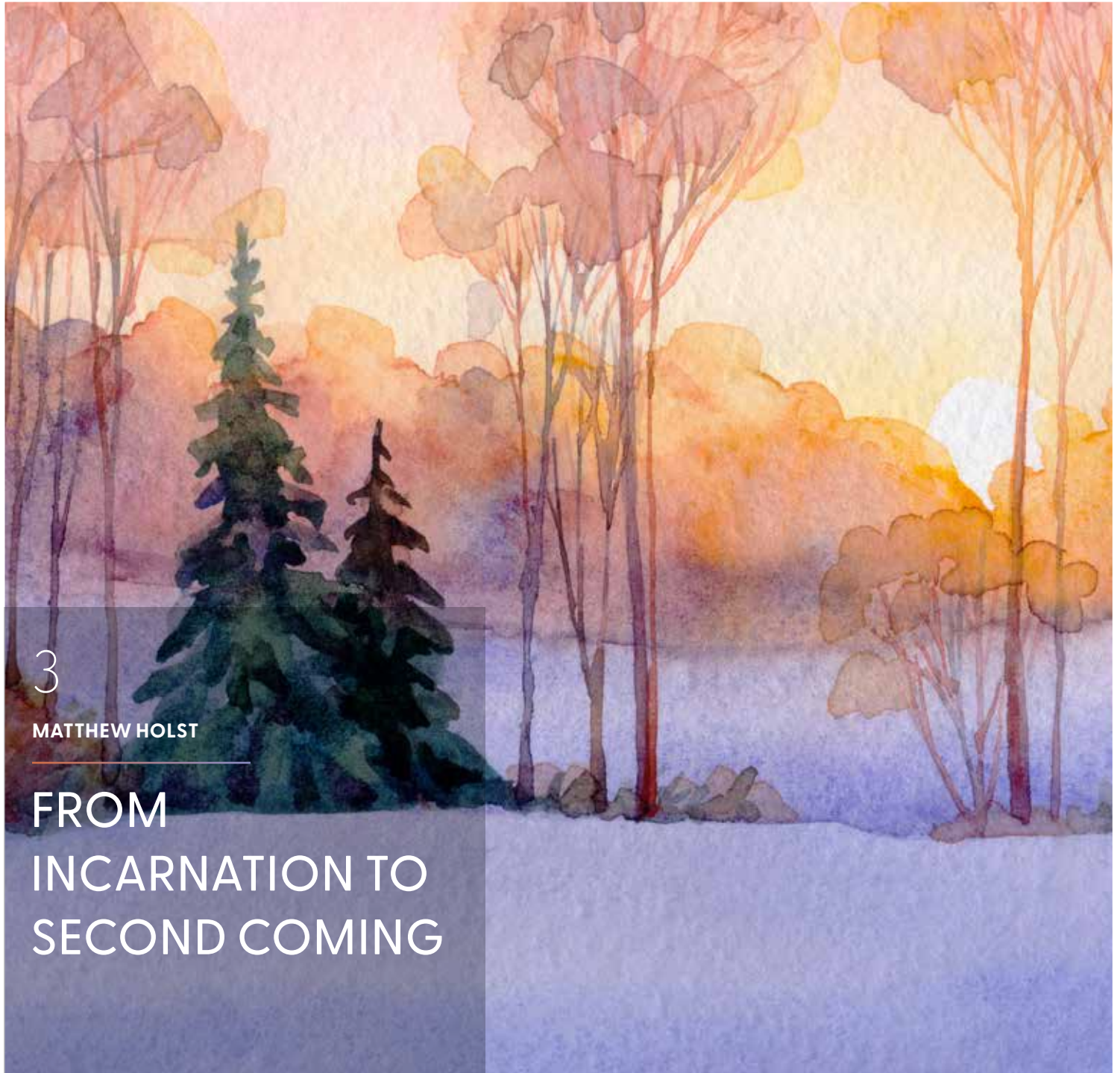


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DECEMBER 2024

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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FROM INCARNATION TO SECOND COMING



MATTHEW HOLST

While Christians are not obligated to remember Christ specifically at Christmas, it has become a helpful practice to meditate on his first coming at Christmastime. However, given the proliferation of the season’s entertainment and “Christmas spirit,” it can be difficult to combine a sacred meditation with secular Christmas. One way to do so is to reflect upon the first coming of our Lord in light of his second coming. In this manner, we hope to set the incarnation of our Lord free from cultural baggage and see it in its proper significance.

THE TIMES

From the gospel testimony, we would have to conclude that the first coming of our Lord was at one of the low points of redemptive history, at least as far as the covenant people were concerned. Politically, Israel was subjugated

by the Romans, and, spiritually, the covenant people were subjugated by the darkness of contemporary Judaism. They were, with few exceptions, spiritually bankrupt. The darkness of the time was profound: the spiritual leaders were blind and leading the blind who followed. Perhaps we might say that this was the ideal time for the Savior to come. Paul states that it was in the “fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4) that God sent his Son to be born of a woman. In our Lord’s incarnation, the Light truly shone in the great and profound darkness (John 1:5).

The second coming of our Lord will be similar. Throughout the New Testament, the evidence for the growth of the church is manifold. So too is the evidence for the growth and intensification of opposition and persecution. The gospel age from Acts to Revelation 20 reveals this simultaneous pattern: as the church grows, so too does opposition to it. Perhaps we see this most clearly, with echoes of the spiritual times of the first coming, in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonian church. In it he warns that the second coming of Christ will not be until the “rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3). Whether you take this man of lawlessness to be the pope or some other figure, what is clear is that with him comes a great opposition to the truth. So much so that the man of lawlessness sets himself up as the anti-Christ, exalts himself in the church, and proclaims himself to be God (v. 4). His influence of darkness will be profound; his activity is Satanic (v. 9); and there is a great deception and delusion regarding the truth, to the end that many “believe what is false” (v. 11), ending in their subsequent condemnation. Yes, the Satanic darkness will be profound before the Light, the Messiah, our Lord, comes once again. Stand fast in his light until he comes.

THE SCOPE

Our Lord’s first coming was localized and national. That is to say, Christ came to Israel, in Israel. Born in humble surroundings in Bethlehem without even national fanfare, Jesus in his birth was not notable for the vast majority of Jews. Moreover, the boundaries of his first coming were largely confined to the covenant people, with notable exceptions to Gentile-populated areas. Naturally this suited the plan of redemption: he came to Judea and Samaria in order that his disciples might go beyond those boundaries unto the ends of the earth.

The second coming will have a worldwide effect. It will be universally known. “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God”

(1 Thess. 4:16). While our Lord's divine nature at his first coming was "veiled in flesh the Godhead see, veiled the incarnate deity" (Charles Wesley), this will not be the case at his second coming. The whole world will know and see him, and there will be no mistaking him for John the Baptist, Elijah, or some false Christ who comes before him. At his second coming, that which was proclaimed in his first coming (salvation and judgment) will be realized. Come, Lord Jesus! Come!

THE MANNER

As we have suggested, the manner of Christ's first coming was subdued. That is not to say it was ineffective—just not what we might have expected, and certainly not what the Jews expected regarding their Messiah. Born in a questionable estate, humanly speaking, which led the Jews to question his parentage (John 8:41), our Lord had a life that was characterized by trial, suffering, and humiliation. He was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3). This culminated in his death by crucifixion, his burial in the grave, and his remaining under the power of death for a time. At his first coming he became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). What condescension!

The contrast with his second coming could not be greater. We have noted it will be worldwide; it will also be universally recognizable. There will be no "infant holy, infant lowly" or "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" (Wesley). He will come on the clouds, with the sound of the trumpet and the cry of command (1 Thess. 4:16). Not only will there be salvation, but there will also be judgment. While one cannot fully agree with A. W. Pink's thought, "At his first coming he came to slay sin in men; at his second he will come to slay men in sin," there is an element of truth to it. While he was judged at his first coming, slandered, spat upon, beaten, crucified, and even rejected by his Father, nothing of this sort will be at his second coming. He will be the judge of the living and the dead. He will be universally acknowledged as the glorious, eternal Son, the Messiah of God, the elder brother of his people, so "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11).

THE RESPONSE

At our Lord's first coming, the general response was rejection, anger, and hatred. Certainly, many were brought to him by God's grace, but the picture of his first coming—summarized at the cross—is of a few dedicated followers surrounded by a mass of baying wolves. "He came to his

own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). That is not to say all rejected him—far from it! At his first coming, the doors of salvation were opened to the spiritually and socially lost, the despised and rejected. He who was himself rejected came to the rejected of society—those who, by God's grace, could see their need of more than a political redeemer but rather one who would save their souls from hell.

The second coming of our Lord will produce similar responses, yet with different results. Regarding his second coming, Scripture speaks of those who reject the Lord, recoiling in horror at his appearance: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Rev. 1:7). Revelation 6 reveals that kings, great ones, generals, the rich and powerful will hide themselves in caves and among rocks while they call the mountains and rocks to fall upon them. They attempt to hide from the wrath of him who sits on the throne, but to no avail. The judge and the judged of the first coming have been reversed in the second coming. And as John records for us, "The great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

As we consider our Lord's blessed incarnation, it is well worth our time not just looking back, but looking forward to what is to come. For our Lord, the swaddling clothes of the manger and burial clothes of his death will be replaced with robes and garments as white as light. So great will be his glory that the New Jerusalem will need no light of sun or moon, for the glory of God and of his Lamb will be its light (Rev. 21:23). And in that glorious light will dwell the saints, who will reign and rule with Christ forever (Rev. 22:5).

Now that's worth meditating upon at Christmas. That's my kind of Christmas spirit. **NH**

The author is pastor of Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

LET LOVE BE GENUINE



MATTHEW E. COTTA

When considering how the church is built up in Christ, the starting point is and must always be the Word of God. It is by the Word proclaimed and sacramentally received by the praying community of faith that Christ continues to build, guide, sustain, protect, and nourish his church.

It is the church as the family of God, as the community of the Spirit, particularly when it is gathered for public worship, that receives the Word of Christ. Edification is a corporate affair (1 Pet. 2:5).

INDISPENSABLE FELLOWSHIP

OPC church planters, including myself, are all given a little booklet to read: *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Among its many pearls of wisdom is this sage observation:

In some church-planting circles, the concept of fellowship is identified as a separate ministry activity. However, it seems more appropriate to identify fellowship activities as one of the means to promote spiritual growth among the people of the mission work. The people whom God has drawn together to form a new church need to know each other and enjoy the sweet fellowship of the saints in order to grow and serve effectively. (91)

To summarize: fellowship activities must not be conceived as an add-on, as one aspect of what the church is and does, tangentially related to worship, Bible study, mercy ministry, etc. Rather, it is a vital factor in everything we are called to be and do as a church.

Gathering together in worship is constitutive and central, for it is there that we behold and witness to who we truly are in Christ. However, if we neglect gathering together outside of worship, are we truly walking in the light of what we are and express together in worship?

Back in December 2016, the *New York Times* published an article titled, “How Social Isolation Is Killing Us.” Summarizing recent research on how more and more of us are feeling lonely, disconnected, and detached from meaningful communion with others, the article claims that social isolation is killing us. It concludes:

Individuals with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent. Another analysis that pooled data from 70 studies and 3.4 million people found that socially isolated individuals had a 30 percent higher risk of dying in the next seven years, and that this effect was largest in middle age. Loneliness can accelerate cognitive decline in older adults, and isolated individuals are twice as likely to die prematurely as those with more robust social interactions. These effects start early: Socially isolated children have significantly poorer health 20 years later, even after controlling for other factors. All told, loneliness is as important a risk factor for early death as obesity and smoking.

The world around us is literally dying for lack of genuine community, that which the church of Jesus Christ has and is. Yet too often, I fear, church members feel the same social isolation as those in the world. Are we truly appreciating and living out what we learned at the Lord’s Table? Does our gathering together for corporate worship result in our being knit even closer together outside of worship? Do we truly recognize how glorious a gift we have been given in Christ in one another?

Take the time to read again what Jesus said in John 13:35. Read what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:14 and 4:7–12. Consider what Paul wrote:

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not

be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom. 12:9–18)

Clearly, this is more than an occasional exercise. It is not an add-on. It is a way of life, a culture, a society that shapes our daily lives in this world.

POWERFUL FELLOWSHIP

Marva Dawn wrote about how the lack of genuine love affects the church, its worship, and its witness. She lamented:

We might know some facts about each other, but we do not actually know who a fellow congregant really is, so we talk about trivia when we gather. We do not know how to share what genuinely matters, how to deal with the real lives and deep hurts or doubts of honest people, or how to speak the truth. Lacking sincere intimacy in congregational fellowship, we often put false pressure on worship to produce feelings of intimacy. Alienated by the lack of true “public” worship, many people, conditioned by our culture’s sterility, prefer merely to attend, and not participate in, worship. They can get lost in a crowd of passive spectators or worship solely through televised services. (*Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 28)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is not how it should be. What can we offer those around us who are dying for lack of true, intimate, meaningful fellowship, if we ourselves are not living out of the inheritance of the communion of the saints graciously won for us by Christ? What argument can we offer to those who prefer to stay home and “watch” worship?

Put plainly, we need to spend even more time together: visit each other regularly, call each other regularly, pray for each other regularly, have each other into our homes regularly, and spend time with each other both in and outside of worship services.

And when together, we need to open our hearts to one another—our hopes and our fears, our doubts, our weak-



Cotta with a new member of Pasadena OPC

nesses, our joys, and our sorrows. We need to really talk and really listen. We need to encourage one another in the things of the Lord. We need to pray not only for but with one another.

We were not meant to walk the way of the cross alone. We need to remember that a truly glorious aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that by his death and resurrection he not only reconciled us to God (though that is the best part), but also to each other.

And we need to believe that the Holy Spirit gives to each member of his church gifts and graces that are indispensable for the wellbeing of the other members—gifts and graces that can only be shared with and enjoyed by others when they are together. The fruits which flow out of the communion of the saints will be mutual edification, a deeper and more profound sense of gratitude and praise for God in worship, a closer bond in public worship with those who with us, next to us, are singing God’s praise, and the drawing in of those outside who see among us something that they are dying to have.

All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. (Westminster Confession of Faith, 26.1) **NH**

The author is pastor of Pasadena OPC in Pasadena, California.

ONE CHURCH'S MINISTRY TO COLLEGE STUDENTS



JOSIAH HEMP

Patrick Henry College student Kat Kidder ended up at Ketocin Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) almost by accident. When she was a freshman in 2018, she missed her ride to her church one Sunday and headed to nearby Ketocin instead. “That was the first time I’d ever gone to a church completely by myself,” she said. “I walked in and really almost immediately felt at home.”

She remembers meeting Rick Weitz, an elder, who welcomed her and introduced her to two other Patrick Henry students who could give her rides to church. After the service, a family invited her and other students to a meal. After that Sunday, she stayed at Ketocin—and is still a member six years later. “I have noticed throughout my time here that there is a real desire to get students involved in the church,” Kidder said.

Statistically, Gen Z students are less religiously affiliated than previous generations. Ketocin, however, has found abundant opportunities to disciple young Christian leaders. The church is just a few minutes away from Patrick Henry College (PHC), a conservative Christian college

with an enrollment of four hundred. Ketocin’s location drove their ministry.

“It’s who God puts in front of you,” Ketocin elder Bob Trombadore said. “We just responded to what God provided. God provided an increasing body of students.”

Ketocin families host young adult fellowship meals on Sunday afternoons. According to Trombadore, attendance two years ago was fifteen to twenty. Today, it’s around forty. “A lot of [our outreach] is a ministry of hospitality to Patrick Henry students and their families,” Trombadore said. He and his wife, Mary, regularly host the fellowship meals and open their home to families who are visiting their students at the college. “We’ve tried to function as a kind of a home away from home.”

The Trombadores often say students can come over any time. Patrick Henry student Rachel Tolbert organized a study evening for PHC girls at the Trombadores’ during finals week last spring. “It was great. . . . we talked to them for over an hour. They provided snacks and food, and we studied,” Tolbert remembered.

“There’s something really important and valuable about being invited into someone’s home,” said Elizabeth Russell, a PHC alum who is originally from Texas and stayed at Ketocin after graduating. “Especially for students far away from home, like I was.”

James Elliot grew up at Ketocin. He said the church’s student ministry is not one person’s project or program—instead, it is “ingrained in the culture of the church.” Elliot didn’t realize the full importance of the ministry to students until he became a PHC student himself. He enjoys the fellowship meals, which he described as “a very intentional setting.”

Now that Elliot has graduated from college and has an apartment, one of his goals is to use his apartment to show hospitality. “Ketocin was a huge influence on my desire to do that,” he said.

The Trombadores welcome both students and their families





Elizabeth Russell, a PHC alum and Ketocotin member

PART OF THE MISSION

Many PHC students similarly use their gifts to serve the church. Some play instruments for accompaniment in worship, others teach children's Sunday school, help the deacons with setup and teardown, and have organized an evening "family worship" gathering at the Trombadores. "There's a lot of involvement pretty much at every level," Bob Trombadore said.

Kidder said that when she began to serve by playing music, "I really started to feel . . . like I was actually part of the mission of the church." She appreciates that Ketocotin takes a different approach from the typical pizza and games used to attract college students. "I've never felt like they were trying to attract us just to build their numbers . . . [but from] a desire to serve students and build them up for the work of the kingdom."

"It's not like we have a super flashy college ministry," PHC student Isaac Torcellini said. "It's that we're going to faithfully . . . stay close to the means of grace that God has provided."

"It's centered around homes and families just opening their doors to you," Russell said. "Rather than creating some program or events . . . it just kind of happens organically around the table, which I think is really awesome."

BLESSING OTHER CHURCHES

This abundant and yet ordinary hospitality, preaching, and mentoring is not primarily directed toward building up one local church. "If you only think of your own congregation as building the church, you're missing the point," Trombadore said. "Being able to minister to college students for an important time in their lives is a great opportunity to minister for the future of the greater church. You're planting seeds or watering young plants that will go off and become big oak trees somewhere."

One of those seeds that grew to a tree elsewhere is OP pastor Zachary Simmons. "Ketocotin was, if not the most influential, certainly near the top of the greatest influences in my life during my college years," Simmons said. He attended Ketocotin from 2007 to 2013, during and immediately after his time as a student at Patrick Henry. He was mentored by the church's then-pastor, Charles Biggs. Simmons is now pastor of Resurrection OPC in State College, Pennsylvania. The impact of Ketocotin's hospitality toward students encouraged Simmons to start a young adult fellowship at Resurrection.

"Ketocotin has had a tremendous impact on the OPC through its discipleship of the students who've come there," Simmons said. **NH**

The author is a member of Ketocotin Covenant Presbyterian Church and a student at Patrick Henry College.

HOW CAN YOUR CHURCH MINISTER TO COLLEGE STUDENTS?

Ben Franks, pastor of Ketocotin Covenant Presbyterian Church

1. See the opportunities

It can be tempting to pull back from ministry to students who may graduate and move on a year from now. But those students who come to your church for a season and then go out into the rest of the world can bless the broader church. Gen Z (like every generation) needs to be rooted in the gospel, and as they grow at your church, you have the privilege of preparing them for service in their future churches. Be eager to invest in them for as long as you can.

2. Practice hospitality

Perhaps the single most effective thing we've done to build relationships with students is simply to welcome them into our homes. All of us have a longing for belonging, and while much of Gen Z is constantly "connected" online, there's a real hunger for flesh and blood relationships. Consider organizing a rotation of families to welcome college students into church members' homes on the Lord's Day.

3. Engage their questions

Gen Z is less likely to be religious than previous generations, but they still have questions about God, Christianity, and the Bible. Teaching and preaching, one-on-one conversations and discipleship, and group Q&As are ways to allow questions and provide guidance.

PREACHING AND THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP



AARON P. MIZE

As Orthodox Presbyterians, there is no hesitation when it comes to defending the regulative principle of worship because Scripture is certainly not silent on the matter of how Scripture regulates the worship of God. Cain's offering to the Lord was not acceptable to the Lord, while Abel's was pleasing to the Lord. Why? Abel offered the choicest of his herd in faith according to what the Lord had revealed in the garden when he covered his parents with garments of animal skin in Genesis 3:21. Cain brought an offering from the earth—an offering devoid of the animal offering set before his parents in Genesis 3:21, which disregarded God's revelation of the way of salvation and the way to approach him in worship.

The books of Exodus and Leviticus supply detailed instruction on how God must be worshiped. The building of the tabernacle, all the furnishings inside and outside, and everything that pertains to the worship of God must

proceed after the pattern that God shows to Moses the mediator (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). Worship must be according to God's commandments alone; what is not commanded by God is forbidden in worship. The offering of "strange fire" that God did not command in Leviticus 10, followed by the death sanction brought by the Lord upon Nadab and Abihu, graphically confirms this crucial point.

The Decalogue sets forth the substance of the regulative principle of worship in the first and second commandments:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Ex. 20:2–6)

In summary form, the substance of the regulative principle of worship consists in this: you shall worship only the living and true God, and you shall not worship the true God falsely but only according to his commandments.

As confessional Presbyterians, we are aware of these Scriptures, and others like them, that frame the regulative principle of worship. Yet I want to suggest the urgency of applying the regulative principle to the preaching of the Word of God. How does the regulative principle bear on what Christ-centered preaching to the glory of God looks like?

THE GOSPEL CONTAINS ITS OWN RELEVANCE

Scripture has many examples of preaching to the glory of God: Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2 and before the people in the Portico of Solomon in Acts 3; Stephen's sermon in Acts 7; Peter preaching to the Gentiles in Acts 10; Paul and Barnabas's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia in Acts 13; and the entire book of Hebrews, which functions as a protracted sermon (Heb. 13:22). Each of these is an exemplar. Each sermon is an instance of "redemptive-historical" preaching that is thoroughly *christocentric*—Christ is the central redemptive subject matter—and *christotelic*—Christ the climatic fulfillment of the Old Testament. Christ, crucified and glorified, forges both the substance and goal of the Old Testament Scriptures that the apostles proclaim in their heralding of the gospel.

This gospel of God's Son contains its own relevance in the way that it addresses sin and supplies salvation in Christ. You will not find biblical examples of preaching that finds its relevance in the preacher's religious experience or in the exemplary character of a biblical figure.

Paul never anchors the gospel in his own life experience, no matter how important his own apostolic life experience might be in the unfolding of redemptive history. Rather, from beginning to end, he preaches a Son-centered gospel (Rom. 1:1–4) that centers not on the experience of the Christian but on the experience of Christ himself. It is a gospel primarily about the Benefactor of redemption—and then and only then a gospel about the benefits sinners receive in union with the Benefactor by the Spirit and through faith (1 Cor. 15:3–4; Eph. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:30). The sinless Son of God as the Mediator himself was justified (1 Tim. 3:16), adopted (Rom. 1:4), sanctified (Rom. 6:9), and glorified in his resurrection (2 Cor. 4:5–6), and the church receives the benefits of salvation only in union and communion with her crucified and glorified Lord.

Moreover, you will not find in apostolic preaching the exemplary sermons so common in American pulpits. The narrative of David and Goliath is not about how to fight the giants in your life, but rather how Christ has fought death, sin, and Satan on your behalf. It is the story of redemption accomplished and applied to the cowering Israelites looking on as their Champion defeats their and his enemy. You will not find sermon application in the Scriptures that seeks to make the gospel culturally relevant. Rather you will find an application first to Jesus Christ—and then and only then to believers united to him by the Spirit and through faith. The application found in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel draws attention from earth to the reality of heaven, where Christ is seated at the Father's right hand. Longtime OP historian and pastor Charles Dennison wrote that

good preaching is God-centered, not man-centered. Enough of these litanies of illustrations, autobiographical and otherwise, often more important to the preacher than the text itself. Enough of these shameful anecdotal homilies invented out of half truths and out-and-out untruths, the stuff of evangelical folklore. Preaching is not first of all about what may have happened to me or to you, disgracefully embellished and exaggerated, but what has most assuredly happened to Jesus Christ. ("Some Thoughts on Preaching," *Kerux*, 1996)

THE APPLICATION OF CHRIST TO THE CHRISTIAN

How, then, does the regulative principle of worship bear on preaching the Word of God? When Paul commands Timothy to "preach the word" in 2 Timothy 4:2, he commands Timothy to preach the gospel as he has received it from the apostles (2 Tim 2:8, 1 Cor. 15:1). The force of Paul's command to Timothy carries with it the force of the regulative principle applied to preaching. What it means to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" in terms of the preaching of the Word is set on display as the apostles call sinners to union and communion with Christ as Savior and the worship and service of Jesus Christ as Lord. Such gospel theology entails that the entire Christian life consists in the laying down of life to serve others in the way Christ has served you, what has been called a "cruciform life." The comprehensive character of the preaching of the gospel thus envelops and bears on the whole of the cruciform life in union with Christ. When pastors depart from the Christ-centered gospel in the ways I have outlined, they are departing from what Paul commanded Timothy, and by extension all ministers, to do in the preaching of the gospel. The resurrection life of Christ in the Spirit conforms the Christian comprehensively to his suffering and cruciform love in new obedience, thereby making the application of Christ to the Christian totalizing and comprehensive.

We must apply the regulative principle of worship to our preaching. Let me conclude with a few more health-giving words from Charles Dennison:

Therefore, the message to preachers is not as it should be, namely, "You and your people have died with Christ to the world, therefore flee the world that, in following the cross and living from heaven, you might be given back as true servants of Christ in the world." Instead the message to preachers becomes, "Master the world, become experts about the world so that you and your people might have influence for Christ and thereby prevail in the world, even as you make your way to God's final benediction." . . . Good preaching doesn't pull the word into our world as if the word were deficient in itself and in need of our applicatory skills. Instead good preaching testifies and declares to us that we have been pulled into the word which has its own marvellous sufficiency. **NH**

The author is pastor of Providence OPC in Kingwood, Texas.

CARING THROUGH COMPENSATION

JOHN M. FIKKERT

For many OP congregations, December and January are the season for annual congregational meetings and approving yearly budgets. If your church budget is like most, the biggest line item is probably pastoral compensation.

Churches have an opportunity not only to support a minister's public ministry but to do so with generosity and joy. The principle of joyful giving is seen in 2 Cor. 9:6–14 when Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about their promised care for the gift of the saints. While Scripture certainly makes clear the obligation of churches to support their ministers (see 1 Tim. 5:17–18, Gal. 6:6, and 1 Cor. 9:8–14), how much better for the church to delight in the opportunity to provide for his and his family's needs.

HOUSING, BENEFITS, AND INFLATION

One of the challenges faced in providing compensation to ministers in our modern economy is the ever-increasing complexity and cost of housing and employee benefits. Long gone are the days of the provided parsonage and inexpensive health insurance. In many areas of the country housing costs have exploded. Health insurance in particular can be one of the costliest considerations in supporting a minister and his family, especially if one or more members of the family have significant health challenges.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported earlier this year that benefits represent about 30 percent of total compensation for the average employee. This percentage should be kept in mind for considering sufficient compensation for a minister. In our day, compensation is more complicated than merely identifying what might seem at first glance to be a reasonable salary.

The Committee on Ministerial Care provides an online compensation tool on its website, opcmc.org, to help sessions, church treasurers, and congregations assess what might be appropriate compensation in their situation. Far from being a one-size-fits-all approach, the tool accounts

for a minister's years of experience, family size, and regional cost of living factors. Separate line items in the tool then provide for the opportunity to list housing allowance,

health insurance, and other common benefits and reimbursements for a minister. The goal of the tool is to remove complexity and provide a reasonable estimate in ten minutes or less.



No discussion of pastoral compensation is complete without a word about inflation: \$100 in the year 2000 is the same as about \$183 today. The impact of inflation on ministerial compensation is such that paying a minister \$65,000 in

total annual compensation in 2000 is the equivalent of paying a minister about \$115,000 in today's money.

BREAK IT DOWN

One final recommendation from the CMC to churches as they compose their annual budgets would be to break the pastor's compensation into separate line items rather than simply listing a total. One large number can create sticker shock for any of us if that is the only number we see! Instead, list each of the major components to help members understand not just what the pastor gets in his paycheck but also the parts that the church, like most employers, is paying on behalf of its employees. For instance, in the 2023 Survey of Ministerial Compensation conducted by the CMC, the average reported annual salary was \$55,364, the average housing allowance was \$33,378, and the average benefits amounted to \$26,694, for a total compensation amounting to \$115,436. This level of detail promotes understanding.

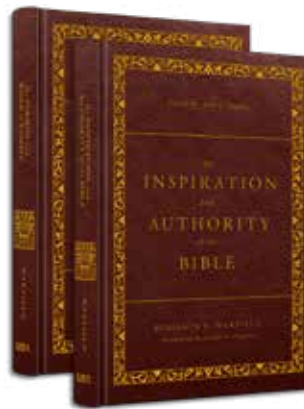
As your church enters its annual budget season, may these thoughts encourage you toward a joyful support of your minister or ministers and their families.

The author is director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

B. B. WARFIELD FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

SANDY FINLAYSON

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851–1921) has justifiably been considered one of the seminal Reformed theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through his teaching at Western Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary, as well as his published works, he had a significant influence for good in the academy and in the church. Warfield’s publishing output was prodigious. During his tenure at Princeton, he published over forty books and more than 1,700 periodical articles and book reviews. In 1948, the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company (P&R) began a project of republishing some of his important works, including the two titles reviewed here. Now more than seventy years later, P&R is again making Warfield accessible to a new generation with these deluxe editions.



THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, first published in 1948, collected for the first time eight of Warfield’s essays on the nature and authority of the Bible. Warfield lived in a time when many, in both the academy and in the church, were having serious doubts about the origins and the authority of God’s Word. Emphasis was increasingly being placed on the human authorship of the Bible. Not surprisingly, this resulted in people questioning anything miraculous or supernatural, and caused some to even question how God could be said to be directly involved in history or the lives of individuals.

Warfield’s essays clearly stated the Reformed understanding of these issues and why they matter. While it’s not possible to discuss all the essays in this review, I would like to highlight two of them that have lasting importance. The collection begins with a summary of the biblical idea of revelation and then moves on to a historical sketch, which sets out what the church has believed about the inspiration of the Bible.

Here Warfield asserts that the church has always seen the Bible “as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says, God says . . . [It is] not a book . . . in which one may by searching, find some word of God, but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God” (37). If these words were important in Warfield’s time, they are even more so now. While Warfield was contending with teaching that questioned in what sense could the Bible be seen as God’s Word, we now live in a time where there are people who question whether truth can objectively be known at all. Without the certainty of God’s Word, we can be certain of very little. It is good to be reminded that God has spoken, and his Word can be trusted.

In the third essay, Warfield looks at what it means to say that the Scriptures are inspired. In discussing the well-known words of 2 Timothy 3:16, he states that what the Greek term says of Scripture is

not that it is “breathed into by God” or is the product of the Divine “inbreathing” into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, “God-breathed.” . . . In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product. . . . No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed. The “breath of God” is in Scripture just the symbol of His almighty power, the bearer of His creative word. . . . When Paul declares, then, that “every scripture,” or “all scripture” is the product of the Divine breath, “is God-breathed,” he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation. (72)

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

The Person and Work of Christ, first published in 1950, is divided into two main sections, the first dealing with who Jesus is and the second with what Jesus has accomplished. Two of the articles are particularly worth noting here. “The Emotional Life of Christ” is perhaps one of Warfield’s best known articles. It has been reprinted many times and is well worth a careful reading. Warfield begins with the assertion that “it belongs to the truth of our Lord’s humanity, that he was subjected to all sinless human emotions” (104). Warfield goes on to examine how Christ experienced compassion and love, anger and indignation, and joy and sorrow. What is most powerful in this article is the stress it lays on how our Lord’s life was focused on his work of redemption. Here, Warfield rightly states that when

we observe him exhibiting the movements of his human emotions, we are gazing on the very process of our salvation: every manifestation of the truth of our Lord’s humanity is an exhibition of the reality of our redemption. In his sorrows he was bearing our sorrows, and having passed through a human life like ours, he remains forever able to be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Such a High Priest, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “became” us. We needed such an one. When we note the marks of humanity in Jesus Christ, we are observing his fitness to serve our needs. We behold him made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and our hearts add our witness that it became him for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (146–147)

In his day, Warfield contended with the views of some scholars who wanted to cling to Christianity as a religion of love but didn’t like the idea that the atonement was at the heart of our faith. The chapter entitled “The Essence of Christianity and the Cross of Christ” is an answer to these dangerous ideas. Warfield reminds us that Christianity is not a religion based on moral teachings or abstract philosophy; rather, it is about Christ’s atoning work for his people on the cross. Warfield says this about those who have been redeemed by Christ:

The redeemed in the blood of Christ, after all is said, are a people apart. Call them “Christians,” or call them what you please, they are of a specifically different religion from those who know no such experience. It may be within the rights of those who feel no need of such a redemption and have never experienced its



B. B. Warfield (fourth from left) with Princeton colleagues in 1894, including Geerhardus Vos (third from left)

transforming power to contend that their religion is a better religion than the Christianity of the Cross. It is distinctly not within their rights to maintain that it is the same religion as the Christianity of the Cross. (566)

The ideas Warfield was engaging with are still with us. There are still those who want to retain some of Christianity’s ethical framework but want no part of the essence of the gospel. We need to be as clear as Warfield was that Christianity without the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is a different religion, and one that is emptied of the saving power that we all need.

Both volumes reviewed here are not just reprints of classic works. Rather, under the skillful editorship of Jonathan Hughes, there are several enhancements and additions. Each title has a helpful introduction as well as summaries of each of the articles and a study guide that could be used for personal or group study. There are also detailed indexes, bibliographies, and editorial notes. For those who are interested in learning more about Warfield, there is a brief biography and an article that provides suggestions for further reading. Whether you are coming to Warfield for the first time or have benefited from his scholarship before, these books are a major achievement and are well worth adding to your library.

The author is a ruling elder at Cornerstone Presbyterian in Ambler, Pennsylvania.

The Classic Warfield Collection: The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible and The Person and Work of Christ, by Benjamin B. Warfield. Series editor, John J. Hughes. P&R, 2023. Hardback, 656 and 752 pages, \$99.98.

EYEWITNESS TO GRACE

JEREMY C. JONES

We set out early Sunday morning down a rain-soaked and muddy path, carrying two shovels, a white cloth, and bags of food and cooking supplies. We were not yet making our way to church for worship, but to the village for a burial. The day before, the Uganda Mission received word that the two-year-old son of Angolere Moses, one of their compound guards, had died. The little boy had been sick in the hospital with an undiagnosed illness. The Karimojong do not wait long for a burial, so we set out early in hopes of arriving in time to give some small support to Angolere and his family.

When we arrived, the child's great-grandfather (and owner of the land) discussed with Angolere the location of the grave. We were invited to sit down beside Angolere, while the women and children sat on tattered tarps on the ground. One of the women tended the fire, which would boil the water for the spiced tea soon to be distributed to the mourners. Once the location for the grave was determined, the young men set to work, first clearing the vegetation, then shoveling the dirt in heaps beside the small grave. The rest of us sat in silence for about an hour, entering into the community's grief, as the grave was made ready. Then the mother and a few other women took the white cloth we brought with us and disappeared inside the darkness of their small round hut made of sticks and mud and topped with a thatched roof of papyrus reeds. There they prepared the body for burial and emerged from the darkness carrying the lifeless child wrapped in the cloth and gently laid this little one in the grave, which had been dug just a few meters away.

At this sign, the rest of us, about fifteen to twenty people, gathered around the open grave. Angolere turned to the visitors from the Mission and asked for prayer. Missionary associate and OP elder Josh Grimsley, who has developed a friendship with Angolere, led us in a gospel-filled, compassionate, and Christ-exalting prayer for the grieving family. Then the family took turns walking by the grave, scooping handfuls of dirt onto the once-white sheet. When the grave was filled and heaped up above the landscape, everyone quickly left the gravesite.

Nangiro John, a member of the ministry team, leads the way to the village



However, the graveside service didn't end there. The village members made their way outside the gate, through the field, to a nearby stone quarry, and everyone gathered two large stones to be placed atop the grave—presumably to keep the rain from washing away the dirt and to guard the remains from predators. The burial concluded with each of the family members ceremonially washing their hands at the head of the grave and sprinkling the water upon the mound of stones that had been raised atop this grave. The washing ceremony, I later learned, reflected something of the fear of death that still holds the Karimojong captive. Washing the funeral soil from their hands signified a heart's longing to be cleansed of death and the grave. According to one Karimojong, even the tools used to dig the grave would commonly be left untouched for three days before undergoing a similar washing ceremony. O to be free from the grave and death's hold!

SHEPHERDING WITH PASTOR JULIUS

This was one of many poignant moments in my recent trip to Uganda that has fueled both prayer and thanksgiving for the church-planting work there. I've had the privilege of serving on the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions for three years, but this was my first visit to the

field. This experience was a taste of the work that our missionaries are engaged in firsthand as the Lord builds his church in Uganda. As part of the Uganda Subcommittee, I keep in touch with our missionaries and missionary associates by Zoom at least once a quarter. While our meetings are profitable, they are no substitute for mourning with a family at a funeral, sharing a meal to discuss the highs and lows of the past day, or celebrating communion with the saints at the church plants in Karamoja and Mbale. My brief visit to Uganda has provided a new appreciation for the faithful service of our missionaries and their co-laborers. It has given me a clearer sight of the good things that the Lord is doing in this land to gather and perfect a people to the praise of his glorious grace.

While we ask the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers to this field, let's also give thanks for those he has and is raising up within Uganda. I was privileged to accompany Nakaale Presbyterian Church's Pastor Julius, a Ugandan national, on a typical Monday morning. After morning devotions for the clinic staff, we met with the ministry team—a handful of young Karimojong men actively engaged in serving the church. Pastor Julius, who does not speak the local language, leans heavily on their knowledge of the culture and language to minister among the Karimojong. We began by identifying key concerns facing some of their church members. Locoro Emmanuel would assist a widow in the church with acquiring some necessary signatures in town to secure housing. Maruk Mark, suffering with symptoms of malaria, would head to the clinic to be tested. Nangiro John and his brother, Loduk Joseph, would walk with us on a shepherding visit to a family who had been sick and absent from worship for the last three weeks.

It was about a mile to the members' home. The rains were heavy the night before, so the creek was swollen and the path was muddy. We pressed on, pushing aside the tall grass in our way and trying not to slip on the soft ground moving beneath our feet. Pastor Julius shared his joy in actually having members to visit. He had recently completed a membership class, and the church plant received its first quasi-official members (official membership will take place once the church plant is particularized with elders). This undershepherd now has specific sheep to know by name, to visit when sick, to feed and lead, in a community where the needs can seem endless. The very limited resources of the church can now be more wisely distributed to help the most vulnerable among their number.

At the village, we asked the women and children gathered in the nearest hut about the family we had come to visit. We had come all this way, and they were not there.

But it was no wasted trip. Their absence allowed us the opportunity to explain to this Karimojong community why we had come, and for them to see something of Christ's care for his flock. After Pastor Julius shared the gospel with the small gathering and prayed, we made our way back to the main road—where we providentially bumped into the very brother we had first set out to see. He had recovered from illness and was returning to work, bagging charcoal to provide for his family. He was looking forward to joining God's people in worship once again.

WORSHIPING ALONGSIDE TIMO

After a week in rural Karamoja, I concluded my visit to Uganda in the city of Mbale, giving me opportunity to see what the Lord is doing at Knox School of Theology to prepare men for gospel ministry in Uganda and throughout East Africa. What an encouragement to see the heart for Christ and the appreciation for the Reformed faith being cultivated among the students and exemplified in the faculty and staff at Knox! Of particular blessing was the opportunity to visit with Lokiru Timothy ("Timo"), a third-year student from Karamoja, who is near to completing his studies and hoping to return home to see the gospel advanced among his own people. This young man is not much older than the number of years that the OP has been ministering in Karamoja.

How Timo's story unfolds is in the Lord's hands, but the meeting was a clear testimony to me of the Lord's patient and persistent work in using the OP Mission to build his church, to nurture the faith, and to disciple this young man for gospel ministry. As I sat beside this dear brother on Sunday morning at All Nations Presbyterian Church, worshipping the same Lord together, I was given a foretaste of future things: a people from every tribe and tongue and nation redeemed to sing the praises of the One who delivers from death and brings us into God's glorious presence.

The author is pastor of Covenant OPC in Grove City, PA.

WHAT'S NEW

Associate missionaries **Mr. and Mrs. Christopher J. (Chloe) Verdick** (New Life Presbyterian Church [PCA] in La Mesa, California) and their children returned to the field in Karamoja, Uganda, at the end of October.

Missionary associate **Mr. Jedidiah T. Homan** (Immanuel OPC in Bellmawr, New Jersey) completed his one-year term of service in Karamoja, Uganda, in November.

GOD'S UNIQUE GUIDANCE IN CHURCH PLANTING

CHRISTIAN REPP

Every church has its own origin story. In the case of a church plant, you are witnessing the initial moments when God brings people together to form a new church family. In this article, I'd like to share the story of how God brought Park Presbyterian Church in Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania, into being, how I was called to be their organizing pastor, and what are the next steps we are trusting God to lead us toward.

AN UNUSUAL BEGINNING

There are various ways to approach the process of church planting. It's crucial for the regional home missionary to remain attentive to important questions like: What is the context and culture? What resources are available? Are there people ready to form a core group or start a Bible study?

Dave Holmlund, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia, had a long-held vision for planting a church in central Bucks County, an area that had been without a solid Reformed church for over a decade. The challenge in this case was finding the right starting point. After years of prayer for God to open doors and provide opportunities, Dave said, it felt like progress was hard to come by.

Fellowship dinner at Park Presbyterian



Repp at his 2023 ordination



Then, in summer 2020, God answered those prayers by bringing together individuals eager for a Reformed church in Doylestown and the surrounding area. Ironically, it was a year of significant division and confusion for many churches that few remember fondly. Yet, our sovereign God used this very time to create a pathway for a mission work in central Bucks. In July 2020, a group began meeting in a park, and by September 2021, it became a mission work of the OPC.

As Reformed Christians, we cherish God's sovereignty, relying on it through difficulties, trusting it in prayer, and rejoicing when we witness his work in our lives. We affirm with conviction: "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Psalm 115:3). This truth is evident in the founding of Park Presbyterian. While men can only do so much, God's arm is never too short. Four years later, a thriving mission work meets every Sunday with a shared purpose: to worship God and to be transformed by the means of grace.

Reflecting on our beginnings, I realize they may not be so unusual after all. God often employs unexpected methods to build his church, making it easy to see how "the heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

MY JOURNEY TO “PARK PRES”

My own journey echoes this theme. Just as forming a mission work and building a core group takes time and wisdom, so does the process of calling a pastor. I didn't grow up in Bucks County, nor even in the United States; I hail from a small town in Germany. So how did I become the organizing pastor of Park Pres? God established my steps.

Initially, my plan was to study at Westminster Seminary California and return to serve a church in Germany, but God had different intentions. I met Dave at a conference, and, a year later, he asked if I'd be interested in getting to know the mission work. My first thought was that it could be a valuable experience, and Dave reassured me during my visit in May 2022 that “if nothing else, you are making new friends.” Little did we know that a year and a half later, I would accept the call and be ordained and installed in November 2023.

PARK PRES TODAY

Today, we gather at a local Grange building in Plumsteadville with a strong core group and many regular visitors. I never imagined I would be a church planter in the States; it always seemed daunting. But there's something incredibly rewarding about seeing new people visit because they heard about us or were invited.

I am profoundly grateful that the Lord brought my family and me to an OPC church plant. We clearly see God's hand in our lives, and I am thankful to serve as the pastor of this wonderful mission work filled with incredible people who love God and each other—often lingering in fellowship for over an hour after the service.

As we look forward to becoming an organized church, we pray for God to raise up elders and deacons and to provide a more suitable building. We are blessed with many young families and children, and we long for a space that better meets our needs and enhances our witness in the community.

The author is a church planter in Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania.



JOIN US IN SOUTH CAROLINA!

Michael C. Cloy

Covenant OPC, a mission work in Bluffton, South Carolina, is uniquely situated in the heart of the Low Country, serving the greater Hilton Head and Savannah communities. In the last year, Covenant has had visitors from the Atlantic Coast, the Ohio Valley, and the plains of the Midwest. These visitors enjoy vacationing in an area with warm ocean tides on white beaches, and lazy inlets nestled amongst old oak trees with Spanish moss. This area is also a hub for young families working in the hospitality, tourism, and manufacturing industries and for those seeking retirement-aged communities.

Do you have the flexibility to move to Bluffton and help our unique mission work grow in this beautiful community? The provisional session of Covenant seeks OP members who can move to Bluffton and use their gifts and graces to help it grow. In particular, it seeks a seasoned OP ruling elder to serve in an in-residence and at-large role to assist Pastor Andy Wann in evangelism, outreach, teaching, and shepherding. “In residence” means moving to establish permanent residence, but it could also mean temporary residence with the expectation of an extended duration. By “seasoned,” we mean five-plus years serving on a particular church session or an elder already in at-large status.

A retired elder with energy and commitment could tremendously help the church develop toward particularization. Or perhaps you work from home and can select where you reside, work, and worship. We know this request is unique and includes a great deal of sacrifice. Please humbly bring this before the Lord and your session, prayerfully considering whether God is calling you to this field of mission.

For more, email Mr. Mike Cloy, clerk of provisional session, at opcsmikecloy@gmail.com. Learn more about Covenant OPC at www.covenantpresbluffton.com.

DEC 2024 PRAYER CALENDAR



The Devenneys (day 6)



The Jees (day 1)

1 Heero & Anya Hacquebord, Lviv, Ukraine. Pray for Bohdan, Oleh, Misha, and Mykola, four soldiers from their church serving on the front lines. / **John & Grace Jee**, Columbia, MD. Pray that Word of Life OPC would corporately surrender to God's will.

2 Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Yearlong intern **Mitchell (Cali) Watson** at Knox OPC in Silver Spring, MD.

3 Pray for **Charles & Connie Jackson**, Mbale, Uganda, that the Lord would be their joy and strength as they prepare to move back to the States this month. / Pray for **OPC Disaster Response volunteers** as they seek to serve those affected by disasters.

4 Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Give thanks for **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda, as they prepare to move to Uganda to serve as missionaries.

5 **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Kyle, TX. Pray the Lord would bless the outreach and evangelism efforts of Hays County OPC. / Active duty military chaplains **Kenneth A. (Mandy) Kruckow**, US Army, and **Cornelius (Deidre) Johnson**, US Navy.

6 Affiliated missionaries **Dr. Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for good health as they travel to different congregations during home assignment. / Yearlong intern **William (Mayra) Devenney** at First Church of Merrimack in Merrimack, NH.

7 Give thanks for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / **Mark & Celeste Jenkins**, Placentia, CA. Pray for Resurrection OPC as it seeks to reach Placentia with the good news.

8 **Dan & Stacy Halley**, Tampa, FL. Pray that Bay Haven OPC would be bold for Christ in conversation. / Pray that the Lord would raise up good leaders now for next summer's **short-term mission teams**.

9 Associate missionaries **Octavious & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Give thanks for the Lord's provision of daily necessities for the saints in La Gonâve. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, general secretary of Christian Education, in his work as editor of *New Horizons*.

10 **Dave (Elizabeth) Holmlund**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for a permanent place of worship for the **Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church** in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

11 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** and administrative assistants **Tin Ling Lee** and **Joanna Grove**, as the Executive Committee meets this week. / Yearlong intern **Joseph (Myranda) Scherschligt** at Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, DE.

12 Give thanks for missionary associates **Lucas & Erica Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay, as they complete their term and prepare to return to the States. / **Nate & Anna Strom**, Sheboygan, WI. Pray for Christ's peace to reign in the hearts of those at Breakwater Church.

13 **Sam & Milda Lukosius**, Springfield, OH. Pray for those who are new to the faith as they begin to follow Jesus. / Office manager and CCE administrative assistant **Esther Parks**.

.....
14 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the Salvos por Gracia congregation will see fruit from their evangelistic efforts. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* would bless listeners.

.....
15 Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Missionary associates **Josh & Danielle Grimsley**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord will use them to encourage the people at Nakaale Presbyterian Church.

.....
16 **Matt & Hyojung Walker**, Yorktown, VA. Give thanks to God for Peninsula Reformed's growth through visitors and new births. / Yearlong intern **Jon (Stacey) Jung** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

.....
17 Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**. Pray that the Timothy discipleship and Knox students would finish their school year well. / **Rachel Kinney**, social media coordinator.

.....
18 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the graduates of the Timothy discipleship program to find good work. / **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest.

.....
19 **Johnny & Berry Serafini**, Marion, NC. Pray that the Lord would bless Landis OPC with fruit as they reach out in compassion to their community. / **Judith Dinsmore**, managing editor of *New Horizons*.

.....
20 **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for spiritual and numerical growth for the churches in Nakaale and Mbale. / Yearlong intern **Josiah (Hannah) Stockwell** at Pilgrim OPC in Bangor, ME.

.....
21 **Bill & Margaret Shishko**, Commack, NY. Pray that the efforts of The Haven OPC will be used by the Lord for the furtherance of his kingdom. / **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, and missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the Uganda team as they navigate changes and challenges.

.....
22 **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest. / Pray that *The Reformed Deacon Podcast* would spur deacons on to joyful service in the church.

.....
23 Pray for affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne** and **Linda Karner**, Japan. / **David Nakhla**, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries. Pray for local deacons as they serve in countless ways.

.....
24 **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for wisdom in deciding when and how often they should visit their elderly parents. / **John & Erin Nymann**, Suffolk, VA. Pray for the Lord to supply a suitable building for All Saints Presbyterian Church.

.....
25 **Andrew & Cheyenne Farr**, Klamath Falls, OR. Pray for fruit from Klamath Reformed OPC's recent evangelistic efforts. / Yearlong intern **Stuart (Simone) Ireland** at Covenant OPC in New Bern, NC.

.....
26 **Mr. & Mrs. M.** (on furlough), Asia. Pray that those in prison or facing harassment for their faith would be encouraged by the Lord's love for them. / Pray for the Stated Clerk, **Hank Belfield**, and his staff as they work to prepare the 2025 editions of the *Book of Church Order* and the OPC Directory.



The Hopps (day 30)

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27 **Gregory & Ginger O'Brien**, Downingtown, PA. Pray the Lord would be pleased to save the lost through the ministry of Christ Church Downingtown. / Pray for the persecuted church in **East Africa**.

.....
28 Home Missions administrative assistant **Allison Groot**. / Yearlong intern **Isaiah (Calli Jade) English** at Grace OPC in Sewickley, PA.

.....
29 Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Pray for their witness to the Ukrainian refugees attending their English outreach classes. / **John Fikkert**, director of Committee on Ministerial Care.

.....
30 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Ask the Lord to bless their ministry to local Ugandan friends and neighbors who need to hear the gospel. / Pray for **James (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

.....
31 **David & Ashleigh Schexnayder**, Scottsdale, AZ. Pray for Providence OPC's ministry to local college students. / Yearlong intern **Luke (Laura) Walkup** at Reformation OPC in Morgantown, WV.



The Walkups (day 31)



JoAnn Vandenburg in 1990 with children from Bethel OPC

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM: JOANN VANDENBURG

Christopher Campbell

(Enid) JoAnn Vandenburg, age 95, went to be with the Lord on October 22. She was joyful and active in her years as a member of OPC churches in Lark and Carson, North Dakota, and Wyoming, Michigan. She was a young girl in the audience when J. Gresham Machen preached his last sermon in Leith, North Dakota, in 1936. I met JoAnn when, after my first evening service in Carson, JoAnn invited our young family to her house and gifted us with buns, vegetables, and beef from her freezer.

Widowed at 54, she talked often about her husband, Bill, and their early years in rural Lark OPC that hummed with a choir, a Ladies Missionary Society, a young people's group, and a Sunday school with a summer Bible program. While her home in Carson was a beehive of hospitality and other activity, she could be found on a winter's evening at the kitchen table with open Bible and a handwritten prayer list—even during the long evenings she was surrounded by those she loved.

Once, when asked whether it was too much at her age to be doing a daycare, JoAnn replied, "What could be better than reading Bible stories to children and taking naps!" She knew well the answer—the rest that awaits those who enter his gates with thanksgiving!

ALLEN AND PAYTON INSTALLED AT OOSTBURG, WI

Lisa Roerdink

On October 25, Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Oostburg,

Wisconsin, ordained and installed Reformed Theological Seminary graduate Christopher Allen and installed former PCA minister Curtis Payton to work as part of the pastoral team with Rev. David Veldhorst. Rev. John Hartley, moderator of the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota, led the service. Pastors Nathan Strom, Zach Tarter, and Brian De Jong were involved in the service. Rev. Christopher Allen gave the benediction. We give thanks for God's faithful provision of godly ministers to serve at Bethel OPC.

TSUI INSTALLED AS RHM

Joe Horvath

On October 4, Brian Tsui, formerly associate pastor of Covenant OPC in San Jose, California, was installed as an evangelist to serve as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California and Nevada. Wayne Forkner served as moderator; Robert Starke preached; Albert Aslan gave the charge; and Calvin Goligher prayed for Brian Tsui. The service was held at First OPC in Sunnyvale, California, with several guests from the presbytery present at the service.

EVANGELISM CONFERENCE IN VA

Charles R. Biggs

The Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic enjoyed a practical conference on church planting and evangelism on October 5 at Bethel OPC in Leesburg, Virginia. Dr. Peter Lee, professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, D.C., guided us through Scripture to see our covenantal God as the true church planter. The Rev. Chris Byrd, regional home evangelist for the Presbytery of New Jersey, equipped us all to prayerful, bold evangelism in our

At Tsui's installation: Robert Starke, Wayne Forkner, Brian Tsui, Calvin Goligher, and Albert Aslan



At the installation of Allen and Payton at Bethel OPC in Oostburg, WI

daily lives. Please pray that our faithful God will bring much fruit from the conference.

WOMEN'S PRESBYTERIAL IN WI

Lois Hofmeyer

The Women's Presbyterial of Wisconsin and Minnesota was held on October 5 at Christ Presbyterian Church in Janesville, Wisconsin. Twenty-five women from seven churches enjoyed sweet fellowship, good food, and hearing from speaker Jeni Richline, former missionary to Uruguay. An offering was received to support the mission to Uruguay.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On September 25, the Presbytery of the Dakotas dissolved **Emmanuel OPC** in Castle Rock, CO.
- On October 19, the Presbytery of Ohio dissolved **Immanuel OPC** in Coraopolis, PA, and placed the remaining members on the roll of the regional church.

MINISTERS

- On July 10, the Presbytery of the Northwest dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Isaac C. M. Baugh** and Reformation in Olympia, WA.
- On September 13, the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Anthony C. Domanik** and Falls Church in Menomonee Falls, WI.
- On September 17, the Presbytery of Ohio announced the deposition of **Tyler E. Jackson**, previously church planter of Redemption Life Bible in New Castle, IN.
- On September 20, the Presbytery of the Southwest received **Timothy L. McClymonds**, now stated supply at Westminster OPC in Bartlesville, OK.
- On September 25, **Dr. Patrick J. Morgan** was installed as a minister of the Word at Westminster OPC in Hamill, SD; he serves as a professor at Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Sioux Falls, SD.
- On September 28, the Presbytery of

New Jersey and Puerto Rico dissolved, at his request, the pastoral relationship between **Peter J. A. Moelker** and Faith OPC in Elmer, NJ.

- On October 4, **Brian Tsui**, formerly associate pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in San Jose, CA, was installed as an evangelist to serve as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California and Nevada.
- On October 12, **C. Frederick Lo**, formerly a teacher of the Word at Calvary OPC in Ringoes, NJ, was installed as an evangelist to serve as a missionary to Uganda.
- On October 10, **Andrew E. Davis** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Emmanuel OPC in Kent, WA.
- On October 18, the Presbytery of the Southeast erased, at his request, **Michael T. Spangler** from the roll of the regional church.
- On October 18, **David R. Wright** was ordained and installed as an evangelist at Westminster OPC in Countryside, IL.
- On October 25, **Curtis L. Payton II**, formally a minister in the PCA, was installed as a pastor at Bethel OPC in Oostburg, WI.
- On October 25, **Christopher Allen** was ordained and installed as a pastor at Bethel OPC in Oostburg, WI.
- On October 25, **Todd E. Smith** was installed as the pastor of Covenant OPC in Coeur d' Alene, ID.

MILESTONES

- **Mark S. Melton**, 72, retired OP minister, died on October 3.
- **James T. Dennison Jr.**, 80, former OPC minister, died on October 3.
- **Lenore Ann Tolsma**, 86, wife of retired OP minister Cornelius "Neil" Tolsma, died on October 14.

LETTERS

Editor:

The review of Saunders's *The Crisis of Civil Law* (October) reads like a dismissal of the problem. If a civil government promotes



Presbytery of WI and MN Women's Presbyterial



Speaker Peter Lee with organizers and attendees of the evangelism conference



Bloechl, center, at his September 27 ordination and installation in Anoka, MN

“idolatry, blood sports, infanticide, promiscuity and perversion, and slavery,” as the review points out that the first-century Roman empire did, is that not a problem to be remedied? God has armed magistrates with the power of the sword “for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers” (WCF 23.1), and they “ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth” (23.2).

Not only did Daniel disobey the law that required him to sin, but he also counseled a king, “break off your sins by practicing righteousness” (Dan. 4:27). In the happy endings in Daniel, we find Gentile kings who publicly professed the supremacy of the true God (Dan. 4), executed justice against malicious accusers (6:24), and passed laws against blaspheming the God of Israel (3:29, 6:26–27). We also find Belshazzar removed by God for his sin (Dan. 5:23–28).

If the state uses its laws to promote a system of morality that is contrary to God’s moral law, I would call that a crisis in civil law. May Christians who love God and their countrymen seek to reform their republic’s laws according to God’s law (and maintain existing wholesome laws) by lawful means, according to each one’s place and calling.

Peter Bringe
Lake Saint Louis, MO

REVIEWS

Wayward Children: Finding Peace, Keeping Hope, by Stuart Wesley Scott. P&R, 2023. Paperback, 96 pages, \$9.00. Reviewed by OP pastor Anthony C. Phelps.

“The promise is for you and for your children” (Acts 2:39). Peter, filled with the Spirit, preached this glorious gospel word on the day of Pentecost. It echoes the immutable promise God gave to Abraham in Genesis 17. For parents of wayward children, this covenant word is sweet comfort. It also fuels our prayers to our faithful covenant God, that he would show

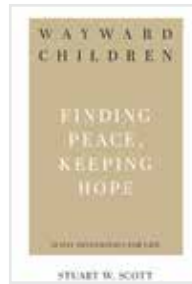
forth his steadfast love and bring back our prodigal children from the far country—to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Strikingly, this thirty-one-day devotional does not invoke a covenant perspective toward our wayward children. I can only assume that the author does not hold to covenant theology even though the book is published by P&R. Nonetheless, I think some Reformed parents of prodigals may find some help from this resource.

The strength of the book is that it gives clear direction to parents reeling from the news that a child has renounced their faith. “What should I do next? How should I process this?” In the pain and fog of such heartbreak, the author, who is the director of biblical counseling at Bob Jones University, provides clear guidance through ample imperatives and practical advice that give shape to processing the pain. The three-part structure of this devotional takes the form of three imperatives: turn to the Lord for strength and hope, take wise action, and persevere to the end. Of the thirty-one devotionals, twenty-one are explicitly in the imperative mood. The tone is more directive than comforting.

There are glimpses of gospel encouragement, however, especially reminders of the character of God, his gospel promises to us individually, his grace to strengthen us to persevere, and the eternal hope we have that God will wipe away all our tears and make all things new in the end.

Obviously, imperatives are good things. Scripture is full of them! But biblical imperatives should also be carefully and consistently grounded in the faith-building indicatives of the gospel. The most comforting and hopeful gospel and covenant



indicatives for the parents of wayward children—such as “I will . . . be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7), “showing steadfast love to thousands [of generations]” (Exod. 20:6), and “the promise is for you and for your children” (Acts 2:39)—are not the foundation of this book. Parents of wayward children can find their true peace in God’s covenant promises, that they might keep hope for the return of their prodigals.

Anxiety: Finding the Better Story, by Liz Edrington. P&R, 2023. Paperback, 96 pages, \$12.99. Reviewed by OP members Elisabeth and Esther Biggs.

Anxiety: Finding the Better Story is part of P&R’s series of thirty-one day devotionals for teenagers. The author, Liz Edrington, was overwhelmed by anxiety as a teen; she is now a mental health counselor and wants to pass on what she’s learned. She challenges anxiety-ridden teens to see how their story fits into God’s big story—that is, the better story of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the effectual application of his love and comfort to all sinners saved by grace.



Brief, yet extremely helpful, Edrington’s book is a tool kit for understanding different types and causes of anxiety. Written in a conversational style and suited for morning devotions, the book is both easy to follow and appealing (less so for more mature teens).

We appreciated that the author based what she said on Scripture, then demonstrated to her readers ways to apply it to their circumstances. The book includes many examples and illustrations that are relevant to everyday situations. In addition, the book suggests beneficial breathing exercises that encourage the reader to meditate on Christ-centered truths whenever they are struggling with anxiety.

We highly recommend this book with

2024 HURRICANES RELIEF FUND

The Committee on Diaconal Ministries has established a fund to aid Dan Halley, pastor of Bay Haven Presbyterian in Tampa, Florida, and others affected by Hurricanes Milton and Helene. For more, visit opcdisasterresponse.org.



MTIOPC SEMINAR: DISABILITY AND THE CHURCH

January 24–25

Redemption OPC, Gainesville, Florida

Speaker: Rev. Stephen J. Tracey

Fri., Jan. 24 5–6:30 p.m. Dinner

7–9 p.m. “Disability and God”

Sat., Jan. 25 9–11:30 a.m. “Disabling People”

11:30–12:30 p.m. Lunch

12:30–2 p.m. “Cognitive

Challenges and the Church”

Admission is open to all OP members. OPC pastors, elders, and deacons are eligible for a travel scholarship of \$400 and will have lodging provided on Friday night. If necessary, an additional \$100 in travel reimbursement is available if matched by the session.

Applications are available at OPC.org under Christian Education. Contact coordinator Judy Alexander at alexander.1@opc.org with questions.

prayers that it will comfort the children of Christ’s kingdom and draw them closer to him in this world full of worries and fears. This book reminds its readers that, even in anxious times, we may be still and know that he is God (Ps. 46:10).

The Pilgrim’s Regress: Guarding against Backsliding and Apostasy in the Christian Life, by Mark Jones. P&R, 2023.

Paperback, 240 pages, \$19.99. Reviewed by OP minister Charles Williams.

There is perhaps nothing more heart-breaking for a pastor than to witness the slow drift of a church member from the things of God. Repeatedly, the Scriptures alert us to the shepherd’s task not only of defending the sheep from wolves, but also in seeking out the sheep who wander and stray (Ezek. 34:16). The human heart, even the redeemed human heart, is still subject to the self-deceptive wiles of sin, so much so that Scripture commands vigilance above all else in keeping the heart (Prov. 4:23). Mark Jones’s latest



nineteenth-century heroes, such as Charles Spurgeon and Octavius Winslow; and even to the moderns, such as John Murray and Sinclair Ferguson. Yet this is not a work of bare academia; at its heart, it is eminently practical and positively pastoral.

Jones describes various actions that contribute to the “drift” (Heb. 2:1). First, he considers the very self-deceptive nature of sin that numbs and hardens the heart to the things of eternity. Jones underscores the reality that such drifting can become true, not only of bare individuals, but also of corporate entities, such as congregations or even whole denominations. He then contemplates various manifestations

of sin, be it that cold, legalistic love that obeys but does not adore; the archetypal sin, pride, which exalts the self over God; or capitulating to the temptation to fear men more than God himself. And though our Good Shepherd has given us resources to combat the plague that continues to fester within—the Word, sacraments, and prayer—the backsliding heart, if left

unchecked, will neglect, disregard, and ultimately abandon these tools as well.

Though those who truly belong to God will never fall away, there are those within the visible church who, though having perhaps even made a public profession, will. And in some cases, as Scripture attests, there may come a point when one drifts to the point of no return. This we call apostasy. Using John Owen as a guide, Jones navigates the warning passages found in Hebrews and elsewhere to describe the nature of apostasy, not only to warn all of the real dangers that attend unmortified sin, but also as a means to comfort weak Christians who despair over the sin against which they so desperately struggle.

The Pilgrim’s Regress is not simply descriptive, but prescriptive. Concluding every chapter are diagnostic questions designed to aid the reader in the task of self-examination and in providing the requisite antidote to the straying heart: repentance and faith. This is, in this reviewer’s opinion, a necessary component of the book, for it is here that Jones’s own pastoral heart shines forth as he seeks to rouse the reader from slumber to be killing sin before it kills the reader. Though this cannot be done apart from the Spirit’s work in our hearts, our hearts must work by the Spirit to put to death the sins of the flesh (Rom. 8:13–14). Highly recommended.

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The Great Dechurching: Who’s Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?, by Jim Davis and Michael Graham. Zondervan, 2023. Hardcover, 272 pages, \$20.99 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP minister Dave Holmlund.

Many of us have friends or family members who used to be members of the local church but have at some point stopped attending church. Sadly, the number of these church dropouts has been on the rise in recent years. Authors Jim Davis and Michael Graham observed

this trend within their Orlando area PCA congregation several years ago, and this set them upon a project to understand both the scope of this problem across American society and what we can know about its reasons so that we might employ a missional strategy to reverse the trend.

The Great Dechurching attempts to connect professional quality statistical analysis on American church involvement with a clear pastoral concern to reach the lost sheep represented in their study. Defining a “dechurched” person as one who used to attend church *at least once per month* but now attends church *less than once per year*, they point to research indicating that around forty million American adults are in the category. The large numbers of the formerly faithful cut across all types of churches and all demographic groups. This is therefore not just an indictment of recent troubles in churches where the Bible has not always been honored—in the liberal mainline, etc. It is now an alarming pattern even in Bible-teaching evangelical churches, including Reformed churches. The book, however, mainly focuses more broadly upon *dechurched evangelicals*—those who were formerly a part of any evangelical church (that is, a Bible-believing Protestant congregation) and now do not attend church.

Using sophisticated computer-based tools of analysis to recognize patterns, they believe it is most helpful to think of four distinct types of evangelicals who are no longer in churches because they decided to stop attending at some point in the last two or three decades. (They

also analyze a fifth group of dechurched Catholics and Mainline Protestants as a point of comparison, but this group is not as central to the study.) First, they describe “Cultural Christians” who dropped out of evangelical churches but don’t seem to show significant faith in basic Christian doctrines. Second, they point to “Dechurched Mainstream Evangelicals” who continue to believe in essential doctrines at high levels but stopped attending church—often through casually detaching after a move or a change in friendships or priorities. “Exvangelicals” are their third category, and this group is characterized by their absolute refusal to ever attend an evangelical church again. This group often reports past traumas in churches or in personal life while having more statistical correlation to broken families, broken social bonds, and mental health struggles. The fourth and last group is the “Dechurched BIPOC”—those who are Black or indigenous or persons of color. The authors present patterns in this last group which are not simply about racial identity.

For each group, Davis and Graham offer a vivid description of the experiences and attitudes behind their decisions to dechurch, but they also offer helpful thoughts on how to minister to such people for their spiritual good with hopes they might find their way back to an evangelical church. The latter chapters of

the book are biblically and theologically solid presentations on ministry priorities for churches and church leaders seeking to be faithful in our modern context that contains these challenges. The chapter advocating ministry which is both “confessional” and “missional” will resonate with many Reformed Christians.

I would not call this a “must-read” book for every Christian since sociology and demographics do not appeal to all. However, I suspect many church leaders will want to read this book carefully if they have already noticed these shifts that started before the pandemic and have accelerated in the years since. Even those who are not church leaders will find it useful for understanding this cultural moment if there is a personal connection to anyone who has dechurched in recent years. For all Christians, the book highlights the distinct challenge and opportunity of carrying out the Great Commission in our modern world. May the Lord use these insights to help us understand the times and discern what biblical faithfulness entails in this newest chapter of American church mission.



TRINITY PSALTER HYMNAL SALE

Don't miss the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* seventh anniversary sale that ends January 15. Visit trinitypsalterhymnal.org for more.

