

NEW HORIZONS

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2024

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE NINETIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY



DANNY E. OLINGER

Before the Ninetieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church convened on the campus of Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington, members of the Committee on Arrangements were already hard at work. Alan Montgomery, Bob Tarullo, and David Mahaffy were picking up rental shuttle vans, setting up video equipment, and testing the voting system. Registrar Linda Jones worked with volunteers to determine routes for the golf carts to move mobility-impaired commissioners between buildings. On the morning of the start of the assembly, Joe Troutman and Jesse Montgomery kept track of commissioners with flight delays while local OPC volunteers directed commissioners arriving at the Seattle-Tacoma airport to the light rail and greeted them when they transferred from the trains to the assembly vans.

John Muether was busy setting up tables for displays and vendors.

As the members of the Committee on Arrangements were working to make sure that the 139 commissioners, 20 corresponding members, and 17 fraternal delegates did not have to worry about logistics and lodging, others were preparing for what they had been tasked to do by the general assembly and their presbyteries or committees. What follows is an account of the assembly, drawing from the reflections of individuals who were engaged in service and reporting during the assembly.

ASSEMBLY OPENS

John Shaw, the moderator of the Eighty-Ninth General Assembly, led the opening worship service and preached a heartfelt sermon on Psalm 56, “When I Am Afraid.” He commented,

After attending roughly fifteen general assemblies, my regular experience is something like this: “I need to hear more about Jesus; please remind me of Jesus.” My heart, soul, and mind need the strength that comes from Jesus when facing busy schedules, hard issues, and difficult decisions. That thought guided me in planning the opening worship service, especially in choosing for a text Psalm 56. The fears of life in a sin-scarred world constantly chase us to discouragement and defeat. But Jesus provides the answer to the devil’s accusations and temptations: “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (v. 3).

John Fesko, professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, was elected as moderator. Before the assembly started, Mr. Fesko was asked if he would be willing to stand if nominated. He recalled,

My longtime colleague David Winslow called me the week before the assembly to ask if I would be willing to be nominated. I told him, “It’s not something that I want to pursue, but if in God’s providence he calls me to serve, I

Alan Montgomery and Brad Peppo



am willing.” I immediately began to pray that the Lord’s will would be done, as I knew the assembly’s docket was challenging, and, if elected, it would be difficult to moderate. This was the first assembly in the denomination’s history that was extended in advance due to the one judicial appeal and nine complaints before it.

The assembly then divided into committees that were assigned to report on committee work, overtures, communications, and appeals. Assistant Clerk John Mahaffy explained his duties.

After the assembly convenes, it breaks up into small advisory committees to review all the reports that come to the assembly. I have created online forms to facilitate getting the appropriate information to most of the advisory committees and then getting their reports to the clerks to be communicated to the commissioners. I find it rewarding to serve the Lord by helping those carrying out the work of the church at its broadest level to have easy access to the information they need to carry out their tasks.



Mark Bube and John Mahaffy

COMMITTEE REPORTS

After five hours of advisory committee work, the assembly regathered to hear reports. One of the most encouraging was from Mark Richline, missionary to Uruguay for the last twelve years. Although he informed the assembly that, prayerfully, he and his wife have concluded their missionary service in order to move closer to their family, he also reported on the great things that the Lord is doing with the mission in Uruguay. He said,

The Lord Jesus Christ has raised up three robust Presbyterian and Reformed works, each with their own ordained officers. These established works have in turn produced three more church plants. All this has been accomplished by God’s grace, in collaboration with other missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. All six works need Uruguayan pastors. Our mission requests that churches would



John Shaw and John Fesko, moderators of the 89th and 90th General Assemblies

pray that there would be funds for pastoral training so that gifted men can dedicate more time to their seminary studies.

New Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) general secretary Jeremiah Montgomery talked about his reporting to the assembly.

I attended my first general assembly in 2013 as a young church planter. This year, 2024, I attended my first general assembly as general secretary for CHMCE. Looking at the story the Lord has unfolded in the life of my family is as humbling as it is surprising. I consider it a tremendous honor and a sacred privilege now to serve the denomination that has served my soul so well since childhood.

Caring for retired OPC ministers and their widows is accomplished in part through the Obadiah Fund, and the Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) was eager to update the assembly on the status of the fund. CMC member Greg De Jong was assigned the task. He reflected,

The Obadiah Fund has been a significant source of diaconal support for our retirees, but most of that happens behind the scenes. We felt it was important that the commissioners hear firsthand not only about what the fund has allowed us to accomplish, but also about the growing needs we are facing. I planned to tell the assembly that we were exactly

Mark Richline with John Van Meerbeke and Douglas Clawson



a third of the way to the goal of \$2.5 million but had the pleasure of modifying my slides because another \$50,000 pledge came in. The commissioners' interest and support of our efforts were gratifying.

Keith LeMahieu, treasurer of the Committee on Coordination, gave praise to God for the generous giving (5 percent over the budgeted goal) to the OPC in 2023. He also reported on the committee's work to support sessions in their responsibility to encourage the practice of biblical stewardship. He said,

It is estimated that \$85 trillion of wealth will be transferred from one generation to the next before the year 2045. A portion of that wealth transfer, about \$13 trillion, will be given to charity, but most Christians need expert advice to help them honor their obligation to biblical stewardship. The OPC has made it possible for her members to obtain this expert advice at no charge through its relationship with the Barnabas Foundation.

Mark Bube, Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations (CEIR) administrator, facilitates greetings from fraternal delegates of churches with which the OPC has an official ecclesiastical relationship. Mr. Bube said,

This year there were fraternal delegates from fifteen churches from all around the world present with us, including from Austria/Switzerland, Canada, England/Wales, Hungary, Korea, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, South Sudan, and of course, the United States. Our hearts were warmed as we listened to our brothers' reports of what the Lord was doing among them. And, as has been our practice for more than a decade, the CEIR hosted an evening colloquium for the fraternal delegates during which they, together with the members of the CEIR who are present at the assembly, gather around a large table to open our hearts to one another and to pray for each other. It was truly a sweet and precious time.

After two years of work, the Special Committee to Help Equip Officers to Protect the Flock submitted their report. Committee member Carl Miller said,

As the undershepherds of Christ have the joyful duty of protecting his precious lambs, it was the Special Committee's privilege to work together and provide sessions biblical and practical tools to support their ministry in doing so. We pray that our report's two handbooks, so to speak, on sexual predation and domestic violence, will be helpful to that end.

Keith LeMahieu, treasurer for the COC, explaining what the Barnabas Foundation offers OP members



OVERTURE

John Keegan, pastor of Grace OPC in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, represented the Presbytery of New Jersey in an overture that sought for the assembly to change the presbytery's name to the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico. The overture was passed. Mr. Keegan described the joy felt with the assembly's action:

The Presbytery of New Jersey, through their stated clerk Rev. Todd Smith, overtured the Ninetieth General Assembly of the OPC to amend the name of the PNJ to the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico. Upon the vote of the assembly to grant the overture, a moving and joyful spontaneous applause arose from the commissioners and attendees. This celebration also quickly spread to the island of Puerto Rico. ¡Sólo a Dios sea la gloria! Soli Deo gloria!

FELLOWSHIP

During the week, warm fellowship was abundantly evident. Retired and current foreign missionaries to Uganda Phil and Meredith Proctor, Jonathan and Margaret Falk, Brian and Dorothy Wingard, Tony Curto, Charles Jackson, Al Tricarico, and Bill Kessler could be seen laughing and talking together at nearly every meal. Anneke Fesko, the

John Keegan, speaking, and Todd Smith



CMC's Care Coordinator for Ministers' Wives, helped to organize times of prayer and local sightseeing trips. On the morning of the Lord's Day, multiple vans and cars were packed with commissioners headed to worship with the OPC congregations in Bothell (Trinity), Kent (Emmanuel), Lynnwood (Lynnwood), Oak Harbor (Sovereign Grace), and Olympia (Reformation Presbyterian), Washington.

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

Once the committee reports were completed (for the most part), the assembly began to hear an appeal and multiple complaints. Mr. Fesko reflected on how the assembly's work up to that point prepared him for what was to follow. He said,

The assembly's initial business was a good way for me to get my parliamentary feet beneath me and to establish a rhythm. As moderator you must call upon the memory as to how other moderators have served and made decisions, and sometimes that memory is rusty. The regular business prepared me for the more difficult test of moderating judicial appeals and complaints. Appeals and complaints are typically more difficult because they deal with disagreement between two or more parties who both believe they are right. This year's large number of complaints required the assembly to streamline debate so that we could hear all of the cases before us.

So heavy was the workload for appeals and complaints that the assembly had two advisory committees working full time on its behalf. David Winslow Jr., longtime elder at Westminster OPC in Westminster, California, served as the chairman of one of these committees. He said about the work involved,

Participants in a women's fellowship and prayer event organized by Anneke Fesko, Care Coordinator for Ministers' Wives



Chris Malamisuro and John Fesko

Preparing for a general assembly where ten appeals will be heard is daunting. It took me weeks of preparation reading each of the five appeals assigned to our committee. In addition to the material distributed to the assembly, we were supplied with an additional two inches of paper that included session and presbytery minutes and position papers covering each appeal. I constantly reminded myself not to draw conclusions until the parties in each appeal were heard.

A judicial appeal against the Presbytery of the Southeast was sustained. The presbytery had upheld the verdict of a trial in absentia of a jailed member. The assembly overturned the presbytery's action and returned the matter to the member's session.

A complaint was sustained against the Presbytery of New York and New England, which had allowed a presbytery commission to enter into a contract with an outside organization to investigate on its behalf. The presbytery was instructed to acknowledge and record in its minutes its error.

Another complaint that was sustained was against the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. A member of one of the congregations in the presbytery had complained to his session about a position paper that allowed women, under the general office of all believers, to teach a mixed class of adult men and women in a Sunday-school-like setting. The assembly instructed the session to retract the paper and to commit to having men teach in mixed settings outside of public worship. A protest was filed and signed by nineteen commissioners. The protesters argued that the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 specifically prohibits women from exercising teaching and ruling functions reserved for the office of elder. They also argued that the action of the assembly, because of its understanding of this text, places an undue and unnecessary restriction.

One complaint that was denied dealt with the position of a church session that it would not admit into membership those who refused to present their children for baptism. The assembly reaffirmed the position of the Thirty-Third (1966) General Assembly that this was a matter of judgment by local sessions.

DEVOTIONALS AND WORSHIP

Immediately before the assembly breaks for lunch daily, it has a devotional service. Zachary Simmons, pastor of Resurrection OPC in State College, Pennsylvania, had the privilege of delivering the devotional to the assembly on Friday, June 21. Mr. Simmons said,

A few months ago, our presbytery moderator asked if I would be willing to do the devotion on behalf of our presbytery. I agreed reluctantly; I was willing to serve but a little overawed by the idea, being a relatively new minister at only my second general assembly. Before and during the devotion, I was much more nervous than I have been for any public ministry occasion in a long time, but I tried to set aside this self-consciousness and remember it was not about me. I wanted most of all to offer gospel encouragement and a meaningful exhortation that would touch all our hearts in a fresh way with the glory, goodness, and calling of Christ revealed through a dramatic episode in Nehemiah's leadership. As I saw the assembly's attentive faces, it was very much like preaching to my congregation. Like every Sunday, we were all tired sinners who needed a taste of Christ's grace from his Word, and hopefully to some degree that's what we received together.

On Sunday evening, a joint service was held. Daniel Dillard, pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian in Bend, Oregon, participated in the service:

Our Presbytery Arrangements Committee asked me, as one of our presbytery's senior commissioners, whether I would

Zachary Simmons (plaid blazer) with other commissioners



Brett McNeill administering the Lord's Supper with the assistance of the session of Emmanuel OPC in Kent, WA

be willing to lead the Sunday evening worship service up to the reading and preaching of the Word. The joyfully reverent sound of all the men and women singing with such love and devotion to the Lord was very uplifting, along with Pastor Robert VanKooten's excellent message.

CLOSING

Chris Malamisuro, pastor of Good Shepherd OPC in Cincinnati, Ohio, authored the assembly's resolution of thanks. He commented,

Early in the assembly, the moderator, Mr. John Fesko, asked me if I would write the resolution. I talked with those who served in the food service, as pages, and on the Committee on Arrangements. I watched others to get a sense of their work. Ultimately, I wanted to thank God for overseeing our assembly and being gracious to us. I was honored and humbled to be asked to write this resolution and to serve the assembly in this way.

John Fesko, who received a standing ovation from the assembly for his service, thanked the Lord for his grace to him and the assembly during the week.

Each morning, I prayed these words: "Lord, give me the wisdom of Christ to lead well, great patience so that I do not give in to anger or frustration, and the humility to admit when I am wrong and to seek correction and input from others so I can moderate effectively." Moderating is a challenging task, but by God's grace in Christ, God was faithful to answer my prayers. We were able to complete all our docketed business. NH

The author is editor of New Horizons.

TWO CHURCHES “SWAP” BUILDINGS



JUDITH M. DINSMORE

In early 2023, two pastors within two miles of each other in Kalamazoo, Michigan, were both at a loss. Both, unbeknownst to each other, were praying for guidance.

For Jonathan Cruse at Community Presbyterian (OPC), the problem was too little space. The church was outgrowing its 5,000-square-foot stone building. The sanctuary was beautiful, but the basement’s fellowship hall couldn’t hold the whole church, and there were no classrooms. By 2023, Community had been looking for a new building for three years.

For Bill Ferguson at Grace Harbor (Church of God), the problem was too much space. The church was maintaining a 28,000-square-foot location that it no longer filled. In 2022, the church excitedly pursued partnership with a nonprofit that would buy the facility and lease it to them on weekends—but in March 2023, that fell through.

By May, Ferguson was thinking, “OK, I’ve been in ministry thirty-eight years, but I’m not sure how we can manage the finances,” he remembered. He was in his office, praying, when he reached for a letter he’d received two weeks earlier and left unopened. It was from a guy named Cruse, to all the local Kalamazoo pastors.

“If you feel God is leading your church to make a decision on your current worship facilities, would you please reach out? Or if you know of a church that might be considering moving from their building to one that better suits their current needs, please point us in their direction. If a church is downsizing, we may be able to work out a swap of facilities!” the letter read.

“God does have plans for you, even when you’re stuck,” Ferguson said. He called Jonathan, they met for coffee, and the unusual idea grew from there: a church building “swap.”

KALAMAZOO

Kalamazoo, Michigan, sits on a river of the same name in southwestern Michigan. After a land rush in the 1830s, the city grew steadily. Dutch immigrants grew so much white and yellow celery in the marshy soil that Kalamazoo was nicknamed “Celery City.” Recent arrivals worked in factories for buggies, windmills, and spring-toothed harrows. People and goods traveled in and out on five railroads.

In 1850, Dutch immigrants established one of the first churches in Kalamazoo. More Dutch Reformed churches followed; today, there are six Christian Reformed (CRC) churches in the city. It was in a former CRC church building on 2131 Alamo Avenue that Community Presbyterian made its home for over thirty years.

In 1886, a lumberjack-turned-preacher led a tent meeting in Kalamazoo that was the beginning of the Kalamazoo Church of God. Its first pastor, William Hartman, was converted through the Salvation Army and served the Kalamazoo congregation for fifty-three years. In 1960, the church moved to a sprawling new home tucked away in a suburban neighborhood at 811 Gorham Lane. In 2014, they renamed themselves Grace Harbor.

When Ferguson and Cruse would text back and forth about next steps on the building swap, they would use those street numbers. “How are things at 2131?” “How did the vote go at 811?”



Ferguson and Cruse

A DECISION MADE IN FAITH

The idea of swapping facilities was an eyebrow-raising suggestion for the two congregations.

Longtime Community Presbyterian member Mary Alphenaar was born and raised in Kalamazoo in a CRC but was drawn to the Lord at an OPC in California, where she was working as a young adult as a traveling nurse. “I was a lost sheep,” she said. “I had heard the gospel a lot but had never heard it in my heart until I was in Santa Barbara.”

Ironically, when she moved back to Kalamazoo thirty years ago, what drew her to Community was its small size. “I was really blessed by the intimacy and warmth,” she said. “And now here we are, needing a bigger building!”

Initially, Alphenaar was not convinced of the need. She served on an exploratory committee that sent a survey to members. Ninety-three percent responded that yes, a new building was important to improve worship, ministry, and fellowship. “That was a wake-up call for me,” she said.

But what really convinced her were the cold teenagers. “When we started the Sunday school season of 2022, the teenagers had to meet in the unheated garage, with the lawnmower and the snowblower. . . . I thought, this is not right. We need to have a space for these kids.”

When the session put forward the possibility of acquiring 811 Gorham Lane, Alphenaar’s reaction was a surprised interest. The leadership moved slowly—“there were many, many, many meetings.” Some reactions from the congregation were practical: How would they keep up with maintenance on a much larger building? Others were about the church’s identity: What did it mean to leave behind the history in their building? What would their hymn-singing sound like without 2131’s acoustical glory?

Grace Harbor’s congregation was also grappling with the idea. “The congregation has been at that site for as long as I’ve been alive!” Ferguson pointed out. At a critical meeting, descendants of the founding pastor stood up to express that they saw the Lord’s hand at work in moving to a smaller building.

The leaders from the two churches then came together to discuss numbers and timing. “I think that was a real anxious moment for everybody,” Ferguson said. There was of course a value discrepancy between the two properties, and all knew that Community Presbyterian couldn’t make up the difference. “We talked about how important the ministries of the churches were. There was a collegiality, a brotherhood of purpose,” Ferguson said. “I could tell that everybody started to sense the same Spirit.”

There came a point in the meeting when it was time to name a figure. They separated—Grace Harbor’s leadership discussed privately, as did Community Presbyterian’s

session. When the two groups rejoined, “they had in their mind the exact same figure,” Ferguson said with a grin.

“I wish everyone could have been present at that meeting,” Jonathan Cruse reflected. “It was about the most impressive display of Christian deference and humility that I have ever witnessed. It was clear from the outset that the folks at Grace Harbor were interested in a win for the church of Christ, not a win for any one congregation.”

Grace Harbor could have sold the land to developers. But they chose to bless another church with the property instead. They had already gotten value out of the building, Ferguson said, “through the years and generations of discipling for Christ.”

Community Presbyterian received their generosity in faith. “In the end, it was such a remarkable providence,” Alphenaar said. “I personally didn’t need to move [to a new building]. But we needed to move for the classrooms; we needed a nursery space; we needed restrooms that people could access. That’s what moved my vote to yes: this is something that the Lord is providing.”

Grace Harbor voted first, and a few weeks later, Community Presbyterian followed. Both congregations were above 95 percent in favor of the swap.

WORSHIPING GOD IN KALAMAZOO

“Surprisingly, since we moved in, we have filled all those classrooms,” Alphenaar said. She’s watched newer members step up to use gifts she didn’t know they had as they use the new building, and she is taking to heart one elder’s reminder that “the Lord has moved us to this bigger building to be a light in this community.”

But chiefly, Alphenaar is here for what has always been a part of Community Presbyterian and what has been her focal point since first meeting the Lord in California: “I just love to worship the Lord. I love being in and with the body of Christ and being fed each week with faithful, Christ-glorifying preaching.” **NH**



811 Gorham Lane

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.

REFLECTIONS ON A PRAYING CHURCH

DALE A. VAN DYKE

Paul Miller’s recent book *A Praying Church* is a deeply convicting and inspiring read. The concepts in it are essential for doing church as Jesus intends.

Miller’s charge is that the American church is “functionally prayerless.” That doesn’t mean people don’t pray but that church doesn’t “do ministry” by prayer. Prayer isn’t a functioning part of the *strategy* for doing church.

Let me illustrate with a positive example. A few months ago, I visited with a pastor from a large neighboring church to talk about staffing issues. During the conversation, I mentioned how difficult it is to find good men for staffing and church planting, and I asked him how they do it. His response? “By prayer and fasting.” He was dead serious. I was surprised, blessed, and convicted. It’s not how we’ve done it. We tend to rely on finely tuned job descriptions, trusted references, and lengthy interviews.

What made this book compelling to me, as a pastor, is that this isn’t just another book about prayer. It is a theology of the church: what it is (a house of prayer) and how it works (prayer→Spirit→Jesus→power). The church is functionally prayerless, in large part, because pastors have a flawed concept of the church. Consequently, they confuse means with ends, rely on their gifting rather than Holy Spirit power, and prioritize institution over organism. Let me explain.

CONFUSING MEANS AND ENDS

The “Ephesians 4:12 comma” debate continues in the church. Did Jesus give the gifts and offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints *and* to do the work of ministry—or did he give these men to equip the saints *for* the work of ministry? Miller leans strongly on the latter reading, and most pastors I know concur. Unfortunately, the way we go about ministry often militates against this working itself out in

practice. We focus on writing sermons, preaching them, teaching, visiting, session meetings, etc., and assume we are faithfully “doing ministry.” All the focus (and weight) of ministry is on us.

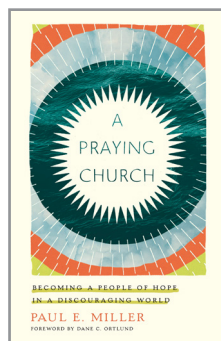
RELYING ON GIFTING

Miller calls this a “prayer resistant model” for doing church. *There’s nothing in the model that demands corporate prayer.* The pastor performs the ministry and the saints function as consumers. The prayer meeting suffers because it isn’t essential. Corporate prayer hasn’t become a load-bearing wall in the ministry model. A gifted pastor and elders are sufficient. Miller illustrates the problem by drawing a circle of a “typical church” and a “praying church” (25–26). At the center of a typical church are worship, preaching, facility, money, plans, vision, and, as one part of the many, prayer. Prayer is valued but not essential. In the circle representing the praying church there is only one thing in the center—the Spirit of Jesus. And every aspect of the church is guided and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus through prayer. Prayer is essential to the model.

INSTITUTION OVER ORGANISM

One of the most compelling concepts in the book was Miller’s insistence that the church is built of “saint lumber.” His argument is that we tend to look at church almost purely as institution. We focus on the ministers/leaders, programs, budgets, buildings, etc. The saints are seen as feeders for these institutional needs (65). We need an audience for our preaching. We need volunteers for our programs. We need donors for our budgets and buildings. These are the things we invite people to participate in and pray about.

We’ve subconsciously inverted the Ephesians 4 church model by placing leaders and institutional needs at the top and the saints at the bottom. We assume that the saints exist to support the institutional aspects of ministry, when the fact is that the institutional structures (including pastors) exist to support the saints in *their* work of ministry. The church is built of “saint lumber.” Christ promises to empower the saints for the work of ministry and mission!





Prayer time at Harvest

The saints are already on the front lines of ministry and mission in their everyday world. The church, as institution, exists to equip them for that ministry—and that will transform the way we pray.

A PRAYING CHURCH IN REAL LIFE

Let me tell you how this changed our monthly prayer meetings. Our typical pattern was to develop a prayer list populated by physical needs of congregants, programs of the church, home and foreign missionary efforts of the denomination, and any special prayer requests. These are all worthwhile items for prayer—but none of them are focused on the current ministry of the saints in the room!

At a recent prayer meeting, I briefly confessed this error to those who were there. I read from 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, where Paul says that he has been “remembering before our God and Father *your work of faith and labor of love . . .*” (emphasis added). And then from 2 Thessalonians 1:11, where Paul prays that God will fulfill “every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power.”

Then I said, “Tonight we are going to pray specifically for your works of faith and labors of love. What do *you* need prayer for as you minister the love and grace of God in the lives of those around you?” And a window opened to the works of the saints.

A nurse at a mental health hospital asked for prayer for her difficult ministry to the patients there. A brother is reading the Bible with an unconverted man and asked for the Spirit to bring that man to a living faith. An elderly saint asked for prayer for the lady she’s been reaching out to at the local donut shop. A sister with cancer asked for open doors to speak of the peace of Christ to the doctors and nurses she meets with for her treatments. The requests

were heartfelt, and the prayers were magnificent: weighted with urgency, heartfelt dependency, and buoyed with expectancy and joy. Prayer was suddenly essential. There was a palpable energy in the room. The Spirit of Christ was empowering his people for their work of ministry precisely as Christ intends.

A LETTER OF RESIGNATION

This approach to ministry promises to be a great blessing to weary pastors. Miller writes to pastors, “If yours becomes a praying church,

increasingly you’ll feel like a spectator following what the Spirit is doing” (32). Instead of trying to carry the church on the shoulders of our giftings and efforts, rather than trying to keep budgets solvent and programs afloat, we are freed to equip and release the saints to do the ministry God has intended for them by the power of the Spirit he promised to them. Corporate prayer then becomes a joyful, essential, functioning strategy for doing church.

But it will require a change in the heart and mind of the pastor. Let me encourage you to consider Miller’s “pastor’s letter of resignation.”

I officially resigned from my role as the third person of the Trinity. I submit my resignation as the spiritual head of my church. I want Christ, by his Spirit, to be the Spiritual leader of this congregation. I no longer want to be the center. I want Christ to be the real, functional Spiritual head. I repent of any desire to control or be prominent in his body. I realize that he has entrusted me to teach and guard the flock, but I recognize it is his flock. I am merely an under-shepherd. I commit myself to being a praying pastor who desires to lead a praying congregation. (33)

May it be so.

The author is pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan.

A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World, by Paul E. Miller. Crossway, 2023. Paperback, 304 pages, \$21.99.

REVIEW: TRUEMAN'S *CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE*

J. V. FESKO

Individualism marks the age in which we live. Carl Trueman's *Crisis of Confidence: Reclaiming the Historic Faith in a Culture Consumed with Individualism and Identity* is a welcome volume that provides important biblical truth that pertains to the need for creeds and confessions within the life of the church in this age of individualism in Western culture.

Trueman's book began life as *The Creedal Imperative* published in 2012, but a mere twelve years later, as the ground has dramatically shifted beneath the church, this new and updated edition helpfully addresses several recent cultural developments. The book consists of ten chapters if you count the introduction, conclusion, and two appendixes that cover a wide range of subjects.

Set against the backdrop of individualism and the wider evangelical world's rejection of creeds in favor of a "No creed but the Bible" point of view, Trueman opens his book with the claim that creeds and confessions are not merely helpful but necessary for the well-being of the church. This does not mean that creeds and confessions supplant the chief authority of Scripture but that they help the church understand the sound form of words, so that the church can rightly understand God and his Word.

In a subsequent chapter Trueman argues that there are four basic assumptions that underlie the need for creeds and confessions: human beings bear the divine image and have an external relationship to God, the past has important things to teach the church today, language is a suitable vehicle for communicating truth, and the church is the institution that can write and enforce creeds. Trueman's four presuppositions run against the grain of our individualistic culture, but this is precisely the reminder the church needs. We are all human individuals, but God has saved us in Christ to be joined to his body, the church, and the church does not merely exist in the present but exists

across millennia. It behooves us, therefore, to listen to the collective voice of the church across the ages as we heed creeds and confessions.

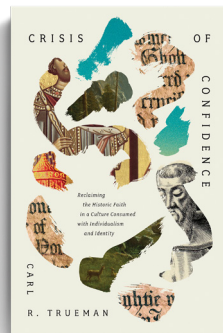
Trueman surveys various biblical passages to demonstrate the necessity for a confessional backbone to the church. He then surveys church history to examine the creeds of the early church and historic Protestant confessions of the Church of England (Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer), Lutheran (Book of Concord),

Continental Reformed (Three Forms of Unity), and Presbyterian (Westminster Standards) traditions. He also has helpful chapters on confessions and worship, their utility in the church, with concluding appendixes on revising and supplementing confessions and suggested books for further study.

Trueman writes in an accessible and easy-to-read style, and yet his easy style does not diminish the depth of his subject. He writes as one who is intimately familiar with the material he covers, a knowledge that equips him to explain detailed history

in an understandable way. This book can serve as an excellent introduction to its topic for people in the church as well as seminarians. While many Reformed Christians are familiar with their own confessional heritage, many know very little about the early church and the ecumenical creeds. Trueman's book is a superb tonic for this deficiency. In this revised edition, Trueman also draws on his recent research and publications on individualism, including *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* and *Strange New World*, where he orients the reader to the latest cultural developments that pose challenges to churches and pastors seeking to instruct their congregations in a corporate confession of faith and practice.

As a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Trueman takes creedalism and confessionalism to the wider church. He is the rare breed of confessional churchman



who has narrow convictions but wide associations that allow him to promote Reformed theology to a large audience. He demonstrates its biblical nature and ecclesial wisdom, and as such, Trueman's *Crisis of Confidence* is a welcome publication that will hopefully teach Presbyterians the vitality of their confessional faith as well as help draw anti-creedal Christians into the confessional fold.

The author is an OP minister and professor at Reformed Theological Seminary Jackson.

REVIEW: GLORIFYING AND ENJOYING GOD

Alan D. Strange

Glorifying and Enjoying God: Fifty-Two Devotions through the Westminster Shorter Catechism is a collaboration of three younger pastors, one in the URCNA (Boekestein) and the other two (Cruse and Miller) in the OPC. Among these three, they've already written some quite useful volumes, and this last one proves to be no exception.

The title, of course, reflects the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which reminds us that while all mankind will ultimately glorify God (in mercy and grace or in wrath), only those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ will be those who enjoy the triune God here and hereafter. The tone of the book is properly that of outreach (evangelism) and discipleship, which is to say that it serves both as a good introduction to the faith to those who are not Christians and as a tool of growth in grace for those who are.

That first question, and commentary thereon, comprises the first chapter of the book. The remaining Shorter Catechism questions and answers, and commentary on them, comprise the rest of the book, formatted suitably for a year's study. In other words, the 107 questions and answers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism are divided into fifty-two chapters, allowing one to read a chapter a week, and, if desired, memorize the catechism at the same time. This is an excellent tool, then, not only for memorizing the catechism but also for coming to terms with its main teachings. Insofar as the Shorter Catechism is, like the Confession of Faith and accompanying Larger Catechism, a brief compendium of the faith, whether one takes a year to read it, or does so more quickly, it will furnish such a

reader (or a family, church class, etc.) with a good survey of the Christian faith as we understand it as confessional Presbyterians.

Several strengths may be particularly noted in this volume. Physically, it is a well-produced hardcover volume with a ribbon marker for the kind of use anticipated. In terms of content, it well expresses the federal theology of the Westminster Standards, as given voice in the Shorter Catechism, explicating the covenant of works as the original covenantal arrangement that God condescended to make, and then the covenant of grace, once man had forfeited life in that first covenant by sinning. Man's utter need and God's initiative shines through it all, as Christ is set forth as prophet, priest, and king both in his humiliation and exaltation, the basis of our redemption being the active and passive obedience of Christ applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit in the *ordo salutis*, appropriated by faith-union with Christ in the use of the means of grace. The law is explicated in its proper uses: showing us our need and the only One who could meet it, as well as furnishing us, upon renewal, a guide for expressing gratitude in the Christian life. The authors carefully exposit Scripture as well as other secondary standards, giving personal and historical illustrations, all while warming the heart. This is devotional theology properly done.

I frequently get asked about helpful family or personal devotional materials. Here is a volume suited for both. It would also be useful for church classes, for school or homeschooling use, and for candidates preparing for the ministry. I would entertain a motion of "filling the blanks" with respect to the uses that may be made of this fine book. As Ko-Ko (in *Mikado*) sings in his List Song, "The task of filling up the blanks I'd rather leave to you," dear readers. I'm sure that you can think of many ways to use an outstanding book like this!

The author is an OP pastor and professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Crisis of Confidence: Reclaiming the Historic Faith in a Culture Consumed with Individualism and Identity, by Carl R. Trueman. Crossway, 2024. Hardcover, 216 pages, \$27.99.

Glorifying and Enjoying God: Fifty-Two Devotions through the Westminster Shorter Catechism, by William Boekestein, Jonathan Landry Cruse, and Andrew J. Miller. Reformation Heritage, 2023. Hardcover, 256 pages, \$30.

STEWARDS OF THE GOSPEL

KENT W. HARDING

In our age of material abundance, who hasn't said, or at least heard someone say, "What can I give to the person who already has everything?" As believers, we can turn that around and ask, "What can I give to the One who has already given us everything?"

The "everything" that we have been given is the gospel. Because of the perfect life, the obedient and atoning death, and the victorious resurrection of our Savior, we have been given the precious pearl of salvation and everlasting life—*everything!* Now what we are called to do is to be stewards of that gospel we have so freely been given. So, the question is, "What does it mean to be a steward of the gospel?" The answer is multifaceted. I would like to draw our attention to just a few ways that we can be stewards of the gospel.

HOMES OF BELIEVERS

Being a good steward of the gospel begins with understanding that God mainly advances his kingdom from one generation to the next in the homes of believers. In Deuteronomy 7:9, Moses encouraged the Israelites to "know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." This amazing promise frames how we, as believers, raise our children in the home. First and foremost, we are to raise them in homes that are gospel-centered—homes where the story of redemption is taught day in and day out and where loving obedience to Christ is practiced.

PRAYING FOR THE LOST

But God's generational promises also move outside our homes and undergird our gospel stewardship in the world. When we pray for the salvation of someone or witness to them, it is with the understanding that, should God call this person to faith in Jesus Christ, it is not only this individual himself but also the generations of his descendants that will be blessed with the gospel.



VIBRANT CHURCH PRESENCE

Raising our children in homes that are gospel-centered and praying for the lost are two ways that we are stewards of the gospel. I would like to add one more. Being a good steward of the gospel involves vibrant participation in the life of the church. It is guarding the gospel truth, encouraging brothers and sisters in Christ to a deeper understanding of it, and stirring them up to the gospel love and good deeds that flow out of such a great salvation. This is supported by another amazing promise of God: "The gates of hell will not prevail against [my church]" (Matt 16:18).

What can we give to the One who has given us everything in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? We can give him, out of our deep gratitude, good stewardship of that gospel.

The author is a retired OP minister.

AUG-SEPT 2024 PRAYER CALENDAR



The Bothuns (day 9)



The Stewarts (day 14)

1 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for spiritual growth for church members and their faithful witness to their communities. / **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

2 Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray for the **Presbyterian and Reformed Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel**.

3 Pray for affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik** (on furlough), Czech Republic, as they speak about their work, and that churches will be encouraged. / Summer intern **Eddie (Hillary) Mercado** at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.

4 **David & Rebekah Graves**, Wichita Falls, TX. Give thanks that the Lord has provided a church planter for Living Stone Mission. / **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the development of a book of church order and for the ongoing Bible study in Maldonado.

5 **Jefferson & Ellen De Oliveira**, Springfield, OH. Pray for Jefferson as he begins his labors as a Spanish Language Evangelist. / Pray for **Short-Term Missions Team Puerto Rico** as they serve at Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura and evangelize this week.

6 Pray for missionary associates **Lucas & Erica Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay, to build deep, meaningful relationships as they continue to settle. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, editor of *New Horizons*.

7 Pray for physical and spiritual nourishment for believers imprisoned in **East Africa** and for their families. / **Bradney & Eileen Lopez**, Guayama, PR. Pray for the evangelism efforts of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura.

8 Pray for **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Summer intern **Sam (Annie) Phillips** at Resurrection OPC in State College, PA.

9 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Lviv, Ukraine. Pray for the men in the church who can be called up to the army at any moment. / Summer intern **Dane (Olivia) Bothun** at First OPC, South Holland, IL.

10 **Christopher & Sara Drew**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray for the four new communicant members of Faith OPC. / Affiliated missionaries **Dr. Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray that all connected to Dahlia Dorm will grow in faith, thankfulness, and love for one another.

11 **Micah & Eileen Bickford**, Farmington, ME. Pray that the evangelistic efforts of Grace Reformed OPC would be impactful and effective. / Pray for the Stated Clerk, **Hank Belfield**, as he handles administrative work following the General Assembly.

12 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Pray for Ben teaching on missions and for Heather teaching English at Knox School of Theology. / Summer intern **Juhan Song** at Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, PA.

13 **Charles & Connie Jackson**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for needed teachers and for fruit in the students as Knox School of Theology starts the school year. / **Mark & Lorie Wheat**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray that the Lord will bring new visitors to Good Shepherd OPC.

14 Pray for **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Summer intern **Alex (Hannah) Stewart** at Faith OPC in Lincoln, NE.

15 Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the logistics of hosting many visitors and for those visits to provide needed encouragement. / Pray that the **Ruling Elder Podcast** would bless listeners.

16 Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Missionary associates **Josh & Danielle Grimsley**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the building project at Knox School of Theology to proceed smoothly.

17 *August: As part of the day of prayer and fasting called by the 90th General Assembly, humbly implore God to raise up missionary evangelists for our foreign fields.*
September: **Nate & Amy Jeffries**, West Norriton, PA. Pray that those of Good News OPC would rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances. / Summer intern **Paul (Sara) Lauer**, OPC Japan Mission.

18 Pray for associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she oversees the clinic and that God's mercy will shine brightly there. / **Committee on Diaconal Ministries** requests prayer for refugees displaced due to war, and all who are ministering mercy to them in Christ's name.

19 Missionary associate **Jed Homan**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Christian students in Ugandan boarding schools to be faithful witnesses for Christ. / **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**,



The Terrells (day 20)

regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California.

20 **John & Katie Terrell**, Dorr, MI. Pray that Living Hope OPC's outreach opportunities would bear much fruit. / Summer intern **Evan (Coco) Zhuo** at Grace OPC in Vienna, VA.

21 Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, to build mutually-encouraging relationships with Ugandans and teammates. / Pray for **John Dunahoo**, interim executive director of Great Commission Publications.

22 **John Paul & Corinne Holloway**, Manassas, VA. Pray that those at Acacia Reformed would find joy and satisfaction in the Lord. / Pray for missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Karamoja, Uganda, to have joy in her service and point those around her to Christ.

23 **Rev. Chris Byrd**. Pray that the Lord would bless Rev. Byrd's evangelistic efforts. / Summer intern **Zac (Caroline) Reeves** at Trinity OPC in Capistrano Beach, CA.

24 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick** (on furlough), Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Carmel, Zion, and Olive Verdick to grow in their identity in Christ. / Summer intern **Jeremy (Hannah) Chong** at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

25 **Mr. and Mrs. M.** (on furlough), Asia. Pray for endurance, health, and quick release for those in prison for their faith. / **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.

26 **John & Grace Jee**, Columbia, MD. Pray that the Lord would bless the church-planting labors of those at Word of Life OPC. / Pray for OPC **Disaster Response** volunteers as they show the love of Christ to



The Grimsleys (day 16)

those affected by disaster, especially this hurricane season.

27 Pray for **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia, as they prepare to relocate and start new ministry schedules in the Northeast. / Summer intern **Jonathan (Elyssa) Vos** at Redemption OPC in Gainesville, FL.

28 **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Kyle, TX. Pray that Hays County OPC would make connections in their community for the sake of the gospel. / Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard** to continue to bear much fruit.

29 Home Missions administrative assistant **Allison Groot**. / Summer intern **Daniel (Anna) Karlson** at Apple Valley Presbyterian in Neenah, WI.

30 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** and administrative assistants **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / Summer intern **Trent (Alicia) Hordyk** at Grace Fellowship Church in Zeeland, MI.

31 *August: Pray for affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne** and **Linda Karner**, Japan. / **Mark & Celeste Jenkins**, Placentia, CA. Pray for **Resurrection OPC** as they seek to bring people under the ministry of the Word of God.*

Surely goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life.
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!



At the ordination and installation of David Rios (center)

NEWS

RIOS ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN COMMACK, NY

On June 8, David J. Rios was ordained and installed as an associate pastor of The Haven OPC in Commack, New York. A native New Yorker, Rios is a graduate of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (GPTS). OP minister and professor at GPTS Ryan M. McGraw preached; William Shishko, pastor of The Haven, administered the vows; retired OP minister Richard Gerber gave the charge to the congregation; and GPTS president Jonathan Master gave the charge to Rios.

THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS IN JAFFREY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Steve Nadeau

On May 12, Jaffrey Presbyterian in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, witnessed Jurg Zwahlen's ordination to serve as an elder. God continues to be faithful to his church, raising up leaders within, even in small churches like ours. Jurg is married to Lourinda, and they have six children.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On June 15, **Good Shepherd OPC** in Sugar Land, TX, a mission work of the Presbytery of the Southwest, became a particular congregation of the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On March 8, the Presbytery of New York and New England dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Roberto Laranjo**

and the Igreja Presbiteriana Brasileira em Melrose in Melrose, MA.

- On May 11, **Jeremiah W. Montgomery** was received by the Presbytery of Philadelphia from the Presbytery of Ohio.
- On May 11, **Albert J. Tricarico** was received by the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania from the Presbytery of Philadelphia.
- On June 8, 2024, **David J. Rios** was ordained as a minister, and installed as an associate pastor of The Haven OPC in Commack, NY.
- On June 15, **Mark R. Wheat**, formerly an evangelist of Good Shepherd OPC, was installed as pastor of Good Shepherd OPC in Sugar Land, TX.
- On June 16, **Arthur J. Fox**, a retired minister, was received by the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania from the Presbytery of Northern California and Nevada.

MILESTONES

- **Kathryn Ruth Strange**, 67, died on July 1. She was the wife of OP pastor and professor Alan D. Strange.

LETTERS

Editor,

It seems that the author's debate with James K. A. Smith's book in "Habits of the Heart" (June) equates to the seeming quarrel between Paul's emphasis on faith and James's emphasis on deeds (work). James's epistle emphasizing deeds does not counter Paul's emphasis on faith, and vice versa. The faith James says is worthless is not the same faith that Paul espouses, nor the works Paul denounces the deeds



Jaffrey Presbyterian's session praying over newly ordained elder Jurg Zwahlen

James's exhorts. They are both correct and complement each other, as should the article's sounding board of Mr. Smith's book be complementary instead of countering or correcting. I did not read in Mr. Smith's book a lessening of the heart's knowledge, nor do I want to read into the author's article a lessening of our habits conforming us to Christ by deeds.

Steve Thompson
Oak Harbor, WA

REVIEWS

We Were a Peculiar People Once: Confessions of An Old-Time Baptist, by David Lyle Jeffrey. Baylor University Press, 2023. Hardcover, 184 pages, \$32.99. Reviewed by OP elder D. G. Hart.

Some Reformed Protestants mock Baptists. Then along comes a Baptist with a sense of humor, and the laughing subsides. Here is a decidedly Calvinistic Baptist with an ironical cast of mind who warmly recognizes folly among the most devout believers. "Here" in that sentence refers to David Lyle Jeffrey, a retired Baylor University professor and provost. Jeffrey has had such a distinguished academic career (he is now 82) that his accomplishments could fill this review. He studied at Wheaton College, followed by a PhD in literature at Princeton, then taught at Canadian universities (Victoria and Ottawa) before Baylor. He is published widely in English literature and the history and influence of the English Bible.

With that pedigree, especially the stop at Wheaton College where the earthy humor of German Lutherans and Dutch Calvinists is taboo, a reader might expect a memoir about growing up Baptist to ooze with godliness. Although Jeffrey's highly readable and often moving book leads to a serious point about holiness, he still captures the down-to-earth character

of Baptist otherworldliness. His Protestants were a peculiar people whose devotion was sometimes as funny as it was sanctified.

The first paragraph of the book sets the tone. Baptist life revolved around "the Sabbath." When not in church, the Jeffrey kids read books. Only later in life did Jeffrey's father relax the rules and allow the boys to play catch in the backyard. That was around the time that Jeffrey was allowed to change out of church clothes for the afternoon before redressing for the evening service. Mrs. Jeffrey made this concession on economic rather than "strictly religious" grounds so the children would not ruin good clothes. Even so, the Baptist piety of 1940s Canada revolved around the Lord's Day, with two services (one evangelistic at night), lengthy exegetical sermons (sometimes an hour), hymns and psalms sung by the congregation, and abstinence from worldly thoughts and (most) recreations.

Jeffrey goes on to describe the home and church life of his youth. The joy of the Lord is evident but does not prohibit mirth produced by the comical mix of sacred and profane. For instance, Jeffrey recalls the strange aspect of missionary conferences when some of the most sexually modest of Protestants allowed their children to see missionaries posing with native people wearing nothing but "a few beads and perhaps a betel nut-stained grin." Jeffrey also covers "church expletives"—those phrases honed by Roman Catholics and repurposed by Baptists: "Holy smokes," "for Pete's sake," and "for the luvva Mike!"

Jeffrey does for Baptists what Garrison Keillor did for Lutherans in his "Lake Wobegon" stories, but this book is not mere nostalgia. Underneath the author's recollections is praise for a sturdy faith that took sin seriously, relied exclusively

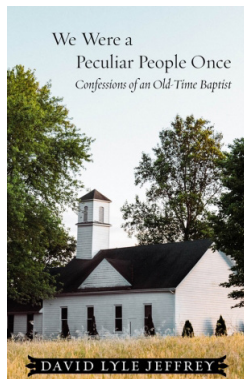
on Christ's saving work, and was saturated in Scripture. Jeffrey wrote the book because he worries about contemporary Protestantism—"the church of the Blessed PowerPoint—where fashion, contemporary music, humor, and politics have replaced the 'old, old story.'" Jeffrey's Old-Time Baptists remind us that "we need to teach that there is a far higher good—and pleasure—in being faithful to the commandments and precepts of God, however it may marginalize us socially."

For Orthodox Presbyterians, another "peculiar people," Jeffrey's excavation of Scottish Baptist piety should be both provocative and edifying.

Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, edited by G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli. Baker Academic, 2023. Hardcover 992 pages, \$64.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Harrison Perkins.

One great tool for understanding Scripture deeply is biblical theology. This discipline seeks to trace how ideas, themes, and principles develop across the unfolding narrative of the Bible. For example, in Genesis 3:15, God promises that the seed of the woman would come to crush the serpent's head. How did that seed theme grow, expand, and obtain new clarity as God continued to deliver new inspired writings to his people? For all these themes, Christ is ultimately the fulcrum in their fulfillment. He is indeed the direct fulfillment of many ideas and themes that are first announced in the Old Testament. Given that this discipline focuses on understanding Scripture as it progressively develops ideas and themes toward fulfillment, the way that the New Testament looks back to and interprets the Old Testament is a key feature.

The *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* is an amazing reference work aiming to digest mountains of scholarly work from recent decades to provide entryway synopses about methods, approaches, themes, and doctrines as they

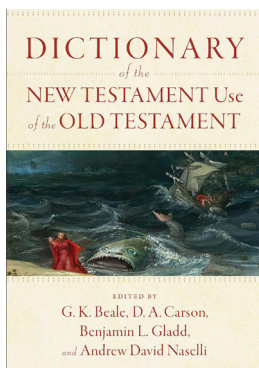


have been considered from the biblical-theological vantage of how the Old Testament appears in the New Testament. This work, as a reference volume, is academic in nature and weighty in its content. It is as accessibly written as such a project can be, but, nonetheless, presumes some knowledge of what biblical theology is and intends to achieve. Many readers of *New Horizons* will not struggle on this front, but it is worth noting.

This book organizes into essays various aspects of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. In that regard, its format is less like succinct statements of definition in a dictionary and more like deeper and more conceptual entries in an encyclopedia. In some ways, the result is to condense the fruit of other research—for example, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, editors, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Baker Academic, 2007—into cogent statements of analysis about those findings in biblical theology. These summaries, combined with each entry's bibliography, are great starting places to understand numerous issues in biblical theology especially related to how the New Testament draws upon the Old Testament.

The five kinds of essays that this dictionary includes address 1) surveys of biblical books, 2) topics in biblical theology, 3) Jewish exegetical traditions, 4) inner-biblical exegesis, and 5) systematic theology.

The most informative type of essay, from this reviewer's standpoint, concerns the Jewish exegetical traditions. The main benefit here is to survey how commentators before the New Testament and outside the Christian tradition have analyzed biblical theological development. The benefit, for me, is that this area of research is least familiar and least accessible. These entries provide true paths to get a quick handle on new but complicated material.



The essays on topics in systematic theology, although few, are typically very good. Interestingly, these essays provide the main contribution about Trinitarian

theology in this volume. J. V. Fesko's entry, "Bibliology," and Kevin VanHoozer's essay, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture," provide perspective on Scripture itself as given to us by the *triune* God, so needing to be interpreted in light of the Trinity.

Stephen Wellum's essay, "Christology," aptly considers how we cannot rightly understand Christ's person and work without both Testaments interpreted in tandem. With these contributions noted, it is somewhat surprising—especially given the contemporary resurgence of focus on theology proper and classical theism—that this dictionary has no entries

devoted to the Trinity or to the doctrine of God. To some, these topics seem like foremost examples of how the New Testament uses the Old Testament to shape some of its fundamental points. Nevertheless, this book contains a wealth of resources that will prove helpful with a host of issues about the relation of the Testaments.

***Religious Liberty and the American Founding: Natural Rights and the Original Meanings of the First Amendment Religion Clauses*, by Vincent Phillip Muñoz. University of Chicago Press, 2022. Paperback, 344 pages, \$30.00. Reviewed by OP minister and professor David VanDrunen.**

The First Amendment of the US Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ." Americans have celebrated

these provisions, but what *exactly* they mean is perennially controversial. Scholars have proposed many interpretive theories, but none has gained widespread acceptance.

The theory of *originalism* has attracted much attention recently. It holds that courts should interpret the Constitution according to its original public meaning. Originalism has been especially dear to people on the political Right, in important part because it constrains left-leaning judicial activism. Originalists themselves, however, don't always agree about what the Religion Clauses prohibit and require.

Vincent Phillip Muñoz, professor of law and political science at Notre Dame, provides one such originalist interpretation of these clauses. His argument isn't especially difficult to understand, but it is very detailed. I can only offer a small taste of it here.

In short, Muñoz argues that although the American Founders came to their convictions by different routes (such as Enlightenment philosophy or Protestant theology), they all believed that everyone has an *inalienable natural right* to worship God according to his conscience. That is, people may delegate authority to the government concerning many matters, but they *cannot* delegate authority over religious worship. Muñoz notes that the Founders had internal disagreements about the extent of this natural right, and he recounts the history of how they landed upon the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses. Nevertheless, he concludes that there is no clear original meaning of what the "establishment" or "free exercise" of religion is. Therefore, Muñoz seeks to

PRESBYTERY OF WISCONSIN & MINNESOTA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

October 5, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

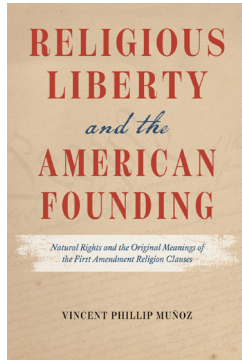
Speaker: Jeni Richline, missionary to Uruguay

Location: Christ OPC, 3625 Skyview Drive, Janesville, WI

Contact: wmspresconf.wm@proton.me

“construct” the Religion Clauses in ways consistent with the text of the First Amendment, with what we can know about its original meaning, and with the Founders’ views of natural rights.

The final result is a fairly narrow view of what the Religion Clauses should do: the Free Exercise Clause prohibits the government from regulating religious belief or exercise “as such,” while the Establishment Clause prohibits government from performing the functions of a church and from delegating its own authority to churches. Muñoz suggests what this interpretation would mean for a number of controversial issues and famous Supreme Court cases. As he correctly says, it produces results that follow neither predictably “liberal” nor predictably “conservative” lines. Perhaps most notably, Muñoz contends that the First Amendment does not provide for exemptions from generally applicable laws that burden people’s religious exercise. Thus, for example, the First Amendment



doesn’t protect churches with an all-male ministry from anti-sex-discrimination laws or protect Christian wedding-cake bakers from anti-sexual-orientation-discrimination laws. Muñoz believes that legislatures may grant such exceptions but denies that the Constitution guarantees them.

This is an academic work, not designed for a popular-level audience. Nevertheless,

Muñoz writes in a clear and organized way, so non-scholars could understand this book if they’re willing to devote some time to it. Those interested in religious-liberty issues or originalism may well find this work informative and stimulating.

I don’t have the specialized knowledge necessary to make a final judgment on the book’s claims. Muñoz is *arguably*

correct that this is the best originalist view of the Religion Clauses. But other originalist scholars as accomplished as Muñoz have come to different conclusions that are just as, if not more, persuasive than his.

One thing *New Horizons* readers should note: No theory of constitutional interpretation is guaranteed to give traditional Christians all the judicial results they may want. Originalism provided them the result they wanted regarding abortion because cases such as *Roe v. Wade* were so clearly at odds with the Constitution’s original public meaning. But that isn’t necessarily true for the sorts of religious-freedom controversies likely to affect us in the coming decades. Traditional Christians may have to decide whether it’s more righteous to adhere to a principled method of constitutional interpretation or to promote whatever available arguments enhance their chances of winning judicial cases.

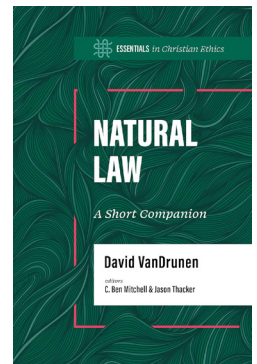
***Natural Law: A Short Companion*, by David VanDrunen. B&H Academic, 2023. Paperback, 160 pages, \$19.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Ken B. Montgomery.**

Plastic serves as an apt “material metaphor” for our age. How so? Plastic can conveniently be shaped to conform to one’s desires and will. But unlike plastic, wood has inherent grooves and grains. Woodworkers know the importance of cutting with the grain and respecting the contours and density of the lumber that is on the table saw.

Professor David VanDrunen maintains that there is a pre-existing grain—an essential moral order called “natural law” (hereafter NL)—that is revealed to all people on earth by God the Creator. VanDrunen defines NL as “the law of God made known in the created order, which all human beings know through their physical senses, intellect, and conscience, although they sinfully resist this knowledge to various degrees” (1).

This book helpfully distinguishes between NL as a theological category and various NL theories. Someone who makes a poor argument based on NL does not thereby render NL an illegitimate revelatory reality, just as the misapplication of a biblical text does not negate the authority of Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16). Put another way, perverse perception on the part of sinful human beings does not undo or silence God’s faithful speech (including moral norms) in the created order (Ps. 19:1–3).

VanDrunen shows from Romans 2 that the Gentiles have a fundamental awareness of God’s righteous requirements, so that having a sense of inner accusation for wrongdoing and the instinct to defend oneself for doing the right shows the conscience as a kind of “miniature courtroom.”



POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Pastor: Christ Covenant OPC in Sheridan, Indiana, is seeking a dedicated, passionate pastor with some experience. We are a small, mature congregation committed to serving God, to the faithful preaching of God’s Word, and to loving the brethren. Sheridan is a rural farm town with suburban development fast approaching. For more, please contact brian.wortman@ccopc.onmicrosoft.com.

Youth Ministries: Redeemer Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, seeks a full-time leader of middle school, high school, and young adult ministries to develop children and young adults into Christ-honoring men and women who have a vibrant commitment to the gospel. For more information or to apply, please visit www.redeemer-opc.org/job-opportunities.

PRESBYTERY OF OHIO WOMEN'S RETREAT

October 11-12

God's Grace in Seasons of Change

Speaker: Megan Hill

Location: 5099 Postlewaite Road,
Columbus, Ohio

Contact: Hazel Kessler
kesslerhf.75@gmail.com
graceopc.org/retreat24

The internal and universal testimony of NL is evidence of God's ruling over all image-bearers as their presiding judge. If there is an updated edition of this book, I would suggest that the author expand on this dynamic in connection with Romans 13 and the role of the civil magistrate, as the apostle teaches that the earthly sword-bearer (even as an unbeliever) is able to approve the one who "does good" and serves as an instrument of "God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:3-4).

One of the highlights of this work is relating NL to the reasoning found in the book of Proverbs: "Proverbs communicates that meaning, purpose, and order remain in our fallen world and that sinful humans are able to discern these things" (30). VanDrunen shows how the author of Proverbs is concerned for his pupil not only to grasp the content of the precepts of the Lord but also (as I like to say) to "spy the why." Wisdom grasps that doing what is right and good harmonizes with God's design and blueprint for his creation. Under the sage's tutelage, we are taught to avoid not only the guilt that comes with sinning, but also sin's stupidity and madness (86-87). The sapiential portraits of the adulterer, the sluggard, and the drunkard are nicely framed with respect to NL in chapter 5, "Natural Law and the Christian Life."

In the final chapter, "Learning the Natural Law and Engaging the Public Square," VanDrunen encourages the reader to make strong and persuasive cases from

NL in matters pertaining to the civic good, even if they fail to convince those who "revel in destructive moral paths" (108). He sets an example in showing the immorality of abortion from the evil of infanticide, "working backward in time" (116). In this section, it would have been beneficial to see more on the role of custom in NL reasoning.

If you're on the lookout for a cogent and pellucid analysis of NL from a Reformed perspective, this book would serve as an excellent starting place for your study!

***Feminism Against Progress*,
by Mary Harrington.
Regnery, 2024. Paperback,
256 pages, \$17.99. Reviewed
by OP pastor John A.
Hartley.**

Feminism Against Progress is not a Christian book, but it is a book for Christians because we live in the same world author Mary Harrington documents, a world increasingly under the spell of what she terms Progress Theology, Cyborg Theocracy, Bio-libertarianism, Big Porn, and Meat Lego Gnosticism—all of which could be street names in the metropolis of our dystopian present.

Yes, the long-feared dystopian future is a dystopian present. We're now living in what we hoped would stay in our novels and films. "The dissociative self and its commodification of body parts" has become a baseline in politics, education, and social relations. With published data from varied research and disturbing vignettes from popular culture, Harrington is persuasive. We are further along in post-humanism than we thought.

There may remain enclaves of pre-dystopian sanity out there, but it would be unwise to not hear from those who have long lived at the epicenter of our dystopian present and have come out survivors, scarred and traumatized yet telling the truth for the benefit of all. Mary

Harrington is such a one.

What does *feminism* have to do with Harrington's project? Much. The modern liquefying of human nature gained its formidable traction among us in the name of freedom and progress. A feminism promoted by both men and women adopted the great maxim of all Progress Theology: liberation from the constraints of nature is the essence of freedom. The dystopian result is that women are now viewed as sterile by default, risk-free and sexually available, underwritten by corporate sponsors via the Pill and abortion tech.

Thankfully, Harrington demonstrates that nature will not yield to these assaults. Without saying it this way, Harrington shows that the works of the Creator will not be defeated by the will of the creature.

The book divides into three parts, but it really is two-thirds descriptive, one-third prescriptive. In the first

two-thirds, Harrington makes the case that modern freedom fighters wish to delegitimize the idea that we have a nature. Only political mantras keep them numb to their self-inflicted wounds. Then, unexpectedly, Harrington shows how this war against nature is deeply embedded in consumer markets and profit-making. By these uncomfortable but necessary truths we learn it is too simplistic to shout, "Feminism is at fault!" Many technological and cultural shifts have brought us to our dystopian present.

In the last third of the book, Harrington does her best to prescribe actionable ideas to renew the world and turn on some lights. The final chapter titles convey her proposals well: "Abolish Big Romance"—return to marriage and to marriages with low expectations, not concerning fidelity, but concerning romance and excitement. "Let Men Be"—recover single sex spaces in our institutions and common culture. "Rewilding Sex"—return



sex to what it used to be, consequential and risky.

It is in this final prescriptive section that the Christian reader becomes most hungry for the gospel. There is nothing on offer here from the age to come. Hope in God's power and mercy is absent. What man must do looms large, always a depressing weight. If the Christian reader is not careful, he may put this important book down and think that the concerns of the present age are the great concerns that should most concern him. It is, of course, foolish to have no concern for these things. We must love our neighbors. But let us love God first and foremost. Let us cry out to God for mercy as we gaze on these desolations. The power of God, even in our dystopian present, is still the gospel of Jesus Christ.

***Beauty Is Your Destiny: How the Promise of Splendor Changes Everything*, by Philip Ryken. Crossway, 2023. Paperback, 200 pages, \$17.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Tyler C. Detrick.**

There is beauty around you if you're willing to see it. In *Beauty Is Your Destiny: How the Promise of Splendor Changes Everything*, Philip Ryken aims to "awaken a deeper desire for beauty that will lead to lives that are more holy, more joyful, more hopeful, and more just" (xi). In this pursuit, Ryken enlists help. He quotes generously from poets and scholars who have expressed both the beauty and ugliness of

the world in words that are particularly poignant. The result is a volume beautiful in its own respect—refreshingly helpful and hopeful.

Ryken's work is helpful. He moves past vague descriptors, teaching us to see the wonders we've overlooked. Readers will find a brief reflection on aesthetics proper in chapter 1, in which Ryken rescues art from subjective preferences by grounding beauty in the objective standard of God's own attributes. "Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder, with a capital B," he writes (4).

Ryken begins with the glory of God in the Trinity and then unfolds the beauty of creation, human beings, sexual purity, the crucifixion, the church, and generous living. An apologetic aim is obvious throughout: Ryken challenges unbelievers with the problem of seeing beauty everywhere but not being able to recognize its source: "How frustrating it must be to receive the gift of beauty and yet be unable to acknowledge it properly" (51).

Yet Ryken reckons with the ugliness of this world. Far from sugary sweet, this book is at times painstakingly honest about the evils in this fallen world and the struggles of Christ's church. This realism gives credibility to Ryken's work and offers a strong appeal to the gospel when he points in chapter 7 to the crucifixion

of Christ as the place where ugliness and beauty meet.



This book excels in practical application. Ryken insists throughout that beauty must manifest itself in tangible, sacrificial action. He challenges his readers to commit to sexual purity, even if that means lifelong celibacy. He summons Christians to intentional hospitality. He contends that simple acts of sacrificial kindness are works

of profound beauty. This emphasis on intentional deed—lacking in many discussions of aesthetics—is another reason why this work is so helpful.

Beauty Is Your Destiny is also refreshingly hopeful. Ryken explains that God is moving history toward a breathtaking conclusion in which believers will behold true beauty in the face of Christ. We endure evil for a time, but "beauty is our destiny" (4).

I walked away from each chapter renewed in the knowledge of the God who has made beautiful things. I found myself looking at creation with fresh eyes, countering the ugliness of this world with a hope that God is recalibrating all things in Christ. Are you dismayed today by the ugliness of death, the madness of the world around you, the confusion within Christ's church, and the unmortified sin in your own heart? Ryken's book will offer you help.