

ORDAINED SERVANT



Officers of the 2004 Orthodox Presbyterian General Assembly

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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.

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Contents: Vol. 13, No. 3

<i>Editorial Notes</i>	51
<i>Take Heed to Your Attitude to Ministry</i> , Parts 2 and 3 , by Joel R. Beeke.....	52
<i>Related to Revising the OPC Directory for Public Worship of God</i> , by Larry E. Wilson.....	58
<i>Even the Boring Parts (on Exegeting the Genealogies)</i> , by Matthew W. Kingsbury.....	64
<i>Book Reviews</i> , by the Editor.....	66
<i>A Response to 'A Scandal in the Church'</i> , by Benjamin K. Wickner.....	68

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EDITORIAL NOTES

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we conclude the fine article by Dr. Beeke on the subject of our *attitude* with respect to ministry. It is my opinion that this two-part article speaks to a very important need. I cannot recall anything in my own seminary training that prepared me for the greatest battle of all in the ministry—the battle with self! I think Dr. Jay Adams is right in saying “At no other time in American history has popular respect for the church and its leadership dropped to such a low point. On the other hand, perhaps at no previous period have the demands that are made upon ministers been greater. This combination of factors does not make the pastoral ministry either an easy or inviting life calling. It takes more than the work itself to attract and hold men. And when you couple to these considerations the facts of meager pay, lack of appreciation and an abundance of thoughtless criticism, the sum total of all is an unappealing picture.”¹ So, the need is great for one entering the ministry to become apprised of what Dr. Adams calls “the hard facts” so that he can deal more wisely with his own response to these things. There are, in other words, some things that can only be learned in the school of experience. It will be in *that* context that Dr. Beeke’s counsel will be most appreciated.

For the past several decades a special committee erected by the General Assembly

¹ *Shepherding God’s Flock*, by Jay E. Adams p. 11 - a wonderful manual that every pastor ought to have.

has been working on a revision of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. The progress, as I have perceived it, has been rather slow. It is my opinion that the reason for lack of greater progress is complex. For one thing, there is so much diversity in the church that it is hard to come to complete agreement. For another there is the problem of squaring known practice in the church with the Westminster Standards. And, of course, there is the omnipresent problem of different understanding on the part of committee members. Yet the bottom line is the supreme importance of the worship of God. We *need* all the help we can get to be faithful, *and* fully scriptural in our worship practices. We need to get away from prevailing practice as our starting point, and get back to the primary and secondary standards of the church (in that order!) The second article in this issue should help us in doing this. Pastor Larry Wilson is now a member of the Committee charged with this revision, and he has done some careful thinking on the subject. The article by him in this issue was presented recently to the Presbytery of Ohio. It was well received. I hope it will be “well received” also throughout the OPC. And more importantly, I hope it will stimulate a discussion and consensus that will help the Committee to finish its work.

In the January 2003 issue of *Ordained Servant* we published an article by Pastor Steve Doe entitled “*A Scandal in the Church*.” The article was about the scriptural way to deal with

church officers whose children are either delinquent or unbelieving. This article raised some questions in the mind of one of our younger pastors—Benjamin K. Wikner—leading to some differing conclusions which he has summarized in the final article in this issue. We welcome such exchanges, for—as the proverb reminds us—“*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another*” (27:17 ESV).

In the last issue of *Ordained Servant* there were some serious errors on pages 31 and 32. The editor has been unable to account for these, but apologizes sincerely (and most of all to the author of the fine article, Rev. Mark Larson). All of these errors have been corrected on the web site (which contains all back issues of *Ordained Servant*) so it is only in the printed copies that these errors occur. It is not difficult to download the issue from the OPC web site in order to print out pages 31 and 32, replacing these in your own printed copy.

Finally, *Ordained Servant* readers should be made aware of a decision made at a recent meeting of the Committee on Christian Education of the OPC. The decision was to make available a CD containing the entire archive of the first 12 years (47 issues) of *Ordained Servant* for \$5 (postage paid). If you want one of these you need to send \$5 to the editor to cover the cost of the CD, the label, the plastic CD case, the sturdy mailer *and* the postage. Be sure to include your full return address.

TAKE HEED TO YOUR ATTITUDE TO MINISTRY



Part 2 - Coping with Criticism and Part 3 - Developing a Positive Attitude

by

Joel R. Beeke

Part 2 - Coping with Criticism

A pessimistic attitude in a minister is no better than a proud one, for pride is usually the root of pessimism. Ministers become pessimistic when they think they deserve better treatment than they're getting. At times they may be right, but they may also be failing to exercise self-denial as their Master did, who suffered far worse at the hands of men than they will ever suffer, yet did not retaliate (1 Pet. 2:23).

Resentment and criticism are the maidservants of pessimism. A complaining spirit produces negativism, depression, bitterness, and disillusionment in the ministry. It also promotes smugness and blindness to one's own condition. Bitter ministers often don't see their unforgiving spirit, their habit of backbiting, or their tendency to judge others and magnify their deficiencies (Matt. 7:3-5).

If any minister had reason to be pessimistic, it was the imprisoned Paul. Yet Paul wrote his most joyous epistle, Philippians, from prison. Paul knew times of

inner gloom and depression (2 Cor. 1:8-9), but his epistles show little evidence of it. He could say, "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). People have enough troubles and burdens without having to endure the ministrations of a pessimistic, discontented pastor.

Part of the problem of pessimism is that few ministers know how to respond to those who criticize them. Being on the receiving end of criticism for many years often results in pessimism, cynicism, exasperation, insomnia, and even resignations. Here are some helps to cope with criticism without letting it lead to pessimism:

1. Consider it inevitable. In a recent study, 81 percent of American clergymen said they have experienced hostile criticism. Twenty-five percent felt that coping with criticism was the most difficult problem of ministry. It is futile to think that you can avoid criticism in the ministry. If you proclaim the whole counsel of God, as you should, you are bound to become a target of criticism. As Jesus says in Luke 6:26, "Woe unto

you, when all men shall speak well of you." Expect criticism; don't be devastated by it.

2. Consider the motive. It is critical, first of all, to listen well. Don't only get the facts straight, but also ask: Have I heard and understood the criticism rightly and accurately? Have I heard the real problem or just a symptom of something deeper? Unresolved anger, depression, changes in life situations, frustration in relationships, jealousy, shattered expectations, and dissatisfaction with church work can lead to criticism. So ask yourself, Does the person who is criticizing me have a proper motive, or is it indicative of something else? For example, does the critic enjoy finding fault because it somehow makes him feel superior? Understanding the person's motive will help you respond and cope better with the criticism.

3. Consider the source. Who is criticizing you—an office-bearer, a mature believer, a babe in grace, an unbeliever, a highly critical individual, or a fringe member of the church? James Taylor writes, "Those who criticize are usually those on the fringe, who stand back and are

COPING WITH CRITICISM

deaf to every appeal for service.” Criticisms from such persons seldom merit change or any other investment of energy on your part.

On the other hand, if the critic is a mature believer or an office-bearer who is usually supportive, you should seriously consider the criticism and will often find some truth in it that calls for change. What’s more, you should encourage constructive evaluation from such people. Generally speaking, the more you can sincerely welcome constructive criticism, the more your ministry and relationships with others will benefit from it.

4. Consider the context. The physical setting, timing, and situation out of which criticism comes may help us determine whether the criticism is helpful. As a general rule, don’t respond to criticism for at least twenty-four hours to allow yourself time for prayer, sifting through your feelings, getting past some of the hurt, and consulting others whose wisdom you respect.

Forcing solutions to issues too hastily may make a bad situation worse. Some situations will yield only to the healing touch of time. Truth has a way of eventually vindicating itself. Luke 21:19 says, “In your patience possess ye your souls.”

5. Consider yourself. Critics are often God’s gifts to guard us from self-satisfied and self-destructive tendencies. The Holy

Spirit uses our critics to keep us from justifying, protecting, and exalting ourselves. Although critics often exaggerate their case and are seldom entirely right, they are often partially right.

Ask yourself, Am I responding appropriately to criticism? Remember, those who have an ear for Christ learn to have an ear for others also. If you find yourself habitually feeling slighted, neglected, and mistreated, view your feelings with suspicion. Let yourself be more vulnerable. Complain less by considering how little criticism you receive, though you are unworthy, compared with Christ, who is perfectly worthy.

Find some accountability partners to monitor your reactions. Seek the wisdom and courage needed to penetrate the insulation around your ego. Don’t be afraid to say, I was wrong; will you forgive me?

6. Consider the content. You can learn valuable truths about yourself from critics. Be grateful for that. Some of our best friends are those who disagree with us lovingly, openly, and intelligently. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). Helpful criticism is like good medicine.

David Pawlison writes, “Critics, like governing authorities, are servants of God to you for good (Rom. 13:4). He who sees into hearts uses critics to help us

see things in ourselves: outright failings of faith and practice, distorted emphases, blind spots, areas of neglect, attitudes and actions contradictory to stated commitments, and, yes, strengths and significant contributions.”

So ask yourself, What are the critics saying that might help me improve myself and my ministry? Is there a kernel of truth in this particular criticism that, if changes are made, will make me a better minister?

If critics say something constructive, absorb it, confess your fault, take the lead in self-criticism, ask for forgiveness where appropriate, make changes for the better, and move on. If they offer nothing constructive, be kind and polite, and move on.

Don’t ever get self-defensive or angry, but turn the other cheek, as Jesus advised. If your conscience is clear, a simple, straightforward explanation may be helpful in certain cases, though respectful silence is often more appropriate and effective (Mk. 14:61). At all costs, don’t strive to justify yourself; refuse to descend to the level of the negative critic.

Don’t take every whisper seriously, get sidetracked into fruitless controversy, or spend your energy trying to appease or per-

¹ "Does the Shoe Fit?," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Spr. 2002, p. 4.

COPING WITH CRITICISM

suade implacable critics who foster animosity. But do ask: Why am I being misunderstood? Do my sermons, attitudes, “hobby horses,” and personal traits somehow combine to send a mixed message? Am I only implying what I should make explicit, or am I ignoring certain problems that should be addressed? Often your critics will be at least partially right in one or more of these areas; at the very least, they will teach you patience, make you more like Christ, and keep you from pride. They can save you from yourself and lead you to greater dependency on God.

Whatever results the criticism yields, once you’ve dealt with it and implemented the necessary changes, do not let it fester inside of you. Develop the attitude of Eleanor Roosevelt, who said, “Criticism makes very little dent upon me, unless I think there is some real justification and something should be done.” Either way, deal with the criticism quickly and efficiently, and put it behind you. Remember, pessimism develops when we harbor the memory and hurt of criticism, allowing it to fester inside.

7. Consider Scripture. Some ministers are so delicate that they cannot endure criticism without crumbling. They need to develop better emotional muscle. Other ministers are so battle-hardened by the ministry that their hearts are, as someone said, like “the hide of a rhinoceros.” They need to develop the tender

heart of a child. Actually, we need both; we need to cultivate the heart of a child for biblical criticism and the hide of a rhinoceros for satanic criticism. That combination is possible, not in our strength, but only through God’s grace molding our hearts by His Word.

We need to memorize and meditate upon texts such as Ephesians 6:10, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,” as well as Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” We ought to read and plead upon such texts every day, and let them permeate our minds and souls. Only as Scripture conforms us to the image of Christ will we find the right balance of strong tenderness and tender strength in the face of criticism.

8. Consider Christ. Hebrews 12:3 says, “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.” Peter is more detailed: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:21–23). If Christ, who was perfect and altogether innocent, was spat upon, mocked, rejected, and crucified, what can we imperfect pastors expect? If one of Jesus’ handpicked apostles betrayed him for a paltry sum, and another

swore that he did not know Him out of fear for a servant maid, why should we expect to carry on our ministries without ever being betrayed or deserted?

What’s more, if our critics happen to be in error and we are suffering unjustly, shouldn’t we thank God that they don’t know how bad we truly are? No matter how much we are criticized, we are never criticized as much as our sin merits, even if we are innocent of the accusation levelled against us.

If we have Christ, who, being innocent, suffered infinitely more for our sake than we shall ever suffer for His sake, we have more than enough to cope with any trial (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 4:7–12). Drink deeply of the love of Christ, and you will conquer pessimism and be able to love your critic.

9. Consider biblical saints. Allow me to illustrate this point only from the example of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians. There he defends himself from the charges of the Corinthians who were challenging his leadership and criticizing him for not being a super-apostle, being physically weak, and having contemptible speech. How does Paul respond to these criticisms in chapter 10? He takes refuge in Christ. “We are Christ’s,” he says in verse 7. He shores up his identity in Christ’s person and His work, according to the Scriptures and his own experience. Then, he strives to take

COPING WITH CRITICISM

every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Finally, he submits his every weakness into God's hands, accepts those weaknesses, and trusts that God will use him even as a broken clay pot to let the gospel light shine through him. Let us go and do likewise.

10. Consider love. Love the one who criticizes you in these ways: For Christ's sake, become better acquainted with those who criticize you; you cannot love those you don't know. Seek to understand them. Assure them that you want to learn from them and that you want iron to sharpen iron. Thank them for coming directly to you with their criticism.

Be willing to forgive any injury done to you. Failure to forgive will keep the pain alive. It will sour your preaching, cripple your ministry, and hinder your prayer life. As Spurgeon says, "Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death warrant when you repeat the Lord's Prayer. Forgive and forget. When you bury a dead dog, don't leave its tail sticking up above the ground."

Pray with your critic. If he visits you, always begin with prayer, and ask him to close in prayer, unless he is still bitter at the end of the visit. (In the case of a woman or child, you should probably offer the closing prayer.) Be very careful to pray to God and not against your critic in your prayer. Go the extra mile to ask the Lord to forgive you and to help you

change in any area that needs forgiveness and change. Be as specific as possible. Pray with integrity and humility.

And then pray for your critic in private. It's difficult to stay bitter against a person for whom you pray. The Lord delivered Job from his hard feelings toward his judgmental friends when he prayed for them. Praying for those who defame you produces peace of mind and freedom from most of the pain of criticism.

Feel pity for your negative critic. How unhappy such a person is! What damage habitually critical adults do to their children! How seldom do the children of critics become stalwart sons and daughters of the church! How tragic to be a parent who causes "these little ones to stumble"! Critical parents will have so much to answer for on the Judgment Day. Thank God that you are on the receiving end, not the criticizing end. That, too, is only by grace, for our natural hearts are no better or different.

There's another side-benefit to this for yourself as well. You will discover that when you lovingly serve your critic rather than resentfully retaliate against him, your own wounds will heal more rapidly. If your critic rebuffs your attempt to serve him, reach out to serve others—comfort the needy, lift up the fallen, support the weak. That will be excellent therapy for you.

11. Consider the long haul. No president in American history

was so respected and yet so reviled as Abraham Lincoln. Thousands opposed his views on war and slavery as well as his attempts to keep the nation united. One day a friend pulled Lincoln aside and told him that the criticism had reached such a crescendo that it was as if Lincoln were surrounded by scores of barking dogs. Lincoln responded, "You know that during the time of the full moon, dogs bark and bark at the moon as long as it is clearly visible in the sky." Puzzled by Lincoln's response, the friend asked, "What are you driving at? What's the rest of the story?" Lincoln answered, "There is nothing more to tell. The moon keeps right on shining."

You see, Lincoln believed he was right and that his policies would in the long run win over critics and unify the country. As pastors, we can waffle too easily under the pressure of "barking parishioners" when we know we are in the right. To obtain temporary peace with a few disgruntled members, we are prone to abandon long-term biblical vision that shines on our churches and ministries like a full moon. Don't do that, brothers. Don't be intimidated by criticism. Don't allow a few critics to force you into their molds, so that you live timid and hesitant lives, doing nothing, saying nothing, and worst of all, being nothing.

Remember, the fear of criticism is usually a greater threat than criticism itself. Even as you feel the fear of man, let the fear of God propel you forward and upward. Retain long-term vision by fear-

COPING WITH CRITICISM

ing God more than man. In the long haul, as Theodore Roosevelt said, "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again."

12. Consider eternity. On the other side of Jordan, our faithful Savior will be waiting for us who will never let us down. He loves us even though He knows everything about us, and He will take us to be with Him where He is forever. He will wipe away every tear from our eye and will prove to be the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. All wrongs will be made right. All injustices will be judged. All criticism will be past. All evil will be walled out of heaven and all good walled in.

Because of Jesus Christ, we will enjoy perfect fellowship and friendship with the Triune God, forever knowing, loving, and communing with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. As a woman seeing her newborn forgets the pain of delivery, you will forget all the trials of your ministry when you embrace Immanuel.

In heaven, there will be perfect unity. We will commune with the unfallen angels and the saints of all ages in absolute perfection. There will be no denominations, no divisions, no disagreements,

no misunderstandings, no theological arguments, no ignorance. There will not be a hair's breadth of difference among the saints. We shall all be one even as Christ is in the Father and the Father in Him. There will be a complete, perfect, visible, intimate oneness.

Three great truths shall become perfect reality for us: first, we will understand that all the criticism we received here below was used in the hands of our Potter to prepare us for Immanuel's land. Second, we will see fully that all the criticisms we were called to bear on earth were but a light affliction compared to the weight of glory that awaited us. Third, in heaven we will be "more than repaid" for every affliction we endured on earth for the sake of our best and perfect Friend, Jesus Christ.

Oh, happy day when this mortality shall put on immortality and this corruption, incorruption, and we shall ever be with the Lord! Let all the criticism our Sovereign God calls us to endure in this life in His infinite wisdom make us more homesick for the criticism-free land of Beulah where the Lamb is all the glory. There,

The bride eyes not her garment
But her dear bridegroom's face.
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand.
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.

Part 3 - Developing a Positive Attitude

Brothers, do we have a positive view of the ministry? We have the most important and significant vocation in the world. My father often said to me, "Your calling is more important than living in the White House!" We never have to wake up in the morning and ask if our ministry is a worthwhile pursuit. As Richard Baxter says, "I would not change my life for any of the greatest dignities on earth. I am contented to consume my body, to sacrifice to God's service, and to spend all that I have, and to be spent myself, for the souls of men."

We are ambassadors of the King of kings, and we have His promise that His Word shall not return to Him void (Is. 55:10-11). Christ is our intercessor at the right hand of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the advocate in our heart. God will not allow criticism beyond what He provides grace for us to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Every criticism, like any other hardship or difficulty, will eventually work for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Stop your worldly complaining. Count your blessings. Persevere in the good fight of faith. You have the best of assurances in that fight—the promises of God; the best of advocates—the Holy Spirit; the best of generals—Jesus Christ; the best of re-

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

sults—everlasting glory. Follow Fred Malone’s advice, “We must quit expecting people to respond properly, making them our tin gods of life and death. This is idolatry, to live and die upon our people’s behavior. Paul said, ‘Having received mercy, we faint not.’ The comfort of God’s mercy received is the only lasting motivation I have ever found to labor on in trial.”²

“Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet” (Heb. 12:12-13). For every look you take at yourself and your circumstances, look ten times at Christ, as Richard Baxter advised. You can start complaining when you have given as much for Christ as He has given for you. Gird up the loins of your mind, and stand fast, for your Savior is greater than both Apollyon and the times. Your Sender will not desert you. Hold fast your profession—even when friends desert you—by clinging to your High Priest who is holding fast to you. Trust Him. He’s a Friend that sticks closer than a brother; He will never desert you. Don’t put your trust in

² “An Encouragement to Ministers in Trial,” *The Founders Journal*, no. 16 (Spr 1994):11.

princes or in a dying, fallen world, but in the Prince of peace. Look Christward; lean Christward; pray Christward; preach Christward.

Put your hands again to the plow, despite your weakness and hurts. “Continue with double

Don’t resign; re-sign. Renew your commitment to Christ and His cause.

earnestness to serve your Lord when no visible result is before you,” Spurgeon advised. Pray more and look at circumstances less. “Bury not the church before she be dead,” John Flavel quipped, and I would add: “Bury not yourself nor the church before you and she be dead.” Believe Christ’s promise to His servants in Isaiah 54:17, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”

Don’t resign; re-sign. Renew your commitment to Christ and His cause. You do that the same way the backsliding Ephesians had to “re-sign” when they left

their first love. You:

- **Remember**, therefore, from whence thou art fallen,
- **Repent** of your worldliness and backsliding,
- **Return** to your first love, ministry, and do the first works (Rev. 2:5).

Don’t give up on the Lord. He is not done with you or your ministry. Serve this great God with faithfulness and zeal. The world

may not be worthy of you, but God is. Serve your Master with all your heart and every gift that you have.

Take Heed to Your Attitude to Ministry

Dr. Joel R. Beeke is Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI, and editor of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*.

Truly any man entering the ministry today must sweep aside all idealistic or romantic notions. That necessity, however, can be an advantage, it forces one to face the realities and to count the cost.

— from *‘Shepherding the Flock’* by Dr. Jay E. Adams pp. 11&12

ISSUES RELATED TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

by
Larry E. Wilson

I. Strengths and weaknesses of the current DPW (*in my opinion*)

A. Strengths (elements we should be resolved to conserve):

1. **Its principles, basic structure, and even some of its terminology have strong continuity with Presbyterian-Reformed liturgical history.** (For example, the beautiful definition of public worship found in I:5 — “*communion with God in his public ordinances*” — is drawn from the Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*.)
2. **Its most significant strength — see II:2 and III:1 — is its explication of worship as a meeting between the triune God and his covenant people.** This principle has always been at the heart of a Reformed understanding of worship, but as far as I can tell from my research, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the first to codify this important Reformed principle of worship in an official ecclesiastical document. This is a very important contribution to Reformed liturgics.

B. Weaknesses (why the DPW ought to be revised):

1. **It *assumes* the Presbyterian-Reformed liturgical tradition without adequately indicating the Scriptural underpinnings of those principles and practices. Moreover, at times it assumes Reformed worship practices without spelling them out.** Originally, this was *not* a weakness; the DPW reflected shared assumptions. But as God has continued to bless the OPC and to add new congregations and new members — even ministers — from all sorts of backgrounds, and as the OPC thus confronts new pastoral needs, there has been a growing necessity for a greater explication of the truth, goodness, beauty, and power of biblically reformed worship. We should praise God for his wonder-work of gathering, building, forming, and reforming his church; at the same time, we need to directly face the new challenges this blessing brings our way.
2. **In that light, I suggest that the DPW really ought to be revised and strengthened in *at least* the following fifteen areas:**
 - (a) The DPW should more consistently flesh out the implications of the fact that public worship is “divine” (II:4) and that it is “before all else a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people” (II:2). The active, supernatural role of the Persons of the Trinity in a worship assembly should be better explicated. The DPW should more clearly express the scriptural supernaturalism found, for example, in Confession XXV:3.
 - (b) Closely related, the DPW should be brought into better harmony with the Church’s Standards in its treatment of *the sacraments*. The DPW places less importance on the sacraments than do the Standards. At one point, the DPW actually conflicts with the Confession of Faith. Confession XXI:5 lists “the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ” with reading, preaching, and hearing the Word of God and the singing of psalms as “all parts of the *ordinary* worship of God.” In contradiction, however, DPW IV:A:1 identifies the sacraments as “*occasional* elements of the public worship of God.” Moreover, in its forms — particularly for the Lord’s Supper — the DPW should more clearly express its confessional commitment to the Calvinistic doctrine of the sacraments (that the Supper is an objective means of grace by which *our Lord* supernaturally grants true communion, *our Lord* personally applies himself and his benefits to those who receive the sacrament in faith, and *our Lord* refreshes and refurbishes them for his service [see, for example, Confession XXIX:7, Larger Catechism #168, Shorter Catechism #96]) and lend itself less to a Zwinglian interpretation (that the Supper is merely a devotional tool by which *we* examine ourselves, *we* remember what our Lord did for us long ago, and *we* recommit ourselves to his service).
 - (c) The DPW should much better spell out the *corporate* implications of the sacraments (see 1 Cor. 12:13; 10:17). This has become increasingly important in our individualistic and voluntaristic culture.
 - (d) The DPW should more explicitly spell out some of the *positive commitments to the responsibilities of church membership* in the membership vows (thinking especially of #4), and to the *corporate* character of our covenantal faith.

ISSUES RELATED TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

- (e) The DPW should show greater conformity to the fact that, according to our Standards, covenant children are *full members of the church*, albeit non-communicant members. On this point our DPW betrays some accommodation to our baptistic, revivalistic, individualistic religious culture. This is especially egregious when the DPW treats the public profession of faith by a covenant young person identically to the public profession of faith by a new convert from paganism, but other sections are also affected.
- (f) The DPW should make more apparent its *reason for providing for public professions of faith*. Why do we do this? In the DPW, it appears to be arbitrary or a matter of mere human tradition. This leaves pastors and sessions in a weak position when, for example, they are pressured to adopt paedocommunion. On this point, the DPW weakens its continuity with the Presbyterian-Reformed worship tradition, which also included this provision but clearly identified it as a means to admit persons to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- (g) The DPW should clearly express *the integral relation between the Sabbath day and public worship*. This section does not appear in the DPW in order to state our theology of the Sabbath —our Confession and Catechisms already do that — but rather it appears here because there is a *relationship* between the Sabbath and public worship. This relationship is barely perceptible in the DPW, although it *is* implicit; it would be helpful, however, if it were stated explicitly. If it were, it would provide an important antidote to arguments currently circulating in our churches along this line: "All of life is worship. Therefore worship services do not have any special status nor any special regulation."
- (h) The DPW should be brought into greater harmony with our Standards by more explicitly stating *the regulative principle of worship* (see Confession XX:2; XXI:1; Larger Catechism 107–110; Shorter Catechism 49–52). It is very peculiar that it neglects to do so, since the regulative principle is regarded as the great distinctive of the biblically reformed approach to worship. John Murray and others sought to persuade the GA to adopt a stronger statement and — presumably because many feared it might necessarily imply exclusive psalmody — were defeated. But at this point the DPW falls far short of its usual continuity with the Standards and the Presbyterian-Reformed worship tradition. That should be corrected.
- (i) The DPW should better clarify the issues surrounding *the leadership of worship*. As many have noted, III:8 is conspicuous in its stark incongruity with the rest of the document. One does not have to be an expert in textual criticism to correctly deduce that III:8 is clearly an amendment inserted into the DPW at some point without regard for its consistency with the whole document. In practice, this provision has been widely used throughout the OPC as a loophole which provides *carte blanche* to disregard the other provisions in DPW III. This has occasioned disunity and conflict in the OPC. The issue of leadership should be addressed more comprehensively first of all to explicate the scriptural rationale behind our practice (where we so unmistakably swim against the stream of modern evangelicalism), and then to reflect a genuine commitment to a true consensus, and to bring inner coherence to the DPW.
- (j) The DPW should give guidance for inflicting and removing the censure of *excommunication* in the context of public worship, just as Presbyterian directories have historically done. By omitting these provisions, the DPW introduces discontinuity with the Presbyterian-Reformed liturgical tradition.
- (k) The DPW should more completely survey the *elements of worship* in chapter III. It omits any mention of the sacraments or of professions of faith (although later chapters provide for those elements). It also omits any provision for corporate professions of faith, although most of our congregations practice these in line with the Presbyterian-Reformed liturgical tradition.
- (l) The DPW should show greater care in some of its *allusions to Scripture* (for example, many have argued that II:2 takes Matthew 18:20 out of context and that II:6 takes John 4:24 out of context).
- (m) The *Building Dedication Service* should be radically revised because it is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed faith. It directly applies Scriptures which spoke of the shadowy old covenant holy place to an earthly church building in this era of new covenant heavenly worship (cf. Jn. 4:24; Heb. 8; 10:19–25; 12:18–29) and repeatedly calls such a building God's "house."
- (n) Some *statements of cultural preference without Biblical warrant* should be winnowed out (for example, "the stately rhythm of the chorale is especially appropriate for public worship").

ISSUES RELATD TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

(o) The whole DPW should be *formatted* in a manner that makes it easier for a pastor to use (with headers and/or captions, paragraphs, and forms adapted to different needs).

3. **The most glaring weakness of the DPW is that, in practice, it is largely neglected or ignored.** It would seem that this is largely a consequence of the first weakness, the need for increased explanation of the biblical and theological and pastoral warrant for Presbyterian-Reformed worship.

II. Present status of the revision efforts:

(in order to help presbyters compare the documents, the *lines* point out sections which correspond; the *shading* indicates sections which have significant differences from the current DPW or between the two draft proposals.)

COMPARISON OF DPW REVISION PROPOSALS — winter 2003–2004

[N.B.: Both documents are provisional drafts and continue to be amended in light of criticisms and suggestions.]

Proposed Revised Version (committee) http://opc.org/GA/DPW_Draft_1-20-04.pdf	Alternative Proposal (minority) http://opc.org/GA/DPW_Alternative.pdf
Preface	Preface
Chapter I. Principles of Public Worship	Chapter I. Guiding Principles for Public Worship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. True Worship B. The Sanctification of the Lord's Day C. The Duty of Public Worship D. The Goal of Public Worship E. The Essence of Public Worship F. The Leadership of Public Worship G. The Manner of Public Worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. God's Call for Public Worship B. The Essence of Public Worship C. The Parts of Public Worship D. The Leadership of Public Worship
Chapter II. The Usual Elements of Public Worship	Chapter II. The Usual Elements of Public Worship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Call to Worship B. Blessings C. Confessing the Faith D. Singing E. Prayer F. Reading the Scripture G. Preaching the Word H. Offerings I. Congregational Responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The Part from God to the People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Public Reading of God's Word 2. The Preaching of God's Word 3. The Administering of the Sacraments 4. Blessing the People from God B. The Part from the People to God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public Prayer 2. Congregational Singing 3. Public Confession of Faith 4. The Bringing of Offerings
Chap. III. Observance of Sacraments in Public Worship	Chapter III. The Administration of the Sacraments
A. General Provisions	
B. Baptism	A. Baptism
1. Baptism of Infants	1. The Baptism of Infants
2. Baptism of Adults	2. The Baptism of Adults
C. The Lord's Supper	B. The Lord's Supper
Chapter IV. Public Reception	1. Admission of Persons to the Lord's Supper
A. Public Profession of Faith in Christ	a. Prerequisites
B. Reception by Reaffirmation of Faith	b. Public Reception to Full Communion of Persons Baptized in Infancy
C. Reception by Letter of Transfer from another Congregation	c. Reception by Reaffirmation of Faith
	d. Reception by Letter of Transfer from Another Church of Like Faith and Practice
	e. Reception by Letter of Transfer from Another Orthodox Presbyterian Church
	f. Excommunication and Restoration
	2. Administration of the Lord's Supper

ISSUES RELATD TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

[<i>The PRV includes a proposal to incorporate the current forms for ordination and installation into the FG (mutatis mutandis)]</i>	Chapter IV. Ordinations and Installations
	A. Ministers
	B. Ruling Elders
	C. Deacons
Chapter V. Special Occasions of Public Worship	Chapter V. Occasional Services
A. Prayer and Fasting	A. Public Solemn Prayer and Fasting
B. Thanksgiving	B. Public Thanksgiving
SUGGESTED FORMS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES	
I. The Solemnization of Marriage	C. The Solemnization of Marriage
II. The Funeral Service	D. The Burial of the Dead
III. The Dedication of a Church Building	E. Thanksgiving for a Church Building

III. Some suggested key issues (not exhaustive) which presbyters, sessions, and presbyteries should seek (1) to acquaint themselves with and (2) to pursue consensus on:

- A. **Should the DPW be revised?** If not, why not? Because the General Assembly set this process in motion over 15 years ago and has repeatedly renewed and expanded the Revision Committee's mandate, and refreshed its membership, it would seem that the burden of proof rests primarily on those who assert that that the DPW should not be revised. If you are persuaded that the DPW should not be revised, how would you recommend that the OPC address the concerns expressed in I.B. above? If you believe the DPW should be revised, then what should a revision seek to accomplish? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- B. What is **the role of a directory for public worship** (as part of our tertiary standards)? How should our secondary standards's doctrine — particularly of the means of grace (especially the Word and sacraments) — impact a directory for public worship? How well is this fleshed out in the current DPW and in the two provisional drafts? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- C. Do you find helpful **the four categories specified in the Preface** (of both proposed drafts)—(1) mandated; (2) not mandated but highly recommended; (3) not mandated but mildly recommended; and (4) permitted? Do the terms chosen clarify or confuse? If the latter, can you suggest better terms? Are the terms chosen used consistently throughout the two provisional drafts? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- D. **What** actually takes place in a public worship assembly? **Why** do believers gather? What is the **essence** of such an assembly? What is its chief end? What are its proximate ends? How well is this fleshed out in the current DPW and in the two provisional drafts? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- E. How important is our doctrine of **the Trinity** to worship? What roles do the three Persons of the Godhead play in a worship assembly? How clearly is this fleshed out in the current DPW and in the two provisional drafts? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- F. In a biblically Reformed church, who should speak in the solo voice in **leading elements of public worship**? **Why**? Who should not? **Why not**? How well is this fleshed out in the current DPW and in the two provisional drafts? The provisional draft of the AP is more emphatic than the committee Proposed Revised Version that **ministerial leadership** in worship is the **ordinary** model. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? **Why or why not**? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- G. Is the wording of the current **membership vows** still adequate? Knowing that they provide perspectives on the *one* requirement for communicant membership — a credible profession of faith — which proposal (if any) do you find most helpful? Should the directory require that the same

ISSUES RELATED TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

wording be used every time the vows are administered, or should it permit pastors to use equivalent terms? What guidance would you give to the committee?

- H. Which **translation of the Bible** should the directory use? Why? How important is this to you? (The current DPW uses KJV, ASV, and original translations; the committee PRV uses NKJV, NASB, NIV, ESV — the primary concern behind this is to make it a manual which pastors can readily use; the minority AP uses the KJV “without prejudice to other translations” — the primary concern behind this is to avoid letting a debate over preferences on Bible versions to become an issue, and to be consistent with the other documents in the OPC constitution). What guidance would you give to the committee?
- I. As you compare the two provisional drafts, which do you deem to be more **concise**? More **consistent** with Scripture and the secondary standards? More internally **coherent** (both doctrinally and literarily)? More **practically helpful** to elders for overseeing and to pastors for planning and conducting public worship? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- J. As you compare **the forms** in the current DPW and the two draft revision proposals, which do you deem to be most helpful, if any? Why? What guidance would you give to the committee?
- K. Regarding additional differences between the two draft revision proposals, what guidance would you give to the committee on the following issues?
- The provisional draft of the minority AP includes **captions**. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
 - The provisional draft of the AP includes in its Preface some **guidance for extraordinary cases**. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
 - The provisional draft of the AP subsumes the provisions for **public profession of faith** under the provisions for administering **the sacraments**, indicating that the warrant for doing this in public worship is **to admit persons to the sacraments**. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
 - The provisional draft of the AP accentuates a greater importance of **the Word and sacraments**, tying them more closely together, even encouraging — although not requiring — weekly communion. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
 - The provisional draft of the AP includes **guidance for excommunication and restoration**. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
 - The provisional draft of the AP includes **guidance for ordinations and installations**. Do you deem this to be helpful or unhelpful? Why or why not?
- L. What are the **respective strengths and weaknesses of the two proposals**? If you were to advise the committee to set aside one draft and to use the other as the basis of its proposal, which would you recommend? Why or why not? What guidance would you give to the committee?

IV. How can presbyteries help the Committee on Revisions?

- A. **Pray** for the revisions committee and its members. This has been a long, arduous process, spanning over 15 years. As you well know, issues of worship tend to stir strong emotions, and that has certainly been the case during this process — both within the committee and throughout the Church. This is as it should be, because worship is both the goal and the fuel of the covenant walk of God’s redeemed children with their God. Corporately committing to shared principles and practices of worship, therefore, is by no means a matter to be taken lightly. Pray that God will use the Committee’s labors to genuinely serve the OPC. Pray that God will grant wisdom from above to the

ISSUES RELATED TO REVISING

The OPC *Directory for The Public Worship of God (DPW)*

OPC as she wrestles with these issues, that he will bring her to consensus on key issues, that he will grant abiding fruit for his kingdom as a result of these labors, and that he will use these efforts toward revival and reformation in and through the OPC.

- B. **Directly face the above and similar issues; do so in love and forbearance, remembering that we are brethren bought with the price of the precious blood of Christ, but do so; seek consensus** in your sessions and in your presbytery on the above (and similar) issues; and **communicate** your opinions and their reasons to the Committee on Revisions *as a presbytery*. The more specific you can be, the more helpful it will be to the committee. Do not permit yourself or your presbytery to neglect these issues. Whatever the OPC does concerning these specific proposed documents, it is a matter of the utmost importance for her health, her unity, and her witness that she make a fresh corporate commitment to shared principles of worship.
- C. In light of the fact that the question before the OPC is the revision of her existing DPW, **keep comparing the draft proposed revisions with the DPW as well as with each other.**
- D. If it is evident to you that the Revisions Committee or any of its members — especially me — have blind spots, please communicate it to them. **Speak the truth in love.**

"The problem in our day, which gives rise to highly questionable church growth methods, is two-fold: On the one hand, *we are seeing a waning confidence in the message of the gospel*. Even the evangelical church shows signs of losing confidence in the convincing and converting power of the gospel message. That is why increasing numbers of churches prefer sermons on family life and psychological health. We are being overtaken by what Os Guinness calls the managerial and therapeutic revolutions. The winning message, it seems, is the one that helps people to solve their temporal problems, improves their self-esteem and makes them feel good about themselves. In such a cultural climate, preaching on the law, sin and repentance, and the cross has all but disappeared, even in evangelical churches. The church has become "user friendly," "consumer oriented," and as a result evangelical churches are being inundated with "cheap grace" (Bonhoeffer). Today's "gospel" is all too often a gospel without cost, without repentance, without commitment, without discipleship, and thus "another gospel" and accordingly no gospel at all, all traceable to the fact that this is how too many people today have come to believe that the church must be grown.

On the other hand, *we are seeing a waning confidence in preaching as the means by which the gospel is to be spread*. As a result, preaching is giving way in evangelical churches to multimedia presentations, drama, dance, "sharing times," sermonettes, and "how to" devotionals. Preaching is being viewed increasingly as outdated and ineffective. Business techniques like telemarketing are now popular with the church growth movement. Churches so infected also look to the multiplication of programs to effect their growth. They sponsor conferences and seminars on every conceivable topic under the sun; they subdivide their congregations down into marrieds and singles, single parents and divorced, "thirty-something" and "twenty-something," teens, unemployed, the child-abused and the chemically dependent, attempting to arrange programs for them all. And once a person joins such a church, conventional wisdom has it, the church and the minister must meet his every felt need. Accordingly, ministers have become managers, facilitators, and motivators—everything but heralds of the whole counsel of God—and this all because they have lost confidence in the preaching of God's Word as the primary means for the growth of the church and the individual Christian.

What is the answer? A restored confidence in the Reformed doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation!"

— Robert L. Reymond, in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*

Even the Boring Parts

On Exegeting Genealogies

by

Matthew W. Kingsbury



My wife's boss asked what I had preached on Sunday morning. I told him our text was the genealogy which begins Matthew's Gospel, and he replied, "Oh, genealogies. I skip over those to the stuff I can understand."

Perhaps he says this because he attends a broadly evangelical Church and has not received proper instruction in hermeneutics, but sometimes I suspect even Orthodox Presbyterian pastors and elders find no profit in Biblical genealogies, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 notwithstanding. This is sad. Like all Scripture, they beautifully demonstrate God's redemptive purposes for his people. Moreover, genealogies can be understood quite readily once one learns how to read them.

A warning: I never said interpreting genealogies is easy. I doubt you'll ever get the point of a genealogy the first time you read it. You will have to ask questions of the text, compare Scripture with Scripture, and meditate on the purposes of our Lord. Understanding genealogies is hard work, but it can be done by the illumination of the Spirit and the due use of ordinary means (WCF 1.6-7).

HERMENEUTIC STEPS

The Context

This first point is obvious, but ought to be made. Genealogies are not road bumps meant to slow down your Bible reading, but organic parts of the text which contribute to its meaning. What we know about every other pericope in Scripture is true of genealogies.

The Beginning and End

I am not afraid to preach genealogies today because of what Iain Duguid taught us in seminary. He pointed out the obvious: genealogies are written to connect the person at the beginning with the one at the end. It's that simple. If I wanted to convince you Abraham Lincoln was my great-great-grandfather, I would recite my father's name, then his father's name, and so on until I reached our fourteenth president. Then I would stop. Were I related to Abraham Lincoln, I would necessarily be related to his father, but the prestige-by-association I'm seeking only comes from the son. Once the starting point has been connected to the ending, the work of a genealogy is done.

Genealogical interpreters go astray when they focus the bulk of their attention on the names in the middle.¹ If you want to understand a genealogy, look at the names at either end and ask why they are linked together.

The Structure

The basic literary structure of a genealogy is a string of names, but rarely is it that simple. Cross-referencing shows many genealogies eliminate names. The author must have had a reason for including some and dropping others; after all, he also had the Scriptures as a reference. So what organizing principles does the Bible give for the genealogy's structure?

Once you get a handle on the genealogy's structure, you're in a good position to examine its peculiarities. What doesn't fit? For example, Matthew introduces his Gospel with a patrilineal genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17), but four women are mentioned. Such oddities, exceptions to the "rules," help define the purpose and flow

¹ Occasionally, the names in the middle do contribute much to one's understanding of the text.

QUESTIONING THE UNQUESTIONABLE

of the particular genealogy.

Hermeneutic Steps Applied:

Ruth 4:18-22 - ¹⁸Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez begat Hezron, ¹⁹and Hezron begat Rom, and Rom begat Amminadab, ²⁰and Amminadab begat Nachshon, and Nachshon begat Shalmah, ²¹and Shalmah begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, ²²and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.²

Our sample text comes from the end of the book of Ruth. Contextually, we can expect it to provide a summary of Ruth's themes.

Ruth 4:18-22 connects Perez to David in ten generations; thus, both men must have relevance for the people and events recorded in Ruth. Perez was mentioned earlier when the people of Bethlehem blessed Ruth and Boaz by saying, "And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the seed which the LORD will give you from this young woman." (Ruth 4:12) This references Genesis 32 where the Davidic seed is endangered through Judah's refusal to give Tamar to his son in marriage. By God's providence, Tamar's "creative" application of the levirate laws (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) kept Judah's line, and therefore David's line, from dying out. This parallels the situation in Ruth, where a Moabitess has to apply Israelite marriage laws to preserve

² The above translation is my own.

Elimelech's family name. In both cases, a Gentile woman is used by God to keep the royal line of David intact.

This genealogy includes only ten generations, which seem awfully few to cover the Egyptian captivity and the period of the Judges. Though commentators disagree on the particular names, all agree some have been left out. Therefore, the number ten has been deliberately chosen. Why?

The answer is in the broader context of Scripture. Deuteronomy 23:2 says, "No bastard shall enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD." (RSV) Judah and Tamar were never married; Perez and his descendants lived under the shadow of bastardy. Our author says ten generations have passed since Perez, so David is qualified to enter the assembly of the Lord and take the throne of Israel.³

Ruth is about the Lord's covenant faithfulness to His people. This genealogy shows how carefully he preserved David's family so the king after his own heart could take the throne and lead God's people. In the fullness of time, we know David was merely a type of his greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This genealogy concludes the book of Ruth by show-

³ For this insight, I am indebted to James B. Jordan. (The Book of Ruth. Seven-lecture audiotape series. Niceville: *Biblical Horizons*, 1982.)

ing the Lord's Covenant faithfulness in bringing His promised Redeemer.

The hermeneutic steps of context, beginning and end, and structure ground the genealogy in the rest of Scripture. They not only guide the exegetical process, they are a means of testing your interpretation of the text. Your interpretation of any given genealogy must make sense of its placement in that Biblical book, the persons with whom it begins and ends, and its particular literary structure.

You may be intimidated by the amount of research necessary to properly understand and teach a genealogy. I have found preparing a sermon on a genealogy takes up a greater amount of time than most other sorts of texts. This ought not make us shy away from genealogies. Having the well-grounded confidence they are profitable for teaching, rebuking, and training in righteousness, we must be zealous to preach and teach them, in and out of season, along with the rest of the God's Word.

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BOOK REVIEWS

With a Shepherd's Heart, Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder, by John R. Sittema, Published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. Grand Rapids, MI, 1996. Paperback 271 pages. \$10 (plus \$3 postage). Reviewed by the Editor.

Although this book has been available for some time we only obtained a copy recently, and were impressed with both how solid *and* how practical it is. A look at the table of contents will suggest the reason for my assessment. Here it is:

Part One: The Shepherd's Heart - Regaining Pastoral Purpose

- 1 Out of the Board Room
- 2 Check Your Aim
- 3 Giving Yourself an EKG

Part Two: The Shepherd's Eye - Sharpening Pastoral Vision

Section One: Knowing the Enemy

- 4 The Wolf's Teeth - Secularism
- 5 The Wolf's Teeth - Materialism
- 6 The Wolf's Teeth - Relativism
- 7 The Wolf's Teeth - Pragmatism
- 8 The Wolf's Teeth - Feminism

Section Two: A Strategic Blueprint for Pastoring Families

- 9 Foundational Principles of Family Care
- 10 Coming Apart at the Seams - Families in Crisis
- 11 Focus on the Marriage - Not the Wedding
- 12 Tend to the Lambs
- 13 Polishing Your Lens - Homework on Family Ministry

Section Three: A Strategic Blueprint for Pastoring Seniors

- 14 Retirement: Vacation or Vocation?
- 15 Pastoral Care in the Nursing Home
- 16 Polishing Your Lens Homework on Ministry to Seniors

Part Three: The Shepherd's Hand - Developing Pastoral Skills

Section One. The Elder and Teaching

- 17 "Apt to Teach"
- 18 Teaching the Lambs of the Flock
- 19 A Catechism on Sex - Helping Parents Establish Biblical Values
- 20 "Old Dogs, New Tricks" - Training Adults in Christ

Section Two: The Elder and Member Visiting

- 21 Visiting to Encourage
- 22 Visiting to Rebuke
- 23 Visiting to Admonish
- 24 Visiting to Guard
- 25 Plotting A Pastoral Strategy

Section Three: Biblical Discipline - Ministry of Accountability

- 26 Church Membership - Committed to Follow a Recognized Voice
- 27 Discipline: Face to Face with the Word!
- 28 The Elder's Meeting - a Structure for Mutual Accountability

Appendices: Tools for Group Study

I was given the privilege, recently, of sitting in on a meeting of the elders of the Sanborn, IA URC during which two of the "Case Studies" contained in one of the Appendices were considered. I have never seen a better way to introduce new men to the biblical task of eldership. The discussion generated by these case studies was very close to the kind of thing that diligent elders are bound to encounter as they watch over the flock. It is not hard to see why the elders who help train one another with the use of this book are, in turn, very highly esteemed by the members. When the members of the church come to understand that their elders really do care about their spiritual welfare, there is a growing appreciation for this God-ordained office.

I do not know of any other resource with quite the combination of condensed (it is not verbose or repetitious) and practical wisdom for elders who take their work seriously. Highly recommended.

When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism, edited by Keith A. Mathison, Published by P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2004. Paperback, 376 pages, \$17.99 (but on sale at present for \$13.50). Reviewed by the Editor.

It is mind boggling to some of us, but there are those today who claim to be correcting the church of all previous ages. As far back as the records go Christian people expected that Christ would return personally and visibly at the end of this age, at which time grave yards would be emptied because of a physical, bodily resurrection of the dead. But certain people—named Hyper-Preterists here—are insisting that neither

BOOK REVIEWS

of these things will ever happen. The reason, they say, is that Christ has already returned *and* the resurrection is already past. Yes, that certainly sounds weird. It is also my conviction—as it is the conviction of the seven men who have written portions of this book—that this is a deadly heresy. And it is my opinion that they leave the Hyper-Preterists without a leg to stand on.

One of the things that makes this book so effective is the fact that some of the best sections of it were written by those who are being more and more frequently called ‘Partial Preterists.’ Being of that conviction myself I was particularly impressed by the cogency of their arguments—which I share—against the ‘Hypers.’ Dr. Kenneth Gentry’s 61 page chapter entitled “The Historical Problem with Hyper-Preterism” is especially effective. But the variety of contributions from the other writers—Charles E. Hill, Richard Pratt, Jr., Keith A. Mathison, Simon J. Kistemaker, Douglas Wilson and Robert Strimple—provide additional proof, from a variety of perspectives, that Hyper-Preterism “is a dangerous theological movement” (p. 61).

Hyper-Preterists are hostile to virtually all of the historic creeds of the church. They love to point out, of course, that only the Bible is infallible. And

of course that is true. But it is *not* true that no one ‘really’ understood the Bible until the Hyper-Preterists came along. One of the excellencies of this book is the effective refutation of this very claim on the part of the Hyper-Preterists.

This book provides a strong antidote to the very serious errors of the Hyper Preterists. I highly recommend it.

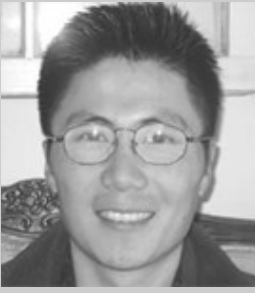
J. Gresham Machen, Selected Shorter Writings, edited by D.G. Hart. Published by P&R Publishing, 2004, Hardback, 590 pages. \$39.99 (but on sale at present for \$30). Reviewed by the Editor.

Like many of you readers of *Ordained Servant*, I have always tried to read every new book *about* J. Gresham Machen and usually find it rewarding to do so. But it is not often that I’ve been able to read something new *by* Machen himself. Of course it is quite obvious that the 46 essays or articles in this book are not new in the sense of having been recently written. But they are new to those of us who have not had access to them before (and, for me, that was most of them). And what a pleasure it is to read them and in doing so to better understand the issues—and the pressures under which Machen faced those issues—back in the twenties and thirties.

One thing that I realized anew, in reading these shorter writings, is Machen’s mastery of the English language. No matter what the subject, or issue, under discussion it is nearly impossible to misunderstand what he thought and said. And for me it is also impossible to miss the enduring credibility of the man.

Have you ever heard of Robert Speer or Charles Eerdman (to name just two men mentioned in these articles)? They were prominent Presbyterian Church leaders in Machen’s time. They were considered “great men” by many—perhaps even by the majority—and yet, today, neither has anything like the enduring influence of Machen. As I read these shorter writings I keep asking how on earth so many people could disagree with Machen when he was so obviously right? But, of course, he is just another in a long line of great men in the history of the church who were villified while they lived and vindicated after they died.

I urge every office-bearer in the OPC to get this valuable book. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Stonehouse who first put many of these together in a now-out-of-date book, and to Dr. Hart who rightly saw the need for an augmented compilation of these shorter writings of J. Gresham Machen.



A RESPONSE TO “A SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH”

by

Benjamin K. Wickner

Introduction

I was grateful for the article written by Pastor Stephen Doe on the sensitive subject of wayward children of church officers (*Ordained Servant* January 2203). The expectation of spiritual continuity and faithfulness in our children, based on the doctrine of the covenant, has been a fixture in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Pastor Doe’s article deals specifically with the children of church officers, particularly elders.

The issue itself could hardly be greater. It is not hyperbole to say the very future of the church is at stake, our children’s spiritual inheritance potentially in the balance. Just as parents have a profound impact on the spiritual succession of their children, so also church elders significantly impact the families of the church, not only by their ruling and teaching, but also by their example of piety and demonstration of godly fruit.

In writing this response, I am aware of the sensitive nature of the topic as there are more than

a few families in the OPC (officers included) with rebellious, unbelieving children. It is not with relish that I respond to Pastor Doe’s article any more than I relish confronting members of my own congregation with the undisciplined behavior of their children. Nevertheless, our children are too precious, our church too dear, for us to do nothing. I pray that this exchange will challenge ministers and sessions to (re)examine themselves in light of God’s Word, that we would sincerely seek to always be reforming our churches.

I will interact with Pastor Doe’s four concluding points.

1. Must the church apply the guidelines for elder qualification in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 only prior to a man’s being considered for office?

This would be new to me. I thought the biblical requirements for eldership were relevant for the duration of a man’s ministry, not merely at inauguration. Yet, according to Mr. Doe’s article, the elder require-

ments of 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6 (on his family and children) are only relevant to those who are applying to be elders. He calls these requirements “front-end instruction, that is, what should happen as men are being *considered* for [office]” (italics his). We are to remember this distinction when these verses “are applied to questions of men *after* they are in office when problems with children appear” (italics his).

No evidence or support (other than the assertion) is given to back up this claim. Furthermore, consider the implications if applied to the other elder qualifications. If a man was ordained to the eldership as the husband of one wife but then years later became polygamous, should he remain an elder? Did the requirement to be a one-woman man only apply when he was ordained? If a man was temperate in using alcoholic beverages when chosen an officer and later becomes a noted lush in the congregation, should he be immune to further examination as to his qualification because the time for examination has passed? In-

A RESPONSE TO “A SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH”

deed, if anything, such qualifications should be even more carefully applied to the continuing officer inasmuch as he should have become a seasoned spiritual leader and been embraced by the congregation as an example to the flock of God.

It is true, of course, that much can transpire after a man’s ordination to office, during the years that he serves in office. Questions arise such as: What about the elder whose children were faithful while in the home, but leave the faith as grown adults? Does that disqualify a man? Or what if a man has four children and only one rebels while the other three are solid believers? These (and so many others) are difficult questions and frankly impossible to answer without extensive knowledge of the context. A multitude of other questions would need to be answered to sufficiently determine appropriate action. Depending on the many relevant details, this action may include an elder’s demitting his office or possibly just taking a leave of absence to attend to the needs of his home. As with all discipline, there are no two cases that are the same. No boilerplate methodology will ever suffice.

Yet, the Biblical principle still remains. The principle laid

out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 should guide us. The complexity of human circumstances, while always relevant, should not be allowed to overwhelm scriptural principles. That would be a classic instance of the tail wagging the dog. Perhaps the OPC now suffers from its head(s) being wagged by the tales of circumstances that seem to mitigate and obfuscate the principle.

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2. Should the church treat a rebellious child of an officer in the same manner as any other baptized member of the congregation?

At face value, we can agree with this. But how we handle the children is not the primary issue. The real question is this: should the church treat the officer who has a rebellious child the same as any other parent? In answer, we must note that fathers who are officers are not just as other fathers in the church. To be simple (and redundant), they are officers. That does not mean they are perfect or that their children are less prone to sin. It does mean they are (or should be) men who ex-

emplify a blameless character with an orderly home, the kind required of an officer.

Therefore, Scripture requires that children of elders be “*believing*” (Titus 1:6). Covenant faithfulness in our children – which is to say belief – is the fruit of faithful covenant nurture. The sincere faith seen in the children of an elder serves as an objective witness that he indeed is above reproach “holding fast the faithful word,” able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those that contradict (Titus 1:9).

Who more intimately appreciates godly spirituality (or conversely despises hypocritical religion) than a man’s own family, those who live with him, play with him, and sit under his “ministry” day by day? In evaluating a man for office, the church must consider the greater impact of his ministry in the home as a means of determining the lesser intimacy and observable impact of his ministry in the church. A man can play the hypocrite much easier in church than he can in the home. Therefore, if the fruit in the family is good, the church has greater confidence for the fruit of his ministry in the church.

The only way around the requirement for elders to have be-

A RESPONSE TO “A SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH”

believing children is to downgrade the use of the word πιστωω to mean “an outward submissiveness to fatherly authority.” This seems to be the “standard OPC position” and the one taken by Pastor Doe. Yet, Doe himself honestly reflects upon the fact that such a meaning is rare, both in the major translations and in the classic Reformed commentaries. Not mentioned by Doe is the fact that πιστος, when referring to a person, almost always indicates sincere belief and not superficial submissiveness.

But let us think about this spiritually and not merely lexically. The biblical standard for eldership demands maturity in godliness in order to rule and teach God’s people. Must a man exhibit merely an outward show (for example) of “loving what is good”? Is sincere belief and obedience really necessary, or just outward conformity to the standards of the church? Surely we must answer the former. The same absolutely is true with our children. Any parent can beat his children into submission. Any OPC father can make his children recite oodles of catechism. Only a spiritual man, full of God’s grace will be the instrument of grace, in the heart of his children. Paul indicates

just such a man in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, a man whose sincere faith can be seen in the belief exhibited by his children.

3. In determining potential discipline, when rebellion occurs in an officer’s children, should the session focus on the fulfillment of a man’s vows at his child’s baptism?

Any parent can beat his children into submission...Only a spiritual man, full of God’s grace, will be the instrument of grace in the heart of his children.

At first glance this seems agreeable enough. But wait a minute...baptismal vows are for all parents of covenant children, not merely elders. (see OPC DW, IV:B.4) An officer, by nature of his office, has additional privileges, responsibilities, vows, and therefore consequences, one of which is the loss of his office. This consequence does not directly arise from baptismal vows, but from ordination vows. Ordination (and continuance in office – see above) requires that a father have children who believe, that is, who are not in rebellion. It is not Paul’s intent to merely require that elders discipline their rebellious children (that would be true for all parents), but that

they have believing children, or not be officers.

Some will say at this point, “But [this or that] elder is such a great teacher. He baptized my children. This church has really grown under his ministry. He’s such a humble man” and etc. Others will say, “Well, if all the elders in the OPC who have unbelieving children step down, the work of the church will be hindered.” Such pragmatic concerns should not supercede biblical principle. Who are we to put into question God’s Word? The Lord honors those that honor him. We dishonor

the Lord by permitting men to shepherd the Bride of Christ who fail to meet the standard of Scripture.

4. Can no one create or mandate faith in anyone, including his own children?

Based on Doe’s choice of words, one can hardly disagree. Who would be so impiously presumptuous as to suggest a parent can “create” or “mandate” faith. That is to put the opposing view in an uncharitable light. As a fact of the matter, the doctrine of covenant succession has been the consistent view of the historic Christian church, and especially of the Reformed church.

A RESPONSE TO “A SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH”

Geerhardus Vos writes, [The covenant] “consists of the expectation that covenant children will enter into the fellowship of the covenant... The covenant is a mother because it spiritually bears sons and daughters by the power of divine grace and the promises...” Vos continues, “As far as we can discover, the leading spokesmen of Reformed theology are completely agreed on this. They all recognize that the church has received such promises for her offspring.” The expectation for our children to succeed us in the faith is not only permissible, but prescribed, inasmuch as God himself authorizes it in the covenant.

Therefore, it is with a great deal of sadness and alarm that we read in Doe’s article, “Our expectations for our children, even if they are godly expectations, can be idolatrous seeking the outcome we desire rather than God himself.” In response we ask, how can godly expectations be idolatrous?! This seems an extraordinary oxymoron! Such thinking pits God’s secret will with our sanctified will, that is to say God’s sovereign decree against his own gracious desires. Of course, as sinful men, we may struggle with sinful motivations at times, but God forbid

that sincere desire and faithful expectation for our covenant children should be spoken in the same breath as idolatry.

God does not promise gracious blessing upon faithful obedience and yet decree a curse. Such a thought is unthinkable (or should be). If par-

God does not promise gracious blessing upon faithful obedience and yet decree a curse. Such a thought is unthinkable (or should be).

ents faithfully instruct, discipline, and nurture their children in the grace and love of Christ according to the gospel, are they not justified to expect—based on the promises of the covenant—that their children will own the faith for themselves? This is no mechanistic *ex opere operato* teaching as has been charged by some and intimated by Pastor Doe, but the very warp and woof of covenant blessing. This blessing works through the means of grace, from both within the family and the larger covenant family of the church. Charles Hodge echoed the common Presbyterian and Reformed belief on this subject when he declared that “early, assiduous, and faithful Christian nurture of the children

of believing parents was the great means of their salvation.”

An important point needs to be said here, however. The qualifications for eldership in Scripture are daunting to say the least. As an elder, I feel the weightiness of these requirements. In my flesh I cry out,

Woe is me. Who is able to stand in the face of these demands? Truly, we as elders are men of earthen vessels. But God has not left us alone to our own devices. Indeed, he has provided all we need for life, salvation, and spiritual attainment. The error

that some make in digesting these things is to place too great an emphasis on our ability, on man’s contribution in meeting the requirements. That’s the error of the *ex opere operato* charge; it thinks much too man-centeredly. This may seem paradoxical, but actually makes perfect sense. The doctrine of covenant succession appeals and responds to God’s lavish grace in the covenant. It is the Lord who enables a man to fulfill the requirements for office.

Consider the thoughts of a godly and pious gardener. He, when looking upon his mature flower bed with joy and deep satisfaction, would not exult in his own glory and presume to

A RESPONSE TO 'A SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH'

think he was the efficient cause of the radiance of his flowers. On the contrary, he would appreciate and praise God for the fertile soil, the hearty seed, and the regular sunshine upon his garden. For sure, he well remembers the hours of wearisome digging, planting, watering and pruning, but he also knows that God gave him the grace and strength to be able to do that. Furthermore, God would send rain to water his garden in those occasions when he forgot or was too lazy to water the garden for himself. In the end, he marvels at the Lord's blessing and enjoys the fruit of his labors.

Such is the nature of the covenant, and God's grace therein. Grace is never mechanical or automatic. But it is powerful,

prolific, and promissory. As Scripture says, "If we are faithless, God remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:13) Covenant nurture is neither the cause nor the meritorious ground for our children's salvation. But it is the means by which they come to an understanding, appreciation, and reception of it. We can all agree that faith is a gift of God, sovereignly administered by grace. Salvation for our children is no more or less a work of grace than our own personal salvation.

Yet if we are consistent, conscientious, and unequivocal in upholding the teaching of Scripture and the historic doctrine of the covenant, we must begin the serious and daunting task of reconciling the present situation in

the leadership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with our new (or renewed) conviction. This may well be a high hurdle for our presently weak legs to leap over. But until we muster the strength and courage to do so, the OPC will continue to struggle with an on-going "scandal to the church."

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