

The
HOPE
FULFILLED



O. PALMER ROBERTSON
As Portrayed by His Daughter, Jane Kincannon Robertson Dodds

The
HOPE
FULFILLED

Essays in Honor of
O. PALMER ROBERTSON

EDITED BY
ROBERT L. PENNY

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Preface

And thus the Word of God, presented by Erasmus to the learned in 1516 was given to the people by [William] Tyndale. In the parsonages and in the monastic cells, but particularly in shops and cottages, a crowd of persons were studying the New Testament. The clearness of the Holy Scriptures struck each reader. None of the systematic or aphoristic forms of the school were to be found there: it was the language of human life they discovered in those divine writings: here a conversation, there a discourse; here a narrative, and there a comparison; here a command, and there an argument; here a parable, and there a prayer. It was not all doctrine or all history; but these two elements mingled together made an admirable whole. Above all, the life of our Saviour, so divine and so human, had an inexpressible charm which captivated the simple. One work of Jesus Christ explained another, and the great facts of redemption, birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, and the sending of the Holy Ghost, followed and completed each other.¹

One of the valuable gems Providence put on the path of my life was the experience of being a student, friend, and co-laborer of Dr. Owen Palmer Robertson. That remarkable stone first appeared at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, in 1968, and he has been cherished ever since because of the single-minded orientation of the man. When Robertson arrived fresh from a south Mississippi pastorate, one quickly sensed in his class on the Epistle to the Hebrews his orientation to the whole Word of God, Old Testament as well as New. There was a reason for this and he showed

1. J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *The Reformation in England* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 1:107.

PREFACE

us day after day in class: Christ may be perceived, heard, and seen, from all parts of the Bible. Quite simply, the Bible in its entirety is about Christ! Thus a hearty amen to Tyndale's early efforts and, additionally, Augustine before him: *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet.*²

In this manner, Robertson has spent his life, as long as I have known him, preaching, teaching, and writing books to declare "the unsearchable riches of Christ" as they are highlighted from all those points, beginning with Moses and going through all the prophets. Now it is one thing to be deft in this exercise in the academic classroom, but it is quite another to take it to the pulpits and university campuses of America, the antebellum homes of north Mississippi, the university campus of the Mississippi Delta, the streets of suburban Washington or Philadelphia, and the refugee villages of East Africa. Additionally, Robertson teaches men to present Christ near Lake Victoria in Africa, the shores of which can be seen from a Kampala vantage, a short walk from the campus of African Bible College in Uganda.

Robertson was immersed early in a context of Reformational preaching in his home church, First Presbyterian of Jackson, Mississippi. It continued in his career as a youth assistant at First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and to his current vice-chancellorship and classroom at African Bible College, Uganda. His goal, observed as recently as one year ago, has been to teach the Bible to all classes of people to be applied to all of life because it declares the lordship of Christ over all of human experience on all its pages.

For this reason we have chosen as our theme for this honorary volume Christ's words: "*Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled'*" (Luke 24:44). In the classroom these were frequent words from Robertson's mouth. His students, former colleagues, friends, and administrators of institutions where Robertson served or is highly regarded were asked to participate and to reflect on Robertson's reliance on this passage of Scripture. As one will quickly discover from the essays, Robertson's thesis (first Christ's) is not difficult to prove.

2. Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* (Questions on the First Seven Books of the Old Testament) 2.73. "The New Testament is in the Old concealed and the Old is in the New revealed." I want to credit my friend, colleague, and fellow contributor to this volume, Dr. Guy Waters, associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, for this reference and the original Latin version of the popular translation in English.

But more than just proving a thesis, our goal in this volume is to celebrate and to relish the truth of Christ's words. We also want to demonstrate publicly how this theme has enriched our understanding of the Scriptures and the worth of teaching others the same. This is our way of doing what Tyndale began for us centuries ago and what we pray will be done in new ways for centuries to come until Christ returns triumphantly.

Again,³ our goal has been fourfold: the glory of God, the honoring of one of Christ's faithful teachers and authors in the church, the edification of the church through a useful volume of instructional essays, and the enjoyment of God's people through their celebration of the faithful life of one of His servants. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

ROBERT L. PENNY

3. See two other volumes in which former Reformed Theological Seminary professors have been honored with *estschrift* presentations: Joseph A. Pipa and C. N. Willborn, eds., *Confessing Our Hope: Essays in Honor of Morton Howison Smith on His Eightieth Birthday* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2004); and Robert L. Penny, ed., *Interpreting and Teaching the Word of Hope: Essays in Honor of Jack Brown Scott on His Seventy-Seventh Birthday* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2005). Both are still in print and available.



Acknowledgments

BY THE VERY NATURE of this book, there are many people whose contribution and help I want to recognize.

First, I want to thank the session of First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with whom I served happily for a five-year period ending in June 2007, for allowing me to work on this project and use their fine word-processing and mailing services. They are a fine “band of brothers” who will be my friends for life.

I also want to thank others: the session of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and many anonymous individuals who contributed to this project. I also want to thank the board of Reformed Theological Seminary. They are responsible for establishing an institution forty years ago—we are joyfully marking the occasion with “Ebenezers” on all our campuses—that brought this perceived “new” thing (i.e. the Reformed faith) to the modern South. Their founding the seminary many years ago has contributed to the spread of the Reformed faith all over the world, and they have allowed me to bring this incomplete project to full fruition.

Then there are the contributors: amazingly, the initially penciled “wish list” was about 95 percent of what you see in the table of contents. This project began in early 2006, and the contributors have been patient through the entire publication process. Our desire was to have men participate who had Palmer as a colleague or who knew something of his writings, and I believe we met that goal. We also sought to include tributes from administrators of all the institutions in which Palmer served.

Our fond hope was to have P&R Publishing take our efforts and bring them to the public, since P&R has published so many of Palmer’s works.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Marvin Padgett and his staff, I feel, were wonderful to work with and have been cordial to come through for us.

Finally, I would like to thank Sara Sealy, office manager at First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for her indispensable help in handling the finances and other related details involved in the production of this book. Then also, I must thank our word processor, Michelle Robinson, Sara's daughter, who formatted all the pieces for me in preparation for the publisher. I am grateful to have had superlative help in those areas.

In the content of the essays, we sought to embody both the Reformation and Westminster theological flavors of Old Princeton, with a pinch of Old Southern Presbyterianism, and to demonstrate how these flavors affect a range of topics, including biblical interpretation, theological formulation, ecclesiastical life, pastoral ministry, and worldwide impact. We felt that such a collection of essays would accurately represent the broad impact of the man who is to be honored here. Further, we believe that the truths present here are, as Paul explained to Timothy, the "pillar and buttress of the truth" that will capture and conquer the world for Christ, even if slowly as the yeast in the flour.

In all of this, we sought to present the true flavor and the savor of the Christ. You will now have the opportunity to judge our efforts.

Sola Deo Gloria.

ROBERT L. PENNY

Biographical Sketch:
O. Palmer Robertson, the Sojourner

JANE KINCANNON ROBERTSON DODDS

WHAT I KNOW about my father's childhood and youth is based on memories my father shared with me. Owen Palmer Robertson was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on August 31, 1937, the fourth child of his parents' five children. I never met Bess Kincannon, my grandmother, but I believe she was the one who raised her daughter and four sons with faithful teaching from the Word. She was softhearted and had trouble catching her mischievous boys, who at least once almost burned down the woods near their house. She and her husband, Jack Robertson, lost their fourth child to a drowning accident in his teen years.

At the age of 15 my father heard the preaching of Billy Graham and received the gift of Christ's salvation. Soon afterward he felt God's call to become a pastor. He then used his skills as state yo-yo champion to tell the gospel with his yo-yo to the poor in the African-American neighborhoods.

He first met my mother, Julia Ruffin, when she was a senior in high school. Daddy would give her rides to youth group at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson.

Eight years later, in October 1963, I was born while my father was finishing doctoral studies at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. Not long afterward we moved to Picayune, Mississippi, where my

father pastored his first church. My sister, Virginia “Jennie” Buchanan, was born there in May 1966. In 1967 we moved to Clinton, Mississippi, where my father taught at Reformed Theological Seminary. I believe my father enabled the students at RTS to become acquainted with the ministry of an African-American pastor in Jackson. Our family visited this black pastor’s church, and it made a wonderful impression on me.

In 1971 my father was asked to teach at Westminster Theological Seminary near Philadelphia. So we made the dramatic move from the known South to the unknown North. When my father first walked into a Philadelphia sub shop, he asked for one “Hoa-a-gie, please” and was almost laughed out of the shop. The seminary soon cured his accent. I believe he was asked to speak strange sentences while holding his nose to get rid of his nasal twang.

My mother’s mother and bed-ridden grandmother came to live with us at this time and stayed until my mother became pregnant with my sister Gwenette Orr, who was born in January 1971, a delightful addition to our family.

My father taught at Westminster for nine years. He seemed always to be involved with the students. While teaching Hebrew, he invented “happy Hebrew,” a method of learning Hebrew phrases through song. I still can sing a couple of these tunes, including the Hebrew alphabet. He was also famous for answering precocious students’ questions by saying “I don’t know.” Despite not knowing everything, my father was already well-known for his interpretations of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Old Testament.

Around his fifth year at Westminster, my father started the first PCA church north of the “Mason-Dixon” line, in Malvern, Pennsylvania. We moved there, about an hour from Westminster. Many of the students from Westminster were involved in this new church. Although I was unaware of it at the time, I’m sure commuting to teach and planting a new church was a major undertaking. My memories of that little family of believers planted in me a love for the church and its vital worship. I especially learned from my father’s weekly sermons and the popcorn and fellowship of Sunday evening services in our home. Daddy even pioneered a “Vespers” service which met in a wooded park complete with a pump organ and the beauty of sunset.

In 1979 my father accepted a position at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. In twelve years of teaching he had never received a sabbatical. Covenant Seminary graciously gave him a half-year sabbatical to

Cambridge, England, before coming to teach. So while packing and sending our things to St. Louis, we were also packing for an extended stay in England. That summer, we kids stayed with our aunt and uncle and their four girls in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, while our parents visited Italy, which I am sure was my mother's dream. She had finished her BA in art history while we were living in Philadelphia.

We moved into a house in a little town called Histon, outside Cambridge. My sister Jennie and I rode our bikes to the village college while Daddy rode his bike to Cambridge University. He must have been writing his book, *Christ of the Covenants* during that time, but of course I have my own memories. Daddy and I were able to ring the bells in the Norman Church down the street, which had eight bells—for which it is still well known among English bell-ringers. I rang the smallest bell and stood on a box to reach the cord. But Daddy rang one of the bigger bells and had his arms pulled out of joint! He didn't continue as a bell ringer, but the intrigue kept me climbing those steeple steps every week. We worshipped in this Anglican church for the remainder of our time in England.

Regretfully, we had to leave that romantic place and come back to America. But my parents seemed happy in St. Louis. They bought a little brick house in University Park. I finished my last two years of high school and went off to college. While teaching, again my father's love for the church led him to become the associate pastor of a Presbyterian church in the Washington University area.

I believe that my father's original call to the ministry continued to pull him, and in 1985 he received a surprise call to pastor a church in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC. At first he wasn't sure and specified that he needed to be able to continue writing books. Wallace Memorial Presbyterian wasn't sure about that, but I guess the church realized it was calling an incurable academic, and agreed. Of course Daddy was more than an academic and soon jumped into that pastoral position wholeheartedly. I felt, in that church, that the preaching we received was overflowing with the treasures of Scripture, both from my father and from the associate pastors.

My parents realized the need in the community for a Christian high school and started one, using the church facilities. My mother was the first principal and my sister Gwenette was one of their first seventh graders. As Wallace Memorial Presbyterian grew, my father had the vision to begin two

new sister churches in the outer suburbs. These churches grew beautifully and all three churches are still doing well.

In 1992 my father and mother were called to join my father's sister and brother-in-law, Nell and Jack Chinchin, in Malawi, East Africa, to teach in the African Bible Colleges. When they returned to the USA to raise support for their missionary work in Africa, Daddy was also asked to teach Old Testament at Knox Theological Seminary in Florida. The seminary was willing to hire him for fall and January terms so that he could also continue in his position at African Bible College in Malawi for the second semester each year. This dual relationship between the college and seminary turned out to be beneficial to both institutions, as several American seminary professors came to Malawi to teach courses. My father had always had a passion for missions and had already traveled overseas to speak at many conferences all over the world. Teaching in Malawi seemed a natural fit for Daddy. He has a love for the African Christians and often speaks of their enthusiasm for learning. My mother, who had received a master's degree in Education while in Maryland, was also ready for a new stage of service to students. In her kind-hearted way, she saw the need for married student housing and was the primary cause for raising money for these buildings.

This chapter of my parents' lives was not to last long. In 1994, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, requiring them to remain in Florida for treatment. In early 1995 the cancer went into remission, so my parents returned to Africa for another academic term. But by the fall of 1995 my mother was severely ill again. She went to be with the Lord on Thanksgiving Day 1995. This was clearly a time of suffering and loneliness for my father. He was with my family during the birth of my fourth child, our first boy, whom we named Michael Owen, after his father and his grandfather. Daddy then went back to Malawi and continued teaching.

While in Africa, my father visited the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya, where an English woman 34 years old was studying to be a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Her name was Joanna Reilly. My father felt she was the only woman he had met who would fit well into our family. Well, that's how he described her to me, but what won me over was her charm and devotion to Christ and others, not to mention her commitment to tea-time. So he proposed to Joanna and, after considering how her own plans would be altered, she prayed and considered again and, after several weeks, agreed to marry my old dad. They were mar-

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: O. PALMER ROBERTSON, THE SOJOURNER

ried in both England and America around Christmas of 1996. Joanna *was* perfect for our family and for the college, where she began to teach Bible Translation courses. By 2003 Joanna and my father had three little boys: Murray, born 1999, Elliot, born 2001, and Daniel, 2002; my brothers and the uncles to my five children!

Soon after the birth of Daddy and Joanna's first child, they became full-time teachers in Malawi. Then, in 2004, they moved to Uganda to help start another African Bible College. Presently this college is in its third year and has a growing student body and faculty and a fine campus.

As a child, my father's creative bedtime stories inspired and enlightened my own creativity and faith in a caring Father with a consistent plan to save; and later, his many theological writings and sermons did the same. Yet this quiet, productive part of his life never seemed to take away from his external relationships as a professor, pastor, or father. The only time I was aware he was writing or in private prayer was in the wee hours of the morning, if I should ever be awake then. He was available to create many wonderful memories, of which these are only the beginning.