shorter Catechism and had their names in *New Horizons*.

The program benefited more than the children. “It helped to get our family on a regular family worship time as well. We’d start by singing a hymn together, we’d do the catechism study, and then read some Scripture, and then pray together,” Bryce said. The study they worked through was Starr Meade’s *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*. Designed for daily use, each reading includes the Shorter Catechism question, a short discussion, and Scripture passages. Bryce and Wendy enjoy it as much as the kids, they said. Although it’s been years since finishing the memorization process, “we still read a question every night to keep up with it,” Bryce explained.

Throughout, they also became more convinced of the value of what they were doing. “As we were going through it, it felt more and more like our duty as parents to make sure our children understood the faith,” Wendy said.

It’s a structure that was lacking in their upbringing, Bryce pointed out—both grew up in families of Christmas-

and-Easter churchgoers.

Don Groot has a different story with the same ending. A member of Faith OPC in Elmer, New Jersey, Groot was an OP kid who found the “bones” of the theology of the catechism helpful in contrast to the more chaotic formulations of belief he heard his Christian school friends articulate. “I was so thankful to grow up in a church and home where things like the Shorter Catechism laid theology out so clearly and carefully.”

So when he started teaching Sunday school at Faith in the early 1990s, “it was a pretty easy decision to teach the catechism.”

Some of Groot’s Sunday school students are memorizing the catechism at home; others aren’t. Some churches may have students who will labor to understand the wording of the questions, let alone memorize them. Currently at Faith OPC, “most of the kids in the Sunday school are fairly knowledgeable and . . . don’t struggle too much with the language of the catechism,” Groot said.

Each week, to prepare for class, he begins by reading from G. I. Williamson’s study guide on the Shorter Catechism (P&R). From it, he formulates his own outline. Typically, in class, he’ll go over the question phrase-by-phrase and sometimes “translate” it into more accessible language. He and his students will then go through the relevant Bible verses together, work through a fill-in-the-blank and study questions, and end with application.

Groot goes through the whole Shorter Catechism for his high school class (“some seventh-graders slip in,” he admitted) every four years, interspersed with other material to give a breather or to deep-dive into a particular topic.

Inspired by the Shorty drawings in Williamson’s study guide—“everyone remembers Shorty!” Groot laughed—he draws his own cartoon characters for the

class to illustrate a point. “Because those drawings are silly and bad, in some sense it helped them to remember the lesson,” he said.

When Groot asked his current class for feedback, the students told him that they appreciated how the Shorter Catechism helps them to understand what the Reformed faith is all about. “They hear [Reformed teaching] at home, they hear it in sermons, but the catechism questions help to reinforce.”

The Value of the Shorter Catechism

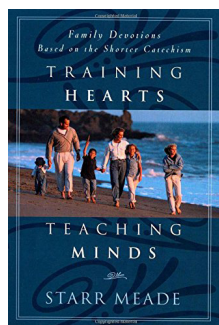
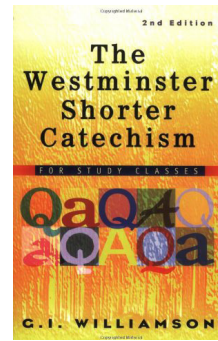
Groot’s students aren’t the only ones benefiting from the class. “I always tell the kids that I learn more than I’m teaching,” Groot said. “It’s humbling to go through the catechism because you understand who God is, how great he is, what he’s done for us. That’s always been the thing about the Reformed faith; it’s humbling when we recognize our standing with God as sinners and what he’s done for us.”

That recognition is what Groot doesn’t want Reformed churches to lose. It’s why he teaches the Shorter Catechism.

Nobody’s kids understand all the answers in the catechism, Marcus pointed out. But the practice of learning it teaches kids to be “faithful, regular, and committed.” Then, later, the phrases they’ve learned may bear fruit in an “aha” moment.

Just last week at supper, they were talking about the Lord’s guidance and what “Thy will be done” really means. So with some self-aware pomp, Marcus asked, “Which of my children can remember, ‘What is prayer?’” They all did: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies”—and that answer led the rest of their conversation. □

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.



A DOCTRINAL ROAD MAP



GREGORY E. REYNOLDS // In my first pastorate in New Rochelle, New York, I was thrilled to discover Hagstrom’s maps of the five boroughs of New York City and Westchester County. They saved countless hours of driving and prevented me from ending up lost in one of the dangerous parts of the metropolitan area. Best of

all, they helped me to become familiar with the fascinating place in which we lived.

Discovering the Westminster Confession and Catechisms was even more thrilling. With this accurate Bible map, I became familiar with the terrain, avoided getting lost, and learned to be at home with the complex and wonderful world of the Bible.

I often hear this expressed by Christians: “I want to listen to what God says, not the words of men.” This is tantamount to saying, “I do not need a map. I can find my own way.” But, while this stance may first appear to be humble, it is actually supremely arrogant. The Reformed Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon, who retained many of the Presbyterian instincts with which he was raised, had a sharp answer to people of this ilk:

Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scriptures without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who

have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd that certain men who talk so much about what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves should think so little of what He has revealed to others. (*Commenting and Commentaries*, 1)

When Washington’s troops built their fortifications in Brooklyn, he insisted that they explore the terrain before battle in order to be surefooted during the rapid movements required in battle. Likewise, catechizing should be a chief concern of the church militant.

Catechizing in Scripture

The concept of catechizing is found in many places in Scripture, even where the word itself is not used. The leaders of God’s people have been given the task of forming the thinking and living

of the church. Therefore, the religion of the covenant of grace has always been a religion of the catechism. In Genesis 18:19, the Lord said of Abraham, “I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice.” Catechizing is the way of guarding and keeping the church in the way. In the Shema, we have an old covenant command to catechize:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut. 6:4–7)

An example of this kind of old covenant catechizing is Psalm 119, struc-

tured as an alphabetic acrostic based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet to aid in memorizing. Catechizing continues in the New Testament. Paul describes his fellow Jews as those who “know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law” (Rom. 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 14:19, Gal. 6:6).

In our congregation we teach our young people that when it comes to biblical truth, dogs and cats get along: the certainties of historic Christian faith, known as *dogmas*, are formed in us by the process of *catechizing*. Of course, memorizing is only the beginning of spiritual formation, but it is an essential ingredient. As Paul tells Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). We could translate the phrase “pattern of the sound words” as “standard of healthy doctrines.” The specific form, as well as the systematic relationship, of sound teaching is crucial to biblical discipleship.

The actual word “catechize”—as well as the idea of catechism—is also found in Scripture. Luke told Theophilus that he wrote the gospel to catechize Theophilus: “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). The Greek verb for “taught” is *katēcheō*, from which we derive our English word catechize, literally “to sound a thing in one’s ears, impressing it upon one by word of mouth” (Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*). “The things” are literally “the word” (Luke 1:2, 4), that is, the doctrines, the truths. The question-and-answer format is a time-tested way of achieving this end. One of the central tasks of the church is to inculcate the truth through oral instruction. *Inculcate* means “to impress upon the mind by frequent repetition or persistent urging” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*). The passive voice in the verb “taught” indicates that Theophilus did not seclude himself to privately study the Bible but humbled himself under the teaching of the church. The ancient

church continued this apostolic tradition in preparing new converts to publicly profess their faith in Christ. They were appropriately referred to as “catechumens.”

An odd usage of the word “catechize” is “to charm or fascinate” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This is precisely what the church seeks to do with what is memorized: to show how utterly charming and delightful is the truth of God’s Word as, start-to-finish, it reveals his amazing grace. To teach God’s accomplishment and application of our redemption in Jesus Christ is to captivate us, molding our hearts and lives with God’s truth. This became the all-consuming task and passion of Apollos as Luke describes him in Acts 18:25: “[This man] had been instructed [catechized] in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.”

Traveling with a Map

The doctrinal map helps us find our way. Many are concerned that an extensive written statement of faith like the Westminster Confession, and its teaching instruments the Catechisms, will undermine the authority of the Bible. Actually, confessions and catechisms help us to appreciate the Bible more. Without them, the Bible becomes either a closed book or a seriously misunderstood book.

Just as no one confuses a map with the reality of the terrain it depicts, so we understand that catechism is not a stand-alone source of truth but a help for us to understand the terrain of the Bible itself. Reading the Bible confirms the terrain, just as traveling confirms the accuracy of a map. A map tells us what to look for and keeps us from getting lost. “Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way” (Prov. 19:2). Learn the map, and you will find your way. Forsake it, and you will soon be lost.

One of the reasons the church is presently filled with so much error is that she has forgotten her past. She

has lost the map and is floundering in dark and dangerous places. We are fortified with true doctrine “that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14). The ancient church struggled with much doctrinal error. It took centuries to develop sound theology after the New Testament record was completed. Eventually the church fleshed out a very important segment of the doctrinal map by defining the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. The authors of our confession and catechisms relied heavily on these formulations. It is dangerous and foolhardy to travel as pilgrims without the map our forefathers have labored so arduously to provide.

The doctrinal map helps us to make spiritual progress individually and corporately. Without a good map, we make our own way very slowly, if at all. Imagine moving into a new area and refusing to buy a map, while insisting on making your own. Each time you went out to explore, you would add to and revise your map. Your progress would be painfully slow.

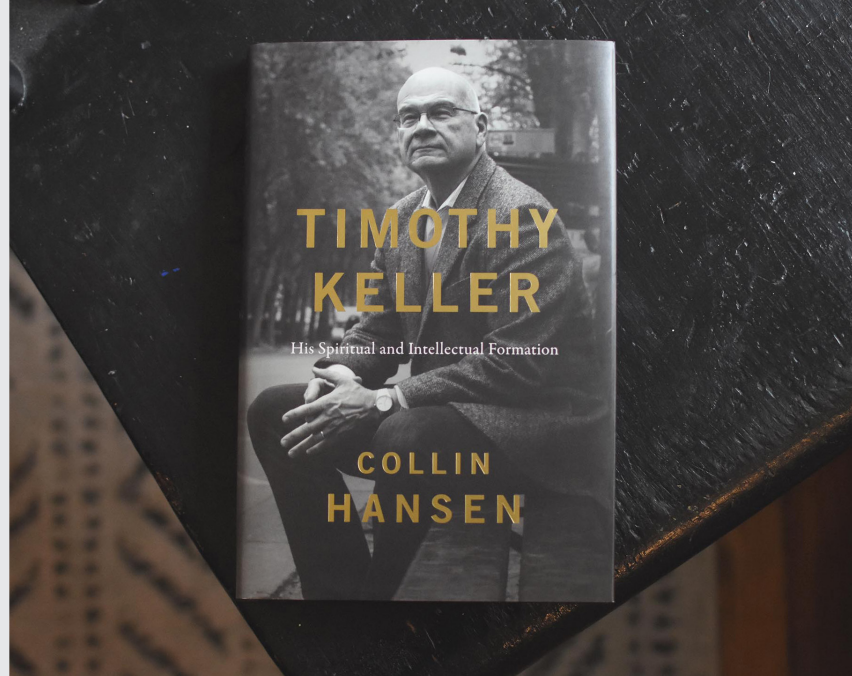
But with a good map, the wisdom of others helps us make quicker, and more importantly, *better*, progress. Confession writers throughout church history are like biblical cartographers. Their collective wisdom, tested and verified over the centuries, is an accurate, systematic guide to the teaching of the Bible. American Christians often sound like Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason* (1794–1795) who once proclaimed that his only church was his own mind. But, as Presbyterians, the catechisms should be ringing in our ears.

To ensure safe and profitable travel through the terrain of Scripture, ministers and elders should be fostering the time-honored practice of catechizing in our congregations. □

The author is an OP minister and the editor of Ordained Servant. A version of this article was originally published in Ordained Servant 16 (2007).

REVIEW: COLLIN HANSEN'S *TIMOTHY KELLER*

// JOHN R. MUETHER



Tim Keller, who passed away in May after a long battle with cancer, was a best-selling author, cofounder of The Gospel Coalition, and most well-known for his nearly thirty-year tenure as the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Manhattan. Collin Hansen's biography focuses on the theological formation of this remarkable ministry. It comes as no surprise to encounter key evangelical institutions in the story, including Young Life, InterVarsity Fellowship, Urbana Missions Conference, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Valley Study Center.

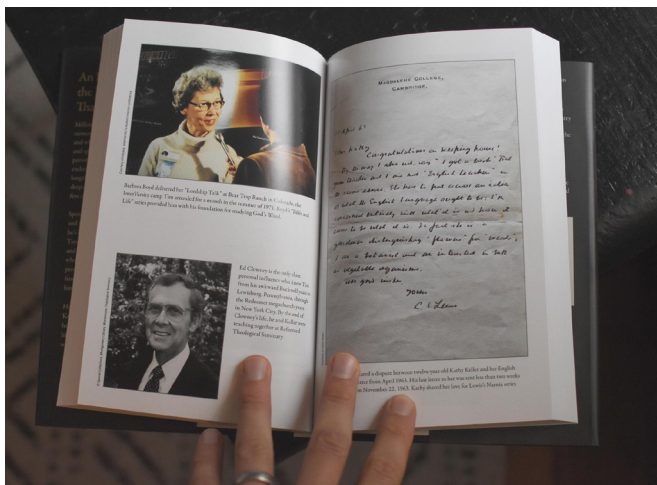
Keller's Mentors

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is not in the index, but it should be. What is striking about the narrative is the extent to which Keller is the product of OPC mentors. His introduction to covenant theology came from six courses under Meredith Kline (more than any other instructor) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS). Edmund

Clowney's Staley lectures that he delivered at GCTS in 1973 so reoriented Keller's views on preaching that he formed the "Edmund P. Clowney Fan Club" with classmates. It was also as a seminary student that Keller embraced the counseling approach of Jay Adams, though later he grew to appreciate the nuances of Adams's successors at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (295).

When Keller came to Westminster Theological Seminary—first as a Doctor of Ministry student while in his first pastorate in Virginia and later to join the practical theology faculty—he fell under the influence of two more Orthodox Presbyterians: Harvie Conn, professor of apologetics and missions, and Jack Miller, pastor of (then OPC) New Life Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. Granted, Miller and his church would reaffiliate into the PCA, and Clowney himself would enjoy a long ministry in the PCA after his retirement from Westminster. Still, these were all mentors of Keller *while* OPC ministers.

Keller's approach to ministry of Redeemer Presbyterian Church was a combination especially of the influence of Clowney, Conn, and Miller. Keller appreciated the shift at Westminster under Clowney's presidency from "a clenched fist to a bowed head" (149). Conn furnished him with the tools for urban ministry, and Miller demonstrated how "gospel renewal applied to social justice, worship, evangelism, and missions" (165). This intellectual formation shaped his appreciation for the pietist, doctrinalist, and culturalist dimensions of the Reformed faith (a taxonomy he was fond of employing to explain the makeup of the PCA). But later in his ministry, Keller leaned on the culturalist, to the point of identifying himself as a Neo-Calvinist. Hansen unhelpfully employs that expression so elastically as to include Louis Berkhof, Francis Schaeffer, and Cornelius Van Til, none of whom were spokesmen for that school. Keller commended presuppositional apologetics as especially effective for ministry after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (235), though he deemed



Van Til too antithetical and preferred the greater stress on common grace in Herman Bavinck.

A Gifted Synthesizer

Hansen asserts, rightly I believe, that in the “theological smorgasbord” of GCTS, Keller graduated with his theological convictions fairly established. But he understates matters when he adds, “Keller didn’t do anything more than tweak some of these views after 1975” (103). He goes on to describe the insatiable reading habits of a lifelong learner, through which Keller’s views were refined and deepened, from Hopewell, Virginia, to Westminster, and then Manhattan. Hansen particularly appears to underestimate the effect of Keller’s “Dogwood Fellowship” gatherings with sociologist James Hunter, whose “faithful witness” approach to Christian social engagement seemed to temper Keller’s rhetoric of cultural influence. This may explain why the biography conveys less emphasis on themes prominent in the early years of Keller’s ministry, such as kingdom-building and transformationalism.

If Keller was correct in his self-assessment that he was not an original thinker (121), Hansen counters that he was an uncommonly gifted “synthesizer” (85). He excelled in distilling ideas and communicating effectively to his congregation, his readers, and to religious skeptics (265). That is reason enough to commend this book, especially to ministers and ministerial candidates.

The author is OPC historian and professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Photos courtesy of Westminster Bookstore.

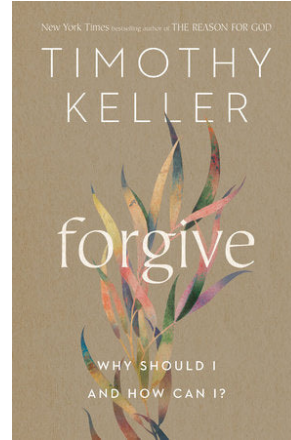
Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation, by Collin Hansen. Zondervan, 2023. Hardcover, 320 pages, \$17.99 (Amazon).

REVIEW: TIMOTHY KELLER’S FORGIVE: WHY SHOULD I AND HOW CAN I?

Danny E. Olinger

Presbyterian Church in America pastor Timothy Keller’s death on May 19 has brought a wave of remembrances in publications that typically do not note the passing of a Bible-believing Calvinist. In *The Wall Street Journal*, Kate Odell argued that Keller built a congregation of orthodox Christians in New York City by speaking plainly of sin and grace. In *The New York Times*, David Brooks, who testified that Keller taught him the joy of the gospel, called Keller one of the most important theologians and greatest preachers of our times. While living, Keller lamented that his fame following the publication of *Reason for God* in 2008 had taken away op-

portunities for interaction with people, which was an aspect of pastoring that he had truly enjoyed. I tried a time or two as editor to have Keller write for *New Horizons*, but I could never break through his office staff even to get a personal rejection. Perhaps that is why I haven’t become an avid reader of Keller, but *Forgive*—his final book, which he wrote during COVID while suffering from Stage 4 pancreatic cancer—is a timely and thought-provoking book that also happens to be refreshingly biblical.



Keller opens the book acknowledging that many believe today that granting forgiveness to others translates into an inability to hold perpetrators of injustice accountable for their behavior. That is, forgiveness is seen as a way that abusive people maintain power over others. Even when forgiveness is extended, Keller notes it is often exercised according to deficient approaches. There is pressure to nonconditionally forgive, a “cheap grace” approach whereby the relationship between abusers and the abused remains unchanged; there is pressure to forgive transactionally, a “little grace” approach whereby forgiveness must be earned; there is pressure to forgive not at all, a “no grace” approach.

What Keller advocates is the “costly grace” approach of the Bible that is grounded in Jesus’s costly sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. It reminds us that we are sinners in need of mercy, and yet it fills our hearts with love and makes it possible for us to bear the cost of forgiving others. At the same time, the cross makes it possible for God to forgive us without compromising his justice. God is wrathful, God is loving, and both are fulfilled at once on the cross.

Keller argues that America’s “shame-and-honor” culture (“its new secular religion”) has greatly impoverished the practice of forgiveness. Individuals are encouraged to demand respect and affirmation of their identity, which means they must break free from the oppression that comes from the structure, roles, and expectations of society. Greater honor and moral virtue are granted to those deemed to be the lowest on the existing social ladder. Consequently, “shame-and-honor” or “cancel culture” thinking creates a mindset in society where forgiveness is seen as radically unjust and impractical; it short-circuits the ability of victims to gain honor and virtue as others rise to defend them.

Keller turns to a literary example from the past, Franz Kafka, to illustrate the emptiness and despair of such a mindset, and a real-life example from the present, Rachael Denhollander, to show that justice and forgiveness can go together. In Kafka’s 1915 book, *The Trial*, the main character, Josef K., is indicted, arrested, interrogated, and finally killed

without ever knowing his crime. For the reader, there seems to be no point. But, according to Keller (following John Updike), Kafka's goal is to expose modern thinking: a sensation of anxiety and shame whose center cannot be located and therefore cannot be placated. Keller explained,

Modern culture has done everything to say: "We don't believe in God. We don't believe in heaven. We don't believe in hell. We don't believe in moral categories." Kafka says it hasn't helped. If anything, it has made it worse—because our guilt now can't be eradicated. (124)

In her 2019 book, *What Is a Girl Worth?* Rachael Denhollander recounts her mental wrestling in light of the abuse she suffered from physician Larry Nassar. As a Christian, she wanted to forgive, but she did not want her forgiveness to be used to say something terrible hadn't happened. Keller cites Denhollander's words in the courtroom to Nassar:

I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so that you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me, though I extend that to you as well. (99)

In Keller's judgment, there is no future without forgiveness. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are essential to foster and maintain community. But, particularly, both are essential in the church. The church is a foretaste of the heavenly world of love and community under the lordship of Jesus. Believers must forgive others even when suffering. Such strength doesn't come from within us; it comes only from being joined to Jesus Christ by faith. According to Keller, the enduring lesson of the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21–35 is this: "it is only when we see a King acting as a servant voluntarily for our sake that we servants will stop acting like little kings and judges" (196).

The author is editor of New Horizons.

Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I? by Timothy Keller. Viking, 2022. Hardcover, 272 pages, \$24.30 (Amazon).

🗨️ Out of the Mouth . . .

At a recent worship service, our pastor read aloud the Ten Commandments. After hearing the tenth, my five-year-old son leaned over and whispered, "But Mom, none of our neighbors have an ox or a donkey or a manservant or a maidservant."

—Michele Martzke
Wheaton, IL

Note: If you have an example of the humorous "wisdom" that can come from children, please send it to the editor.

ON READING OLD BOOKS

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

THE CHURCH OF GOD

BY STUART ROBINSON

For a succinct introduction to a Reformed view of the church, one could hardly do better than *The Church of God: As An Essential Element of the Gospel* by Stuart Robinson (1841–1881). Robinson, an Irishman by birth, was educated at Amherst College and trained for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister and served pastorates in the western mountains of Virginia and eventually in Louisville, Kentucky. He also taught at the Presbyterian Seminary in Danville, Kentucky.

The Church of God, a sterling work of brevity, benefits from the fact that Robinson saw the church in light of the big picture—as God sees it—from all eternity in the covenant of redemption. This ideal perspective inevitably led Robinson to stress the centrality of Christ in the doctrine of the church. Christ was given a charge from eternity, and he was given a people to save from eternity. As Professor John Murray put it, we should not think of the church apart from Christ, and "we cannot think of Christ properly apart from the church" (*The Collected Writings of John Murray*, Banner of Truth, vol. 1:238). An inseparable relationship persists between the two.

Robinson expounds how Christ fulfills the covenant of redemption by building his church, as he calls out of the world all those given to him by the Father (John 17:2, 6, 9, 24). As long as Christ continues to carry out his work as prophet, priest, and king for his church, she continues to be an "essential element" of the gospel. She is an organic body in union with her head. For Robinson, this means that Christ is actively involved in his church—present in and ministering to his church through the officers, orders, and ordinances he has provided for her health, strength, and safekeeping.

—A. Craig Troxel

☆ Congratulations

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

- **Caleb Stevens**, *Covenant OPC, Coeur d'Alene, ID*

EIGHT MONTHS IN MONTEVIDEO

// STEPHEN S. PAYSON



Uruguayans characterize life in their country as “tranqui”

As I sit down to write this article, it is a beautiful fall day here in Montevideo in early May. The sky outside my window is perfectly blue, and the leaves are turning yellow throughout the city, gently falling on the sidewalks and busy streets of the capital of Uruguay. A steady stream of buses, taxis, cars, and motorcycles, each hurrying to its intended destination, parade by our apartment building, as they do pretty much every day of the week, most days of the year. On any given day, most Uruguayans outwardly characterize life here in their small but beautiful country as *tranqui*—that is, tranquil, and the usual greeting is, “*Todo bien?*” . . . to which the expected response is, “*Si, todo bien*”—meaning, “Yes, everything’s good.” Even though Catalina and I have been here for only eight months, it hasn’t taken long for us to adopt the customary way of greeting others as the Uruguayans do.

But as a Christian and, now, as an OPC missionary to this lovely country nestled between Brazil and Argentina, I know that not everything here in Uruguay is *tranqui*. In fact, despite all the relative economic stability, the lovely beaches and coastline, and the general warmth and friendliness that characterize the people here, there is in Uruguay, just as there is in every country in the world, a pervasive spiritual darkness that overshadows the souls of its citizenry and makes those who live here slaves to sin and children of wrath. Most people in Uruguay would freely acknowledge that their country is *laico*, meaning secular or “non-religious,” and is intentionally so. For example, Christmas is officially called “Family Day” and “Holy Week” is now celebrated as

“Tourism Week.” Whereas most of Latin America has been religiously and culturally influenced by the Roman Catholic Church and, to a diminishing degree, remains so, this is far less true in Uruguay. For example, the traditional, forty-day period of self-denial leading up to Easter that characterizes the Catholic observance of Lent has been culturally replaced in Uruguay by forty days of “Mardi Gras,” a much-anticipated time of frivolity, drumming, dancing, and musical theatricals called *murga*, colorful and satirical depictions of Uruguayan political and cultural life.

The Hunger for Unseen Spiritual Reality

This does not mean, however, that people here are not “religious” in the way that all the fallen children of Adam are by nature:

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Rom. 1:21, 25)

Walking around the streets of Montevideo, one will find ubiquitous signs advertising “tarot,” “astrology,” “philosophy,” and “alchemy” as the various means of putting people in touch with the unseen spiritual realities which, in turn, offer (for a price) hope, prosperity, inner fulfillment, and guidance for one’s future. Historically, there has been an ongoing fascination in Uruguay with alchemy, which is characterized as a psycho-spiritual “philosophy” and “proto-science” that aims to transmute



“Tarot: The best option for clearing up doubts. It is not religion.”

the archetypes of the human psyche, the powers of the natural world, and the hidden forces of the spiritual realm into elixirs for extending life, for healing, and for transforming the self and its environment. In Montevideo, there is even a museum dedicated to alchemy's presence and influence in Uruguay.

Within the past two decades, abortion, same-sex marriage, and the legalization of marijuana have all been proudly embraced by the ruling principalities and powers of Uruguay, as they have been in many nations of the world, including the United States. According to *Operation World*, a prayer guide to the nations, "Uruguay's rates of depression, suicide, abortion, and divorce are some of the highest on the continent" (www.operationworld.org). And, as in many cities, homelessness and addiction are pervasive here in Montevideo, as well as the hopelessness and meaninglessness which both underlie and accompany these devastating social ills.

The Worship of the Church

But amid all these oppressive realities here in Uruguay, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is present too, declaring "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17) as the kingdom of God is proclaimed every Lord's Day like light shining in the spiritual darkness. This has been one of the heartening things that Catalina and I have witnessed during our initial months here in secular Uruguay, that our Lord Jesus is still saying to his people, as he did to Paul in Corinth, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you . . . for I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:9-10). Amen! Christ our King has many in Montevideo, and he continues to add to their number day by day those who are being saved (see Acts 2:47).

Even though Uruguay has been characterized in the past as "the graveyard of missionaries," we have found that there are many pockets of evangelical believers, at least two evangelical seminaries or Bible schools, and, yes, a good number of foreign missionaries, not just from the United States but also from Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia. At another mission's



The author leading a service at Salvos Por Gracia

Bible Church, which we sometimes visit on Sunday mornings, to our joy we have found the Scriptures preached clearly to people hungry for the life-changing gospel of Christ.

We have especially found that same hunger for the Word of God at Salvos Por Gracia, the OPC's mission church begun seven years ago, where we now minister and worship every Lord's Day evening. Here too the light of Christ shines over against the empty and demonic spiritual darkness of Uruguay. Here we find the vibrant faith of those whose eyes and hearts, like our own, have been opened to "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Together with these precious Uruguayan saints, we have come to participate in the worldwide mission of Christ to open the eyes of those who still "by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18) and know in their hearts that life is not *todo bien*. We proclaim this so "that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith" in King Jesus (Acts 26:18).

The author is a missionary in Montevideo, Uruguay.



Stephen and Catalina Payson



A small group study at Salvos Por Gracia

What's New

// Appointments

Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel L. (Elisabeth) Bloechl (Covenant Presbyterian, in Hammond, Wisconsin) have been appointed to serve as missionary associates with the OPC Uganda Mission in Mbale. They and their three children, Jane (4), Isaiah (2), and Abraham (8 mos.), will arrive in mid-July, when Nathaniel, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota, will begin his labors as a missionary intern.

WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT?

// WILLIAM SHISHKO



The Haven's new church building, purchased through God's providence

On May 24, 1844, the Baltimore-Washington telegraph line officially opened. The first message transmitted by Morse code was four words from Numbers 23:23: “What hath God wrought?” Samuel Morse, inventor of the single-wire telegraph system, was a devout Christian, and to the end of his life he marveled at what he saw as God’s provision of this gift to mankind.

“What hath God wrought?” also perfectly describes how those who are part of The Haven at Commack, an OP mission work, marvel at God’s provision of a church facility in the northwest corner of Suffolk County, Long Island, New York—a wealthy, expensive, populous, and gospel-starved portion of the Lord’s vineyard.

The Haven’s Origin Story

What would become The Haven at Commack began on Sunday afternoons in January 2019 as a time of singing, Bible study, and prayer. The home gatherings of about thirty people were vibrant, and, right from the outset, there was a desire to start an Orthodox Presbyterian Church that would be a haven to those in need. Psalm 107:30 became and remains our theme text. As the weary and fearful experience the storms of life, “. . . they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.” The great Haven, Jesus Christ, and the “halfway house” of the church are portals to the consummate haven of heaven.

From this beginning, the Lord continued to grant his perfect provision. From April

2019 through March 2020, we were able to use the beautiful sanctuary of a Lutheran church in Deer Park. Then, during the COVID-19 lockdown, we were blessed with the use of the OPC facility in Bohemia, New York (the only other OPC in Suffolk County).

However, we wanted our own facility so that we could have a place of physical presence in the community and meet on the Lord’s Day for a more traditional time of morning worship, Bible School, and fellowship. We prayed earnestly that we would be able to purchase a suitable facility in Deer Park (in central western Suffolk County on a main north/south thoroughfare).

But the Lord had a different plan. And a far better one.

Perfect Provision

In October 2021, we learned of a church facility in Commack that might be available to us. This information came from a man who, three decades before, had been converted while living in a pipe on that church’s property. Through him, we arranged a meeting between our three officers and the remaining three officers of the Cleft of the Rock Bible Chapel, a Brethren congregation that had known rich blessings on its

labors in decades past but had declined to only a handful of congregants. The officers had become weary of maintaining the building.

That Thursday evening meeting was one of the most remarkable times of my ministerial life. For three hours, we discussed the doctrinal views and ministry commitments of both the Chapel and The Haven. Each of the Chapel elders had been influenced



Shisko leading worship inside the new building

by the Reformed faith through ministries like Desiring God and Ligonier, and also by the *Reformation Study Bible*. Our commitments to the final authority of Scripture, worship regulated by the Word of God, weekly communion, the means of grace as the means by which Christ builds his church, and the Great Commission as *the* commission of the church were identical! By the end of our meeting we all were saying to ourselves, *What hath God wrought?* The officers of the Chapel were close to simply *giving* us the church facility with its three-bedroom apartment upstairs and space for another apartment, all on nearly two acres of land on one of the most well-traveled portions of highway in that part of Suffolk County. However, the Chapel was providing support for a number of missionaries, and our officers wanted the Chapel to continue that provision. We suggested that the Chapel officers agree on an amount which would enable them to do that through a trust. If the amount was reasonable for the small Haven congregation, we would be thrilled to purchase the property.

We waited, and we prayed.

Less than two weeks later, the head elder of the Chapel contacted me and asked if \$425,000 would be acceptable to us. I wanted to shout like a Pentecostal, but Orthodox Presbyterian ministers usually don't do that, so I said quietly, "That would be fine."

The Lord continued to show us his wonderful work over the next few months. We were able to get a loan from the OPC Loan Fund. We closed on the property on March 30, 2022. The next month, crews began doing renovations of the entire facility under the leadership of a Haven member and construction company co-owner. Over five months, the entire facility for our worship and meetings—and parking to accommodate those attending—was transformed. And, through generous Haven members and friends, gifts came in for the purchase of one hundred beautiful and comfortable chairs to replace the aged pews, new Bibles and *Trinity Psalter Hymnals*, and playground equipment for our spacious backyard area. Each week we marveled at the gift the Lord was giving us. "*What hath God wrought?*"

Seeing the Spirit Work

Our 2022 inaugural worship service was on Sunday, September 11—a day that is particularly solemn for those of



Construction work in process at one of the apartments

us in the metropolitan New York area who will never forget the destruction of the Twin Towers and the loss of over three thousand lives as a result of the terrorist attacks twenty-one years before. But what better time to proclaim Jesus Christ, the great Haven for those in distress? What a thrilling day that was as the parking lot was nearly full and the sanctuary alive with vibrant worship of our sovereign Lord.

From this first day of our meeting as The Haven at Commack, we have enjoyed the Lord's presence and power as we gather on the Lord's Day for worship, Sunday Seminary, classes for younger ones, and food and fellowship. The experience is very much like that described in Acts 2:42–47; and Haven members and visitors have even made that observation. Our great encouragement is that, in such a Spirit-filled environment, "the Lord added to their number . . . those who were being saved." We are seeing that, and we pray to see even more!

Though we are a small congregation, we are blessed to be part of the *big picture* of the Great Commission. We minister to two Haven members who are incarcerated in different correctional facilities in New York State. Both came to us through our presbytery's radio ministry, "A Visit to the Pastor's Study," when it was aired on the Redeemer Broadcasting network. We have also been able to assist the house churches in Iran. And one of our Haven members is on the front lines of assisting churches in dealing with domestic abuse. Amazingly, that's just a portion of the ways this "forward operating base" in Commack is privileged to serve the kingdom of God.

Pray for us! Suffolk County in Long Island, New York, is a challenging mission field. But pray for the Lord to change hearts and turn self-centered sinners into God-centered saints. And pray that, as we look at what God has done with The Haven at Commack thus far, we will not lose our awe of what God hath wrought.

The author is pastor of The Haven at Commack in Commack, New York.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by subscribing at CHMCE.org or scanning this QR code.



THE OBADIAH FUND: "BREAD" FOR MINISTERS

// JOHN A. HARTLEY



Where did Obadiah find all that bread? It is a fair question but certainly not the point of Scripture's brief yet dense testimony to one man's faith, love, and courage: "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:3–4).

The Spirit wants us to notice Obadiah. In dark times, he shined in the care and keeping of the Lord's prophets. We must not look away from men of such honorable priorities. By God's grace, the OPC has not.

Meeting Ministers in Need

Several years ago, through a generous donation, a fund was established to meet the needs of retired OPC ministers and their widows. Each year the Committee on Ministerial Care makes a general disbursement from the fund to each eligible beneficiary. It is one way our retired ministers and their widows taste and see that the Lord is good. Each year the fund also makes needs-based disbursements in coordination with the presbyteries of eligible individuals.

But where does Obadiah find all that bread?

Did Obadiah use King Ahab's kitchen? Did he have fifty obscure friends harvesting wheat and grinding flour and baking bread to feed a hundred prophets? Did he just have twenty such friends? Just five? Did he bake that bread himself? That we do not know is the point. Obadiah took the frontline risk, but there were likely many unseen hands making the work light.

Obscure Friends and Unseen Hands

Obscure friends and unseen hands are what is needed for the sustainability of the OPC's Obadiah Fund. The Committee on Ministerial Care will continue to make disbursements,

but the fund is not limitless. For this reason, we are inviting obscure friends and unseen hands, fifty or five, to extend the work of the Obadiah Fund.

It is certainly true that planning can reduce many hardships for a retired minister and his widow. The Lord does not oppose the planner. This is why the Committee on Ministerial Care has dedicated significant resources to help working pastors prepare for retirement. One of our newest is Financial Aid and Retirement Evaluation (FARE), a partnership with Ron Blue Trust to provide a discreet financial and retirement evaluation. It is like a tailored suit for retirement readiness. Learn more at opccmc.org.

But as Scottish poet Robert Burns famously wrote, "Even the best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry." Not all the prophets hidden by Obadiah could bring their own bread. Bad planning is not the explanation for every need. As James pointedly says, "You do not know what tomorrow will bring" (James 4:14). At times it is even the Lord's will that we do not make a profit.

This is especially why the Lord has given our church the Obadiah Fund. It is a testimony to the greatness of his kingdom and wideness of his mercy—a testimony he often prefers to that of making every member of the body healthy, wealthy, and without need.

The Lord would have us all take notice and look inside Obadiah's cave. There we see a foretaste of the rule of the King who came that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

Would you like to be an obscure friend, one of the unseen hands helping our Obadiah Fund? You can give directly online at give.opc.org/ministerial-care-detail/obadiah-contribution. Or contact Rev. John Fikkert, director of the Committee on Ministerial Care, at john.fikkert@opc.org.

The author is pastor of Apple Valley Presbyterian in Neenah, Wisconsin, and member of the CMC.

JULY



The Jacksons (day 2)

-
- 1** **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for a fruitful and safe English camp for college students and American volunteers. / **JEREMY & GWEN BAKER**, Yuma, AZ. Pray more year-round families join Yuma OPC.
-
- 2** **TYLER & KARA JACKSON**, New Castle, IN. Pray Redemption Life Bible OPC would be faithful and eager to reach the lost. / Pray for camp volunteers and attendees of **ENGLISH FOR KIDS** in St. Georges, Quebec.
-
- 3** **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray for a new ministerial candidate and his family as he begins studies at a Reformed seminary. / Summer intern **NATHAN (HANNAH) MARQUARDT** at Westminster OPC in Hamden, CT.
-
- 4** Pray for **LACY (DEBBIE) ANDREWS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for regular Bible studies with Chinese students in the U.S. over the summer.
-
- 5** **MILLER & STEPHANIE ANSELL**, Waco, TX. Pray elders of Trinity have productive visits with families. / Stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD'S** work on the minutes and yearbook of the 89th (2023) GA.

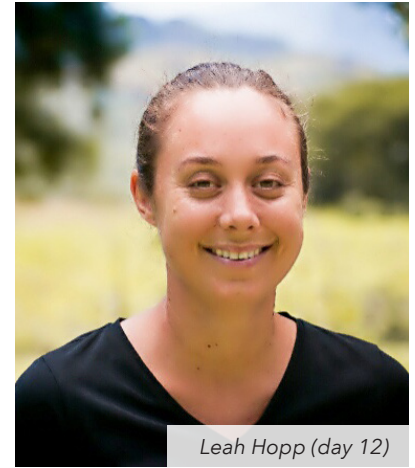
6 Pray for affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic, and **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. / Pray for **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education and editor of *New Horizons*.

7 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray the Lord provides missionary evangelists in Mbale and Karamoja. / **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray for Grace Reformed's new members class.

8 **BRAD (CINNAMON) PEPPO**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Summer intern **BRIAN (ALLISON) GROOT** at Immanuel Chapel in Upton, MA. / Database administrator **CHARLENE TIPTON**.

9 Tentmaking missionary **TINA DE-JONG**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the mission team's communication and unity. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, short-term missions coordinator. Pray for safety for short-term missions teams.

10 **MARK & LORIE WHEAT**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray Good Shepherd OPC finds a new place to worship. / Associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the mercy committee's wisdom in distributing aid for food.



Leah Hopp (day 12)

-
- 11** **JOHN & KATIE TERRELL**, Moline, MI. Pray for Living Hope OPC's summer evangelism events in their largely non-Christian community. / Summer intern **ZACH (CAROLINE) REEVES** at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.
-
- 12** Associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that her research will aid the clinic in offering better care for the region. / Pray for **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** volunteers at the English for Kids Camp in the Czech Republic.
-
- 13** Tentmaking missionary **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that visits to Nakaale church members would encourage spiritual growth. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.
-
- 14** **JOHN PAUL & CORINNE HOLLOWAY**, Manassas, VA. Pray Acacia Reformed grows in zeal for evangelism. / Summer intern **JOSEPH (MYRANDA) SCHERSCHLIGT** at Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, DE.
-
- 15** Pray for missionary associates **NATHAN & ELISABETH BLOECHL**, Mbale, Uganda, and family as Nathan begins a yearlong pastoral internship. / Pray that the **RULING ELDER** podcast would bless listeners.

JULY



The Watsons (day 17)

21 Retired missionaries **CAL & EDIE CUMMINGS**. Praise God for the months they served in Japan, enabling others to go on furlough. / Summer intern **KEVIN (CAMI) GODSEY** at Hope OPC in Grayslake, IL.

22 **MARK & CELESTE JENKINS**, Placentia, CA. Pray that outreach to the homeless would lead many to Christ. / Pray for retired missionaries **YOUNG & MARY LOU SON** as the Lord sustains them through ongoing health struggles.

23 **DAN & STACY HALLEY**, Tampa, FL. Pray God raises up officers at Bay Haven Presbyterian. / **COMMITTEE ON DIACONAL MINISTRIES** requests prayer for refugees displaced due to war, specifically those in Ukraine and Sudan.

24 Pray for retired missionaries **BRIAN & DOROTHY WINGARD** as Brian works on a 1 Kings online commentary to benefit African pastors without libraries. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

25 Pray for attendees and speaker Stephen Tracey at **MTIOPC** at Mission OPC in St. Paul, MN. / **DAVID & ASHLEIGH SCHEXNAYDER**, Scottsdale, AZ. Pray for Providence's church anniversary outreach events.

26 **CHRIS (MEGAN) HARTSHORN**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for the Port-au-Prince congregation as they prepare to hold VBS programs for local children. / Summer intern **SAM (ANNA) NESBITT** at Trinity OPC in Hatboro, PA.



The Mercados (day 29)

27 Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray the Lord provides political and economic stability for the nation. / **MARK STUMPF**, Loan Fund manager.

28 **NATE & ANNA STROM**, Sheboygan, WI. Praise God that Breakwater Church has been welcoming new visitors. / Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan.

29 **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Pray for the discipleship ministries of Heritage Presbyterian. / Summer intern **EDDIE (HILLARY) MERCADO** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

30 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for Ben's witness to two Roman Catholics preparing for priesthood. / Summer intern **JOHNATHAN (MONICA) ALLEN** at First OPC of South Holland in South Holland, IL.

31 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON** and administrative assistant **TIN LING LEE**. / Home Missions administrative assistant **ALLISON GROOT**.

16 **CHRIS BYRD**, Westfield, NJ. Pray Grace OPC is united in vision for corporate prayer. / **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray officer candidates complete training and be certified by the session.

17 Summer intern **MITCH (CALILEE) WATSON** at Trinity Presbyterian in Capistrano Beach, CA. / **OPC DISASTER RESPONSE** requests prayer for those who remain displaced as a result of the earthquakes in Turkey.

18 **STEPHEN & CATALINA PAYSON**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray God provides a gifted Latin American pastor for the mission church. / Summer intern **STEPHEN (SAGE) BYRD** at Bethel OPC in Fredericksburg, VA.

19 Pray for the care of retired missionary **GREET RIETKERK** in the Netherlands. / **A. J. (CHELSEA) MILLSAPS**, Maryville, TN, area evangelist. Pray the Lord grants evangelistic zeal to the Athens mission work.

20 **CHARLES (MARGARET) BIGGS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / **BOARDWALK CHAPEL** staff and volunteers in Wildwood, NJ.

NEWS, VIEWS & REVIEWS

CRAFT ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN VOLGA, SD

On April 18, Kelle Craft was ordained and installed as the pastor of Calvary OPC in Volga, South Dakota. Rev. Archibald Allison preached from 1 Corinthians 15; Rev. Steven Richert gave the charge to the pastor; and Rev. Richard Wynja gave the charge to the congregation.

Kelle Craft is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and served as a pastoral intern at Redeemer OPC in Dayton, Ohio. He is married to Alex, and they have two sons.



Members of Calvary OPC in Volga, SD, at the April 18 service of ordination and installation of Kelle Craft (center, with family) as its pastor

BARTLETT ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN HUGHSON, CA

On April 28, Jonathan Bartlett was ordained and installed as the new pastor at Sovereign Grace Community Church in Hughson, California. Dr. Jonathan Master preached from Matthew 28:16–20; Rev. Calvin Goligher gave the charge to the pastor; and Rev. Reid Hankins gave the charge to the congregation. Dr. Jim Lemen led in prayer.



At Bartlett's ordination: Reid Hankins, Jonathan Master, Bartlett, Wayne Forkner, Jim Lemen, and Calvin Goligher

BARNARD ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN HANOVER PARK, IL

Chris Barnard

On April 28, Chris Barnard was ordained and installed as pastor of Grace OPC in Hanover Park. John Sharpe, pastor of Calvary OPC in Tallahassee, Florida, delivered the sermon. The charge to the congregation was given by David Carnes, pastor of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian in Ft. Pierce, Florida. The charge to the minister was given by Geoff Downey, pastor of Lake Sherwood OPC



Barnard, now pastor of Grace OPC in Hanover Park, IL

in Orlando, Florida. Chris is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando and served as pastoral intern at Lake Sherwood in Orlando before moving to Illinois with his wife, Laura, and their three children.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

• On February 4, the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania granted **Ronald L. Beabout's** request to retire and named him evangelist emeritus.

• On April 28, **Jonathan J. Bartlett** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor at Sovereign Grace Community Church in Hughson, CA.

• On May 5, the Presbytery of the Southwest granted **Clarence E. Veld's** request to resign his call as pastor of Westminster OPC in Bartlesville, OK, and to dissolve the pastoral relationship.

• On May 5, the Presbytery of the Southwest granted **Todd P. Dole's** request to resign his call as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, Texas, and to dissolve the ministerial relationship.

• On May 5, the Presbytery of Southern California received **David C. Innes** from the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York.

• On May 12, **Daniel S. Schrock**, formerly the associate pastor, was installed to continue as the pastor of Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL.

• On May 24, **C. Adam Ostella** was installed as associate pastor of Covenant OPC in Brighton, MI.

• On June 2, **Filipe Schulz dos Santos** was ordained as a minister and installed as associate pastor of Trinity OPC in Hatboro, PA.

• On June 2, **Nathaniel G. Jeffries** was ordained as a minister and installed as an

evangelist of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, to labor at a church plant in King of Prussia, PA.

MILESTONES

• **Todd S. Bordow**, 60, died April 29. He pastored OP churches for twenty-five years in Washington, New Mexico, and Texas.

REVIEWS

Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing, by **Ryan T. Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctis**. Regnery, 2022. Hardcover, 256 pages, \$18.71. Reviewed by OP minister and professor **Carl R. Trueman**. [A longer version of this review first appeared at firstthings.com on August 4, 2022.]

The fall of *Roe* has proved revelatory on a number of fronts. It has exposed the pathological commitment of many feminists and Democrats to infanticide. It has demonstrated that many of those who thought Donald Trump's boorishness was the moral issue of our generation still cannot acknowledge that he did anything worthy of praise. Perhaps most surprising, it has revealed how many on both sides of the abortion debate have not thought that deeply about the real issues involved. In part, this latter point is understandable. While abortion was a constitutional right, there seemed little reason to wrestle with the issue in depth. One could be pro-life or pro-choice, but in practice this did not affect most individuals' engagement in the wider life of the nation. That is no longer the case.

In this context, Christians need to think more deeply about the issue. And that is why Anderson and DeSanctis's *Tearing Us Apart* is so valuable. In seven chapters, the book covers the damaging effect of abortion on unborn children, women and family life, equality and choice, medicine, the rule of law, politics and democracy, and media and popular culture. It is a thorough primer on the problems of a culture bent on paying the mortgage on the myth of cost-free sex by killing the most vulnerable

members of society.

One argument that has surfaced recently, even in pro-life Christian circles, is that the fall of *Roe* is not a cause for rejoicing because the problem of abortion can only be solved by changing hearts—not by changing laws. It is odd that this kind of argument is only ever applied to laws that profane progressive pieties. Further, this reasoning fails to acknowledge that laws do not stand in isolation from a society's moral imagination but are actually constituent parts of its transformation. There is little doubt that *Brown v. Board of Education* helped to shift American thinking on segregation, as *Obergefell v. Hodges* has with thinking on gay marriage. We should pray that *Dobbs* does the same on abortion.

Three chapters stand out. First, the chapter on how abortion harms equality and choice details the murky origins of our abortion culture in the eugenics movement of the twentieth century. It also highlights how abortion has disproportionately targeted babies that are female or disabled or from ethnic minorities. No, Iceland has not eliminated Down's syndrome. It has eliminated people—real people—with Down's. That is an important, and rather chilling, distinction.

Second, there is the chapter on how abortion harms medicine. The culture of abortion thrives in, and reinforces, a medical culture of therapy, not true healing. It's related to the rising acceptance of euthanasia. It is also connected to transgenderism: Planned Parenthood now operates over two hundred centers offering trans hormone therapy. This makes perfect sense as abortion is predicated on personal autonomy and wages war against the perceived tyranny of biology.

Third, the chapter on politics gives a fascinating account of the evolution of the Democratic party on the issue. As left-wing pro-life advocate Nat Hentoff commented many years ago, it is perverse for the party of the underdog to be so committed to killing society's most vulnerable, but that is where we are.

Will the book persuade any pro-abortionists to change their position? In terms of its underlying argument, probably not.

But people also think intuitively, and intuitions are not primarily shaped by facts or even by self-conscious philosophical frameworks but by stories. That is why the minuscule number of abortions sought by victims of rape and incest has become the dominant storyline of the pro-abortion lobby. We too need stories to make the facts and framework of the pro-life cause come alive in the imaginations of the people who will be casting votes on this issue in the next few years. This book provides them.

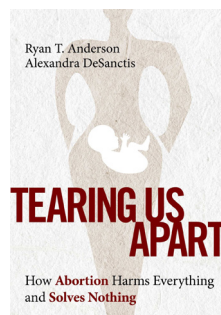
Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor with the Gospel, by **A. S. Ibrahim**. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 176 pages, \$12.98 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP ruling elder **Ashraf Guirgues**.

Growing up a Christian in the Middle East afforded me a unique perspective of the Muslim world. Muslims are not all the same but rather diverse in their views on Mohammed, the Quran, and adherence to Islam. Doctor Ibrahim, author of *Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor with the Gospel*, approaches evangelism to Muslims in the Western world with a depth of understanding that comes from living and growing up in the Middle East.

The first half of this book deals with the varieties of Muslims that will be encountered. The second half deals with the tools needed for carrying out evangelism. The book has an underlying focus on a Christ-centered approach to evangelism.

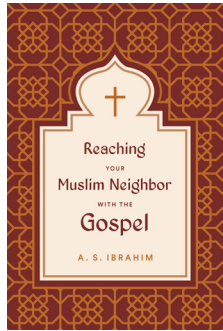
The author's attention to the three varieties of Muslims is unique in evangelistic literature addressing Islam and Muslims. The examples given are helpful in clarifying potential opportunities and pitfalls in beginning a relationship or a discussion with Muslim acquaintances. The stories told to illustrate various scenarios are clear and should be relatable even to those who have never lived in the Middle East.

Whether stateside or abroad, the author declares clearly that regardless of how persuasive and friendly we are it is God who does the work of conversion. "No matter how smart, educated, and skillful Christians are in terms of theological argumentation and gospel proclamation, the only one who is able to persuade Muslims is the Holy Spirit." Prayer is presented as being even more



important than the words we speak.

The methods suggested and described are helpful but even more practical is the portrayal of common pitfalls that may be faced in the process of evangelism. The reverence that Muslims afford Muhammad as the final prophet of Allah and the Quran as his dictated word are often obstacles to proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation. The author suggests utilizing the Bible to elevate the discussion with Muslims without getting bogged down with comparisons between Jesus and Muhammad. It is



also noteworthy that presenting the gospel message does often require us to show that there is a price for following our Savior.

Although the author may not be Reformed as far as his view of soteriology, he sees the sovereignty of God as an essential component of successful evangelism. This focus drives his discussion of the tools and methods that we have at our disposal in the Word of God. The love that God has for the lost, including Muslims, should be matched by our zeal for evangelism. These image-bearers marching on the path to desolation should break our hearts and fill our prayers with pleading to our heavenly Father to bring them to himself and to use us.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book as a practical volume on evangelism to Muslims. It is concise and God-honoring in dealing with a complicated topic.

***The StoryChanger: How God Rewrites Our Story by Inviting Us into His (An Introduction)*, by David Murray. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 128 pages, \$12.66 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Z. Bulut Yasar.**

C. S. Lewis, in the second book of his Space Trilogy, *Perelandra*, writes himself into the story as the friend of Ransom, the main character, and plays a crucial role in the great battle. It is widely believed that Rembrandt put himself into

his paintings to reflect and capture the mood of his scenes, as in *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*. In her popular *Lord Peter Wimsey* mystery novel series and short stories, Dorothy Sayers writes herself into the plot as Harriet Vane, who marries Lord Peter and helps him solve mysteries. Each author and painter steps into the story to bring about a desired outcome, to change the narrative, and to help the plot move forward positively. Yet all of them remain mere pointers as they push us toward the greatest story, into which the Author truly entered and changed the plot forever: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

In the first three chapters, Murray shows how our stories are messy and filled with sadness and sorrow. In the beginning it was not so. In fact, in the garden hill of God there was joy, friendship, true satisfaction, and intimate communion with the Creator. But all this changed through the temptation of the villain who deceived Adam and Eve and made them and all humanity villains in our story. And as Murray points out in the fourth chapter by taking us to the story of the Samaritan woman, we have been trying to rewrite, renew, and change our narrative ever since. But anything we try to attach ourselves to for a better story, for a more glorious plot, turns out to be the efforts of a failed ghost writer who is incapable of bringing about a change in our storylines. In the next four chapters, Murray explains that Jesus is the only true “StoryChanger” who can cosmically change our story and even transform us inside out as we hand over our pen to him (by trusting in him by faith). Murray highlights that, through Jesus’s death and resurrection, he cleanses and saves us from our miserable chapters and propels us forward by renewing us internally for a glorious conclusion. In the final chapters, Murray focuses on how our transformed narratives are even further fed and read in the community of God, as many stories intertwine—challenging, encouraging, and receiving and giving hope to each other.



This is an immensely practical, easily applicable, and deeply personal book.

Not only does Murray directly speak to the reader with side comment boxes in each chapter, but also, at the end of each chapter, he shares how the StoryChanger stepped into his life and changed his story forever. Moreover, each chapter ends with review questions and a prayer, which makes this book a great resource for small groups. Although the story metaphor may at times feel overused, this is a great book that focuses on the Creator who came into his creation in the person of Jesus and saved us from a devastating conclusion.

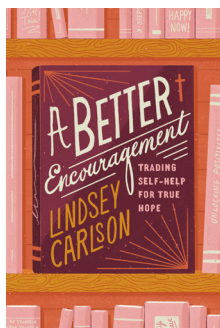
***A Better Encouragement: Trading Self-Help for True Hope*, by Lindsey Carlson. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 177 pages, \$11.04 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP member Allison Groot.**

When was the last time you received a compliment? Do you remember a wave of warm appreciation rushing over you as you heard affirming comments about your abilities, gifts, looks, or personality? If nothing else, I’m doubtful you were left feeling downcast following that friend’s kind word or your spouse’s endearing remark. Yet it’s very possible those pleasant sentiments, which we are often quick to label as encouragement, fall desperately short of the word in its fullest, biblical sense. When examining Scripture’s teaching on encouragement, we find that it consists in an intentional cultivation and recapitulation of the promises of God, one to another. This true and effective encouragement, unique to Christians, is Lindsey Carlson’s point of conversation in her book *A Better Encouragement*.

The term “encouragement” is not unique to the church. The secular world certainly has its own definition of encouragement, which has caused much unacknowledged syncretism between the Christian’s perspective and the world’s. Yet Carlson eagerly and competently approaches the task of explaining why genuine, effective encouragement cannot exist outside of the truths of God and his

Word—boldly confronting the unbiblical, platitudinal inspirations that have been seeping into Christians' thoughts for decades.

In a world that groans with the effects of sin-produced suffering, and specifically in a culture where self-help and self-pity remedies abound, this book addresses a universal need. Carlson repeatedly urges ladies to look away from themselves and look to Christ, for the only way to fight sin, temptation, and discouragement is to rehearse and believe the promises and faithfulness of God as seen in the person of Jesus. Then she goes one step further by guiding the reader to find Christ in the means of grace as God's ordained path to encouragement.



Though not a particularly deep study, I found Carlson's writing persuasive, edifying, and convicting. I'm certain that I will not be the only reader to realize that in my attempts to build others up, I often default to merely sharing superficial compliments and affirmations. Carlson's analysis will also deeply resonate with anyone who has experienced discouragement or has sensed the vanity of unbiblical clichés. While being on guard against the temptation to view encouragement as an effort to conceal the difficulties of life, she confidently asserts that even in the darkest of trials there is no greater encouragement than that which is found in Jesus Christ. Though our feelings are subject to change, God changes not. Thus, in him must encouragement lie.

***Grace at Work: Redeeming the Grind and the Glory of Your Job*, by Bryan Chapell. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 240 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP elder Joseph W. Smith III.**

When I signed on to review Bryan Chapell's book on a Christian approach to work, I assumed I already had a pretty thorough grasp of this subject. But we all know how assumptions work. Indeed,

considering the many solid works by this author, I should have known what a treasure-trove of insight and wisdom I would find in *Grace at Work*.

Consider, for example, Chapell's tantalizing one-word chapter titles: Dignity, Purpose, Integrity, Money, Success, Humility, Glory, Evil, Leadership, Balance, and Witness. Concerning the first of those topics, Chapell advances what could serve as a thesis for the book: "Your work is your mission field, and because of that, there is a God-given dignity in what you do" (17).

As he says in his intro:

All kinds of work possess qualities of divine mission—not just those of preachers or missionaries, and not just those of CEOs and brain surgeons. God is calling the cop and the carpenter and the concrete layer to experience the dignity of their work as he uses their jobs to help others, improve lives, and spread the influence of his kingdom in the world. (12–13)

I relished Chapell's countercultural insistence that, particularly in the current economic downturn, Christians may not always find jobs that perfectly match their skills and callings—that our work will often feel frustrated and unfulfilling; yet we can still do it in ways that glorify God, obey his commands, and advance his purposes.

Chapell is a master of anecdotes and illustrations. His material on the long-held North Korean prisoner Kenneth Bae is especially hard-hitting—as is the story of a 1990s delegation to then-president of China Jiang Zemin. The author also includes plenty of his own experiences as a father, husband, pastor, and fundraiser, plus those of employees, families, and executives with whom he's worked. At the same time, he incorporates a wide range

of historical and cultural references. And of course, Chapell's use of Scripture is terrific, eliciting fine new insights even from such well-known passages as Genesis 1–2, the Prodigal Son, and Daniel's interactions with Nebuchadnezzar.

Chapell's strongest chapters are "Balance," bringing in issues of anxiety, family, and rest, and "Evil," which covers temptation, persecution, forgiveness, and the inherently difficult nature of all work in a fallen world. "Don't be surprised," writes Chapell, "if your job is enduring your job with the strength Jesus gives you" (148).

Other catchy quotes: "We climb to the top of the ladder of success and find that it is leaning against the wrong building" (148). "Hellish busyness makes us unavailable to God" (192). And as a summary of Chapell's approach: "In the mundane and in the magnificent, in the significant and the insufferable, in the skilled work and in the 'good tries,' in the successes and in the honest failures, God is expressing and extending his glory through faithful believers that honor his name in the work they do" (141).

***The Heart in Pilgrimage: A Treasury of Classic Devotionals on the Christian Life*, by Leland Ryken. Crossway, 2022. Hardcover, 192 pages, \$27.26 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP minister Thomas D. Church.**

The prolific pen of Dr. Leland Ryken now brings us another most useful volume. In this attractive clothbound treasury,



Position Available

Co-pastor: Living Water OPC in Springfield, Ohio, seeks a co-pastor to share the preaching and shepherding duties of our young and growing congregation with the current pastor as fits their combined giftings, or an associate pastor to focus on discipling the large percentage of our congregation that are young in age and the Reformed faith.

Dr. Ryken has cherry-picked a rather remarkable selection of fifty classic devotionals on the Christian life. The devotionals themselves, often portions of larger works, are never more than two pages in length, followed by an “explication” or analysis of the selection. Here Ryken brings to bear mature spiritual perception and a wide knowledge of English and American literature together with his academic tools and skills honed for nearly fifty years as a professor of English literature at Wheaton College. The goal is to put readers in possession of the texts and enhance their experience of them.

Ryken’s creative devotional selections are what makes this book exceptional. “Monotony and predictability,” writes Ryken in his introduction, “are a besetting weakness in conventional anthologies of devotionals, and as an editor of this volume I worked hard to counteract this syndrome.” This he accomplishes. You might have expected his inclusion of a portion from Jeremiah Burroughs’s *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, John Donne’s “Death as a Welcome Sleep,” a selection from J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, or even the Westminster Standards on providence, but Ryken uncovers shining devotional light in places we might not look for it—or expect it! *The Heart in Pilgrimage* includes such offerings as William Bradford’s account of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock and their trust and praise of God in circumstances of great extremity, the lovely words of the Bidding Prayer from the Anglican service of Lessons and Carols, and passages from Blaise Pascal, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Jane Austen.

Or to give another example, Ryken shares his discovery that the prefaces to English Bible translations turn out to be an untapped treasure of devotional riches. In the selection entitled “What the Bible Means to a Believer,” Ryken proves it by including portions from the Geneva Bible and the King James Version.

I found all or very nearly all of his devotional entries to be well chosen, sound,

and profitable. I will rest my case in recommendation of this anthology with the following portion (selection no. 1) from

the opening lines of rhetorical paradox from Augustine’s *Confessions*, answering the question, “What is my God?”

Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful and most just; most secret and most truly present; most beautiful and most strong; stable, yet not supported; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never

new, never old; making all things new, yet bringing old age upon the proud, and they know it not; always working, ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things... You owe men nothing, yet pay out to them as if in debt to your creature, and when you cancel debts, you lose nothing thereby. Oh! that I might repose in you! Oh! that you would enter into my heart and inebriate it, that I might forget my ills and embrace you, my sole good!

This is a book to have and to keep.

***The World as We Know It Is Falling Away*, by Jane Greer. Lambing, 2022. Paperback, 54 pages, \$15.95 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP ruling elder Chris Campbell.**

Soon after we moved into a rented house on what had been a small North Dakota farm, a neighbor came by on his horse, which he brought right up to the dining room window, its gaze both startling and delighting our children. In a similar way, Roman Catholic author Jane Greer taps on a window with

her book of poems *The World as We Know It Is Falling Away*. The poems present a

landscape of faith that may be startling at times, but one that should resonate with and delight the readers of *New Horizons*.

I’d like to pass on a few of the book’s highlights to whet your appetite. Several of the poems involve biblical and theological subjects. “I Lived in Paradise,” for instance, begins with the couplet: “I lived in Paradise but then I fell. / Outside of Paradise can seem like Hell.” Another poem provides a testimony from the Apostle Paul (“Thorn”), while “Two Men in White Address Them” retells the angels’ admonishment to the disciples in Acts 1. “He Paces” provides a wonderful comment on the Law as a reflection of God’s will, and how we risk our relationship with him when we cross its line.

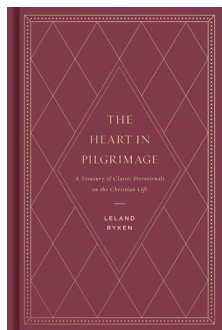
“Eschaton Song,” with a refrain based on 1 Corinthians 7:31 (the basis for the book’s title), may be viewed as the book’s centerpiece; the poem suggests our remedy to the fall from Paradise—

Let go of lust and pride and treasure,
relentless longing, fleeting pleasure.
Release the few things you do well.
Meanwhile, Death is going to Hell.
Death is going to Hell to stay.
The world is falling away.

Equally as compelling are the poems about relationships—mother and son, daughter and mother. The speaker in “More” voices faithless complaints to God in the face of death (note: the speaker’s perspective should not be identified with the poet’s). “First Elegy,” on the other hand, is a lament over the loss of a mother. Another tour-de-force, this poem maps out the unfolding of a battle with cancer, death, and its aftermath, which Greer poignantly articulates—

We have joined the ranks of those not
children any longer
who flounder, suddenly irresolute and
full of worry,
who let some details slide, for how
long I can’t be sure.
What I am quite sure of is that Mother
would be stronger.

A review of Greer’s book would be lacking without a comment about the shape of her poems. As editor of the *Plains Poetry Journal* from 1981 to 1993,



NEWS, VIEWS & REVIEWS *Continued*

Greer advanced a movement in poetry circles referred to as the New Formalism. My enjoyment of her book partly derives from the poetic forms she masterfully uses, leading to a restraint and understatement that give way, in turn, to the discoveries of a faith arrived at.

I'll close with a suggestion to the future reader—overlook the eleven blurbs in front of the book about Greer's poetry and go directly to the poems. The poems contain a light of their own and can do without these kind efforts at illumination.

***Give Me Understanding That I May Live: Situating Our Suffering Within God's Redemptive Plan*, by Mark Talbot. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 240 pages, \$21.99. Reviewed by OP ruling elder James H. Berry.**

The author of *Give Me Understanding That I May Live: Situating Our Suffering within God's Redemptive Plan* is well acquainted with his topic, and not merely academically—Professor Talbot knows suffering. At the age of seventeen, he suffered an accident that left him paralyzed. Facing a lifetime of such irreparable physical brokenness, questions about God surfaced. How can a good god let this happen to me? Does God really love me? The premise behind such questions is that a loving, powerful, and good god does not permit or author suffering. Talbot's interaction with this premise is both pastoral and biblical-theological: he situates suffering in light of Scripture's story.

This is the second installment in what will be a four-volume series. The first volume, *When the Stars Disappear: Help and Hope from Stories of Suffering in Scripture*, encouraged the framing of personal tri-

als in light of particular biblical characters who endured great suffering. Biblical saints bear witness to the hand of God amid terrible distress, working all things for the good of his people and for his glory. These examples encourage faith and perseverance when it appears that chaos, darkness, and emptiness are all that exist. The current volume takes a broader tack by using the unfolding story of Scripture to explain why suffering exists and to present a future without suffering in Glory. Talbot recognizes suffering's tyrannical tendency to fixate on the immediate pain, often resulting in the sufferer unhealthily identifying the suffering as core to who they are: "I *am* suffering." The biblical story focuses on that which is universal, purposeful, and eschatological, allowing all manner of suffering to be experienced without defining the sufferer. Rather, the suffering is defined and valued by God, is shared by his saints, and is not all that is.

The book has four chapters, three of which examine divisions of biblical history: creation, rebellion, redemption, and consummation. A fourth chapter is devoted to answering, "What is suffering?" and, "How does it affect us?" In creation, God made all things good and harmonious—his perfect design, perfectly implemented. In rebellion, sin destroys this perfect unity, tragically giving birth to the alien element of suffering. Creatures are now in disunion and discord with themselves, creation, and God. Eve blames Adam. Adam blames God. Love turns to hate. Life is now painful. In his love, God has not left human-

kind in the estate of sin and misery, but has offered redemption through the suffering of his Son. Through Christ's sacrifice, our lives are renewed, and creation is restored to perfection. This perfection is not immediate but awaits full consummation on the last day, which creates both the edge and opportunity of suffering. In its cutting, suffering teaches that life is not as it should be and invites us to call out to God both in lament for what was lost and in longing for what is to come.

Overall, this book is accessible, offers a useful introduction to the biblical story, and provides context for suffering.

The prologue is a helpful guide on how to read and make use of the material. The epilogue is a fine apologetic for the importance of story and calls us to embrace the grand narrative of all things, of which suffering is only a minor plot. The footnotes present opportunity to study concepts and Scripture more fully.

In sum, the book was edifying and engaging. However, it seemed that too much was left unsaid. *How* do we live in a world of suffering? How does the resurrection redeem life *now* as opposed to the life to come? The biblical story centers on the person of Christ—how is suffering worked out today in his body and bride, the church? Attention could have been given to the vital importance of the means of grace to endure this current darkness and rise above. There are two more volumes yet to be published. My hope is Professor Talbot will use his compassionate skill to lead us in a greater exploration of these themes.

