

# NEW HORIZONS

in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

6 The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: An Interview with Carl R. Trueman

DECEMBER 2020

10 The Saint's Great Desire in the Song of Simeon // by James T. Lim



TECHNOLOGY, THE BODY,  
AND THE CHURCH

by J. V. Fesko // 3

# CONTENTS

## FEATURES

- 3** Technology, the Body, and the Church  
*By J. V. Fesko*
- 6** The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: An Interview with Carl R. Trueman
- 8** Review: Tara Burton's *Strange Rites*  
*By Danny E. Olinger*
- 10** The Saint's Great Desire in the Song of Simeon  
*By James T. Lim*

## DEPARTMENTS

- 12** Foreign Missions  
*Being Still and Knowing God During COVID-19*
- 14** Christian Education  
*An Introduction to Family Worship • Favorite Psalms and Hymns • Out of the Mouth. . .*
- 16** Home Missions  
*Chris Walmer Retires as Regional Coordinator*
- 18** Stewardship  
*Faith and Finances*
- 19** Prayer Calendar
- 21** News, Views, & Reviews

## New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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On October 2-3, Grace Presbyterian in Vienna, Virginia, hosted a retreat with the theme "Christ's Courage for Us." Twenty women enjoyed teaching by Emily Van Dixhoorn, fellowship, and even some watercolor painting while social distancing and wearing masks. Lucy Green and Nanny Concepcion shared testimonies of God giving courage to them in their times of need.



# TECHNOLOGY, THE BODY, AND THE CHURCH



J. V. FESKO // When God made the heavens and earth, he reached into the dust to form, mold, and create a body, and then breathed life into its nostrils through his Spirit (Gen. 2:7; compare with John 20:22). When he created man, male and female, he declared a judicial verdict over them: “And God saw everything that

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he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

## The Goodness of Embodied Existence

The fact that God pronounced his creation very good means that man, in both body and soul, is a good thing. But ever since the Fall, sinful human beings have sought to disassociate, disconnect, and divide the holistic connection between body and soul. Plato, the philosopher, claimed that the body was the prison house of the soul. A common Greek philosophical idea was that it was unthinkable for the gods to assume flesh because the body was evil and the spirit was good and the only way to overcome the limitations of the body was to free the soul.

This is why the incarnation was so shocking to many people in the first century—in Paul’s words, it was “folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). Nevertheless, John reveals the deity of the Word,

the *Logos*, who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The disciples were equally insistent upon the importance of the incarnation and resurrection. Jesus wasn’t a ghost; he didn’t merely have the appearance of a human being. Rather, the apostles testified,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. (1 John 1:1–2)

John repeatedly mentions the disciples’ use of their physical senses, their bodies, to highlight the reality of the incarnation. Paul makes a similar appeal to the senses when he repeatedly mentions that the resurrected Jesus appeared to more than five hundred

people (see, for example, 1 Cor. 15:6). The creation of man, the incarnation, and the bodily resurrection of Christ highlight the unity of body and soul and the goodness of our embodied existence.

Yet the denigration of the body did not disappear with the Greeks. Despite the influence of the Christian faith, again and again throughout history false teachers from either within the church or outside the church have sought to sever the body and soul. In the early church, the Gnostics denied the incarnation of Christ—they argued he only *appeared* to be physically present. In the Middle Ages, the Cathars, a heretical sect, denied the goodness of the body and believed that married couples should never engage in sexual relations because it contributed to the corruption of the soul.

In the early modern period, René Descartes created his famous philosophical dictum, *Cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore, I am”). At first glance

this statement might not seem all that problematic, but at its heart lies a denial of the goodness of the body. Descartes believed that he couldn't trust his senses (taste, touch, and smell) and that, therefore, the only way he could truly believe that he existed was through being capable of thought. He denied the holistic creation of body and soul, material and immaterial, and he isolated the mind from the bodily senses. Today's condition of gender dysphoria, in which a person is uncomfortable being the sex that their body dictates, is arguably the heritage of Descartes—our minds have been set in antithesis to our bodies.

All these errors seem far afield for anyone in the church who seeks to remain faithful to the teaching of God's Word. Yet, in what way is the world conforming us, the church, to its patterns and way of thinking? In what ways might we be imbibing from the sinful spirit of the age a spirit that sets our minds against our bodies?

### Technology's Separation of Body and Mind

One prominent way is through technology. Prolonged exposure to the internet, specifically, has the ability to drive a wedge between our bodies and minds, and, more broadly, between our minds and our embodied existence in the good but nevertheless fallen physical world that God has created.

A few examples can illustrate the acidic effects of modern technologies upon our embodied existence. Many people participate in online communities, maybe for gaming or for discussions about politics, philosophy, and even theology. Sometimes these communities are attached to traditional social media platforms, sometimes not. Often, these groups are perfectly innocuous—people gather virtually around a common interest or common purpose to exchange ideas, have discussions, and try to learn from one another. On the other hand, these groups can devolve into digital dens of iniquity. It doesn't take long to discover how many people have been politically, theologically, or ideologically

radicalized through online communities.<sup>1</sup> They stare into the bright screens of their computers and give their hearts and minds over to disembodied ideas and people they have never met. They ignore their flesh-and-blood friends, family, parents, and siblings.

In one instance, a minister I know participated in an online chat group and decided to embrace false teaching without ever consulting with the elders in his church or presbytery. He was unwilling to repent and thus was willing to be defrocked for his views, for this aberrant teaching that he learned from voices without bodies and names without faces. In other cases, online communities circle the drain of morality as people cease to engage ideas and instead lather their hands in insult and invective.



The internet breeds such misconduct, I think, because it's a disembodied environment. People do not communicate face to face, and ideas become divorced from reality, and, in a sense, lead us to create our own reality. We are willing to denigrate people because we don't look them in the eyes but only stare at a screen. The digital environment is the perfect context to allow us to slip off our Dr. Jekyll persona and allow the evil Mr. Hyde to roam free.

Another way technology works against our embodied existence is that it gives us the impression that the online world is real, when it is really just a picture of our own wants and desires. The internet and social media outlets are largely driven by economic forces. Pay-per-click ads litter web pages and hope to draw our attention so that we'll click,

read, and buy. Social media supposedly gives us a window on the world so we can see what's pressing and vital, but, in reality, it is simply providing us content it thinks we want to see based on the information we enter into our computers. The websites we visit, the ads we click on, and, in the case of cell phones, the words we say, find their way into corporations' databases, which can then send us related content.<sup>2</sup> If you have an Amazon Echo or Alexa-enabled device, for example, Amazon is listening to you so that it can better sell you things.<sup>3</sup> When we look into the internet, we're not really looking into the world but instead into a mirror. We might not say, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" when we login, but our computers are likely only reinforcing our sinful characteristics and pushing us into the arms of narcissism and selfishness.

Along with giving only the appearance of reality, the internet also provides us with only the appearance of accomplishment. As we regularly sit down in front of our computers and scroll through tweets, texts, and Facebook, we might give ourselves the impression that we're engaging with the real world. Clicking, surfing, and tweeting fill us with the feeling that we're doing something. But are we really? Today's internet warriors believe that, if they can just create enough of an online stir, then they can change things in the world. Cancel culture has been big news in the past year. Online activists comb through articles, tweets, and pictures, looking for smoking guns on a host of new unpardonable sins. But, from a Christian perspective, just because you get someone canceled doesn't mean that person changed much. Have hearts been swayed? Have people repented of sins? Have lives been changed by the gospel of Christ?

Similarly, recent tragedies cause many of us to post in sympathy or outrage, thinking that we've done something in response to the tragedy. But does putting up a picture or tweet amount to assisting people in the

physical world? Or does it merely signal to our Instagram and Twitter followers that we're truly concerned about the latest trending news?

### An Embodied Church Life

These different examples bring us full circle to the goodness of our embodied existence, which finds its zenith in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether it's finding one's community online, viewing the world through social media, or engaging in online activism, all drive a wedge between the user and the world. Online messaging doesn't happen in the real flesh-and-blood world. Social media doesn't give you a boots-on-the-ground view of the real and pressing needs of your physical church or community. Online activism may garner likes and retweets, but it doesn't put a cup of cold water in your hand to give to someone who is thirsty. The aforementioned examples keep us firmly planted behind our keyboards, cell phones, and tablets. But if we take seriously the goodness of our embodied existence and the amazing fact of the incarnation—God in the flesh—then we should take a very different approach to these scenarios.

While online communities can be at times beneficial, how much more valuable is the physical body of Christ, the church? If being online dominates our time, then we should break away from the digital world and engage the church, at least as much as is possible during this age of COVID-19. Call a group of friends together and create a real-world community. Pick a book of the Bible or a classic theological text, sit down with friends and a good cup of coffee or milkshake, and look people in the face to discuss things. More than eighty percent of communication is non-verbal, or bodily. How much do we lose when we simply exchange words online? Moreover, reach out of your own demographic and talk with people who are different from you. Talk with people who are younger, who are older; talk with people who are less experi-

enced and who are more experienced; talk with your elders and pastors. You might find that in-person conversation will keep you far from false teaching.

The author to the Hebrews reminded his readers to “stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” (Heb. 10:24–25). As a flesh-and-blood community, we can discuss the things that we encounter on the internet. Others can provide feedback regarding whether these beliefs are godly or wicked. Older members of the church can teach us wisdom. Our pastors and elders can help us discern when certain concepts might have false doctrine or ideologies buried deep within. In other words, God created us for community—we are part of the body of Christ—and thus we need to ensure we are connected to it.

Rather than looking at the world through the window of social media, get up from your computer, put your cell phone down, go outside, and interact with your neighbors. As the author of Hebrews writes: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2). Hospitality involves both your mind and body, as you share food, break bread, and consume physical things that God has given to you through the good but fallen creation. As we fellowship with our neighbors, we can minister to their needs, both body and soul.

Instead of tweeting the latest trending hashtag, walk outside and find out what the real-world needs of your church truly are. Before making a TikTok video, find out whether there are any widows or orphans in your church or community that you can help. According to James, tending to their needs is “religion that is pure and undefiled,” and, I might add, it's also embodied (James 1:27).

The church community is often a vital but missing component in our use of the internet. Internet addiction actually erodes our connections to the real world. When we find ourselves staring for hours into the bright light of our

computer screens and failing to connect to the flesh-and-blood people in our lives, we must realize the danger that we are in. God has created us as embodied creatures, which means that whenever we disengage from contact with others, we begin to erode our God-created, flesh-and-blood existence.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once made an astute observation regarding the necessity of the church:

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. . . . Let him who is not in community beware of being alone . . . . Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.<sup>4</sup>

In this case, Bonhoeffer's warnings about solitude without community bear significant relevance for our use of the internet and of technology. We must pursue holiness and piety in order to reform and change our desires, but we can never do so apart from the body of Christ and the physical world God has created. □

*The author is an OP minister, professor of systematic and historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, and author of [The Christian and Technology](#) (EP Books, 2020).*

#### Notes:

1. See Christopher Mims, “Why Social Media Is So Good at Polarizing Us,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-social-media-is-so-good-at-polarizing-us-11603105204>.
2. See Louis Matsakis, “The WIRED Guide to Your Personal Data (and Who Is Using It),” *WIRED*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/wired-guide-personal-data-collection/>.
3. See Geoffrey A. Fowler, “Alexa has been eavesdropping on you this whole time,” *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/05/06/alexa-has-been-eavesdropping-you-this-whole-time/>.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 77–78.

# THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF



AN INTERVIEW WITH CARL R. TRUEMAN // **On November 24, Crossway released [The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution](#) by Carl Trueman, OP minister and professor at Grove City College. *New Horizons* editor Danny E. Olinger interviews**

**NH: How did the book come about?** Rod Dreher of the *American Conservative* and Justin Taylor of Crossway asked me if I would write an introduction to the thought of Philip Rieff, the great analyst of modern therapeutic culture. At the same time, as a historian I was becoming interested in how the statement “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” had suddenly become so important and so plausible in our culture. And as I started to research the former, it became clear that I could actually expand the project into an application of Rieff’s thinking in a manner that would help me explain the latter.

**NH: Who was Rieff and why is his cultural analysis helpful?** He was a scholar at the University of Pennsylvania who applied Freudian thought to cultural analysis. Rieff saw Freud as locating human identity in psychological categories and happiness in sexual fulfillment, but he then proceeded to show how these ideas have come to grip the modern moral imagination where identity is closely connected to sexual desire and the purpose of society has become therapeutic: society exists to enable

individuals to be psychologically (i.e., sexually) fulfilled. This helps to explain why identity politics has placed sexuality at the center of political life. But Rieff goes further to argue that cultures depend upon setting boundaries to behavior. As society slowly but surely abandons all sexual taboos, it makes itself profoundly unstable. That is the situation we now find ourselves in. The people and institutions who are supposed to maintain society as a stable entity—political leaders, artists, writers, universities etc.—are all committed to precisely this overthrow of moral tradition and thus to further destabilizing culture.

**NH: What audience did you have in view in writing the book?** My target audience is that of the thoughtful, engaged person who wants, not simply to lament the changes we see in the culture around us nor to engage in standard polemics, but rather to understand why these changes are happening and how we are all in some sense implicated in them. The book is not a simple read because analysis of culture requires engagement with history, philosophy, politics, and psychology, among other things. So, the

reader looking for easy and straightforward answers will be disappointed. But I am particularly hoping that Christians will find the book helpful in understanding why our culture appears to be changing so rapidly and what we might expect in the future. To understand something is always the first step to overcome the temptation to panic or despair.

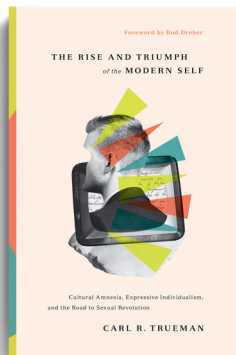
**NH: Modern society rejects the biblical understanding of humanity made in the image of God. Is this why the old arguments about culture no longer work?** To a large extent, yes. Of course, one of the reasons why Christian arguments worked to some extent in the public square long after Christian orthodoxy ceased to be the default position of culture was the fact that there was still an assumption that there was such a thing as human nature. Rousseau, for example, regarded ethics as grounded in sentiments, but he avoided subjectivism by assuming that human nature was something shared by all. Kant does a similar thing as a means of granting his categories universal, stable status. Then, in the nineteenth century, the very notion of human nature comes under

explicit scrutiny. We find Hegel and then Marx historicizing it and thus making it something dynamic and historically relative. Darwin reduces the difference between humans and animals to mere stages in a non-teleological evolutionary process. More significantly, Nietzsche calls the bluff on all metaphysical claims and thus tears away the ground for seeing knowledge as anything more than a contingent construct, a point which of course includes human nature and anything built thereon. What we are seeing today is arguably the cultural outworking of this collapse in human nature. There now seems little upon which to agree to build our ethics beyond respect for the individual. Hence, in sexual ethics, consent is virtually the only criterion left by which an act can be morally assessed.

**NH: You argue that behind the American society that now sees biblical beliefs about sexuality as hateful, even immoral, is a shift in identity. Can you explain?** The key figure here is Freud. His basic idea, that we are all at base defined by our sexual desires, has come to grip the moral imagination of modern society. In part this is because it contains a kernel of truth: sexual desires are among some of the most powerful impulses that humans experience. In part, it is because pop culture, from commercials to the mainstreaming of pornography, has served to press home the centrality of sexual desire to human existence.

What all this has done is change sex from something we do to something we are. And that has obvious implications for how the wider world perceives Christianity. I object to homosexuality because it involves acts of physical union that God has declared illegitimate. In doing so, I am objecting to forms of behavior. But society sees such objections not so much as a moral commentary on actions as a repudiation of a person's identity. This is why arguments that draw parallels with Christian objections to premarital heterosexual intercourse do not deflect accusations of homophobia. In the mindset of the current

culture, there is no parallel between the two things because one is a categorical repudiation of an identity, the other merely a repudiation of an inappropriate expression of an otherwise legitimate identity. It also makes the distinction between hating the sin and loving the sinner implausible to the secular mind: where sex is identity, the sin and the sinner are one and the same, and they cannot be separated even at the conceptual level. That is why terms such as homophobia and transphobia have emerged as culturally potent.



**NH: The *Bostock* ruling by the Supreme Court occurred after your book was at the publisher. How would you evaluate that ruling in light of what you argue in the book about identity?** It is entirely consistent with the trajectory that I outline in the book. It acknowledges in legal precedent that which is already part of the political and cultural imagination of contemporary America: that sex and gender are entirely separable and that individuals can choose their own identities and, where these conform to the spirit of the age, demand that the law compel others to recognize our choice as legitimate.

Justice Gorsuch's legitimation of transgenderism as law will have an impact on later judgments. It is inevitable that it will both encourage others to challenge established precedents with regard to the rights of religious organizations and strengthen the general case for an increasingly narrow reading of the protections provided by the First Amendment.

**NH: How should Christians navigate the current culture?** First, we need

humility. The culture of individual autonomy and expressive individualism that has allowed for things such as transgenderism to emerge is our culture, too. We need to examine ourselves to see how this has affected our attitude to authority, to others, and to the structures of accountability in which we are placed.

Second, on a pastoral level, we need to educate people to think ethically. My experience of teaching college students is that many young Christians believe the Bible; they are just not sure what it says about sexual and gender issues. That may seem odd to those of my generation, but the world is so powerful and relentless in the messages it sends that we need to think long and hard about how to communicate Christian ethics, and patterns of Christian ethical thinking, to people in the pews.

Third, we should expect to be put under pressure by the wider culture in ways that we have not experienced in the past. Social media has all but obliterated the private sphere. It will be increasingly hard to keep our religious and moral convictions as matters of personal, private choice. The days in which personal convictions on sexual morality were considered irrelevant to public, social existence seem to be coming to an end.

Fourth, we should keep our eyes on Christ and the promises made in him to the church. It is a hardy perennial of church history that every generation thinks that the world is going to the dogs and the church is in serious trouble. That fact alone should relativize the current situation. Then, when we recall that God will build his church, that the gates of hell shall not prevail, and that Christ has already broken the real power of the rulers of this world, we should be encouraged. This is not to say that we should not take the current situation very seriously—the human carnage of the sexual revolution is not something to be taken as a light or trivial thing. Real people made in God's image are suffering because of it. But we should still regard it as something over which God is sovereign. It will not ultimately prevail. □

# REVIEW: TARA BURTON'S *STRANGE RITES*



DANNY E. OLINGER // Tara Burton's *Strange Rites* (PublicAffairs, 2020) is not an easy book for a confessional Reformed Christian to read. The language is vulgar and graphic at points. She seems to have little interest in an orthodox view of special revelation or why a defense of "the" faith might be important when compared to a

defense of Christian theism. Her one mention of John Calvin is to make a joke about the mantra of wellness culture being equal parts Ayn Rand and Calvin: "you're not just allowed but in fact obligated to focus on yourself—but, no matter how much you do, it will never be good enough" (98). And each chapter describing the religious landscape of America, including the growth of institutional paganism, seems more discouraging than the previous chapter.

It is not an easy book for a confessional Reformed Christian to read, but it is an important one. Particularly illuminating are Burton's insights on why so many millennials have abandoned institutional Christianity. Her thesis is that increasingly Americans, especially younger Americans, are not rejecting religion, but remixing it. They long for a sense of meaning in this world, but reject any authority, institution, or creed that conflicts with their own personal feelings and experiences. The result is a "Remixed" religion of their own making that often stands at odds with historic Christianity and its authoritative claims from the Bible.

## The Religious "Nones"

Burton points out that almost 40 percent of Americans born after 1990, the so-called young millennials, say that they have no religion. These religious "Nones," an estimated 81 million people, are both the fastest growing religious demographic group in America and the largest.

What Burton attempts to prove in the book is that the Nones have a religious interest, but that their religious interest is self-oriented. In her judgment, this is the result of an internet-defined generation and the self-creating power of social media where people are accustomed to finding their own sources of information and mixing it with different perspectives. This belief, that one's religious life can and should be customized to one's personal interests, has become an embedded part of the culture.

Burton explains what this means in practice. The Nones can get their sense of community from one place (like fandom) and their sense of meaning from another (like social justice activism). They can employ rituals associated with

wellness culture while seeing their calling in life as primarily political. But what ties everything together is a rejection of institutions and authority and the embracing of gut instinct. With the rejection of authority, truth itself is redefined. One's lived experience is what functions as an authoritative account of the world. Seventy-five percent of millennials agree with the statement, "Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know" (33).

Still, Burton pushes back against the media stereotype that the Nones are rebelling against an upbringing in churches that emphasized doctrine. Rather, she argues, they saw their parents attending church, but they were acutely aware that their parents did not view religion as a core part of their lives.

This is in contrast to the youth who were raised in a Christian home where the faith mattered. Burton notes that in Protestant households where parents talked about religion a lot, 89 percent of the grown children continue to identify as Protestant. Burton concludes that the "raised religious" who are leaving the church are not for the most part



those whose parents found purpose and meaning in the faith. Rather, those leaving are those raised with the sense that religion is just what one does.

### Today's Great Awakening and the Birth of Remix Culture

Corporations have seized upon this spirituality bubble and sought to fill the gap. Nike celebrates Colin Kaepernick's decision to take a knee, enabling it at the same time to promote its moral righteousness in a political manner and enhance its financial bottom line. Burton observes, "In so doing, they are creating moral universes, selling meaning as an implicit product and reframing capitalist consumption as a religious ritual—a repeated and intentional activity that connects the individual to divine purpose in a value-driven framework" (59).

Another cultural phenomenon that has filled the spiritual gap is J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. *Harry Potter*, like the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* series before it, has displaced the Bible as a sacred text for many with its creation of a spiritual universe. The Remixed question why they must fit into the narrow category of organized religion with its doctrines that do not adhere to progressive values reflected in these beloved entertainments. "Why not use the language of Hogwarts houses to talk about good and evil, alongside the rhetoric of social justice and metaphors garnered from *Star Wars*?" (88).

Burton contends that if fandom provides the structure of Remixed religious culture, then wellness provides its implicit theology. The anthropology of wellness is that we are born good but are tricked through Big Pharma, processed foods, and civilization (the toxic energy of others) into a life that is short of our best. Sin is insufficient self-care. Prior to the emergence of SoulCycle, Goop, Thrive, and WW, Oprah Winfrey articulated the "oxygen mask theory" that they all employ: life is like being on an

airplane where you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before helping the people around you.

### Doctrines for a Godless World

According to Burton, there are two *de facto* civil religions. The first is social justice culture that sees America as a repressive society where progressive politics are the means to slay the Goliaths of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice. It has fueled such movements as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. The second is the techno-utopian culture of Silicon Valley, which puts forth a liber-

tarianism that looks to technology as that which can unleash human potential. The two civic religions share a disdain for the rules, maxims, and mores of society. But, in Burton's view, most importantly both groups treat earthly self-actualization as the ultimate goal. Consequently, "both groups are fundamentally eschatological

yet thoroughly materialistic" (168). They seek a kingdom of heaven on earth rather than a world to come. The technoutopians seek it through robot-fueled singularity. The social justice culture, particularly BLM, seeks this kingdom on earth through Marxist-style cultural revolution.

Her commentary on the social justice movement is especially helpful. Social justice activists see society as having been shaped by white and male privilege. Government institutions like the police and border patrols are viewed "not merely as ineffectual, but as actively malevolent agents of structural inequality and the cruelty and brutality such inequality manifests" (169–70). For this group, the election of Donald Trump as president was a tragic reminder that America, despite its lofty ideals at its founding, is a country built on white supremacy, patriarchy, repression, and hatred.

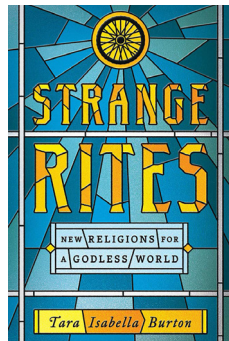
Social justice has provided meaning and purpose for the secular and has reenchanted a godless world. God is not needed to create an eschatologically

focused account of a meaningful existence. Still, the movement's success is in replicating the cornerstones (meaning, ritual, community) of traditional religion in an internally cohesive way. It takes the varied tenets of intuitionism—the self, emotions, and identity—and threads them together into a visionary narrative of political resistance and moral renewal. It provides for a sense of community with its collective ritual catharsis of calling out problematic enemies or insufficient allies who deserve to be canceled. It provides an explanation of evil, "an unjust society that transcends any one agentic individual and, more specifically, straight white men" (178). By equating the problems of a repressive society with the egos of straight white men, social justice is able to balance its fatalistic conception of society now with a more optimistic future. The goal is a new creation, that is, a new world full of love and compassion that will arise "from the ashes of a patriarchal, racist, homophobic, repressive, Christian society" (178).

### Religion and the Modern World

Burton maintains that affluence and the proliferation of the internet has rendered us all parishioners, high priests, and deities simultaneously. This has led the church into a catch-22: Those Christian communions which are stringent and theologically demanding retain a greater percentage of their members, but they are also more likely to alienate those who are unable to conform to their values. Conversely, mainline Protestantism is more capable of welcoming those on the theological margins but more often than not fails to retain members or fill spiritual needs. But Burton does not stop with the comparison. She goes on to suggest that once you begin to relax elements of the faith, as mainline Protestantism has, you have already adopted the philosophy of Remixed nation, a place where God and his church are not needed for spiritual purpose and fulfillment. □

*The author is editor of New Horizons.*



# THE SAINT'S GREAT DESIRE IN THE SONG OF SIMEON



**JAMES T. LIM // In the beginning of my current pastorate, I would regularly visit the eldest member of my church, Helen. She was the last of our founding members, who, in 1941, petitioned the OPC to start our church, Faith OPC in Long Beach, California. When she became housebound, I would sit with her for hours**

listening to her stories of the church. As her health deteriorated, she would continually tell me how much she wanted to depart and go home to be with the Lord. She echoed the apostle Paul's words when he said, "my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

This is the great desire of every true believer in Christ, and it is the same desire we see in Luke's account of Simeon in Luke 2:25–32. As Simeon holds the baby Jesus in his arms, he sings that he can depart in peace, celebrating the coming of Christ.

## **A Song of Faith**

Simeon's song is first a song of faith celebrating the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ. On the eighth day after Jesus's birth, Mary and Joseph take him to the temple "to present him to the Lord" (Luke 2:22). As they do, they come across Simeon, a "righteous and devout" Jew who has been waiting for "the consolation of Israel" (v. 25).

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he "would not see death

before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (v. 26). Since then, he's been watching and waiting, trusting in God's Word. He has been trusting in the promises, not only made to himself directly, but made to all God's people, beginning with the very first promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Simeon has been trusting in God's promise of a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who would bless all the nations: "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 26:4; see also Gen. 17:7 and Ps. 105:8). And, finally, he has been trusting in that great promise of David's greater son who would sit on his throne forever:

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his

kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. (2 Sam. 7:12–14)

There in the temple, Simeon is holding in his arms the great fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises of God, which were promised in every law, every type and shadow, every redemptive event, every miracle, and every office of prophet, priest, and king. "For all the promises of God find their Yes" and "Amen" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Christ has finally arrived!

And so, Simeon sings a song celebrating the fulfillment of this promise as the climax, not only of the whole of the Old Testament and of redemptive history, but of his whole life. This is the great reason for which God saved him and sustained him until now. He can die having held the Messiah in his own arms, beholding him with his own eyes: the seed of woman; the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; David's greater son; the Son of God; the Son of man; the King of Israel; and the Savior of the world. All of God's promises to Simeon have found their "yes" and "amen" in

this little baby boy that he is holding. So he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.” (Luke 2:28–29)

What a beautiful illustration of how faith takes hold of Jesus alone for salvation! Simeon took Jesus up in his arms. If you’ve ever held a floppy, newborn baby, you know that you can’t just hold them like you would a book or a basketball. You have to drop whatever is in your hands and very carefully, gently, yet firmly hold that child with both hands and arms. That is what Simeon must have done, letting go of whatever he had in order to take hold of Jesus. This is what faith does as we let go of our sins, self-righteousness, and idols, in order to take hold of Jesus for salvation.

### A Song of Salvation

Simeon’s hymn is also a song of salvation celebrating the person and work of Christ.

He sings of the very person of salvation. Simeon says he can now “depart in peace,” and tells us why: “for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:30). In holding and beholding the baby Jesus, he has seen the salvation of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ. Now, Jesus doesn’t save Simeon or anyone else merely by his incarnation and birth. Rather, it is what he was incarnate and born to do that brings salvation: living the perfect and holy life we were supposed to; dying the death that we deserved to die, taking our sin and punishment on the cross; and rising from the dead to give us new life. The child Simeon is holding in his arms is not simply a part of his salvation. The child *is* salvation. If you have him, you have salvation. (See *The Incarnation in the Gospels* [P&R, 2008], by Daniel M.

Doriani, Phillip Graham Ryken, and Richard D. Phillips, 126.)

Simeon also sings of the peace of salvation. He can depart in peace because Christ has come. It’s Simeon’s way of saying he’s prepared to die and be with the Lord. Most interpreters assume that Simeon is an old man and, now, toward the end of his life, after seeing Jesus, he can die happy. But the passage doesn’t really tell us his age. He might be old, but he might also be young. The point is: Simeon isn’t saying that he’s going to die, but that he is ready to die. This is the deeper truth of Simeon’s song. If you behold Jesus by faith, then, like Simon, you can depart and die in peace. But if you haven’t, then you have no peace in life nor in death, whatever your age, for you have no peace with God.

Simeon exemplifies the peace that comes in the gospel, the peace *of* God that comes through peace *with* God through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7; Rom. 5:1). When we see Jesus and his salvation, we are ready to depart from this life in peace and enter into eternal life in heaven.

This is why Stephen, in the book of Acts, didn’t cry out in fear as he was being stoned, wondering if there is a God or if heaven is real. No, he died with peace. Luke says he had such peace “that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). Stephen beheld the person of Jesus and was ready to depart and be with the Lord. As he was dying, he saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand. Phillip Ryken says:

*Anyone* who has seen Jesus with eyes of faith is prepared to die. And anyone who has not seen him—whether young or old—is not ready to die at all. When we see Jesus and his salvation we are ready to be dismissed from this life in peace and enter the life to come. . . . It is then and only

then that anyone is prepared to die. (*The Incarnation in the Gospels*, 126–127)

Lastly, Simeon sings of the scope of salvation. He not only sees salvation in Jesus, he also sees the extent of salvation through Jesus—“that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:31–32). Jesus comes to bring salvation to “all peoples.” This doesn’t mean every single person in the world, but rather people from every tribe, language, tongue, and nation—Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, rich or poor (Gal. 3:28; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Jesus comes to bring the light of eternal life and salvation to all the “peoples” of the world.

### Singing Together of Faith and Salvation

This Christmas season, we all sing the song of Simeon. We sing songs of fulfillment and of salvation; of incarnation and of advent. Like Simeon, we celebrate the promises of God fulfilled in Christ, beholding his person and work of salvation. Like Simeon, we take hold of Jesus by faith and sing of his salvation because he *is* our salvation. Whatever our circumstances may be, like Simeon we are ready to depart in peace to be with the Lord, which is far better.

During my last visit with Helen, I read her some of her favorite passages including the one about Paul’s desire in Philippians 1:21–23. Soon after, the Lord granted her the desire of her heart. At the ripe age of ninety-seven, singing her favorite hymns, surrounded by family, she departed in peace to be with the Lord. May the Lord do the same for us. □

*The author is pastor of Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Long Beach, California.*



# BEING STILL AND KNOWING GOD DURING COVID-19

// CHRISTOPHER J. VERDICK



*A staff worker at the Akisyon a Yesu Presbyterian Clinic, where Christopher Verdick serves as administrator*

With COVID-19, fires in Australia and the western United States, locusts in East Africa, and the decampment to North America of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, 2020 has become a bitter byword for many. In Uganda, with schools closed, “dead year” is the epithet on everyone’s lips. But dead or no, the kingdom of God is never dormant, even in the dark and stillness of the grave.

## A Flurry of Activity

As the coronavirus made landfall in Uganda in late March, supply chain interruptions in China and India caused the price of drugs and medical supplies to skyrocket. The demand for hand sanitizer went vertical overnight, and, in my role as the administrator for Akisyon a Yesu Presbyterian Clinic (AYPC), I spent weeks in frantic phone calls trying to procure enough hand sanitizer for the clinic and have it delivered despite severe restrictions on transport.

Then came the masks. We attended multiple trainings where we were taught in pantomime how to don personal protective equipment because the real deal had not yet materialized. At every training, it was “arriving any day.” I tried daily to balance optimism and apocalyptic fire—to keep the clinic staff vigilant, but not so frightened that they deserted their posts (as had the staff at the hospital up the road). Every day brought new presidential directives, new scientific data about COVID, new questions about what was expected of our clinic during the

pandemic. I spent my time combing newspapers, downloading World Health Organization guidelines, and communicating to the district health office, all in an effort to make sure that we were as prepared as possible for the coming storm.

This all looks like a flurry of activity, but it was merely flailing to keep above water. It did not serve any larger, forward-thinking purpose that missionaries are supposed to be taken up with. We relish words like “progress” and “growth,” and supporting churches are generally much happier to hear about a project completed or convert won than about how we decided to sit on our hands and do nothing.

## Hunkering Down in Holy Confidence

One of the great ironies of this pandemic is the stumbling way that advertisers have sought to inspire concern for public health. The biggest telecommunications company in Uganda put up ads with the slogan “Fight Corona Together”

at a time when public gatherings of more than five people had been proscribed. Another poster from one of the health agencies showed two hands grasping each other, proclaiming “United We Will Defeat Corona.” What to make of these messages? And how do we show love and care for our neighbor when the disease we are battling is best fought by keeping our distance—when the rhetoric of a military campaign translates, practically, into an all-out retreat?

Early on, our family decided that we needed to take isolation seriously due to my work at the clinic. If COVID came to AYPC, we did not want to pass it on to our friends. Likewise, if mission members, far more mobile than most of our neighbors, were to become infected, we did not want COVID to pass into the community through us via



*A mobile hand-washing station*

the clinic. Thus, we stopped having guests in our home and furloughed our house help. We started emphasizing to our children the need to keep hands to themselves, as if every day were a church service or a cross-country car ride.

We have tried to be clear in our intentions to our friends in the community, and thankfully many (though perhaps not all) have sympathized with our need to adapt to an extraordinary situation. Nevertheless, there remains a nagging sense that to retreat, or to sit still, cannot possibly be the right course of action for a missionary.

In the midst of these doubts, I am reminded of what the psalmist says in Psalm 46: “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (v. 11). The extended image of the psalm is one of hunkering down, not out of fear, but out of a holy confidence in the God who surrounds us like a strong wall. Outside is tumult, chaos, and activity; inside, we are invited to “be still and know that [he is] God” (v. 10).

In fact, the psalmist goes a step further. It is not merely God taking the buffeting on our behalf; rather, God is in control of the raging uncertainties of the world. He is carrying his people safely through.

### A Reminder to Restless Hearts

And so, we are brought to a choice—to fight the tumult and chaos in our own strength, or to surrender ourselves to God to be carried through. To dash around madly to accomplish something in a dead year, or to rest in the peaceful inactivity of faith.

Without a doubt, I had plans for this year, both personally and professionally. I had hoped to make much of our clinic’s recordkeeping electronic. I had hoped to send several employees for school or technical training. I had hoped to make more progress on new housing for the clinic staff. I am more than capable of railing against the inconveniences brought on by our nation’s lockdown. I have the choice to try and force my own vision for 2020 on reality—a choice that, in a more mundane year, I would be sorely tempted to exercise. Instead, the psalmist encourages me to “come, behold the works of the

LORD.” Unexpectedly, the best work I can do in this or any year is to maintain a faithful presence—to be a witness passing on what I have seen of God’s ongoing faithfulness.

In 2020, the recorded sermons sent out to our church members because of restrictions placed on organized worship have yielded interest from surprising quarters. My wife, Chloe, and I have also been blessed by the fledgling faith expressed in our children’s prayers. The clinic staff has risen to the challenge of this season and has demonstrated to the community our concern for their welfare by so simple an act as coming to work every day. And Chloe and I have had



*The Verdicks show hospitality by inviting friends to chat under their lemon tree—yes, the fruit in the photo is a variety of lemon*

ample, if unusual, opportunities to minister to our workers and friends as well—by getting their groceries while public transport was shut down, by downloading and sharing sermons, by making the effort to telephone friends, by inviting one or two over to share a concern or a soda (or both) under our lemon tree.

Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, but in our current context, even remembering to wash our own hands can be a small demonstration of loving service and a reminder to our restless hearts that God will be exalted in the earth. It is often in our stillness that his glory is most strongly shown.

*The author is an associate tentmaking missionary from New Life Presbyterian Church of La Mesa (PCA) in La Mesa, California, laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.*



*Christopher and Chloe Verdick with their daughters*

## What’s New

### // Comings/Goings

Tentmaking missionary **Miss Tina M. DeJong** (Westminster OPC, Hamill, South Dakota) arrived in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, in October 2020 to begin her labors with the Uganda Mission.

# AN INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY WORSHIP

// LOWELL IVEY



"Family Worship" by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, c. 1790  
(public domain)

In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, when parents bring their children before the Lord for baptism, they promise to teach them the Scriptures, pray regularly for and with them, and bring them up in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” I can think of no better means of fulfilling those vows than through the regular practice of family worship. It was this concern for helping families impart the faith to the next generation that led the 1647 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to approve, in addition to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Shorter and Larger Catechisms, a Directory for Family Worship. (A version of the Directory may be accessed at [thewestminsterstandard.org/directory-for-family-worship](http://thewestminsterstandard.org/directory-for-family-worship).)

### Directory for Family Worship

It was of great concern to the ministers and elders of that general assembly who drafted the Directory that family worship not be neglected. In fact, it was of such great importance that, in their preface, they wrote that if any family did not practice regular family worship, the head of that family was to be “gravely and sadly reprov’d by the session” if he willfully neglected his duty to provide spiritual leadership to his family, and if he did not repent, he was “for his obstinacy in such an offense [to be] suspended and debarred from the Lord’s Supper, as being justly esteemed unworthy to communicate therein, till he amend.”

The Directory for Family Worship was written for the purpose of “mutual edification, for cherishing piety, for maintaining unity, and avoiding schism and division.” In other words, the goal was much broader than encouraging spiritual growth in individual families. The goal was the unity and maturity of the whole body of Christ (see Eph. 4:11–16). The ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland wisely recognized that the ministry of the Word must begin in the church,

flow out of the church into the home, and flow out of the home back into the church. The home, as the Puritans liked to say, was to be “a little church.”

### Practical Principles

So, what can we learn from the Directory for Family Worship? The Directory gives several very practical principles that can help us think about what family worship should look like today, nearly four hundred years after it was written. Here are just a few:

**1. The foundation of family worship is private, or “secret,” worship.** The Directory begins with private worship, noting that private communion with God is the wellspring of all other duties in the Christian life. It encourages the regular practice of private worship every morning and evening by every member of the household, and emphasizes that heads of households have a particular responsibility to set an example of daily private worship, and to instruct, encourage, and admonish all within their care to be diligent, and grow in, regular private communion with God.

**2. Family worship ordinarily consists of three main parts: prayer and praise, reading the Scriptures, and edifying conversation.** First, families should pray and sing praises to God together. In particular, families should pray for the church, for the nation in which they live, and for the needs of their particular household. Second, families should read the Scriptures together, using the catechism as a help, with the goal that each member of the family should be better prepared to profit from public worship on the Lord’s Day. Third, together with prayer, praises, and Scripture-reading, families should engage in “godly conferences.” In other words, they should talk openly and earnestly together about the things of God.

**3. Heads of households should lead their families in understanding the Scriptures.** While only ministers have the calling to preach and teach God’s Word officially in the

church, heads of households have a particular calling to read the Word to their families, explain its meaning, and apply it to the particular needs and circumstances of each individual member of the home. This requires constant, diligent, prayerful study of the Scriptures on the part of those entrusted with such great responsibility over the souls of others.

**4. Heads of households have a special duty to direct their families in public and private worship on the Lord's Day.** Not only should heads of households ensure that every member of their household attends public worship on the Lord's Day, but also that the whole day is used rightly as a day of holy rest and worship, and that only the works of necessity and mercy be performed by any member of the family on that day. Fathers (or heads of households) should follow up on the preaching of the Word by reviewing the sermon with the family. The day is also best used in catechizing the family, taking time to talk about spiritual things, and "reading, meditation, and secret prayer, that they may confirm and increase their communion with God: that so the profit which they found in the public ordinances may be cherished and [promoted], and they more edified unto eternal life."

**5. Family worship ought to take precedence over all worldly business and activities.** How often we give ourselves the excuse that we are "too busy" for family worship! But why are we so busy? Because we have other plans and priorities. The Directory helps us to see that God has better priorities for us and our families than we do. On this point, the Directory is very emphatic. It argues that family worship "ought to be performed in great sincerity, without delay, laying aside all exercises of worldly business or hindrances, notwithstanding the mocking of atheists and profane men." We are to remember how merciful God has been to us, to our families, and to our nation, in making such a thing as family worship possible, and in giving us a desire for it. Furthermore, anyone with any influence at all has a responsibility by word and example to encourage and admonish others to this basic Christian duty of family worship. (An excellent resource for further study on family worship is J. W. Alexander's *Thoughts on Family Worship*, available from Reformation Heritage Books.)

*The author is pastor of Reformation Presbyterian in Virginia Beach, Virginia.*

## ☆ Congratulations

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

- **Phoebe Yarashus**, *Grace Presbyterian, Vienna, VA*

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

- **Evalena Pinegar**, *Bethel Presbyterian, Wheaton, IL*

## Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 23A* "The Lord's My Shepherd"

*Judith M. Dinsmore*

23A in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is one you almost certainly know: the metrical arrangement of "The Lord's My Shepherd," set to the tune of "Crimond." ("Metrical arrangement" simply means that the words of the psalm were fit into a meter—this one in common meter, which alternates between eight-syllable and six-syllable lines.)

First drawn up by the Westminster Assembly for the 1650 Scottish Psalter, this particular metrical arrangement has been long loved in Scotland. The tune, however, is new—or, at least, newer than 1650. It first appeared in print in 1872, its composer listed as David Grant, a tobacco merchant from Aberdeen who liked to scribble tunes in his spare time. Some believe the composer to actually be Jessie Seymour Irving, talented daughter of a parish minister who served in Crimond, the village in Aberdeenshire after which the tune is named.

"Crimond" didn't become really popular as a fit for the twenty-third psalm until 1936 onward, when the Glasgow Choir began to perform it regularly on live radio broadcast. Then, with its stunning descant, Psalm 23 set to "Crimond" was even sung at the royal wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip in 1947 at Westminster Abbey.

"Crimond" reminds me, however, not of soaring church spires but of assisted-living apartments and hospital rooms. As kids, my siblings and I frequently sang it for elderly friends from church, to the backdrop of lace doilies and thermostats set to eighty degrees. The whole room would join in singing the comforting words, and nurses would sometimes stand by the door for a listen. However quavery at the start, we finished loud:

Goodness and mercy all my life  
Shall surely follow me;  
And in God's house forevermore  
Our dwelling place shall be.

## ● Out of the Mouth . . .

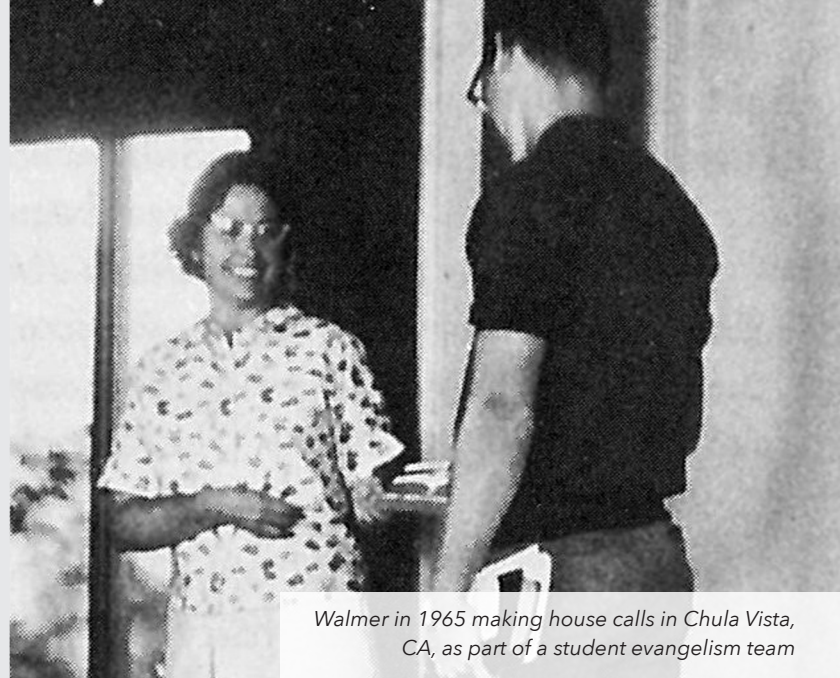
My four-year-old son, like many boys his age, often proclaims, "I'm a big boy." But my son ends the sentence a little differently than most: ". . . and does not have a body like men."

—Hyojung Walker  
Glenside, PA

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

# CHRIS WALMER RETIRES AS REGIONAL COORDINATOR

// KATHARINE OLINGER



Walmer in 1965 making house calls in Chula Vista, CA, as part of a student evangelism team

Philadelphia and Pittsburgh account for over half of Pennsylvania’s thirteen million residents. And yet it’s central Pennsylvania that may be the player to watch. “In fifty to a hundred years, central Pennsylvania is going to be a booming area,” Chris Walmer speculates. He serves as the regional home missions coordinator for the OPC’s Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. “It’s in between three or four major cities. And if people are working from home, they’re going to be looking for a less expensive place to live. That’s part of what’s encouraging for central Pennsylvania: for the most part, it’s a growing area.”

## The Growth of Reformed Churches in Central PA

Central Pennsylvania has potential, but this hasn’t always been obvious, even to the church. Walmer remembers when Calvary in Middletown, Pennsylvania, wasn’t just the only Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the Susquehanna Valley—it was the only NAPARC church. “I’ve been a member of Calvary in Middletown my whole life. I was baptized into it. . . . Now there are thirty to forty Reformed churches [in the area]. What’s going to happen in the next seventy years? It’s going to look a whole lot different, I think.”

The Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania, formed in 2010, has never known a year without Chris Walmer as its regional home missions coordinator. Now, as Walmer approaches his retirement from this position, he finds

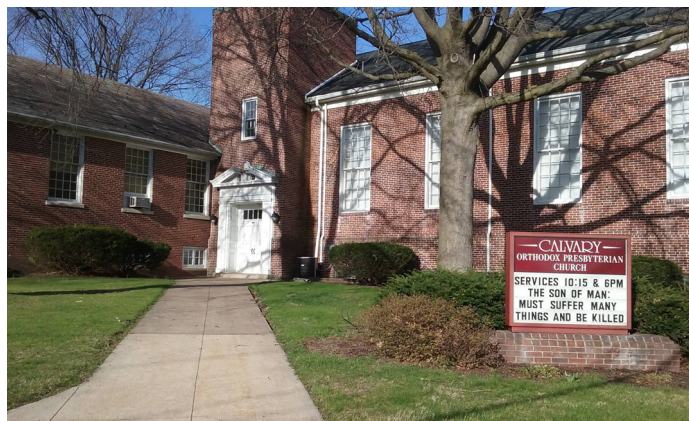
himself in a unique position to reflect on the presbytery’s growth.

“There were churches—particularly New Life in Williamsport—that were active in church planting at the time of the presbytery’s formation, which was quite helpful to me,” Walmer begins. “[But] a lot of the churches—away from Philadelphia, the big city—weren’t large congregations. To do church planting we felt that we needed to have several of us working together.”

## An Itinerant Elder

In God’s providence, this approach suited Walmer. Because Walmer is ordained as a ruling elder, and not a minister of the Word, his work is different than that of a typical regional home missionary. You can think of him as an itinerant elder. “I do a lot of the work an elder might normally do to help support a minister. Part of that is developing a stewardship plan, working that plan out, and encouraging and supporting outreach endeavors.”

“Mr. Walmer and his wife, Nancy, have been a great blessing to my family in their kindness and encouragement,” wrote Adam Wells, pastor of Calvary in Middletown. “Both seem to truly have servant hearts.” As someone new to the presbytery, Wells appreciates Walmer’s thoughtfulness and experience regarding area missions. “Written information is always useful, but there’s something really encouraging about hearing someone give a report: What they’ve been seeing, people



At one time, Calvary in Middletown, PA, where Walmer has been a member his whole life, was the only NAPARC congregation for miles.



they have come to know, and how God is working. Chris does this for me (and I'm sure for many other pastors), and it is a great benefit."

Lately, Walmer's ministry has centered around Grace and Truth OPC in Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, where Ron Beabout is the organizing pastor. At Mifflintown, Walmer serves as the financial secretary, he attends provisional session meetings, and he also participates in the life of the church. Sometimes this means meeting with the congregation's weekly Bible study group, other times, attending a student's graduation party. Last year, Walmer helped Grace and Truth conduct outreach at Mifflintown's Spring Festival and National Nite-Out celebrations, held at the park adjacent to the Juniata Library (the church's regular meeting place). He, Ron Beabout, and a number of congregants handed out tracts, made popcorn for people, and set up an outdoor movie viewing experience. "These are the types of things I tend to do. Just being helpful."



*Grace and Truth in Mifflintown worshipping outdoors this summer*

And Mifflintown has needed help. Because of the pandemic, Grace and Truth spent the summer worshipping in a member's farmhouse. While they were grateful for use of the farmhouse, it would have been difficult to grow the church plant there. Thankfully, Grace and Truth has been able to return this fall to the county library. "The Lord's blessed that effort," Walmer reflects. "We've made some new contacts. . . . People

are coming. We're hoping that we may see some fruit there, at the appropriate time."

### **The Future of the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania**

During Walmer's tenure, the presbytery has pursued five church-planting efforts: Redeemer in Danville, Omega in West Williamsport, Resurrection

in State College, Covenant in Chambersburg, and, most recently, Grace and Truth in Mifflintown. This is a good indication of the presbytery's growth. However, Walmer is even more thankful for the way that God is growing the presbytery spiritually. What's the evidence? Just this: Almost every church in the presbytery participates in the work of home missions—through prayer, financial assistance, and through lending deacons and elders. "I think we've grown in our unity," Walmer explains. "In a way, that's [just] as significant as having four more new churches—or, potential churches. We've grown into a more cohesive group around church planting."

Central Pennsylvania is the OPC's youngest presbytery in more ways than one. With ministers like Zach Siggins, Zach Simmons, Bulut Yasar, and Adam Wells in their first post-seminary pastorates, God has provided the regional church means for its continued and future growth—perhaps to match the economic and urban growth of central Pennsylvania itself. Walmer attributes the retention of these young ministers to the OPC's internship program: "It sort of stemmed from New Life. They brought in Drew Adcock—he was an intern there. And Bulut was also an intern. He's now the associate pastor at New Life with Paul Browne. And when Josh McKamy first went down to Covenant in Chambersburg, he was still an intern. These young men are beginning to mature and be significant participants in the presbytery. That's wonderful, too. A real blessing."

### **Prayer Requests**

As Walmer looks forward, he identifies several prayer requests for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. First, pray for the calling of a new regional home missionary or coordinator. Pray for wisdom for the presbyters as they identify that individual, and pray that the presbytery would be able to pursue this ministry from a financial perspective. Walmer also prays that the recent closing of Covenant OPC in Chambersburg would not be a discouragement. "There are going to be church plants that don't make it," he says. "We go in faith. . . . There's potential to begin churches in the area. I try to convey that to people: 'This is happening! Maybe you don't see it now, but central Pennsylvania is going to be changing.' So we need prayer for that church-planting spirit to continue in our area. And, that our presbytery would continue to function in unity, and peace, and love."

*The author is administrative assistant for the Committee on Home Missions.*



*Chris and Nancy Walmer live in Hummelstown, PA*

### **Home Missions Today**

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by e-mailing [HomeMissionsToday@opc.org](mailto:HomeMissionsToday@opc.org). New editions: December 9 & 23.

# FAITH AND FINANCES

// DALE A. VAN DYKE

One of the wonderful things about the way the Bible talks about money is that it never treats it as a budget issue; it's always a heart and faith issue. Whenever the authors of Scripture address the topic, it is clear that they are not seeking resources but righteousness. In the same vein, as we wind down this very eventful year of our Lord, we have a wonderful opportunity to live and give by faith.

Hebrews 13:5 is a fascinating verse in light of the fact that it is written to saints who suffered severe financial hardship for the cause of Christ: "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" It wasn't that long ago that they "joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property" (10:34). And yet the Spirit thought it necessary to warn these Christian pilgrims of the dangers of "money-love." How much more necessary is it for us today as American believers swimming in the spiritually toxic waters of materialism and consumerism? Ask yourself this: Why is it so hard to part with our money when we are giving it away and so easy to part with our money when we are spending it away? Because spending money for our comfort and convenience feels like what money is for. Consumerism feels right. We need to realize that we are in the midst of a spiritual pandemic!

## Keep Your Lives Free from Love of Money

The words "keep your life free from" suggest that money-love is infectious and contagious—like a virus. It is something to be avoided, something from which we are to protect ourselves with all possible precautions. It is a spiritually deadly disease.

Money-love is one of the great evils warned about in Scripture. Jesus assures us that love of money and love for God are mutually exclusive (Matt. 6:24). One of the requirements for an elder

or deacon is that he not be "a lover of money" (1 Tim. 3:3). Paul says that in the last days, one of the evidences of evil will be that people are "lovers of money" (2 Tim. 3:2). Money-love is dangerous and deadly. How can we protect ourselves?

## Be Content with What You Have

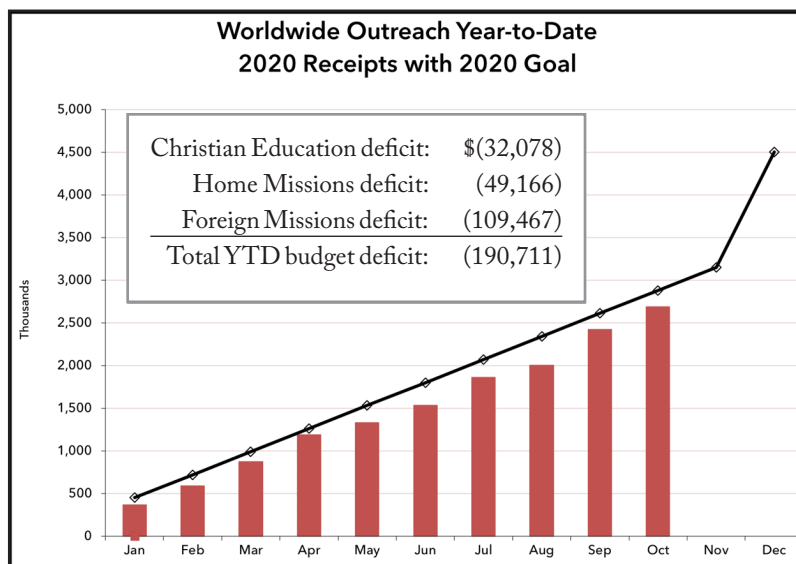
There is a wonderful spiritual prophylactic available that is completely free and 100 percent effective in guarding against this deadly virus: contentment. People love money because it provides access to things we currently don't have—things we are convinced will bring us happiness, comfort, and security. This is why money-love is so contagious. But contentment with what you already have thoroughly blocks the disease.

But how do we gain contentment when all the desires that drive people to money-love reside in our own hearts? The question is anticipated, and the answer immediately given in Hebrews 13:5: "... for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

The fact that the Lord will never leave us means that we already have infinite reasons for happiness, comfort, and security in our Lord Jesus! He is always actively engaged for us. Jesus isn't near to simply hold our hand—he's there to exercise all his sovereign might on our behalf and accomplish all his saving purposes for our good. That's his promise.

Believing this promise frees us to use our money as God intended: for our needs, for others' welfare, and for the furthering of his gospel cause—the ministry of his church. So, let's live virus-free. Let your finances express your faith. Bring your gifts this December with deeply contented hearts, rejoicing in all that God has freely given you in Jesus.

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



# DECEMBER



Tina DeJong

**1** Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda, gives thanks for a safe arrival. / **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for Heritage OPC as it takes steps toward particularization.

**2** Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**. / Pray for yearlong interns **BEN PETERSEN** at Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, TX, and **JOSHUA VALDIX** at Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, PA.

**3** Associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the Ugandan children and teachers as schools reopen. / Praise the Lord as the generosity of the OPC is expressed in this year's **THANK OFFERING!**

**4** **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Pray for the small group ministry at Grace Fellowship OPC. / **MARK LOWREY**, interim executive director of Great Commission Publications.

**5** **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY. Pray that the Lord would use Evangelism 101 meetings to help congregants reach unbelievers. / Yearlong intern **DAVID (LEBO) BONNER** at Tyler Presbyterian in Tyler, TX.

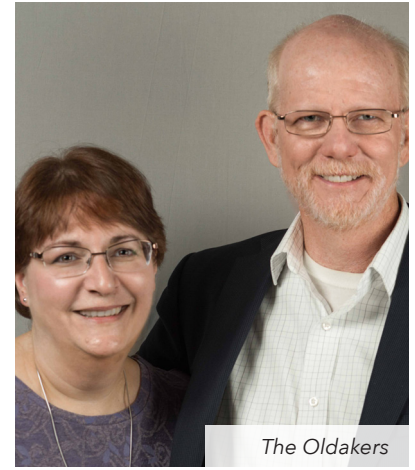
**6** Assoc. missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the team as they serve under COVID-19 conditions. / **OPC DISASTER RESPONSE** gives thanks to the Lord for sustaining churches through many disasters in 2020.

**7** Associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the clinic staff to be encouraged in their work and witness. / Pray for **LACY (DEBBIE) ANDREWS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

**8** **RYAN & ROCHELLE CAVANAUGH**, Merrillville, IN. Pray that God would make Mission Church effective in outreach and bold in love. / Yearlong intern **SETH (EVA) DORMAN** at Limington OPC in Limington, ME.

**9** Assoc. missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for faithful witness to her community health team. / Pray for **LOCAL DIACONATES** as the holiday season provides opportunities to give and share the gospel at an economically challenging time.

**10** Yearlong interns **JOSEPH (ANNIE) POLLARD** at Calvin Presbyterian in Phoenix, AZ, and **ISAAC (MASHA) BAUGH** at Covenant OPC in Kennewick, WA. / **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSENDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the mission's diaconal work may assist the local church in becoming more self-sufficient.



The Oldakers

**11** **LARRY & KALYNN OLDAKER**, Sandusky, OH. Pray for growth in grace, Christian living, and evangelistic opportunities at Firelands Grace OPC. / **RODNEY KING**, as he oversees the Q&A page of OPC.org.

**12** Pray for **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough), as they visit with their families over the holidays. / Yearlong intern **SILAS (ANASTASIA) SCHREYACK** at Merrimack Valley Presbyterian in North Andover, MA.

**13** **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for opportunity to connect with some inactive members of the church. / Pray for **MIKE (ELIZABETH) DIERCKS**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio.

**14** **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray that the Lord would provide new visitors to Grace Reformed OPC. / Pray for missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she learns Karimojong.

**15** Affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. Pray for several new people who have begun attending church services regularly. / Yearlong intern **DAMON (ELISABETH) YOUNG** at First Church in Merrimack, NH.

## DECEMBER



The Bekkerings

**21** **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray that the Word will go forth with fruitful power from the pulpit, in Bible studies, and in daily teaching. / Editorial staff of **ORDAINED SERVANT** and **NEW HORIZONS**.

**22** Pray for **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Associate **P. F.**, Asia. Give thanks as the church prepares to ordain a new deacon.

**23** **KEVIN & RACHEL MEDCALF**, Cumming, GA. Pray that the Lord would bless the outreach efforts of Providence Presbyterian. / Pray for the **BOARDWALK CHAPEL BAND** as they tour to raise support and awareness.

**24** **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for strength and wisdom for Juan, the sole ruling elder, while the Richlines are on furlough. / Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**.

**25** Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Praise the Lord for new visitors to New Braunfels OPC.

**26** **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray that the trials Pasadena OPC has faced this year would forge the church together in love, prayer, and support. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and the **COMMITTEE ON ARRANGEMENTS** as they plan for the 2021 assembly in the face of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.



The Hopp family

**27** **BEN & HEATHER HOPP** and associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray for peace and security in the coming year. / Pray for Christian Education general secretary **DANNY OLINGER** as he directs MTIOPC.

**28** **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Arroyo, PR. Pray for God's Spirit to direct and empower the witness of the church. / **SHANE & RACHELLE BENNETT**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray for fruitful connections between Reformation and its community.

**29** Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. Pray for the faith of Dr. Rotha, a recent convert. / Yearlong intern **JOHN (SHARON) CANAVAN** at Grace Presbyterian in Vienna, VA.

**30** Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for wisdom for the government as the nation reopens. / **ABBY HARTING**, office secretary for Christian Education, and **AN- NELISA STUDLEY**, office manager.

**31** **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Charles as he teaches in Turkey next month. / **PAUL & SARAH MOUR- REALE**, West Plains, MO. Pray that the Lord would direct Covenant Reformed toward new outreach.

**16** Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**. / Yearlong interns **ANDREW (ANESSA) BEKKERING** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI, and **ELIJAH (GRETA) DE JONG** at Faith OPC in Grants Pass, OR.

**17** **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray for continued growth and spiritual development at Christ Church. / **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada, give thanks for a new young convert.

**18** Affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** (on furlough), and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. Pray for those desiring baptism at Shin Urayasu Grace Church. / **MARK STUMPF**, loan fund manager.

**19** **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for their children as they prepare for a move to another country and new school. / **JEREMY & GWEN BAKER**, Yuma, AZ. Pray that God would bring local families to join worship.

**20** **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, Mifflintown, PA. Pray that God would raise up qualified and willing officers at Grace & Truth OPC. / Pray for **OPC SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** as they begin to assess opportunities for 2021.

# NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

## CUER DE ANDRADE ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT PARK HILL

*Bryan Prouty*

On October 3, Eric Cuer de Andrade was ordained and installed as pastor of Park Hill Presbyterian in Aurora, Colorado. Dale Van Dyke, pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, delivered the sermon. The charge to the minister was given by Greg Thurston, pastor of Bethel Presbyterian in Broomfield, Colorado. Tripp Martin, ruling elder of Providence Presbyterian in Denver, Colorado, gave the charge to the congregation.

Eric is a graduate of Westminster Seminary California and served as a pastoral intern at Harvest in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, area before moving to Park Hill with his wife, Viviane, and their two children. Eric is a native of Brazil and served as an evangelist before enrolling in seminary.

## IN MEMORIAM: WILLARD (BILL) GEKLER

*Michael C. Lynch*

Elder emeritus Willard (Bill) Gekler went to be with the Lord on August 4, 2020. He is survived by his bride of sixty-seven years, Jan, three children, and five grandchildren. In 1962, Bill brought his family to a new housing tract in Rossmoor, California. Their neighbor, Dr. Todd Mulford, suggested that they attend his church, First OPC (now Faith) in Long Beach. During a meeting with the pastor, Lawrence Eyles, the Holy Spirit convicted Bill's heart that he did not actually know and trust in Christ as his Savior. Not long after, Bill and Jan joined the church. He became a dedicated, hardworking servant of God



*Mike Dempsey, Bill Gekler, Mike Lynch*



*At the installation of Cuer de Andrade (left to right): Greg Thurston, Archie Allison, Dale Van Dyke, Eric Cuer de Andrade, Tripp Martin, Bryan Prouty*

who used his many talents to greatly bless the church of Christ. He served as an elder for thirty-nine years, and frequently as clerk of session. He served on ministry councils, taught, attended general assemblies, served on presbytery committees, and served on the church's board of trustees. His warmth, welcoming spirit, enthusiasm, concern for others, and evangelistic spirit was a powerful example to many.

## UPDATE

### CHURCHES

- On October 2, **Christ Covenant OPC** in Crystal Lake, IL, was organized as a particular congregation of the OPC.
- On October 16, the Presbytery of Southern California received **Living Hope OPC** in Cerritos, CA, formerly Covenant Community Church, PCA.

### MINISTERS

- On September 23, retired minister **Joseph A. Auksela** was received as a ministerial member of the Presbytery of the Dakotas from the Presbytery of the Southwest.

- On October 2, **Brandon T. Wilkins**, previously the organizing pastor, was installed as pastor of Christ Covenant OPC in Crystal Lake, IL.
- On October 3, **Eric Cuer de Andrade** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Park Hill Presbyterian in Aurora, CO.
- On October 9, the **Timothy M. Marinelli** was received from Covenant East Classis, RCUS, and installed as pastor of Emmanuel OPC in Castle Rock, CO.
- On October 11, **Nicholas K. Barnes** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Winner OPC in Winner, SD.
- On October 16, the Presbytery of Southern California granted the request of **Douglas P. Harley** to demit the ministry and transfer his membership to Christ PCA, Santa Barbara, CA.
- On October 16, the Presbytery of Southern California received retired minister **Carl W. Bogue**, pending the transfer of his credentials from the PCA.
- On October 16, the Presbytery of Southern California deposed **Riley D. Fraas** and dismissed him from the

regional roll of the church to Bonita OPC in Bonita, CA.

- On October 19, **Thomas B. Brown** was received from the Presbytery of Northern California, PCA, and installed as pastor of Bethlehem Reformed Church in Freeman, SD.

- The Presbytery of the South dissolved the pastoral relationship between **J. Brewer Ames II** and Covenant Reformed Presbyterian in Fort Pierce, FL, declaring the pulpit vacant as of November 22 and transferring his credentials to the PCA's Presbytery of Southeast Alabama.

## LETTERS

### DEPICTIONS OF CHRIST

Editor:

In "Stories to Capture a Child's Heart" (September), there is no explicit critique or mention of depictions of Christ in the recommended books as being against our confessional standards. While some may make a distinction between realistic and nonrealistic (cartoon) images of Christ, that distinction is not reflected in the language of the Larger Catechism (Q. 109). In a sense, *New Horizons* represents the denomination, and this article could give the appearance of the OPC's approval of these resources. As parents, my wife and I long for more children's resources that do not contain images of Christ. An article recommending such resources would be more helpful. I am so thankful for *New Horizons* and its work. May Jesus Christ be praised!

Dhananjay Khanda  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

### RECOVERING FROM BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

Editor:

In his review of Aimee Byrd's *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (November), Dennison says it is a "fine book" in spite of its flaws. It would be more accurate to say that it is deeply flawed in spite of its virtues. First, Byrd departs from a correct view of Scripture when she claims that Huldah (2 Kings

22:14–20) granted canonical authority to "what we know" as the book of Deuteronomy (46). This claim draws from the liberal and Roman view that the canon comes from the church, not from the Confession's teaching that divine inspiration creates the canon. Second, Dennison is only superficially correct to say that Byrd upholds male-only ordination. Byrd affirms that Junia (Rom. 16:7) was a female apostle, and calls churches to "wrestle" with the implications of this (227), while never pointing to the clear teaching of the pastoral letters on this question. Church members and officers should be alarmed by these and other major errors in this book.

Calvin R. Goligher  
Sunnyvale, CA

Editor:

As those indebted to John Piper's and others' painstakingly constructed responses to feminism, we were grieved to see their work represented reductionistically in Byrd's book. Their nuanced position is not fairly summed up, as she implies, by the phrase "all women submit to all men" (105). And, Byrd's enthusiastic use of the yellow wallpaper metaphor was disconcerting, given its source in an iconic feminist text.

Byrd fails to make a clear case for an alternative to what she critiques. After claiming that Phoebe in Romans 16 was a woman with authority in the church (148) and suggesting that Junia was part of a "coed team of apostles" (227), she fails to spell out the implications of these highly debatable claims. While Byrd advocates for women as teachers of men in the church (174, 233), absent is any interaction with the text most apparently at odds with this position, 1 Timothy 2:8–14. We remain keenly interested in how women's gifts can be cultivated and utilized by the church, but we did not find this book to be a helpful step forward.

Nathan and Ashley Trice  
Charlotte, NC

## REVIEWS

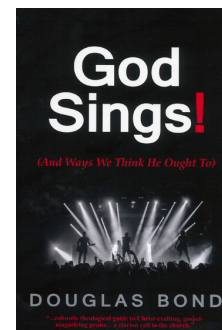
***God Sings! (And Ways We Think He Ought To)*, by Douglas Bond. Inkblots, 2019. Paperback, 270 pages, \$13.75 (Ama-**

**zon). Reviewed by OP pastor Jonathan Landry Cruse.**

The title of the book, and its driving theme, are derived from Zephaniah 3:17, "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." This line leads author Douglas Bond, and us, to wonder in fascination about the being of God: "What must God's singing sound like? ... The richest, deepest, most resonate bass voice; the most transcendent soprano, never shrill, never harsh, never shattering, but power and sweetness emanating out of divine perfection. The mere speculation boggles the mind" (13). Bond reminds us that as God's image bearers "we do in miniature what he has done and continues to do in infinite grandeur" (13). As a church, and with our singing in particular, we are forced to ask ourselves, how are we doing with that?

In this collection of essays, Bond assesses the state of today's worship and argues compellingly for a recovery of God-honoring, artistically-excellent texts and tunes in the church. It would be an oversimplification to say this book simply pits the traditionalists versus the contemporary movement. In fact, Bond would disavow the moniker "traditionalist" (47). Rather, the position that he argues for is one he convincingly argues is found in Scripture itself. The form, substance, and style for congregational singing is guided by the Word of God: "one could argue that the entire book of Psalms gives us the most comprehensive model of how we are to enter in the presence of God in our sung worship" (17). Also to guide our practices, frequent reference is made to how Hebrews roots our worship in the reality of God as a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28–29).

Bond does, however, reveal the ways in which the contemporary Christian



music scene has largely missed the mark of biblical standards for worship music. He highlights how some of the most popular modern worship songs lack a theological and scriptural foundation (chapter 7) and how entertainment is driving our decisions about church (chapter 8). He notes the paucity of good poets serving the church today, with the result that many of the newer texts lack the aesthetic of “unity and progression” (139)—foundational elements in both English and biblical poetry that preserve us from vain repetition (chapter 9). Bond cautions against making church “hip” rather than “holy,” or “cool” rather than “Christian” (227): “It’s washing down *boeuf bourguignon* with Kool-Aid to wed the deep truths of redemption with music designed to amuse and entertain” (150).

Although it is undoubtedly a severe critique of a dominant movement in today’s church, these pages are saturated with grace, which makes the book far more palatable than many other polemical works. I found it to be an even-handed yet witty treatment of a delicate subject—as engaging as it is important. So, take up and read—or better, take up and sing!

***Reforming Journalism*, by Marvin Olasky. P&R, 2019. Paperback, 392 pages, \$13.99 (Amazon). Reviewed by managing editor Judith M. Dinsmore.**

Marvin Olasky, editor-in-chief of *World* magazine and author of twenty-two books, wrote his new *Reforming Journalism* with aspiring journalists in mind: each chapter ends with key terms, discussion questions, and a bibliography for further reading.

Indeed, the book would work best in the hands of a teacher who could deepen what Olasky skims—the state of journalism in China and the United States, the history of Western journalism, and the how-tos of the trade. He has most likely used the book’s material himself in his mid-career journalism course or the *World* internship program. Occasionally, the writing resembles hasty lecture notes. But the content,

though quickly covered, is helpful.

The first part centers on Olasky’s trademark articulation of the “central concept of Christian journalism”: biblical objectivity (23). “Our goal is to take strong stands when the Bible is clear, and to avoid doing so when the Bible is not,” he writes (25). It’s almost uncomfortable in its simplicity but rings true. Olasky offers six gradations of clarity from contemporary issues that the Bible unmistakably addresses, such as abortion, to those more layered and complex, such as trade relations with China.

The second part is nitty-gritty advice for prospective journalists, from interviewing to revising drafts to developing what Olasky calls the “determination quotient” (187). The third section speeds through the centuries since the Reformation to note examples of biblical objectivity and bravery in journalism. He traces socialism and postmodernism in American journalism through the 1950s, then describes the modern-day journalistic tilt toward the left in the United States.

Reform in the field is certainly necessary. Print media sales have plunged in the last few decades, small newspapers are being absorbed by conglomerates and staffs eviscerated, and digital journalism still struggles to make money. Along with our age’s crisis of trust in institutions like law enforcement, schools, and corporations, comes a crisis of trust in journalism.

Olasky seems to be endeavoring to raise up an institution—biblically objective journalism—that takes its format and practices from secular journalism (Olasky trained at *The Boston Globe*) but rethinks the worldview. *Reforming Journalism* is but one facet of his commendable endeavor. As editor of an independent national Christian magazine with 85,000-plus subscribers, according to its website, Olasky may have reason to be confident of some success. But as Christians reckon with where our duty of

## Position Available

**Pastor:** Covenant OPC (St. Augustine, Florida) is looking for an experienced pastor who loves preaching Christ, shepherding his people, and reaching his harvest. If you are interested or would like to learn more about Covenant, please email us at [Covenant.St.Augustine@gmail.com](mailto:Covenant.St.Augustine@gmail.com).

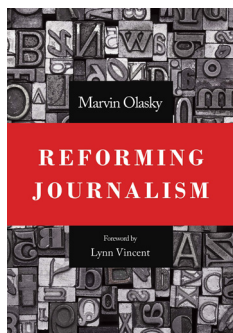
allegiance lies amidst institutional deterioration, we ought to be wary of proposing an automatic shift to purer but more poorly funded alternatives modeled on the collapsing structure. We might find ourselves watching gloomily from the sidelines as the Christian version struggles to keep up with its own quality ideals, with the rapidly changing digital world, and with its secular counterparts. Only a few institutions are inviolable. Maybe these days are a chance to rethink the structure of the rest, including traditional journalism.

***Laughing at the Days to Come: Facing Present Trials and Future Uncertainties with Gospel Hope*, by Tessa Thompson. Reformation Heritage, 2019. Paperback, 192 pages, \$13.00. Reviewed by OP member Anita Klumpers.**

In Scripture, laughter often expresses scornful derision (Ps. 59:8). Sometimes it conveys great joy (Ps. 126:2). In *Laughing at the Days to Come*, Tessa Thompson uses her own experiences to demonstrate how both types of laughter are appropriate for God’s people who grapple with suffering.

Thompson was diagnosed at fifteen with NF2, a rare and hereditary neurological disease. Initially, she wasn’t concerned that the tumors forming on her auditory nerves would affect her thoroughly satisfying life as a Christian teen. When the hearing loss progressed faster than she’d anticipated, her world shrank. She spent years coming to terms with increasingly serious health concerns, the difficulties of participation in a hearing world, and what this trial revealed about her understanding of a sovereign God.

After briefly describing her symptoms, diagnosis, and initial response, Thompson



NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

details her progressive manifestations of laughter at her disease. She laughed first in lighthearted denial, then with absolute confidence God would heal, and forayed briefly into stoic, gritted-teeth laughter. At each stage, God was leading her to the conviction that he chooses how suffering and trials sanctify his children.



The Christian assesses suffering and trials through a unique lens. Our eternal perspective enables us to laugh with “spiritual sobriety”—a seemingly incongruous juxtaposition. “God’s Word and Spirit enable us to be sober, God-conscious women who are daily responding to the good, bad and potential circumstances of life with calm and correct thinking” (63). The believer isn’t expected or qualified to walk through suffering by sheer determination. We’re given the perfect example of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and confidence in the discipline of a loving Father.

Thompson gets specific in the final chapters. Her dawning realization that God wouldn’t miraculously heal her drove her to pray in submission to his perfect will and promises. She encourages participation in the body of Christ as a necessary and healthy component of submission. We’re called to “a life of faithful worship and selfless love” (153). The book concludes with the triumphant assurance that suffering Christians can laugh at earthly days to come, because they are temporary.

*Laughing at the Days to Come* is a satis-

fying, nourishing, well-written book. It reveals the author as a gracious woman who doesn’t place herself and her story front and center. Each anecdote, each fresh trial, each hope and fear is dwelt on only briefly before Thompson turns the reader’s eyes from herself and directs them to the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The entire book is drenched in sound doctrine, the mystery and beauty of “now and not yet,” and a profound trust in the sovereignty of God. Thompson points us past fleeting pleasure in temporary healing on earth to the laughter of joy-saturated eternity.

***B. B. Warfield*, by Simonetta Carr. Christian Biographies for Young Readers series. Reformation Heritage Books, 2019. Hardcover, 64 pages, \$14.00. Reviewed by OP member Charlotte Van Dixhoorn, age 9.**

I never knew that people years ago studied the same catechism that I am studying. Hearing about B. B. Warfield studying the Westminster Catechisms and how it helped him so much makes me feel that my catechism study is very important.

It is interesting that B. B. Warfield started off thinking he wanted to be a scientist. But he ended up being a theologian. I think it’s funny how B. B. Warfield’s dad picked a school for his son based on the well-trained hunting dogs at the college. There is a lovely painting of him with the dogs. There are so many pictures that help me imagine what life in his time was like.

My favorite picture in this book is of the Harz Mountains in Germany. The

setting is beautiful with a lake and lots of trees and hills. It’s neat to see where he and his wife Annie were traveling. Another painting shows how they were caught in a thunderstorm walking on those hills.

There are some sad parts to B. B. Warfield’s life. He lost his books when he moved from Europe to Pennsylvania. My dad lost some important books when he moved to Pennsylvania too—including his Warfield books! My dad was very sad about that.

Another sad part is that B. B. Warfield and his wife Annie couldn’t have children. That was very sad. But they really enjoyed their friends’ children.

I liked hearing that B. B. Warfield spoke up for black people. He wrote about hard times for black people after the Civil War. He also convinced the seminary to include black students in the sleeping areas everyone shared rather than separating them from white students. I think this is good because Jesus says we shouldn’t judge people on how they look. The Bible teaches that black people and white people are equal in God’s sight.

I recommend this book to someone who is looking to grow in courage because B. B. Warfield was a man of courage. He was a man of courage because he was joyful in all circumstances, kind of like the Apostle Paul. And he was a man of courage because he was willing to say he was a Christian and not get embarrassed and feel bad. He also showed courage in saying that God told people what to write in the Bible and that the Bible is an extraordinary book.

