

## BOOK REVIEW

of

Philip G. Ryken (editor),

*Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically*,  
P&R Publishing, 2004.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Tenth Presbyterian Church is located in the heart of old Philadelphia, in what is frequently called “center city” Philadelphia, just a few blocks from the somewhat famous City Hall that may be said to be indeed the center of the city, and this according to the city plan of Benjamin Franklin. Tenth Pres is a lighthouse of the Gospel right there in the middle of one of the world’s most famous cities so rich in American history, radiating its influence far beyond the city of Philadelphia. Much of that far-reaching influence came about through the ministry of Dr. James Montgomery Boice, pastor of Tenth Pres from 1968 until his untimely (humanly speaking) death in 2000. Dr. Boice was not only the senior pastor of Tenth Pres, the author of over 40 books, the speaker of the weekly Bible Study Hour radio program, frequent conference speaker and one of the main organizers of the annual Conference on Reformed Theology, founding member of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, but he also oversaw the growth of Tenth Pres not only in terms of numbers, but in terms numerous ministries to the community and beyond. Philip Ryken became Boice’s replacement as senior pastor in 2001, which prompted the writing of this book. In addition to Ryken, there are contributions by Allen C. Guelzo, William S. Barker, and Paul S. Jones. The book includes a forward by Linda M. Boice, wife of Dr. Boice.

Dr. Boice is well-known to many at Evangel through his books, radio program, and other ministries. Most notably, he was the speaker at Evangel’s annual conference on reformed theology not once, but twice (in 1996 and 1999). That is one reason why some at Evangel may find this book valuable. But in addition, it is perhaps interesting and valuable to learn about how one church has survived for more than 175 years maintaining a consistent message of thinking and acting Biblically. It gives a perspective on what a church can be, and perhaps should be. Were those 175 years always growing and rejoicing, with optimism? Not at all. There were ups and downs. Even under Dr. Boice’s very influential ministry, average attendance at Tenth Pres steadily declined each year from 1987 through 1994 (with the exception of 1989 and 1991). The average attendance in 1994 was about the same as it was in 1980. Happily the trend reversed, and attendance began to steadily increase again. The membership in 2002 was 1508: small by mega-church standards, but that is at a church with no parking lot in a very congested city!

The book has six chapters. Chapter one is *Roots*, where the very beginnings of Tenth Pres are reviewed. The church was founded in 1829.

Chapter two is *The First Three “B’s”*. It is a curiosity that all of the senior pastors of Tenth Pres that had a lengthy tenure had last names that begin with the letter *B*. The first three were Henry Boardman, pastor from 1833 to 1876, William Breed, pastor from 1856 to 1889, and Marcus Brownson, pastor from 1897 to 1924. Chapter two covers the history of Tenth Pres from essentially its founding through 1924.

Chapter three is *Barnhouse*, which is about the ministry of the fourth *B*, Donald Grey Barnhouse, pastor from 1927 to 1960. Barnhouse founded the Bible Study Hour, authored books, and was a frequent conference speaker. Although he died in 1960, even today you have perhaps heard a recording of him on the radio or on an audio tape. Barnhouse had a significant influence upon both Jim and Linda Boice. When Jim Boice was young and still preparing for the ministry, it was Dr. Barnhouses’ pattern that Boice wished to follow. As Providence would lead, it was the pulpit committee of Tenth Pres that sought out Dr. Boice, who was then an assistant editor for *Christianity Today*. It was the first and only pulpit that Boice would fill. He never served as an Assistant Pastor or an Associate Pastor at other churches, which would be the usual pattern. Boice had a strong call to follow the pattern of Barnhouse, and structured his preparation accordingly, but the call to fill the pulpit at Tenth Pres still came unexpectedly, with delight and trepidation.

Chapter four is *City Church Again*. This is a brief chapter on Mariano Di Gangi, who filled the pulpit at Tenth Pres between Barnhouse and Boice.

Chapter five is *Boice*, which is about the ministry of the fifth *B*, James Montgomery Boice, pastor from 1968 to 2000. During his tenure at Tenth, Boice had opportunities and difficulties, but remained committed to his calling. In 1980 he was invited to consider becoming the President of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and in 1981 he was encouraged to return to *Christianity Today*, this time as editor. In the 1980s, Tenth Pres withdrew from the PCUSA and joined the PCA, a move that seemed necessary due to doctrinal differences, but caused long, drawn-out legal issues. And there was the temptation to relocate to the suburbs. Boice never wavered in his sense of God’s call upon his life.

Chapter six is *A Church for the Twenty-First Century*, written by Philip Graham Ryken, and outlines Ryken’s vision for the future of Tenth Pres: A Biblical Church, An Evangelical Church, A Reformational Church, A Presbyterian Church, and A City Church. Then he presents his ideas concerning the mission of Tenth Pres, which includes preaching, teaching, worship, education, missions, and service. It would appear that Tenth Pres is in good hands.

The book concludes with eight appendices. This includes an appendix on a short history of music at Tenth Pres, and one on the City Center Academy.

This is a very interesting read, but no doubt especially for those who have some ties to Tenth Pres. If this review is of any interest to you, I would highly recommend the book to you.