

“During my time at Cove  
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graduate, I am trusting  
spiritual formation and  
received at Covenant for

—*Mike Caponigro (MDiv '25)*

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that the Lord will use the  
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COVENANT  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



**Covenant Magazine** is a publication of Covenant Theological Seminary, the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America. For nearly seventy years, Covenant Seminary has equipped thousands of pastors, counselors and ministry leaders to lead and serve the church globally. This magazine is a testimony to the Lord's work in and through the people associated with Covenant Theological Seminary.

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In confessing the creeds and confessions of the church as authoritative, we number ourselves in the communion of those who celebrate a shared understanding of God, ourselves, and the world we inhabit.

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT

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**Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs**

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Having recently concluded another academic year at Covenant Seminary, I am once again struck by the amazing graciousness of God to this institution. We are grateful for the increased enrollment and improved financial health he has brought us in recent years, for the many donors and friends who support us with generous gifts and prayers, and especially grateful for this year's nearly 100 graduates who are going out to serve the Lord as pastors, church planters, missionaries, counselors, ministry leaders in local churches, and in so many other ways.

But even beyond these wonderful blessings, we are grateful simply for the opportunities the Lord gives us as faculty, staff, and students to interact with and learn from one another on a daily basis. Living, learning, and worshiping together in this covenantal community of grace is a powerfully transformative experience to which all of us can attest and for which we are all extremely thankful.

The credit for all of this belongs, of course, not to us but to our amazing triune God, whom we honor and celebrate in our daily work and studies, and, in a more specific way, in this issue of *Covenant* magazine. In these pages, you will find stories that attest to God's great and gracious work, touching every facet of the life of our community, in the inspiring and thought-provoking teaching of our faculty, and in the wide-ranging and world-encompassing ministries of our graduates.

Yes, there are indeed many reasons to be thankful to God and give glory to his name. We invite you to join us in praising him as we seek to honor and serve him in the mission he has given us.

*Soli deo gloria!*

All for Jesus,

ILLUSTRATION BY STÉPHANE MANEL

EST. 1956 | ST. LOUIS, MO

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# Covenant.



At The Center  
*of* Biblical Truth.



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# NEWS & EVENTS

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## “Where Two or Three are Gathered..”

**Doing seminary life together is the heart and soul of Covenant.**



Community life is an essential part of the Christian experience. At Covenant, we seek to be a living, learning, worshiping community of grace that reflects the biblical values of care for neighbor, service to one another, and the development of deep personal relationships that exemplify the love of Christ and prepare us for a lifetime of fruitful ministry. These values play out in the rhythms of daily campus life and through the many campus and community events that take place here each semester. Here is an overview of notable events and activities from the last several months, along with some upcoming items.

ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

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## Reaffirmation of Accreditation Status

● We are constantly working to evaluate and strengthen the base of our academic foundation in conjunction with our accrediting agencies. To this end, last October the Seminary hosted a comprehensive evaluation visit for reaffirmation of its accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Commission on Accrediting. Evaluators from peer institutions visited the campus to verify that the school met all applicable Commission Standards of Accreditation (available at <https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/standards-of-accreditation.pdf>). ATS also solicited comments in advance from those with relevant knowledge, and met extensively with students, faculty, board, and staff before reporting its findings.

The visit went very well. The team recommended and ATS later approved that Covenant's accreditation be reaffirmed for a period of ten years, until March 31, 2034. All current degree programs were approved. In addition, the team cited the following distinctive strengths of the Seminary:

- Dynamic and collaborative institutional leadership that has renewed relationships with stakeholders, strengthened denominational trust, and led to a process that resulted in a strategic plan that is bold, measurable, and realistic.
- A well-qualified faculty who match personal warmth with the truth of their convictions in ways that foster an environment for student learning and formation, helping to share a distinct Covenant Seminary ethos that marks graduates in identifiable and win-some ways.
- An attentive and relational student services team who are student-focused, data-informed, and proactive in fostering an environment where students have the support needed to flourish throughout their educational journey.
- The implementation of a shared governance model led by a policy-driven board that incorporates diverse voices through an advisory

board and that works together with the administration and the faculty to advance the school's mission.

- Library services and staff who are extending the capacity of the school's resources to support both the residential and online student communities.

Please rejoice with us in this news of reaffirmation of accreditation! This represents the culmination of more than a year's worth of labor by many staff and faculty members. Special thanks go to Shannon Hathaway, Director of Accreditation; Jay Sklar, Vice President of Academics; and Jessie Swigart, Dean of Academic Administration, who guided us excellently through this process. We also thank the trustees and advisors who met with the Peer Review Team. For more on our accreditation, see our website at <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/legal-information>.

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## ATS Moving Forward in Mission Grant—\$25,000 to Further Church Planting Recruitment and Training

● We were pleased this year to receive a \$25,000 Moving Forward in Mission Grant from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) to further the Seminary's goal of recruiting and training more pastor-minded church planters, as well as church planting team members, for the Presbyterian Church in America and beyond.

The grant, part of the ATS Organizational and Educational Models Project, provides additional support for our recruiting efforts in part through the creation and distribution of enhanced print, audio/visual, and digital marketing materials specifically for our Church Planting Track. It also enables us to explore new recruiting pipelines by supporting attendance at national conferences dedicated to church planting and hosting such a conference on our campus.

Dr. Robert Kim, the Philip and Rebecca Douglass Chair of Church Planting and Christian Formation at Covenant, noted, "Preparing church planters has long been a part of Covenant's pastoral training mission. A good number of qualified graduates each year end up planting churches through Mission to North America

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*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.*

EPHESIANS 2:19

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(MNA), the PCA's church-planting agency, or with other similar organizations or ministries. But the need for new churches—and well-trained planters to lead them—is great. To help address this need, the Seminary a few years ago instituted the Church Planting Track, a specialized series of courses and related internships for the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Arts (Biblical and Theological Studies) (MABTS) degree programs. Covenant is one of only two ATS-accredited Reformed seminaries to have such a track. The ATS grant will significantly enhance our ability to recruit appropriately gifted and interested students specifically for church planting.”

We are immensely grateful for the work of ATS and for this grant, and we look forward to seeing how the Lord will continue to build his church through it. Watch our blog and other social media outlets for more information, resources, and stories related to church planting.

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#### **Newly Restructured Church Planting Scholarship**

● Covenant's Church Planting Track Scholarship, initiated several years ago, has recently been restructured to better equip Church Planting Track students in the MDiv and MABTS degree pro-

grams with the ministry tools necessary to plant thriving, gospel-preaching churches.

→ *Full-time MDiv students in the Church Planting Track* in the first year of their program receive a scholarship of up to 50% of tuition. The award increases each year and caps at up to 80% in year four.

→ *Students in the Church Planting Track of the MABTS program* may receive an up-to-25% tuition award for every year in the program.

The goal of the scholarship is to help launch future church planters and church planting team members into the harvest field with as few financial burdens as possible. To learn more, visit [covsem.co/cptscholarship](http://covsem.co/cptscholarship).

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#### **New Graduate Certificate in Leading Bible Studies**

● As part of our commitment to providing training and resources for the local church, we have developed a new Graduate Certificate in Leading Bible Studies, designed to teach believers to study the Bible well and lead others in doing the same. Coursework for this 11-credit-hour program will

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engage students in the content and structure of the Bible, the process of interpreting the Bible, and designing lesson plans and talks to faithfully communicate Scripture. This GC is open to both men and women and will be especially helpful for Men's or Women's Ministry leaders, church elders, or anyone who simply wants to learn how to read and understand Scripture better.

The certificate can be done residentially or 100% online. If students wish to pursue further study, the credits are transferrable to other Covenant programs, especially the MAM or MABTS degrees. The program will be available to start online in summer 2025, or to start residentially in fall 2025. For more information, contact our Admissions team at <https://connect.covenantseminary.edu/register/inquire>.

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### Dedication of the Garden of Lament and Hope

● Seminary does not insulate us from the hardships common to life. The challenges of juggling classes, family life, work, ministry opportunities, and anything else life throws out there can be daunting. Sometimes, it can be too much. Hardships strike us all now and then, and grief can be a specter that broods over us. A campus family struggles with the loss of a child, the death of a parent, personal illness, depression. A faculty member fights an ongoing battle with cancer. A long-ago incident of horrific murder casts shadows that haunt many lives even today. Stories of lament and grief like this are as much a part of life as stories of praise and hope—and God uses all of them to shape his people for the ministries to which he calls them.

In recognition of these hard stories in our lives—and of the fact that even in lament we have cause for hope in Jesus Christ—the Seminary, as part of our annual Chapel Service of Lament in March, dedicated an area near our library as a memorial Garden of Lament and Hope. The garden is a place of memorial and meditation where anyone in the campus community can come to remember and reflect on the griefs we all share and seek rest in the hope we all claim in Christ. More details will be available in coming months.

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### Encouraging Enrollment News

● We are pleased to report that the past academic year has continued the general upward trend in enrollments in key programs. For instance, our flagship pastor-minded MDiv-Ordination Track program grew 18% compared to last year, and the Master of Arts (Biblical and Theological Studies) (MABTS) and Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC) programs continue to flourish.

Progress in enrollment remains our top institutional priority, and we are grateful for the wonderful work being done by our tireless Admissions team, under the direction of VP of Enrollment Rev. John Chung, in identifying and recruiting new students. Please join us in congratulating them, and in praying for their efforts, and please pray that even now the Lord would be preparing the hearts of those whom he would bring to Covenant in the coming year.

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### Compelling Preaching Grant Update

● Last year we told you about our receipt of a \$1.19 million Compelling Preaching Initiative Grant from Lilly Endowment for the purpose of equipping future preachers. This grant is helping us further develop an emphasis on preaching as a primary means of pastoral ministry for our MDiv students. One special benefit of the grant enabled us to move Dr. Thurman Williams, our Director of Homiletics, from part-time to full-time faculty status, where he is doing an excellent job teaching and overseeing our preaching classes. He is also busy developing other aspects of the grant, which include:

- Preaching cohort groups to better facilitate peer growth in preaching, and preaching conferences and workshops that will expand on the success of our existing annual Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures.
- Preaching resources and a related website that can be used to encourage and revitalize seasoned preachers and better equip and support young preachers and those aspiring to preach.

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→ Opportunities for preachers of all experience levels, ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities to learn from each other, especially those who may not have access to seminary-level education due to lack of accessibility and/or affordability.

Look for more information as it becomes available.

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### Other Campus Events and Activities

→ **The 2024 Francis Schaeffer Institute Lectures—*Christ and All His Hallows: Evangelism in a Disenchanted World.*** Our annual FSI Conference in September brought in pastor and apologist Dr. Gavin Ortlund, award-winning author of *What It Means to Be Protestant*, and Mr. Jake Meador, editor-in-chief of *Mere Orthodoxy*, to discuss the challenges and opportunities of evangelism in a world that has become jaded

and disenchanted with the claims of Christianity. Drawing on the works and ideas of philosopher Charles Taylor, the presentations explored some of the causes for the current cultural situation and offered ways in which believers can embody and convey a dynamic experience of the risen Christ that breaks through the cultural hardening with the truth of the gospel. The fall 2025 FSI Lectures will take place September 12 and 13 on the Seminary campus. Theme and speaker details will be announced in the next few months.

→ **2024 Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures Focused on *No Greater Calling: The Life of the Preacher.*** Rev. Dr. Trent Casto, Senior Pastor of Covenant Church (PCA) in Naples, Florida, was the featured speaker for the 2024 edition of the Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures. Noting that Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once described preaching as “the highest, the great-



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est, and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called,” Dr. Casto delved into the profound responsibility of those who are set apart by God to proclaim his Word. He explored three key aspects of the preacher’s life: the craft of preaching itself, the common pitfalls that can undermine a preacher’s ministry, and the essential pursuit of personal holiness. The goal was to equip those called to this sacred task with the zeal, diligence, and reliance on the Holy Spirit necessary to fulfill their calling. The 2025 edition of the Lectures will take place October 28; theme and speaker are yet to be announced.

→ **2024 Lifetime of Ministry Conference Highlighted Renewed Hope in Kingdom Ministry: Sustaining Grace for a Life of Ministry.** The recently re-instituted Lifetime of Ministry (LOM) Conference is designed to help pastors and church leaders explore and navigate the unique challenges of pastoral work, and to provide a place of rest, retreat, and encouragement for pastors and their spouses with a view to equipping them for the next season of ministry. The 2024 edition of LOM took place in October with Dr. Dan Doriani, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, and Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs, President and Associate Professor of Applied Theology, as the featured speakers. Their focus was on helping those in ministry renew a sense of hope and enthusiasm amid the challenges of ministry life, and on ways of sustaining that renewal for the long term. The 2025 edition of LOM will take place in November; theme and speaker are yet to be announced.

→ **The 14th Annual Theological Fellowship Conference Featured Dr. Jack Collins.** This year’s edition of our annual student-led theology conference took place in January 2025 and featured plenary speaker Dr. Jack Collins, Professor of Old Testament, who presented on the topic “*The Testimony of the Lord is Sure, but What About Everyone Else’s?—The Shape of Sola Scriptura: The Place of Extra-Biblical Material in Biblical Thinking.*” Hosted by The Theological Fellowship at Covenant Seminary, a student group devoted to theological discussion, the conference also featured presentations of pa-

pers from Covenant students on a variety of theological topics, with an award given for the best paper as judged by the group. The Theological Fellowship also brings in other speakers during the year for the benefit of the student body.

→ **The 2025 David C. Jones Theology Lectures Featured Dr. Fred Sanders on the Doctrine of the Son of God.** The second installment of our recently revitalized David C. Jones Theology lectures took place in March and featured Dr. Fred Sanders, Professor at the Torrey Honors College of Biola University and a faculty member of the Los Angeles Bible Training School, who focused on the doctrine of the Son of God, exploring the trinitarian context of Christology and the modes of the Son’s presence in the history of salvation—specifically considering his sending in terms of invisible mission and visible mission. Dr. Sanders is the author of several books, including *Union with Christ and the Life of Faith*, *The Holy Spirit: An Introduction*, and *The Triune God*. Named for the late Dr. David C. Jones, long-time professor of systematic theology and ethics at Covenant Seminary, the Jones Lectures honor Dr. Jones’s teaching and influence on generations of our students and highlight our Reformed theological heritage through presentations by noted authorities focusing on a particular area of theological study. The date, theme, and speaker for next year’s lectures are yet to be determined.

→ **The 2025 Austin Harrington Counseling Lectures Featured Dr. Gary Moon.** To assist counselor, pastors, and ministry leaders in growing in their work, and to help them help others grow in their lives and faith, our Counseling Department annually offers the Austin Harrington Counseling Lectures. The 2025 edition in March featured Dr. Gary Moon, distinguished Professor of Psychology and Spiritual Formation at Richmond Graduate University and founding Executive Director of the Martin Institute for Christianity and Culture and the Dallas Willard Center for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College. Dr. Moon spoke on the main theme of *Stimulating Spiritual Formation: Helping One Another Thrive* by

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*Campus life is a reflection of the brotherhood we have in Christ as we live, work, play, study, worship, and pray together in a covenantal community of grace and faith.*

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looking at how spiritual formation shapes us as persons, and answering seven important questions related to the practical implications of formation for counseling and ministry. The date, theme, and speaker for the 2026 edition of the Harrington Lectures have not yet been determined.

→ **Weekly Chapel Services.** One of the primary ways the Lord shapes our campus community for ministry is through worship at our weekly Wednesday Chapel services. Speakers for the last several semesters have been reflecting on and unpacking the meaning of core themes in our institutional purpose statement. The fall 2024 theme, for example, was “Glorifying the Triune God,” and for spring 2025 it was “Walking in God’s Grace.” In addition to Covenant professors, speakers for this academic year included a variety of pastors from PCA, EPC, and other churches both locally and nationally, as well as several leaders of our denomination, such as Dr. Irwyn Ince, Dr. Ed Dunnington, Dr. Scotty Smith, Rev. S. J. Lim, and others.

→ **Ministry Lunches.** Multiple times in each semester representatives from many different church, ministry organizations, and PCA agencies and committees host lunch-time gatherings to inform students about internship and ministry opportunities, provide helpful insights on ministry life, share experiences, and offer encouragement. This year featured two special Ministry Lunches of particular note:

- In October 2024, award-winning Christian recording artist and Covenant alumna **Laura Story** visited campus to lead music during a Chapel service and lead a lunchtime discussion on the ins and outs of leading worship music.
- In March 2025, **Karen Hodge**, Coordinator for Women’s Ministry with the PCA’s Committee for Discipleship Ministries, joined us for an enriching lunchtime conversation with Covenant’s women about our shared commitment to serving Christ’s church through the vital work of women’s ministry.

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# FACULTY & STAFF

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## “For We Are God's Fellow Workers...”

**Our faculty and staff enjoy the privilege of co-laboring together for the sake of the gospel.**

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One of the Lord’s greatest gifts to Covenant Seminary is the people who serve as faculty, staff, or trustees. Whether they’re here for a short time or a lifetime, we are grateful for each of them and for the blessings they are to the Seminary, our students, and the Body of Christ. Their hard work on behalf of the Seminary, their care for one another and our students on a daily basis, and their godly lives and service in their churches and communities make them powerful examples to each other and the world of Christian faithfulness and love. Here are some faculty and staff updates since our last issue.



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### Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins Retires After 32 Years of Faithful Service

One of our longest-serving faculty members, Professor of Old Testament **Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins**, retired from Covenant Seminary at the end of the 2024–2025 academic year after 32 years of faithful service. Our Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, and thousands of alumni across the country and around the world are grateful for Dr. Collins’s ministry among us and to us, and we look forward to seeing how the Lord will work through him and his wife, Diane, in the next chapter of their life.

President Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs noted: “Jack’s teaching and many other professional and personal contributions to the life of this institution have had a profound impact on generations of our students and alumni, as well as the broader church. I personally am deeply grateful for Jack’s influence on my own ministry journey and for the blessing of knowing him as a friend and colleague. I am grateful as well for his wife, Diane, who has been an integral part of Jack’s life and ministry, and of the life and ministry of Covenant.”

Dr. Collins joined Covenant’s faculty in 1993 after several years as a church planter in Spokane, Washington, serving first as Assistant (1993–1995), then as Associate (1995–2000), and finally as Professor of Old Testament (2000–2025). He has chaired the Old Testament department since 2005. His many books and journal articles focusing on themes of science and faith and how to read the Bible well have helped many to better understand the Scriptures, especially the early chapters of Genesis. His work as chair of the Old Testament committee for the ESV translation of the Bible and as general editor for the Old Testament portion of the ESV Study Bible helped produce one of the most important and influential modern Bible versions. His books include *Science and Faith*, *The God of Miracles*, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*, *Reading Genesis Well*, and many others.

Dr. Jay Sklar, Vice President of Academics, summed up nicely the feelings of many who have known and worked with or studied under Dr. Collins: “I have been teaching alongside of Jack for going on twenty-five years now. Throughout that time, he has been a faithful mentor and friend. And ‘faithful’ is indeed the word to use, for if there’s one thing Jack has modelled for me it is his faithful care and commitment to his friends. I’m so grateful for that friendship and for the many, many ways he has taught me to read the Bible better. God bless you, brother!”

For more on Dr. Collins, see the “Faculty Profile” in this issue.



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### Dr. K.J. Drake Joins Faculty as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology

We are pleased to announce the addition in July of **Dr. K.J. Drake** to our faculty as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology. He most recently served as Associate Professor of Historical Theology and

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*“I have been teaching alongside of Jack Collins for going on twenty-five years now. . . . I’m so grateful for his friendship and for the many, many ways he has taught me to read the Bible better.”*

DR. JAY SKLAR, Professor of Old Testament

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Academic Dean at Indianapolis Theological Seminary and previously was Sessional Professor of History at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Drake holds a BA in History, Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Classics, and Latin from the University of Nebraska; an MDiv from Covenant Theological Seminary; and a PhD in Historical Theology from Saint Louis University. His scholarship focuses on historical and systematic theology, particularly the Reformation, Reformed Christology, and sacramental theology. He is the author of *The Flesh of the Word: The extra Calvinisticum from Zwingli to Early Orthodoxy* and has published widely in both scholarly and popular theological platforms. Dr. Drake is a Teaching Elder in the PCA and chair of the PCA’s Theological Examining Committee. Dr. Drake is married to Heather.

President Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs, said, “We are excited that Dr. Drake is joining us. His history with the PCA, expertise as a Reformation scholar, and personal experience of the Covenant Seminary ethos make him an outstanding fit for our team of pastor-scholars. He will be a great blessing as we continue focusing on forming and shaping the next generation of pastor-minded ministry leaders for our churches.”

Dr. Drake noted, “Joining this faculty is an honor. Covenant’s emphasis on integrating theological formation with practical ministry training was an immense blessing in my own development. I look forward to helping pass this vision on to the next genera-

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*“Joining this faculty is an honor. . . . I look forward to . . . continuing the legacy of training pastors and ministry leaders who are deeply rooted in Scripture and Reformed orthodoxy, and who can minister effectively to the contemporary world for God’s glory.”*

K.J. DRAKE, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology

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tion of students and continuing the legacy of training pastors and ministry leaders who are deeply rooted in Scripture and Reformed orthodoxy, and who can minister effectively to the contemporary world for God’s glory.”



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**Dr. Richard Joe Named to Paul D. Kooistra Chair of World Missions**

We are pleased to announce that **Dr. Richard Joe** is joining our faculty this summer as **Associate Professor of World Missions** and the first occupant of the Paul D. Kooistra Chair of World Missions. Dr. Joe comes to us from Mission to the World, where he has served for several years as Persian Global Ministries Regional Coordinator. He also was the Persian Regional Director for Mosaix Academy.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Dr. Joe has had a calling to serve Persians ever since his first trip to the Middle East in 1993. He pastored a PCA church in California for several years, moved to Europe in 2006 to pastor a Persian church, returned to the US for

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further study and then the Middle East in 2013 to teach and train international church leaders. In 2017 he returned to the US for PhD studies. In addition to teaching at Covenant Seminary, Dr. Joe will continue to teach and train international church leaders in Europe, the Middle East, and other regions of the world. He holds a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a Master of Professional Studies in Persian from the University of Maryland, a Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary, and BA in International Studies from Muhlenberg College.

President Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs said, “Dr. Joe’s many years of experience in global missions and his heart for reaching the unreached with the message of the gospel make him an ideal choice to be the first to fill the Kooistra Chair, named in honor of Dr. Paul D. Kooistra, former President of Covenant Seminary, former Coordinator of Mission to the World, and former President of Erskine College, whose influence on our institution and on the PCA and beyond has been enormous. Dr. Joe will be our first full-time missiology professor in more than a decade. We are immensely grateful to have him with us.”

MTW Coordinator Dr. Lloyd Kim noted, “We are thrilled for Covenant Seminary to name Dr. Joe as its Paul Kooistra Chair of World Missions. Richard and his wife, Hyeyoung, have served faithfully as missionaries with Mission to the World for many years in some challenging contexts. He will bring to this role both academic expertise and invaluable field experience. We are excited for the many students Dr. Joe will equip, train, and inspire for global missions.”

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#### Other Faculty/Staff Updates



**Dr. Dan Doriani**, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, who has been teaching for us part time over the last year while serving as Interim Senior Pastor for Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, will **return to full-time** teaching at Covenant later this year. We are grateful for the opportunity Dr. Doriani has had to provide pastoral leadership and stability for this flagship church of our denomination following the unexpected passing of long-time Senior Pastor Dr. Harry Reeder in May 2023. Dr. Doriani continues to bless our students and the broader church through his work with the Center for Faith and Working St. Louis, of which he is Founder and President, and through his many speaking and teaching engagements and publications.



**Dr. Aaron Goldstein**, Associate Professor of Old Testament and Director of Online Learning, will **step into a full-time teaching role** in our Old Testament department beginning July 2024. Dr. Goldstein began in 2015 as a Visiting Instructor in Old Testament and took on additional responsibilities with Covenant’s online program in 2018. In 2021, Dr. Goldstein joined the faculty as Assistant Professor of Old Testament and also became the Director of Online Learning.

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He also currently serves as an Associate Pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Kirkwood, Missouri.



**Dr. Robbie Griggs**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the ThM Program, will **assume the role of Dean of Faculty** as Dr. Brad Matthews moves from that role to Vice President of Academics (see below). Dr. Griggs will continue to oversee the ThM program. He joined our faculty in 2016 and has been an invaluable player on the Covenant team, serving as a member of the Seminary's Chapel steering committee, one of the Faculty Advisors for the student-led Theological Fellowship at Covenant Seminary, a member of the board of the student-produced *The Common Table* magazine, and overseer of the revitalized David C. Jones Theology Lectures. He also serves on Missouri Presbytery's Credentials Committee.



**Dr. Brad Matthews**, Associate Professor of New Testament and Dean of Faculty, will step into the role of **Vice President of Academics** in July 2025 when Dr. Jay Sklar, the current VP, shifts back to full-time teaching and writing (see below). Dr. Matthews joined our faculty in 2008. He has published on the topics of Christian maturity and interpretive issues in Colossians and is currently working on a popular version of his doctoral thesis as well a work on the topic of Christian authority. He also serves as Assistant Pastor at South City Church (PCA) in St. Louis.



**Dr. Jay Sklar**, currently Vice President of Academics and Professor of Old Testament, has, after nearly a decade in that role, decided to **shift back to full-time teaching and writing** as of the end of the current academic and fiscal year. He also served as Dean of Faculty from 2012 to 2020. Dr. Sklar is the author of *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* as well as important commentaries on Numbers (Story of God, Zondervan) and two on Leviticus (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament; Tynedale/IVP Old Testament Commentary). He also serves as one of three general editors for Crossway's ESV Expository Commentary series (for which he has written on Exodus and Jonah) and offers a helpful collection of resources for preaching and teaching on the Pentateuch at [preachandteachthebible.com](http://preachandteachthebible.com).



**Dr. Jessie Swigart**, Assistant Professor of Educational Ministries and Dean of Academic Administration, **recently defended her dissertation and earned her PhD** through Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Completed under Dr. Donald Guthrie, Dr. Swigart's dissertation explored professional identity formation in early career helping professionals. Dr. Swigart joined the staff of Covenant Seminary as Academics Coordinator in 2009 and was appointed Associate Dean of Academics in 2013 and Dean of Academic Administration in 2016. In this role she works with the Vice President of Academics to manage and evaluate the academic processes of the Seminary, and also teaches in the Educational Ministries department.

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*“I received Dr. Kooistra’s invaluable training in MTW as he laid a foundation of gospel-centered grace. This Chair reflects Covenant’s ongoing commitment to take that impact to the ends of the earth. I am deeply honored.”*

DR. RICHARD JOE, Paul D. Kooistra Chair of World Missions

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**Mr. Nate Whitfield (MDiv '23)** joined our staff in spring 2025 as our **Admissions Recruiter**. Originally from the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, Nate is the twenty-second person in his extended family to have graduated from Wheaton College, where he earned a BS in Computer Science. He worked in consulting and sales and relationship management in Maine and St. Louis, before coming to Covenant Seminary to study for his MDiv. Nate’s enthusiasm for the Seminary and love for people make him a valuable addition to our Admissions team.

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#### Farewell to Old Friends



**Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Benton Jr. (1941–2025)**. With our brothers and sisters in the Presbyterian Church in America, Covenant Seminary mourned the passing in January of Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Benton Jr. following a long battle with Alzheimer’s disease. Our hearts are with Dr. Benton’s beloved wife, Pam, his children and grandchildren, and their family and friends as they grieve his loss, but we rejoice as well that Dr. Benton is now in the presence of the glorious Savior he loved so much and served so well. We praise God for Dr. Benton’s

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*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.*

EPHESIANS 4:11-12

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many years of pastoral ministry, twenty of which were at Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, not far from the Seminary. We are grateful for his love and support of Covenant over the decades, as he shared his wisdom and expertise as a preacher and pastor with our students as an adjunct homiletics professor and Doctor of Ministry instructor, and served as a faithful friend and mentor for countless Covenant faculty, staff, and alumni. His involvement with and support for the Seminary's Center for Ministry Leadership in the early 2000s helped refine and sharpen the institution's focus on preparing strong pastors and other leaders for Christ's church. Dr. Benton's influence on Covenant and on our denomination has been profound.



**Eleanor "Ellie" Brown (1943–2025).** Many of our alumni and long-term staff and faculty remember Ellie Brown, former Financial Aid Director and Registrar for the Seminary, who passed away in January 2025 in DeSoto, Missouri, at the age of 81. Ellie served at the Seminary for many years after an already full career in health care services. After her retirement from Covenant, she managed the Paradise Valley Resort in Cassville, Missouri, for several years. Ellie loved working and serving our students, and many still recall fondly her kindness and expertise in helping them get the financial aid they needed to pursue their seminary studies. Ellie is survived by her children, grandchildren, siblings, and a large contingent of friends and relations.

# BOOK RELEASE

VOL. 36

SPRING 2025

ISSUE 1



## “Take Up and Read...”

**A selection of recent faculty and alumni publications for the growth of the church.**

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Our faculty’s influence reaches far beyond the classroom as professors mentor and disciple students, serve in local congregations, share their teaching and preaching abilities with the larger church in the US and around the world, and engage with the culture of our day from a biblical, gospel-centered perspective. Their books, journal articles, blog posts, conference and seminar talks, and other online resources are a great blessing to the church. The same is true for our growing number of alumni who serve as pastors, church planters, missionaries, counselors, and other ministry leaders in churches and other settings in all 50 states and 51 countries.

ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

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## Faculty Releases

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**“Anaphora Pilati,” “Paradosis Pilati,” “Pilate Cycle,” and “Vindicta Salvatoris” in Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, ed. P. van Geest, B. J. L. Peerbolte, and D. Hunter Brill, 2024**

● By Dr. David W. Chapman. These short scholarly articles explore ancient documents relating to Jesus’s trial before Pilate and the aftermath of his execution.

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**“The Testimony of the Lord is Sure,” But What About Everyone Else’s?—The Shape of Sola Scriptura: The Place of Extra-Biblical Material in Biblical Thinking *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2025)**

● By Dr. C. John Collins. Non-canonical ancient Hebrew and Christian writings have much to tell us and can contribute greatly to our understanding of Scripture—if we read them with discernment. In this article, Dr. Collins presents a case for wise use of extra-biblical materials.

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**The Death of the Deadly Sins: Embracing the Virtues That Transform Lives *P&R Publishing, 2025***

● Edited by Dr. Daniel M. Doriani. Each deadly sin has virtues to counterpoint it. Dr. Doriani, along with Michael Kruger, Jen Pollock Michel, and others explore biblical teaching on godly character and the practices and means of grace that promote virtue.

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**Centered on Christ’s Mission to Train the Next Generation**

*Covenant Magazine* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2024)

● By Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs. In this essay, Dr. Gibbs outlines the key pillars of the Seminary’s recently implemented Strategic Plan and looks at how our progress in these areas is building on our strong foundation to expand and enhance our ability to train and sustain pastor-minded leaders for the future of Christ’s church.

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**On the Relevance of Creeds and Confessions**

*Covenant Magazine* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2025)

● By Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs. This article, reprinted from the Spring 2023 edition of *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, examines the historical importance of the creeds and confessions of the Christian church and why they are not only relevant but also necessary for the ongoing spiritual health of the church.

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**The Passover Meal: A Meal for Remembering**

*byFaith online, November 19, 2024*

● By Dr. Aaron Goldstein. Dr. Goldstein looks at the significance of the Passover for the collective memory and identity of the ancient Israelites, and what relevance this has for Christians today as we view the meal through the lens of its connection to Jesus Christ.

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**Virtue and Vice in Christian Thought: A Brief Sketch**

*Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 50, no. 2 (Fall 2024)

● By Dr. Robbie Griggs. This article is a longer and more

technical version of material adapted from Dr. Griggs’s chapter in *The Death of the Deadly Sins: Embracing the Virtues That Transform Lives*, edited by Daniel M. Doriani (see above) and looks at the history of Christian thinking on virtue and vice.

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**Find and Get Your Ideal Ministry Job *J. Hathaway, 2025***

● By Dr. Joel D. Hathaway. Based on 20 years of experience coaching pastoral candidates and consulting with church search committees and adapted from material originally taught in Dr. Hathaway’s seminary class on Candidating and Transitioning Into Ministry, this step-by-step guide helps candidates find the best ministry positions, navigate search committees, ace interviews, understand church dynamics, and much more.

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**The Debate on Marriage at the Westminster Assembly (1644)**

*Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 50, no. 2 (Fall 2024)

● By Dr. Drew Martin. Among the many theological and practical items discussed during the Westminster Assembly, one that sparked considerable debate among the Divines was marriage—specifically, the relationship between marriage and worship, and the role of the minister in relation to the civil magistrate. Dr. Martin offers a fascinating look at the discussion.

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**Francis J. Grimké: An Introduction to His Life and Ministry**

*byFaith online, Feb. 15, 2025*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. Adapt-

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ed from material in Dr. Martin's book on Grimké (see below), this short article provides a perfect introduction to the man who pastored in Washington, DC, for 50 years and became an important early figure in the civil rights movement.

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**Grimké on the Christian Life: Christian Vitality for the Church and the World**

*Crossway, 2025*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. Part of Crossway's Theologians on the Christian Life series, this groundbreaking book looks at the life and ministry of Francis J. Grimké, who, though born en-

slaved in South Carolina became an influential pastor, preacher, and tireless confronter of the racism and injustice of his time and whose legacy has important implications for us today.

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**Is Neo-Calvinism a Thing?**

*Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review 51, no. 1 (Spring 2025)*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. What exactly is Neo-Calvinism? Where did it come from? How has it developed over the years and what has its influence been? Does it still have relevance in today's world? Dr. Martin takes an in-depth look at these and other questions in light of the 2023

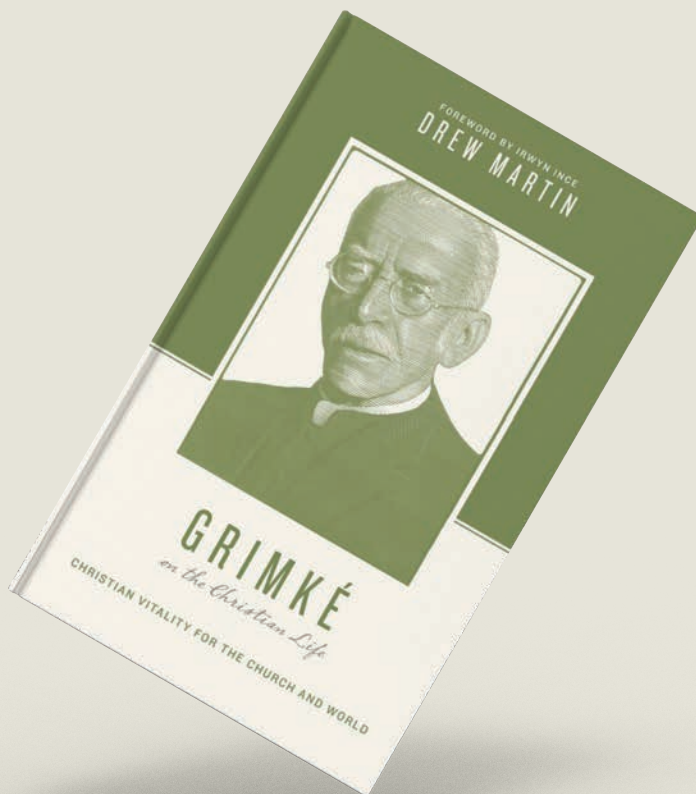
book *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction*, by Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto.

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**Is the Story of Jonah and the Whale a Historical Account or a Parable? (Jonah 1 and 2)"**

*Crossway.org, June 19, 2024*

● By Dr. Jay Sklar. In this short reflection adapted from material Dr. Sklar published in the *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 7: *Daniel–Malachi*, ed. I. M. Duguid, J. M. Hamilton, and J. Sklar, he explores the varying views on how one looks at the story of Jonah and the difference that makes to our understanding of Scripture.



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### Compelling Preaching and the Mission of God

*Covenant Magazine 35, no. 2 (Fall 2024)*

● By Dr. Thurman Williams. As an outgrowth of the recent Compelling Preaching Initiative grant the Seminary received from the Lilly Endowment, our Director of Homiletics here delves into the significance of preaching for the ongoing mission of God, drawing on everything from the book of Acts to the history of Reformed missions, and more.

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### “Preaching Before the Lord” and “Four Lessons on Preaching From Grimke’s Ministry”

*by Faith online, August 28, 2024, and February 19, 2025*

● By Dr. Thurman Williams. In these two short articles, Dr. Williams looks at the importance of the preacher’s character and life to the effectiveness of his preaching; the second draws on the life and ministry of influential preacher Francis J. Grimke.

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### How One Liberal Theologian Found Jesus: The Enduring Testimony of Eta Linnemann (1926–2009)

*The Gospel Coalition, July 25, 2024*

● By Dr. Robert W. Yarbrough. Dr. Yarbrough here tells the fascinating story of a liberal scholar and Bible teacher whose view of everything began to change when she encountered the living Son of God in, of all places, the Bible.

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## Alumni Publications

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### The Children’s Sanctuary Sunday School/Worship Curriculum

*FaithPassing.org, various years*

● By Cynthia S. Fischer (MAEM ’14). The TCS curriculum fosters faith in preschool to early elementary children using the framework of worship and the theme of God’s covenant story as told through Bible stories. The environment is one of a quiet sanctuary, and the class follows a simplified worship liturgy with a Bible Story illustrated with objects in a basket or box, and a concluding song and Benediction in which each child is prayed for by name.

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### A Living Faith: A Devotional Journey Through James (2023); Got Hope?: A Devotional Journey Through 1 Peter (2024); Greater Love: A Devotional Journey Through 1 John (2025)

*PCA Bookstore*

● By Stanley D. Gale (DMin ’97). Faith, hope, and love are basic to life and maturity in Jesus Christ. This trilogy of Devotionals for Discipleship leads readers in practical exploration of these basics as featured in the epistles of James, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

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### Keep Writing: 101 Strategies for Academic Writers

*Independently published, 2025*

● By Pat Goodson (MATS, ’92) and Margarita Huerta. For those who must write for a living, this book offers bite-sized suggestions for sustaining their motivation and practice across time. Pat is Professor Emerita at Texas A&M University, and

her co-author is founder of the online service Real Academics.

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### At His Feet Bible Studies Series 19Baskets, various dates

● By Christine Gordon (MATS ’03), with Hope Blanton. If you’re a woman who feels like you don’t have time to study the Bible in a deep, meaningful way, but you want to, this series of studies is for you. The authors have the ability to create questions that guide the reader and apply God’s Word in helpful ways. Designed to be completed in just twenty minutes, each study is substantive, time efficient, and useful for individual and group studies.

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### His Spear Through My Side into Luther: Calvin’s Relationship to Luther’s Doctrine of the Will

*Vandenhoock & Ruprecht, 2024*

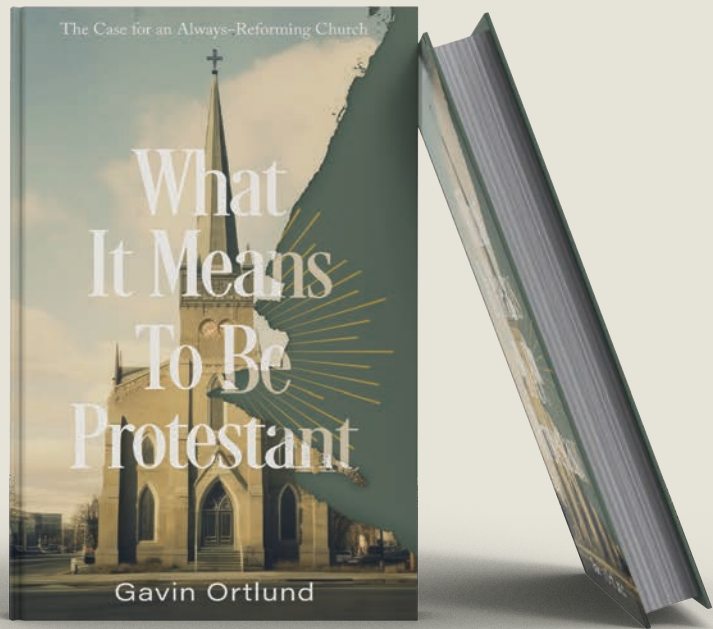
● By Matt Heckel (MDiv ’98). While some scholars have challenged Luther and Calvin’s unity on the will, Heckel, who serves as Visiting Instructor in Church History at Covenant, argues that Calvin defended Luther’s doctrine of the will bound to sin and divine sovereignty, against the work of Albert Pighius, and that Luther influenced Calvin in unique ways.

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### God’s Plan for Development: Leading Others to Understand God’s Good Design

*PCA Committee for Discipleship Ministries, 2025*

● By Zoe E. Jones (pseudonym). Designed to equip parents and caregivers of children ages 0–5 years with engaging,



nurturing, and educational activities to support healthy relational attachment, this 8-week curriculum is perfect for church groups, parenting groups, neighborhood outreach, or day-care/school programs.

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**Pour Out Your Heart: Discovering Joy, Strength, and Intimacy with God Through Prayer**

*B&H Books, 2025*

● By Jeremy Linneman (DMin '25). Whereas some approach prayer in a one-sided way, Linneman here looks at prayer as both communion with God and an act of boldness in seeking God's transformative power to work mightily in our world. We pour out our hearts in the presence of our loving, all-powerful Father, and

he pours back his love and power into us.

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**What It Means to Be Protestant: The Case for an Always-Reforming Church**

*Zondervan Academic, 2024*

● By Gavin Ortlund (MDiv '09). Congratulations to the winner of the 2024 *Christianity Today* Book of the Year Award in the Popular Theology category, and winner of *Credo Magazine's* Award in Theological Retrieval! Ortlund draws from his scholarly work in church history and his personal experience in ecumenical engagement to offer a much-needed defense of the Protestant tradition. Retrieving classical Protestant texts and arguments, he shows how many of the contemporary objections

leveled against Protestants are rooted in caricature, and how historically rooted Protestantism offers the best pathway forward for Christians today.

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**Nurtured: God's Tender Care for New and Expectant Mothers**

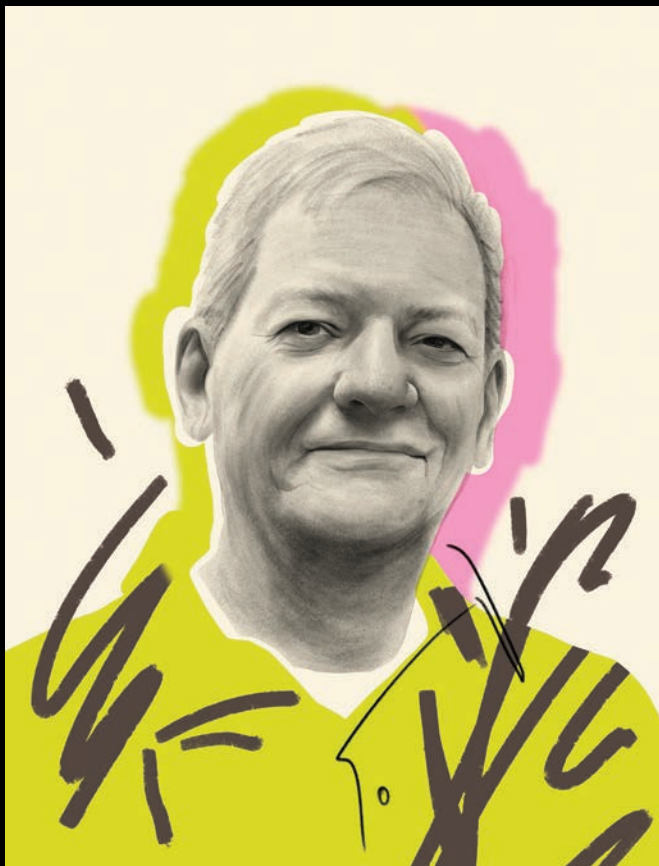
*PCA Committee for Discipleship Ministries, 2025*

● By Annalisa Smith (MAM '25). This 9-week group Bible study connects expectant and new mothers to scriptural passages to reveal the One whose tender love strengthens them for the beautiful task he has given them. Designed to require no written preparation, with a mostly hands-free experience, it's a Bible study meant for the crazy-full days of baby-juggling life. Includes leader's guide.

# Ministry at the Intersection of Science, Linguistics, and Faith: Getting to Know Dr. Jack Collins

*Science, linguistics, and faith may seem an unlikely combination of interests, but they led Jack Collins to a full and fruitful life of ministry.*

By Rick Matt



**A** LIFELONG INTEREST IN SCIENCE and a master's degree in systems engineering put Dr. C. John "Jack" Collins on track to pursue a career in that field, but an equally strong interest in linguistics—and the persistent desire to study and teach the Bible—changed his trajectory. Dr. Collins, who is retiring from Covenant after 32 years of faithful service (see "Faculty & Staff" in this issue), shared his story in this recent interview.

**Rick Matt (RM):** Let's begin with a little bit of your background. Where are you from originally? What was your faith situation like?

**Jack Collins (JC):** My parents are from the New York City area, but I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. My father was a troubleshooting manager for RCA and moved around a lot to various branches and districts. We then lived in Atlanta until I was five, then in New Jersey until I was 10, then here in Missouri for a while, where my older brother became a friend of the Chapell family. He was converted through the influence of [former CTS President and current Stated Clerk of the PCA] Bryan Chapell's older brothers. Bryan and I were classmates in school, but we didn't know each other very well at the time. Then my family moved to the Chicago area and from there to the Boston area.

As to my faith background, my father was a lapsed Catholic. Having served in the Second World War and so forth, he was pretty bitter about religion. My mother had been raised a Missouri Synod Lutheran. So, my siblings and I were nominally Christian. I did make a sort of profession of faith when we lived in Chicago but didn't really come to a living faith until my second year of college. I went to MIT with the intent of studying math and physics and ended up in computer science and systems engineering. My brother's faith had really taken hold, though, and during Christmas break in my second year at MIT, he invited me to a Navigators conference. That's where I was converted, just over 50 years ago now. After that I finished a BS and MS at MIT, then worked in the Boston area for three years before going to seminary.

In the meantime, as I grew in my Christian faith and led Bible studies with the Navigators, a new student came into my Bible study. Her name was Diane, and she eventually became my wife. We were married in 1979. She also completed her BA and MA at MIT, while I was working. After that, we moved to Washington State, where I went to Faith Lutheran Seminary while Diane worked for Boeing. Then she was able to land a job in London, so we went to the UK, where I did my PhD in Hebrew at the University of Liverpool's School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies while living in London. We lived there three and a half years, then came back to the States, where I eventually planted a church in Spokane, Washington, over the course of another three and a half years.

**RM:** How did you get from there to teaching at Covenant Seminary?

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**JC:** As the church plant was in the process of organizing, Bob Yarbrough, who was in his first stint of teaching here at Covenant, and then Bryan Chappell, who was serving as Dean at the time, both contacted me about submitting my resume for an open teaching position. Bryan and I had reconnected a couple of years earlier when he was one of the assessors at the MNA church planting assessment I went through. So, I sent in my resume and was called to come teach at Covenant. I started in January of 1993. They wanted me because I could teach both Hebrew and Greek, which I've been teaching ever since, as well as classes on the Prophetic Books, the Psalms and Wisdom Books, the Old Testament Historical Books, a class on Science and Faith, and many other things.

**RM:** To backtrack a little bit, tell me how you went from working in systems engineering to going to seminary.

**JC:** I was leading those Bible studies for the Navigators at MIT while also working in engineering. But I quickly realized I was not adequately equipped. My initial goal was to go to seminary for the tools to do intelligent ministry, then finish a PhD in systems engineering. Instead, when I was in seminary, I kept getting positive feedback from the elders of the church we attended, so I decided to stay and get my MDiv. It just seemed like ministry was what I was cut out for, particularly biblical languages.

**RM:** How did your interest in languages develop?

**JC:** I've always been interested in linguistics. My mother's grandparents spoke German, and I heard a little bit of German from Mom. Mostly what she said was the equivalent of "Hurry up!" My father's mother spoke a little Irish, and the main phrase I remember her using was the equivalent of "Shut up!" I'm sure that says a lot about me! When I was choosing a college, one goal was to study German linguistics, particularly Scandinavian languages. In seminary, I also did a lot of Hebrew and comparative Semitics study. Then during the half-year before we left for the UK, I took more Hebrew, including modern Hebrew, and refreshed my French and German. Then I started graduate linguistic studies.

**In church plants, people tend to get closely intertwined with each other. Lots of good things happened in that congregation. I learned a lot about ministry there.**

In the UK, my wife worked for the Chase Manhattan Corporation and we lived in the London area while I worked on my thesis. My advisor was a good, conscientious Christian man named Alan Millard, who was very helpful to me with some crises of faith at the time. Also on that faculty was Kenneth Kitchen, the renowned Egyptologist. Both men became good friends of ours. They took very good care of us.

Our church in the London area also loved us well. There was a lot of anti-American sentiment in England at the time because of the American bombing of Libya, and the planes had taken off from English bases. But our church people were very kind to us, so much so that our kids are named after some of them. I finished my thesis in 1988, then we visited the States that fall to do the church planting assessment, and I was asked to plant a church in Spokane. So, we came back to the States for good in May of 1989 and started the plant in Spokane that June.

**RM:** Why church planting? Had that been a goal of yours previously?

**JC:** No, it hadn't. That came about because when I was looking for potential teaching jobs stateside, there wasn't much available. And the only pastoral post on offer at the time was an interim pastorate at a church undergoing a serious crisis, which I was advised not to pursue. Someone suggested that I put my name in the hat for church planting, which I'd never thought of. I figured I'd give it a

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whirl. We were approved at the assessment in the fall of 1988 and ended up in Spokane in 1989.

**RM:** What was that experience of church planting like?

**JC:** It was hard work. I'd just been through a PhD program, which was hard enough, but this was a very different kind of hard work. It included a lot of people contact and administrative stuff, which I hadn't had to do as a doctoral student. I had to learn a lot of those skills. I started the process believing we had a core group ready but soon found out we did not. We had contacts, but not a core group. I spent several months gathering one by doing Bible studies and such.

Over a couple of years of services, the church grew until we had about a hundred people in our orbit. That was extremely good at the time given that Washington was competing with Oregon as the least churching state in the country. There were only a few other PCA churches in the region and the nearest congregation to us was 275 miles away. Today we have several churches out there, though it's still pretty hard going. So, we were doing pretty well under the circumstances.

The church was already in the midst of the official organizing process with the presbytery when I got the phone call from Covenant about coming to teach. Our people very much encouraged me to take the opportunity. They said I shouldn't pass it up. I'm *pretty* sure they said that because they believed it and not because they wanted to get rid of me!

**RM:** I'm sure that was the case. So, you came to Covenant in 1993?

**JC:** It was the summer and fall of 1992 when I candidated at Covenant. I was officially called during the board meeting that September and started teaching in spring of 1993. We left the church with a lot of tears. A large contingent of the congregation came to the airport to see us off and we all wept profusely. In church plants, people tend to get closely intertwined with each other. Lots of good things happened in that congregation. I learned a lot about ministry there. I was glad to hear that they were able to find a successor for me reasonably soon, but unfortunately, he stayed only

about five years before moving on. The successor after him, sadly, had some issues that eventually caused the church to close.

**RM:** That must have been heartbreaking for you.

**JC:** Yes, it was pretty hard. But a few years ago, I was asked to speak at the organization service for another church plant in Spokane led by one of our graduates. He and the pastor of another congregation who attended that service told me they thought their churches owed their existence to what happened at the church I planted all those years ago. Some of our people had been the base on which the thousand or so people worshiping in those two churches had been built. So, there was some measure of healing in that for me and, I hope, for others.

**RM:** What was it about Covenant that made you want to come here to teach?

**JC:** I was actually being recruited at two places, but Covenant was attractive first of all because it was the seminary of the denomination I was ordained in. I also had connections with various people here—not just the Rayburn and Chapell families, but I also knew David Jones, who had been very helpful to me over the years, and Paul Kooistra. There was also the Francis Schaeffer connection, which was a draw for me. Covenant was small back then, but it was starting to grow, which is one of the reasons I was hired. We saw some phenomenal growth in the 1990s.

**RM:** And now you've been here for 32 years! What are some high points for you?

**JC:** I have enjoyed learning how to teach, learning how to relate to students, and also learning my subject matter well enough to be able to teach it. When I started, I was thrown in at the deep end with a third-semester Hebrew class, a third-semester Greek class, and a Prophetic Books class. It was a bit overwhelming. Just because you have a PhD in Hebrew Linguistics doesn't mean you know everything there is to know about the Bible. I had to learn a lot.

I've also felt stimulated to be a lifelong learner—which of course is one of our themes around

here—not just because of the classroom and the needs of the students, but also because of my colleagues. I'm very, very grateful for the colleagues I've had. I feel like we have worked well as a team and the product of the team has been better than the product of the individual contributions. There's something about the team itself. And I felt this way even before we started doing team teaching.

Additionally, most of the things I've written have come out of classes I've taught or issues that have arisen along the way. I've also had some very exciting opportunities come my way. One was a grant from the Templeton Foundation for the purpose of creating a class on science and faith. Through my work on that I got interested in the subject of miracles and God's action in the world, which resulted in my book *The God of Miracles*, and a more general book called *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* And of course, that involved studies in Genesis, which led to further research and writing on that topic, such as my book *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* Connections made through that process led to my involvement with the Creation Project of the Carl Henry Center for Theological Understanding at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and to a year-long fellowship there. One result of that work was the writing of my book *Reading Genesis Well*.

My work at Covenant also got me appointed to the Creation Study Committee for the PCA, which produced the Report on Creation Days, and around the same time I was asked to be on the translation committee that created the English Standard Version of the Bible. I was chairman of the Old Testament translation team and privileged to work alongside the great J. I. Packer and many other incredible scholars. One of the great things about being on those two committees was that even though we had sharp disagreements at times, we learned how to benefit from each other, and again, I think the results ended up being greater than the sum of the individual parts. That year at the Henry Center and the opportunity to work on the ESV were real high points for me. I cannot get over how privileged I am to have been able to do both of those things.

Of course, there have been some challenges along the way as well. My work on the historical Adam and Eve has not always been well received by some in our circles, but it has opened up a lot

of opportunities and new avenues for ministry in speaking about the topic and why it matters. I'm happy to say that despite that critical fire I've always felt well supported by the Seminary administration, even as we've been through several transitions in leadership over the years. They've always been very helpful and encouraging of me and my work.

**RM:** So, as you get ready to retire, what's next for Jack Collins?

**JC:** Well, I have about five or six very nerdy research projects that I want to do while I still have the energy and the mental capacity to do them. Some of those are building on things I've already done, if only tangentially, but others more substantially.

As for other plans, I have grandchildren who live locally so my wife and I look forward to being more involved in their lives, which is a big deal for us. Also, our daughter is moving back here after 11 years in South America. Our plan is to stay here in Missouri, but we would like to do some traveling and other things we haven't been able to do during the years we've been here. Diane is from the Pacific Northwest and "pines" for it, you might say, so we'll probably head out that way. She also really wants to see Italy, so I guess sooner or later we'll do that.

**RM:** Do you have any last thoughts you'd like to share about Covenant?

**JC:** Mostly I would like to say that my colleagues are an absolute treasure, and I would like people to treat them as such. None of us is perfect and there are always ways we can improve, but people improve better when they are loved and appreciated. These are good, learned, sincere people, and it's been an immense privilege to know and work with them. I would like them to be appreciated for what they are.

**RM:** Amen to that! ■

*Rick Matt is Senior Writer and Editor for Covenant Seminary and loves to tell the stories of what God is doing in and through the lives of CTS students, graduates, and faculty. He also serves as a ruling elder in the PCA.*

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Ascribe to the LORD  
the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the  
splendor of holiness.  
(Psalm 29:2)

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all things were made. For us men and for our salvation  
 y in accordance with the Scriptu  
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 and I look forward to the resurrection of

then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, tea  
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 ilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with  
 he dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
 holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

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 ty of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided  
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# On the Relevance of Creeds and Confessions

he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit  
was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at  
the right hand of the Father, and he will come  
again with the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified, who has the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in God, the Father  
almighty, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

being by no means taken away by the union, but rather  
the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets foretold, who  
all things visible and invisible.  
through him all things were made. For us men and  
for our salvation he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day,  
ascended into heaven, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
ascended into heaven,

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
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the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory with the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in God, the Father almighty, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

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through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

ably, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means dissolved into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten of the Father, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, who with the Father together, who with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, ascended into heaven, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead. Amen. We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, who with the Father together, who with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

the mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two persons, without confusion of person, without change of substance, without division of nature being preserved, and concurred in one person, who with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught and commanded us, that we should worship and adore his only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, who with the Father together, who with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory with the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in God, the Father almighty, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in God, the Father almighty, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. We expect his resurrection, and the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

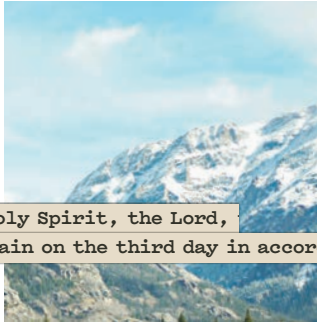
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen. I believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means dissolved into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten of the Father, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, who with the Father together, who with the Father and the Son together, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who speaks through the apostles. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

nd down to us. I believe in one God, the Father almighty, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

*CreeDs and confessions have historically served many purposes in the life of the church, but are they still relevant today? And why do we need them if we have the Scriptures?*

*Photography by Keghan Crossland*



I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
and rose again on the third day in accordance with

## **INTRODUCTION**

Two things the Lord used to confirm in my heart a call to ministry were a love for his Word and a passion to help others understand it so that they might know Jesus. Both of these are essential to faithful theological inquiry.

Your words were found, and I ate them,  
and your words became to me a joy  
and the delight of my heart,  
for I am called by your name,  
O Lord, God of hosts. (Jer. 15:16)

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. 2:1–2)

To these two, there is a third Scriptural priority I want to highlight that is equally essential to faithful theological inquiry: guardianship. Paul writes,

“By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14).

Lest we think this guardianship refers only to doctrine, Covenant Seminary Professor of New Testament Dr. Bob Yarbrough, quoting Timo-

thy Johnson, reminds us that the deposit refers to “the way of life found in the healthy teaching that accords with the good news.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Yarbrough notes that the ethic of Christian obedience ought not be abstracted from the “doctrine that informs it and the historical truth that the good news consists in.”<sup>2</sup>

Taken together, then, these three passages call us to love the Word of the Lord, pass down that Word to faithful believers who will also be able to pass it down to succeeding generations, and to preserve a faithful understanding of this Word so that the church can live faithfully and in obedience to Christ.

The point worth observing is this: the church cannot fulfill this task without taking up the work of creating and preserving a creedal and confessional<sup>3</sup> reading of the Scriptures. I write this in full awareness that for some the notion of any systematic or unitive theological effort invokes fear and raises suspicion. To name only a few possible misgivings:

- a. Those who write creeds and confessions err.<sup>4</sup>
- b. Creeds and confessions introduce “illegitimate ecclesiastical constraint upon free and rational inquiry.”<sup>5</sup>
- c. Creeds and confessions written later unduly influence careful exegesis.<sup>6</sup>
- d. Creeds and confessions (and systematic theology more broadly) abstract the historical narrative of the Scriptures and subject it to extra-biblical systems.

To be sure, there are pitfalls, but, they should not scuttle the project of forming and passing down a confessional reading of the Scriptures. Neither do they outweigh the considerable benefits arising from this work.

As the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America, Covenant Theological Seminary gladly rejoices in our confessional standards and believes them to be essential to the performance of the mission in this world that Christ has given to us.<sup>7</sup> In no way do they detract from the Christian’s calling to completely submit to the authority of the Scriptures in all

*The most important purpose deriving from the creeds and confessions of the church is their ability to clarify and summarize what the Bible says in ways that serve a specific historical and cultural context.*

matters of faith and practice.<sup>8</sup> In fact, their work is complementary. More broadly, all creeds and confessions of the church ought to be conceived as subordinate stewards, strengthening our ability to understand and teach the Scriptures faithfully and promoting greater obedience to Christ and service in his Kingdom.

Though not exhaustive, I'd like to suggest five reasons why this is true. I also hope that you will come away with a greater appreciation of, and encouragement to employ, our confessional standards in your ministry, regular teaching, and corporate worship.

#### **1. CONFESSIONS CLARIFY AND SUMMARIZE WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES FOR THE CHURCH.**

The most important purpose deriving from the creeds and confessions of the church is their ability to clarify and summarize what the Bible says in ways that serve a specific historical and cultural context. Surveying the history of the church, it is evident that creeds and confessions were often created to defend the clear teaching of the Scripture against those who would twist the Bible to serve selfish and erroneous conclusions. For example, in the earliest creeds of the church, like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Creed of Chalce-

don, the church, using the language available to it, articulated and defended the important doctrines of the Trinity, the unique divinity of Jesus Christ (*homoousios* not *homoiousios*), and the full humanity of Christ (*incarnatus*). In each succeeding generation of the church, new questions and heresies emerge. At those critical junctures, the ensuing debates may require the church to clarify and affirm important biblical teaching in relation to those disputed issues. As they have been handed down to us, these documents are now critical to our understanding of the Bible's teachings and guide us as we wrestle afresh with old questions and as we engage new and unforeseen ones.

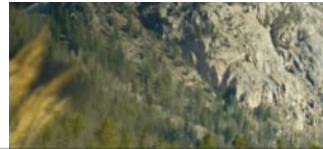
#### **2. CONFESSIONS HIGHLIGHT THE COMMUNAL TASK ESSENTIAL TO THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY WHILE HONORING THE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH.**

Throughout its history, the church has been called to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Faithfulness to that task through the centuries has produced not only Christians, but diverse communities of faith, comprising churches, denominations, and whole theological traditions. Consequently, no one today approaches the Bible *tabula rasa*, as though language,

*All creeds and confessions of the church ought to be conceived as subordinate stewards, strengthening our ability to understand and teach the Scriptures faithfully and promoting greater obedience to Christ and service in his Kingdom.*

historical context, cultural realities, and intellectual capacities do not affect the task of interpreting the Bible. Despite the protestation of those who declare “no creed but Christ,” it is impossible to approach the Bible without acknowledging that Scripture and the interpretation of Scripture have already been received, studied, taught, and obeyed by generations of believers across diverse cultures. As Scott Swain, quoting Abraham Kuyper, notes, “[T]he Christian reader ‘is no isolated worker, but . . . the organ of restored humanity. Christian reading is thus a communal enterprise.’”<sup>9</sup>

For this reason, Christian summaries of the Bible’s doctrinal and ethical teaching are both a communal blessing and serve a normative, though not ultimate, authority in the life of the church. That the creeds and confessions were formed in the context of communities of faith that were “with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27) is an abiding example for us in the church for how *we* ought always to be wrestling with the truth of the gospel. There are no solitary disciples of Jesus or interpreters of his Word. That these creeds and confessions were received by the church, then, honors that work and solidifies their normative function



God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.  
and was buried; he descended to the de



in the church's life. Indeed, it is impossible today, more than two millennia after the closing of the canon, "to contend for the faith" without honoring the contributions of the church's deposit of creeds and confessions.

In confessing the creeds and confessions of the church as authoritative, we number ourselves in the communion of those who celebrate a shared understanding of God, ourselves, and the world we inhabit. Honoring the creeds and confessions of the church, then, is a matter of Christian humility. Paul summons us to "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Receiving our theological tradition as articulated in our confessional standards is a matter of being a humble student of the Word, yet all the while recognizing that our own study must necessarily follow in the footsteps of many others who have, in obedience to Christ and in the power of his Spirit, trod this path before us.

### **3. CONFESSIONS SERVE TO UNITE THE CHURCH IN DOCTRINE, WORSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, AND MISSION.**

As already noted, despite there being many historical, cultural, and linguistic factors affecting the hermeneutical task and specific theological conclusions emerging from this work, these do not deny, but rather establish essential biblical doctrines as transcultural, having relevance that spans across history. Rooted in the unchangeable character of our God, a shared story of creation-fall-redemption, and a common anthropology, those redeemed in Christ have many more things in common than they do outstanding differences. On this, theologian Michael Allen is insightful:

[The call of the Christian] is to be more contextual than the contextualizers. Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida are correct to highlight the shaping powers of society in its various facets. They are myopic in that they focus only on the economies of this world and miss the most fundamentally defining reality for all humans: the divine economy rooted not in class, race, gender, or education but in God's eternal fullness and his covenantal election.<sup>10</sup>

When we discern that Scripture is speaking the same good news across cultures, across his-

tory, and across the peoples of the world, an obvious benefit is its unifying purpose. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:28–29). Creeds and confessions that orient us to the common plight of humanity and its sole hope in Jesus Christ as revealed to us in the Scriptures have tremendous potential to unite the church in its doctrine, its practice, its worship, its discipleship, and its mission.

In today's world, where extreme positions garner more attention and where ecclesiastical bonds frequently weaken, it is important for us to highlight our confessional standards for the unifying purpose they serve. Here is where we have said we agree. We have a shared understanding of scriptural truth. We must work hard to preserve those bonds forged out of a shared understanding of the Scriptures.

Nevertheless, as our experience testifies, mere theological agreement is insufficient for ecclesiastical unity. Our hearts must be sanctified as well as our minds if we are to enjoy the rich bond of fellowship we long for. As Paul reminds us, confessional stances (as with other matters) must be held "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2–3).

### **4. CONFESSIONS SERVE A PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH.**

Next, our confessions serve a pedagogical or instructional purpose in the life of the church. In his final letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The undergirding idea in the word *orthotomeō*, translated in the ESV as "rightly handling," involves the guidance of "the word of truth along a straight path."<sup>11</sup> Clearly, this work requires faithful exegesis of the Bible so that it is understood in its original historical, literary, and canonical context. But it also requires the faithful explanation and application of that text in ways that serve the particular needs and situations of succeeding faith communities as

they change throughout the generations.

Theologian Kevin Vanhoozer reminds us that the purpose of Christian doctrine “is direction for the fitting participation of individuals and communities [i.e., faith communities that make up the church] in the drama of redemption.”<sup>12</sup> The creeds and confessions of the church have been created precisely for that purpose. As carefully worded summaries of the Bible’s truth situated in specific historical contexts, they are essential, ensuring that succeeding generations are able to understand and apply the Word of God to their particular cultural settings. In this way, the creeds and confessions are good teachers, modeling for us key elements in the task of theological inquiry.

This is also why it is incumbent upon the servant of the Word of God to be familiar with the relevant confessions so that their insights might bear fruit in the life of the church. Faithful deployment of the creeds and the confessions through sermons, liturgical use, class instruction, programs of memorization and more, is fundamentally both an act of wisdom and of humility by the ministry leader (or a Christian institution like a seminary), recognizing that an entire legion of faithful ministers in past generations have put their hands to the proverbial plow to ensure that the faith is rightly understood and applied.

#### **5. WRITING CONFESSIONS FULFILLS OUR LORD’S COMMAND TO LOVE GOD WITH OUR MINDS.**

Finally, the task of theology, of which writing creeds and confessions is but one aspect, is an act of Christian obedience to love the Lord our God with the whole self, including our minds (Matt. 22:37). According to theologian John Webster,

Christian theology is biblical reasoning. It is an activity of the created intellect, judged, reconciled, redeemed, and sanctified through the redemptive works of the Son and the Spirit . . . it is rational contemplation and articulation of God’s communicative presence.<sup>13</sup>

As with all aspects of the human person, our minds and the articulations of our minds require sanctification according to the Spirit to be brought into

conformity with God’s holy Word. Historically, the creeds and confessions of the church have recognized the priority of this task and have been deployed unto that purpose. They are both servants of the Christian’s sanctification and its bounty.

Moreover, is no mere accident that during times when creeds and confessions were created, the church often flourished through greater numbers coming to personal faith in our Savior. The intellectual task of Christian theology, then, is not just a Christian avocation but absolutely essential to every Christian’s vocation in the Lord. Theologian Sinclair Ferguson notes how important is the work of the mind in the promotion of the work of the church:

The conviction that Christian Doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important growth points of the Christian life. Frequently in pastoral work this can be seen. Most of us, by nature are not students but more “practical” types, “doers” rather than “thinkers.” Yet both Scripture and the history of the church indicate to us that it is, generally speaking, “thinkers” who make the best “doers”! Cast your mind over the life-stories of the men and women who have had the most practical influence on the church, or perhaps on your own life. You will discover very few among them who were not students of Christian truth, however unsophisticatedly they went about their studies. From the greatest theologians, martyrs and intellectually gifted preachers, to those of lowliest gifts but spiritual power, all, perhaps without exception, have been students of the doctrines of the Bible and therein lies one of the secrets of their usefulness. However paradoxical it seems to our natural minds, it is one of the facts of spiritual reality that practical Christian living is based on understanding and knowledge. A verse in the Old Testament illustrates this. It says of man that “as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prov. 23:7 NIV margin). That summarizes the Christian position perfectly—how we think is one of the great determining factors in how we live!<sup>14</sup>

As one of the primary deposits of church history, the creeds and confessions not only testify to how important is the work of the mind in the service

of Christian obedience, but they also guide the church today in that same task—to love the Lord our God with all *our mind*.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though much more could and should be said on why we ought to value and transmit our confessional heritage, these five reasons seem self-evident. Moreover, in no way should this diminish the Bible's role as occupying the place of final authority on matters of faith and practice. At Covenant Seminary, when it comes to interpretation, we are decidedly a Bible-first institution. To be otherwise would, as noted above, depart from our confessional commitments.

Nevertheless, to say that we are Bible-first does not disregard the rich contributions of those going before us who also were seeking to “rightly [handle] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The creeds and confessions of the church, in fact, are a vital blessing to that end, and are even essential in attaining to a better understanding of the Scriptures.<sup>15</sup> So, rather

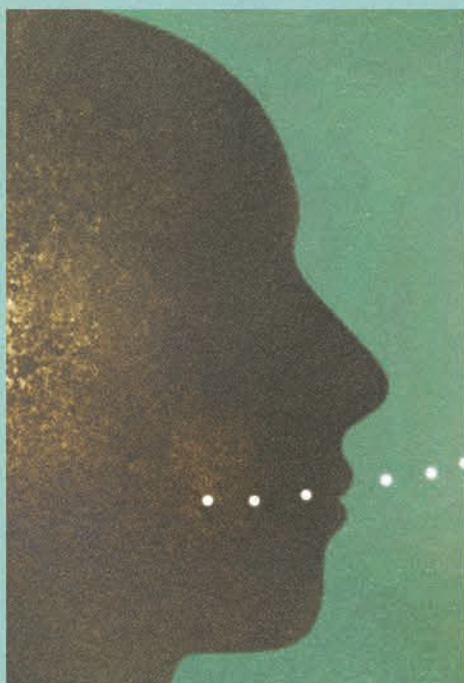
than seeing the Bible's relation to creeds and confessions through an adversarial lens, it is far better to see the creeds and confessions of the church as complementary companions that guide us in our task. Again, Scott Swain summarizes the point well,

Reading Scripture in light of the rule of faith thus involves reading Scripture within the context of our trinitarian faith, aided by the church's good confession, for the sake of the church's continuing growth in this trinitarian faith.<sup>16</sup> ■

*Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs is the sixth President of Covenant Theological Seminary, having previously planted and served as Senior Pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in San Antonio, Texas. He also planted an RUF campus ministry at Baylor University and was a youth director in Birmingham, Alabama. This article is adapted and condensed from its original publication in Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review 49, no. 1 (Spring 2023).*

## **Endnotes**

1. Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 340.
2. Yarbrough, *Timothy and Titus*.
3. The word “creed” derives from the Latin *credo*, meaning “I believe.” Our English word “confession” derives from the Latin *confitendo*, meaning “to confess.” Though distinct, creeds and confessions share a common purpose.
4. Nevertheless, not all errors are equal. Despite this potentiality, creeds and confessions can be immensely helpful in clarifying and categorizing key elements of biblical teaching. Moreover, it is worth noting that the Westminster Confession of Faith acknowledges this explicitly (WCF 3).
5. Scott Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed: The Role of the Church's Confession in Biblical Interpretation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 2012): 179.
6. Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed.”
7. As a second level of authority, subordinate to the inspired and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) are set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, The Larger Catechism, and The Shorter Catechism. Though not all creeds and confessions are constitutionally binding in the PCA, this article references more broadly the positive contributions of creeds and confessions throughout the history of the church.
8. The answer to question 3 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism—“What do the Scriptures principally teach?”—reads: “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God [faith], and what duty God requires of man [practice].”
9. Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed,” 181.
10. Michael Allen, “Knowledge of God,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Catholic Church*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 27.
11. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 580.
12. Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 102.
13. John Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 733.
14. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1981), 2.
15. “Church dogmas provide instead a divinely authorized interpretive key for unlocking the treasures of God's word, a blessed pathway into Holy Scripture.” Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed,” 191.
16. Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed,” 193.



**THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**AND COUNSELING**



**by Dr. Dan Zink**

What is the Holy Spirit's role in the counseling process? A paucity of literature on the topic led Dr. Dan Zink on a journey of discovery and growth—both personally and professionally.

Illustration by Ibrahim Rayintakath

**O**NE WOULD THINK THAT much has been said through the years about the Holy Spirit's role in counseling. However, as I think back, I can only recall a line or two on the subject. The apparent scarcity of content on this topic could be a result of my poor memory, so I searched a library database for "Holy Spirit and counseling"; 2,600 articles came up. It turned out that most of the articles on the list were included only because the words "Holy Spirit" showed up somewhere in the text of the article. Most of the articles were not about the Holy Spirit *and counseling*. I looked through a few hundred entries and found four articles that I thought might be useful. In the end, I set those four aside for another day. They were interesting, but I didn't find anything in them specifically about the role of the Holy Spirit in counseling.

It seems we Christian counseling professor types have neglected to write about the Holy Spirit's presence and role in the counseling we do. I suspect so few of us have addressed this topic because the Holy Spirit's presence and role in our everyday living is not something we think about often, or at least not often enough. I must be honest and confess this to be true for me. This impacts my writing and my teaching. In my thirty years of teaching, I have taught very little about the Holy Spirit. I have talked about the Bible and counseling, and I have talked about prayer and counseling, but I have not talked about the Holy Spirit and counseling.

#### **WHERE TO BEGIN?**

We must begin with creation—in the beginning, when God made all created beings and things. God is unique, uncreated, and not located in the realm of created things. He is transcendent. Yet, he chose to be in relationship with all things, including us, and through his relationship with everyone and everything, he governs with providential care.

Enter the deceiving serpent. In a conversation—that interactive process that powerfully shapes relationships—the serpent asks Eve to choose whom she is going to trust, God or herself. Adam, who was with her, seems to be listening with a don't-ask-me attitude.

Adam and Eve make their choice. They take things into their own hands, putting at risk trust in God and what he provides. Through their choice, they alter their relationship with God in a way they cannot reverse.

The Father's response to Adam and Eve's universe-changing choice is to actively seek conversation with them. He continues his relationship with Adam and Eve despite the violence they have done to that relationship. And God doesn't stop. We see through the whole biblical story God's continued pursuit of connection with humankind. God does not stop. He continues his loving pursuit now, in our lives, through the Holy Spirit's never-ending interactive presence.

#### **THE SPIRIT'S GOAL**

Jesus told us the goal of the Spirit's work:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:25–26)

Cognitively leaning people that we are, we might conclude from Jesus's words that the teaching the Spirit does is a head-only project. That could lead us to believe that the Spirit is in the what-to-know business and our task is to remember what to know. If we fall into this trap, our help to others in the counseling room is limited to improving the content of their thinking. This approach can be attractive. It reduces the uncertainties we feel around our capacity to be helpful. We feel more confident that the help we are offering is what the person needs.

But this is deceptive. This approach, as attractive as it may be for us, steers us away from helping people with the intensity of their life challenges. People need most a companion who enters the depth of their stories, seeing from inside that story, so to be able to guide them to deeper understanding of themselves and their circumstances. Only then can they make wise choices in their lives.

The best guide helps the other person make better choices; he does not make choices for them.

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The best position from which to guide the person is from the side. The content-focused approach, however, encourages us to position ourselves above the other. When we become the expert giving advice to another to help him or her make better choices, we are not helping that person grow. We are helping that person grow dependent on us.

Jesus said the Spirit “will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). Consider the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus addresses the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness’ sake and on Jesus’s account. Jesus starts with issues of the heart. He teaches inside out, addressing heart and mind—the whole person. The Son of God himself does not position himself above others. He is not giving directions. He is asking for growth that cannot be humanly engineered. He is proposing growth that is not possible through improving our knowledge or through trying harder. The growth Jesus proposes is only possible if we are dependent on God.

The apostle Paul understood this inside-out approach. And he understood the source of the power that generates that kind of growth. He prays that God may grant the Ephesians “to be

strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16–19). Amazingly, they now can comprehend the love of Christ which is beyond comprehension.

How is this possible? It starts with the Spirit’s work in a person’s inner being, and that work strengthens the person, not to rule over others, but to do all we do from a foundation of love.

The apostle concludes his prayer with a familiar benediction you have likely heard at the close of church services you have attended.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. (Eph. 3:20–21)

Our great hope when we counsel is “*the power at work in us.*” The Spirit is at work in both the helper and the one seeking help.

#### **THE SPIRIT IN THE COUNSELING ROOM**

How the Spirit’s present relationship works is mysterious, not entirely clear. Perhaps this is why so many of us writers about counseling have written so little about the work of the Spirit in counseling. We want to be clear, and we desire to be certain. We hope to lead toward correct understanding. We don’t want to get it wrong. We are, after all, cognitively leaning people writing to cognitively leaning people.

We find help in words from Jesus about the Spirit, words that put a pause on our hopes for predictability and clarity about how the Spirit works.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8)

God does the work he wants to do in the way he wants to do it. He chooses to allow us to co-labor

with him. We must not forget that we are not equal partners. We cannot control the process or the outcomes. And we do not decide when and how God the Holy Spirit shows up, proceeds in his work, or the role we play in it. We can only be attentive, then responsive; we can only be aware, then cooperate. We cannot initiate, then expect the Spirit to reciprocate; we cannot direct, then expect the Spirit to follow.

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#### **LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE COUNSELING ROOM**

To assist a person to grow requires a relationship marked by safe connection between two people. This connection occurs most fully when both the affective and cognitive parts of the people are at play in the relationship. There needs to be balance between the emotions and thoughts. This balance is more than equal contribution of each element. This balance is like the balance we maintain when we walk. Weight is shifted from the right leg to the left leg, from the left leg to the right leg, and so forth. A smooth gait results when the weight that is shifted is shifted equally and, because of adjustments to changes in climate and terrain, sometimes approximately. The balance that deepens conversation is made of reflection, which requires awareness of emotions and the meaning of things, and clear content, which is mostly thoughts.

These days we are not taught how to balance the meaning of things with the details of those things. Mostly it is an issue of trust. We trust information more than we trust emotions. One seems solid. The other seems flighty. One seems in charge. The other seems to wander. One seems obviously true. The other seems obviously confused. We feel safe when the details are clear. We seldom feel as safe when in pursuit of the meaning of things. Meaning seems too fluid to trust. In such a climate, it is difficult to imagine that mature functioning flows from the partnership of information and emotions.

There are two layers to human experience. One centers on words. Words differentiate and distinguish one thing from another and one person from another. Words provide structure. The other layer is wordless but there is communication, nonetheless. This communication is based on felt connection. This connection is reciprocal and mutual. Both persons know they are seeing

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the other and being seen by the other at the same time. In the seeing and being seen both experiences being known by the other. This wordless experience connects and joins each one to the other. The experience is unstructured, but it is more complete than differentiated structure allows.

The clearest picture of this wordless experiential connection is a mother and her infant child. In the dual deep attention to each other, what some call attunement, both child and mother are impacted. If you have ever observed moments like this between a mother and child, you have been impacted too. If a picture was taken of you with the mother-child pair, you might have been surprised by the peaceful smile on your face. Sometimes we are hesitant to speak fearing we might break the spell.

The majority of social scientists and laypersons believe this mother-child connection is reserved for the early months of a child's life. When the child acquires words, the pair move on to a higher form of communication, leaving behind the immature language of gaze-in-awe. The assumption seems to be that the very close connection between mother and child was only necessary for survival. As the child become verbal and mobile, such close connection is left behind because survival is assured in other ways.

Those who study relationships disagree. They recognize that the wordless communication

mode, what the majority calls primitive, operates our entire lives. Without sufficient attention to this layer of experience, people may be very competent, but the emotional portion of themselves has been muted. The person living with muted affect is a person living less humanly than the creator designed them to live.

How does God communicate with us? Specifically, any way he wants to communicate to us using anything he wants to use. Generally, God communicates to us through both the words and the wordless layers of our selves. Both are required if we are to know God loves us.

The songwriter might help us here. Dion DiMucci writes:

Do you walk the streets at night?  
Try to stay beneath the light?  
Do you sense it as you go?  
Maybe you are not alone. . . .

Times when you can't find the word,  
It comes to you as if you heard.  
Someone's voice from long ago  
Tells you what you need to know.  
—"Angel in the Alleyways"

Dion DiMucci and Mike Aquilina (2001)

If you cannot recall moments like DiMucci describes, how do you know God is alive and real? Because the words of your theology tell you? That is not enough. That kind of belief will not hold when life turns harsh. That kind of belief will not help when your trusted friends betray you. The words-only foundation is not the full foundation God provides for you to be rooted and anchored.

I could not have written that previous paragraph a few years ago. I came to Covenant Seminary as a student in search of biblically grounded theology. And I found it here, and that changed my life and my walk with God for the better. In the course of time, God brought people into my life who showed me my need for more solid roots than biblically grounded theology alone could provide. And then, in that context, I entered a period of suffering that strained my sense of worth, usefulness, and hope. My personhood was at stake.

I purposely avoided talking about it to counselors I knew. I feared they would name some

diagnosis with intent to help. I knew the diagnosis, and I knew it was merely the outside of my struggles. I assumed their diagnosing would be avoidance in joining me in my pain, and I could not face that increase in my isolation.

I was left alone with God and a particular question: Did God like me? There were no words that wielded enough power to put that question at rest. No words. And there were not feelings that could be named either. The thing that brought me back was this: God never went away. *He always kept being right there in the midst of my struggle.* He stood still when I yelled at him, when I cried out to him, and when I pushed him away. He would not yield.

That began a review of memories, things I have returned to from time to time my whole life. But this time it was different. In this review, the eyes of my heart were opened to see God's gracious presence. He was always there. Never failed.

One result of this dive into the deep end is that my counseling changed. I found myself joining people in the suffering more easily. I found myself knowing their pain more clearly. I found questions to ask that sometimes were used to open their eyes to their deeper hard-to-name experience. Other times, I saw that my question was off the mark, but it was used anyway to open their own eyes. Or it was not used, and I could see my mistake, admit it, and in that honest context was used to move the other person in the direction they needed to go.

Coming through my dark struggle, led by the Spirit's persistence, changed my way thinking. I learned, if I can put words to it, to *expect* God to show up, to be *aware* of it when he does, and to *follow* his lead. ■

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**GLORIFYING THE**  
**TRIUNE GOD**  
**THROUGH CHURCH**  
**PLANTING**



by DR. ROBERT KIM





How are we best to  
 “glorify God and enjoy  
 him forever”? For Jesus,  
 it meant fulfilling the  
 mission God gave  
 him. For us, it means  
 planting churches to  
 the glory of the Father.



**O**N MY OFFICE DOOR at Covenant Seminary, you will find a parody of the Chick-fil-A cow advertisement that states, “Plant more churches.” My hope is that, as the next generation of students passes by my office, they will consider the great need of church planting in our time.

In the opening paragraph of *The Great Dechurching: Who’s Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Zondervan, 2023), authors Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P. Burge note, “In the United States, we are witnessing the largest and fastest religious shift in the country’s history . . . approximately 40 million American adults once attended church but no longer do.” That shift accounts for more people than the First and Second Great Awakenings and every revival in our country *combined*, according to their research. It also underscores the importance of church planting today.

In John 17:4, Jesus prays, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” He gives glory to the Father on earth by fulfilling the work God gave him. Just as Jesus faithfully engaged in the mission God set before him, so too does God receive glory when we faithfully join him in the mission of redeeming all things (Col. 1:19–20).

If the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (as Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 states), it is fitting to ask, “How best do we glorify and enjoy God?” For Jesus, it was fulfilling the mission God gave him. What followed was the planting of churches to the glory of the Father.

It is amazing to consider that we are the fruit of saints from the early church who faithfully lived out the Great Commission through church planting. This is something I do not take for granted, especially as I reflect on the Presbyterian missionaries who were sent to South Korea. One of those missionaries traveled to rural regions and reached my grandmother, Soon Ja Kwon. When she immigrated to the United States in 1971, she continued attending Presbyterian church plants until she passed away.

Church planting is the establishment of new churches to spread the gospel by making disciples. This work is deeply rooted in God’s mission to redeem the world, and its ultimate purpose is to bring glory to our Triune God: Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. While we often think of church planting as our work, we are in fact joining in what God is already doing in the world.

This article will explore the theological basis for church planting, why it is essential, and how it brings glory to God. We will also discuss how church planting participates in the larger story of God’s redemptive plan for humanity and how the church itself becomes a means of worship and glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF CHURCH PLANTING**

Before exploring how church planting glorifies the Triune God, we must first establish its biblical and theological foundation. Church planting is the outworking of the commission Christ gave to his followers, rooted in both the Great Commission and the nature of God himself.

While the Bible does not explicitly use the term “church planting,” that does not mean there is no biblical basis for it. The foundation for church planting is the Great Commission, which commands Christ’s followers to make disciples (the only imperative in the text), baptize, and teach. What immediately followed was the apostles carrying out this commission by establishing local churches. If we are to faithfully respond to the Great Commission, should we not follow the example of those first hearers?

## **THE GREAT COMMISSION: CHRIST’S MANDATE FOR EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP**

The primary biblical text underpinning church planting is the Great Commission, given by Jesus Christ after his resurrection. In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus says: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This command establishes the framework for evangelism, discipleship, and the expansion of God’s kingdom through the establishment of local churches. Making disciples involves not just preaching the gospel but also nurturing believers

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**From the outset of creation, God has been on a mission to redeem a lost world. . . . In his sovereign plan, God uses the church as an instrument to accomplish his purposes as a Kingdom outpost.**

in a communal context where they can grow, worship, and be equipped for God's mission. Church planting creates new communities of believers engaged in worship, fellowship, teaching, and service to the world.

#### **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN**

From the outset of creation, God has been on a mission to redeem a lost world. His work involves both personal and cosmic redemption. In his sovereign plan, God uses the church as an instrument to accomplish his purposes as a Kingdom outpost. The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–27), the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22–33), and a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). These metaphors reveal that the church is central to God's purposes in the world.

Church planting is not merely about establishing local gatherings; it is about participating in God's mission to bring redemption, restoration, and reconciliation to a broken world. Each new church planted is a manifestation of the gospel taking root in a new community and a testimony to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises.

#### **GLORIFYING THE TRIUNE GOD THROUGH CHURCH PLANTING**

Now that we have established the biblical and theological foundations for church planting, it is important to explore how church planting glorifies the Triune God. Church planting honors God by displaying the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through various facets of the church's life and mission. Below, we will examine how each person of the Trinity is glorified through this essential work.

#### **GLORIFYING THE FATHER**

The primary purpose of church planting is to bring glory to God the Father, who is the Creator of all things and the one who sent his Son into the world to redeem humanity. The work of church planting is a response to God's initiative in salvation, and it points to his ultimate plan to bring glory to himself through the salvation of people from every tribe, nation, and tongue (Rev. 7:9).



*The Father's Plan of Redemption.* God the Father is the architect of salvation, and his redemptive plan is fulfilled in the sending of the Son, Jesus Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Through church planting, the glory of God the Father is made known as new believers come to faith and as the church embodies God's redemptive plan by reaching out to others with the gospel. Church plants are often most effective in reaching new believers through their zeal for the lost. Every new church established is a tangible sign of the Father's work in history, fulfilling his promises to bless the nations (Gen. 12:3).

*A Witness to His Sovereignty.* Church planting is a testimony to God's sovereignty in the world. Despite the many obstacles, challenges, and opposition that often accompany new churches, the Father is at work in and through his people to bring about his will. The very act of church planting, as it unfolds in different cultures and contexts, is a demonstration of God's power to build his church, even in the most difficult circumstances. As Jesus stated, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

*The Father's Glory in the Church's Mission.* Church planting is a manifestation of God the Father's eternal purpose to draw people to himself. As churches engage in evangelism, they carry out God's mission of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–19). The Father is glorified when new churches are planted and people from all walks of life come to know and worship him.

#### **GLORIFYING THE SON**

Church planting brings glory to God the Son, Jesus Christ, by proclaiming his life, death, resurrection, and Lordship. The church is built upon the foundation of Christ, and it exists to make his name known in the world.

*Christ as the Head of the Church.* The Apostle Paul teaches that Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:18). Every church plant is established with Christ as the central figure and with the intention of making him known. In planting churches, believers gather around centrality of the person and work of Christ, proclaiming his gospel of salvation. Christ is glorified as his name is proclaimed and his reign is acknowledged in the establishment of new congregations. While the work of church

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**And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).**



planting is significant for all who are involved, the glory is to Christ who is head of the Church.

*Proclaiming the Gospel of the Cross.* Church planting is essentially the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through preaching, teaching, baptisms, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the church continually points to the saving work of Christ on the cross. Jesus's atoning sacrifice and victory over sin and death are the foundation of every church, and church planting is one way of making his work known to a world that desperately needs to hear it. As new believers come to faith, they are united to Christ, and his glory is revealed in their transformed lives.

*Christ's Kingdom on Earth.* Church planting is a foretaste of the fullness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. Each new church represents a manifestation of the reign of Christ in the world. When a new church is planted, it is a small, visible expression of Christ's lordship over the world and the beginning of the restoration of all things in him. I often think that the joy Luke speaks of Jesus having over the "one sinner who repents" (Luke 15) is the same joy Jesus has when a new expression of his bride with church planting.

#### **GLORIFYING THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Church planting also glorifies God the Holy Spirit, the one who empowers, equips, and sustains the church in its mission. The Holy Spirit is the one who draws people to Christ, transforms their hearts, and enables the church to carry out its mission.

*Empowering the Church for Mission.* The Holy Spirit empowers believers for the work of ministry. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come upon his disciples and give them power to be his witnesses in all the earth. Church planting is a work of the Spirit, as he equips and strengthens believers to go out and spread the gospel. Without the Holy Spirit, the church would not be able to accomplish its mission, and church planting would be impossible.

*Building the Church.* The Holy Spirit is also the one who unites believers in the church, forming them into a body that reflects Christ's character and purposes (1 Cor. 12:4–3). When a new church is planted, it is the Spirit who brings believers together, giving them the gifts and unity needed to be a functioning, thriving community of faith.

The Spirit is at work in every aspect of church life, from worship to service to evangelism, and his presence brings glory to God.

*Laboring in the Harvest.* The Holy Spirit plays a central role in bringing people to faith. Through the work of effectual calling and regeneration (John 16:8), the Holy Spirit opens hearts to the truth of the gospel and empowers people to respond in repentance and faith. Every time a person is converted and baptized in a new church plant, it is the Holy Spirit who has done the work of bringing them to new life in Christ. The Spirit glorifies God by transforming lives through the power of the gospel.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Church planting is a profound way for Christians to participate in the mission of God to bring glory to the Triune God. Through the work of church planting, the Father's redemptive plan is advanced, the Son is made known, and the Holy Spirit empowers and unites the church. Every new church plant is a tangible manifestation of God's grace and glory in the world. Every new church plant is a fresh expression of the beauty of the Bride of Jesus for the glory of the Triune God.

As believers, we are invited to participate in this work of church planting, knowing that it is not just about establishing places of worship or a new fellowship group, but about advancing God's kingdom, making his glory known, and fulfilling the mission given to us by Christ. Church planting is an act of worship, a means of glorifying our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through it, the gospel is proclaimed, lives are transformed, and God's name is made great in all the earth. ■

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*by Dr. Aaron Goldstein*

The *Word*

*Became* Flesh

Meeting our heroes can bring a momentary  
thrill—but knowing the One who “became flesh  
and dwelt among us” brings eternal joy.

*Illustration by Dadu Shin*



*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and life was the light of men. The light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. . . .*

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’” For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*

— John 1:1–5, 14 –18

**A** FEW YEARS BACK, my sons became very interested in soccer, both as players and as fans of the professional sport. Not having played or watched soccer as a child, I did my best to learn on the fly with them. One of the first things new initiates learn about is Lionel Messi, the great soccer player from Argentina, who has also played for professional clubs in Europe. Many consider him one of the greatest, if not the greatest, player of all time.

When Messi moved from his club in Europe to an MLS team in the United States called Inter Miami, my sons were excited because that meant he would play against our professional St. Louis team at some point. In the midst of that excitement, a series of pictures circulated on the internet of Messi in shorts and flip-flops shopping at a Publix grocery store in Florida. My sons’ response to the photos was, “Yeah! Let’s go see him!” We do have family in Florida and they have been to a Florida Publix before, so they could imagine

it. But killjoy that I am, I explained to them that even if we made the twenty-plus hour drive to Miami, it was highly unlikely that Messi would be just hanging out in the grocery store waiting for us to show up and meet him. Their enthusiasm was undaunted, however, and it would have been worth it to them to make the trip just for the slim possibility of meeting Messi in the flesh.

In our passage from John, we read about someone much greater than the greatest soccer player of all time—One who did indeed appear and did so in the flesh. And he appeared not in a “one in a million chance that we might get to see him” way, but for the express purpose of being known by us deeply and intimately, and that we might be known by him as well.

#### **THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY**

I’ve always been fascinated by the way that each of the four Evangelists begins his Gospel in a com-

pletely different way. Mark throws us right into the action with John the Baptist at the outset of Jesus's public ministry. Luke first gives us a description of his research methodology, which I as an academic appreciate. Matthew starts by grounding the story in the genealogy of Jesus. But John goes a step further. He starts with "In the beginning. . ." This has unmistakable echoes of the first words of the creation account in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." That passage speaks of God as the Creator and how he alone made all things from nothing. In our passage, John reaches for those familiar words to assert that Jesus the Word, the second Person of the Trinity, was there in the beginning and at creation, and even before that in eternity past, long before he was a baby born in Bethlehem. And in a dramatic flourish, John says that the Word was both *with* God and *was* God, giving us a glimpse of the Trinitarian mystery. This is an explosive way for John to start.

Later, in verses 14–18, he tells us about the most important thing that's happened in our human history: "The Word became flesh." That is to say, the eternal Son of God, who was there in the beginning, who was God and is God, in the person of Jesus, became flesh, took on humanity. Just as he did at the start of this chapter, in this little paragraph John uses familiar Old Testament language and imagery, and does so evocatively, not spelling it out, but trusting that the reader will catch the subtle connections he makes, especially to the book of Exodus. He does this to ground his remarkable point and its implications: that in Jesus the Word became flesh.

I want to highlight here three important facets of that idea as they are found in our passage.

#### **THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE INCARNATION**

John's fourteenth verse says: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"—that is, among us human beings. We were made to live in communion with God. That's where we find our deepest satisfaction and purpose. With the fall of our first parents, this was lost. The story of Scripture is about how God does not give up on humanity but acts redemptively on our behalf and is himself part of that redemptive story. We see God again and again moving toward his people so that he might

once again be present with them in spite of their sin and unholiness.

One of the significant moments in this story comes in the book of Exodus. After redeeming his people from slavery, the Lord brings them to Mount Sinai and meets with them there. As part of those interactions, he gives them extended instructions on how to build a tabernacle—the royal tent—which was to function as the place of God's presence in the midst of his people. Imagine being part of that Israelite community and having God's presence in your midst. As they traveled through the desert, they would stop at each camp and set up their own tents, their own tabernacles. Then they would set up the Lord's kingly royal tabernacle right in their midst. Of course, God is not confined to a single building, and they knew that. Yet this tabernacle was his royal abode on earth that represented the place of his presence with them.

The Greek word John uses that we translate here as "dwelt" is *skēnoō*. It means something like "set up a tent or an encampment." It is related to the word "tabernacle" in the way that word is translated in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Thus, we could actually translate this phrase from John as "The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us." Why is that important? Because someone reading this who was familiar with the Old Testament could hardly miss that point. It calls the reader back to Exodus and tells us that in the same way that God dwelt in the midst of his people in the wilderness, now in a new and greater way, God is present with his people in the person of Jesus. Later, in the book of Revelation, we read of John's vision of a new heavens and a new earth, which uses similar language.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling place [*tabernacle*] of God is with man. He will dwell [*tabernacle*] with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." (Rev. 21:1–3)

We live now in a sort of in-between time. We look back on Jesus's earthly life and ministry through the Scriptures, and we look forward to his bodily return. Yet in the present, he's not with us in the same way. But we have a great gift, so great a gift that Jesus would say to his disciples later in John's Gospel that "it is better for you that I go away. I say this because when I go away, I will send the Helper to you. But if I did not go, the Helper would not come" (John 16:7). We don't have Christ with us bodily in this moment, but we have his very Spirit dwelling in us.

This is the first major point of our passage: *We see the presence of God in the Incarnation.*

### **THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE INCARNATION**

But from "The word became flesh and dwelt among us," the passage goes on: "and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14b). Then later, in verse 18, John speaks again about seeing: "No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Having already picked up on the tabernacle language and being in Exodus mode, so to speak, we are now reminded of another story, this time from Exodus 33 and 34. Israel has been waiting for Moses to return from atop Sinai, where he was meeting with God, and he has been delayed. So the people decide to build a golden calf, which is a huge sin of idolatry. In response, the Lord first declares his intent to punish them, but ultimately relents and forgives them, and promises to go forward with them. After this, Moses goes to the Lord and makes the following request, seemingly as an assurance that God will indeed be with them as he promised:

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he [God] said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place where you can stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take

away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." (Exod. 33:18)

I'll make two observations about this passage as it relates to John 1: First, note that the Lord twice tells Moses that his face cannot be seen. John says, "No one has ever seen God." Second, Moses's request is to *see God's glory*. John says of Jesus in 1:14, "We have seen his glory." What is the point? In Exodus, Moses was not able to look on the fullness of the glory of God. But with Jesus we have *seen the very glory of God by way of the incarnate Son of God*. Glory is a significant theme in John's telling of the life and ministry of Jesus. He says much about how Jesus displays this glory.

One way he does so very prominently is by organizing the first portion of his Gospel around seven miraculous signs that Jesus does. These signs are amazing in and of themselves, but the fact that they are signs means that they point to something else, something about who Jesus is. After the first one, when Jesus changes water into wine, John adds the explanation: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory" (John 2:11). Then in the last one, when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, glory is mentioned several times (see John 11), so much so that we get the idea that these signs are meant to show through Jesus the glory of God.

Briefly, the seven signs are:

1. *The changing of water into wine (John 2:1-12)*. Jesus shows his power over the created realm. But with the idea of wine viewed as a sign of blessing or celebration, we see Jesus as one who came to bring the abundance of joy to his people.
2. *The healing of the official's ill son (John 4:46-54)*. Jesus heals the gravely ill son of a local official, but he does so from a distance, without actually going to him. This shows that he is not limited by locality, that he has authority and power in every place.
3. *The healing of the paralytic at Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17)*. Jesus visits the pool of Bethesda and heals a paralyzed man on the Sabbath, which causes some consternation among the watchers. His doing so demonstrates a healing that foreshadows a greater

*We were made to live in communion with God. That's where we find our deepest satisfaction and purpose.*

healing that will come when the full Sabbath rest is in place.

4. *The feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–15, 22–59)*. To feed the hungry multitude, Jesus takes five small loaves of bread and two fish, has the disciples pass them out to the crowd, and then has them gather up multiple baskets of leftovers after everyone has eaten. He speaks of himself as the bread of life, pointing to the fact that he is the one who will nourish his people spiritually and satisfy the deepest longings of their souls.
5. *Jesus walking upon the water (John 6:16–21)*. Jesus literally walks across the surface of the Sea of Galilee to reach his disciples who are far out upon the lake in a boat. In biblical imagery, the sea is often a place of chaos and danger, but here we see Jesus walking on it. When we read the Psalms, we see that only One has power over the sea, the Lord God himself, who is the Creator King. So, this incident implies that Jesus is God himself because he too has this power.
6. *The healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–7)*. As he prepares to heal a man who was born blind, Jesus he says, “I am the light of the world.” In a world of spiritual darkness, he declares that the light comes from him because he *is* the light.
7. *The raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:17–44)*. In the final sign, Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead, showing his own power over death, and declares, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

# *In John's Gospel, the fullest expression of God's glory comes by way of the cross.*

In addition to these, in John's Gospel the fullest expression of God's glory comes by way of the cross. In John 12:23–24, as Jesus draws nearer to his death, we read: "Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'" Through his death, Jesus will bear much fruit, the fruit of salvation for all of his people, including you and me. This too is glory, and this is the second major point of our passage: *We see the Glory of God in the Incarnation.*

## **THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE INCARNATION**

Coming back once more to John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth." That phrase "grace and truth" comes up again in verse 17: "For the law

was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." We are in Exodus mode again. First, we had a description of Jesus tabernacling with his people. Then, we saw the glory of God through Jesus, reminding us of Moses' request in Exodus 33. And now we are to recall the story in Exodus 34, when the Lord gives Moses what he requested, at least in some measure. He passes before Moses, then describes his own character for him: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6).

When the Lord says this, he is communicating his loyal, committed, faithful, trustworthy, devoted, covenant love for his people. In John's Gospel, the phrase "full of grace and truth" is likely intended to recall the phrase "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." That description, which in the Old Testament is so associated with the Lord God, is here associated with Jesus.

John 1:17 is not, as some might think, meant to say that Moses and the law are bad and Jesus is good. No, the law was a gift of God to his people, and now we have One in our midst who is himself abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. This is grace upon grace, as John will later say. This one is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus, the embodiment of God's covenant love for his people. Thus, the third point of our passage: *We see the love of God in the Incarnation.*

### **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THE INCARNATION?**

We have seen that in Jesus, the Word became flesh and tabernacled, or became present, with us. We've seen in him the glory of God. And we've seen in Christ, who is full of grace and truth, the love of God manifested. In light of this unparalleled, remarkable news, how then should we respond?

When I asked my sons how they would respond if their soccer hero Messi were to suddenly show up at their soccer practice and play a game with them, they not surprisingly gave me answers like: "It would be the best day ever!" "I'd want to get my picture taken with him and have him sign my jersey!" "I'd want to watch how he shoots the ball and do it just like him!" "If he played with us, we'd definitely win by a lot!"

Those responses could be grouped into four main categories, which I'll call joy, adoration, imitation, and confidence.

If my sons can respond in the ways I've just described to the coming of a merely earthly hero they revere, how should we as believers respond to the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, in the flesh? Hopefully, the connection I'm making here is obvious, but I want to make it anyway.

*First, we respond with great joy.* John says, "From his fullness we have received grace upon grace." Our Savior has come to bring redemption from sin and make us holy. What good news that is and how joyous it should make us!

*Second, we respond with adoration, with worship.* That's what we're doing when we go to church on Sunday. We're there to glorify the triune God, just as the apostle Thomas did later in John's Gospel when he declared to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). And then Jesus said to

Thomas in verse 29 words that are actually true of us who were not there in the Upper Room: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

*Third, we respond with imitation.* Among the reasons Jesus came was so that we might learn from his ways and follow after him. Of course, we are not called to be the God-Man as he was then and is now, but we are called to follow after him, to love the way he loves, to view the world around us the way that he views it, and to respond to people and events the way he would. We are to value the things he values, even, at times, to get angry at the things that make him angry. We see these calls to imitation in several different ways throughout John's Gospel. Jesus washes his disciples' feet and then tells them to go wash the feet of others. He says, "Love one another even as I have loved you." He tells them that they will endure persecution as he has because the world hated him and it will hate them too. So they, and we, are to follow and be like him.

*Finally, we respond to Jesus's coming with confidence.* After the resurrection narrative, John describes the purpose for which he has written his Gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31). And that life that John speaks of is eternal life, of course, but it includes abundant life even now. If you believe in Jesus, if you trust in him, you can have all the confidence in the world that that life is yours *now*.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Let us rejoice in him, worship him, follow him, and live with confidence in him—now and forever. Amen! ■

*Dr. Aaron Goldstein is Associate Professor of Old Testament and Director of Online Learning for Covenant Seminary. He will be transitioning to a full-time teaching role in July 2025 (see "Faculty and Staff" in this issue). This article is adapted from a sermon Dr. Goldstein delivered in Chapel in the fall of 2024 as part of a series (by various preachers) on the theme of "Glorifying the Triune God."*

# “Sing Praises to the Lord”: Making Music to the Glory of God

*Music can be a powerful means of artistic expression, but for Bekah Marsh (MDiv '25) it's more—a gracious gift to help God's people worship and glorify him well.*

By Rick Matt



**S**ING PRAISES TO THE LORD, *O you saints, and give thanks to his holy name.*” These words from Psalm 30:4 not only express the psalmist’s joy at the goodness of his God but also give eloquent expression to one of the main themes running through Bekah Marsh’s personal story.

For the past two and a half years, Bekah has served as the Chapel Coordinator for the Seminary, a position that involves planning the liturgy, coordinating musicians and speakers, and leading the music for weekly worship services for the campus community. Making music to the glory of God and helping others to worship him well through it is a job—or rather, a ministry—she loves and one she feels blessed to have been called to from a young age.

Growing up as the daughter of a PCA pastor—her father was the late Rev. Rodney Stortz, founding pastor of Twin Oaks Presbyterian Church in St. Louis and the long-time preaching voice of the radio program *Oaks of Righteousness*—Bekah had much encouragement in her musical endeavors from her family, peers, and especially her church youth leaders. But the most important seed for her future life was planted not by music but by water.

“I was baptized as an infant just down the road from the Seminary at Covenant Presbyterian Church,” Bekah says. “My dad had just become the pastor there, and I had the amazing privilege of growing up in a covenant home and in a church that really embraced the covenant ideals of raising up children in the church together. My parents were my first disciplers but many others also poured into me and my sisters along the way. I really experienced the joy of that.”

Later, after her father had planted Twin Oaks Church, she found herself disciplined further by dedicated Sunday school teachers. “I still remember many of them, several of whom are connected to the Seminary. As I grew into middle and high school, the youth leaders at church were very discipleship oriented. I had taken piano lessons all my life, and around this time I started messing around playing and writing songs, as well as journaling, as a way of wrestling through my faith and my sin and my need for Jesus. It was a blessing that God gave me music to do that with at a young age.”

In middle school, God opened up other opportunities for her to use her gifts. “This was when worship music that wasn’t traditional hymns was just becoming a thing,” Bekah remembers. “So, as people noticed my abilities, they started inviting me to play at youth group and during the school chapel services. Then at church on Sunday evenings, the youth band would be asked to play, and I would be part of that. I realize now it was a very intentional thing on the church’s part. It would have been so much easier not to have the youth play, but the fact that they did made us feel like loved and valued members of the church. That was really important.”

An even bigger opportunity soon came Bekah’s way. “When I was in high school, my dad noticed me writing down these songs

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and playing them, playing in coffee houses with my friends. So, one day he said to me, ‘Will you write a song for Advent?’ I was so excited. Our music director at the time, John Haines, who is now at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, took the tune and words I wrote and orchestrated them for full choir and orchestra. It was amazing!”

Hearing her music played and sung in church this way had a profound impact on the young Bekah. “It was one of the most humbling experiences. It was the first time I really understood that I could not have come up with these things on my own. It was a pure gift from God. And then to have someone take the time to make it something a choir and the congregation could sing—it inspired me to want to pursue music in a way that could enrich the church, not just for my own benefit.”

As she prepared for college, Bekah considered whether she should pursue her musical interests more fully or, as she puts it, “continue figuring out this whole covenant thing I’d been part of growing up. I was very hungry for theology and the Bible. I was reading a lot of theology and grappling with the sovereignty of God and why he would choose me and not some other person. Then around that time, my dad was diagnosed with cancer, and that was part of my struggle too. Why him, when he was doing so many wonderful things for the kingdom? It didn’t make sense.”

In the end, theology won out. She decided on Covenant College, where she pursued a Bible major and a music minor. “A music major probably would have been more practical, but it really was very fruitful for me at that period of my life to study under so many good Bible teachers, especially as my dad did pass away during my freshman year. I was so thankful for that community and for how God used my Christian friends to love me well. Even the writing of a term paper on heaven to help me work through some of my issues. Those four years were some of the most formative of my life.”

Also during these years, she began to sense a strong call to music ministry in the church and thought about going to seminary. “I felt like many churches, especially the ones using more contemporary music, didn’t really know how to sing well.

**I’ve been struck by the realization that [in Scripture] the times when God is most lifted up and glorified . . . are the times when his people are worshiping and singing to him.**

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I wanted to be a help in that, but I knew I needed more training to understand exactly what that might look like.”

Then, in her junior year, she met Jeremy, the man who would become her husband. He was a decade older and a JAG lawyer in the Air Force. “I really wanted to marry him, but it would mean not being able to pursue some of the other things I wanted. So, I married him anyway, and we went wherever the Air Force sent us for about ten years. Just like the decision to major in Bible instead of music, it didn’t make sense at the time. But everywhere we went, the Lord provided ministry opportunities.”

Soon after they married, Bekah started teaching Bible to middle school and high school students part time, while also working on a seminary master’s degree online. It was a very challenging couple of years. Then came a move to Virginia, where Jeremy taught at the Army’s JAG Legal Center and School, and the couple had two baby boys, James and Ben. They got involved in a PCA church where Bekah was able to get back into leading worship music. It was a blessed five years.

After that, they headed for Colorado Springs, where Jeremy taught at the Air Force Academy, and where their daughters, Emi and Betsy, were born. They found another PCA church. One day they noticed in the church bulletin that the music director position had opened up. “Jeremy said I should apply, but I said, ‘Are you kidding me? I’m crazy busy with four kids!’ But he put my name in for it anyway, which just shows how much he’s always supported me in this. So, I became the music director there for about four years—with babies! Sometimes I’d have babies hanging on my front in a carrier while I was playing, then go nurse during the sermon and come back to play later on. It was a wonderful church that gave me opportunities to think creatively. We started a children’s choir, an adult choir, and other things.”

Then Jeremy retired from the Air Force and the Lord called the family to Kalispell, Montana, where he started a second career as the head of a Christian school. “Montana is basically like another country,” Bekah says. “But it was wonderful. God put us in another PCA church, and I had these four little ones and figured I’d just focus on them for a while. The church had just

hired a new worship pastor, but it very quickly did not work out. We’d been there about a year when the pastor called and asked if I wanted to do music for the church. The Lord just gave me the opportunity. It turned out to be probably the most fruitful three years I’ve ever experienced in ministry. I felt like I was really doing what God made me to do. The pastor loved to be creative, and he encouraged me in that. For example, one of the things we did was to start monthly vespers services that were all music and readings and prayers. I started teaching the women’s Bible studies, too, which I loved.”

She also loved Montana and the mountains and watching her kids enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. The family loved their church and the kids’ school. From Bekah’s perspective, they could have stayed there forever—but the Lord had other plans.

An opportunity came up in St. Louis for Jeremy to work in development with Westminster Christian Academy and it seemed too good to pass up. There were many other advantages to being back on Bekah’s home turf. They would be near her extended family again. And there are lots of PCA churches to choose from. It also got her thinking of going back to seminary. She got a job teaching music at Twin Oaks School, her old alma mater, and started taking classes part time at Covenant Seminary. She very quickly realized that this was what God was calling her to do full time. She quit her job and became a full-time student in the MDiv program. At the time, there weren’t many immediate opportunities to do music at her local church, but God again stepped in. The Seminary’s Chapel Coordinator position became available.

“The Lord opened that door, and it’s been a huge gift. It’s been a great experience, and I’ve learned a lot. Though planning and leading Chapel worship is very similar to what one might do for a congregation, there are also some important differences. With Chapel, we’re not really a single congregation. We have people here from lots of different church backgrounds and styles, different ethnicities, different nations. The number of songs that are familiar to everybody may not be as great as in a congregation. There’s a little more freedom to try something new. I see it as an opportunity to show future ministry

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leaders some of the rich music that's out there, and the wide variety of it, so that when they go to their church's later as pastors or music directors or whatever, they'll know what resources are available for good music."

Good as her Chapel experience has been, Bekah's time at Covenant has done more than simply give her another outlet to express her musical gifts. "It has helped to shape me in new and more profound ways. As we have dived deeply into the books of the Bible, I've been struck by the realization that the times when God is most lifted up and glorified, when we see his majesty the most, are the times when his people are worshipping and singing to him. And that is not just one person individually. It's always throngs of people. Even in the New Testament letters, the church is commanded to sing together communally. Just as the Trinity is complete in community with one another, so is the church when we glorify God as his people singing together. Worship is not a spectator sport. The goal is for all of us to participate—and to participate thoughtfully, which is why it's especially helpful for those who are planning and leading liturgies and music to be thoughtful in how they put those elements together. Covenant has helped me understand that in deeper ways."

As a musician who feels called to minister to God's people through leading worship, Bekah found Dr. Collins's Psalms and Wisdom Literature class especially impactful for her spiritual growth. "Thinking through why God chose to give not just the psalms, but all of this other wisdom literature to his people was just amazing to me. What a creative God that we have! But how do we teach these books well to the people in our churches? And how do we incorporate things like lament into worship? How do we lament well together?" Other classes were significant for her too. "Dr. Yarbrough's Revelation and General Epistles class stirred my heart to the vastness of God's world and the immense diversity of his church. Educational Foundations gave me principles I use every time I teach a Sunday school class, or even when just at home with my kids. Those are just three examples, but I've learned so much from everyone here. I said earlier that my college years were pretty formative, but I think my time in seminary has been even more so."

**Worship is not a spectator sport. The goal is for all of us to participate—and to participate thoughtfully.**

Having graduated in May 2025 and handed the reins of the Chapel Coordinator job on to someone else, what is next for Bekah and her family?

"I'm not exactly sure yet. My husband has shifted back to education from development and is now interim head of school at Heritage Christian Academy, so we plan to be here for a while. I want to minister in the church in some capacity. I hope to use my degree in some way to help shape the worship of the church both locally and more broadly, and to continue to teach as opportunities present themselves. We'll see what doors the Lord opens. Whatever happens, I'm grateful for my time here and for all the encouragement I've received. I'll keep playing music no matter what—there is so much to sing about!" ■

*Rick Matt is Senior Writer and Editor for Covenant Seminary and loves to tell the stories of what God is doing in and through the lives of CTS students, graduates, and faculty. He also serves as a ruling elder in the PCA.*

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# CLASS NOTES

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## “Go Therefore and Make Disciples”

**More than 5,000 Covenant alumni serve Christ’s church and kingdom in 50 states and over 50 countries.**

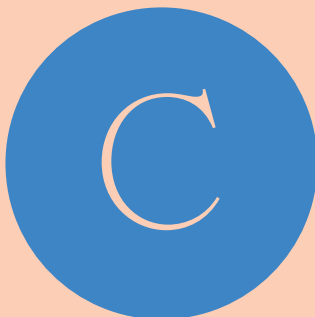


ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

Connections made in the Covenant community extend well beyond the time spent on campus or in classes together. We celebrate the joys and share in the sorrows of our alumni by highlighting some of their life and ministry milestones in each issue of *Covenant*. Additionally, to access the ongoing care and resources we offer alumni, contact Director of Alumni and Career Services Dr. Joel Hathaway at [joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu](mailto:joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu). From job placement assistance to vocational discernment, we are always happy to assist our graduates as they seek to serve the Lord for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

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## Ordinations, Installations, & Transitions

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**Brandon Addison** (*MDiv '10*) transitioned to full-time coaching and consulting with Tin Man Ministries and C12, a Christian CEO Peer Advisory Forum, after seven years of leading The Neighborhood Church. He is completing his DMin at Denver Seminary, focusing on peer cohorts, transformational leadership, and neuroscience. His wife, Amy, is transitioning from her role as a Pediatric Oncology Nurse at Children's Hospital Colorado to providing operations and administrative support. Brandon is ordained in the EPC and continues to engage in pastoral health work for the de-

nomination. The Addisons have two children, Aidan (14) and An-sley (9), and live in the Denver Metro area.

Congratulations to **Jamie Burkemper** (*MA '21*) on his ordination in the Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana de España (Evangelical Presbyterian church of Spain) in Madrid on October 20, 2024. Jamie and his wife, Jennifer, have led an MTW team in Madrid since 2021. Prior to that, they served MTW for 20 years in Mexico. Their team is currently planting the first RUF-Global ministry in Spain and a new church in Madrid.

After church planting for ten years in Hollywood, FL, **John Houmes** (*MDiv '10*) is now

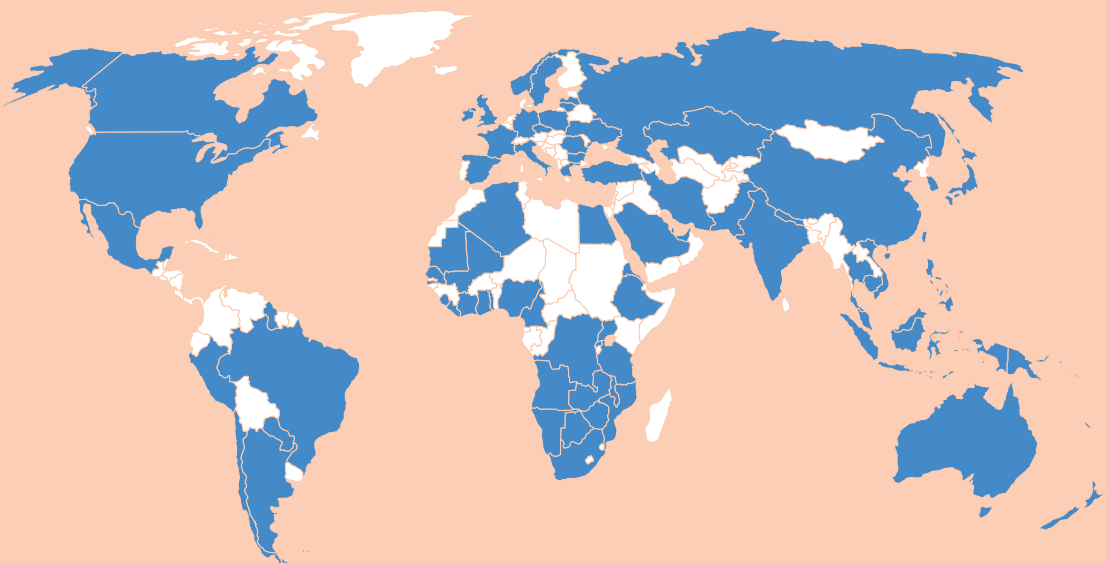
serving as the Pastor of Family Ministries at Spanish River Church in Boca Raton, FL. John continues to co-host the PostEverything podcast with **Brad Edwards** (*MDiv '10*), a podcast about remapping culture and rethinking leadership in a liminal age. John and his wife, Virginia, have three daughters ages 15, 12, and 9.

After 4.5 years at the University of Nebraska, serving with Reformed University Fellowship, **Thomas Kuhn** (*MDiv '19*) and family moved to Greenville, SC, where Thomas is now serving as an Assistant Pastor at Resurrection Presbyterian Church (PCA), with lead pastor **Jonathan Davis** (*MDiv '11*). Thomas was ordained in the PCA in 2020. He

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## Where Our Graduates Go

■ ALUMNI PRESENT    ■ TO BE REACHED



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is married to Molly. The Kuhns have two children—Louise (3) and Walter (2).

After 20 years of pastoral ministry, **Michael Quillen** (*MDiv '06*) transitioned from pastoring churches to supporting pastors and their churches. He began working as an Interim Pastor with Grace & Peace Presbyterian (PCA) in Limerick, PA, in January 2024. He is also working hard to launch the “business” assets of serving pastors through one-to-one coaching, community groups, and workshops. He and his wife, Julia, celebrated 25 years of marriage and continue to thank God for seven amazing children who are launching into adulthood well.

**Ed Rogland** (*MDiv '12, MAC '13*) became Chief of Chaplain Service with the Cheyenne VA Health Care System in November 2024, supervising six chaplains serving veterans from the southern half of Wyoming to northern Colorado and into western Nebraska. In December 2024, Ed retired from the Army National Guard after serving 20 years in the Army Guard and 5 years in the Marine Corps, the last 12 as a Chaplain. Besides serving at the VA, Ed is an Assisting Priest at St. Peter's Anglican Church (ACNA) in Cheyenne, WY.

**Shaun Spencer** (*MDiv '07*) and family are moving to Siloam Springs, AR, where Shaun will Pastor First Presbyterian Church (EPC). Shaun was ordained in the PCA in 2007 and has been serving Living Waters Presbyterian Church (EPC) in

Wendell, ID, since 2020. The Spencers have three girls, Eva (18), Lily (15), and Claire (12).

**Simon Stokes** (*MDiv / MAC '13*), after serving 11 years with RUF at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, is serving now as Lead Pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Durham, NC. Simon received his DMin from Duke in 2020, writing on “Learning to Sail in the Storm: Integrating Murray Bowen's Concept of Differentiation of Self with Pastoral Theology and Leadership.” His wife, Katie, continues to work part-time as a graphic designer while actively volunteering with their local elementary school and serving in myriad ways with their church. The Stokeses have three children—Emory (10), Caroline (7), and Peter (5).

**David Wright** (*MDiv '14*) was recently ordained and installed to serve as an evangelist at Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Countryside, IL. He will split preaching duties with his co-pastor, Bob Tarullo, and spend the balance of his time bringing the message of the gospel to the surrounding neighborhoods and the rest of the Chicagoland area.

### *Celebrations*

**Josh Holler** (*MDiv '18*) successfully defended his PhD in Biblical Studies & Ethics, completed at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO. Josh's dissertation is entitled “An Ethical Appraisal of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA).” Josh serves as the Lead Pastor of

First Baptist Church of St. John (SBC) in St. Louis, MO.

**Ryan Laughlin** (*MDiv '04*) successfully completed his PhD dissertation, “Truth and a Song: The Role of Preaching in the Life and Legacy of Francis A. Schaeffer,” awarded by Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO. Ryan and Heather live in Virginia near Washington, DC, where Ryan has served as the Senior Pastor at McLean Presbyterian Church (PCA) in McLean, VA, since 2022.

### *Family Updates*

**Stephen** (*MDiv '16*) and **Audrey** (*MABTS '22*) **Moss** announce the birth of Ruth “Ruthie” Barbara Moss, born on July 26, 2024. They live in St. Louis, MO, where Audrey teaches middle school theology at South City Community School. Stephen recently accepted a new remote position as Director of Student Outreach for Harvest USA, where he will be writing, speaking, and producing resources for churches and youth pastors to help their students grow in a biblical understanding of sexuality and gender.

**Katie** (*MAC '19*) and **Mark Ribera** announce the birth of their daughter, Nola Joy Ribera, born on June 21, 2024. The Riberas live in Seattle, WA, where Mark works as a software engineer and Katie serves as the Executive Director of Bell Tower Counseling, a non-profit counseling center she helped launch in 2021. Katie and Mark attend Trinity Church Seattle (PCA), where Katie also serves on staff as the Director of Adult Ministries.

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## Condolences

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To the family of **Susan Elizabeth Calhoun** (*MATS '16*), promoted to glory, December 22, 2024. She is survived by many family members. A multi-talented lady with many interests, Susan earned degrees in German Literature, voice, communication disorders, and an MA in Counseling, and worked at various times as a German teacher, a professional soloist, and a speech-language pathologist. She also enjoyed participating in local theater productions and was a tireless pro-life advocate.

To the family of **David Mann Jones** (*MDiv '81*), promoted to glory March 4, 2025. David is survived by his wife, Marcia, and their children and grandchildren. He started classes at Covenant Seminary one week after getting married, in June 1977. David and Marcia spent a year in India with World Presbyterian Missions and subsequently worked with InterVarsity and Mission to the World (MTW).

To the family of **Henry F. Lazenby** (*MDiv '78*), promoted to glory March 15, 2025. Henry was a theologian, a teacher, worked in IT, and served with the military. He is survived by his wife, Lois, and many extended family members.

To the family of **Thomas Herbert Mehnert** (*MDiv '81*), promoted to glory, February 13, 2025. Thomas is survived by his wife of 56 years, Lois Barlow Mehnert; his son, Mark Thomas Mehnert; his son-in-law Scott Seaton (Ginger Seaton), and many

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grandchildren. A Mechanical Engineering graduate of Virginia Tech in 1966, Tom dedicated much of his career to the David Taylor Research Center in Annapolis, MD, and contributed greatly to deep ocean technology research, traveling to Hawaii, Denmark, and Italy. He later pursued an MDiv and served in Christian missions Ocho Rios, Jamaica, before returning to the US to start his own contracting business.

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## Publications

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See the "Book Release" section of this magazine for a list of recent Alumni publications.

*Covenant Seminary's Alumni and Career Services staff provides ongoing care and resources for alumni. To share updates or access alumni support, contact Dr. Joel Hathaway at [joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu](mailto:joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu).*

# Covenant.



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