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Statement Of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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Contents: Vol. I, No. 3

| | |
|---|----|
| Editorial., by <i>G. I. Williamson</i> | 49 |
| Knox Voters' Guide..... | 51 |
| Taking Heed to the Flock (2), by <i>P. Y. de Jong</i> | 59 |
| Reforming the Diaconate (1) by <i>William Shishko</i> | 63 |
| Feedback..... | 67 |
| Ministerial Study..... | 69 |
| Book Review..... | 72 |

EDITORIAL

One of my reasons for belonging to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is the fact that it is a *confessional* church. It has, in other words, an official and authoritative statement of doctrinal truth that all office-bearers accept because it contains “the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” (Form of Government, Ch. XXV, 6b, Q. 2). It is understood, of course, that the Confession of Faith and Catechisms are never to be placed on a level with the Word of God. Of course not. Anyone who did that would by that very fact contradict the clear teaching

of these very documents. That is why the Reformed system of government provides for a way to correct anything in these confessional documents that may need correction. It is for this reason that the the Westminster Confession of Faith has been altered—slightly and rightly, as we would maintain—by the OPC (and by other orthodox Reformed bodies).

But this is not our main concern here. No, in this editorial we want to direct attention to the opposite side of the matter. And by this I mean the tendency to take too

low a view of these forms of unity (as our Reformed brethren term them). And here—to cite a concrete example, and to speak about it in a candid way—I want to refer to the high view of the Sabbath which is set forth in the Westminster standards.

It is my conviction that it behooves all elders and deacons in the OPC to make sure that in word *and deed* they are sincerely faithful to the teaching of these documents. Now it is certainly true that these standards teach a high view of the Lord’s day as the Christian Sabbath. Such things as buying and selling on the Lord’s day—apart from some urgent necessity—are clearly contrary to this teaching. I was therefore greatly heartened some time ago when I heard of an OPC session that finally felt guilty enough about the glaring inconsistency between profession and practice to do something about it. There was an open admission that the elders had not upheld the standards of the church faithfully in both teaching and example. The result was very beneficial. There was, among the elders themselves, a new sense of the importance of consistency and integrity in the meaning of their vows.

Let it be clearly understood that I do not say this because I think the Westminster Confession of Faith (or Catechisms) teaching on the Sabbath could not possibly be amended. What I plead for is simply the kind of integrity that refuses to do an end run around the confessional standards by way of adopting practices that are not countenanced by them. It just so happens that I think our constitutional standards do need to be amended. I am not going to say *where* in this editorial for two reasons. The first reason is that I would then be violating the very principle that I am concerned about. The second reason is that, in a sense, it is beside the point. Perhaps you are also convinced that you have the light, at some point, where the

fathers lacked it. Fine. But if you do, *and at the same time take your vows seriously*, you need to get busy and bring the matter before the courts of the church (*not* the congregation in the first instance) in order to seek orderly change. But then, having done that—if you are unsuccessful in persuading your brethren that change is needed—you ought to willingly restrict yourself so as not to contradict the published confessional testimony of the church. You ought to be willing to do this for the same reason that you would want others to do it, and not to unilaterally impose their contrary view upon the church.¹

What is greatly needed in the OPC is a greater degree of uniformity—and consistency—in doctrine and practice. It is perfectly true that our official standards are out of accord with what is acceptable in our culture in general, and even to most evangelical christians. But that only defines our privilege as Reformed believers. Ours is not a minimum faith—trimmed down as far as possible to fit these degenerate times. No, to the contrary, it is a maximum faith: one that calls us to the high standards that are part and parcel of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

It has been said that actions speak louder than words. How important it is, then, that we who are the Lord’s ordained servants mean what we say when we answer those ordination questions—and show that we do by our consistent practice.

1. I was serving in a congregation of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand when a pastor there decided to challenge the Westminster Confession’s teaching on the subject of the fourth commandment. He did *not*, in other words, just go his own way unilaterally. No, he did the right thing. He argued his case in Presbytery and Synod. The interesting thing is that in this instance—even though it was relatively new to the New Zealand churches—the Westminster Confession was upheld.

“My place accordingly it is, whom with all my unworthiness the Lord hath appointed to be a laborer in His field, to say these things to you, to sow, to plant, to water, yea to dig around about some trees, and to apply the basket of dung; belongeth it to me to do these things faithfully; to you to receive them faithfully; to the Lord to aid me in my labour, and you in your belief, all of us labouring, but in Him overcoming the world.” — The Works of Augustine [Sermons on New Testament Lessons, LI, section 4] in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. VI, p. 423.]

Knox Voters' Guide

Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church
Silver Spring, Maryland
1991

Each year, there is a congregational meeting at Knox Church.

As a member,

before the meeting you are invited to nominate men for the offices of elder and deacon,
at the meeting you are called upon to vote in elections for church officers, and
after the meeting you are asked to promise support for and submission to the officers.

What does your nomination mean?51

Why should I nominate anyone—doesn't the Session do that? And even if I do, don't they have the final say?

What should happen between the nominations and the election?.....52

The Session "certified" a candidate I'm not sure should be one, and the man I nominated is not on the list.

What should I do now?

What does your vote mean?.....53

What are good reasons for voting YES for a candidate? For voting NO?

What does the outcome of the election mean?

What should happen after the election?.....54

What are ordination and installation of officers? What does it mean when I raise my hand during their ordination and installation?

Reference materials:

1. Biblical qualifications for church officers.....55

2. Session procedures and policies for certifying candidates.....55

3. Mutual responsibilities of officers and members.....57

4. Bibliography.....57

What does your nomination mean?

What a nomination is: a written note to the Session, signed by you as a communicant member of Knox Church, giving the name of a male communicant member of Knox Church who you think would make a good ruling elder or deacon, and the office for which you want him to be considered.

What a nomination is not: it is not a formal procedure that places the name of the man we're talking about on the ballot for the election.

There are several ways to think about the fact that, when a member submits a name to the Session (including members who are already ordained officers), the man nominated is not automatically a recognized candidate for the office.

First, we must remember that Knox Church is not our church, really—it belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King and Head of the Church. As King he has provided for a government in his church by giving gifts to men to do the work of ruling in the church, on his behalf. The elders, as a Session, are to exercise this rule in order to maintain the peace (good order, harmony) and purity (doctrinal and moral integrity) of the church, and as rulers they have the duty and prerogative of examining prospective officers. It is their obligation to Christ to make certain that no one is presented to the congregation who is not biblically qualified for the office or who has not been adequately trained.

Second, from the purely organizational standpoint, it is wise for a nominating committee (in this case, the Session) to review suggestions for officer candidates, screening them for their willingness and qualifications to serve and for their agreement with the principles of the organization. It is good for any organization when people are nominated with forethought to hold responsible positions—much more so when there is a sacred trust involved.

Your nomination is meaningful because it is the beginning of the discernment that all church members should have and exercise with regard to whom Jesus Christ is providing with gifts for leadership in the church. It is meaningful even if the man is not presented for election at this time. If that happens, it is perhaps because the man has the gifts but needs to gain experience, under the training and guidance of the Session. Or, it may be that he is unable to make the commitment to serve at this time.

What should happen between the nominations and the election?

The Session, having called for nominations from the members, reviews the list of names submitted to see if any or all of the men can be presented to the congregation as being qualified according to the biblical requirements for officers. Very briefly¹, the main qualifications are:

- (1) the man must desire the office
- (2) the man must understand and agree with the doctrinal and organizational principles of the church and denomination
- (3) the man must have the gifts needed for the exercise of the office
- (4) the man must have had experience and training in the duties of the office.

In addition to these general requirements, the OPC Form of Government also requires the man to have been a member of Knox Church for at least one year, and to have completed certain training and certification procedures defined by the Session.²

After considering the qualifications of those nominated, the Session will formally decide in each

individual's case whether to "certify" him as a qualified candidate for the office to which he has been nominated. The names of the men so certified are then announced to the congregation, usually together and well in advance of the election.

When the members learn who the candidates are, they should begin to make a prayerful evaluation of the candidates individually, since the election will be a YES/NO vote on each man rather than a choice of one over another. While it should be meaningful that the Session considers the candidates qualified, each member has the duty to make up his own mind privately about a candidate's qualifications and whether his service would be pleasing to God, edifying that member and the church as a whole. If there is some doubt about a candidate, the member should make a reasonable effort to resolve the doubt in a biblical manner by speaking to the candidate directly.

If a member has a serious objection to a particular nominee, this fact should be made known to the Session in writing or by meeting with the Session.

What does your vote mean?

The OPC Form of Government provides for the congregation's making its advice concerning officers (elders and deacons) known in three situations:

- (1) The congregation determines by vote whether to have officers serve indefinitely or for three-year, staggered terms. At Knox Church, the practice is to elect elders and deacons for term service on the Session and the Board of Deacons, respectively.
- (2) The members may propose men to be considered for office, and the congregation votes for or against the candidates for the offices that are presented by Session.
- (3) The congregation may petition to have an officer removed if his services do not appear to be edifying to the congregation.

Obviously, the only one of these three situations that occurs regularly is the annual voting for candidates. When voting on a candidate, what does a YES vote mean? What does a NO vote mean?

A YES vote for a candidate means that the member believes that the candidate is gifted by God to serve in the office and that his services would be edifying to Knox Church. A YES vote should not be an expression of affection for the man or of gratitude for some gifts he may have faithfully exercised that are not related to the office for which he is being considered.

Generally, a NO vote for a candidate means that the member believes that the candidate at the time of this vote is not equipped by God for the office, or that his services in that office would not be edifying to Knox Church. A NO vote should not be used to express dislike for the man or for an opinion that he is free to hold as a Christian.

For either case, a YES vote or a NO vote, the member should desire to use his vote intelligently, in a manner pleasing to God. This implies preparation for voting, and a certain reverence for the process of determining who it is that God would have serve as officers—ultimately this is what your vote means.

It is customary and reasonable to regard the outcome of the voting as an instance in God's providence

of all things needed by the church. God is in control, and he raises up or does not raise up to office those whom he will. In recognition of God's providence in the selection of officers through their voting, the members ought to consider their vote a high privilege and solemn duty. Whether the outcome will be according to a member's vote or not, he should be prepared even as he votes to honor God by respecting and supporting the men who will be revealed by the voting to be God's choice at this time.

What should happen after the election?

Unordained candidates who have been elected to the offices of elder and deacon are then ordained and installed. Ordained candidates who have been elected to serve on the Session or on the Board of Deacons only have to be installed.

What is ordination? Ordination and installation of a man is the public ceremony of setting him apart for an office and investing him with the powers and duties of the office. The ceremony starts with the minister's statement of the warrant and nature of the office, the character to be sustained by the officer, and the duties to be fulfilled. Then to the candidate are posed the following five questions:

- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?
- Do you promise to seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church?
- Do you accept the office of ruling elder [or deacon] in the congregation and promise, in reliance on the grace of God, faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?

After the candidate answers YES to each of these questions, the minister asks the members to raise their right hands to give their YES answers to the following question:

- Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder [or deacon], and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord, to which his office, according to the Word of God and the constitution of this church, entitles him?

Then the minister declares that the man is in the office and is entitled to the honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord that go with the office.

What is installation? Installation of an officer who was ordained previously follows the same form as ordination, except that the officer is asked the following, one question:

- Do you agree to serve as a ruling elder [or deacon] in this congregation, and promise, in reliance on the grace of God, faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?

Notice that there are promises and duties on both sides: the officer's and the member's. These are well

summed up in the Larger Catechism's questions and answers about mutual responsibilities of "inferiors and superiors" (Q/A 123-133, included below with the reference materials). Sincere effort and grace from God is needed by both for these responsibilities to be met.

Reference Materials

1. Biblical qualifications for church officers³

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop,⁴ he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless,⁵ the husband of one wife,⁶ temperate,⁷ sober-minded,⁸ of good behavior,⁹ hospitable,¹⁰ able to teach;¹¹ not given to wine,¹² not violent,¹³ not greedy for money,¹⁴ but gentle,¹³ not quarrelsome,¹⁵ not covetous,¹⁴ one who rules his own house well,¹⁶ having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

"Likewise deacons must be reverent,¹⁷ not double-tongued,¹⁸ not given to much wine,¹² not greedy for money,¹⁴ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.⁵ Likewise, their wives must be reverent,¹⁷ not slanderers,¹⁹ temperate,⁸ faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife,⁶ ruling their children and their own houses well.¹⁶ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."— I Timothy 3:1-13 (New King James Version).

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless,⁵ the husband of one wife,⁶ having faithful children¹⁶ not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop⁴ must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed,¹³ not quick-tempered,¹⁵ not given to wine,¹² not violent,¹³ not greedy for money,¹⁴ but hospitable,¹⁰ a lover of what is good,²⁰ sober-minded,⁸ just,²¹ holy,²² self-controlled,⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine,¹¹ both to exhort and convict those who contradict."— Titus 1:5-9 (New King James Version).

2. Session procedure and policies for certifying candidates

The Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, with respect to the selection of ruling elders and deacons, states that

"In order that these sacred offices not be committed to weak or unworthy men, and that the congregations shall have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those by whom they are to be governed and served, no one shall normally be eligible for election to office until he has been a communicant member in good standing for at least one year, shall have received appropriate training under the direction of or with the approval of the session, and shall have served the church in functions requiring responsible leadership. Men of ability and piety in the congregation shall be encouraged by the session to prepare themselves for the offices of ruling elder or deacon so that their study and opportunities for service may be provided for in a systematic and orderly way." [XXV.3]

In following through with this constitutional requirement, the Session of Knox Church has adopted various local rules and procedures, summarized briefly in the following paragraphs.

The process of certification

Session affirms that the process of certifying a man to be a qualified candidate for service in the office of ruling elder or deacon shall include:

- (i) a determination that the potential candidate possesses the biblical qualifications and gifts for the office, including the desire to serve in the office;
- (ii) a determination that the potential candidate has received “appropriate training” and has “served the church in functions requiring responsible leadership”;
- (iii) a determination that the potential candidate can in good conscience answer all of the ordination questions given in The Form of Government in the affirmative, this determination including the judgment that any exceptions held to by the potential candidate are not so weighty as to nullify his subscription to the church’s constitutional documents;
- (iv) a determination that, if the potential candidate holds a view on something recognized by the General Assembly as an area of Christian liberty, he is able to hold it peacefully and responsibly, does not judge others with a different view, and desires to serve as an officer for all the members; and
- (v) a determination that Session can present the man as a qualified candidate for the office and gifted for service in the office, realizing that the confirmation of the man’s calling to serve in the office in Knox Church is determined not by Session but by a vote of the congregation.

Note that in items (iii) and (iv) there are references to “exceptions” and “views.” These are included because as a man studies the Westminster Confession of Faith and other constitutional documents, it may happen that he cannot quite agree that a particular statement is biblical. Or, he may feel that he holds to these documents, and that the prevailing interpretation or practice of the denomination or of Knox Church departs in some way from them in a particular respect. Within our denomination there is a recognized variety of opinion on some aspects of doctrine or practice, and within that range of opinion there is agreement that men with different opinions can fellowship and work together in one Church. In keeping with this tradition, the Session of Knox Church has adopted the following policy:

Men who meet the biblical qualifications for the office of ruling elder or deacon and who can in good conscience subscribe to the secondary standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church should not be considered ineligible for these offices on the basis of their view on something recognized by the General Assembly as an area of Christian liberty.

Examples of the variety of opinion that the Knox Session, in following the practice of the denomination, respect as biblical positions:

- Certain views on the order of events at the end of the world (eschatology).
- Certain views on the kinds of music that are proper in worship services.

- Certain views on the use of Christian symbols and other decorations in the place where the congregation meets.

In particular, the Session of Knox Church acknowledges that men who hold to the view that only the inspired Psalms may be sung in public worship, and men who do not hold to this view, do work together peacefully in our denomination, and that by the grace of God Session is willing that this harmony should also exist in Knox Church.

Training Programs

The Session has developed course outlines and study materials for training those men who aspire to an ordained office in the church. In addition, programs of practical training in areas such as visitation have been set up. Those who teach or who serve in various other positions of responsibility (whether they aspire to office or not) are approved by Session for those positions.

3. Mutual responsibilities of officers and members.

[At this point, in the original, Larger Catechism Questions and Answers 123-133 are reproduced.]

4. Bibliography

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Miller, Samuel, *The Ruling Elder (1832)*, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Jackson, MS, 1987.

Scipione, George C., *Timothy, Titus, and You*, Pilgrim Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1975 (paperback).

—, *The Westminster Standards*, Great Commission Publications, Philadelphia (paperback).

—, *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Great Commission Publications, Philadelphia, 1988 (loose-leaf).

¹ Details of the biblical qualifications of church officers are in the accompanying reference materials.

² A summary of the Session's procedures for certifying candidates is given in the accompanying reference materials.

³ Words in italics are supplied by the Bible translator.

⁴ Literally, overseer.

⁵ "...a man who habitually strives to walk by the rule of God's Word. A blameless man will not be found doing what he knows is plainly wrong....If he wrongs another in any way, he will not need to be prodded to make right the wrong he has done." (L. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church*)

⁶ Not necessarily a married man (Paul was not married)... "The real force of the words is that elders must be chosen from among

men who have only one wife at a time.”

⁷ Or “vigilant” (KJV); more like “serious-minded” or “down to earth” than free from wine, according to Eyres, since non-addiction to wine is mentioned separately.

⁸ Connotes “soundness of mind, prudence, self-control” (Eyres), like “in his right mind” in Mk 5:15.

⁹ “...means one who exercises that sort of self-control that enables him to manage all the outward affairs of life. All three terms [temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior] taken together mean that every elder ought to be one who has a good mind, able to look at things objectively and fairly. He must be able to rise above his own feelings about anyone, above his own prejudices. In a word, he must be a man of good mental discipline, able to control his own emotions.” (Eyres)

¹⁰ “The hospitable man is one whose heart is first open to the lonely, the rejected, the alien among men of all kinds and in all conditions...a loving heart [is] the test of hospitality.” (Eyres)

¹¹ “...includes the idea that the elder must be a good learner—‘teachable’... Yet the thrust of the words is on the elder’s ability to set forth sound doctrine... at the very least, an elder must be able to deal with people on a one-to-one basis, applying the Word to the needs of the individual.” (Eyres)

¹² “God’s men must have full control over their appetites, especially the appetite for strong drink... True, total abstinence must not be made a test of either fellowship or office. But the office bearer at least must so conduct himself as to be above reproach...” (Eyres)

¹³ Or “no striker” (KJV). Also not self-willed, but patient (gentle). “An elder must not be self-willed, stubborn, arrogant, or overbearing... How do we spot this type of person? Look for the man who, when his mind is made up on a difficult and complex subject, takes the attitude that anyone who questions his conclusions is questioning God himself!... Paul’s alternative is the gentle, patient man, the one who is fair-minded, fully willing and able to understand a different point of view—even when he disagrees with it. He is firm when he knows he stands on the Word. But he is always open to being convicted from the same Word that his opinion is wrong, and when convinced he does not find it hard to say he was wrong.” (Eyres)

¹⁴ “Money, with other earthly possessions, may not be so highly prized as to hinder in any way the calling to follow Christ.” (Eyres)

¹⁵ “An elder needs not only to be in full control of his bodily appetites but also of his emotions. Some men express anger with wild tongues, others with wild fists. The former are the greater menace, but neither has a place of rule or teaching in the house of God.” (Eyres)

¹⁶ “An elder must be gifted in the art of ruling... their ability to rule may be judged by their business activities, or their leadership qualities, or their ability in teaching... But the most natural way to prove a man’s gifts for ruling is to observe how he handles himself in his own home and among his own family members... Is there a proper balance of fairness and firmness and affection evident there? Do the children show a good attitude elsewhere toward authority? Are they always made aware that they, as a family, are under the lordship of Christ and His Word?” (Eyres)

¹⁷ Or “grave, venerable” (commanding respect): Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible.

¹⁸ That is, deceitful—saying one thing and meaning another.

¹⁹ Slander: “The utterance or spreading of a false statement or statements, harmful to another’s character or reputation” (Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language).

²⁰ Or “a lover of good men” (KJV)

²¹ Or “upright” (NIV)

²² Or “kind, gracious”: Young’s Analytical Concordance.

TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation

by

Peter Y. de Jong, Ph. D.

Chapter III

The Scriptural Basis Of Family Visitation

"The church is not only not bound to be guided by any other rule or standard, but is not at liberty to have regard to any other; as this would be virtually to withdraw herself from subjection to Christ's authority, and voluntarily to submit to a foreign yoke. No mere laws or statutes of men—no mere regard to worldly or secular advantages—should ever regulate the conduct of the church of Christ, or of any section or branch of it. She should be guided solely by the revealed will of Christ, and she should ascertain what that will is by diligent and prayerful study of His word."

— WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM: HISTORICAL THEOLOGY.

Although it is both appropriate and valuable to know something about the history of the venerable custom of conducting family visitation, we who are Reformed realize full well that it is of far greater consequence to consider whether or not the practice has the approval of the Holy Scriptures.

For surely if this spiritual activity is rooted merely in the whims and fancies of men, it can accomplish little if any lasting good. Then those who engage in it are arrogating to themselves spiritual functions and powers which do not belong to them by right. Should purely practical concerns move the church to carry on this work, we are convinced that the practice could not long continue and much less carry away the indispensable blessing of God. Sound practice can result only from sound theory. Therefore if there is no Scriptural foundation for this work, the sooner we rid ourselves of it as an improper as well as an unnecessary encum-

brance, the more readily the spiritual life of the congregation will develop in a wholesome direction.

The Biblical View of the Church

In order to answer the question under consideration it will be necessary first of all to have regard for what God's Word teaches us concerning the church.

The Bible never wearies of informing us that the church is the spiritual body of the Savior. Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians speaks of "the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."¹ Her life is entirely bound up with Christ Himself, for He is "the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God."¹

¹ Ephesians 1:22,23

Reformed Christians have therefore always insisted that all the activities of the church must find their justification in the blue-prints which God has provided for well-regulated congregational life. These are found only in His inspired Word. The church is not the product of the mind or will of man. Instead of believing that the organization owes her being to religiously-minded men and women who have voluntarily united themselves in a visible society, we confess that the church has been established and is maintained by Christ through His Holy Spirit.

Thus we agree with the statement of the *Belgic Confession*, which reads, “We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”² Likewise the *Heidelberg Catechism* in answering the question “What do you believe concerning the holy catholic church?” replies, “That the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life; and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.”³

In order that those who are such members may attain to spiritual manhood and womanhood, Christ has been pleased to institute the offices in His church. Through them as the usual means which He is pleased to employ, He works for their salvation.

Thus all the activities performed by them must be done in His name and according to his will. The work of ministers, elders and deacons is in a very real sense the work of Christ accomplished by them. They have been officially called and qualified for their task. And, as they engage in it, the members of the congregation must recognize in their labors of love and patience the ceaseless work of Christ on their behalf.

Is family visitation, then, based on a solid Scriptural foundation? In the light of the teaching of Holy Writ on the relation of Christ to His church, of the church to its officers, and of these officers to the Savior Himself, we firmly believe that it is.

1. Colossians 2:19
2. Article 27
3. Lord's Day XXI, 54

Christ as Our Chief Shepherd

The Bible teaches us that the great work which Christ does on behalf of His church is basically pastoral. He is first and foremost the Great Shepherd of His sheep.

This very name, so rich in meaning and inexhaustible in comfort, is applied to Him in the benediction found at the close of the epistle written to the Hebrews. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant . . .”¹ The Savior refers to Himself similarly, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep.”²

Such passages teach us that He has been sent by the Father into this world, in order that He might seek and save His own. As a faithful shepherd He brings them together into one flock and leads them by His Spirit and Word. With loving care and tenderness He watches over them all, lest any go astray. And when one has wandered from the safety of the fold, He leaves the ninety and nine to seek him who because of waywardness has forfeited the safety of the flock and is in danger of his life on the wild mountainsides of the world. Even as a shepherd by virtue of his calling is obligated to provide food and drink for the sheep, lead them into pleasant pastures and defend them against all enemies, so Christ as the Good Shepherd guarantees that all the needs of His own will be abundantly supplied. He has purchased His flock not with gold or silver or precious stones but with His life-blood. Therefore in life and death they are not their own but belong with both body and soul to Him.

That unique ownership of Christ is stressed in several of Paul's epistles. We read, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”³ In the next chapter a similar exhortation is expressed, “Ye are bought with a price; be ye not the servants of men.”⁴ Thus in the sight of God He rules His people with perfect right. He alone is their Head and King, and the holy obligation of all who belong to His flock is to render constant and loving obedience to His will.

1. Hebrews 13:20
2. John 10:11
3. I Corinthians 6:20
4. I Corinthians 7:23

From this we must conclude that the church is in no position to rule and care for herself. It is both her glory and the guarantee of her safety that she belongs to another. In our days when we hear so often of the right of the church to make her own rules, how necessary it is to remember that the life of God's people must be grounded entirely in the unique relationship which obtains between them and their Shepherd.

The Undershepherds Whom He Appoints

When we consider the Scriptural basis for family visitation, we must always bear in mind also the relation in which the members of the church stand to the officers. Since Christ has ascended into heaven, He has been carrying out His triple office from the place of highest glory and power at the right hand of the Father. This He does in a double way—not only through the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those chosen to eternal life, but also mediately through human agents appointed by Himself in connection with the express choice of the members of the congregation themselves. These are the officers of the church. In distinction from the deacons, who also have certain pastoral duties to perform, it has pleased the Head of the church to charge the elders as undershepherds of the flock to watch for the souls. Paul speaks in this vein of the diversity of gifts which Christ has communicated to His people. *“And He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.”*¹³ Likewise in the epistle to the Corinthians he counsels the believers to submit themselves to all who labor in the work of ministering to the saints. The attitude of those who enjoy this spiritual care may be inferred from the plain teaching of Hebrews 13:17, *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you.”*

The same apostle charged Titus with setting in order those things in the church at Crete which were still lacking, thus appointing elders in every city that the churches might prosper. The story of the election of the first deacons speaks of the express choice of the believers in the matter, although the work was carried

on under the direct supervision of the apostles as the rulers of the church.

No one can read the New Testament with any degree of care and without prejudice and still deny the necessity of officers in the church. In order that the work of edification may prosper, it is essential that the spiritual power of Christ be vested in certain men chosen to be leaders and examples of the flock. They must perform their duties in the spirit and according to the example of the Savior, being clothed with humility and always ready to serve, and it is incumbent upon the members of the congregation to submit themselves willingly and cheerfully to such government as unto the Lord.

The Responsibility of the Officers to Christ

Yet one more consideration calls for our attention. To establish the Scripturalness of family visitation, it will be necessary to see clearly the relation in which the officers as undershepherds stand to Christ. Contrary to the popular construction that elders and deacons are the servants of the church and its members, the Bible teaches that they are responsible not first of all to men but rather to the Exalted Savior Himself. This is the plain implication of Hebrews 13:17, where mention is made of the account which each must render of his work. Paul likewise teaches this, when he speaks of himself as being zealous with a godly zeal for the spiritual advancement of the church.

Indeed, because the members are anointed with the Holy Ghost to be prophets, priests and kings and must therefore perform the duties inherent in the office of all believers, the officers of the church are their servants. But as Paul plainly teaches, they are “your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Knowing that their calling has come from Christ, the officers may often be compelled to act contrary to the wishes of many in the congregation, in order that they may be able to give a good account of their stewardship in this respect. They must watch carefully, as Peter warns, lest they arrogate to themselves powers which are not rightfully theirs or make misuse of the position to which they have been lawfully called of God. Never may they lord it over the flock in an attempt to force their will on the believers. But as they perform their work in the spirit of love and with patience, they must be aware that they are ambassadors of God and servants of Christ.

1. Ephesians 4:11,12

It is true that in this survey we have nowhere discovered a text which speaks directly of family visitation. However, beyond the shadow of a doubt we have seen that the officers must do far more than preach and teach the Word in public worship. They are undershepherds appointed by Christ, and these must watch for the souls of God's people in the name of Christ Himself. This work demands careful supervision of the faith and conduct of those who name the name of our Lord. This they do in the name of Christ, because of the abiding interest

which the Savior sustains in the welfare of His flock. Thus in approaching the believers the elders come not merely with good advice and counsel, but being clothed with authority they must instruct and admonish, warn and comfort. Their words, when conforming to the Word of God, come with the official authority of Him whom they represent; and all who refuse to submit to such good government in the church do violence to the welfare of their souls and cannot, while in such a state, experience the blessing of the Lord.

“The specific duties of the office of elder are: together with the ministers of the Word, to have supervision over Christ's Church, that every member may conduct himself properly in doctrine and life according to the gospel; faithfully to visit the members of the congregation in their homes to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reprovng those who behave improperly. They shall exercise Christian discipline according to the command of Christ against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent; they shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned. They further are to take care, being stewards of the house of God, that in the congregation all things are done decently and in good order, and to tend the flock of Christ which is in their charge. Finally it is their duty to assist the ministers of the Word with good counsel and advice and to supervise their doctrine and conduct.”

“The specific duties of the office of deacon are: to see to the good progress of the service of charity in the congregation; to acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties, and to exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy; further, to gather and manage the offerings and to distribute them in Christ's Name according to need. They shall encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love, and promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord.”

(Articles 22 and 23 of the Church Order, of the Canadian Reformed Churches)

Reforming the Diaconate

by

Rev. William Shishko

Part 2

TRAINING PROSPECTIVE DEACONS

It is hard to believe that any church which is serious about being a “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15) would permit men to be ordained to office without some form of training prior to their placement before the congregation for election. If truth could “out”, however, we would be surprised and appalled at how frequently this is and has been the case. I have no doubt that many of our ecclesiastical weaknesses, inefficiencies, and failings stem from precisely this tragic omission. Is this the case in the congregation in which you serve? How well, if at all, were you prepared to serve in the office you now hold?

We need not go far for reasons to challenge us to conscientiousness in the training of prospective officers. God’s own warning about the seriousness of vows (see Ecclesiastes 5:1-7) should be sufficient to make any officer-elect say “NO!” to taking the ordination vows for ruling elders or deacons unless he has been carefully apprised of what they mean. Greater responsibility in the church certainly warrants greater training so that those responsibilities might be fulfilled with understanding. And the very practical benefits of a pastor and perhaps other officers working with prospective officers before they begin official service cannot be overestimated. Is not the model of our Saviour in His “training of the twelve” a sufficient rationale for us?

No doubt it is for these reasons that the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stipulates (XXV:3): “In order that these sacred offices not be committed to weak or unworthy men, and that the congregations shall have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those by whom they are to be governed and served, no one shall normally be eligible for election to office until he has been a

communicant member in good standing for at least one year, shall have received appropriate training under the direction of or with the approval of the session, and shall have served the church in functions requiring responsible leadership.”

The focus of this article is specifically on training prospective deacons. Once you have defined the diaconal task (see my previous article in *ORDAINED SERVANT*), how do you actually go about preparing men to function in that capacity?

Some churches make no distinction in training ruling elders and deacons. This is certainly far better than doing nothing, and it has the advantage of giving what (hopefully) is a full and uniform program of instruction to all men in the congregation who show promise for office. If you find that helpful then you may want to skip on to the next article. The approach I am suggesting is different, but we have found it to work well in the congregation I pastor, and we have also found it to bring more advantages than the other model.

Our elder training program takes far longer (usually about 18 weeks of two hour sessions, along with “practical training”), and deals with doctrinal matters in far more detail. It also includes large segments of pastoral theology and church polity, which are not as directly applicable to the diaconate. Our deacon training program (see Appendix A) is only 6 weeks in duration (not counting the “practical service” which displays the prospective deacon’s gifts and commitment). It covers the main heads of the Westminster Confession of Faith from the perspective of diaconal work, after which it focuses in on the biblical characteristics required of deacons, and their specific responsibilities in the congregation. To my mind, the

very fact that I Timothy 3 gives a distinct listing of gifts and graces necessary for each officer is a sufficient warrant to make a distinction in the way each group is trained. The practical advantages are also great. Here's how we do it.

The first three weeks (sessions are usually 90 minutes to two hours in length...depending on how discussion oriented your prospective deacons are!) focus in on “The Deacon and Doctrine.” While elders must be “apt to teach,” I Tim. 3:2 (and I see no reason why this qualification is confined to “Teaching Elders” alone), and therefore must know well the doctrine they are called to present to others, deacons must “hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience,” I Tim. 3:9. Our prospective deacons have required homework covering the basics of Reformed doctrine, and the class sessions offer applications to the diaconate which flow out of the heads of doctrine as represented in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and elaborated upon in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. This is done under a series of “Doctrinal Propositions Which Must Guide the Ongoing and Developing Work of a Diaconate.”

For example, growing out of our confession regarding “Holy Scripture” (WCF, chapter I) there is the affirmation that “There must be a dogged determination to align every diaconal practice with the precepts and directives of Holy Scripture.” Questions like “How is mercy to be shown? To whom? To what extent?”, and principles for drawing up budgets, recommending salaries, the use of the church building, etc, must all be answered or derived from the Word of God. We emphasize this, and explain how that is to be done in the “real world” of the official work of the church.

Another example is from our application of the Westminster Confession’s doctrine of “God’s Covenant With Man” (Chap. 7). In coupling this with various Scripture passages we point out that “There must be an unashamed differentiation in our dealings with those who are inside or outside the covenant of grace.” Here we deal with basic principles for diaconal service to believers and to unbelievers. This introduces prospective deacons to the excellent material on “covenantal benevolence” developed by Leonard Coppes and others in the OPC. It is important to take time with this because in contemporary Evangelicalism there is little awareness or appreciation of this aspect of Biblical teaching.

Over the first three weeks of the training program we discuss the reading assignments and give an overview of

our confessional standards from this very practical diaconal perspective. It enables us to cover a wide terrain of doctrine, and do it in such a way that the prospective deacons begin thinking biblically and confessionally about the diaconal task. Particularly in covering the material on soteriology it gives me the opportunity to give prospective deacons some help in the evangelistic and personal ministry they will inevitably become involved with if they are doing their work conscientiously. We obviously do not cover every head of the WCF, but isolate those confessional materials which most relate to the diaconal functions we have defined for this congregation. The beauty of this approach is its flexibility and practicality in applying the doctrinal standards of the church.

The next three weeks are devoted to “The Deacon and His Work” (again, see Appendix A). This begins with an analysis of the biblical qualifications for deacons as given in Acts 6:3 (the “macroscopic” view), followed by a similar analysis of I Timothy 3:8-13 (the “microscopic” view). It is crucial to point out that these are non-optional qualifications, i.e. the “must” of vs. 2 carries over to the “likewise” of vs. 8.

Time is also spent on giving basic directives for cultivating these qualifications. There is usually much profitable discussion at this point in the training program.

Week number 5 is given over to presenting “The Deacon as an Officer: General Considerations.” This begins with an exposition of Acts 6:1-7, operating under the presupposition that this pericope describes the origin of the diaconal office (see my previous article). Here the practical necessity of the diaconal office is laid out, its official and authoritative character is presented, and its relation to congregational life is described. I cannot overstate the importance of deacons and prospective deacons having a good grasp of this passage. From that you must move to actual contemporary application of this office of “waiting on tables.” In the description given in our training program we conveniently list these as:

1. The table of the genuinely needy among God’s people.
2. The table of the church as an organization.
3. The table of the pastors, i.e. teaching and ruling elders.
4. The table of the Lord, i.e. setting up for the Lord’s Supper.

This introduces prospective deacons to the actual responsibilities expected by us of those in that office. The Christ-like role of official service is put before the men as a summary of the diaconal role.

Reforming the Diaconate

The final actual training class deals with “The Deacon: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly.” During this time we offer a potpourri of directions and suggestions for growing in grace as a deacon. Habitual attentiveness to personal communion with God on a daily basis, cultivation of “diaconal mindedness” before God and one’s fellow man, duties during Lord’s day services and other church meetings, requirements for Board of Deacon’s meeting attendance and involvement, working with the session, conforming to the OPC Form of Government and local church By Laws, and miscellaneous ethical responsibilities are all presented and applied in detail. Prospective deacons must know what they’re in for if they should be called out by the congregation and ordained to the diaconal office. It is far easier to deal with problems in an officer if the man was told in advance what was expected of him.

Following successful completion of this course prospective deacons are, upon the approval of the session, actually presented to the congregation for election to the office of deacon. It is emphatically not our practice to put a number of men before the congregation and ask the members to vote for a certain number to conform to the “quotas” set by the church By Laws. If a man has been “proved” (I Tim. 3:10), i.e. he has shown himself to be faithful in service responsibilities given to him prior to and during his time of diaconal training, and the session and congregation judge him to possess the requisite qualifications for the office he is called out by congregational election to serve as a deacon...for life!

After men are elected by the congregation to serve as officers, they are examined by the session in what in fact becomes another officer preparation meeting. Deacons-elect are expected to be familiar with the Book of Church Order of the OPC, and also with our own local church constitution and by-laws. They are examined by the session in any of the areas reflected in the ordination vows the deacons-elect will be expected to take. Even as prospective church members have the vows reviewed with them by the session before a public profession of faith, so prospective officers must have the ordination vows reviewed prior to the actual laying on of hands. This is always a most salutary exercise for all involved.

Ordination follows in a worship service that is truly a celebration. God has given another officer to represent the hands and feet of Christ in the service of His Church! And you may be assured that whenever God gives laborers He will give labor! When the first corps of deacons was ordained in accordance with the divine prescription, the

result was that “the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly...” (Acts 6:7). May the same thing be true as you go about praying for, preparing, and properly calling out men to serve the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the exalted office of deacon.

In the final article we will look at how the deacons in the congregation I pastor actually function. This will take all the theory and put it into practice. I think you will see that the results are wonderful.

Rev. William Shishko,
OPC, Franklin Square, N.Y.

APPENDIX A:

DEACON'S TRAINING PROGRAM

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this program is to give a general overview of the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture and undergirding the work of the diaconate; and to provide an introduction to the qualifications necessary for deacons as well as to the basic principles which will govern their service in the church.

TEXTS:

Required reading will be from the following:

1. Berkhof, Louis. SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (Eerdmans).
2. Berghoef, Gerard, & Lester DeKoster. THE DEACON'S HANDBOOK (Christian's Library Press).
3. Coppes, Leonard J. WHO WILL LEAD US, (Pilgrim Publishing Co.).
4. MacNair, Donald J. THE GROWING LOCAL CHURCH, (Baker).
5. MacNair, Donald J. THE LIVING CHURCH, (GCP).
6. Kuiper, R. B. THE GLORIOUS BODY OF CHRIST, (Banner of Truth).
7. Deacon's Manual (OPC Franklin Square, N.Y.)
8. Westminster Confession of Faith (We recommend the edition published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland).

Books are preferably purchased for personal use and reference.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Reforming the Diaconate

Classes will meet on the established dates from 7:30 - 9:30 P.M. Classes meet in the lower auditorium.

CLASS OUTLINE:

WEEKS 1 - 3

AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

“Deacons must...hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” I Timothy 3:8,9

Week 1:

God & Man - Required Reading: WCF, I-VII, IX, Berkhof, pp. 9-89

Week 2:

Christ & His Work - Required Reading: WCF, VIII, X-XVIII , Berkhof, pp. 93-148

Week 3:

The Church & Last Things - Required Reading: WCF, XIX-XXXIII , Berkhof, pp. 151-198

WEEKS 4 - 6

THE DEACON AND HIS WORK.

“Let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.” I Timothy 3:10

Week 4:

The Deacon as a Man - Required Reading: Acts 6:1-7, I Timothy 3:8-13, MacNair, GROWING..., pp. 79-86, 195, MacNair, LIVING..., pp. 155-157

Week 5:

The Deacon as an Officer: General Considerations
Required Reading: Coppes, pp. 105-138, Kuiper, pp. 150-157 (handout)

Week 6:

The Deacon as an Office: Specific Applications
Required Reading: Berghoef & DeKoster, pp. 135-181, Coppes, pp. 139-154 , MacNair, GROWING..., pp. 109-125, Deacon's Manual

Week 7:

Between Election & Ordination - Required Reading: OPC Standards, Congregation/Corporation By Laws.

“...in the delineations given of the qualifications that should be sought in those who were appointed to fill the office of presbyter or episcopos in the several churches, nearly the whole have respect to character; so that out of thirteen or fourteen different qualities mentioned, only one has distinct reference to the gift of teaching; virtually implying that character was the most essential thing, and that if matters were but right there, others would in good measure follow as a matter of course.” — Patrick Fairbairn in Pastoral Theology, Old Paths Publications, 223 Princeton Rd., Audubon, NJ 08106 (1992 reprint).

FEEDBACK

“What should a Session do when a member — disenchanted with the church (i.e. local congregation) and feeling justified in that disenchantment — stops attending worship and starts shopping for another church?”

This problem is certainly not uncommon. And such is the sad state of many (maybe we should even say most) of the churches in America that we can expect little help from them. This, at least, has been my experience. Where I live there are six churches. One is Roman Catholic, and five are Protestant. Three of these are very liberal, and another besides our own is strongly conservative. Yet it was this conservative church that acted in such a way as to undermine our efforts to faithfully exercise church discipline. We acted sooner, rather than later. And, as Rev. T. E. Tyson’s article in a previous issue argued, this is essential. Sessions far too often act later rather than sooner, and in doing so find that all is already lost. But the point I am making here is that even when Sessions are alert, and acting promptly, we will often find that our efforts are undermined by the attitude and actions of other churches. In such cases it is my conviction that the Session ought to write an official letter to the ruling authorities of the ‘other’ church to protest (speaking the truth in love) actions that have the effect of short-circuiting and undermining the oversight efforts that the Session has been making.

It is also my conviction that Sessions in cases such as these should institute disciplinary action against those who forsake the church in such a way as to manifest disdain for the ruling offices of the church [Book of Discipline V,2.a.(1)]. If someone sincerely comes to Baptist convictions, for example, and for that reason wishes to leave the OPC in order to join a Bible-believing Baptist church, that is one thing. (In such a case there is no reason why such a change cannot be made decently and in order). But when someone just wants to have his or her own way, and shows utter disdain for the elders of the church (thus breaking the fourth membership vow), then it is another. I believe it is better for the honor of Christ and

His Church, and also better for the people involved (though they will not recognize this at the time), if the Session institutes discipline and refuses to issue a letter of attestation ‘as if’ these people are walking uprightly.

Let me also add that we ought to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are always tempted, I think, to want to jump at the chance of having a few more members in ‘our’ congregation. But we should always exercise care in receiving people who come to us without the approval of those they are leaving. There are those, of course, who do not come from *any* prior church connection. What we are concerned with here, however, is the way that we receive people who *do* come from other churches. If a pastor—or governing body—of another church indicates to me that a certain family or person has left that church because of un-resolved problems that ought to be resolved first, then I believe it is my duty to take care that I do not undermine the faithful work of servants of God just to gain new members.

As most of the readers of this journal are aware, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) has adopted what is called a ‘Golden Rule’ comity agreement.¹ Among other things it commits the member bodies to “build the Church of Jesus Christ” rather than merely their “our own denominations.” And in order to do this the member bodies will “refrain from enlisting members and take care in receiving members” of the other member denominations. This agreement is surely in the right direction.

To sum up our answer, then, this evil is greatly magnified by the divided state of the church. In many cases all we can do is make sure that we do not add to the problem, or give the appearance of approving it by giving attestations to people who really need censure.

1 - The text of the ‘Golden Rule’ Comity Agreement can be found in the Appendix to the Minutes of the 53d General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, on page 167. As far as we know this has not been further amended.

MINISTERIAL STUDY

Notes from Dr. J. W. Alexander's

Letters to Young Ministers.

We are persuaded that grave errors prevail in respect to what should be the aim of the pastor, in his parochial studies and discipline. Looking at the greatness of the harvest, and the shortness of life, one is tempted at the first blush to say, "Let the study alone; go forth and save souls." When learning in the ministry is mentioned, some are ready to think of a purely secular erudition, such as withdraws a man from his duty, or unfits him for it. I beg you to observe that the ministerial learning which I am recommending is solely the discipline and accomplishment whereby you shall be better fitted for your work. The study is not a place for lettered luxury, but the sacred palaestra in which Christ's soldier is supposed to be forging his armour, and hardening his muscle, and training his agility, for the actual combat of the ministry. If, in the daily pursuit of knowledge, you keep constantly before your mind the end for which you seek it, there need be no fear of excess. To the last day of life, regard your mental powers as given you to be kept in continual working order, and continual improvement, and this with reference to the work of preaching and teaching. You will find all great preachers to have lived thus. I earnestly charge you to hold all studies as only means to this end, the glory of God in the salvation of souls. The day is near when your whole ministerial life will seem to you very short in retrospect. You must allow me to tell you plainly, that the danger is not that you will have too much of this preparation, that you will be over-educated, or extravagantly learned, but all the reverse. You may get great learning, with a bad motive; you may get little, with same: but all you will ever get, multiplied ten times, will not be too much for your work, or more than the Church and the times demand. Neither devotion, nor active labour, will furnish you an excuse for the neglect of knowledge. This is a question where examples are worth more than reasons. Look at Luther. Who was more devout? Who was more active? Yet who was more devoted to learning, or more profoundly anxious, to the very close of life, that literature and

religion should never be divorced, in the ministry of the Protestant Churches? "There be some," he says, "who think that the writer's office is a light trifling office, but that to ride in armour, and bear heat, cold, dust, drought, and the like, is labour indeed. I would fain see the knight who could join me in sitting still all day, looking on a book!" John Owen and Richard Baxter, whose works by themselves make a library, were working pastors, through as much of their life as was allowed to them from persecution. Edmund Calamy is famous, as one of the authors of *Smectymnuus*, written in answer to Bishop Hall's *Divine Right of Episcopacy*. No London preacher was favoured by greater crowds, and that for twenty years. But he had not attained his fullness of preparation without some pains. While a chaplain, he studied sixteen hours a day. Need I assert the diligence or erudition of Matthew Pool? Look at his tall folios, especially his *Synopsis Criticorum*, the fruit of ten years' toil, during which he used to rise at three and four o'clock. He was pastor of St. Michael's, London, fourteen years, till the Bartholomew's Day, and was a laborious preacher. Tuckney is memorable as the principal writer of the *Shorter Catechism*. Calamy relates, in regards to the college elections, that Tuckney used to say, "No one shall have greater regard to the truly godly than I; but I am determined to choose none but scholars: they may deceive me in their godliness, but in their scholarship they cannot." The grace of God did not leave our Scottish forefathers without some striking examples of parochial studies and successes. The value which they set upon ministerial learning is inscribed on the constitution of our Church. It could not be otherwise, where the foundations were laid by such hands as those of Knox, Buchanan, and the Melvills. Robert Bruce, that saintly preacher, favoured beyond most with near approaches to God in prayer, and marvellous power in awakening sinners; and whose life you ought to examine in detail, thus speaks of himself in old age:—"I have been a continued student, and I hope I may say it

without offence, that he is not within the isle of Britain, of my age, that takes greater pains upon his Bible.” David Dickson’s name is a precious ointment in Scotland. He was exceedingly blessed in an age of wonderful revivals. Multitudes were convinced and converted by his means, yet Dickson was the author of several learned works and in his latter years professor of theology in Glasgow. I must mention Samuel Rutherford. Christians of the present day, knowing him chiefly by his letters, scarcely remember that he was one of the most learned men of his age. He was professor as well as preacher. He commonly rose about three in the morning. He spent all his time either in prayer, or reading and writing, or visiting families. Read his Letters; they will prove to you that great study need not quench the flame of devotion. I could easily record the names of clergymen still living, who add to the constant labours of the ministry, regular and persistent efforts to discipline the understanding and enrich the heart by private study. Engrave it upon your souls, that the whole business of your life is to prepare yourself for the work, and that no concentration of powers can be too great. Ministerial study is a sine qua non of success. There is such a thing as maintaining a transient popularity, and having a little usefulness, without any deep study; but this fire of straw soon burns out, this cistern soon fails. The preacher who is constantly pouring out, and seldom pouring in, can pour but a little while. The crying evil of our sermons is *want of matter*; we try to remedy this evil, and that evil, when the thing we should do is to get something to say. The grand point is this: there must be perpetual acquisition. This is the secret of preaching.

Ministerial study is twofold—special and general. By special study, I mean that preparation for a given sermon; by general study that preparation which a liberal mind is perpetually making, by reading, writing, and thinking over and above the sermonizing, and without any direct reference to preaching. What theologians say of preparation for death, may be said of preparation for preaching; there is habitual and there is actual preparation: the current of daily study, and the gathering of material for a given task. The clerical scholar, however, diligent, punctual, and persistent, who throws his whole strength into the preparation of sermons, and never rises to higher views, or takes a larger career through the wide expanse of methodized truth, must infallibly grow up cramped, lopsided, and defective. His scheme of preaching may never take him through the entire curve of theology and Scripture; or the providential leadings of his

ministry may bring him again and again over the same portions. These are evils which can be prevented only by the resolute pursuit of general studies, irrespectively of special pulpit performance. Such habits will tend to keep a man always prepared; and instead of getting to the bottom of his barrel as he grows older, he will be more and more prepared.

The objection to regular studies which meet us most frequently is, that there is no time for labour in the pressure of parochial cares. Indeed, I fancy I hear you exclaiming, ‘How is it possible for one situated as I am, to find hours for learning?’ I desire to suggest a few considerations which will, perhaps, clear the path, and open some light through the seeming forest.

(1) **Maintain a reverential love for Holy Scripture.** Keep one sacred object in view in every study you undertake. All your discipline and your acquisition are only so many means for learning God’s Word, and for teaching it. Devote the first and last part of every day to the perusal of the Bible in the original tongues. It is a source of deep regret to many in review of life, that they have scattered themselves over too many fields; let me entreat of you to spend your strength on one.

(2) From what has been said, you will deduce the all important rule, to **lop off all irrelevant studies.** If you mean to succeed, and to save precious time, see to it that you rid yourself of all impertinent matters. Be determined to be ignorant of many things in which men take pride. Read solid literature. Familiarize yourself with masterpieces, and disregard the perishing nothings of the hour.

(3) **Observe the evils which attend the lack of thorough preparation.** Of all the ways of preaching God’s Word, the worst is the purely extemporaneous—where a man arises to speak in God’s name without any solid material, and without any studious preparation. As all men dislike labour in itself considered, the majority will perform any task in the easiest way which is acceptable. And as most hearers unfortunately judge more by external than internal qualities, they will be—for a certain time—satisfied with this ready but superficial preaching. The resulting fact is, that in numberless instances, the extemporaneous preacher neglects his preparation. If he has begun in this slovenly way while still young, and before he has laid up stores of knowledge, he will—in nine cases out of ten—be a shallow, rambling sermonizer as long as he lives.

(4) You cannot well overrate the benefit to be deprived of carrying always with you a **high estimate of your study-labours**. The clergyman's study, which some people regard as they would a pantry, is the main room in the house. It is the place where you speak to God, and where God speaks to you; where the oil is beaten for the sanctuary; where you sit between the two olive-trees [Zech. 4:3]; where you wear the linen ephod, and consult the Urim and Thummim. As you are there, so will you be in the house of the Lord. A prevalent sense of this will do more than anything to procure and redeem time for research, and will cause you to learn more in an hour, than otherwise in a day.

(5) **Practice an economy of time in punctuality and order:** as Hannah More says, 'It is just as in packing a trunk; a good packer will get twice as much in as a bungler.' Follow a plan. Propose questions to yourself—What part of the week do I devote to study? What head of theology has lately been under investigation? What is my plan of study for the coming day? Cover the majority of the day's study as early as possible. Tell me how you spend your forenoon in your

early ministry, and I shall be better able to predict how you will preach.

But after all, it cannot be concealed that there will be need of vigorous and unceasing efforts, to secure time for application, and to cut off all occasions of sloth and waste. You will be under a perpetual attraction to leave your study. There is constant need of decision, self-denial, and self-control. Read a book as itinerants do—finding one in their chamber windows—as though you should never see it again. He grossly errs who considers the life of an evangelist as other than a conflict. Yet it is happy; indeed I hesitate not to express my conviction, that the life of a faithful minister is the happiest on earth. To declare God's truth so as to save souls, is a business which angels might covet: acquire the habit of regarding your work in this light. Such views will lighten the severest burdens and dignify the humblest labour. Think more of the treasure you carry, the message you proclaim, and the heaven to which you invite. Such are the considerations which may well serve to awaken true ministerial zeal.

“There is a story told of me and some person who desired to see me on a Saturday night, when I had shut myself up to make ready for the Sabbath. He was very great and important, and so the maid came to say that someone desired to see me. I directed her to say that it was my rule to see no one at that time. Then he was more important still, and said, ‘Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see him immediately.’ The frightened servant brought the message, but the sender gained little by it, for my answer was, ‘Tell him I am busy with his Master, and cannot see servants now.’”

— C. H. Spurgeon

Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian and Presbyterian by William Cunningham. Still Waters Revival Books, 4710-37A Ave. Edmonton, AB Canada T6L 3T5. A Numbered Collectors Edition, \$34.95 (Canadian). [The book is also available through Great Christian Books at \$17.50 U.S.] Reviewed by the Editor.

The writings of William Cunningham are not easy to read, at least not for me. His style is too ponderous or lumbering. The consequence is that it takes more effort to read and digest Cunningham than such writers as Warfield or Murray. But the bottom line is this: it is well worth the effort.

The book is a collection of a number of Cunningham's articles and lectures having to do with principles of church government, and—as the book's title accurately indicates—it deals with Romish, Erastian and Presbyterian views. Of particular interest to me were the seven sections of Chapter XI dealing with the great patronage issue in Scotland. This is followed, in Chapter XII, by a thorough review of 'The Principle of Non-Intrusion' in the writings of the great Reformers and the stated doctrine and practice of Calvinistic Churches from the time of the Reformation. The last chapter entitled 'Patronage and Popular Election' is a report of a speech that Dr. Cunningham delivered at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1842. (It is probably due to the fact that this was originally spoken rather than written that I found it so much easier to read.)

Some of the issues dealt with in this book will probably seem rather far removed from our situation. But no pastor or elder will fail to profit from a careful reading—and re-reading—of these weighty studies. At the very least it will generate a far greater sense of appreciation for the cumulative results of the faithful contending of those who have gone before us. It will also help to keep us from complacency in safeguarding our sacred liberties.

No, this is not easy reading. But we heartily recommend this volume to the Lord's Ordained Servants.

Sermons, 1820 to 1860, by William Cunningham. Still Waters Revival Books, 4710-37A Ave. Edmonton, AB Canada T6L 3T5. A Numbered Collectors Edition, \$34.95 (Canadian). [The book is also available through Great Christian Books at \$17.50 U.S.] Reviewed by the Editor.

The sermons in this volume are remarkable for several reasons. One is the fact that these sermons were preached over and over by this great Scottish theologian. It does not seem to me that this practice should be followed by most of us. And it must also be remembered that he did not preach to the same congregation week after week. These sermons were preached in many different places as Cunningham was invited as a guest preacher. It is also clear that in these sermons the great

theologian exercised great care to bring out the most important themes of the gospel precisely because they were too often lacking in the preaching of the time. As Rev. J. J. Bonar says in his preface to the volume "In his latter days, Dr. Cunningham became much alarmed by preachers—and some of these trained by himself—leaving the Gospel out of their Sermons; and he believed that men were preparing to exalt Spiritual Life over Scriptural Truth, as if the former did not flow from the latter."

To my mind one of the most important lessons that we learn from the preaching of William Cunningham is the importance of setting forth the truth of God in antithesis to the prevailing errors of the day. The people of God are not, by nature, good theologians or clear thinkers. They do not discern the things that differ without sufficient help received through God's own appointed means of faithful preaching. They need to be told not only what is true but also what is not true even though it superficially sounds like it is. A reading of these sermons by Dr. Cunningham should sharpen any preacher's appreciation for this.

These sermons are a reminder that the power of God unto salvation is not found in fads and gimmicks—as so many in modern America seem to think—but in the grand verities of the Reformed faith. Many Dutch Reformed churches have had a tradition of 'catechetical preaching' with precisely this purpose: to bring the preacher back, again and again, to the central truths of the gospel. As far as we know, catechetical preaching has not been the custom in Scotland. But in these sermons you find the very same emphasis on the things of greatest moment. This is clear even from some of the titles. Here are just a few: 'How To Estimate Repentance,' 'On the Trinity,' 'The Humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ,' 'God Manifested by the Cross of Christ,' 'A Risen Christ, Not Another Christ,' 'The Headship of the God-Man' and 'The Atonement: Scripture Doctrine and Current Theories.'

What our generation needs more than anything else is better preaching. It needs to hear the whole counsel of God. But it needs to hear it in the language of today. It will not do, in other words, to try to imitate this great preacher theologian of another generation in linguistic style. But having said that it is also true that there is something about faithful preaching of the gospel that is like the gospel itself—it is, in a sense, timeless because it deals with a basic situation that has not changed in the least. Man is still lost and there is still no other name given under heaven by which they can be saved but the name of Jesus. Therefore we can always learn from faithful preachers who have gone before us.

Still Waters Revival Books is doing a great service to the Reformed community in North America, in making works of this kind available again.