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## INTRODUCTION



These chapters were originally a series of lectures delivered at the Christian Studies Forum at the church where I was Senior Minister from 1989 to 2006, Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware. The Forum began in 1993 and lasted until my departure at the end of 2006. This particular series of lectures began in 1996.

The Forum met several times a year on a Saturday morning, and consisted of a superb home cooked breakfast, a lecture by a distinguished visiting scholar—of whom there were many available between Philadelphia and Washington, DC—or myself, followed by discussion. One notable visiting lecturer described it as the best discussion group he had ever attended. There were many research chemists in the area, Wilmington being a centre of research, together with a range of intelligent laypeople, and occasional ministers, all with a keen interest in theology and the Christian faith. Public discussion frequently lasted for up to an hour after the lecture had ended.

The chapters focus on a number of figures who, for the most part, played a crucial role in the spread of the gospel and the advancement of the church. We consider briefly the life and

work of each one, refer to their strengths and weaknesses, and provide some hints for further reading. As you will gather, this will be of particular interest to laypeople with a serious interest in learning of the way the church has understood the gospel down the centuries, and should also appeal to ministers and students. It is intended too to provide the reader with guidance for further study. Only one of the dozen may not fit the category of 'key figures'; John Nevin was a relatively obscure German Reformed theologian of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, he is of much interest, particularly in North America, and has become the focus of increased attention more recently.

It is my pleasant task to thank all who have helped in the production of this book. Philip Ross encouraged its publication while Willie Mackenzie kept a watchful eye over its progress.

Behind all this I want to remember all who assisted in the Christian Studies Forum, without which these chapters would not have been produced. †Dick and Ann Symons set the room up, Ann serving her delicious breakfasts that were so much of an attraction. Jim Wadsworth took care of the funds and advised on our plans. †Dr. John Van Dyk was a generous supporter of the Forum and of other conferences held by the church on the interaction of Christianity and particular areas of life.

Above all, we recall the work of †Charles and Bertie Toler whose combined energies were responsible for it taking place originally as the Truth and Grace Breakfast Club until their move to North Carolina on 31 July 1997. It was largely Charles Toler's vision, energy, and enthusiasm that helped the ministry to get off the ground and so to flourish over this extended period of time. It is to his memory that this book is dedicated.

Robert Letham

*The second week in Trinity, 2014.*