

# NEW HORIZONS

OCTOBER 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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*Cover image: Vasily Surikov, The First Council of Nicea, 1876, oil on canvas, Russian Museum.*

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# TAKE NOW THE NICENE CREED AS TASK



J. V. FESKO

This year, the Nicene Creed turns seventeen hundred years old. Christ's outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost has great significance for the church's doctrinal teaching throughout the ages, including in the Nicene Creed. Paul writes: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12 *KJV*). Through the outpouring of the Spirit, Christ gave the gift of pastors and teachers, those uniquely gifted at preaching and teaching the Word of God. Christ gave these gifts for perfecting, equipping, and building the body of Christ. The gifts of Christ extend from Pentecost to the present day and beyond, to the consummation. Every single faithful pastor and teacher in the history of the church constitutes Christ's gifts to the church.

Christ's gifts bring two relevant and vital truths to our hearts and minds. First, as we note the seventeen-hundredth anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which met May through July of AD 325, we can class the Nicene fathers as part of Christ's gifts to the church. Second, while

Scripture is our chief authority, it is not our only authority. We can appeal to the authority of tradition so long as Scripture remains our lone chief authority—so long as we submit the opinions of ancient writers to "no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture," we are on safe ground (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.10). Given these two presuppositions, we can ask some helpful questions: Why was the Council of Nicaea necessary? What scriptural truths were false teachers promoting? How did the church fathers of Nicaea defend the truth? Answering these questions allows us, the church in the present, to continue to proclaim the faith that was once delivered to the saints—the truth that Jesus is God in the flesh who came to save sinners.

## DENYING THE TRUTH

For thousands of years God promised that he would come in the person of his Son to redeem his people from their sin. God progressively unfolded this promise throughout redemptive history until Christ was born. John powerfully captures the truth of the incarnation when he writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1–2). The Son is fully God, but wonder of wonders, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, translation mine). Scripture clearly teaches that the Son of God is God and that he became a human being. Despite the historical reality of Christ's incarnation and the perspicacity of God's Word, the serpent still slithers through the church and asks, "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" (Gen. 3:1 *KJV*). False teachers in the apostolic church denied the doctrine of the incarnation. The Apostle John instructed the church on how to discern false from true teachers: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (1 John 4:2). In other words, there were those who denied the incarnation of the Son of God.

By the third century, false teaching from a bishop by the name of Arius (ca. 250–336) was spreading. Arius believed that Jesus was not fully equal with God. Instead, he believed that the Son of God was the highest of all creatures; when the Scriptures, for example, state that Jesus is the "begotten" of the Father (John 1:14 *KJV*), Arius claimed *beget* means *to create*. If the Father begot the Son, then there was a time when the Son did not exist. Bishop Alexander of Alexandria (d. ca. 326) got wind of Arius's teaching and called a synod in Alexandria in 317 that condemned Arius's views. Arius appealed his condemnation to Eusebius

of Nicomedia (d. 341) and controversy ensued. Emperor Constantine (272–337) heard of the dispute and called for a council to resolve the conflict. The issue before the Council of Nicaea was to defend the biblical truth regarding the deity of the Son of God.

## DEFENDING THE TRUTH

While there were other doctrinal issues in play, the Council's deliberations focused upon the question of whether Jesus was of "like substance" (*homoiousias*) with the Father, which was the view of Arius, or whether he was of the "same substance" (*homoousias*) with the Father. Was the Son, in other words, fully and completely God or was he only merely like God?

Some might initially object to the introduction of terms foreign to the Bible. Why invoke the term *homo-* versus *homoiousias*? Why not simply rest on the terms used in Scripture? The Arians were willing to say that the Son of God was like the Father in every way but argued that because he was "begotten" by the Father, it meant he had a genesis or origin. The Nicene fathers, then, introduced extra-biblical terminology to define what various passages of Scripture meant and to preclude Arian false teaching. This truth came home to me in an unforgettable way when I was in seminary. I once asked one of my professors how an interview with the trustees went. He smiled and said it went very well. Why? He said, "They asked me if I believed in substitutionary atonement, and I said, 'Yes I do.' What they don't know is that I have redefined what substitutionary atonement means." J. Gresham Machen documented this phenomenon in *Christianity and Liberalism* when he said that theological liberals use biblical language, but they redefine it, empty it of truth, and then boldly appeal to the Word of God. My professor did this with the seminary trustees, and the Arians also did this at the Council of Nicaea.

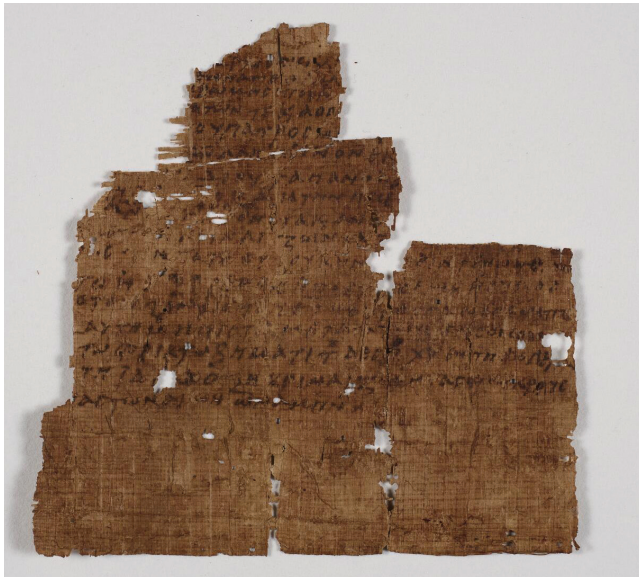
When the Council completed the creed, they made a number of statements that carefully guarded the deity of Christ and traced the teaching of divine revelation. The creed states that the Son of God was "begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father." The first thing we observe is that the creed traces biblical language when it says that the Son was "begotten of the Father." John's gospel makes this claim four times: "And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14, translation mine); "No one has ever

seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18, translation mine); "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16 *κῆρ*); and "Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18, trans. alt.). But because the Arians also affirmed the term *begotten* but redefined it, the creed specifies that the Son is "begotten not made." In other words, the creed is saying, "We do not mean what the Arians mean when they say *begotten*." The creed affirms that the Son is eternally begotten; in other words, there is no time when the Son did not exist: "And those who say 'There was a time when he was not,' and, 'Before he was begotten he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what is not,' . . . these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes." Nicaea states that the Son is eternally the Son.

A second feature of the creed's statement is that it affirms that the Son of God is "of the substance of the Father" and it invokes the technical term *homoousias*: the Son is *consubstantial*, or the same exact "stuff" of the Father. In the later language of the Chalcedonian Definition (451), the Son of God is "truly God." The Nicene Creed affirms this point by saying that the Son is "God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God." An initial reading of these statements may lead some to the hasty conclusion that the Son derives his deity from the Father because he is "Light of Light" rather than simply saying that he is eternal light all on his own. To address this issue, we must consider two theological truths concerning the doctrines of God and the Trinity. First, the fathers of Nicaea affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity as it pertains to the being of God. The Westminster Confession, for example, teaches this truth when it states that God is "without body, parts, or passions" (2.1). God has no parts; he is not a composite being like a human, that has arms, legs, a soul, intellect, will, affections, etc. All that is in God is God. The Westminster Confession coordinates the doctrine of divine simplicity with the doctrine of the Trinity when it states that "in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity" (2.3). In other words, all three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, share the same divine substance. Factoring the "Light of Light, true God of true God" statement in light of divine simplicity means the Son is fully God because he is of the same substance as the Father. We must coordinate the "Light of Light, true God of true God," however, to the three persons of the Trinity.

All three persons of the Godhead share the same divine substance. Medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury





The oldest extant copy of the Nicene Creed, from the sixth century (John Rylands Library, University of Manchester)

(1033–1109) helpfully explains that we stress the unity of the Godhead to highlight that all three persons are God. However, we must never push the unity at the expense of harming the three persons of the Trinity. In other words, if we emphasize the unity of the Godhead at the expense of the three persons, then we fall into the error of unitarianism. Three distinct persons collapse into the unity of the Godhead, and we lose the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity. When the Nicene Creed, therefore, says that the Son is “Light of Light, true God of true God,” it affirms that the Son is at the same time fully God and he is also eternally distinctly the Son. The Father and Son are distinct persons. To put this in terms of the Athanasian Creed (fifth or sixth century), the three persons of the Godhead are all God and Lord, yet “the Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son.” That is, all three persons are God, yet the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. We must always preserve the unity of the Godhead and the reality of the three persons.

When the Nicene Creed says that the Son is “Light of Light, true God of true God,” it once again traces the lines of divine revelation. Recall Jesus’s words: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26). In the words of John Calvin’s

*Genevan Catechism* (1545), “The Lord Jesus who was begotten of the substance of the Father, and is of one essence with the Father, is by the best title called the only Son of God, because he alone is Son by nature” (Q. 22). The Father communicates his essence to the Son. Calvin elsewhere writes, “The Father is the fountain and origin of the deity” (*Institutes*, 1.8.7, 23, 25). Or in the words of Zacharias Ursinus, the author of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563):

The Father is the first person, and, as it were, the fountain of the divinity of the Son and Holy Spirit, because the Deity is communicated to him of no one; but he communicates the Deity to the Son and Holy Spirit. The Son is the second person, because the Deity is communicated to him of the Father, by eternal generation.

The Westminster Confession sums up these Nicene constructions when it states: “The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son” (2.3).

### THE NICENE CREED TODAY

The German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) once wrote, “What you have as heritage / Take now as task.” In other words, we should not look at the Nicene Creed as if it were an antiquated museum relic. Rather, the creed rightly explains the deity of the Son and also helps the church to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. The Nicene tradition is now our task—we must pass on this doctrinal heritage to future generations. We must faithfully herald the message of Scripture so beautifully captured in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” With Paul we must say that the “fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). We can both worship Christ and rejoice in knowing that Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, saved sinners like us. We can thank our triune God and celebrate the gifts that Christ has given to the church on this, the seventeenth-hundredth anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. **NH**

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*The author, an OP minister, is the Harriett Barbour Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.*

# ANNE VAUGHAN LOCK: FORGOTTEN ENGLISH REFORMER

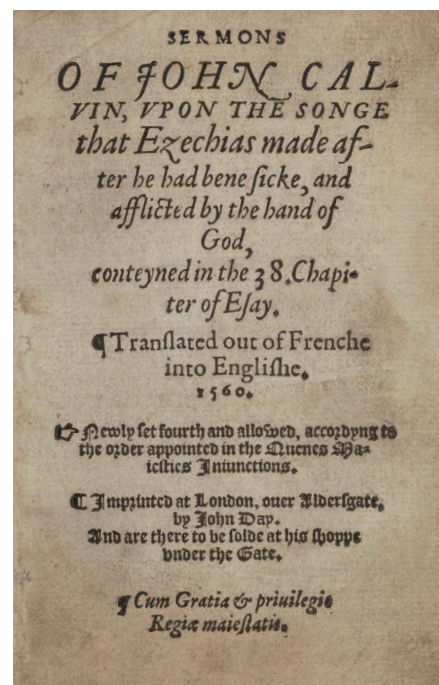


SUSAN M. FELCH

**N**ovember 1557, Geneva, Switzerland. John Calvin is delivering a midweek sermon and has arrived at Isaiah 38, King Hezekiah's prayer to God when he fell ill. Preaching in French, Calvin speaks of God's loving discipline and his presence with, and comfort to, his people during times of suffering. In the congregation is twenty-three-year-old Anne Lock (ca. 1534–after 1590), an English exile, herself no stranger to suffering. She had arrived six months earlier at the urging of her friend John Knox. He had fled to the Continent when the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor became queen of England, and the English Reformation, begun on shaky terms by King Henry VIII but propelled forward by the now-deceased Edward VI, was forced underground.

Lock, too, faced persecution if she remained in England. Her parents, Stephen and Margery Vaughan, now dead, had been active members of London's evangelical circle, her father a vocal supporter of the martyred William Tyndale. Her husband, Henry Lock, belonged to a prom-

The title page  
of Anne Lock's  
translation of  
Calvin's sermons  
(Folger Library)



inent family of cloth merchants. His mother and sister had actively encouraged the family to smuggle, purchase, and read the banned books that circulated surreptitiously during the early days of the Reformation. She herself, along with her husband and his sister, had publicly hosted Knox during his stays in London. She was a marked woman. Geneva offered religious freedom as well as the opportunity to grow in her faith; it was, Knox told her with characteristic hyperbole, "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles."

Yet coming to Geneva was a fraught decision. She was a mother with two small children. Her husband, responsible for the family business, was unable to accompany her. Travel was difficult, and she could bring along only one maid. Geneva was already crammed with refugees, and housing was tight. Still, she came, arriving in May 1557. Almost immediately, tragedy struck. Within four days, baby Anne was dead, buried in a foreign country, leaving her mother to grieve among fellow exiles. To grieve, to suffer, but not to despair. Now, six months later and still in Geneva, Anne Lock listened to Calvin's four sermons on Isaiah 38 and took them to heart. She also took them in hand, translating the French transcript, taken down by a shorthand stenographer, into English.

## A PILLAR OF THE ENGLISH REFORMED COMMUNITY

If this is all we knew of Anne Lock, she would still be worth remembering as a young Reformed woman who persevered in her faith, despite trials that might well have



overwhelmed her. But this is not all we know about Anne Lock, who, in fact, went on to become a pillar in the English Reformed community, recognized both in the church and in the public square. She deserves to be remembered today not only for what she did, but also for how she exemplifies the significant role of laywomen in the Reformation, of whom she was only one among many, and their honored status in the church.

We can begin with Knox. Despite his reputation, Knox had many women friends, none closer than Anne Lock, whom he claimed as a mother in the faith, although she was some twenty years younger. In his letters to her, he discusses theological issues and freely offers advice, but in matters of conscience he defers to her own judgment: “the Holy Spirit will guide you to make the right decision,” he concludes. After the exiles’ return to England upon the accession of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth, Knox includes her among the “brethren” of Geneva, asks her to circulate his letters, requests that she select books for him to read, and implores her to use her influence to get the government and wealthy individuals to send money for support of the Scottish reformation. That she is a woman does not matter to Knox; that she is a fellow Christian does.

Sometimes we may forget that one of the fundamental principles of the Reformation was what was later called “the priesthood of all believers”—that all Christians have direct and unmediated access to God through his Word and the sacraments. As Calvin said, each and every Christian is a partaker in Christ’s priesthood (vol. 12 of *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* [Eerdmans, 1974], 266). The Reformers knew that laypeople were indispensable parts of the body of Christ, and because no one in the sixteenth century advocated for female priests, women were perfectly positioned to be exemplary laypersons. If women were partakers of Christ’s priesthood, then it was clear that all laypersons enjoyed that privilege. This is visually demonstrated in a woodcut from John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* that illustrates the ideal of reformation under King Edward VI. It shows such an exemplary laywoman, reading the Bible for herself as she participates in public worship and takes her place at court.

The woodcut also neatly captures Anne Lock’s life after she returned to England from Geneva. Rather than slipping back into a comfortable middle-class life, she actively threw herself into defending and propagating her Reformed convictions. To be sure, she supported Knox and other Genevan brethren with spiritual and financial resources, but she also stepped up to the task of calling England itself, and England’s new queen, to repentance, following the devastating reign of Mary Tudor.



“Latimer preaching before Edward VI,” woodcut in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* which illustrates an exemplary laywoman reading Scripture (seated in the foreground)

Calvin’s sermons on Isaiah 38 dealt with the illness and subsequent repentance of a wayward king. Lock recognized their relevance to England’s situation and set about to publish them. To her translation of the sermons, she added a sermonic preface of her own that called on her readers to recognize their spiritual need, repent of their sins, and turn to God by swallowing the wholesome medicine Calvin preached. To punctuate her message, she concluded the volume with a set of twenty-six poems that paraphrased Psalm 51, turning this classic psalm penned by another royal sinner into a national liturgy of repentance.

The emphasis on royalty—the sin and repentance of King Hezekiah and King David—was not accidental. Nor was the decision to foreground on the title page and in the preface that God’s good medicine came via the preaching of John Calvin. Although Anne Lock was not in imminent danger of persecution in 1560, when she was newly returned to London, her Reformed community remained out of favor. Queen Elizabeth was no fan of Calvin, whom she blamed for allowing Knox to author a book against the reign of queens, although Calvin had actually warned his friend against publication. Lock, however, refused to be intimidated. Recognizing that she did not have sufficient societal standing to address the queen directly, she dedicated her book instead to the most important Protestant woman at court, Katherine Brandon Bertie, the dowager duchess of Suffolk, who is actually pictured in the upper left-hand corner of the woodcut, standing near the young King Edward VI. The duchess, Lock knew, could and would carry Calvin’s sermons and Lock’s own preface and poems into the court itself. The book was published, and reprinted at least twice, by John Day, who also published Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*.

## “MY POOR BASKET OF STONES”

While we don’t know a great deal of Lock’s activities in the next decade, we do know that the prominent preacher Edward Dering, who had become convinced of Reformed teachings, wrote several proposal letters to her after Henry Lock’s death, asking her to return his deep affection. He acknowledged her godliness—you are God’s own possession, he told her—but also her intellectual prowess by including an untranslated Latin quotation. Their eventual marriage coincided with the growing animosity of bishops and the queen against the Reformed community. At one point, in the face of possible prosecution and arrest, her husband wrote confidently of Lock, “God hath made her rich in grace and knowledge to give *account* of her doing.”

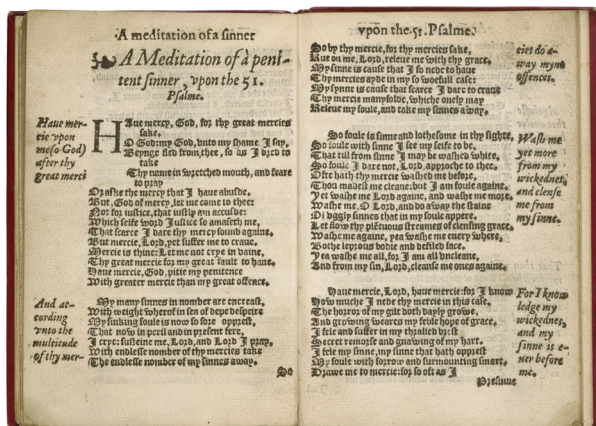
Indeed, Lock was continuing to give account of her faith, in ways that were increasingly public. By 1576, when she was forty-two years old, she was praised in print as one of four exemplary Englishwomen “famous for their learning,” and held up as a model for the queen herself to emulate. What the queen thought of this suggestion, we do not know, but certainly Lock was sufficiently well-known that the mere mention of her name sparked recognition.

After Dering died, she helped shepherd his own writings into print. In 1583, after her third marriage, to Richard Prowse, she was honored with a book dedication. In the preface to a printed sermon by Knox, John Field described Lock as “virtuous,” “very godly,” and “no young scholar” in the school of Christ, an echo of Knox’s own description of Geneva and a fitting tribute to a woman famous for her learning. “I know you live to your God,” Field says, and then calls her a “remembrancer.” A remembrancer was an official in the Elizabethan court who represented the sovereign in collecting debts. Field here suggests that Lock is recognized in the church as one who represents God by reminding others of their obligations and their need for repentance and God’s grace, as indeed she had done in her first book.

By 1590, the Reformed community in England was reeling from further confrontations with the bishops and the court. Prominent leaders died; others were imprisoned or exiled. It was time for another book. This time Lock chose to translate French pastor Jean Taffin’s *Of the Marks of the Children of God*, a book that spoke of suffering as the mark of God’s promise to adopt us and to preserve us through affliction as his beloved children. It shows the esteem in which Lock was now held that the title page featured her name as prominently as that of pastor Taffin. This, it seemed to say, is a book you can trust. As with her earlier book, she intended the second one to reach not only her own community, which needed to be comforted, but also the wider English society, particularly the court that was the instrument of affliction. Dedication the book to Anne Russell Dudley, the countess of Warwick, she reminded her fellow believer to be a light on the hill, shining for the gospel at court and throughout the land. For herself, Lock chose this biblical image to sum up her vocation: “I have according to my duty,” she says, “brought my poor basket of stones to the strengthening of the walls of that Jerusalem, whereof (by grace) we are all both citizens and members.”

The reference to Nehemiah, another layperson who faithfully served both church and court, is a fitting epigram for Anne Lock. From her childhood among the earliest English Reformers, through exile and personal suffering, to the persistent use of spiritual and intellectual gifts to strengthen her small Reformed community, Anne Lock built up the kingdom of God whereof, by grace, she was a citizen and member. Her contemporaries honored her as an exemplary layperson, and, in gratitude for her life and service, so should we. **NH**

*The author is an OP member, emerita professor of English at Calvin University, and the editor of Anne Vaughan Lock: Selected Poetry, Prose, and Translations with Contextual Materials (2021).*



Anne Lock’s sonnets on Psalm 51, from her 1560 translation of Calvin’s sermons (Folger Library)



# THE OPC VIDEO HISTORY PROJECT

**BRIAN L. DE JONG**

In 1994, the Committee for the Historian, working in tandem with the Christian Education Committee, produced a video history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The OPC Historian at the time was Rev. Charles Dennison. He wrote the script, conducted the interviews, oversaw the production, and was the moving force behind the whole project. That video, first released on VHS and later on DVD, was much loved by our denomination. It remains available for viewing at [opc.org/historian.html](http://opc.org/historian.html).

Thirty-one years later, the committee believes that it is time for an update. To that end we have embarked on a new project to tell the fascinating story of the OPC: a series of short videos featuring the lives of key figures in our history.

Each episode will come with background information, discussion questions, and bonus video tracks. These episodes will be appropriate for Sunday school classes and small groups as well as individuals and families. As we look ahead to our centennial celebration in 2036, there will be a growing collection of these episodes on OPC.org.

## OUR FIRST EPISODE

Our first episode focuses upon the death of Anna Strikwerda in Eritrea in 1974. Anna was a nurse serving at an OP mission hospital in Ghinda when she and her fellow nurse Debbie Dortzbach were kidnapped by Eritrean insurgents. We strive to tell Anna's story not just from an American perspective, but also from the perspective of our Eritrean brethren.

Anna's murder was not outside of Christ's control. This tragic event was foreordained by our sovereign God to demonstrate his glory through the mature faith of this godly woman. On that day, Anna left behind the chaos and cruelty of a sin-cursed world to enter the peaceful presence of her Savior. For Anna, to live was Christ and to die was gain. Since that day, Anna has been enjoying the glories of heaven in the presence of just men made perfect, the holy angels, and the triune God.

For OPC veterans, these stories will serve as good reminders of God's faithfulness in days past. They may even

*Anna Strikwerda (left), here at the Eritrea clinic in the 1960s with a colleague, is the subject of the first episode of the OP video history series.*



present an opportunity to renew fellowship with forgotten friends. For our newer members, these stories will present both the history and the heritage of the OPC.

## HISTORY IN LIGHT OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

When the next generation steps into the leadership of our church, in order to lead us well, they will need to know where we came from. Although our history doesn't explain everything about our identity, it is an important element in defining the uniqueness of Orthodox Presbyterians. We are a historically oriented branch of Christ's church. We value the past as we live in the present and look to the future.

By examining the events of the past, we see God's sovereign goodness at work. The study of OP history is really one subdivision of the doctrine of God's providence. Seeing how he has preserved and governed our fathers in the faith and all their actions teaches us more about the Lord himself. We see his grace and compassion, his wisdom and prudence, his kindness and severity.

Remembering these key events from our past also shines a light on the members and the congregations of the OPC. What did these brave people stand for (and against) as individuals and as churches? How did they

*Continued on page 18*

# A BURDEN FOR AFRICA

BENJAMIN K. HOPP



*Adisu, a licentiate in the Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church, who is being mentored by Ben Hopp, regional foreign missionary for the OPC*

On several trips to Ethiopia, I have seen older women carrying loads of firewood on their backs. Rural Ethiopians, like many Africans, use wood or charcoal for cooking, so it must be collected and carried home. What a heavy physical burden!

What about the spiritual burdens people are carrying in Africa? How does the role of a regional foreign missionary support the Lord's compassionate work of relieving such burdens? My work as a regional foreign missionary involves three primary tasks to help churches shoulder the burdens of ministry. First, I visit countries to investigate and evaluate possible fields where we might send new missionaries. Second, I come alongside churches of like faith and practice to help in the training of pastors and elders. Third, I help churches to develop connections within their own countries (for example, to regional churches or their general assemblies) and even with other Reformed churches in their region.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW FIELDS

Can you locate Ethiopia on a map? Or a tiny country like Burundi? Africa is a massive continent with fifty-five countries. Only after moving here in 2024 have I truly begun to learn the lay of the land, so to speak. Traveling

to different countries and encountering many different people has opened my eyes to Africa's diversity. In South Africa in July, you'll need a winter jacket, but in South Sudan, you'll need a short-sleeved shirt.

Rwanda is one of those little countries in Africa that is hard to find on a map. During a recent trip to Musanze in the mountains of northwest Rwanda, I had the privilege of preaching to a gathering of four different congregations who were worshiping together. The Rwandan government shut down unapproved church buildings in their area, and only one building made the cut. Now all four congregations unite under one roof to worship together each Lord's Day.

The music was very lively. When the large choir sang and stomped their feet, clouds of cement dust from the unfinished floor filled the sanctuary. By the end of their song, it was hard to see the back of the church. As they prayed, the dust settled, but it was stirred up again when the next choir praised the Lord.

My hosts, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian missionaries laboring there, suggested that biblical training is the greatest need. False teaching is rampant in Africa. Like the Pharisees in Jesus's day, these so-called preachers "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's



shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matt. 23:4). Discussions about how the OPC might help lighten this specific load are ongoing.

During my travels, I might determine that a country’s burdens would be best relieved by opening a new mission field. Training church leaders and guiding them into all truth is so very important. If you are a minister of the gospel, or training to be ordained, maybe you need to ask whether God is calling you to labor for him overseas.

## THEOLOGICAL MENTORING

Shashemene is a medium-sized city in southern Ethiopia. Several congregations of the Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church exist in this area. While teaching on the pastor as a shepherd, I was struck by the engagement of those present. Every teacher desires their students to be attentive and eager to learn. I must confess I was amazed that everyone came with a notebook and Bible, and gave their full attention during the teaching sessions.

Adisu is a licentiate in the Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church. You can see on his face that he has a real desire to learn not just from teachers sent from abroad, but from his Savior. He recognizes that his true burden of spiritual ignorance will only be lifted by studying God’s Word. As the regional foreign missionary, I have the opportunity to teach, to search out places that need biblical teaching, and to facilitate other men to come to Ethiopia as part of the Committee on Foreign Mission’s Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps (MTMC). The work of the regional foreign missionary under the MTMC is helping churches carry their burdens. It is a privilege to come alongside churches to help them with the gifts God has given us. Ultimately we point them to Jesus the true burden bearer. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28, 30).

And what does this mean for you? If you are a minister or elder in the church who loves to teach, maybe God desires that you would commit a short time to bring your knowledge to Africa to teach as part of the MTMC.

## CONNECTING CHURCHES

Unlike Rwanda, which gained notoriety for its 1994 genocide, the country of South Sudan is less well known. In fact, it is the youngest country in the world, having gained its independence from Sudan in 2011. But the Sudanese Reformed Church (SRC) dates back to its formation in Khartoum in 1992. My ministry in South Sudan has been restricted to the capital city of Juba. Other congregations

*Ben Hopp (right)  
with Juma, an  
interpreter who  
works with Hopp  
in South Sudan*



of the SRC remain isolated by ongoing armed conflict and periodic flooding, especially along the Nile River.

But churches need to be connected. Along with theological training of pastors, elders and licentiates, we are seeking to carry the burden of guiding the general synod and classes of the SRC by connecting it with other Reformed denominations in Africa. We never do the work alone. We often need interpreters, like Juma, to accurately communicate theological truths for SRC pastors so they can be the fishers of men they have been called to be.

So what does this mean for you? Pray! Prayer is a practical way we bear one another’s burdens. As you grow in your knowledge of churches overseas, you are able to obey the Lord’s command through Paul: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

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*The author is the OP regional foreign missionary to Africa and Haiti.*

## WHAT’S NEW

**Miss Beatrix V. Taverne** (Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Florida) concluded her one-year term as a missionary associate to Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, in July 2025.

**Rev. and Mrs. Samuel N. (Eunsoo) Foltz** concluded a one-month furlough and returned to Asia in mid-August.

After a two-month furlough, **Rev. and Mrs. Stephen S. (Catalina) Payson** return to Uruguay in early October.

# REVIEW: SMITH'S *WHY RELIGION WENT OBSOLETE*

ALAN D. STRANGE

Sociologist Christian Smith of Notre Dame University, who, in his work on teenage spirituality twenty years ago, gave us the phrase “moralistic, therapeutic deism,” now tells us that traditional religion is obsolete for most. Teenagers in 2005, according to Smith, believed in a Christianity that was good for being ethical and finding healing but kept God at a distance, including the Christ who became incarnate to save his people from their sins. Now, Smith tells us, after some years of gathering and reflecting upon further data, many factors combined, beginning in the post-Cold War world (in the early 1990s), to create a series of “Perfect Storms Converging” (the title of the second of three sections) that has landed us in the trouble in which we find ourselves: Christianity and other traditional faiths are now regarded as *passé*, past their expiration date, useless to help us in any meaningful way.

Many poll respondents, especially post-boomers (Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z), no longer identify with any religion. This does not mean that they necessarily identify as “secular,” however, despite the “secularism thesis” that predicted anti-supernaturalism would come to prevail in the modern world. Increasingly, respondents to Smith’s surveys answer neither as religious nor secular, but as a third category that calls itself “spiritual, but not religious.” This third category is not satisfied with the naturalism of a secularized science but seeks some higher source to give meaning to our existence and is part of what Smith sees as the cultural “re-enchantment” of the world (about which Smith is writing his next book).

That the world needs cultural re-enchantment means that the vicious secularization of the new atheism, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, which portrayed all religions as toxic, has not worked. But that also does not mean that the church has benefited. Whatever sort of answers religion provided previously, perhaps particularly in times of crisis, it no longer does, at least to the satisfaction of many

of the post-boomer generations. This is why post-boomers, though deeply troubled in many respects, arguably more than ever, no longer find the answers that religion typically affords to have the purchase that they once did, and religion has become, for them, obsolete.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

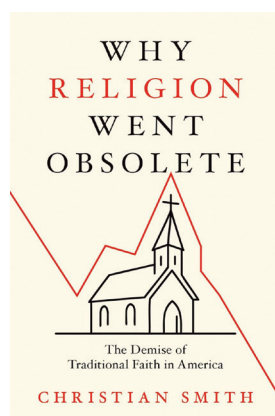
What are the factors that go into making the perfect storms that have led to widespread disaffection with religion? Smith’s first section is “Setting the Stage,” in which he sets forth the actual problem, not only decreased religious observance, especially church attendance, but also increased religious irrelevance. Fewer profess belief

in God (29–30), falling from about 75 percent of boomers in 1988 to only about one-third of millennials in 2021. Many of those now identify as “not religious” (31)—43.4 percent in 2021 of those ages 18–29. About a quarter of all adults now identify as “spiritual but not religious” (31).

Smith discusses long-term social trends (chapter 4) and the developing religious environment (chapter 5) that led up to the 1990s and the end of the Cold War: Perhaps having a common national atheistic foe or two—communists in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam,

and elsewhere—especially served to foster at least a civic theism. The rise of popular postmodernism, intensifying expressive individualism, triumphant mass consumerism, and many other factors contributed to this series of perfect storms, all made accessible to everyone without leaving home, via the digital revolution. This is just a bit of what Smith covers in chapters 6–7.

Is he equally right about it all? Perhaps not, but he tries to rope in as many things that led to the beginning of the end in the ’90s, assuring obsolescence and its concomitants in the 2000s. The broader problem appears to be that no one is joining anything, not just churches, but civic organizations, unions, etc. Fewer leave their homes, in fact,





for any interpersonal interaction, heightened by COVID isolation. Religion contributed to its own demise with its various scandals of recent decades, all made so much more accessible by mass media (chapter 8). The social media revolution has allowed all sorts of marginalized folks to link up and not feel so marginalized, sometimes innocuously and many times disastrously, especially in creating bubbles outside of which you need not interact with any group but your own little weird one. This populist zeitgeist, which chapter 9 and the rest of the book so well explore, is disastrous for the institutional church and for all organized religion.

## INSIGHTS FOR THE OPC

What are the lessons to be learned here for us in the church? In the OPC? Smith, as a sociologist, is rightly quite reticent to prescribe. One of his observations, though, seems especially telling. Millennials and more recent generations report a high level of depression and hopelessness. Historically, such has been ripe pickings for the church, as it preaches a message redolent with hope: Christ Jesus has come to save sinners, even the chief of them. Why are millennials and their younger fellows not resonating with the message of the church? They find their situation too bad for an evangelical church that they perceive as too “upbeat” to offer real solutions to those with such deep needs. Enter our churches. If anyone understands how desperate we are and what a Savior we have, who alone can lift us out of the pit and the miry clay, it is we in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

Though he finds it unlikely, Smith wonders what would happen “if American traditional religions turned their difficult predicament into an opportunity for self-critical soul-searching.” He suggests a “brutally honest ‘Come to Jesus’ (if I may) confrontation” that might bring about a costly transformation that would be risky, induce loss, and may fail. “Perhaps a season has come for traditional religion’s remaining seeds to fall into the ground and appear to die so that some much more fruitful life might be born” (372–373). I would say that the solution is not more woke progressivism on the left or Christian nationalism on the right (Smith agrees); rather, Christianity must be maximally true to its best impulses and rediscover that salvation is of the Lord, not of moralistic therapeutic deism or its knockoffs.

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*The author is an OP pastor and president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.*

## MTIOPC FALL COURSES

### HOMILETICS AND REFORMED EVANGELISM IN ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

This fall, the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC is offering two courses: Homiletics and Reformed Evangelism. Classes begin October 22; applications are due the 15th. The class is online with a mandatory in-person intensive January 27–29 in St. Augustine, Florida.

Homiletics is taught by Rev. Douglas E. Clawson, general secretary for the Committee on Foreign Missions, and Rev. Dale A. Van Dyke, pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan.

Reformed Evangelism is taught by Rev. Jeremiah W. Montgomery, general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions, and Rev. Dr. Eric B. Watkins, church planter and regional evangelist.

OPC elders, ministers, church planters, licentiates, and men under care are welcome to apply, as are non-OPC ministers. All students, except for OP church planters, must pay a \$50 registration fee that is fully refundable upon successful completion of the course.

Tuition is free for OPC church planters, ministers, licentiates, and men under care. Tuition is an additional \$50 for OPC elders and \$100 for non-OPC ministers.

OPC pastors, licentiates, and men under care of a presbytery qualify for a travel scholarship of up to \$400 to help defray the cost of travel to Intensive Training. An additional \$100 for travel expenses also is available if matched by your local session or presbytery. CHMCE reimburses travel costs for CHMCE church planters.

To apply, visit [www.opc.org/cce/MTI.html](http://www.opc.org/cce/MTI.html). For more information, email MTIOPC coordinator Judy Alexander at [alexander.1@opc.org](mailto:alexander.1@opc.org).

*MTIOPC Homiletics participants in Oostburg, WI, in August*



# A GROWING INTEREST IN EVANGELISM

CHRIS BYRD

A few years ago, a fellow minister remarked that he had been observing an increasing interest in evangelism within the OPC, something I had also noticed. Indeed, it seems that in the last five to ten years, the Lord has been kindling a growing desire in Reformed churches in general, and the OPC in particular, to reach the unchurched and unconverted—to see our local churches growing, not just through transfers but also through gathering in the lost. This has certainly been the case in the Presbytery of New Jersey & Puerto Rico, and it is exciting.

## GROWTH AT GRACE OPC IN WESTFIELD, NJ

A burden for evangelism was placed on my heart when I first served as an intern at the Boardwalk Chapel in 2014. Speaking every day with people from all over the northeast about Christ, I realized that our churches are surrounded by people who have never heard the gospel clearly articulated. In early 2018, I came to our presbytery's Home Missions Committee and explained my desire to serve an existing church, alongside another pastor, with a focus on reaching the people outside the church.

At the same time, Rev. Timothy Ferguson, pastor of Grace OPC in Westfield, New Jersey, was thinking along the same lines. When he was installed in 2015, the congregation had only eighteen active members. By 2018, the Lord had grown that number to fifty-five. With the increased pastoral load, Tim no longer had time for the degree of evangelistic outreach he had been engaged in, and he desired a second minister to help lead the work of evangelism. The committee connected us, and I was installed as evangelist at Grace in 2020, where I served until last spring.

The Lord greatly blessed—and continues to bless—the outward growth of Grace. From 2018–2024, Grace received forty-five people by profession of faith! There are several factors I believe the Lord has used in this growth. First, the Lord has used preaching. The division of labor allowed Tim to focus more on preaching—preaching that speaks to and instructs the saints but is also intelligible to the unchurched, and that always includes an explicit gospel proclamation and call. A common testimony in session



*Ten years ago, Grace Church in Westfield, NJ, had eighteen active members.*

interviews of those preparing to publicly profess faith was that God used the preaching at Grace to help them understand the gospel and their need for Christ. Another important factor is the evangelistic culture that has developed in the congregation. Most new professions of faith were made by people who had been invited by a friend or relative to worship. People at Grace regularly think about, talk about, and pray for those they want to see come to Christ, which naturally flows into speaking to friends about the Lord and inviting them to “come and see.”

## A BURDEN FOR THE CHURCH

During my time at Grace, I realized more clearly that my burden for evangelism was in part a burden for the church—a desire to see the church become more evangelistic. This eventually led to being called last year as our presbytery's regional home evangelist. In this role, my mission is to assist existing churches and future church plants in outward growth through evangelism and promoting a culture of prayer and witness. Part of this call involves serving as a full-time “evangelist in residence” each spring at one of our presbytery's congregations. In 2025 I completed my first residence at Providence OPC in Mantua, New Jersey. While there, I taught a twelve-week Sunday School series on evangelism, preached on passages

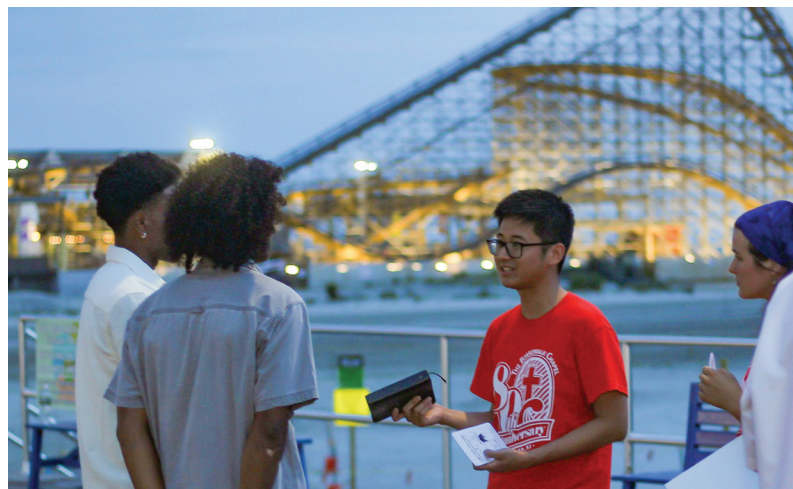
related to the evangelistic mission of the church, engaged in evangelistic work, served as a partner to the session, labored in prayer for the lost, and worked to encourage the congregation in prayer and witness. The Lord has certainly been blessing the preaching and witness of Providence and answering prayers in wonderful ways. Among those blessings is a man in his twenties soon to be baptized and another man, a father of two with no church background, being discipled in the gospel.

## THE BOARDWALK CHAPEL

My call also involves serving as director of evangelism at the Boardwalk Chapel in Wildwood, New Jersey. Established in 1945 by our presbytery as an evangelistic preaching station on Wildwood's famous boardwalk—a modern-day “Vanity Fair” that millions of people visit every summer—the Boardwalk Chapel has developed in recent years into an evangelism and lay apologetics training ground. Up to forty-five students and adults serve on staff each summer, and each week churches from all over the United States send groups for an intensive evangelism training and missions experience. There I have the privilege of training staff and church groups, teaching on prayer and evangelism, overseeing several evangelism conferences, mentoring seminarian interns, and engaging in daily evangelism.

In the last three summers alone, ninety thousand gospel tracts have been handed out and over four thousand people have had the gospel personally shared with them, with more than seven hundred Bibles and gospels of John given to those who show particular interest in knowing more about Christ. And tens of thousands of people came within hearing of the gospel preached nightly from the Boardwalk Chapel. We won't know all the ways the Lord is using these tracts, conversations, Bibles, prayers, and this preaching, but we do know that in Christ our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). And we have been encouraged by testimonies reminding us of this. One couple emailed us that their son had been on the boardwalk the previous summer when a Chapel staff member began to witness to him. A seed was planted that flourished over the course of the year, and the son had recently professed his faith. They wrote: “We have prayed for our son for years, and somehow that gentleman [from the Boardwalk Chapel] got through to him. Praise Jesus!”

The ministry of the Boardwalk Chapel is increasingly being used to encourage and equip Christians and churches for their evangelistic witness back home. Two young ministers now involved in evangelism or church planting recently shared that their experience at the



*One aspect of the Boardwalk Chapel's ministry is training church officers and seminarians in outreach.*

Boardwalk Chapel several years ago is what ignited a passion for home missions. A veteran OPC minister shared that he returned home from our evangelism conference two years ago with a renewed focus on the ministry of prayer—and that the Lord has been using this to grow the congregation he serves. Our desire is that the Boardwalk Chapel would continue to be a place where local church members and leaders from our presbytery and beyond can come for intensive evangelism training and ministry and return home with strengthened faith in the power of God through his gospel and a new or renewed vision for reaching the lost in their own communities.

## FORCED TO PRAY

A central piece of all this evangelism teaching and ministry has been prayer. I believe prayer—both prayer meetings and impromptu prayers pleading with the Lord for the Spirit's power and work—has been a key element in the fruit we have seen in Westfield, Mantua, and Wildwood. (For more, read Rev. Aijalon Church's wonderful article “Forced to Pray on the Boardwalk” on OPC.org.) Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain (Ps. 127:1). In prayer we ask the Lord to give what we cannot produce ourselves: hunger for God, conviction of sin, spiritual sight, wisdom and love. We pray to the God who hears and who promises great things in his Word (John 14:12–14).

Give thanks for the increasing work of evangelism in our churches. And let us pray that the Lord will continue preparing a great spiritual harvest and that he will continue shaping the church into an army of sowers and reapers so that we might all rejoice together in due time!

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*The author is regional home evangelist for the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico.*



# SUMMER 2025 SHORT-TERM MISSIONS TRIPS

LANETTE HARRIS

The Bible promises that the Holy Spirit will enable us in his work of spreading the gospel. It also promises that he will prepare the hearts of the elect to hear the gospel. This promise gives us great confidence to reap the harvest that God has planted. This year's OPC short-term missions trips tasted that confidence in God's work.

"What I love about the Boardwalk Chapel is that it presents the opportunity and the training to not be ashamed of the gospel," said Zach Leestma. This year is the third time Leestma (Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan) has volunteered at the Chapel. He is amazed each time by the spiritual work that Christ does through the work



Elizabeth Marsh

of short-term missions, "not only in the people we evangelize, but also in our group and [in] ourselves." Several participants at the Boardwalk Chapel, both first timers and veterans, dealt with nerves. Eliza Bierling (also from Harvest OPC in Wyoming) rarely talks to strangers in her hometown. But she "just went for it," and, she said, became more confident afterward. Boardwalk staff member Elizabeth Marsh (Covenant Church in New Berlin, Wisconsin) said that the key to volunteering at the Chapel is to depend on the Lord: "One thing that's really stuck with me is the emphasis on prayer; how to pray and really rely on the Holy Spirit."

## SPIRIT-ENABLED WORK

In 2025, sixty-nine OPC participants from eighteen states served on eight mission teams: Uganda, Quebec, Colombia, Japan, Hungary, and two teams to the Czech Republic.

Before this year's summer short-term missions season, two members of OP churches attended the Cross-Cultural



Team Colombia

Missions Training program in Tepic, Mexico: Melody Brad-dock (San Antonio Reformed OPC in Texas) and Moriah Johnson (Mt. Rose Reformed OPC in Reno, Nevada). At the training, Melody felt her world expanding: "I grew in so many ways—spiritually, relationally, and personally. While spiritual growth can't be measured, I came away with new tools for personal devotions and Bible study. Relationally, I was pushed far beyond my comfort zone."

Like some of the volunteers at the Boardwalk, Allison Smith (Cornerstone Presbyterian in Ambler, Pennsylvania) felt trepidation about going on the short-term missions trip to Colombia, but God answered her prayers and showered his love on her. "I learned quite a bit about trusting God and his sovereignty," she said. Allison and her team partnered with a local church, Iglesia Ra'ah, to offer the church's first Vacation Bible School. Her favorite part of the trip was "getting to know and work with the Iglesia Ra'ah church members." She enjoyed their hospitality and "selfless love and service."

## THE SPIRIT PREPARING HEARTS

As many short-term missions participants realized this summer, the Holy Spirit prepares hearts to receive the gospel message.

In Uganda, the team worked alongside staff from Knox School of Theology to host Vacation Bible School for

250 children in the village of Lobulepeded in Karamoja. Pastor Julius Mukwana, pastor of the Presbyterian church in Naakale, Karamoja, expressed gratitude for the team and said that he would encourage the church to use the Vacation Bible School studies to reach the community with the gospel. Team member Heidi Sherrill (Providence OPC in Tulsa, Oklahoma) was happy that the helpers and translators had said that the VBS program also ministered to them personally.

Anne-Marie Coulombe (Beauce Reformed Christian Church in Saint-Georges, Quebec) expressed awe regarding God's sovereign work in preparing the hearts of the students who came to English Camp in Saint-Georges, Quebec. After helping to lead the missions team at this summer day camp that teaches English to kids using Christian materials, Coulombe wrote: "Throughout the week, the Lord was faithful to prepare the hearts of both counselors and children in attendance; overcome worries, fears, and doubts; and grant energy and strength when needed." The Lord didn't always send sunny weather, but he did give the team the ability to stay flexible for each day's activities with the children. On the fifth day of the camp, "the kids were able to put on a wonderful show for their parents, reflecting on what they had learned through the week. Pastor Christian (Saint-Georges) also gave a gospel message before the crowd of parents that night," Coulombe reported.



Samantha VanDelden

During week three of the Boardwalk Chapel, Samantha VanDelden (New Hope OPC in Frederick, Maryland) was impacted by a conversation with two women on the boardwalk. The women affirmed that there is a God and a devil but showed little spiritual understanding beyond that. They deeply recognized, however, that

terrible things happen in this world. Samantha wrote, "I think understanding that God is a good God and that someday everything will be holy and will be good was mind-blowing to them."

### ONE LORD, ONE FAITH

God worked in other ways this summer as well. Allison Smith found it remarkable how God put the Colombia team together "with a great collection of skills, personalities, and giftings." But what she found more amazing is the



Children playing at the VBS in Alamacar, Karamoja, Uganda

beauty of the international church. "We have so much to learn from each other, and going on this trip helped broaden my perspective on the global church. It is a beautiful reality to see that we have brothers and sisters all over the world with whom we share a common faith."

Across various cultures and languages, believers are united by a shared faith in Jesus Christ. Short-term missions provide people with the experience of enjoying that union and feeling the particular needs of another region as if it were their own. Rhiannon Bennett (Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California) was struck both by the beauty of the Czech Republic and its need for the gospel. "Going on this trip really showed me what the church is like there, and how they can be prayed for, and how important outreach truly is there."

In light of our unity in Christ with the international church, we welcome you to participate in a short-term missions trip next summer. If you are interested, or would like to pray specifically for the short-term missions endeavors of the OPC, sign up for the monthly email newsletter, the S.T.O.R.M. Report, by going to [OPCSTM.org](http://OPCSTM.org).

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*The author is communications assistant for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.*



Mark Bube being interviewed at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, for the OP Video History Project



## THE OPC VIDEO HISTORY PROJECT

*Continued from page 9*

respond to difficulty? How did the theology of the OPC inform the practical Christian living of this pilgrim people?

In the context of the ordinary life experiences of humble and faithful Christian folk, the gospel of Christ shines forth with special brilliance. We witness the love, grace, mercy, and care of our God toward his covenant people. He saves us from our sin in order that we may devote our days to service in his kingdom. Such stories as these include the verbal proclamation of the good news of Jesus as well as the living testimony of saving faith refined and purified in the furnace of affliction.

### A SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

The heritage, or inheritance, of an earthly family includes physical assets such as homes, cars, land, possessions, and investments. In God's family the heritage is spiritual. We enjoy the blessings and benefits that God has conveyed to us from our spiritual parents and grandparents. That includes doctrinal truths, such as the sovereignty of God in salvation, the covenant between God and man, justification by grace alone through faith alone, and many others we hold dear. Our heritage also includes certain ways of functioning as the church. We are Presbyterians by conviction and receive the rule of elders in the church, the graded courts of the church, and the careful attention to church discipline as well as to the orderly and reverent worship. Living together in a covenant community, we enjoy the ordinary means of grace, pastoral care, and personal accountability, as well as the communion of the saints. All these things and more are included in this good heritage handed down to us by our forebears.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church did not drop out of heaven, fully formed and perfectly complete. We were

born as a church in 1936 and went through growing pains in the decades that followed. Our denomination gradually grew into what we are today, and we will continue to develop in the decades ahead. God is transforming us from what we once were into what he desires us to become, as we hope will become abundantly evident in these videos. In all things we wish to exalt Christ. We ought not to engage in hero worship of men and women, however godly they might have been. These videos attempt to shine a clear light instead on our glorious Savior.

To that end, these videos have a deliberately vertical aspect. We believe that God is providentially working in and through his church. He takes his dear children by the hand and leads them through the circumstances of life that he has wisely ordained for them. At each point of the story, we are asking the important question, "What is God doing in this situation?" By keeping our focus on Christ, we avoid turning these stories into mere morality tales. We do not want to convey lessons about right and wrong behavior. We want to show how Christ's hand governs all the affairs in the life of his church.

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*The author is an OP pastor and member of the Committee for the Historian.*



# OCT 2025 PRAYER CALENDAR

*This prayer calendar has two entries per day on those supported by the OPC's Worldwide Outreach, so that we in the church can support them also in prayer.*

1 Pray for **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda, as Fred teaches at Knox School of Theology and prepares for a pastors' retreat in Asia. / **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada.

2 **David & Rebekah Graves**, Wichita Falls, TX. Pray that the Lord would grow Living Stone OPC through new members. / Pray for **Hank Belfield**, stated clerk, as he works on communications and administrative matters following the 91st General Assembly.

3 **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for first-year students at Knox School of Theology as they adjust to the demands of quality theological education. / Pray for US Army active military chaplains **David (Jenna) DeRienzo** and **Joshua (Stephanie) Jackson**.

4 Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / Pray for growth in the **Presbyterian Church of the Reformation in Colombia** through recent OPC Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps seminars there.

5 Pray that attendees at the **Presbytery Diaconal Summit 2025** in Chicago would be encouraged in their labors. / Pray for the **Committee on Christian Education** as it meets October 6–8.

6 Pray that the Lord would grant **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay, a good transition back to the work of the Mission after furlough. / **Danny Olinger**, director of MTIOPC.

7 Pray for a second missionary for the **Uruguay Mission** to assist with Salvos por Gracia Church in Montevideo and the Soli Deo Gloria

8 **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for ruling elders and congregations to be uplifted by *The Ruling Elder Podcast*.

9 **Mr. & Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray for God's comfort for those who are suffering for their faith. / Pray for those planning **Short-Term Missions** opportunities for 2026.

10 **Mark & Lorie Wheat**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray the Lord would bring new members to join Good Shepherd OPC. / **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for Mr. F.'s witness as he responds to the opportunities provided by the Lord this fall.

11 Pray for **Jefferson (Ellen) De Oliveira**, Spanish language evangelist for Springfield, OH. / Pray for yearlong intern **Joseph Brian (Kelsey) Bowen** at Providence OPC in Rockford, IL.

12 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Praise God for the 200-plus children who attended VBS, and pray that they will find their security in Jesus Christ. / Pray for **Linda Foh**, assistant technical associate for OPC.org.

13 Affiliated missionaries **Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for the local churches and the Family Clinic, ministering to marginalized people in the community. / **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

14 Pray for wisdom and stamina for those involved in the ongoing **Disaster Response** efforts in North Carolina—a year after the hurricane. / **Kevin & Cami Godsey**, Peoria, IL. Pray that the Lord would



*The Paysons (day 6)*



*The Bowens (day 11)*

bless the ministry of Radiant OPC.

15

Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Pray that the Spirit would work in the hearts of those who attended the summer evangelistic outreaches. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jeremy Chong** at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

16

**Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota. / **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Pray for God's blessing on Heather as she teaches a women's conference for the Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church in Addis Ababa.

17

**Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for yearlong intern **Sangwoo Kim** at Anaheim OPC in Anaheim, CA.

18

Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / Pray for yearlong intern **Elisha (Kara) Walker** at Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, MI.

19

Pray for associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for the VBS outreach to 810 children and pray for the Holy Spirit's work in each life. / **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Pray for the outreach and evangelism efforts of Prince of Peace



*The Godseys (day 14)*

Presbyterian Church.

20

**Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jeffrey Shirley** at South Austin Presbyterian in Austin, TX.

21

**Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Pastor Julius, his wife Doreen, and their children, as he serves as organizing pastor of Nakaale Presbyterian Church. / Pray for **Char Tipton**, accounts manager.

22

Pray for **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, regional evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the work of the Community Health Team and the new midwife at the Clinic.

23

**Andrew & Cheyenne Farr**, Klamath Falls, OR. Pray that the Lord would bless Klamath Reformed Church's monthly Saturday outreach events. / Pray for yearlong intern **Drew (Monica) Tilley** at Providence OPC in Bradenton, FL.

24

Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for renewed and new relationships as she reacclimates after an eight-month furlough. / **Judith Dinsmore**, managing editor for *New Horizons*.

25

Affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne**, Japan. Pray for their discipleship and outreach work at Shin Urayasu Grace Church. / Pray for **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico.

26

Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / *New Horizons* editorial assistants



*The Johnsons (day 29)*

**Diane Olinger and Ayrian Yasar.**

27

Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he travels to encourage our missionaries. / Pray for **Rachel Kinney**, social media coordinator.

28

**Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**.

29

**Paul & Rachel Johnson**, Laveen AZ. Pray the Lord would grow Laveen Presbyterian through new members. / **John Fikkert**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

30

Pray that the persecuted church in **East Africa** would be joyful and steadfast in hearing the Word every Sunday. / **Anna Hall**, administrative coordinator for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

31

**Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for effective, sincere follow-up with college students who attended the summer English camp. / Pray for **Jeremiah Montgomery**, general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.





Two hundred kids attended VBS in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, despite local violence.

## NEWS

### CHURCH MEMBERS PRESERVED IN PORT-AU-PRINCE

During VBS week in August for Reformed Presbyterian Church of Delmas in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, an armed group invaded the nearby neighborhood. “Thousands of residents, including many from our congregation, were forced to flee their homes. We thank God that the attack was brief and that everyone was able to return home safely,” wrote OP affiliated missionary Octavius Delfils. Nearly two hundred children, aged five to fifteen, attended VBS and heard Bible stories from the book of Daniel.

### DANG INSTALLED AT BRICK, NJ

On July 14, Rev. Kim Dang was installed as pastor of Faith Bible Church OPC in Brick, New Jersey. Rev. Keith Graham preached the sermon, Rev. Jim Zozzaro gave the charge to the new pastor, and Rev. James Allay gave the charge to the congregation. A fellowship dinner, hosted by the women of Faith Bible Church, was enjoyed by all.

### IN MEMORIAM: ALLEN H. HARRIS

*Richard Ellis*

Retired OP minister Rev. Allen H. Harris, 82, passed into glory on August 21, 2025. He and Kathie, married fifty-eight years, were residents of Quarryville Presbyterian Retirement Community.

Allen was ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1970, having begun his ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In 1978 he planted Columbia Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Maryland, from which he retired in 2011.

Upon my graduation from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1981, I became Allen’s first intern. I was drawn to him not just because he and Kathie had attended Knox OPC in Silver Spring, where my father was pastor, but because of an invigorating seminar on strategic ministry he led at WTS during my final year.

Columbia Presbyterian’s vision was drawn from Paul’s Ephesians 1 prayer: “Know him, know our hope, and know his power.” Church life flowed from that purpose. Allen’s preaching was sound and biblical. He was also eminently practical. He aimed at equipping saints for every-member ministry so that the body would grow to maturity as members spoke the truth in love to one another.

During a visit a few weeks before he died, after a few minutes of small talk, Allen said: “We don’t have much time; how has the Spirit encouraged you in your life recently?” He was in decline, but was still hardwired to lead the conversation into the deep waters of “knowing him, knowing our hope, and knowing his power.”

## UPDATE

### CHURCHES

- On August 8, **Christ Covenant** in Sheridan, IN, withdrew from the OPC.

### MINISTERS

- On May 9, **Johnathan L. Allen** was ordained and installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of MI and ON.

Allen H. Harris



Newly installed pastor Kim Dang with his family





At McClymonds's July installation: elder Jerold Barnett, Rev. Dr. Alan Strange, Rev. Timothy McClymonds, Rev. Jim Stevenson



Members of the presbytery and friends at Johnathan Allen's May installation as an evangelist in the Presbytery of MI and ON.

- On June 13, **Josiah G. Stockwell** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Pilgrim OPC in Bangor, ME.
- On June 20, **Daniel B. Miller** was installed as a pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.
- On July 14, **Kim N. Dang** was installed as pastor of Faith Bible OPC in Brick, NJ.
- On July 21, the pastoral relationship between **Stephen A. Migotsky** and Jaffrey Presbyterian in Jaffrey, NH, was dissolved upon his retirement.
- On July 25, **Timothy L. McClymonds** was installed as a pastor of Westminster OPC in Bartlesville, OK.
- On July 26, **Francisco Jefferson Lima De Oliveira** was installed as an evangelist to serve as organizing pastor of Alfa y Omega OPC, a mission work in Springfield, OH.

- On August 20, **Aaron P. Mize** was installed as pastor of Trinity OPC in Bothell, WA.

## MILESTONES

- Retired OPC minister **Allen H. Harris** (82), died on August 21.

## REVIEWS

*On to the Sanumás: The Missionary Lives of Donald M. and Barbara H. Borgman and the Translation of the Sanumá New Testament*, by Thomas J. Sorkness. Resource, 2024. Paperback, 428 pages, \$45.59. Reviewed by OP member Josh Currie.

In 1958 Donald Borgman left his home in the United States on a mission to make contact with a remote tribe in Brazil, to learn their language, and translate Scripture for them. By the time Borgman's mission was completed, he'd shared the gospel, seen tribespeople converted, and planted an indigenous church, witnessing firsthand worship of God in a language that had never before spoken his name.

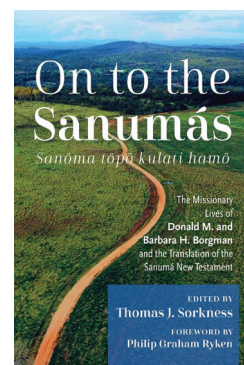
To tell this story, OP elder Tom Sorkness, who plays a small role himself in the story of the Borgmans, was given access to private journals, diaries, update letters, and personal correspondence. The narrative he's assembled with these documents is remarkable, not just for the unique glimpse behind the veil of missionary obscurity it provides, but for how deeply the reader is able to experience a

faithful missionary calling. It's a story that will inspire others to go, and their sending churches to consider more deeply how to prepare them.

The earliest parts of the story are adventurous and tense. Embarking on numerous expeditions through the remote northern portions of Brazil, Borgman meditates on Scripture daily, but has little opportunity to share the gospel. How can he without knowing the language? But eventually a base is found, the language is acquired, and he gets to work on a decades-long project of translating a complete Bible. Eventually Don marries, and he and his wife, Barbara, raise their family as the fledgling indigenous church is established.

The joy that the Borgmans experienced in Brazil is paralleled by unbelievable suffering in their ministry—losing their eldest son to a venomous snake bite, surviving a bus crash, enduring constant bouts of malaria and other illnesses, and losing their closest friend to murderous gold miners. Yet, as dramatic as the Borgmans' story is, *On to the Sanumás* isn't simply an adventure story.

By relying on Donald Borgman's voice, Sorkness allows a compelling portrait to develop that will reward readers who are considering missions themselves, or those who are sending missionaries. It's a patient perspective that, over the years, shows Borgman's own missiology maturing through experience. Especially toward the end of the book, as Borgman splits his time between Florida and Brazil to concentrate on completing his translation, his thoughts turn to the organization of the church there, of its leadership, and to the problem of communicating sound doctrine.



## ALL SAINTS FOUNDATIONS CONFERENCE

October 31–November 1

Speaker: Dr. Lane Tipton

*Adam and Christ: The Doctrine of Man*

Discover how humanity's first and second representatives shape our identity, fall, and redemption. Friday evening and Saturday morning at 3520 Pruden Blvd., Suffolk, VA, 23490. RSVP to [asopcfoundationsconference@gmail.com](mailto:asopcfoundationsconference@gmail.com).

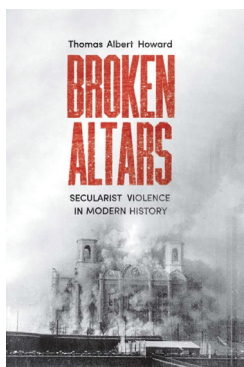
This book's great strength is in bringing to life the principles of biblical missions that are easy to abstract, and which much of the church has lost touch with. Following Don and Barbara, readers will understand how critical it is for missionaries to acquire the heart language of the people they're ministering to, to commit to translate the complete text of the Bible for them, and, ultimately, to plant an indigenously led church.

Today, the situation in Brazil is unfriendly to tribal churches. Fewer missionaries are being sent. Influential secular organizations have incentivized apostasy. But the Sanumá now possess everything they need for their faith to survive. The story of how it happened is well worth the read.

***Broken Altars: Secularist Violence in Modern History*, Thomas Albert Howard. Yale University Press, 2025. Hardcover, 296 pages, \$35.00. Reviewed by OP minister and professor David VanDrunen.**

Thomas Albert Howard notes that scholars and the media in recent decades have given extensive attention to the problem of religious violence—that is, violence committed in the name of religious conviction. Howard doesn't deny that such violence exists but seeks to correct the corresponding lack of attention to secularist violence against religious communities. According to Howard, the latter problem has actually been far worse.

Chapter 1 identifies three primary ways in which proponents of “modernity” have tried to resolve tensions and conflicts related to religion and politics. The first, *passive secularism*, recognizes broad religious liberties and is exemplified by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. This approach has been generally friendly toward religious practice and isn't Howard's focus here.



The second is *combative secularism*, exemplified in France's Third Republic (1871–1940), the Mexican Revolution beginning in 1910, areas of Republican-controlled Spain in the 1930s, and Kemalist Turkey following World War I. Combative secularism wasn't anti-religion per se but was strongly anti-clerical and sought to suppress religious influence and keep it out of public affairs. Finally, *eliminationist secularism* views religion itself as problematic and retrograde. This emerged from Europe's far left and animated communist regimes around the world.

The remaining chapters provide the horrendous details of the last two secularisms. Chapter 2 considers the “combative secularist” regimes mentioned above. As bad as their atrocities were against religious communities, they can hardly be compared to the twentieth-century communist regimes discussed in the remaining chapters. Chapter 3 focuses on the Soviet Union, chapter 4 on Eastern Europe (particularly Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Albania), and chapter 5 on Red Asia (particularly Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Cambodia). Many of these places had considerable religious diversity. The vast USSR, for example, contained not only Russian Orthodox but also large numbers of Muslims, Jews, Buddhists,

and Roman Catholics. Even a relatively small country such as Romania had Lutherans, Reformed, Roman Catholics, Jews, and Muslims in addition to Romanian Orthodox. Howard describes how the degree and methods of religious persecution varied from place to place, from time to time, and from group to group, but all these regimes despised religion, slaughtered religious people (especially clergy), destroyed religious buildings, and often used torture that Howard describes as “unspeakable”

## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Pastor:** Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod in Barnstable, Massachusetts, is looking for a new pastor. If you are interested, please contact the chairman of the search committee David Kinner at (774) 764-0106 or davidkinner@hotmail.com.

**Pastor:** Bethel Reformed in Fremont, Michigan, is seeking a new shepherd for a small congregation seeking to build on what God has already done. Contact Bill Johnson at (231) 250-9035 or bjohnson@americandecency.org. For more information, visit [bethelreformedopc.com](http://bethelreformedopc.com).

**Pastor:** Firelands Grace OPC, a small congregation in Sandusky, Ohio, is seeking a full-time pastor skilled in expository preaching. Commitment to the authority of the Scriptures, an emphasis on Reformed doctrine and practice, reverent worship centered on Christ, and humble care for our members is essential. We value fellowship with one another and are blessed to have our own facility. To apply, contact elder Randy Wilson at [77rswilson@gmail.com](mailto:77rswilson@gmail.com) with your Ministerial Information Form.

and “sadistic.” The book's conclusion includes brief discussions of contemporary communist regimes that continue to treat religious believers harshly: North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, and especially (because of its size) China.

This isn't a pleasant book, but it is a good one. If nothing else, it chronicles an enormously important part of twentieth-century history that would be tragic to ignore. I recognize that I belong to the last generation of people who grew up during the Cold War and imbibed a cultural ethos that regarded communism as evil. (I was a college freshman when the Iron Curtain began falling across Eastern Europe in

late 1989.) In the light of the continuing romanticization of communist figures and allure of socialist politics, younger generations especially need to know this history. *Broken Altars* may also help Christians be better informed as we engage with people indoctrinated with the idea that religion is inherently divisive and violent and thus that some form of non-religious secularism is the only plausible way to attain peaceful societies.

Finally, *Broken Altars* should encourage gratitude in Christians who live under the First Amendment or similar constitutional protections. In a day when many people on the so-called left and right, including professing Christians, downplay or criticize religious liberty, it's useful to consider what recent alternatives have been.

***The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written*, by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2025. Paperback, 96 pages, \$12.99. Reviewed by OP member Katharine Olinger.**

*The Nicene Creed*, by Kevin DeYoung, is the latest book in Crossway's Foundational Tools for Our Faith series. First drafted in AD 325, the Nicene Creed has expressed the church's Trinitarian theology for seventeen-hundred years. By reintroducing readers to the church's earliest ecumenical council and its far-reaching creed, DeYoung helps us understand the doctrine it defends and the heresy it combats so we

can continue to benefit from it today.

DeYoung's book reminds me of a great scene from the *Peanuts* comic strip. On a stormy day, Lucy worries that the rain might never end, but Linus recalls God's covenant promise to Noah in Genesis 9. Lucy is relieved and says, "You've taken a great load off my mind," to which Linus responds, "Sound theology has a way of doing that." *The Nicene Creed* does this, too.

DeYoung begins with history. The Council of Nicaea, called by Constantine the Great, addressed a theological crisis shaking the Roman world. Arius argued that "the Unbegun made the Son. . . . Thus there is a Triad, not equal in glories" (19). In response, Alexander defended the divinity of Christ—revealed in passages like John 1:1–3, but not yet clearly defined in theological terms. According to DeYoung, most bishops stood somewhere in the middle, hoping to be convinced of the truth. The Nicene Creed as we know it (with its expanded emphasis on the Holy Spirit) wasn't confirmed until the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

DeYoung divides the Nicene Creed into twelve articles and examines each with historical and theological insight. Throughout, DeYoung is intent on showing that "doctrinal precision does not get in the way of authentic discipleship" (83).

As a middle school teacher, I see this book supplementing a broad study of church history. The Nicene Creed can serve as a blueprint for understanding later creeds, the development of ecumenicity, and church-state relations. There are even tie-ins to modern Presbyterian conflicts over doctrinal precision and confessional integrity. While some sought to keep the Nicene Creed general, Alexander's side "wanted language that no Arian could honorably submit to" at the council (21). DeYoung points out that relational unity in the church is the fruit

of theological and spiritual unity. Then and now, it matters not only what we confess—but how we hold what we confess. Most importantly, the Nicene Creed attests that the subject, focus, and aim of church history should be the worship and glory of our triune God.

DeYoung shines a helpful light on a well-trod text. Recommitting ourselves to the words of "the most influential, most ecumenical, and arguably most widely used statement of faith in the history of the church" is a worthy and timely task (9). As DeYoung observes, "the Nicene Creed is a creedal floor, not a creedal ceiling," and our world will continue to need "new efforts to delineate truth from error" (83).

