

NEW HORIZONS

FEBRUARY 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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Editor: Danny E. Olinger
Managing Editor: Judith M. Dinsmore
Editorial Assistants: Ayrian J. Yasar
Diane Olinger
Proofreader: Sarah J. Pederson
Cover Designer: Christopher Tobias
Editorial Board: The Committee on
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Send inquiries, letters to the editor, and
other correspondence to the editor at
danny.olinger@opc.org. Letters may be
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WHY INTERCHURCH RELATIONS?



L. ANTHONY CURTO

Why does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church put such time and energy into interchurch relations? People frequently ask me that question, and I answer by pointing out the usefulness and importance of fraternal relations within the universal visible church.

Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2 defines this universal visible church as that church which “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This universal visible church is composed of particular, visible churches (WCF 25.4). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is one such particular church. It is a part of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, along with all those denominations and federations that profess the true religion. Christ, who is the head of the universal visible church, gives his church everything necessary “for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world” (WCF 25.3).

Jesus in the Great Commission sent his church to all nations—every kindred, tribe, and tongue. No one

particular church can accomplish this task. It is the whole church, the whole universal visible church of our Savior, that is tasked with the proclamation of the gospel to the world. WCF 25.3 focuses the work of the whole church on the “gathering and perfecting of the saints,” and it is my contention that this cannot be accomplished without a visible unity among particular churches by way of fraternal relations. A house divided will not stand. An army separated will not win. This is what makes interchurch relations useful and important.

Fraternal relationships between particular visible churches of like faith and practice glorify God, honor Christ, promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and enhance the witness of Christ’s church throughout the world.

GLORIFYING GOD

For nearly a decade, while serving as a full-time missionary of the OPC, I came to realize that as churches worked together in a coordinated effort to advance God’s kingdom, God’s glory was manifested and displayed to the communities in which they served. Cooperation through a common vision, shared faith, and the fellowship we possess in Christ, brings much glory to God. When many different churches from many different groups or denominations work independently despite sharing a common vision, faith, and fellowship, confusion can result. We should not compete against churches of like faith and practice—we should help one another, encourage one another, and pray for one another. How can we do this to God’s glory? By establishing and maintaining strong fraternal ties with churches that adhere to the doctrinal standards of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In a world where the slogan is compete, compete, compete, a divinely established unity of fraternal relationships strengthens the church to the glory of God.

HONORING CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the King and Head of his church. As its King and Head, he is honored as the church submits to him in all things. As the Great Commission is given to the whole church of Jesus Christ, Christ is most honored when the church as the church, with all of its gifts and graces, faithfully labors for the extension of his kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reminds the believers that gifts were given by the Spirit for the edification of the whole body. Gifts are not given for the individual’s pride or arrogance. The gifts are given to advance the cause of Christ. What applies here to the Corinthian church also applies to the universal visible church. Gifts are given to the church



Dr. Curto with pastors of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe



Melaku Solomon Tamirat and Zecharias Abraham Weldeyesus at the African Conference of Reformed Churches in South Africa

not for the pride or advancement of any particular church, but for the exaltation and honor of Christ. When churches neglect or refuse to share the gifts given by Christ, they dishonor the Lord. WCF chapter 26, “On the Communion of Saints,” states in article 1:

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.

This communion of the saints applies to churches, presbyteries, general synods, and assemblies as well as to churches with whom we have established fraternal relations.

PROMOTING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Fraternal relations between particular churches promotes and strengthens the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Paul exhorts the Ephesian saints to walk “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3). Even acknowledging that there are particular churches because of geography, nationalities, languages, and cultures, the command of Christ is that a spiritual unity must be maintained. Some would argue that this spiritual unity can only be realized or obtained by an institutional unity. This idea fails to take into account the diversity in the body of Christ. Fraternal relationships with churches of like faith and practice allows for diversities centered around a shared confessional heritage. For instance, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council is a council of American Presbyterian and Continental Reformed churches to labor together for Christ’s kingdom without having to deny their heri-

tage or cultural traditions. There are differences between the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession. These differences could prevent a formal union, but are not a hindrance to our laboring together through a fraternal relation seeking to advance Christ’s kingdom while maintaining the unity of the Spirit.

Often the question is asked, “Why are there so many denominations?” There are social, theological, and cultural answers to this question. Some are legitimate, and some are not. There have been sadly many divisions in Christ’s church, and the evil one uses these to tarnish the church’s witness. I have heard it said that Protestantism is the religion of division. The endeavor to establish fraternal relationships can be used to heal sinful divisions as well as to create fraternal ties with churches of like faith and practice, to the strengthening of the church’s witness that Christ is the great reconciler. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Are churches to walk aloof from one another or to seek to demonstrate biblical unity as the one body of Christ? These several reasons make the pursuit of fraternal relations a useful and important enterprise for churches of like faith and practice. **NH**

The author is an OP minister and member of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

ECUMENICITY IN THE OPC



MARK T. BUBE

Over the decades, both foreign missions and inter-church relations have been a precious part of the life of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. At our very first general assembly, when our fathers (and now grandfathers) in the faith were feeling very much alone and still reeling from the events that had led to our founding, the Christian Reformed Church of North America sent a telegram of greeting to us, inviting us to send a fraternal delegate to the meeting of their synod—and we were delighted to appoint the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Van Til to that task.

THE CEIR

In 1965 the general assembly renamed its committee dealing with ecumenical matters the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) and assigned it new responsibilities. It is currently composed of nine ministers or elders elected by the general assembly, plus the following ex officio members, without vote: the stated clerk of the general assembly, the general secretaries of the Committee on Foreign Missions and the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, and the administrator of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.

In obedience to our Lord, the CEIR seeks to enter into and to promote closer fellowship with other churches,

where it is consistent with biblical unity and truth, as a visible demonstration of the unity we already have in Christ, all to the glory of God. We go about doing this, in part, by recommending the establishment of official ecclesiastical relationships with other churches of like faith and practice, and through nurturing those relationships; by sending fraternal delegates to and receiving them from such churches at our major assemblies; by meeting together to discuss matters of mutual interest or concern; by encouraging our presbyteries to reach out to their counterparts in such churches; and by facilitating cooperation in ministry among the corresponding agencies of such churches.

As defined in its “Rules for Ecclesiastical Relationships,” the OPC’s official ecclesiastical relationships include both bilateral (one-on-one) and ecumenical relationships. Our two categories of bilateral relationships are full *ecclesiastical fellowship* and *corresponding relations* (which is our “let’s get to know one another better with a view toward entering into ecclesiastical fellowship in the not-too-distant future” relationship). Our single category of ecumenical relationships is that of *ecumenical contact*, which applies to all the member churches of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) with which the OPC does not otherwise have one of the two bilateral relationships.

Currently, we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with twenty-one churches (eight in North America and thirteen overseas); in corresponding relations with twelve churches (two in North America and ten overseas); and in ecumenical contact with fifteen churches (three in North America and twelve overseas)—for a total of forty-eight official ecclesiastical relationships with other churches.

Finally, we simply note in passing that the phrase “churches of like faith and practice” appears several times in our *Book of Church Order*—for example, receiving a member from another church by letter of transfer—and most of our sessions and presbyteries would deem any church with which the OPC has a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, corresponding relations, or ecumenical contact, to be a church of like faith and practice for such purposes. Nevertheless, while our formal ecclesiastical bilateral relationships are limited to confessional churches having Reformed standards and who are of like faith and practice, it is good and appropriate to remember that Christ’s church is indeed broader than the Reformed and Presbyterian world.

BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS

As we explore possibilities for establishing a new bilateral interchurch relationship, in addition to ascertaining

which confessional standards have been adopted by the other church, we seek to understand how seriously their officers take their vows of subscription. Affirming that our mutually held confessional standards set the theological and doctrinal “fences,” inside of which there is Christian liberty, and outside of which the elders must ward off false teachings and doctrines, we also seek to understand to what degree those standards are actually reflected in the lives of their congregations—which usually takes some time, depending on the frequency of our contact.

Sometimes, overseas churches reach out to us, and, as we are able, we try to follow up with them to ascertain whether the desired substantial contact is feasible, given current resources. In many parts of the world, churches desiring to remain faithful to the whole counsel of the Word of God often find themselves seemingly alone, with some even facing serious opposition. The OPC remembers what it is like to be small and feel isolated, so part of her ministry to Christ’s visible church is to be an encourager of our brothers and sisters in Christ, walking with them along our mutual pilgrim paths toward our heavenly home where we’ll be gathered around the throne of our Savior. Other times, we encounter an overseas church/federation, perhaps an observer to a meeting of the ICRC or at an ICRC regional conference, to which we find our hearts particularly drawn and, with a measure of intentionality, begin to explore possibilities for developing a substantial relationship. And the stated goal for our foreign missions works includes the establishment of a healthy indigenous, national, confessionally conscious Reformed church “with whom the OPC may have fraternal relations.”

In carrying out our responsibilities that arise out of a bilateral relationship, the CEIR appoints one or more of its members to serve as a liaison to that other church/federation to help keep the CEIR updated on developments in that body. And we endeavor to send a fraternal delegate to the major assembly of an overseas church with which we have either ecclesiastical fellowship or corresponding relations at least once every four years; and to meet with their delegation at the quadrennial meetings of the ICRC. Receiving fraternal greetings from these churches around the world at our own annual general assemblies, as they proclaim and frequently suffer for the name of Christ, is frequently one of the high points of the assembly.

Currently we are cooperating with the PCA in Great Commission Publications; with the URCNA in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* joint venture; with the ARPC, KAPC, KPCA, PCA, RPCNA, and URCNA in the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel. We are also cooperating in foreign missionary labors in



At the 49th NAPARC meeting in 2024

Haiti (CanRC, FRCNA, HRC, and PCA), Uganda (ARPC, PCA, and URCNA), Ukraine (PCA), and Uruguay (IPB). Our Committee on Diaconal Ministries has a cooperative agreement with the BPC regarding responding to major disasters.

Sadly, three times in the history of our interchurch relationships we have suffered the heartbreak of having to terminate a bilateral relationship for cause. In 1997 we terminated our relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church of North America, having suspended it the year before in the wake of the 1995 decisions of synod to allow women to serve in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist, and having pled with them “to turn back to the Scripture-based fellowship that has been a blessing in the past.” In 2016 we terminated our relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church in Japan following a similar decision by their 2014 General Assembly. And most recently, in 2023, we terminated our relationship of corresponding relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) following similar decisions by their synods in 2017 and 2020 and the termination of their membership in the ICRC in 2022.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The OPC is a member church in two ecumenical organizations: North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The basis of NAPARC is “full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms,” and that of the ICRC is substantially the same. The purpose of NAPARC is “to *advise, counsel, and cooperate* in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice” (emphasis added); and that of the ICRC is:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;

2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;
3. to *facilitate and promote cooperation* among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world. (emphasis added)

At this point, and at the risk of oversimplification, we think that it is especially important to note that neither the ICRC nor NAPARC are “the church” in a governmental or synodical sense and therefore neither has been tasked to “do ministry” or to set up its own ministry agencies itself. Rather, the work of both bodies is to encourage and facilitate their respective member churches’ carrying out the ministries that Christ has entrusted to those churches, as part of his catholic visible church.

NAPARC

NAPARC was constituted in 1975, and the OPC was one of the five constituent churches. Today it has thirteen member churches, who send delegates to meet together annually to pursue its purpose. The fiftieth meeting of NAPARC is scheduled for next year. In addition, NAPARC also sponsors several inter-agency consultations:

Representatives of the appropriate corresponding agencies of the Member Churches (e.g., home missions, world missions, Christian/church education, relief/diaconal ministries, theological training, youth ministries) are encouraged to gather together periodically with their counterparts in the other Member Churches to consult with each other regarding the ministries that have been entrusted to them and to explore ways in which they might cooperate with one another to advance the cause of Christ.

For more than forty years, the general secretaries (or their equivalents) of the world missions agencies of the NAPARC member churches have gathered together, more or less annually, for an informal time of sharing the work of, and of prayer for, the labors of their respective agencies, including new works being planned, opportunities for cooperation, and helpful resources discovered.

ICRC

The ICRC was constituted in the Netherlands in 1982 with nine churches participating. The first quadrennial meeting was held in 1985 with delegates from seven member churches (the OPC sent three observers). The OPC was

received as a member church in 1993 and hosted the fifth meeting in Philadelphia in 2001. There are now thirty-eight member churches in the ICRC, including nine who are also member churches in NAPARC. At the last meeting of the ICRC in Namibia in 2022, the OPC delegation was able to have bilateral meetings with our counterparts from fourteen of the overseas member churches of the ICRC and one observer church. Several members of the CEIR are actively involved in different capacities in the work of the ICRC. The 2026 meeting will be hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea.



At the 10th ICRC meeting in 2022 in Namibia, Kenya

The ICRC has a similar practice to encourage cooperation in ministry although, while the representatives of the NAPARC ministries agencies are able to gather together annually, the members of the corresponding ICRC agencies, due to the expense of international travel, are able to gather only once every three or four years. However, for the last couple of rounds of meetings, the representatives of both the ICRC and NAPARC world missions agencies have been able to join together for several days of consultations, to which the representatives of the diaconal ministry agencies of both bodies have also been included. The ICRC also has an active Theological Education Committee, which is organizing a conference in Grand Rapids in June 2025 for representatives of member churches and the seminaries they endorse or use. And we’re inclined to think that these gatherings might represent ecumenical interchurch relations at its best.

On the night before he went to the cross, our Savior prayed to his Father for all those whom the Father had given to him “that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:23). **NH**

The author is administrator of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER



JUDITH M. DINSMORE

The list of acronyms for small to mid-sized Reformed and Presbyterian denominations worldwide can be eye-watering. In ecclesiastical fellowship on this continent alone are the OPC, the PCA, the ARP, the URCNA, the RPCNA, the ERQ, and more.

For the uninitiated scanning a church website, the acronyms may feel like a code to crack. But for anyone in the aftermath of flood, earthquake, or war who is helped by one of these churches, the acronyms may go unnoticed altogether. Pressed by need, the unity among like-minded denominations becomes more apparent.

The OPC's ecumenical relationships often include such offering—and receiving—diaconal aid. As David Nakhla, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, looks at his travel calendar, much of it revolves around ecumenical relations. "This excites me," he said. When churches assist each other in this way, Nakhla said, they're living out what they affirm. "Don't just tell me you love me, show me you love me."

RESPONDING TO DISASTERS WITH THE URCNA

One prominent example is the love that the URCNA has shown to the OPC in its disaster response. Rob Brinks characterizes the URCNA—that's the United Reformed Church of North America—as a church with "a lot of generous,



In Puerto Rico in 2018 after Hurricane Maria (left to right): OP pastor Bradney Lopez, elder Jonathan Layana, David Nakhla, and Rob Brinks

compassionate-hearted people, especially when it comes to disasters." Brinks is administrative director of Reformed Mission Services.

The numbers bear him out. In the last ten years, over one hundred volunteers from seventeen URCNA churches have served on OPC teams.

David Nakhla first met Brinks in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, when Brinks was delivering a large trailer's worth of supplies from Michigan to the affected area in the Eastern Seaboard. At that time, both men were a few years into their respective positions—Brinks with Reformed Mission Services and Nakhla with the OPC's Committee on Diaconal Ministries. Their jobs both began with a focus on mission trips for teens, and grew to include planning trips also for church members, some with specialized skills, to provide aid, and preparing more broadly for disasters through acquiring equipment and supplies.

In 2017, when Hurricane Harvey landed in Houston and Nakhla was on-site weighing what OP congregations and their communities needed that the CDM could provide, he phoned Brink.

"He wondered if I could come down and help assess what was going on down there. I jumped on a plane," Brinks remembered. They spent four days together, making plans. As the OPC's disaster relief began to take shape, the URCNA "probably provided more funds and more volunteers for Hurricane Harvey relief than the OPC did," Brinks said—something Nakhla is quick to share as well.

Directing rebuild projects comes naturally to Brinks. A bricklayer and carpenter by trade for twenty-seven years, Brinks was first employed by his father-in-law, primarily a brick layer, who "never turned any work down." That taught him, in addition to bricklaying, skills such as roofing, installing drywall and insulation, and laying subfloor.

In 2017, after Hurricane Maria, Brinks led a skilled team to Puerto Rico. And when an OP family's home in Midland, Michigan, was flooded in 2020 and the CDM offered assistance to rebuild it, the committee brought Brinks onboard

to help oversee the project. He traveled to Midland from his home in Hudsonville every few weeks for months.

Brinks quotes an African proverb to describe the cooperative relationship: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with a group.” He continued, “That’s how David and I feel. We want to go far. Both with the two of us, and with the relationship between our denominations.”

AID TO UKRAINE THROUGH THE RPCCEE

But the ecumenical relationships of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries goes beyond disaster response. “More and more, we’re seeing interaction happen in times of trouble, in times of stress,” David Nakhla said. That’s been the case with a sister denomination in Eastern Europe.

In mid-2024, Pastor Imre Szöke traveled from his home in Miskolc, Hungary, across the border into Ukraine to visit church members, to deliver medicine and food, and to preach to people whose able-bodied men are fighting, hiding, or gone.

“I’ve been to Ukraine about twelve times in the last five years,” Szöke said. “As soon as you cross the border, you feel in the air that there is war in the country. You won’t find many men on the streets, and everything is unstable.” Szöke is stopped frequently at checkpoints, where soldiers are looking to conscript Ukrainian men. As a Hungarian, he can pass freely.

Szöke is the pastor located closest to Ukraine in his denomination, the Reformed and Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe, or RPCCEE, which is in full ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. “The name of our denomination is so impressive, but the denomination is very small, just twenty churches in Hungary, Romania, and Western Ukraine,” Szöke explained.

At the beginning of Russia’s invasion, refugees streamed across the border into Hungary, and the congregation in Miskolc housed over a hundred of them. Some stayed for days, some for weeks, some for a few months. “As many people God sent here, he always provided. We never had to turn anyone away,” Szöke said. “He only sent as many people as he provided funds or other means to help them. That was an interesting experience.”

Funds are tight for this new denomination. It was founded in 1998, when several pastors, including Szöke, came out of the state-sponsored Hungarian Reformed Church, due to its liberalization. “We had no other options than to leave,” he said. They grew to twenty congregations and fifteen ministers in two presbyteries by 2024. The denomination is unique in Hungary, because it has a professing membership, a presbyterian church government, and is self-supporting. “Zero government money,”

Szöke stressed. “This is the first time in five hundred years [for a Reformed church], because the state church is always government funded. It’s a miracle, in a sense.”

The reason why the non-government-funded RPCCEE was, and is, able to provide for those in need is due in part because of the generosity of the OPC and other fraternal churches. “The OPC gave very generously twice—that was a great help. We received other gifts from New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, because our little church would not have been able to support so many people,” Szöke recounted. “Of course, our small denomination tried to help as much as we can because people gave very generously, but we were also able to get help through ICRC contacts.” (The denomination became a member of the ICRC—International Conference of Reformed Churches—just last year, with the OPC as its sponsor.)

Mercy ministry is also noteworthy for the RPCCEE because inside the state church there is no such thing as a diaconate. Szöke, who had met Nakhla through ICRC meetings, invited Nakhla to speak at a conference in 2023 in Hungary on what a deacon is and does.

The congregation continues to reach out to those in need. In December, they organized an evangelistic meeting for Ukrainian refugee families—mostly women and children, because the border is closed to men aged eighteen to sixty—in Miskolc. The families each received small gifts, and a Ukrainian-speaking pastor preached in their language. “We hope to repeat that,” Szöke said.

Another outreach endeavor, a summer English Camp, is receiving support from the OPC through short-term missions. The church hosts the camp for free each year, grouping the attendees by skill level. “I thought, why don’t we invite a team of young people to interact with the kids,” Szöke said. An OPC team traveled to Miskolc in 2024, and it was a big success, he said. The kids who attended loved the interactions with the American teenagers, and the Americans in turn had the opportunity to sightsee and learn. Another trip is planned for summer 2025. “This project is very important. It helps us and it helps the team to experience Christian fellowship,” he said.

As founding member of a denomination that’s only twenty-five years old and navigating a war on its border and the challenges of outreach in a secularized country, Szöke is grateful for the relationship with the OPC. “I am thankful for the faithfulness of the OPC. It is a great gift of God to be faithful for ninety years,” he said. **NH**

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.

ARE WE TOGETHER?

TINA M. DEJONG with members of NAKAALÉ PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Are we together?” is a question I often hear where I serve in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda. I hear it during meetings with compound workers, while fellowshiping around cement benches after worship services, or while visiting friends in village *bandas* (round mud huts). This question can mean, “Are we in close proximity to one another?” It can mean, “Do you understand what I’m saying?” Yet the more that I get to know people, I’ve found that they are really asking, “Are we seeking to encourage and help one another reach a common goal?” Since my natural tendency is to seek my own happiness and comfort instead of others’, it takes a long time to get deep enough in relationships to truly be able to respond, “Yes, we are together.”

BEYOND “FINE, THANKS”

Before the Lord took me abroad both times, I was given various resources about the country in Asia that was my first place of service, and Uganda. They were helpful starting points in getting to know the new places God was taking me. However, knowing facts did not mean I knew anyone personally. I was in the same physical proximity with people from these regions but was not yet fully “together” with them. It is similar to how we can know about Jesus and maybe even attend church yet not have a personal relationship with Christ.

God calls many of us to move to new places, whether abroad or across state lines or more locally. This propels us into the uncomfortable and often scary situation of having to attempt to understand new people. There can be a tendency for us to remain at the surface level of relationships. Someone asks, “How are you?” and we respond, “Fine, thanks,” although we may be far from “fine.” Maybe we’re worried about a sick child or thinking about a disagreement we had with a family member the night before. Maybe we are concerned that the rains have not come at the best times, causing a bad harvest. Our hearts long to share our real concerns, but we are scared of facing hurt or rejection if we share those struggles. Our desire is to not

Alebo Moses with his children in 2023



only be physically around people, but to be *with* them, to walk together through struggles toward a common goal. Ultimately, it is only our loving Redeemer who is able to do this, yet he graciously brings fellow Christians alongside us to be the physical presence and encouragement that we need. These people not only hear the words being spoken but also our heart’s desire behind the words.

UNITY IN CHRIST AT NAKAALÉ PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

I’ve been joyfully witnessing my brothers and sisters at Nakaale Presbyterian Church growing in this unity in Christ. Joyce, a dear sister believer, remembers that when the church was new, many people came to it out of curiosity. They hoped that these foreigners could solve problems of hunger, drunkenness, adultery, fighting, and other similar hardships. Some hoped the new meeting place would make them happy and comfortable. The church rapidly grew, and people were physically together. But when the difficulties of life continued, some left in search of immediate gratification without the burden of long-term commitment. As the number decreased, wrestling with God and one another increased. Loss and unmet expectations led to days of discouragement and frustration. However, we are starting to see how the Lord is using those things to deepen

the roots of faith and unity among those who remain.

The church now has a small group of families with monogamous marriages where children love being with their fathers because the fathers are attentive and seeking to help nurture children in the Lord. Lochoro Emmanuel's kids sometimes run to the front of the church to give him a hug even while he is translating. Maruk Mark can be seen carrying his sick son to the clinic instead of following the cultural custom of sending the child with one of his older siblings or his mother.

We also observed fruits of faith and unity during the long painful months leading up to the death of Alebo Moses, who passed away from chronic kidney failure. Instead of avoiding his family out of fear that they were cursed, church members regularly visited to sing Christian songs and share Bible passages. Members have continued to encourage his widow, Acia Rose, and her three young kids in the months since. These are all sweet testimonies of how Christ is drawing his people together. I think Joyce said it best: "We are no longer a group of people looking to find favor with the whites. We are a Karimojong church seeking to help one another as we are able."

THE PRAYERS OF THE GLOBAL CHURCH

We are at this stage in the Nakaale church in large part due to the faithful prayers of God's global church. Recently I was reminded of our togetherness in Christ when I opened a letter from a godly brother I have never met. He has supported the OPC work in Uganda since it began and



Maruk Mark with his wife and one of their children

has been praying intentionally for the Nakaale church. This brother was praising the Lord for a new village where some ministry men had started going on Sundays. He explained how this was the ninth preaching point he has been praying for, and he listed the names of the other eight villages. As joyful tears welled up in my eyes, I thanked the Lord for bringing his children together no matter how great the physical or cultural differences!

I've been blessed to see this truth while growing up on the plains of South Dakota, while among our persecuted brothers and sisters in Asia, and now on the savannah of Uganda. Everywhere we go, God is the one carrying us. He is the one equipping us. He is the one working through us. He is the one who will complete the work he started. Let us press on to win the prize of the upward call of Christ! Let us not grow weary in reaching out to others with the truth of the gospel, whether that is by living in the same house where you were born or by moving to another part of the world.

What a joy it is to worship our loving Redeemer who graciously nurtures us in unity to truly "be together" as his global body for all eternity. As Christ's global church, may we daily seek to grow closer together in him, as our brothers and sisters in Nakaale are.

The author is an OP tentmaking missionary in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.

WHAT'S NEW

Mr. and Mrs. D. Joshua (Danielle) Grimsley (Concho Valley OPC in Concho, AZ) completed their term of service as missionary associates with the OPC Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, and returned with their daughters, Paisley, Viola, Rosemary, and Grace, to the United States in January.

The Rev. and Mrs. Michael J. (Jennifer) Kearney (Presbytery of the Midwest) have been called to serve as missionaries with the OPC Uganda Mission in Mbale, Uganda. The Kearneys and their daughter Joanna will arrive on the field in March.

Tentmaking missionary **Miss Tina M. DeJong** (Westminster OPC in Hamill, SD) returned for a nine-month furlough to the United States from Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, in February.

ADAM SMITH AND CALVINISM

BARTON SWAIM

The title of Benjamin M. Friedman’s *Religious Influences on Economic Thinking* is dully academic but eye-catching all the same. It is a slim book, some of it a restatement of the argument the author made in his 2021 book, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

Mr. Friedman chiefly wants to know—this is only a slight oversimplification—what sort of religious ideas were afloat in Scotland around the time Adam Smith expressed, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the core principle of modern economics: that markets, engaged in by self-interested competitors, tend to benefit everyone. The individual merchant, Smith wrote, “neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. . . . He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”

Thus, Mr. Friedman explains, did Smith formulate what economists call the First Fundamental Welfare Theorem. The idea, we’re told, couldn’t have come from the Bible, which held that prosperity was a “reward for proper moral and religious behavior.” That will surprise anyone who’s ever read the Bible with care. The main idea in Mr. Friedman’s book is that Smith was able to formulate his theorem because, in mid-eighteenth-century Scotland, orthodox Calvinism had receded and made way for Enlightenment-era religious views that took a more optimistic view of human potential.

The claim is dodgy on its face. Calvinism, the term assigned to the Reformed strand of Protestantism of which John Calvin (1509–1564) was the principal figure, prevailed in precisely those nations—Switzerland, the Netherlands, Britain—that first formed capitalist economies. Mr. Friedman weakens his case by relying on a series of preposterous caricatures of Calvin and Calvinism. He defines it, based on its doctrine of predestination, as a kind of fatalism that denies human agency. No one who

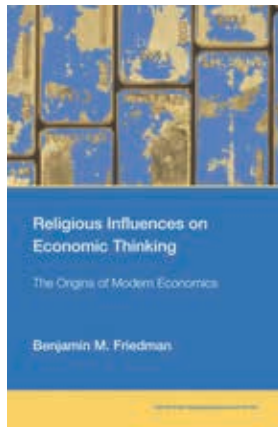
has ever read the French reformer’s writings—or indeed those of the Apostle Paul, from which he derived predestination—would conclude that Calvin rejected agency or subscribed to fatalism.

Mr. Friedman draws from this mistaken premise the claim that Calvinist doctrine led to a lack of concern with individual morality. “If men and women know that they are predestined either to be saved or not,” he writes, “and that God’s choice regarding their individual spiritual fate has been made before they were born (more than that, before the world existed), what incentive is left to motivate them to live moral lives?” Such a mindset led, in turn,

to lethargy and an “inability to make choices or take action to improve one’s material well-being.” A moment’s reflection might have reminded Mr. Friedman that the Puritans were nearly all Calvinists. Whatever failings the Puritans may be charged with, an indifference to individual morality and a lack of personal agency are not among them.

By the end of the book we find Mr. Friedman having to explain why his contention doesn’t contradict the one made by the German sociologist Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber’s thesis held that seventeenth-century Calvinists, eager to prove their status as among God’s elect, cultivated industry and thrift and so helped create the capitalist economies of Northern Europe. Mr. Friedman’s argument, he explains, concerns economic thought rather than economic behavior, the development of economics as an intellectual discipline rather than the development of market economies. He would have been wiser to reject Weber’s thesis, as many historians have, on the grounds that its best remembered claims wholly lack empirical evidence.

As for Adam Smith, Mr. Friedman rightly notes that he kept his religious beliefs, if he had any, to himself. We can safely assume, based on Smith’s earlier book, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” (1759), that he was not an adherent





of orthodox Calvinism. Unless I'm mistaken, however, nothing in *The Wealth of Nations* contradicts any part of the Calvinist creed.

One example: Mr. Friedman, in an attempt to show that Calvinists held a narrow view of life's purpose, quotes the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, documents drafted in the 1640s by English

and Scottish Puritans. Yet Smith's view that mutual benefit can arise from self-interested behavior finds wonderful expression in the Westminster Larger Catechism (composed in 1647), which asks, in question 141, what duties are required by the eighth commandment (in the Reformed tradition, "Thou shalt not steal"). The answer, in part: "The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man . . . and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to *procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own*" (emphasis added).

I suspect you could make a sounder argument than Mr. Friedman's by asserting its opposite: Adam Smith's description of a naturally functioning market of self-interested individuals wasn't a rejection of the Calvinist outlook but a development of it.

The author is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America and a columnist for the Wall Street Journal; this review first ran in the October 4, 2024, print edition.

Religious Influences on Economic Thinking: The Origins of Modern Economics by Benjamin M. Friedman. MIT Press, 98 pages.

CONGRATULATIONS

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

- **Azariah Brown**, Bethlehem Reformed Church, Freeman, SD

ON READING OLD BOOKS

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

—C. S. Lewis

The Institutes of Christian Religion (1536) by John Calvin

When the editor of *New Horizons* asked me to submit an article for this column, I was reading through Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. While reading, I wondered how many times I have read through this work. What provoked my questions was the number of ways I had marked the text—in pencil, in black, blue, and red ink, and in several shades of markers.

You may already be wondering: Why would anyone read through such a work at all, and why numerous times? My answer is that I find it informative and inspirational with each reading.

I first bought the two volumes for reference. After examining a few topics, I decided to read the entire work. After my first reading, I was hooked. With each subsequent reading I found new ideas and explanations that added depth to my grasp of the Bible. Each exposure to the *Institutes* fascinated me with Calvin's ability to integrate Scripture with his theology and to weave it into all his explanations.

Some may suspect that only a retired professor would recommend reading such a tome. The *Institutes* can be heavy going. Some may get discouraged when they begin to wade through Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of God at the beginning of his work. This is partly true because theology proper is one of the most complex parts of theology. If you start to read and find it slow going, I recommend that you leap ahead and read Calvin's treatment of prayer. There you will find profound theology and practical insight in an easily grasped form.

Most of the readers of this magazine identify themselves as Calvinists. Why not go to the source of our doctrinal commitment and read the *Institutes*? You will not only be more fully informed about the Bible, but also encouraged in the entire gambit of biblical knowledge and practice.

—Allen D. Curry

PROVIDENCE ON DISPLAY IN VIRGINIA

JOHN R. NYMANN

In the 1680s, Presbyterian pioneer and missionary Francis Makemie organized a congregation on the banks of the Elizabeth River in southeastern Virginia, near what is now the city of Norfolk. Ever since, there has been a Presbyterian presence in southeastern Virginia. In the Lord’s good providence, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been able to establish a number of congregations and mission works in this same area, including All Saints Presbyterian Church (ASPC) in the city of Suffolk.

A CHURCH PLANT THAT’S PLANTING CHURCHES

In 2013, three OPC ministers—Steve Doe, Pete Stazan, and Lacy Andrews—began praying for the Lord to establish OP congregations in the Tidewater area, which has a population of over one and a half million people. The Lord answered these prayers as Reformation Presbyterian Church, then in Virginia Beach, held its first worship service in 2014. Lowell Ivey was called as church planter to Reformation in 2016.

The session and congregation of Reformation had a church-planting mindset. While they were still a church plant, Reformation planted Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church, which held its first worship service on March 5, 2019. In time, Pastor Matt Walker was called to that work.

An outdoor service at the local park



Suffolk, Virginia, population 100,000, is flanked on two sides by the Nansemond River

As Reformation began to grow under the ministry of Pastor Ivey, some families joined who lived to the west in Suffolk, Virginia, while others lived to the south in North Carolina. Many of these members had to drive over an hour to get to Reformation for Sunday worship. A desire to plant a church in the Suffolk area grew, and the Reformation session decided to begin Bible study in Suffolk. After the session met with the group of interested members to discuss the principles of church planting in the summer of 2021, the first Suffolk Bible study was held in the home of Doug and Julie Hoven on December 5, 2021. Over fifty people came.

“ALL” THE SAINTS

At that first gathering, Regional Home Missionary Lacy Andrews set the stage by teaching on the concept of being a “seed group” over against a “core group.” Rather than focusing on a core group, which new families would be added to, the concept of a seed group entails the reality that any new families who commit to the Bible study would be as much a part of the work as families who were present from the beginning. This helped to establish a healthy pattern for the group.

In spring 2021, Pastor Ivey approached me with an idea. At the time, I was a seminary student in Windsor, Ontario. His idea was for me to serve Reformation as a

church-planting intern working with the group in Suffolk. God opened all the doors, and in winter 2022, an offer was officially extended to me. In God's goodness, the United States Government granted a visa for this work, and the Nymann family arrived in Suffolk, Virginia, on January 1, 2023.

The Suffolk Bible study chose the name All Saints Presbyterian Church based on Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to *all the saints* in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (emphasis added). Now with a church-planting intern in place, the work progressed with the first commission meeting taking place on January 11, 2023. The desire to begin worship services had only grown. In the Lord's providence, a building suitable for worship was secured, and on February 5, 2023, the first worship service of All Saints Presbyterian Church was held in downtown Suffolk. Pastor Lowell Ivey preached a sermon on Ephesians 4:7-16 titled, "Only Christ Grows His Church."

During the next few months, I preached a series from Colossians to further encourage the new congregation's focus on Jesus Christ as the head of the church. In addition to Sunday evening worship, a prayer meeting was begun on each second and fourth Wednesday in the month. As time progressed, the work grew, and a call was extended to me to be the church planter of ASPC. I was ordained to the work on January 12, 2024.

BBQ, YARD WORK, AND A BIBLE AT A BASEBALL GAME

During the spring and summer last year, given the beautiful weather in Virginia, we held outdoor morning worship services once a month at a local park, followed by a barbecue lunch. Our hope was to give ASPC some exposure to the community.

One member, Nate Admiraal, carried out a creative initiative also for the purpose of evangelism: he posted on social media that he and his teenage children wanted to help people with yard work. This bore fruit. They helped people in the community, they brought the gospel, and some new guests came to worship.

The Lord's gracious providence has been on display frequently in the work of ASPC. This past summer, for example, I was at my son's baseball game and sat down on the bleachers with a small Bible and notepad. Not knowing it, I was right next to the pastor and an elder of a local Baptist church. Our conversation revealed that we had much in common, and the next Sunday I visited their church. The congregation was small and no longer using the sanctuary for worship. After some deliberations and



At the organization service in December 2024: Tim Marinelli, Jay Bennett, Sterling Tyler, Dan Cooke, John Nymann, Scott Shallenburger, Nate Baker, Matt Walker

discussions, this congregation allowed ASPC the use of its church building for worship services. About two months after moving to the building, the members and leadership of the Baptist church voted unanimously to sell it to ASPC for a very favorable price. In God's amazing providence, going to a baseball game led to the purchase of a wonderful church building.

On December 6, 2024, a service of organization was held. All Saints Presbyterian Church is now an organized congregation in the OPC. Mr. Dan Cooke is a ruling elder. The Lord our God has been gracious beyond all expectations in his work in building this congregation over the last two years. Please pray that the kingdom may continue to be built through the OPC in southeastern Virginia.

The author is church-planting pastor of All Saints Presbyterian Church in Suffolk, Virginia.

NEWSLETTER: HOME MISSIONS TODAY

To subscribe to the biweekly newsletter of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, visit chmce.org.

REJOICE. PRAY. GIVE THANKS.

PEDER J. KLING

They're three simple commands, and we know they're good for us. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:16–18). There's a warm and memorable ring about them. The first sermon I ever preached focused on these verses at a Thanksgiving Eve fireside service, complete with cardigans and a blazing fire.

However, truth be told, these aren't easy words. They're words for warfare against sin and division. They're meant to arm us against pride, laziness, and greed. In the previous verses, Paul urged the Thessalonians to "respect those who labor among you and are over you" (5:12), referring to church leadership. Then, Paul addresses unity in the church. "Be at peace among yourselves" (5:13). That's not always easy. But Paul continues with more instruction. "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (5:14).

How can we *do* this sort of work? Paul narrows into the heart of the matter in the next three verses. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." That's how we're to "be at peace," and "admonish the idle," "help the weak," and so on. Do it joyfully, prayerfully, giving much thanks to God in Jesus. Joy, prayer, and gratitude are God's will for us in all of these.

We might say they're at the heart of stewardship. Giving and stewarding our resources wisely is an extension of giving our all to God through Jesus—giving our emotional and spiritual energy to the peace of the church; our humility and respect to our leaders; our time to the weak; our admonishment to the idle. When wondering "how can I have *that* conversation?" or "where's the strength to serve?" or "how can I respect *that* leader?" remember God's will for us in Jesus. It's about joy, prayer, and gratitude before Jesus, which is always God's will for you in every circumstance. He is risen, after all. So receive whatever gracious providence he has for you with joy, prayer, and gratitude. Remember Paul's question to the Corinthians: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7).

He has all authority (Matt. 28:18) and all the blessings (Eph. 1:3). He has saved us, blessed us, commanded us, and provided us with the means to obey what he's commanded (John 14:16). It's his church and ministry. So, we'd do well to pray with Augustine, "Give what you command, and command what you will." And, the beauty of it? He's commanding that you rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all these things.

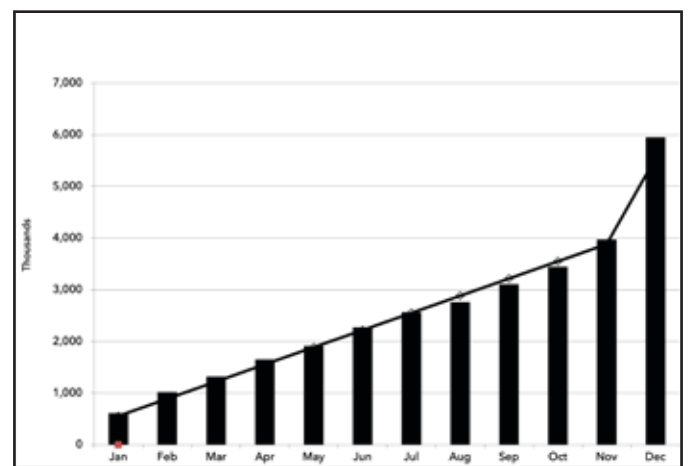
Are you thinking that you don't have it in you? In the gospel, God gives it as he commands it. Trust him. Serve him. Give your all, and then some. Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks. Has he not given you Jesus?

The author is pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in Amsterdam, New York.

WORLDWIDE OUTREACH

2024 RECEIPTS WITH 2024 GOAL

Christian Education surplus:	\$107,738
Home Missions deficit:	\$175,416
Foreign Missions surplus:	\$471,613
Total budget surplus:	\$403,935



FEB 2025 PRAYER CALENDAR



The Sumpters (day 11)



Beatrix Taverne (day 15)

1

Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for physical and spiritual protection for displaced families and those in high-risk areas. / Pray for **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio.

2

Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray for **Hank Belfield** and his staff as they prepare for the 2025 General Assembly.

3

Retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. Affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne** and **Linda Karner**, Japan. / Active military chaplains **Stephen A. (Lindsey) Roberts**, US Army, and **Jeffrey P. (Jennifer) Shames**, US Army.

4

Gregory & Ginger, O'Brien, Downingtown, PA. Pray for God to use Christ Church Downingtown as a means to seek and save the lost. / **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Lviv, Ukraine. Pray for men from the church who could be drafted into the military at any time.

5

Dave (Elizabeth) Holmlund, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / **Esther Parks**, CCE Administrative Assistant.

6

Reformed Church of Quebec (L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, ERQ). Pray for ministers to fill the vacant pulpits of this small denomination. / Pray for the **OPC Disaster Response** efforts underway in Tampa, FL, and McDowell County, NC.

7

Pray for affiliated missionaries **Dr. Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia, as they wrap up their home ministry assignment this week. / **Mark & Celeste Jenkins**, Placentia, CA. Pray the Lord blesses outreach efforts at a local college.

8

Nate & Anna Strom, Sheboygan, WI. Pray for continued zeal as Breakwater Church seeks to carry out their work faithfully. / Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he directs the Internship Program.

9

Pray for tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she arrives in the US to begin her furlough this month. / Pray for yearlong intern **Mitchell (Cali) Watson** in Silver Spring, MD.

10

Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the missionaries in Uganda as they cover Tina's responsibilities while she is away.

11

Pray for **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for yearlong intern **Vince (Eri) Lamb** in Austin, TX

12

Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the effective discipleship of leaders at Nakaale Presbyterian Church. / Pray for yearlong intern **Joseph (Myranda) Scherschligt** in Wilmington, DE.

13

Travis & Bonnie Emmett, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for missionary children (and adults!) as they miss friends and family in other places. / **Sam & Milda Lukosius**, Springfield, OH. Pray for God to grant wisdom in shepherding nearby college students.

14

Dan & Stacy Halley, Tampa, FL. Pray the Lord will fill community members with hope and the truth of the Gospel. / Pray for yearlong intern **Isaiah (Calli Jade) English** in Sewickley, PA.

15

Pray for joy and creativity for missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she works with the missionary

children. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* would encourage elders as they lead and care for their congregations.

.....
16 Pray for **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest. / Give thanks for new missionaries **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda, as they prepare to move with their daughter Joanna to Uganda.

.....
17 Pray for **Lauren LaRocca**, Home Missions administrative coordinator. / Pray for yearlong intern **William (Mayra) Devenney** in Merrimack, NH.

.....
18 **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Fred and the faculty of Knox School of Theology as they adjust to working together. / Pray for yearlong intern **Luke (Laura) Walkup** in Morgantown, WV.

.....
19 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Pray for Ben as he pursues new church contacts throughout Africa for the OPC Missions program. / Pray for **James (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

.....
20 **Bill & Margaret Shishko**, Commack, NY. Pray the Lord will continue to draw committed individuals and families to join The



The Lukosiuses (day 13)

Haven OPC. / Pray that churches and individuals would engage in one of the many upcoming **OPC short-term missions** opportunities.

.....
21 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** and administrative coordinators **Ling Lee** and **Joanna Grove**. / Pray for **Christopher Drew**, assistant website administrator for opc.org.

.....
22 **David & Ashleigh Schexnayder**, Scottsdale, AZ. Pray ministry efforts to local college students will be fruitful and draw students closer to Christ. / **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for the Reformed church to be faithful in training men for the office of elder.

.....
23 **Johnny & Berry Serafini**, Marion, NC. Pray the Lord will bless connections made at a local shelter, opening doors for meaningful ministry. / Pray for **Ayrian Yasar**, editorial assistant for *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant*.

.....
24 **Mr. & Mrs. M.** (on furlough), Asia. Pray that university students in Columbus will attend Mr. M.'s Friday Bible studies. / Pray for database administrator **Charlene Tipton**.

.....
25 Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Praise God for the men Jerry teaches who want to grow spiritually. / **John & Grace Jee**, Columbia, MD. Pray All Saints Presbyterian Church would deeply experience God's immeasurable power at work through their ministry.



The Shishkos (day 20)

.....
26 **John & Erin Nymann**, Suffolk, VA. Pray for wisdom and faithfulness as All Saints Presbyterian embraces new ministry opportunities. / **David Nakhla**, Committee on Diaconal Ministries coordinator. Pray for deacons as they love and serve their congregations, often in countless ways.

.....
27 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the Lord will send a second missionary family to work alongside the Paysons. / Pray for **Sharon Jeromin**, administrator for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

.....
28 **Andrew & Cheyenne Farr**, Klamath Falls, OR. Pray for wisdom in creating community outreach plans to effectively share God's love and truth. / Pray for deliverance, endurance, and God-glorifying joy for those imprisoned in **East Africa** and their families.



Robert B. Strimple (left) at Westminster Seminary California with Robert Den Dulk

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT B. STRIMPLE (1935–2024)

John R. Muether

The passing into glory of the Rev. Dr. Robert B. Strimple last November, at the age of 89, is the fitting occasion to consider the remarkable imprint he quietly placed on the lives of thousands of students of Westminster Seminary, east and west, over the past half-century.

Strimple was raised in a Methodist home in New Castle, Delaware. After he graduated from the University of Delaware (where he met his wife, Alice), he went on to earn BD and ThM degrees at Westminster Theological Seminary, and then a ThD at Trinity College, University of Toronto. He joined the Westminster faculty in 1969, where his administrative gifts saw him quickly ascend also to the post of Vice President for Academic Affairs. In that dual capacity, he moved to Escondido, California, in 1980 with the formation of a West Coast campus. When it soon became cumbersome to maintain the seminary as a single institution, Strimple became the first President of Westminster Seminary California in 1982. Six years later he returned to full-time teaching until his retirement in 2001, after over four decades serving the two Westminsters. Throughout those years he was a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and he moderated the semi-centennial General Assembly of the denomination in 1986.

In the classroom, he presented to his students what he learned from his mentor, John Murray: systematic theology built on

the solid foundation of exacting exegesis. In addition, he taught popular electives on modern atheism and Roman Catholicism, which he had carefully studied.

Above all, Strimple pointed his students to Christ. I was one of the incoming students he welcomed at the opening convocation at Westminster Seminary in 1977. His address directed hearers to the goal of “Learning Christ” (Eph. 4:20). “We must let the apostle’s inspired language have its full force,” he explained, “and remind us of that personal relationship with Christ himself, which is the blessed reality of the Christian life. . . . To learn Christ, Paul emphasizes, is to learn the Holy One of God.”

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On December 6, **All Saints Presbyterian Church** in Suffolk, VA, a mission work of the Presbytery of the Southeast, became a particular congregation of the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On November 23, **Christopher I. Byrd** was installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico.
- On December 6, **John R. Nymann**, formerly organizing pastor, was installed as pastor of All Saints Presbyterian Church in Suffolk, VA.

MILESTONES

- OP minister **Everett C. DeVelde Jr.**, 89, died on December 12.



On December 7, Immanuel Chapel in Upton, MA, celebrated the retirement of its pastor, Mark Marquis (center), after twenty-one years of ministry at Immanuel.

REVIEWS

J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism, by Crawford Gribben. Oxford University Press, 2024. Hardback, 256 pages, \$39.95. Reviewed by OP pastor Cliff L. Blair.

This is a short book but not slight. Dr. Gribben, professor of history at Queen's University Belfast, brings substantial scholarship to his subject. (A simple metric: About a third of this volume is notes and bibliography.) His theological portrait of Darby cuts against popular misconceptions. Between a substantive introduction and conclusion, he considers four areas of Darby's theology: soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, and eschatology. The book is too dense to consider closely in a short review so I will constrain myself to three impressions.

I knew Darby was an educated man but had little grasp of the breadth of his gifts. Educated in classics (taking a gold medal from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1819), he practiced law briefly before turning toward a clerical vocation. He was ordained as a priest in the Church of Ireland in 1826. In a few years, he was effectively separated from the Irish Church but flourishing as a leading light of the Plymouth Brethren where he would continue until his death in 1882. Gribben writes, "His achievements were extraordinary. During his lifetime, he wrote more than 850 separately published items . . . with subjects ranging from biblical exposition, theology, and devotional poetry to Greek grammar, political commentary, and reflections on the work of J. S. Mill . . . he led projects to translate the New Testament into German (1855), French (1859), and English (1867)" (2). His notebooks touched on even broader interests from Hinduism to Kant. He is reported to have preached in English, Irish, French,

German, Italian, Dutch, and perhaps even Māori when visiting New Zealand (16).

Dispensationalism is associated in my mind with Arminianism (John MacArthur notwithstanding). I was surprised to discover the tenor of Darby's soteriology: "Late in life, he referred to the doctrine of unconditional election to explain why he had been saved while others had not: 'When I was converted, the quarrel about Calvinism was pretty strong, but I said to myself, How came I to be brought out, and all my companions left where they were?' Darby was a Calvinist because the Genevan doctrine of salvation made sense of his own experience" (34).

Gribben opines that using the Canons of Dort as a measure, "Darby was an idiosyncratic but orthodox Calvinist" (55).

More surprising, eschatology was not a dominant interest: "Despite his reputation as the most influential eschatological thinker, his writings on the subject occupy only four of the thirty-four volumes of

his *Collected Writings*" (114). More striking still, while Darby is commonly considered the father of dispensationalism, he would most likely not own, or even recognize, the theological system of that name as it appears today. Modern dispensationalism from the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909) forward, though certainly not uniform, is fairly stable in saying that history from creation is divided into consecutive dispensations (usually seven), and that we live in the penultimate dispensation (the church age, or ecclesial dispensation). The millennium is the final dispensation inaugurated with Christ's return. It is surprising to learn that such terminology and thinking would have been foreign to Darby. His definition of dispensation changed over time, but he found them only between the flood and the cross and did not consider either the church age or the millennium as dispensations (134).

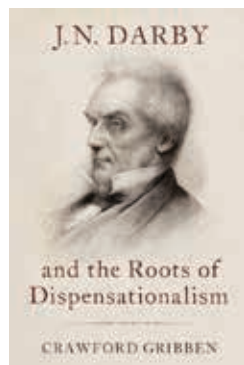
In a theologically dense work there

will be many places for Christians to disagree, but two stood out. Darby staunchly rejected the imputation of Christ's righteousness as part of justification; this is accomplished by Christ's sin-bearing alone. In his mind, the doctrine of active obedience introduced a form of works righteousness. Gribben quotes Darby: "We are not justified by the works of law, by whomsoever done, but entirely in another way. It was never God's intention to bring in righteousness by law" (50). I find his grasp of what Christ has done for us impoverished. Equally troubling, but oddly less explored in this otherwise thorough book, is his foundational notion of the separation of Israel and the church. We are told that this idea came early in his theological formation, in the late 1820s (10, 62), and it is often referenced, but its formation is not canvassed. This defining feature of Darby's theology continues in most forms of modern dispensationalism. In my judgment it is a catastrophic misunderstanding of the Scriptures. I agree with Al Mohler's observation made in an excellent interview with Gribben (available online), that this doctrine opens "a colossal chasm on a giant question related to the gospel itself . . . between classical dispensationalism and classical Protestant theology."

This book is accessible to the motivated laymen or the person already somewhat familiar with the theology and history of this period.

Being Elisabeth Elliot: The Authorized Biography: Elisabeth's Later Years, by Ellen Vaughn. B&H, 2023. Hardcover, 304 pages, \$24.99. Reviewed by OP member Linda Finlayson.

Being Elisabeth Elliot is the second volume of a biography written by Ellen Vaughn. The first volume, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*, was published in 2020 and covers Elisabeth's (Betty to her family) life until her return to the United States with her daughter Valerie in 1963. That part of Elisabeth's story is the better known one, or at least her missionary work in Ecuador



VOLUNTEER WITH DISASTER RESPONSE

NC and FL: OPC Disaster Response is looking for volunteers to help in western North Carolina, to build temporary homes for those affected by Hurricane Helene, and in Florida, to help with the restoration of Pastor Dan Halley's home after damage from Hurricane Milton. Please visit OPCdisasterresponse.org for more information.

and the martyrdom of her first husband, Jim Elliot.

The second volume covers the rest of Elisabeth's life until her death in 2015. Throughout both volumes the author relies on what she describes as Elisabeth's "over frank" journals. The journal entries are full of her most secret agonizing thoughts, seeking to work out the mystery of God's will in her circumstances, which she often found confusing. Her life did not run in smooth and always pleasant places. Having lost her husband in Ecuador, Elisabeth found herself the "darling" of the evangelical world. Churches and Christian organizations clamored for her to tell them about her suffering and the happy ending it brought. But there wasn't a happy ending, nor a happy beginning. Her life as a missionary was fraught with difficulties besides the excruciating loss of Jim after only three years of



and mistakes. No one wanted to hear that. So she wrote her books, many of the earlier ones receiving very mixed reviews, especially *No Graven Images*. However, the requests for speaking engagements kept coming, and, feeling this must be God's will, she started her travels around the country again. While on the circuit, she met her second husband, Addison Leitch. This marriage was unexpected but very happy until Addison became ill with cancer and died slowly after only four years of marriage. After a period of mourning, Elisabeth resumed her teaching and speaking around the country, expecting that she would live out her life as a widow. However, renting out rooms to seminary students resulted in a husband for her daughter and one for herself (Lars Gren). This third marriage according to Vaughn was not happy, or at least very different from the other two. It was during this time that Elisabeth began her most earnest writing and speaking about submission—submission to God and to her husband.

While Vaughn had spent almost a hundred pages on Elisabeth's second marriage, she only devoted nine pages to Lars Gren as a husband. This is in part because Lars burned Elisabeth's journals covering their marriage. Views on this man vary. Some have said he was a controlling man, bordering on being an emotional abuser, while others point to Elisabeth's public statements about the roles of husbands

marriage. When she returned to the States, Elisabeth wanted to tell the Christian world about what life on the mission field was really like, including the difficulties, disappointments,

and wives, using her own marriage as an example. The author hedges, unwilling to say for sure which view is true.

I think this book is valuable, giving the reader a chance to see Elisabeth as she saw herself. However, I think Vaughn overused the journals. Elisabeth was very hard on herself, not always seeing herself clearly, and while Vaughn was dedicated to telling the truth about her subject, I'm not sure she maintained a balance between letting Elisabeth speak and providing good biographical analysis.

Many people have benefited from Elisabeth's books, podcast, academic teaching, and conference speaking over the years. While Elisabeth may have been dissatisfied with herself, others were greatly helped. I also think that the author's own tragedy, which she shares at the end of the book, may have caused her to focus more on the death of Addison, to the exclusion of other relationships, particularly with her daughter. Elisabeth Elliot was a remarkable woman whose life has much to teach us. This book is a good start, but I'm not sure it presents a balanced picture of her life.

A Prairie Faith: The Religious Life of Laura Ingalls Wilder, by John J. Fry. Eerdmans, 2024. Paperback, 240 pages, \$24.99.

Reviewed by OP member Hannah Schmidt.

Growing up on the wide-open plains of North Dakota, my imagination was captured by *The Little House on the Prairie* and Laura Ingalls Wilder's other novels for children. Laura and her family attended church, sang hymns, and prayed for spring after long, icy winters, just as my family did. John J. Fry in *A Prairie Faith* asks what role religion played in the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder. It was not as great a role as one might assume from reading the Little House series. She was a moderate Protestant but had little to say about her own religious beliefs and practices, believing that "the things between one and God should be between him and God"

NEW HOPE WOMEN'S SPRING CONFERENCE

April 11-12

Speaker: Lori Stanley Roeleveld
Location: New Hope Presbyterian
Green Bay, WI 54302

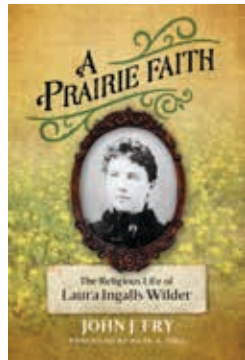
Register: www.nhopc.org
Contact: Julie Agen, 920-833-2808
or library@nhopc.org

(4). Wilder's preference for privacy about spiritual matters restricts what Fry, an OP elder and professor of history at Trinity Christian College, can say about her faith; nevertheless he faithfully and thoroughly portrays the spiritual life of a woman who was neither a fundamentalist nor a liberal, but a conventional Christian.

Laura Ingalls Wilder based her popular books for children on her own experiences growing up on the American frontier at the close of the nineteenth century. Her memoir *Pioneer Girl* remained unpublished during her lifetime, but her daughter, Rose, convinced Wilder to modify and fictionalize tales from her youth to make them more appealing for publication. Thus began a writing partnership that spanned decades. Rose, who rejected traditional Christianity and was attracted to Islam, "both added to and subtracted from [the Little House books'] engagement with spiritual topics" (136). For example, *The Long Winter* contains references to heaven, Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, and Daniel, and detailed accounts of Bible memorization and prayer. Almost all these references were added by Rose or modified in some way (155). Similar modifications can be found in all the books. Although Laura had a Christian upbringing, the spiritual quality of her life was sometimes exaggerated for the novels.

Fry brings a uniquely Christian and Reformed perspective to the study of Wilder's life. His analysis includes Wilder's personal correspondence, newspaper articles, and journals. Wilder attended church regularly throughout her life, though Fry notes that she did not typically attend evening services or attend church while traveling. Wilder participated in Congregational, Methodist, and Methodist Episcopal churches, but she never became a member of one, even when other family members did. Her single encounter with

Scottish Presbyterians was a negative one—she felt constrained by their strict Sabbatarianism and rejected the doctrine of predestination (54). Most likely Wilder would not have sought out an OPC church!



Readers of the Little House books may be surprised to learn from *A Prairie Faith* that Wilder made false claims about her books. To the end of her life Wilder asserted that all the Little House books were true and strictly biographical. Fry writes that "this was clearly not true. Laura and Rose combined historical characters, left out people

who had lived with the family, and created some stories out of whole cloth" (200). This revelation could inspire further discussion among readers about the boundaries between fact and fiction.

Overall, Fry reveals Laura Ingalls Wilder to have been a flawed but persevering Christian who sought to do good and attend church. He notes that Wilder writes more of God's law than his grace. This is sad, since there are many instances in the novels that could be mined for examples of human and divine mercy. Fry refrains from exploring how Wilder's novels may have influenced the faith of her readers. Having grown up reading the stories as an example of Christianity, I would have been interested to read more about Wilder's faith legacy.

***The Pastor as Leader: Principles and Practices for Connecting Preaching and Leadership*, by John Currie. Crossway, 2024. Paperback, 240 pages, \$19.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Jeremy A. Brandenburg.**

When your championship team is down at halftime, the need of the hour is a coach's speech that both inspires

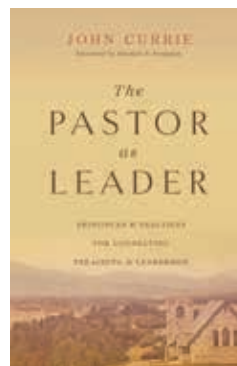
and instructs. This is the way to approach John Currie's book *The Pastor as Leader*. This book helped me think about my callings as a Christian and a pastor with renewed purpose and zeal. Among other things, it puts thoroughly biblical and Reformed meat on the bones of what our Form of Government means when it says the pastor, with the other elders, is to "lead them in all the service of Christ" (VIII). The "them" being the church: everyone Jesus Christ saves, builds up, and sends into the world.

Most of us are reflexively suspicious of anything resembling "big tent evangelicalism." We love being Presbyterian and Reformed. We aren't interested in being trendy and changing everything to grow our churches. If anything, the OPC's moderate but stable growth over its history shows robust community resistance to modern ministry fads. But we are not without need! Currie's book addresses that need from a thoroughly Reformed and biblical perspective. We should be thankful for our growth but take Currie's call to pastoral arms to heart.

Currie writes persuasively about the need for pastors to understand preaching as leadership. In his words, pastoral leadership is "an organic extension of the preaching ministry of a man of God" (31). His argues from Scripture and relies heavily on the theological riches of Calvin, Owen, Vos, Murray, and Gaffin. That is what makes Currie's case so compelling. It

is union-with-Christ theology in pastoral practice. He shows how, as those united to the risen Christ, we should unashamedly lead through preaching: equipping and motivating the saints to use their Spirit-given gifts and graces. Crucially, Currie thoroughly emphasizes the sanctified character and prayer-dependent nature of faithful leadership.

To miss or ignore the leadership dimension of gospel proclamation is to miss



a core horizontal purpose of preaching—to influence the saints to *do* something. Truly redemptive-historical preaching will not only connect the hearer to a passage’s Christ-centered meaning, but also to what Jesus is doing in and through his people now. Jesus Christ is the living Lord of his church. We are called into and part of “the greatest of all causes.” The proclamation of the eternal gospel by a man of God set apart by Christ should resound with the glory and excellence of Christ himself, for he is King of kings.

The Pastor as Leader is not a book on preaching per se. It is the halftime exhortation we need to rally pastors, elders, deacons, and members to remember we are in a cosmic conflict that demands strategy and wisdom. The outcome is decided. Jesus Christ has triumphed through his death and resurrection. But Christ calls men to herald the good news of his victory and urge the church onward in the power of the Spirit to love, serve, and sacrifice until he comes again.

***Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda*, by Megan Basham. Broadside, 2024. Hardcover, 352 pages, \$32.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Mike Myers.**

Many readers may have heard of Megan Basham’s book because of the controversies surrounding it. Make no mistake, it is controversial, and not just because it wades into cultural hotbeds of our day. It discusses how influential evangelical (and Reformed) leaders and institutions have been enticed into adopting socio-political-moral stances that do not clearly align with the Word of God.

In straightforward, journalistic style, Basham examines and analyzes topics in-

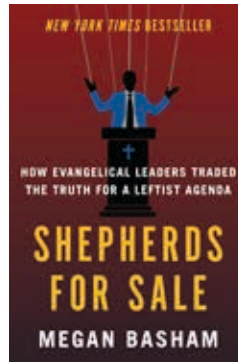
cluding the climate change agenda, illegal immigration, abortion, the pandemic, race relations, abuse, and perversions of sexual morality. Her goal is to explore the positions that some leaders in the church have taken with respect to these issues and, more importantly, what and who has influenced them in those directions. It is this reviewer’s opinion that this book is an important read for the following reasons.

First, her writing highlights the danger and reality of church leaders being courted and targeted by worldly powers. For example, the introduction tells of how communists placed pastors on what they called “suckers lists” in the 1920s–1950s! The documentation that this existed (and similar pressures exist) is a call to pray for your pastors and elders to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord’s work (1 Cor. 15:58).

Second, Basham sanely addresses the pressures of global and domestic political entities upon our society and churches. For many, this line of thinking can be alarming and discomfiting. What compounds this problem is that many who discuss these matters do so in a manner that is largely unhelpful. *Shepherds for Sale* navigates this well, as the author carefully documents how some evangelical publications, centers of learning, and leaders are being steered by social pressures and questionable financial backers.

Third, this book is an encouragement to faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his Word. In the last chapter, Basham highlights how the clear witness and preaching of Charles Spurgeon was blessed by God not merely to convert sinners but also in resisting the lies of Karl Marx and socialism in his day. She connected this historical illustration to the work of Dr. Cal Beisner and the Cornwall Alliance. This single, small-budget entity has been standing in the way of global purveyors of the climate change agenda for some time. Her point is that even

one seemingly insignificant but faithful witness to the truth can have far-reaching effects in a world full of deceit.



If you are skeptical of this book, I recommend beginning at the end. The first half of the final chapter is autobiographical, and it reveals the heart behind a book that is direct and hard hitting. Knowing the author may help the reader hear what she has to say, and while you may not agree

with everything, it may help you listen to her in a more understanding way.

In every generation, the church has a responsibility to walk worthy of its calling (Eph. 4:1). This includes coming to terms with the world that stands in defiance against the Lord and his anointed (Ps. 2:2). Basham’s book calls for the church to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16), and to resist being conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1). This is an encouragement the church always needs to hear.

***Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction*, by Harrison Perkins. Lexham, 2024. Hardcover, 520 pages, \$49.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Ethan J. Bolyard.**

Although it is popular to reduce Reformed theology to a flowery acronym, Michael Horton was nearer the truth when he said, “*Reformed* theology is synonymous with *covenant* theology” (*God of Promise*, 11). If not exhaustive of the Reformed faith, the doctrine of the covenant is certainly a distinguishing and central mark. This conviction clearly animates Harrison Perkins’s *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction*.

The last seventy-five years have seen an explosion of interest in the covenants, and given the vast number of books already available, one might wonder what contribution any new work can make to the conversation. But here Perkins charts a fresh course. Whereas other studies, such

CORRECTION

On page 16 of the January issue, Alexander Henderson incorrectly appeared as Thomas Henderson.

as O. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants* or Meredith G. Kline's *Kingdom Prologue*, have focused on biblical theology, this book considers "the covenants from the perspective of systematic theology" (viii), "emphasizing covenant theology's categories rather than the covenants' narrative" (xvii). In other words, Perkins draws a circle instead of a line (Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 16).

This distinctively dogmatic concern is reflected in the tri-covenantal structure of the book: 1) "The Covenant of Works," 2) "The Covenant of Redemption," 3) "The Substance of the Covenant of Grace," 4) "The Administration of the Covenant of Grace," and 5) "Living in God's Covenant of Grace." Within each section, the book's method is threefold: an examination of Reformed confessional statements, a defense of those statements from Scripture, and a demonstration of continuity with the ancient and medieval church (xvii). Academic in rigor though often surprisingly pastoral in tone (e.g., it opens with a prayer, uses vivid illustrations, and concludes most chapters with application), the book is designed to help ministers teach this material to their congregations (xviii).

Diffuse and digressive at times, the book covers a lot of ground. Highlights include a discussion of the heavenly nature of Adam's reward under the covenant of works (55–75; cf. Vos's "deeper Protestant conception"), a defense of why the covenant of redemption sweetly complies with divine simplicity (109–111), and an explanation of how the Spirit applied the benefits of the covenant of grace to Old

Testament saints prior to the incarnation (290–93). In discussing these and other themes, Perkins makes frequent use of classic distinctions (e.g., covenant-rule, procession-mission, principal-penalty).

Although broadly Reformed in outlook and irenic in approach, the book is not without its debatable points. For example, in contrast to the classic definition of covenant as an agreement between two or more parties, Perkins defines it as "a formal relationship" (5). Some readers will not be convinced this modern tweak of the older language is necessary or even an improvement. He also suggests that Adam was created in covenant with God (5), in apparent tension with WSC Q. 12, which classifies the making of this covenant as a "special act of providence."

Additionally, Perkins relies heavily on a "hypothetical" (or "contingency") reading of Romans 2:13 and the surrounding verses, which he treats at length in an appendix. Although his position is historically defensible, it is worth noting that many Reformed stalwarts—including Martin Bucer, John Ball, Thomas Manton, Herman Witsius, Wilhelmus à Brakel, and Petrus van Mastricht—held a "real" interpretation of verses 5–11 if not also of verses 12–16 (see Mark Jones's foreword to Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, x–xi).

Likewise, given the book's emphasis on the sharp antithesis between works and grace, it is not always clear how a final judgment according to works functions

meaningfully for new covenant believers (2 Cor. 5:9–11), nor how the prospect of rewards for obedience (James 1:12) and the threat of sanctions for apostasy (Heb. 10:26–31) genuinely motivate holy living (Heb. 12:14). In fact, despite data to the contrary (Matt. 25:31–40), Perkins seems to deny that the final judgment involves any consequential "evaluation of our works" (250) when he insists, "Believers were already judged at the cross . . . , so there is no future review of our works" prior to our reception of reward (238; cf. 252–53).

Perhaps the most controversial section is Perkins's exposition of the Mosaic covenant. Although he affirms that this covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace (cf. WCF 7.5), he also argues that it "resembled the covenant of works" at

the typological and national levels (320). While assessing his argument, the reader may benefit from reading the OPC General Assembly's "Report of the Committee to Study Republication."

Regardless of one's position on these disputed points, the book remains a treasure trove of confessional statements, exegetical insights, and historical resources. At its best, it draws the reader into a deeper meditation on the Scriptures, a more serious engagement with the Christian tradition, a richer fellowship with the saints, and a sweeter communion with the triune God. This is what covenant (and thus Reformed) theology is all about.

