

Window on the World

Window on the World is our weekly opportunity to examine our culture from the vantage point of biblical Christianity. Here you will find the text from Dr. Ryken's "Window on the World" talks from Tenth Presbyterian Church's evening service. If you missed one or wanted to send a copy to a friend, you will be able to find them here. Please note: there is no "Window on the World" on third Sundays, selected other Sundays, or in July and August.

Windows on the World before September 2005 are available in an older format. [Click here](#). Many of these are now published in [My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2002) and in [He Speaks to Me Everywhere: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2004) by Philip Graham Ryken.




Happy Birthday, Philadelphia Presbytery

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Series: Happy Birthday, Philadelphia Presbytery

Date: 02/26/2006

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This year marks the 300th anniversary of the first presbytery in America, which was formed right here in Philadelphia in March of 1706. This year also marks the beginning of a new era for the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). As of January 1, the old Philadelphia Presbytery has multiplied into three new presbyteries, with the result that we now find ourselves in a smaller, city-only presbytery with a larger vision for reaching Philadelphia with the gospel. As we remember the past and look to the future, it is time to say, "Happy Birthday" to the Philadelphia Presbytery.

It is hard to be certain, but the first time a Presbyterian minister preached in Philadelphia may have been in 1692, when Francis Makemie made his first visit to the burgeoning city. His ministry was not well received by local Quakers, who said he spoke with "invented words of man's wisdom, contrary to Scripture." Philadelphia was not yet ready for Presbyterianism.

Yet by the end of the 17th century a small church of Reformation Protestants was meeting in a storefront owned by the Barbados Company, a West Indies trading company located at 2nd and Market. The church had only a couple of dozen members, at the most. Many of them were Baptists, but there were also some Presbyterians, and the two groups agreed to take turns choosing the Sunday preacher.

In 1698 the Presbyterians succeeded in attracting a Presbyterian pastor to be their regular preacher: Jedidiah Andrews, a graduate of Harvard College, which was dedicated in those days to producing men for the ministry. Unfortunately, Andrews was a polemical preacher, and soon he managed to alienate the Baptists, who left to start their own congregation.

Those early days were difficult. The church was small and struggling. Its members were poor, unable to give their pastor full-time support. The surrounding culture did not encourage practical godliness, and Christians didn't always find it easy to get along. The level of education was low; there were no schools. Disease was common, and conditions were generally harsh. It was a frontier situation in almost every respect.

What the church had was hope for the future in the grace of God. In 1704 they managed to erect their first building,

a moderately-sized meetinghouse at Market and Bank Streets. And the church was growing. Some early members were Puritans who had come down from New England—native-born Americans. Others were French Huguenots, or came from the Dutch Reformed tradition. But most of the first Presbyterians in Philadelphia were Scotch-Irish immigrants who had been Presbyterian from birth. American Presbyterianism was drawing strength from its ancestral home.

By 1706 Francis Makemie could see that the church would continue to grow, as the constant influx of immigrants required gospel ministry and spiritual care. He recruited seven pastors, including Jedidiah Andrews, to establish America's first presbytery. Makemie served as the moderator and is generally considered the father of Presbyterianism in America.

Philadelphia's first presbytery was financially supported by Presbyterians in England, New England, and Scotland. To a certain extent the presbytery itself was multi-cultural, with Scottish, Irish, and American ministers. According to their minutes, these men agreed

to meet yearly, and oftener if necessary, to consult the most proper measures for advancing religion and propagating Christianity in our various stations, and to maintain such a correspondence as may conduce to the improvement of our ministerial ability by prescribing texts to be preached on by two of our number at every meeting, which performance is subjected to the censure of our brethren [Guelzo, 26-27].

In other words, these ministers would meet together to strategize about advancing the kingdom of God through the church, and to that end, they would work on developing their skills in the single most important task in spreading the gospel: the preaching of God's Word. Growth was slow at the beginning, and in 1710 there were only five Presbyterian churches in all of Pennsylvania. Yet by 1716 there was sufficient growth for America's first presbytery to multiply into four new presbyteries, and there have been Presbyterian churches preaching the gospel in Philadelphia ever since.

As we reflect on this history, we can hardly help but notice the many parallels between the early days of Presbyterianism in Philadelphia and recent developments in the Philadelphia Presbytery of the PCA. As it was in the beginning, our new city-only presbytery is relatively small, with no more than a dozen churches. This is more churches than there were in 1706, but of course the city is much larger, and its needs are much greater.

A number of our newest churches are in ethnic communities, including immigrant communities from China, Africa, and Russia. Together we are strategizing about starting new churches, including church plants in University City, Cheltenham, Elkins Park, Mount Airy, and South Philadelphia. And we will do this gospel work by preaching Christ-centered expository sermons. To quote from the statement of our core values:

Preaching the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the divinely-appointed means of bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and building believers up in the gospel. . . . By expository preaching we mean preaching that is driven by Scripture and derived from its divine authority, so that God's Word is declared to God's people. . . . Expository preaching carefully and thoroughly communicates what the Bible actually teaches, exploring its context, explaining its meaning, expounding its doctrine in connection to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and applying its gospel to the spiritual needs of those who listen, exalting the glory of God.

We pray that the result of such preaching will be to advance the kingdom of God in the city through the church of Jesus Christ.

[The historical information for this Window on the World comes from Allen C. Guelzo, "Roots," in *Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically*, ed. by Philip G. Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004) and from Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1944)].