

Ministerial



Training

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From the Editor

One of the most important tasks performed by our presbyteries is their oversight of the preparation of men for the ministry of the gospel. From taking men under care, through licensing them to preach, to the goal of ordaining them, presbyteries take action under the guidance of their committees on candidates and credentials. In the local church the session seeks to recognize and encourage gifted men to pursue this calling. At a denominational level the general assembly has charged the Committee on Christian Education, under whose oversight this journal functions, with the task of facilitating this important work through its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training. This subcommittee oversees programs such as the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC), providing training supplementary to seminary to candidates and ministers; summer and year-long internships; the Timothy Conference to challenge young Orthodox Presbyterian men in their late high school and early college years, aged sixteen to twenty-one years, to consider the gospel ministry as God's calling for their life; and the OP Summer Institute to give a taste of ministry in the OPC to men in late college and early seminary through an intensive time of reflection and conversation.

The lead article this month is Jim Gidley's informative piece, "Why a Candidates and Credentials Conference?" given at the inaugural Candidates and Credentials Conference at the offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, on August 8–9, 2005.

Next up, Ryan McGraw encourages men preparing for ordination exams as one who has been through the ordeal in the PCA in "How to Prepare Spiritually for Ordination Exams."

I offer thoughts on the temptations of young theologians entering ministry in our heady tradition of a "learned ministry."

PCA Pastor Charlie Wingard reviews a fascinating new book giving a personal view of the brilliant historian Elizabeth (Betsey) Fox-Genovese from the perspective of her equally brilliant husband Eugene. Their journey from Marxism to Catholicism is instructive.

Finally, this month's poem "On the Road" by the editor was written during the Summer Institute at Shiloh Retreat in Jefferson, New Hampshire last year.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Training

Why a Candidates and Credentials Conference?

by James S. Gidley

Welcome to the inaugural Candidates and Credentials Conference!¹ In such company, I am conscious that much, if not all, of what I have to say will not be new to you, but I hope that it will be a helpful reminder.

So, why are we here? The most direct way to answer this question is to say that the General Assembly, in effect, wanted us to be here. In 2004, the Seventy-first General Assembly adopted a recommendation of the Committee on the Views of Creation in the following form:

That the General Assembly encourage the Committee on Christian Education and its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training to seek ways of working more closely with the candidates and credentials committees of presbyteries in order to bring ministerial candidates to a fuller understanding of the confessional standards, the *Book of Church Order*, the *Minutes* of the General Assembly and the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.²

The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training proposed this conference as a means of responding to the Assembly's request, and the Committee on Christian Education has endorsed it. The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training had already been considering how we might work with candidates and credentials committees, and I view this conference as a continuation and extension of a variety of efforts undertaken by the SMT and the CCE over the last decade to strengthen the preparation of candidates for the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

It is significant that the Seventy-first General Assembly's action came originally as a recommendation from the Committee on the Views of Creation. You are well aware of how the issue of the days of creation has troubled our presbyteries and influenced the process of examining candidates for the ministry, and I hope that Alan Strange will address this issue somewhat more directly later in the conference. For my purposes, I draw your attention to a more general problem, of which the views of creation are a particular instance: increasing diversity in the church and among candidates for the ministry presents a challenge to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in maintaining our identity and, more importantly, the faithfulness of our witness. A crucial part of the challenge is encountered in the process of preparing and examining candidates for ministry, and therefore a particular responsibility for meeting this challenge falls upon your shoulders.

¹ Held at the offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania on August 8–9, 2005.

² *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 29.

All of this leads me to consider more fundamental reasons for our presence here today than the deliberations of a committee or even the action of a general assembly, however important these things may be. We are gathered here today to consider how we may increase our faithfulness in the exercise of the binding and loosing authority of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. On that memorable day in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

As Presbyterians, we believe that this promise was not made to Peter as an individual, nor even exclusively as an apostle—much less as the first Pope—, but that this promise descends to the true church in all ages and places of the world. The promised authority is concentrated in the ordained officers of that true church. In particular, the promised authority descends to us as elders and ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps the most far-reaching exercise of that authority is the admission of men into the sacred office of minister of the gospel. We do well to consider carefully Paul’s exhortation to Timothy on this score: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure” (1 Tim. 5:19). Is it not significant that when Paul urges this sobriety and caution in ordaining men to office he immediately adds that Timothy is not to take part in the sins of others? If we commit the sacred office to unqualified men, we take part in their sinful motives for seeking the office, whether they are consciously seeking the ministry for base and selfish reasons or honestly yet foolishly overestimating their qualifications. In an indirect way, we then also take part in the sins of omission and commission that such unqualified men become guilty of in the conduct of a ministry to which God has not called them. As I consider this, I would not wish to be among such Presbyterian elders and ministers as those who ordained a Charles Grandison Finney to the ministerial office!

Yet I believe that the warnings of the Lord contain a promise of blessing as well. If it is true that we in some way participate in the sins of those whom we ordain, is it not also true that when we entrust the ministerial office to able and faithful men, we also participate in their faithfulness and fruitfulness? The Puritan John Flavel approvingly cites the Jesuit theologian Suarez, who “argues for a general judgment, after men have passed at death their particular judgment; because (saith he) long after that, abundance of good and evil will be done in this world by the dead, in the persons of others that overlive them.”³ Consider then what fruit may be borne even after we are dead and gone from our placing men in the sacred office of the ministry! Whether good or ill, we will be called to account for it in the last great day, at least as far as it lay in our power to foresee what that fruit would be.

It is well for us to consider the times and circumstances in which we bear the responsibility of the keys. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we are undoubtedly living in a period of change. One way of characterizing this change is to observe that the diversity of the OPC is increasing. Probably a good bit of this is simply the result of the growth with which God has blessed us.

The membership of the OPC is changing. Luke Brown, the Statistician of the OPC, noted in his report to the Seventy-first General Assembly:

³ John Flavel, *Pneumatologia: A Treatise on the Soul of Man* (London: W. Jones, 1824), 116.

The church as a whole grew from 19,198 members (including ministers) at the end of 1993 to 28,019 at the end of 2003. This 8,821-member increase represents a net gain of 45.9 percent. During the same period, losses due to deaths and erasures totaled 8,638 persons, at least some of whom were replaced (statistically) by new members being added to the rolls. Thus one may estimate that well over one-third (perhaps even one-half) of our church members are new to the OPC since 1993. This is truly remarkable.⁴

I would add: remarkable only for the relative speed of the turnover. As surely as all flesh is grass, 100 percent of the membership of the church of Jesus Christ will be new 150 years from now. Certainly none of us will be here! Having said that, however, it does seem that Mr. Brown has put his finger on an important aspect of the life of the OPC as we begin the twenty-first century: we are in a time of significant change. Corresponding to the turnover in membership, there seems also to be a turnover among elders and ministers: at this year's general assembly, over 40 percent of the commissioners had been ordained within the last fifteen years.⁵

We observe another aspect of change in our church-planting efforts. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension reported to the Seventy-first General Assembly: "For almost a decade OP church planting has been in a response mode. A group of Reformed people find each other, come to us for help, and we adopt them as a core group."⁶ In addition to this, you are all aware of whole congregations entering the OPC from other denominations or from independency. One of the implications of this is that we have groups of people, including whole congregations, coming into the OPC having been converted, disciplined, and catechized (or *not* catechized) in other traditions, some Reformed, some not. Please understand that I am not questioning the sincerity or convictions of these precious brothers and sisters in Christ; I am only pointing out that their history suggests that they present the OPC with a special challenge and responsibility in the arena of Christian education.

The diversity has become ethnic and linguistic as well. For example, what a blessing and encouragement it has been to hear at this year's assembly and to read in the most recent *New Horizons*⁷ of the increasing presence of Hispanic brothers and sisters in the OPC! I recall sitting in a CCE meeting almost fifteen years ago and ticking off in my head the names of the men sitting around the table—names like Williamson, Tyson, Elder, Poundstone, Johnson, Winslow, Wilson . . . white Anglo-Saxons all! It is a blessing that this will typically no longer be so. Already we have had names like Shishko, Deliyannides, Olinger, and Van Drunen, and there is nothing to prevent our having a Perez, an Alvira, or a Kim on the CCE. Yet again, ethnic and linguistic diversity poses new challenges for Christian education.

⁴ *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 70.

⁵ David K. Thompson and Danny E. Olinger, "The Seventy-second General Assembly," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 8 (August–September 2005): 4.

⁶ *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 80.

⁷ Ross Graham, "Spanish Spoken Here," and Richard Gerber, "Gospel Fruit in Vineland," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 8 (August–September 2005): 18–19.

As there is increasing diversity in the membership of the OPC, so also there is increasing diversity among the ministers of the OPC. The days when we could assume that most ministers in the OPC had been to Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia are long gone! Whatever we may think of that change, it is undeniable that our ministers no longer have a unifying seminary experience to introduce them to the OPC and to each other. At the 2003 General Assembly, Danny Olinger sat quietly at the Historian's table and conducted a poll of the ministers. He found that collectively they had attended over twenty different seminaries. In your duties for candidates and credentials committees, you have no doubt dealt with ministers coming to the Reformed faith in the midst of their ministry and seeking entrance into the OPC. They may have attended a non-Reformed seminary or no seminary at all. Again, praise God for these dear brothers in Christ. But again, they pose a challenge to our Christian education efforts.

Recent general assemblies have also seen an increasing number of candidates for ministry who do not meet the standard educational requirements for ministers in the *Form of Government*. This may simply be an anomaly, or merely a result of the growth of the church, but it seems to be a real increase. Our *Form of Government* provides for exceptions to the educational requirements for the ministry because we do not believe that ministers are made by formal education. Nevertheless, education equips men to minister. Again we have a challenge to our Christian education efforts.

One reaction to increasing diversity is to insist on a rigid uniformity. While my premise is that the ministers in the OPC are exhibiting an increasing diversity, it could be argued that we are seeing a narrowing of views and an increasing uniformity among our ministers. I do not believe that these competing diagnoses of the situation are necessarily mutually exclusive. Our response to diversity in denominational background, culture, ethnicity, etc., may be to compensate by developing a greater ideological uniformity. I use the word "ideological" deliberately. Ideological uniformity may or may not be true biblical uniformity.

Presbyterian history illustrates the dangers of a misguided insistence on uniformity. According to the sober church historian Williston Walker, in 1637, in a fatuous desire for uniformity, Charles [I, King of England and Scotland], inspired by Laud [William Laud, then archbishop of Canterbury], ordered the imposition of a liturgy which was essentially that of the Church of England. Its use, on July 23, in Edinburgh, led to riot. Scotland flared in opposition.⁸

A chain of subsequent events gave us the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms a little over a decade later. That riot in Edinburgh, featuring the tossing of a stool at the mitered head of a bishop by one Jenny Geddes, has passed into legendary status in Presbyterian history and stands as a symbol of Presbyterian protest against a top-down, hierarchical ecclesiology. The lapse of over three and a half centuries has not been sufficient to remove our constitutional aversion to "a fatuous desire for uniformity."

Coming down to the present, we observe that the principal locus of responsibility for preparing and examining candidates for the ministry resides in the Presbytery. Hart and Muether have observed historical reasons for this:

Because Presbyteries were established first, not synods or general assemblies, American Presbyterianism is characterized by the power of presbytery. The American

⁸ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 412.

church, unlike its Scottish analogue, has delegated greater power to presbyteries than to higher courts. This is particularly evident in ordination, where presbyteries still enjoy remarkable autonomy in calling men to the ministry. This feature of American Presbyterianism may reflect sound polity and good theology, but it is also an accident of history. One of the reasons for forming a presbytery in Philadelphia in 1706 was to license and ordain men for the gospel ministry. Ever since then, presbyteries in America have been jealous to guard that prerogative.⁹

As you know, in the OPC the general assembly becomes involved in the ordination process only in exceptional cases.

The Committee on Christian Education and its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training have no desire to steer the church in the direction of a more top-down, hierarchical ecclesiology. Our role in putting on this conference is to assist and to facilitate. Because each of the members of the CCE and SMT is also an elder or minister, and because some of us also serve on candidates and credentials committees of presbyteries, we also join with you in the collegial task before us. To put it simply and comprehensively, I see our task not as the establishment of uniformity, but as the promotion of unity and consistency in the process of preparing, licensing, and ordaining men to the gospel ministry. This bears repeating: our goal should not be *uniformity*, but *unity* and *consistency*.

Let me illustrate what I mean by unity and consistency in the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. We face a basic problem of unity and consistency when a candidate can be ordained in one presbytery but not in another. Ordinarily there is no reason to be distressed by this. There will always be variations in how candidates are prepared for the ministry, variations in how the presbyteries apply the common criteria, and variations in how candidates and credentials committees conduct examinations. Devotees of uniformity may be distressed by this natural outcome of the various distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit, but adherents of unity and consistency need not fear it. The manifold workings of God's grace and providence do not work injustice upon candidates who are affected by this sort of non-uniformity.

However, there are two situations in which diversity among presbyteries *is* problematic. The first situation is where it is publicly known that one presbytery is substantially more—or less—rigorous than others in the conduct of the trials for licensure and ordination. Candidates are then tempted to gravitate to the “easy” presbyteries, which run the risk of becoming something like the “diploma mills” that cheapen higher education. Other candidates may be tempted to feed spiritual pride by gravitating to the difficult presbyteries in an attempt to prove themselves against a higher standard.

The second problematic instance of diversity occurs when it is common knowledge that a man will be denied ordination in some presbyteries because of a particular theological conviction that is unacceptable in those presbyteries but not in others. Then candidates are tempted to shop for a presbytery that is congenial to their particular views. In the heat of debate over particular theological issues in the church, the ordination process runs the risk of becoming something like a political football. We are tempted to

⁹ D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, “Turning Points in American Presbyterian History, Part 2: Origins and Identity, 1706–1729,” *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 2 (February 2005): 23–24.

examine men not so much for their comprehensive fitness for the gospel ministry as for their adherence to the theological party that is dominant in our presbytery. The Seventy-first General Assembly tried to address this problem by adopting two recommendations of the Committee on Views of Creation, one of which dealt specifically with the doctrine of creation,¹⁰ which I will here pass by, and the other of which addressed the general problem:

That the General Assembly urge members of presbyteries and sessions to uphold the peace of the church by addressing theological issues within the church primarily through educational, administrative, judicial, or other constitutional means, and not merely by voting for or against candidates for office.¹¹

It is well to remember that Presbyterians have not historically demanded a precisionistic, all-encompassing *doctrinal* uniformity any more than they have wished to impose a precisionistic uniformity in the forms of worship or church government. Our confessional documents ought not to be viewed as a pinpoint of doctrinal precision but as a circle within which acceptable variations of theological conviction are to be found.

Another way of describing healthy diversity among presbyteries would be to say that it should be exhibited in dealing with candidates for the ministry whose qualifications are at the margin of acceptability, candidates about whom all would agree going in to the process that there is significant doubt or even reservation about their qualifications. Unhealthy diversity, however, is exhibited in dealing with candidates who are far from the margins of acceptability. On the one hand, men who are eminently qualified for faithful and fruitful ministry may be denied ordination because of excessive rigor in the process or because of party spirit. On the other hand, men whose qualifications for ministry are evidently substandard may be ordained because the examination process is culpably lax or because they are able to mouth the particular Shibboleths that are congenial to a presbytery.

If these situations persist, it is only a matter of time before some ministers ordained in one presbytery will not be received or recognized by others. Whenever this occurs, the unity of the church is threatened. When it becomes something other than an extremely rare event, we are no longer one church.

On the other hand, *unity* prevails when presbyteries uniformly respect each others' actions, particularly with respect to ordinations. *Consistency* prevails when candidates for the ministry cannot predict where they would most easily be ordained or where they could not be.

Perhaps it would be appropriate here to back up and approach the problem from yet another point of view, that of the call to the ministry. The Presbyterian approach to the call to the ministry is complex, involving the call of God and the call of the church, or as they might be alternatively designated, the internal and the external call. Yet these two sides of the call are not independent factors. The call of God is sovereign and determinative; in principle, the call of the church is the working out and confirmation of the call of God. If we identify the call of God exclusively with the term "internal call," we run the risk of supposing that the call of God is purely a personal affair between a

¹⁰ *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 28–29.

¹¹ *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 29.

man and God. The external call of the church is in reality no less the call of God than the internal call operating in a man's heart and conscience.

Having said this, however, we must always reckon with the fallenness of this world and the imperfection within it of even divinely ordained means and institutions. It is all too possible that the visible church may call to the ministry men whom the Lord has not called. Such are the plants that our heavenly Father has not planted, whose destiny is to be rooted up (Matthew 15:13). May we be spared from participating in the sins of such men!

On the other hand, it is also possible that the visible church may refuse to ordain men whom the Lord really is calling into the gospel ministry. In this world, such failures are inevitable, but it is still our duty to do all in our power to avoid them.

We ought to be equally concerned about failures on either side. Therefore, the way to discharge our duty wisely and faithfully is *not* that we should all become more and more rigorous in the licensure and ordination process until only men of apostolic giftedness and devotion can be ordained. Neither, of course, should we make the process so lenient that no qualified man, by any stretch of the term qualified, would ever encounter any difficulty.

We must strive to admit to the ministry those whom God is calling and to exclude from it those whom he is not calling. I am sure that you will agree that we must not seek to know whom God is calling by way of special revelation or mystical insight. Rather, we must do the hard work of designing and administering trials for licensure and ordination in such a way as is most fit, by the grace of God and under his providential guidance, to achieve a result consonant with the call of God.

Where do we go from here?

Our history and our convictions forbid a (worldly) top-down approach. In fact, according to Presbyterian conviction, there exists no ecclesiastical "top" from which pronouncements and directives can come down except the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, in so far as we have the law of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have all the top-down direction that we need or that we ought to allow. But in the visible church on earth, there is no ecclesiastical "top."

We are left with the process of mutual encouragement and exhortation among the ordained officers of the church, a process that is so distressing to control freaks of every stripe. I hope that our gathering together for this short conference will enhance that process and prove to be fruitful in mutual edification and for the peace and purity of the church.

To be specific, let me suggest two ways in which I believe that this conference may bear fruit. This will by no means be an exhaustive list.

First, by facilitating open discussion between members of candidates and credentials committees of various presbyteries, each presbytery may be better able to move towards the adoption of "best practices" in preparing men for the ministry and in the conduct of the trials for licensure and ordination. Undoubtedly, each presbytery exhibits different strengths and weaknesses. Let us share our strengths and correct our weaknesses! In doing so, I hope that we may also move towards a more perfect unity and consistency among the presbyteries.

My second suggestion flows from the fact that the preparation of men for the ministry is the concern of the whole church. I have already spoken about the power of

presbyteries, but there remains a legitimate role for the whole church, acting through the general assembly, in preparing men for the ministry. That is why the OPC has a Subcommittee on Ministerial Training within its Committee on Christian Education and has charged it to do the following:

- (1) Assist the churches in seeking out men with apparent gifts for the gospel ministry and in pressing upon them its urgent claims.
- (2) Consider means of strengthening the preparation of men for the gospel ministry.
- (3) Consult with representatives of seminaries or other educational institutions regarding the training of men for the ministry.
- (4) Recommend to presbyteries ways in which gifts of men under care may be developed and proved, and work with presbyteries in establishing suitable programs to this end.
- (5) Develop means for the continuing education and development of ministers.¹²

In my fifteen years of service on the SMT I have more and more come to see how large a task is outlined here! There are many things that we are not doing, but let me highlight two things that we are doing, which I believe you could help us to do better, which is my second suggestion.

First, the SMT conducts a program of seminary visitation. Reports on our visits to seminaries have been appearing in the report of the CCE to the general assembly in recent years, and these are available in the published GA minutes. We hope that these reports have been helpful to you in dealing with candidates coming from the seminaries that we have reported on, and we would be interested in your feedback on how useful the reports have been. How could we make them better? Our manpower is small, and we have enlisted ordained officers from outside the SMT/CCE to assist us in the visitation process. Let me thank those of you who have participated and ask all of you how you might help us to make the visit process more effective and helpful to the church.

Second, the SMT operates the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. (You will be hearing from some MTIOPC instructors later in the conference.) What is your experience with men who have taken one or more courses in the MTIOPC? Do these courses appear to have been helpful in preparing men for their trials for licensure and ordination? Have you taken courses yourselves? Do you see the MTIOPC as a wise use of denominational resources, both in terms of finances and manpower? If so, how can we make it better? For example, are there additional courses that we should be offering?

If these efforts and others like them are to be fruitful in a Presbyterian way, they need the support and participation of presbyteries. In asking for your help, I am seeking to keep these efforts truly Presbyterian.

Again, brothers, welcome! Now let us work together.

¹² *Standing Rules of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, X.2.c.*

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Servant Training

How to Prepare Spiritually for Ordination Exams

By Ryan M. McGraw

Taking a ministerial licensure or ordination exam must be an act of piety. Laying hold of this thought is the best means of approaching an exam without fearing the men who shall examine you. In many respects, preparing for licensure and ordination can be one of the best means to prepare for the pastorate. If we would be bondservants of Jesus Christ, then we must not seek to please men (Gal. 1:10). Being examined for the ministry is the first act among many in the ministry where a man must wrestle between speaking his conscience as it is informed by the Word of God, and seeking to tell others what he thinks they desire to hear. How you approach your exams will often indicate how you will approach your ministry. You must prayerfully seek to conduct yourself in your exam in a manner that is worthy of the office that you are seeking to enter. This means that you must be prepared to confess your faith in Christ and your desire to obey him with humility, submission, and sincerity, yet with boldness.

A ministerial examination is, above all, a test of the heart. Your examiners can discern what you present to them outwardly, but you alone can search your heart and pursue your exam as an act of worship to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. In all of your laborious preparations for the ministry, be sure to keep your heart diligently, for from it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). By the blessing of the triune God, the following considerations will help you to approach your examination as an act of piety.

1. Regard your examination as a public testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the truths of his Word. Through it, you must confess with your mouth what you believe in your heart (Rom. 10:9). This should make your exam an act of worship. This is true whenever you speak in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you confess him before men, then he will confess you before his Father in heaven, but if you deny him before men, then he will deny you before his Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32–33). If you are confident that Christ is pleased with your answers, then the presbytery should be pleased, too.

2. Approach your exam in prayer and in faith. Philippians 4:6–7 asserts, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”¹³ There have been times in my ministry where I have prayed fervently through this passage daily in order to persevere. This text provides you with the biblical means to deal with anxiety in terms of both a command and a promise. Pray through all of your preparations to ensure that your studies are driven into your heart and life by the work of the Holy Spirit, and do not

¹³ Scripture citations are taken from the New King James Version.

neglect thanksgiving! When we give thanks to the Lord for and during the circumstances that have tempted us to be anxious, then we both place our trust in him and we confess his sovereign wisdom.

3. **Consider the cause of your fears.** Frequently, we must reason ourselves out of fear. Why else do we dread an examination other than the fact that we may potentially fail, together with the ensuing consequences of failure? This highlights a great danger in the ministry. Once you are ordained and the fear of passing or failing an exam is removed, the temptation to become lax in the charge that you have received from Christ becomes stronger. If you neglect your knowledge of the Word of God and cease to grow in your study of theology, then you may not “fail” an exam, but you must answer to Christ for the weak emaciated sheep who are under your care, who are unable to stand against the assaults of the evil one. Fear prior to an exam may be “natural,” but remember: “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:6; Ps. 118:6). The Lord warned Isaiah that it is audacity against God for one of his messengers to fear men: “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of a son of man who will be made like grass” (Isa. 51:12).

4. **Be honest and keep a clear conscience before God and men.** If you do not know the answer to a question, then be honest and say so. Would you really want to stand before a congregation and say, “thus says the Lord,” when you are not sure whether he has actually said so or not? If so, then why would you desire to do so before ordained men who are examining you for the ministry? Besides this, giving an answer when you are unclear or uncertain will almost always get you into trouble—especially in an oral exam.

5. **Remember that ministry is bold.** Some candidates for the ministry object that they do not perform as well in oral exams as in written ones. If such is the case, then your oral exam will be even more profitable to help prepare you for the ministry. Most of a minister’s public work in the local church is verbal and not written. If you intend to speak in the name of Christ from the pulpit, then it is good for you to learn to speak without shame before a presbytery or before an examination committee. Though often intimidating, a presbytery (or comparable ordaining body) is a relatively friendly environment, whereas an unbelieving world, and at times a congregation, is not. Let us imitate the apostles by praying for boldness (Acts 4:29; Phil. 1:19–20).

6. **Remember that those who will be examining you for the ministry have been given a sacred trust from the Lord.** They are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). When they admit others into their number through the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14, etc.), they must take care that they do not lay hands on anyone hastily, lest they share in the sins of those who prove to be unfit for the office (1 Tim. 5:22).¹⁴ Be humble and be respectful of the solemn charge that has fallen upon such men and that, if the Lord wills, you shall one day share. Would you truly desire your examiners to ordain you to the ministry carelessly or mistakenly, any more than they should desire to do so?

7. **Look upon a thorough ordination exam as a confirmation of your call to the ministry.** Remember that the triune God uses his church to set men apart for the gospel ministry. When a man has a personal sense of call to church office, and this call is

¹⁴ See the “Appendix” below.

confirmed both by the election of a local congregation and by a group of previously ordained elders, then, and then only, shall that man know with confidence that the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer (Acts 20:28). Your motive for ministry must be love to the God who has first loved you in Christ (1 John 4:19). Your goal in the ministry must be to proclaim the love of the Father, as it is manifested through the grace of Jesus Christ, by means of the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18; 2 Cor. 13:14). However, your call to the ministry must never be a bare internal desire or a mere individual decision. We are easily self-deceived. Men may have a virtually invincible “sense of call” to the ministry in their hearts, but unless the church agrees that this is the case, both on the local level and on the presbytery level, the fact remains that such men have not actually been “called” to the ministry. The simple reason for this is that the church has not yet given him a call to labor as one of its ministers! I have known men who believe that they are called to the ministry, and yet virtually no one in the church seems to agree with them. May you never forget: “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). Your exam is neither a formality nor is it superfluous. There is no example of an ordinary officer in the New Testament who was not elected by the people and ordained by the laying on of the hands of a presbytery. A call to the ministry is always a churchly affair. If Christ is calling you into the ministry, then your exam is part of how he is doing so.

8. Remember that your examiners are your potential future colleagues in the ministry. If they have been duly called to their office, then their desire should be for the good of the church. This includes the good of your soul. You must avoid viewing these men as “enemies,” but look upon them as fellow soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of them are experienced veterans from whom you have much to learn. How often have young men scoffed at criticism that they have found later to be “words of wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:2)?

9. Regard taking an ordination exam as an excellent exercise in self-denial. Whether you pass or fail, the Lord is at work both in you and in his church through this process. Submit to his providence humbly and, if at all possible, cheerfully. A good test of whether we are denying ourselves is to consider whether we find ourselves complaining about the process. Theological students who complain over a heavy course load become candidates who complain about their exams. Candidates who complain about their exams, in turn, become ministers who complain about their churches and their presbyteries. Faithful and hard-working ministers realize quickly that the most rigorous course of seminary training cannot compare to the difficulties of the pastorate. If you find yourself developing a sinful pattern in this area, then deny yourself, pray that you might be content in whatever state you are in (Phil. 4:11), and read Numbers 11 and following regularly!

10. Preparing for your exam should provide you with a stronger foundation for biblical knowledge and personal piety. We must avoid making a sharp distinction between knowledge and piety. We must know what we practice, and we must practice what we know. The truth, as it is revealed in Scripture, is according to godliness (Titus 1:1). Every truth of Scripture including—among many others—the two natures of Christ, the covenant of works, the efficacy of the sacraments, the law of God, and the Trinity, has been derided as theological “hairsplitting.” Yet each of these areas has significant pastoral implications. If we do not see how true theology is “profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), then the fault invariably lies with us rather than with the Word of the triune God. If nothing else, all theological truth must increase our personal communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In order to pass a bar exam, a future lawyer must know the law *and* how to apply it. The same standards apply to medicine and to other disciplines. Should we expect less diligence and fewer rigors with respect to future ministers of the gospel? Studying for an exam frequently forces men to tie together more comprehensively what they have learned in seminary. Candidates should use this rare opportunity to pray these truths more fully into their hearts and lives. Preparing for your exam forces you to review your knowledge, yet let it serve as an occasion to wed your knowledge to your piety as well. If you pursue your examination for the ministry as an act of piety, then you shall never find the experience barren or unfruitful.

APPENDIX: JOHN ERSKINE (1721–1803) ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDINATION EXAMS

In 1750, John Erskine preached a sermon entitled, “On the Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity.” Erskine was an influential Scottish minister who helped prepare Jonathan Edwards’s *History of the Work of Redemption* for publication. He concluded this sermon with an exhortation to presbyteries regarding their involvement in ordaining men to the gospel ministry. Erskine’s material re-enforces what is written above by viewing ministerial examinations from the standpoint of the examining body. I have broken down the original large paragraphs into smaller parts for easier reading.¹⁵

How awful is the warning of Paul to Timothy, and in him to all concerned in ordaining others to the pastoral office! *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.* As if he had said, though you have no particular reason to suspect a candidate unfit for the ministry, be not on that account slight and superficial in trying his qualifications for it, but examine, with the utmost care and exactness, his moral character and aptness to teach; for if, through indolence and carelessness, you neglect to make those inquiries, upon which you might have discovered what was amiss; or if, through an excessive tenderness for candidates, through that fear of man which bringeth a snare, or through some other unworthy motive, you so far connive at his known vices or defects, as to grant him ordination; by this conduct, you partake with him, not only in the sins he has already committed, but also in those which he shall afterwards commit, while he either teaches or lives badly; and therefore, you must answer for all the pernicious consequences of his ordination, in ruining his own soul, and the souls of his flock. Nay, should other ministers be unwarrantably rash in this matter, and urge you to concur with them, be not moved by their entreaties or authority, to act contrary to your own judgment, lest you be condemned as accessory to their guilt.

In the verse preceding this caution, ministers are charged *not to prefer one before another, and to do nothing by partiality*, i.e., not to determine a cause for or against a person till we hear what can be said on both sides; not to prefer one before another,

¹⁵ Taken from, John Brown (of Edinburgh), ed., *The Christian Pastor’s Manual: A Selection of Tracts on the Duties, Difficulties, and Encouragements of the Christian Ministry* (orig. pub., Edinburgh, 1826, reprint, Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1991), 136–140. Sadly, this excellent volume is now out of print. However, it can be downloaded in full from <http://www.puritanboard.com/f29/christian-pastors-manual-john-brown-39577/>.

where there appears no sufficient reason for such a preference; and not to be swayed by friendship or prejudice, to be favorable to one and more severe to another, than we ought to be. And, in the end of the chapter, to encourage this diligence, the apostle informs us, that if we proceed with due deliberation we shall not lose our labour, but shall ordinarily be able to form a judgment concerning candidates. *Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before them to judgment; and some men, they, viz. their sins, follow after. Likewise, also, the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they, viz. the good works, that are otherwise, cannot be hid.* The meaning is some men's sins are so heinous and notorious, that, going as it were before them to judgment, little or no trial is necessary to discover them. And the sins of others follow them to judgment; because, though less open, yet they also might, in most cases, by due inquiry, be brought to light. In like manner, the good works of some, and their fitness for ordination, are easily discerned, even before they undergo a formal trial; and those good works which are not manifest beforehand, but which, through the modesty or obscure situation of the performer, are little observed, may often, by a diligent search, be discovered.

From this remarkable passage . . . Grotius observes, that we ought not only to enquire, whether a candidate for ordination is innocent of atrocious crimes, but whether he has done much good, seeing the pious actions of the eminently pious can seldom be hid. And, agreeably to this, Paul requires, not only that a bishop be blameless, but that he have a good report with them that are without, lest he fall into reproach; so that freedom from gross scandals, without certain positive evidences of a pious disposition, is no sufficient warrant for us to ordain any. It is criminal to lay hands on a candidate, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will preach usefully; and it is equally criminal to do it, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will be an example to others in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity; for the last of these is as really a part of the minister's duty, and as really a means to be used by him for the saving of souls as the first. The things, says Paul to Timothy, that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. We must have probable evidence of their faithfulness, as well as of their ability to teach. Even deacons are first to be proved, and then to use the office of a deacon. Sure, then, ministers, whose office is much more honourable and important, should not be allowed to exercise it, till their fitness for it is well tried. . . .

If any allege that there would not be found a sufficient number of ministers for all our churches, did we ordain with such caution, I answer, it is better to hazard this inconvenience, than to break an express law of Christ, which, if less strict in ordaining, we certainly do. Let us mind our duty, and leave the event to providence. Strictness in admissions may, indeed, discourage those who bid fairer for starving or poisoning, than for feeding the souls of their flocks. But to discourage such is highly commendable: and a small number of able and faithful pastors, is more to be desired than a multitude of raw, ignorant, illiterate novices, incapable either to explain or to defend the religion of Jesus; or of polite apostates from the gospel to philosophy, who think their time more usefully and agreeably spent in studying books of science than in studying their Bibles; or of mercenary hirelings, of as mean and sordid a disposition as those we read of in 1 Sam. ii. 36, who crouched to the high-priest for a

piece of silver and a morsel of bread, saying, 'Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's office, that I may eat a piece of bread.'

May God, in mercy, prevent such low and unhappy men from ever creeping into the sacred function! May a faithful, an able, and a successful ministry, ever be the blessing of our land! May the glorious Head of the Church appoint unto every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and to all her assemblies, pastors according to his own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding! And may he, whose words are works, say to our church in general, and to this corner of it in particular, 'This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with righteousness, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame; but upon himself his crown shall flourish.'

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ServantReading

A Marriage Remembered

by Charles M. Wingard

Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage, by Eugene Genovese. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009, 144 pages, \$25.00.

Two of America's odder contemporary historians are Eugene Genovese and his late wife, Elizabeth (Betsey) Fox-Genovese, who died in 2007.

Although the couple's scholarly works cover a diverse range of subjects, it is the antebellum South's story, told through the eyes of slave and slave owner, for which the Genoveses will be long remembered. Distinguished by a comprehensive examination of the era's primary source materials, their scholarship never fails to impress and enlighten. Only 150 years have passed since the War Between the States, but the Old South is truly another world, one to which the Genoveses skillfully introduce students with the single most valuable gift great historians bestow—understanding of a people and their culture. As a minister, I especially appreciate the thoroughness and sensitivity with which they treat Southern religious life. Through the years, Eugene Genovese has become one of the premiere expositors of the Southern conservative intellectual tradition.

But what's odd about this couple is not their first-rate scholarship, but their intellectual and spiritual journey, from atheistic Marxism to their conversions to Roman Catholicism in the 1990s. This was not your ordinary marriage.

Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage is Gene Genovese's moving, provocative, and humorous tribute to his beloved wife, an extended reflection on the rich life they shared—from their first date to her death in 2007 after many years of physical decline and debilitating sickness.

Gene and Betsey's first date was their first meeting. His first impression of her was "Death Warmed Over," the effects of her battle with hepatitis and anorexia evident. He describes the evening:

When I arrived at five p.m., Betsey looked terrible. At six or so, she wasn't all that bad. At seven she had become sort of nice-looking. By eight, sitting across a table at Restaurant le Maître Jacques, she had blossomed into lovely. When I left her at one a.m. with a kiss on her forehead, she was radiantly beautiful. Almost forty years later, she was in immeasurably worse shape than when I first laid eyes on her. Physically broken and fighting for life, she was unable to get out of bed by herself; barely able to walk; wracked by relentless, searing pain. Still radiantly beautiful. (7)

Campus run-ins with fellow Marxists were not uncommon. The Genoveses deplored intellectual sloppiness and political correctness. On occasion, when debating or speaking

to ostensibly Christian audiences, they found themselves—two atheists—articulating Christian doctrine for the sake of intellectual honesty.

While teaching at the University of Rochester in the early 1970s, Gene and Betsey were invited to a public forum by two Catholic chaplains, liberation-theology Marxists. Quickly the chaplains had cause to regret the invitation. While confessing their commitment to work with the priests toward common political goals, the Genoveses asserted the incompatibility of materialistic Marxism and Christianity. Things grew hot. The author recalls:

In the end, we were driven to defend Catholic theology against ‘dissident Catholics’ who had no time for the fundamentals of Catholic theology, Church doctrine, and the teaching of the Vatican. So there we were, nonbelievers and committed Marxists, fervently defending the doctrines of original sin and human depravity against professed Catholics who replaced the ostensibly dated teachings of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas with those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Karl Marx of the utopian *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*—the jejune ‘early Marx’ whom neither Betsey nor I ever took seriously. (71)

In 1975, after speaking at a Unitarian church on the subject of slavery, members eagerly invited him to join their congregation. His atheism was no obstacle. Most of the congregation didn’t believe in God! After all, how could anyone believe in a God who permitted natural disasters, like the recent earthquake in Nicaragua, which claimed the life of baseball star and humanitarian Roberto Clemente en route to deliver aid to quake victims?

I gasped. How could well-educated and intelligent people talk such rubbish? Stunned and momentarily forgetting my atheism, I responded with an impassioned defense of Christian theology. I may not have believed in God, but I considered their objections an insult to my intelligence. I interpreted their remarks as meaning that God, to be worthy of worship, had to do whatever they wanted Him to—that God had to follow the dictates of their various consciences. I reminded my Unitarian hosts of the words of Genesis 23:50 [sic]: ‘The thing proceedeth from the Lord. We cannot speak unto you bad and good.’ (73)

I confess that I am fascinated by the Genovese intellectual pilgrimage and turbulent campus adventures, told within the context of a moving love story. Their marriage was marked by mutual devotion, affection, tenacity, and cheerful perseverance in the face of trials.

With thanksgiving the author concludes:

Betsey was the love of my life, and I have had no prouder yet more humbling sense of fulfillment than the knowledge that I was the love of hers.

With Betsey, my life was blessed. (137)

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ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

On the Road

O no, I'm not questing terrestrial nirvana—
just a simple stroll down this alpine dirt road.
The gravel, stirred by tire treads, evokes a childhood
memory of the excitement of road building—
the aroma of progress and the risk of travel.

Beside the road in wounded earth the bluits grow—
that's why we call them cow pees, because
adversity's their best soil—their metier.
O no, my trek is not a pilgrimage as goal—
perpetual peregrinations ending in road dust.

This road, like all others, has a destination—
the lodge at Shiloh, “that which belongs to him.”
To whom? The one who formed the bluits—
to him we sing praise—a journey hymn,
no gallivanting jaunt—but a dusty path to glory.