

Vol. 7, No. 1

ORDAINED SERVANT



Rev. John P. Galbraith

Published by
The Christian Education Committee
of

THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

January, 1998

ORDAINED SERVANT

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.

Published for the Christian Education Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

under direction of

Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, Rev. Larry Wilson and Rev. William Shishko

by PLEROMA PRESS, Box 242, Carson N.D. 58529

Subscription price is \$12 per year. *Ordained Servant* will be published from 2 to 4 times per year in the present format. Do *not* send subscriptions to the editor but to **PLEROMA PRESS.**

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Please send all materials intended for possible publication in *Ordained Servant* to the Editor, G. I. Williamson, 406 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201. (Or send it in a text file, by Email to: williamson.1@opc.org). Please send all requests for additional copies, or back issues, to the Publisher, Stephen Sturlaugson, PLEROMA PRESS, Box 242, Carson N.D. 58529. Telephone: 701-622-3862 (Email: Stephens@westriv.com), or download them from The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Web site on the Internet at: <http://www.opc.org>.

Editorial Notes

When we began to prepare this issue of *Ordained Servant* the fourth meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) was meeting in Korea. The Conference was opened with an address by Rev. John P. Galbraith who had previously served over a number of years as the President or Moderator of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). It is our opinion that, in this way, the ICRC recognized as important to the Reformed cause in the world today, the decision of the OPC to leave the RES (now called the Reformed Ecumenical Council, or REC) because of its persistent refusal to uphold its own professed Reformed Standards, and to become a part of the ICRC. It should also be noted that there were two other Orthodox Presbyterian men who presented papers at this Conference — Dr. Richard Gaffin spoke on the cessation of the charismatic gifts and Mr. Mark Bube spoke on the mission task of the church. As we see it the value of such an international meeting ought not to be limited to those who were there. We therefore begin this issue with a written version of the speech that Rev. Galbraith gave. And we hope, in later issues, to bring other material to your notice.

The Internet is a rapidly increasing reality in the lives of many. During my recent service in Cyprus and Egypt it was a great blessing indeed. In a previous visit to Cyprus it was almost impossible to keep in touch with others because the mail took so long to come and go, and telephone calls were so expensive. This time it was possible to send and receive virtually mail on a daily basis, and to receive material for this issue of *Ordained Servant*. If there was no other value

than this it would still keep us enthused about the use of the Internet. But there is more as Pastor David King shows us in his contribution to this issue.

A few requests—by mail or by email—to send more copies of *Ordained Servant* are still coming directly to the editor, even though we have tried to make it very clear—and even to call attention to the fact—that this is not his responsibility. So, once again we repeat: **all requests for additional copies of *Ordained Servant* should be sent to the PUBLISHER, not the Editor** and **not** the offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Horsham, Pa. The publisher is Mr. Stephen Sturlaugson, a ruling elder of Bethel OPC in Carson, N.D. His telephone number is: 701-622-3862, and his *new* Email address is: **StephensS@westriv.com**. A brief note to him is all that is needed to add to, or subtract from, the number of copies that your church is receiving. Thank you.

Are the records of your Session in order? And what *is* the proper order? These are important questions — and they are perennial. Every year throughout the OPC new men take up the task of clerk of Session and often without any previous experience. It is our hope, therefore, that the succinct article in this issue — by elder Luke Brown (who is also the Statistician of the General Assembly) — will help all of our Session clerks to better understand what is required of them. It is also our hope that the contribution from ruling elder David Winslow will stimulate a renewed zeal in all of you ruling elders to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

PERFECTING FELLOWSHIP

by

John P. Galbraith

Based on and expanded from an abbreviated address given at the opening of the Fourth Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, in Seoul, Korea, October 15, 1997¹

It is a great joy to me to be back in this great country, sadly divided at present into North and South, but particularly to be again in this nation of South Korea. Here the Spirit of God has worked mightily since Presbyterian missionary work, which was then Reformed, began in the north in 1884. It is said that today between 30 and 40 percent of the people of South Korea profess to be Christians. Thanks be to God!

But given the heritage of this generation of Christians, and in particular the heritage of this Kosin Presbyterian Church who are our hosts for this meeting, this growth does not surprise me. This Church was fed and nurtured—its fathers, its mothers, its children—on the Word of God as the only infallible rule for its faith and life. So, in the early part of this century, under the Japanese occupation before World War II, when the Church and its people were still very young in the faith, they were nevertheless strong. By the thousands they resisted and disobeyed edicts requiring obeisance at the Shinto shrines, risking the price of imprisonment or worse. Then in 1950—now nearly half a century ago, and when the Church was still only about 60 years old—came the Communist invasion. Again they had no question that their loyalty was to God first, and to life last. That’s what the Word of God said. For them it was that simple: *Seek first the kingdom of God* (Matt. 6:33). Then when the Communists soon began systematically to select church leaders, the ministers and ruling elders, for execution, many of them sent their wives and children to the safety of the south while they remained to suffer and die with their people. That is the

stuff of which this Church is made. We sit today among children and widows of martyrs—yes, some of those faithful wives are still living—who counted their lives as nothing for the sake of Christ.

Then when the Communists soon began systematically to select church leaders, the ministers and ruling elders, for execution, many of them sent their wives and children to the safety of the south while they remained to suffer and die with their people.

Now it is a new day, and you and I are here. We gather in a beautiful church building with the latest modern facilities, we sit in comfortable chairs and pews, and those who have come from around the world feel assured of the safety and well-being of our families left at home. Yet we have something in com-

mon with our Christian fathers and mothers, and sisters and brothers, in this land. We have not paid anything like the price that these Koreans paid, yet we are of one heart with them. The very existence of this ICRC and our part in it are testimony to our desire to declare for all to hear and see, that for us, too, God’s Word is our only infallible rule of faith and practice. Most of us, in our home countries, live in the midst of churches that have forsaken God and his Christ. Some of us—I may even say that most of the churches that we represent—have had to separate from churches and organizations that have put other things above obedience to the Word of God. That is why, if I may say so, this Kosin Presbyterian Church feels at home in this body, to have part in its fellowship. And I must add this exhortation: may we be faithful to them. And may our fellowship deepen and grow.

The need for growth in the fellowship of our churches is, in fact, the reason that I am speaking to you on the subject, “Perfecting Fellowship”. In preparation for that I wish first to read to you three brief passages of Scripture which together form the foundation of what I plan to say. I have no one verse as a text; instead I draw on all three.

¹ Summary in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, 1997*, pp. 47-49

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Reading from the New King James version, the first passage is:

Isaiah 5:1-7 - Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding his vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out the stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and take down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold, weeping.

That is a vivid picture of what has happened in the church from time immemorial, in Israel and in the church of our own day: God planted and nourished it but it turned away from him and brought forth sour fruit. Many times there was repentance and reform, but again departure and unbelief, and again, and again, and again. Thus in this day we see the remnants of many churches all around us—once they were beautiful vines, but now they produce wild fruit. Let us be warned.

The second passage of Scripture is also from an Old Testament prophet,

Jeremiah 1:7-8, 17 - But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you", says the Lord....And Verse 17, "Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you...."

There are the King's orders to his ambassador: speak the words that I reveal to you. Speak all the words.

The final passage brings us into the new dispensation where Christ has died and risen, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the church, and the gathering of his elect is expanding to all kinds of people to the ends of the earth.

Ephesians 6:10-18 - Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints....

In God's great wisdom and power and grace he distributes to his church the equipment she needs to become the mighty body of Christ on earth that shows God's power over sin, over earthly and spiritual powers and, yes, over death itself. Your church and mine are called to be such churches.

With these three passages there is set before us a *lesson* in how pervasive and destructive is the tendency to rebel against God, not only by the world but also by those in the very church of Christ. In Jeremiah there is set before us the *obligation* of the messengers of the Lord to declare one message alone, whatever he commands by his Word. And in Ephesians is revealed the *gracious provision* that God has made for the triumph of those who by the Spirit follow and obey him. Keep those in mind as we move forward.

Earlier I said, We are here. We have come from many distant parts of the world—from Asia where we are gathered, but also from "Down Under", from Africa, Europe, North America. Our churches have spent the Lord's money to send us here, and we have put our own time and energy into it. And I challenge you to think

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again, Why are we here? Why did we come all this way? For fellowship with those whom we have come to love in Christ? Indeed so. Some of our churches find that in our Reformed faith they are largely isolated, and in coming together here they find a refreshing strength in the common bonds of our faith. Do we come to bear witness to the world, and even to the worldwide church, that the Reformed faith is vital today and lives in both hemispheres and on both sides of the equator? Yes, that too. But also, as our ICRC Constitution says in a variety of ways, we come together to encourage and help one another to become more like the churches that we ought to be. To do that we need to improve and deepen our fellowship. And that, in Perfecting Fellowship, is where I am aiming. We must understand the need and find ways to help each other grow into the likeness of Christ. In the past, churches have collapsed from within and been blown apart from without. Churches have departed from the faith, and their ecumenical organizations have both followed and led them. That is the past. This is the present. And we must look ahead to the future. Here I want to pay tribute to those who had the foresight to begin the ICRC and to lay its foundations in the unchanging Word of God rather than in the speculations of man. We in this meeting have the opportunity to build, as we depend upon the Holy Spirit, on that foundation. We may not just sit placidly together and nod our heads pleasantly in greeting to each other. Our need is to work at the task of strengthening one another so that in our own places of ministry, and together, we shall stand fast. We shall demonstrate that the gospel is indeed **“the power of God unto salvation”** (Rom. 1:16). That is just another way of saying that we must perfect our fellowship. It is that, if we are to be an effective instrument in the hands of our covenant God, that I believe we must be stirred to see and to do. The past does not have to repeat itself; our churches do not have to collapse. Let the ICRC, by the grace of God, be an instrument to help us to prevent our breaking down and, rather, to exhibit God’s power.

With these things in mind I wish you to look with me at Our Foundations, Our Purposes, and Our Responsi-

bilities. Or, again, who we are, why we are, and what we are to do.

OUR FOUNDATIONS

So, who are we? If I may say so, we are people of God who are consumed by a desire to follow him, and to follow him as he has revealed himself and his will to us in his Word. We are churches that have a foundation. Just as the foundation of a building is composed of rock and a cementing agent so is the twofold foundation of the church of Jesus Christ: (1) God, in Christ, is our rock, the root, the first cause, the omnipotent Creator, the sovereign Ruler, the gracious Redeemer of all that we are and hope to be, and (2) the Word of God in which he reveals himself to us and declares his will for us. On this we build. Yet not we but the Holy Spirit working in us and through us.

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Our God is not some imaginary ideal that man carries in his mind. Nor yet a nebulous force that somehow exerts itself in our universe. God is a person, the living God, who is eternal in his being. **“In the beginning God”**, says the very first verse in the Bible; and not only so, but also **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”**, adds that same verse. Our God speaks, he hears, he acts. And so we here believe. **“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God”** the inspired psalmist says (Ps. 90:2). Here we of the ICRC stand also. For though we live in a day when the evolutionary hypothesis has spread like wildfire we know from his Word and proclaim that God created the immense cosmos and this little world in which we live. Nor is our God absent from this world that he created. He rules it by day and by night. He is its King, its sovereign: **“he does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth”** (Dan. 4:35).

That will is not only sovereign but also gracious. In 1 Pet. 2:6 God says, **“I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone...and he that believes in him shall not be confounded”**. As soon as man had sinned in the Garden of Eden, and even before he was ejected from that paradise, God interposed with mercy. For right then and there, as recorded in Gen. 3:15, he revealed his plan to

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send a Redeemer to save his people from their sins. At the core of that plan was that that Redeemer would be his own Son, the very second person of the Trinity, who would, as Matt. 20: 28 says, **“give his life a ransom for many”**. That is mercy: that he himself would pay the price for our sins. What mercy, what love! As Isaac Watts said it,

“See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

We stand there, also.

And lest anyone misunderstand, God adds in Eph. 2:8-9, **“by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works....”**. And if we need still more to see the graciousness of our salvation he tells us that, **“he chose us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world”** (Eph. 1:4) before we had done good or evil. We have a name for that, don’t we? We rightly call it sovereign grace. Further to compound it (it piles up, doesn’t it?), someone asked Jesus, “How can we know the Father?” Jesus said, **“no one comes to the Father except through me”** (John 14:6). Or, again, **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”** (2 Cor. 5:19). And one final witness, from 1 Cor. 3:11, **“other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”**.

So we begin with God in creation and we come back to God in salvation. “God”, said the psalmist, **“is my Rock and my Fortress”**. Here we all stand.

However, I used the word “foundations” (plural) for this subject, advisedly. For although all that exists is founded on God he chose to reveal himself in a particular way, that is, through a written revelation. In Old Testament times they called that revelation “the law and the prophets”. Today we call it the Bible, or Scripture, composed of the Old and New Testaments. It is the very Word of God. By his Holy Spirit he moved men to write exactly what he wanted to reveal. Precisely that. And nothing else. And as John 17:17 says, that Word **“is truth”**. We have a name for that, too. in inspiration; or

plenary inspiration, if you will. The Bible is entirely God’s Word, and nothing else. It is God speaking to us to tell us what we need to know about him and the world that he made, about ourselves, and about what God wants us to believe and the kind of lives he wants us to live, and what is in store for those who believe and for those who do not. Scripture is the sole place where we can learn infallibly about God and his will for us.

So, although God is the One from whom all life comes, Scripture is the foundation of our faith. The Presbyterians’ Westminster Shorter Catechism says that “the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man”.

With a far higher, and a qualitatively different, authority God himself says of his Word, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Tim. 3:16).

However, God has not revealed all his will to us. There are, he says in Deut. 29:29,

“secret things” that belong to him alone; nevertheless he has revealed all that we need to know which, he says, “belong to us and to our children”. They are the things that we need, in order that “we may do all the words of (his) law”, as that same verse puts it. Our faith and our responsibilities to God are to be found there and there alone.

Remember, if you will, the passage that we read from Jeremiah. The prophet is given a very careful and explicit instruction: **“Whatever I command you, you shall speak”** (v.7), and v.17, **“Speak to them all that I command you”**. It is interesting to note that the last words of Jesus to the New Testament church, recorded in Matthew chapter 28, v. 20, were a command almost identical to that of Jeremiah: **“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”**.

Do people want to know about God? Teach them the Bible. Nothing else. The Bible. Do people want to know what is right or wrong? Teach them the Bible. What do you preach in church or wherever else you have opportunity? If it is anything other than the Bible you are on the

wrong track, you are failing God. God says, Teach what I have commanded you. Teach them my Word. And bear in mind the warning he gave to Jeremiah: **“Be not dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them”**.

This living, inspired Word, this Word alone, of all the writings ever written in all the world and in all ages is, being the Word of God, without error. This is the Word that is the foundation of our faith. And if I were to ask all who agree with that to say, Amen, you would as with one voice say so. Here also we stand. These are our foundations. Without them the ICRC would not be, and you and I would not be here this evening. But if we all agree, why have we come together? What purpose can there be in that?

So now we move on to our purposes.

OUR PURPOSES

Why are we here? We posed this question before, and we ask it again, *Why are we here?*

We are here because we all have a ministry that comes out of our foundations, God and his Word. The Constitution of the ICRC states several purposes, but in general they focus on a ministry of each member church helping all the others, and the body as a whole. And that is right. Yet I would remind you that there is no longer such a thing as isolation. If anyone ever did live in a vacuum, surely none of us does now. We are in contact all the time with other churches and the world, and we must as churches minister to them, too. In a very real way we have a threefold purpose or ministry—to each other, to the worldwide church, and to the world.

We all recognize that the world around us—the unchurched world—is the devoted enemy of Christ. Surely in remote places where the gospel has hardly, or not at all, been preached, where primitive paganism has been in control as long as men can remember, surely there Satan and his minions hold obvious sway in the hearts and minds of the people. But enmity toward Christ is not limited to such societies. It is prominent also where the gospel has long been preached. Sometimes it is subtle, but often the world’s enmity to Christ is quite straightforward. Blasphemous lives are lived openly, and often right in our faces. Schools and universities despise and attack the basic Christian doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation. Government laws are adopted that make sin increas-

ingly easy for those who want it. Entertainment daily strikes at the heart of Christian morality. Many of the same things can also be said of religious groups that call themselves churches, but are, as Jesus labeled them in his day, synagogues of Satan. Often in such churches the idea of an eternal, living, personal God is denied, along with his work of creation, his miracles, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of Christ, and the reality of heaven and hell. So-called science has become the god of many. The sinfulness of mankind and sin itself are widely rejected, so that personal holiness, the value of human life, and the worship of God are scorned. Yes, all around us, in the world and in other churches, a ministry awaits us.

That, however, in no way negates the purposes of the ICRC, which focus on helping one another. As a matter of fact the prevalence of unbelief in our world increases the need for us to help one another. For one thing, the ICRC is not itself a church, nor church generically. It is but a place where churches confer, as “Conference” implies. Its function is to seek answers, through conferring, to such questions as, “How can our churches best minister?” Secondly, however, and more importantly, it is those anti-Christian conditions in which most of us live that should give impetus to the “conference” purposes of the ICRC. We need to overcome the tendency, the all-too prevailing tendency, to go it alone, to try to solve problems with our individual knowledge and experience, sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling on our faces, probably doing our job only partly as it should have been done. We need to humble ourselves and say to each other, “We need you”.

Through the course of Christian history it has been through acceptance of interdependence that some of the greatest advances in the church’s understanding of the Christian faith have come. Through Councils such as at Jerusalem in the time of the apostles, and later ones such as Nicea and Chalcedon basic doctrines of our faith such as the person of Christ and the Trinity became established. They benefited the whole church then and through the centuries since. We should see ourselves as working not only for our limited memberships but together to speak to and edify the whole church of Christ wherever it is today or will be in the future. Some might exclaim, “Such arrogance! To think that this little group of Reformed churches could teach the worldwide church..” But let me remind you of the power of the Word of God in the hands of his Spirit. There was that day in the midst of the titanic struggle about the person of Christ and the Trinity when some friends of Athanasius, who pro-

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claimed both the full humanity and the full deity of Christ against Arius, came to him to warn him of the futility of his battle. They said to him (somewhat reminiscent of Job's "friends), "Athanasius, the world is against you." To which Athanasius replied, "Then I am against the world." Because lonely Athanasius stood upon the foundation of the Word of God, and taught it to his generation, we more than a millennium and a half later are upheld by his teaching. Do not underestimate what the Spirit of God can do with and through the ICRC. Those purposes propose to have us help each other as churches to fulfill the ministries that God has laid before us. This ICRC, with all of us building on the same foundations, is just what we need.

We turn now to our responsibilities.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Our Constitution speaks of helping each other with our "common problems". There is at least one difficulty with that idealistic statement: either we do not know what our common problems are or there are no problems that we have in common. Since the previous ICRC meeting four years ago our church has not conferred with any other member churches about problems that have confronted us, nor have we conferred with any of you about your problems. We get along fine; we don't trouble each other!

That is not my idea of getting along well nor of helping one another. It reminds me of the couple who were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Someone asked the husband how they had been able to get along so well for all those years, and he replied, "When we were married we agreed that I would make the decisions on all major problems, and my wife would decide all the others, and it has just so happened that in all these years we have had no major problems." But in the life of our churches there are problems, some major and some less major, and we would all benefit if we would confer about them.

First we should be concerned for one another. On the one hand we should not think that the other churches would not be interested in our problems nor, on the other hand, should we think that we don't need the others. Scripture enjoins the believer (how much more, bodies of believers) to "let each of you look out not only for his

We need to overcome the tendency, the all-too-prevailing tendency, to go it alone, to try to solve problems with our individual knowledge and experience, sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling on our faces, probably doing our job only partly as it should have been done. We need to humble ourselves and say to each other, "We need you".

own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil.2:4). We need to cultivate a sense of empathy with one another. We are not talking about sympathy and clicking our tongues, saying, "We are so sorry that this has happened to your church." We are talking about participating in each other's feelings, feeling what the other feels, putting ourselves in the place of another, and asking, "What can I do to help? How can we work on this together?" It is: "Don't just stand there. Do something." That is fellowship. That is being members of one another. That is what I hope that the ICRC is going to be, and I fervently hope that you do, too. As we thus help each other to stand fast in the faith we are, in a sense, taking out insurance on the future of the ICRC.

Also hear God speak of our need of each other in 1 Cor.12 beginning at v. 14: "**The body is not one member but many...(21) and the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'....(24) But God composed the body (25) that there should be no schism in**

the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another." I am sure that it was just those principles that lay behind the origins of this body. It is to help us achieve our goals, to perfect that fellowship, that all that I am saying this evening is directed.

Secondly we must use the armor that God has given us. Let me now backtrack for a few moments. Back to "common problems". All of us share one common problem. Yes, I am sure you have guessed it: sin. And Satan, the author of sin, the great deceiver, is out to mislead the church and destroy its ministry, just as he tried to destroy Jesus himself and his ministry. We are in a war! Not a physical war, but a spiritual war, as Ephesians 6 reminded us. And God has armed us for that war, as we read earlier. Well armed us, from head to foot, from the helmet of salvation to the gospel of peace for our feet, with truth, righteousness, and faith in between. With this armor he protects us from destruction by Satan's fiery darts that might pierce our hearts, and places in our hand a weapon to defeat all his and our enemies. He calls that weapon the "**sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God**" (v. 17).

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A “sword”. Not a physical sword, but spiritual. The Word of God. Only the Word of God. No other offensive weapon. Just the Word. It is, he says, “**sharper than any two-edged sword**”; so sharp that no unbelief or any sin can hide from it, for it discerns “**the thoughts and intents of the heart**” (Heb. 4:12). We return to the thought of our foundations: it is on this Word, the Word of God, that repentance and faith are built. And it is not our sword. It is part of the armor that God had given to us, but it is not ours. It is the sword “**of the Spirit**”; it is the Word of God. As we take that sword in our hand, as we proclaim that Word, it is the Holy Spirit who—not we—takes it and drives it to its intended destination in the hearts of men, whether as a savor life or of death (2 Cor 2:16).

After giving the effects of his sword-thrust—life or death—he asks the rhetorical question (really an exclamation!), “**Who is sufficient for these things?**” To which we should each reply, “Not I”; and to which each of our churches should reply, “Not we”. So, in the third place, we need to recognize our own weakness. Our insufficiency is not limited to our lack of power to change the hearts of men, which God alone can do. That question/exclamation is saying that we lack wisdom also. We do not know the answers to the problems that come to us. No, we may not have the answers; but maybe our brothers across the seas, or in our own country, may know something that we do not. Yet we draw back from asking them, fearing to inconvenience them since it is not their problem; or perhaps it does not even occur to us to ask them. But it should not be that way: your “interests”, as the Scripture said, should be mine and mine should be yours. And a warning against pride: How can they help us? We need to cultivate humility and learn the hard lesson to “**esteem others better than himself**” (Phil. 2:3). Understanding and applying these truths moves us in the right direction: we will call on one another for help.

Fourth, we need to put our fellowship into better practice. Although the ICRC gives us true fellowship with each other, and I think that everyone here feels that, there is nevertheless a sense in which we stand off from each other, thinking our own thoughts, wondering how these meetings and this organization will help us. Per-

haps we came not so much denying that we each came to help *others*, but as if more on our minds was you helping *us*. But fellowship is a two-way street; the traffic must flow in both directions. I remind you that the first stated purpose of our Constitution is “to express and promote the unity of the faith” of our member churches (Art. III.1). We are here in these meetings, to help each other, to avoid the need for each to try to go it alone. But a meeting every four years for ten days, no matter how much we may do in those ten days, is not enough. That is small fellowship indeed. We need to help each other between our quadrennial meetings. Sometimes when we fail to ask help before decisions are made we discover our mistakes when it is too late, though other of our churches, through knowledge or prior experience could have prevented it. The result of not asking has been seen throughout church history and within our own experience. That result is that we go our direction and you go yours and in the course of time our directions have become so divergent that unity is broken, division occurs. In the six decades that I have been privileged to minister in Christ’s church I have seen

In the six decades that I have been privileged to minister in Christ’s church I have seen the sad results when churches disregard the help that others of like faith could have given them if they had not chosen to go their own way, with their own limited wisdom. Our own church has had just such an experience with another church for several years, and especially in this past year.

the sad results when churches disregard the help that others of like faith could have given them if they had not chosen to go their own way, with their own limited wisdom. Our own church has had just such an experience with another church for several years, and especially in this past year.

Even right at home in my own church we have been wrestling for several years with a discipline problem concerning evolution. Perhaps that is not a “common” problem, though we never found out, because we never asked you. But what if it is an “uncommon” problem? Maybe we need even more help on that kind of problem than we do on the common variety. In any case, did we seek your help? No. But we should have. Think of the accumulated wisdom in the whole body of Reformed churches in this ICRC that might have supplemented the more limited wisdom of our one church. Now that the decision has been made, it is too late to ask your advice.

There have also been interchurch bodies similar to the ICRC that have failed to give adequate help to their members, and the whole body has eventually foundered. We must try to not let that happen to us. That means that

Perfecting Fellowship

we are going to have to work at it. Just the fact that we exist, calling ourselves a conference of Reformed churches, guarantees nothing. I am trying, then, in this message, to seek, through the Spirit of God, to stir you up, and through you your churches, to understand better not only who we are and why we are here, but also what we need to do to fulfill the purposes that our Constitution—not to say, the Word of God—sets before us.

As we are gathered here in the name of unity and fellowship I want, before I close, to make a concrete suggestion as to how we might move toward perfecting that fellowship. I suggest that when we deal with a problem, whether it be doctrine, ethics, or church order, we immediately seek the help, wisdom, advice of each other. And the other side of the coin is that when asked for help we will give it even as we would like it to be given to us. Although it is hard to imagine that there is anything new under the sun, I do not know if this has ever been done. I do know that it was not done in my own church's previous interchurch affiliation, and it has not been done so far in the ICRC fellowship. Outside the ICRC the OPC has been testing the waters of such an effort; we are finding them warm and encouraging. Yes, when the ICRC meets every four years we read papers that touch on needs and we discuss them for an hour or so, and they are probably helpful to all of us at the meeting but do they work their way into the life of our churches? Also, problems in the churches do not wait until every fourth year, and the papers do not necessarily get at some very pressing needs. To put it another way, we need to scratch where we itch. We do that by telling the churches what is troubling us, when it is troubling us, so that they may tell us how they believe the Word should be applied to the problem.

Surely each of our churches has experienced times of both triumph and despair. We should not go through those times alone, and if we are one in our faith as we profess to be, we should not have to pass through such times alone. Scripture tells us (Rom. 12:15), "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." To do so we shall need to know what is going on in each other's church life and that, in turn, will require us to share our lives with each other—our difficulties, our victories, our disappointments. We need to be one, as well as to claim it.

All these things being said about our need to help each other we must remember that the church's battles have never been won by the strength of men. The battle

is the Lord's. However wise we may think ourselves to be, our hope is in the name of the Lord. And that is what God is so careful to say to us in Ephesians 6. After having told us of all the armament that he has given us for our use in the warfare he then places the capstone on it with these closing words, "**praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit**" (v. 18). The Lord is our "**light and salvation...the strength**" of our life (Ps. 27:1). As someone has already said, "The church must march on its knees."

We are all dying, and the day will come when we can no longer speak. Obversely, others are dying who will no longer hear. It is obvious that we should speak "as a dying man to dying men". The ICRC should not be a cozy little club for our own comfort and pleasure but it should be, as it was intended to be, an instrument in the hand of God to build each other up in our common faith and to help each other church to do better the task that he has given us to do. Let us help each other, going out of our way if need be, to wear God's armor well and to wield faithfully the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. May we be faithful to speak to each other, to all the church, and to the world, while he gives us time.

May we be faithful until Jesus comes. Amen.

John P. Galbraith was present at the first General Assembly of the OPC. His ministerial career has therefore spanned the entire history of our denomination. He was three times elected Moderator of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), and has always had a great zeal for faithful Reformed Ecumenicity. It was therefore fitting that he was asked to give the opening address at the recent International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) as it met for the fourth time in Seoul, Korea. It is our hope that the ICRC will live up to the high purpose so eloquently set forth here by Rev. Galbraith.

The Myth of Influence

by

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether

Were J. Gresham Machen and the other leaders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church wise to leave the Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) when they did? The small size and meager influence of the OPC suggests to some historians of American Presbyterianism that Machen left too early. At roughly 20,000 members the OPC pales in comparison to other Protestant endeavors; for instance, a regular Promise Keepers rally will draw more men than two OPCs put together. Meanwhile, after contributing mightily to the world of evangelical scholarship through the figures of Ned Stonehouse, E. J. Young, John Murray and Cornelius Van Til, the OPC has few theologians or biblical scholars who command the attention of an academic renaissance among evangelicals. This set of circumstances has prompted some to consider that if conservatives had stayed in the PCUSA longer perhaps either the mainline denomination could have been reformed or more conservatives would have left thus leaving the OPC with a better and bigger witness.

Influence, however, is hard to evaluate; in the fiefdoms that comprise modern evangelicalism it is hard to conceive of any one particular individual or institution speaking for and to the whole movement. Does the popular James Dobson of Focus on the Family, or D. James Kennedy of Evangelism Explosion fame, or the prolific historian at Wheaton College, Mark A. Noll have the sort of influence that the investment firm of E. F. Hutton once did (“when he speaks people listen”)? Even within American Roman Catholicism where one voice is supposed to command the allegiance of church members, not even the immensely popular Pope John Paul II has the influence that some Reformed believers wish they had.

But to ask about the long term influence of Machen and the church that he helped to form is to raise the wrong question. For him and other conservative Presbyterians the choice was not how best to have a larger and more influential church. If the founding of the OPC was simply done for strategic reasons, then history might conclude that Machen and other conservatives were unwise to leave the PCUSA. Still, the issue wasn’t one of strategy or influence. Rather what led to the founding of the OPC concerned the very heart of the struggles that led to the Protestant Reformation itself. Sometimes called the formal principle of the Reformation, the question that faced Machen was whether the Word of God was ultimate in judging the work and witness of the church. Was the norm for the life of the church the wisdom of God or the wisdom of men? Faced with this question, Machen and others looked past matters of influence to the more germane issue of Christ's Lordship over his church.

The Strategy of Influence

One important piece of Presbyterian history to remember about the origins of the OPC is that the denominational struggle did not begin in the 1930s. In fact, it began sixteen years prior to the formation of the OPC. For the first fourteen years of that struggle the most important issues facing conservative Presbyterians were ones of strategy and influence. With liberalism in the church how best should conservatives respond? Put another way, how should the PCUSA be reformed? The answers were not always clear as is usually the case in the arena of denominational politics where prudence and discernment are just as important as biblical imperatives and confessional requirements.

One strategy was that pursued by Machen when in 1923 he wrote *Christianity and Liberalism*. Here conservatives used arguments regarding the nature of Christianity and the character of the church to persuade Presbyterians that liberalism should not be tolerated within the PCUSA. On the one hand, Machen argued, liberalism and historic Christianity differed on all the classic verities of the faith, from the doctrine of God to the nature of salvation, so much so that liberalism was another religion altogether. On the other hand, Machen defended the confessional basis of ordination in the Presbyterian Church and tried to show that liberal Protestants were unfaithful to their ministerial vows. Machen's book successfully defined the issues in the church but failed to persuade the majority of Presbyterians that liberalism existed within the denomination as subsequent events would show.

Another strategy concerned the annual gatherings of the General Assembly and the business of the church handled at those meetings. Here conservatives strove to elect other conservatives to positions of leadership, whether to the office of moderator or the composition of denominational committees. The most successful campaign came in 1924 when conservatives elected Clarence Macartney as moderator, the only conservative elected during the 1920s and 1930s. But when it came to committee and board membership, conservatives were clearly in the minority. For instance, in 1923 the Overtures and Bills Committee charged with deciding upon the Presbytery of New York's ordination of two men who would not affirm the virgin birth could muster a minority report opposing that presbytery's action with only one conservative signer.

Overall, conservative efforts at denominational politics were ineffective. The Special Committee of 1925 appointed to study the controversy in the denomination reported to the next years General Assembly that liberalism as Machen had defined it did not exist in the church and blamed conservatives for starting the struggle in the first place. This report only paved the way for the 1926

General Assembly to call for the investigation of Princeton Seminary, the source of so much conservative opposition to liberalism. When that investigation recommended the reorganization of the denomination's oldest seminary, the die was cast. In 1929 that recommendation took effect and conservatives lost control of the only denominational agency that voiced their views.

The reorganization of Princeton led to the last strategy of conservatives, namely, that of institution-building. Machen and other conservative faculty left Princeton to form Westminster Seminary so that the education of conservative Presbyterian ministers could go on. In fact, with the founding of Westminster conservatives began to recognize that the strategies of persuasion and denominational politics were not going to be successful. If a truly Reformed witness were to survive it would depend on creating their own institutions that would give visibility and momentum to that witness.

Missions and the Mandate

The institution-building strategy continued in 1933 when in response to a report on Protestant foreign missions (*Re-Thinking Missions*) that denied the uniqueness of Christianity and argued for cooperation with indigenous religions. Conservatives, again led by Machen, formed the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Conservatives had sent overtures to the General Assembly that sought the reform of the denomination's official Board of Foreign Missions. But once those failed they founded another agency to voice dissent from denominational policies and to stand for the Reformed faith.

Not surprisingly, the Independent Board looked—to denominational leaders—like a rival organization. To squash it denominational officials drew up the Mandate of 1934, passed by the General Assembly the same year, which declared that the Independent Board was unconstitutional and ordered Independent Board members to resign or else face trial by their presbyteries. At this

point strategy was no longer the issue. Instead, the question facing conservatives was whether they would obey the church's ruling. And this question bore directly upon the matter of authority in the church. Were church officials acting lawfully or were they usurping the authority given them by the Word of God and the church's constitution? If conservatives were convinced of the latter then they had a solemn obligation to make that case in the courts of the church. Machen said that because he believed the official board of missions was "unfaithful" he could not support it nor urge others to support it. Neither could he simply withdraw from the church because such evasion would be "a violation of my ordination pledge to maintain the purity and peace of the Church, whatever 'persecution or opposition may arise' unto me on that account."

This was the heart of the struggle that led to the foundation of the OPC. Conservatives did not leave the PCUSA (of course, some were kicked out) because liberalism was in the denomination and church officials tolerated it. This was indeed a grave situation and Machen led the charge in arguing that conservatives and liberals could not exist in the same communion. Still, he knew the church militant would never be perfect. The OPC was not formed to be a pure church. Instead, it was founded because the PCUSA was unlawfully binding the consciences of ministers and church members. By requiring ministers to swear allegiance to the boards and agencies of the church as a condition of ordination the PCUSA had put the word of man above the Word of God.

The Real Influence of Christ's Church

Did the OPC lose influence within the most prominent circles of mainline Protestantism when it was formed in 1936? To be sure it did. And did the formation of the OPC deplete the witness of conservatives in the PCUSA? This question is harder to answer since by the estimates of conservatives who remained in the Northern Presbyterian Church there were many more sound ministers and congregations than the small number

(i.e., 5,000) of Presbyterians who left to join the OPC. Blaming the woes of the PCUSA on the OPC will not exonerate the responsibility of those conservatives who did not leave.

But these are the wrong questions. The real issue was whether Christ's headship was readily evident in the life and witness of the church. That is, was his prophetic office visible in the preaching and witness of the church? Was his priestly office evident in the worship and liturgy of the church? And was Christ's rule as king visible in the government of the church? These were the questions that led conservatives to found the OPC because these are the ways in which Christ displays his Lordship and by which he has promised to bless his church and make it effective. To be sure the OPC has never been a pure church. But Orthodox Presbyterians have recognized that the church's calling is not to transform the culture or be influential. Rather, it is to live obediently under the Lordship of Christ. As the Belgic Confession puts it, the true church is known as the place where Jesus Christ is acknowledged as head. The false church, however, "ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God." In the end, this is the only way to evaluate the influence of the church.

D. G. Hart and John Muether are coauthors of *Fighting the Good Fight, A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Both are ruling elders in the OPC — Mr. Hart at Calvary OPC, Glenside, PA and Mr. Muether in Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, FL.

Thoughts on the Plusses and the Pitfalls of Using the Web for Mutual Ministry

by Rev. David King

“And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. As a result we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:11-16

As the primary means of grace is the Word of God, the growth of Christian believers and churches requires communication, from pastors and teachers to congregations (and to each other), and between believers. For centuries churches and believers have been able to live out these apostolic instructions with personal immediacy and direct interaction only at short distances - within local congregations or between members and officers of churches in the same city. Speaking the truth in love for the purpose of mutual up-building took more time and effort across greater distances - the give and take of mutual instruction, encouragement or correction taking days, weeks, even months. Could this have been a significant contributing factor to the growth of independency in the vastness of America? This geographic

challenge has been, in my opinion, a significant problem for the OPC, a small denomination with congregations often separated by considerable distances from each other.

While the 20th century has seen exponential increases in the speed of communication over distances, using high-speed communication can be expensive. What pastor has not had the frustrating experience of wishing he could call two or three trusted brothers in distant places to thrash out the exegesis of a difficult passage or work out a questionable doctrinal point or seek counsel on a thorny pressing problem — but the reality of long-distance phone rates killed the wish? So you write letters, and maybe it takes a week or two to get an answers, possibly too late to help when help was most needed. How many times have you driven home from a presbytery meeting wishing the agenda and everyone’s busy schedules had allowed sufficient time for real ministry to each other, and you regret that time and money keep us from getting in our cars and meeting somewhere just for the purpose of fellowship and mutual edification? A number of ministers have drifted off in unorthodox directions who might have been kept on course if they had been in regular and immediate communication with brothers who could have helped them at the outset to think through their aberrant ideas to sound conclusions (though it's quite likely at least some of them would have followed their deviant course in any case).

Enter the modern communications technology that enables instant and nearly cost-free (after you pay \$1000 or more for the

equipment!!) written communication via e-mail and the worldwide web. The struggling session can now send out an emergency appeal for counsel to scores of other sessions and hope to receive good advice while the problem is still gestating. Pastor-teachers can ask each other questions, propose ideas for critique, and share new insights across thousands of miles as if next door. Young ministers can keep in touch with older mentors. Three, four, ten, fifty people can carry on an active conversation without needing to drive long miles and tiring hours to meet.

None of this requires any special ability. I who write am a technobooby. Somebody who knows how this all works set me up and showed me how.

Computers and the world-wide web offer all kinds of possibilities, most of which I have not explored because I am still wading in the shallow end. But I would like to talk about the benefits I have received and also some liabilities and pitfalls I have experienced.

E-mail greatly enhances the efficiency of committee work. A lot can be done, and done fairly quickly, if committee members are connected together and can generate, send, and critique proposals and reports without the need for driving to meetings.

News of important events, meetings, prayer requests, and thanksgivings can be broadcast to a large group of churches and people instantly. It's still news when you get it! There's still time to pray when you get the prayer request.

I mentioned above sharing of ideas with other elders for critique and seeking counsel. Currently I am involved in an e-mail discussion group for Orthodox Presbyterians (managed by the *Christian Observer*, e-mail address presbyterians-opc@xc.org). Several

times sessions have described a serious problem they face, and have received timely and (in my opinion) good advice. Individuals ask for the names of the best books on various subjects; they ask questions about difficult subjects; they offer commentary on current events from a Biblical point of view. In the course of these discussions over the last, say six months, I have been delighted to receive in my study some of the finest exegesis and most weighty theological reasoning one can hope to encounter. I have learned a great deal about biblical church government, both theological and practical. Membership vows, the nature and extent of church power, the relationship of the church and civil government, questions about taxes, usury, marriage and divorce and church discipline, arguments about the use of instruments in worship and the application of the second commandment to church decoration, etc., etc. Some of it has struck me as trivial or wrong; but some I have gladly copied to permanent disk storage for future reference.

There are problems.

(1) Time management. I find I can allow myself to become quite absorbed in these Internet discussions, to the neglect of more important matters. Self-discipline in regard to time having always been a problem for me, the Internet has occasioned much violating of Ephesians 5:16. A few times I have come close to calling it the hand or foot of Matthew 18:8 and cutting it off.

(2) Gossip and offense. There is something seductive about a medium in which one retains near anonymity while speaking back and forth to people almost as if they were right there with you. You converse, but through a wall; you are safe. Some, I suspect, undergo the kind of personality change that others experience in the cars, as when courteous, diffident, quiet people turn into aggres-

sive pit-bulls on the highway. I think it is too easy to ignore the Christian “rules of etiquette” on the Internet. Matthew 18:15 and the Golden Rule still apply, but you don't see and may not even know the people with whom you exchange postings; you are alone in a room with their words on a screen. How easy to forget the law of love and pass on gossip or lash out at perceived stupidity and error. In this way the speed of the Internet is a liability. Your fingers fly with brilliant repartee, the barbs shining bright, you are a valiant warrior for truth against heresy, you press the “send” key and away it flies away, irretrievably, to pierce its target and reach scores of other readers (maybe hundreds, thousands?). A letter would have taken longer to type. You would have slept on it before handing it to the postman. There would have been time for your better angels to whisper caution to your conscience. Think twice and pray well before you “send.”

(3) Ignorance. You often do not know those with whom you may be disagreeing on some theological matter. You know nothing of their history and cannot see their faces or hear their inflection. Their words come out of the ether without these vital contexts. Misunderstanding is easy; making false judgments is a great danger. Ask questions of the other fellow before you assault his statements.

(4) Pseudo-fellowship. As a corollary to (3), your Internet exchanges may have some of the marks of Christian fellowship, but they are not the real thing. Our conversations and debates may express the fellowship we have in Christ, but we still need the face-to-face encounter with flesh-and-blood human beings.

(5) Caveat emptor. Balancing the outstanding exegetical and theological material I have seen have been a few examples of the very opposite (in my opinion). A lot of worth-

less junk floats around on the Internet. Remember how Pierre Salinger made a fool of himself by believing—and loudly proclaiming—a total fabrication about Flight 800, and don't be a naive guppy yourself. Can Christians spread baseless rumors through the Web? You'd better believe it, or you will believe it.

Computers and the Internet are tools. The Word is the Lord's appointed means of grace. The Lord blessed and used His Word for nineteen centuries of gospel preaching and church-building before this latest tool became available. The Word without the computer and Internet has as much saving and sanctifying power as it ever did. Blazing high-tech communications without the Word are useless. As a tool can be used to serve righteousness or sin, so the Internet is neither good nor bad, per se, but can be used by and for either. I managed to live nearly 50 years, and minister more than 20, without it. Now I use it and am glad, mostly, but also see the need to be careful and sometimes to repent.

David King is pastor of the Janesville, WI, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and a frequent contributor to discussions on the Web site to which he refers in this article. It was because we so often appreciated his uncommonly astute comments in these internet discussions that we asked him to write this article for *Ordained Servant*

CATECHETICAL PREACHING

by Rev. R. E. Knodel, Jr

Has the reader ever experienced catechetical preaching? Does he think it sounds dull? By way of testimony, let me say that catechetical preaching has been one of the richest discoveries of my life. I can't rave enough about it, nor encourage others too much to become practitioners of it.

I don't claim this on account of my predilection for this kind of preaching; nor because of my ease in preaching this way, nor because of its inherent popularity. My endorsement arises out of twenty-five years of doing it. The deeper I have gotten into my ministerial career, the more cumulative blessing has accrued from my sermonic exercises in the catechisms. And the more dynamic I have observed this phenomenon, the more I have wondered: "Am I alone? How many others have allowed themselves to be tutored by the great catechisms of Protestantism?"

Today I am fully convinced that good catechetical preaching holds one of the main keys for the future blessing of the church. With this in view, how could I not want to share my findings? The following then would serve as an introduction to the enjoyment I have discovered. I hope it tantalizes the reader to pick up this homiletical rubric if he has not already; or to dust it off if he has used it, but not recently, or consistently.

Introduction and background

I first considered using the Westminster Shorter Catechism as the foundation of a preaching series because I had seen another, older minister, doing so. After listening to him for a number of months, I could see benefits in my life. It was natural then to take up the challenge in my first charge, once I had been ordained. But at that time, I really had no idea

of the depth or breadth that I would one day assign to this medium. In other words, I took it up trying to be a "good reformed pastor." Later on I learned how, by trying to be obedient in small ways, I had received abundant blessings I had never foreseen!

When I first began this project, I found it very, very difficult. In fact, I would say that it was not until I had gotten into my third series that I began to thrive on this kind of preaching. It wasn't easy. But I felt it was right. And so I worked at it, and worked at it and worked at it. In the end, I have seen the Lord add His mighty blessings to my meager effort. Catechetical preaching is "right." And when we do the "right," we get God's blessing! (Psalm 1: 4)

But is it really right? Can we not be accused of "creed-olatry," or the idolatry of the writings of men? Indeed, this was one of my early methodological problems because being a strong sola scriptura man I found it difficult to be scriptural and catechetical at the same time. If I spoke of the latter, did it not obscure the former? While much of this will be considered in the "how to" section below, let me make a small "apology" or defense here in the introduction.

First of all, we know that our catechetical documents are scriptural. If one uses the edition of the Westminster Standards printed by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland which is easily available from the major book distributors, the voluminous scriptural references which prove each clause usually fill the bottom two-thirds of every page.

Recently I was intrigued to find an edition of the Westminster documents in a used book store which dated from 1813. These were the years of Asahel Nettleton's evangelistic preaching, and Archibald Alexander's teaching, in the

American colonies. I was intrigued: What did the men have available back then? Opening the palm-sized leather volume I laughed. It was the exact same material and layout of which I just spoke above. When our presbyterian forebears went preaching on the frontiers, they took not only the confession, but the larger and shorter catechisms. They did this because these documents were the best summary of Scripture known. If they wanted to be scriptural, they had to be confessional. And if they were confessional they were scriptural! The bottom line is that if we want to be scriptural in our preaching, we can hardly do better than to aim at the catechisms which summarize our biblical doctrine in a question/answer format. The catechetical division provides both preachers and hearers with bite-size portions which easily accommodate themselves to the sermonic format. And as we'll see later on, catechetical preaching has no need of being "style-bound." It allows us, as preachers, to be varied and stimulating in our presentations.

At this point in my ministry, I have worked my way through the Shorter Catechism four times, while also traversing the Heidelberg Catechism, the canons of the Synod of Dordt, and finally the Larger Catechism — with which I am almost finished after a two year effort! This has been spread out between three churches and twenty-five years. As I said: It has all been good! My people have never complained. On the contrary, every time a new series has commenced they have greeted it with expressed excitement!

Multiple Benefits

Many are the benefits of this type of preaching for both preacher and people. Here follows a partial list in summary form:

1) The benefit of balanced, scriptural thought. We need tools to help us avoid the prejudices and hobbyhorses which come naturally to us as fallen, sinful men. Using the catechisms shows homiletical humility! Many have been the occasions that catechetical preaching forced me to deal with issues of which I

either saw little relevance, or didn't fully understand. But sermonizing through a catechism forced me to deal with those issues, and learn that which I had not previously! Because of the catechism's theological balance, sermons from them imbibe the same. I have improved my seminary education many times over by preaching through the church's catechisms. Without such tools we guarantee ourselves narrowness, superficiality or peculiarity. With them we tutor ourselves with the best minds of church history. We better approximate the apostolic command of preaching "the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20: 27)

2) The benefit of better understanding the "system of doctrine" to which we subscribe. Can the reader quickly explain how God brings His Eternal Decrees to pass, or how His Counsels manifest themselves in time? He can, if he understands the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 8! To the Question of "How doth God execute His decrees?," the catechism answers, "God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence." This simple formula answers some of the deepest philosophical questions posed. It shows that the complexity of God's decrees — His Eternal Counsels — come into time and space in either of two categories: creation or providence! Further, it grounds both of these ideas in the idea of God's decrees.

Creation cannot be contained under the study of science alone! Science can never explain the creation without incorporating God's revelation concerning His decrees. Further this answer shows that all of God's will is sovereignly brought to pass in either his sovereign control over creation, or his sovereign control over the subsequent events — providence — of that creation. Every catechism question relates to its neighboring questions. The truths they promulgate relate with each other and interact!

When we preach through these catechisms, we give our people a theological skeleton by which their thinking can be organized. Without such systems their minds tend not to grasp the corpus of the Scriptures. By default they remain

an amorphous mass. But with a skeletal structure God's revelation more readily imposes itself upon us! God himself shows us this with the law, summarizing myriads of ethical commands in the "Ten Commandments." Learning the "ten" we have a structure by which the "hundreds" can be understood and remembered.

3) The benefit of wonderful scriptural serendipity. Part of the responsibility of preaching catechetically involves the selection of Scripture texts as the basis of the sermon. It is rare when I have gone beyond the texts the divines offered as "proofs." And so often when I turn to such texts, I am brought to see insights not previously seen. For example in studying the Fourth Commandment in Question 121 of the Larger Catechism, I noted the citation of Ezekiel 20:12.

Upon study of that larger passage it was obvious that Sabbath observance becomes a covenant community's signal that it acknowledges God's sovereignty. In verse 25, God says that because of Israel's neglect of this signal law, He "gave them up to statutes that were not good and judgments by which they could not live." I was stunned! Here was scriptural proof that civil Sabbath neglect led, in Israel's case, to systemic vanity in their whole law code. Having thrown off God's sovereign claim, God gave their government's sovereignty over to vanity. Their legislators legislated, but God made sure their machinations were flawed.

Then I thought of our own day where so many of our "well-proposed" laws have had dramatically unintended, negative consequences. Could it be that our modern legal vanities were tied directly to our lack of recognition of the Lord? That was the obvious implication. And it was just as obvious that if we would change just one part of our behavior, Sabbath observance, that God would begin to allow us efficacy in regards to our larger system of jurisprudence! Where else can one simple behavioral change lead to such fruitful results? Yet this is the testimony of God I discovered through the catechism's Scripture proofs! It was something I had never noticed previously

in reading Ezekiel. And it made a wonderful sermon whereby we could see how the church — through its preaching — could help the state in unimaginable ways!

Such discoveries have been innumerable in the series I have preached. The Scriptures have come alive simply because I have been forced to observe how my forebears used them! They have referenced them to doctrinal points I never would have considered. But when I did consider them, refreshment and understanding resulted!

There are other benefits upon which I could elaborate but for space restraints. Catechetical preaching saves the preacher effort in being creative. He doesn't have to find new pearls, but just understand that which has already been discovered! Often it solves hidden problems in one's church even before they become apparent. But we will limit ourselves to mere mention of these benefits, so as to consider some practical "how tos."

"How To" Hints

1) I have used catechetical preaching primarily in the evening worship. That way, Scripture text alone has been the focus of the morning sermon, and the beginning of the Lord's Day. No confusion between form and substance offers itself. With that foundation laid, a good scriptural sermon which has one of the catechisms as its foil can be brought to one's people in the second service. With this, there's also an interesting balance between pure, textual exegesis (A.M.), and exegesis and doctrinal formulations (P.M.).

2) When using the Westminster Shorter Catechism (and this would be my advice for a first step in this procedure) one can easily print each question and answer out in the bulletin so people can find direct reference to it as the pastor speaks. With longer catechisms, I have printed out the formulations on a separate insert. Without such aids, it is very difficult for the people to grasp textual comments, or to follow the sermon.

3) The preacher should not think that he has to cover every question and answer exhaustively! That manner is more suited to the lecture or Sunday School. He either has to subsume a number of points under one main theme, or speak to one main idea. He's called to sermonize and proclaim, not plod on, substituting a lecture for the kerux of Christ. He also has to discover for himself how and why each question is important and relevant for his people! Without this, his presentation will inevitably appear merely academic, or as something which is an end in itself. The end of our preaching must be to glorify the Father through the ministrations of the Son and the Spirit. Is this not the essence of worship?

Many catechism questions would overwhelm listeners with their complexity. This is especially true of the Larger Catechism. But focusing on various points within the questions allows the pastor to more closely tailor his catechetical preaching to the needs of his church.

4) Along these lines, I would advise those first tackling this enterprise to err on the side of Scripture and not creed. When I first began this exercise years ago, I found efforts at referencing myself to the catechism very distracting. It was like I was trying to ride two horses at once. So I decided right away to only use the foil of the catechism so as not to overshadow the text of Scripture.

As I have worked on this over the years I believe the Lord has blessed me with greater and greater ease in using the creeds alongside the text without eclipsing God's word with man's. Sometimes at the end of the Scripture reading I can immediately deal with the Catechism, asking, "Is this what the Scripture teaches?" At other times I focus on the text with barely mentioning the catechetical formulation. Then later I will say, "Is this not precisely what the Divines discovered and taught in their answer?" Other times the text of Scripture brings out one main point of the Catechism, after which I can shortly make reference to additional lessons and applications

brought out by the whole of the answer. As time avails, short scriptural references can teach many shorter, additional points without obscuring the salient core of the presentation. These may almost appear as applications of the main point, or proofs in-and-of-themselves of the saliency of the main point!

Whatever immediate manner the preacher uses, the best part of his procedure involves the progressive dealing with a doctrinal system biblically. What is missed during his first series may be published during a second series, a year or two or three later. If done well, the end result of this procedure—this catechetical preaching—will be a loving flock of people more in awe of their Great God, and better able to teach their faith to their children, and to their children's children!

The following books are suggested as useful helps for Catechetical preaching.

- 1) Thomas Vincent's *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*. Banner of Truth.
- 2) Thomas Watson's *The Body of Divinity* (in three volumes). Banner of Truth Trust. (Cf. each one of the three volumes deals with a major portion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.)
- 3) Thomas Boston's *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, Vol. 1 & 2, Still Waters Revival Books.
- 4) G.I. Williamson's *The Shorter Catechism*, Vol. I & II. Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.
- 5) Thomas Ridgeley's *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, Vol. 1 & 2, Still Waters Revival Books.

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 • Catechetical preaching has
 • characterized his ministry
 • there during the past eleven
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ELDER TO ELDER

Start those Home Visits Now!

by

Ruling Elder David Winslow

A new year has begun and your session has set itself the goal of visiting each member family during the year. Good! So when are you going to start? If you or your fellow elders are like me, you may find it easy to let the first months of the year slip by. Then summer comes, and of course you are super busy and with families having vacation schedules it's tough to make visits, so you wait until fall. Ah the fall, everyone's back in school.... now if we can only work around those holidays. Honestly, did you get to the end of last year without making nearly the number of home visits you were supposed to make? While serving on my presbytery's Visitation Committee the number one lament that I have heard is that sessions don't think they are keeping up with home visits the way they ought to. I suspect that many of you might be in the same situation.

However the intent of this article is not to make you feel guilty. Rather it is to encourage you to get on with the fruitful work of shepherding the flock entrusted to your care, especially in this particular aspect of that care: the Home Visit. You and your session may find several suggestions helpful toward a productive year calling on the families of your church. Perhaps at your next meeting you can discuss these suggestions to see how they fit into your session's best intentions for this ministry.

Organize the church so that each elder knows for sure who he is to call on. Whether

you call these 'flocks' (as we do), 'small groups', 'parishes', or 'districts' is beside the point. What is important is knowing which elder is responsible for each individual or family in the church. Publish this list so the congregation knows what to expect. Somewhere between 10-15 family units is about the maximum that a single elder can handle. That's about one visit per month, certainly an achievable goal if one doesn't procrastinate.

Docket time in each session meeting to discuss briefly the home visits made during the previous month. It would be a good idea to record in the minutes that 'Reports on home visitation with the following families were received'. Your clerk should not record discussion of these reports in the minutes. Each elder can record notes from the visits on a Sessional Calling Record form that can be kept in a private file in the pastor's study. Does your session take time to pray for the congregation at each session meeting? If so your visits will provide a source for informed prayers.

Does the session have a theme or scripture passage to use for the coming year? My session has never done this but I have often thought that this could be unifying and helpful to both the elders and the congregation to have a particular Bible passage read in each home as the elders visit. In any event, each visit should begin with prayer, Bible reading, and a brief devotional. It is so important

START THOSE HOME VISITS NOW

to set the home visitation ministry apart from the social calls that the pastor and elders may make at other times. Beginning with these three elements as soon as is politely possible sets the tone from the very beginning for serious ministry to the family. My point is that you, the ruling elder, need to prepare a passage ahead of time appropriate to the occasion. For example I have found John 15:1-17, Colossian 3:1-21, Hebrews 12:1-24, and II Pet 1: 2-12 excellent passages to read at home visits.

Create a home visit call sheet that helps you fulfill the goals of the home visit. The very first issue of *Ordained Servant* (Yes, that's Vol 1, No.1) had a calling record sheet that you might like to copy. But what I have in mind is one that our session uses, one that spells out a number of questions centered around the threefold service for Christ that the OPC Form of Government speaks of in Chapter II 4. "The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness". It is our goal to find out how our families are growing in their life of worship, mutual edification, and witness for Christ. We want to be sure that they are receiving and giving in these areas. Are they being equipped for this manifold service for Christ and are they in turn contributing to the life of the church according to the measure of grace given them in Christ? Our Sessional Calling Record contains questions that we hope will allow us to see the Lord's work in their lives and enable us to stimulate them in their life of sanctification, encouraging them to make use of the means of grace.

Is your own house in order? Your ability to deal with problems that are brought to your attention during home visitation will be greatly affected by your own godliness. How can you exhort a family to tithe if you don't? Will you have boldness or insight into the

father leading family devotions if you fail to lead devotions in your own home? Can you encourage them to share gifts of, say hospitality, if you don't? This is to say that undershepherds must reflect the life transforming glory of the Great Shepherd if they are to effectively guide the flock to the green pastures and quiet waters for His sake.

Questions for Elder to think and talk about:

How important is a Home Visitation program to our discipling of the congregation?

What are the most common impediments to accomplishing this ministry?

Have we defined our purpose or goals for this year's Home Visitations?

What would make our Home Visitation more fruitful this year than last year?

Do I/we need someone (like the pastor or an experienced elder) to show us how to do home visitation?

Can our deacons help us in this ministry?

David Winslow serves as a ruling elder in the Garden Grove Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Garden Grove, California. He is a member of the General Assembly's standing Committee on Christian Education and serves on the Ministerial Training Subcommittee.

SESSIONAL RECORDS

The Importance of Maintaining Complete and Accurate Church Records

by

Luke E. Brown

The task of gathering statistics from over 230 Orthodox Presbyterian local churches and mission works is met each year with a variety of responses. Most clerks of session promptly provide clear and complete information on their church's membership, attendance, giving, etc. Others are slower in responding, but come through after a reminder or two. There have been some clerks and pastors, however, whose records are in such disarray that they seem to have difficulty finding and reporting basic information concerning their local church membership. One clerk a few years ago even questioned why we must keep a record of membership. In his opinion, the OPC's practice of receiving, dismissing, and erasing members was a waste of time that session members could better spend in ministering to people regardless of whether they were members on the church roll. What about the matter of keeping good sessional records? Why is it necessary, and how can it be done well without spending an inordinate amount of time? To answer these questions, let's consider first what kinds of records a session should maintain, and then we'll explore some ways to do the work efficiently and well.

What are Sessional Records?

A session ordinarily keeps a wide variety of records. **The primary records are those that are mandated in the OPC Form of Government, Chapter XIII, Section 8.**

The session shall keep the following records: (1) **minutes of the session's meet-**

ings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) **minutes of the meetings of the congregation**; and (3) **rolls of the members of the congregation**, both of communicant members and of their baptized children, with the dates of their reception. Such rolls shall designate those members worshipping with a mission work. Births, baptisms, censures, restorations, deaths, and removals shall be noted on these rolls. The session shall submit its minutes and the minutes of the congregation to the presbytery for review at least once every year.

It is the clerk of session who has the duty "to be accountable for the recording of the transactions [of the session and the congregation], to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required" (F/G, XIX).

Other records of a session might include files of important correspondence, written reports on various matters, financial records, property and legal documents, and so on. Our attention here will focus primarily on the minutes and membership records.

Why Maintain Good Records?

Scripture provides little direct guidance concerning the matter of keeping church records, but it does contain certain principles and numerous examples that can be applied in this area. The practice of maintaining written records is common throughout the Bible, which is itself

a written record of God’s creative and redemptive activity. Counting the number of people in particular, well-defined categories is almost taken for granted, especially in Old Testament Israel. One entire book of the Bible is primarily a record of Numbers! Records were carefully written and maintained so that future generations would know how the Lord worked with and through his people in particular circumstances of historical significance.

For a session, **important actions must be recorded in written form** (i.e., “the recording of the transactions”) so that those who follow will have a way of knowing what has been done, what decisions were reached and when, what policies or procedures have been decided upon, etc. Well kept minutes are even handy to help us recall what we decided only a few months or years ago!

In the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), although the focus is not on the particular number of sheep in the shepherd’s care, it is important to observe nevertheless that the shepherd knows that he is responsible for precisely 100 sheep, and he knows when one of them has become lost. He will go after the one that is lost until he finds it. Close is not good enough for him! If he knew only that he had approximately 95 to 100 sheep in the pasture, he would never have missed the one that wandered off. The apostle Peter exhorted the elders of the church to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion, but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2). In their willing and eager service, surely they will be careful to know who are under their care.

Our Form of Government states that “the local church consists of a definite membership”, and that “the membership of a local congregation consists of communicant and non-communicant members, all of whom have the privilege of pastoral oversight, instruction, and

government by the church” (F/G, XIII, 1). **A session that is unclear as to who is or is not a church member may also be having some difficulty providing the necessary pastoral oversight of all of its members.**

Suggestions for Keeping the Minutes

Keeping clear and precise minutes, rolls, and other records is not an insurmountable task, but it does require discipline and practice to do it easily. It doesn’t come naturally to everyone; and we all have to work at it to some degree. When I was a clerk of session, I had the practice of taking rather thorough notes during the session and congregational meetings, and writing up the draft minutes a few days later from the notes. The wording of a decision or an action is always of particular importance. When a motion is passed or a decision is reached by common consent, write it down in your notes just as it should read in the minutes, rather than try to reconstruct it days or weeks later. If the action being considered seems unclear or incomplete, ask for clarification right then while it’s on the floor. Sketchy notes may be adequate for some parts of a meeting, but the record of transactions should be put on paper (or on the computer) right from the start.

It is good practice, and a general rule, that session minutes be approved at the beginning of the next regular session meeting. By that time they should be in written draft form. Minutes should never be ad-libbed by the clerk from his notes, to be cleaned up later for the minutes book! Session members have a right to know what the record will state concerning the actions they’ve taken. Minutes of a congregational meeting may be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, or by the entire body prior to adjournment.

Any recent edition of Robert’s Rules of Order contains much useful information (about 8 pages!) on the keeping of minutes. Some ex-

amples: ordinarily the minutes “should contain mainly a record of what was done at the meeting, not what was said by the members.” **The minutes should show “all main motions ...** stating: a) *the wording* in which each motion was adopted or otherwise disposed of ...; and b) *the disposition* of the motion ...” Often a session will reach a decision ‘by common consent.’ Such an action has the same weight as an adopted motion. In such cases, “when a question is considered informally, the same information should be recorded as under the regular rules, since the only informality in the proceedings is in the debate.”

Suggestions for Keeping the Membership Rolls

The membership rolls are not difficult to maintain with accuracy if a few simple definitions and rules are understood and carefully observed.

(1) The first rule is to ***read and understand the OPC Form of Government*** (especially Chapter XIII, Sec. 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9) and the Book of Discipline (especially Chapters II and V). Pastors and clerks of session, I call your attention particularly to B/D II:B, which describes in full the provisions for receiving and enrolling church members (II: B.2), and for removing members from the rolls (II:B.3). These procedures are indispensable for guiding the session’s actions and for maintaining accurate church rolls. If these procedures are neglected or ignored, confusion and error will undoubtedly be the result.

(2) The second rule is to ***record in the session minutes all significant events or actions taken by the session with respect to church membership*** (assuming that the session takes the appropriate actions, which, of course, it should!) A clerk or a pastor who observes the first rule above will be able to insure that the session does take the necessary actions.

(3) The third rule is to ***establish and maintain an up-to-date written list of communicant and non-communicant members*** (i.e., the rolls). Some presbyteries (perhaps all) have a rule that this list of members shall be recorded in the session minutes book at the end of each year (probably to insure that such a list actually exists.) In any event, keeping the list of members up to date helps to insure that the session has taken all the necessary actions in regard to receiving and removing members.

One Final Suggestion

Make it a practice to **keep all the sessional records organized in an orderly fashion**. We all have our own system, whether or not it’s very systematic. Maybe it’s just a ‘file pile’ or a cluttered desktop. Hopefully, it’s a little better than that, if for no other reason than that you will someday need to pass it all on to the next clerk of session, poor fellow.

More often than not, the time and effort spent in keeping sessional records in good order are more than amply repaid in time saved by avoiding errors and confusion, and in the satisfaction of having done the job well as a willing and eager shepherd of the flock of God.

Luke Brown is a ruling elder serving on the session of the Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hatboro, Pa. He has also served for the past eleven years as the Statistician of the General Assembly of our denomination.