

# ORDAINED SERVANT



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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.

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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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## COVENANT AND CONVERSION

by

Peter J. Wallace

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church requires all communicant members to make a public profession of faith before the congregation. While the continental Reformed churches have had this practice for centuries, it is a fairly recent innovation in the Presbyterian tradition. As Samuel Miller put it in 1847, “*Our fathers of the Church of Scotland know nothing of the public parade in the middle aisle now so common.*”<sup>1</sup> While the form that the OPC uses is drawn from the continental practice, the roots of public profession in the Presbyterian church go back well into the nineteenth century, and are deeply entwined with the changing views of covenant and conversion.<sup>2</sup>

The Context:  
the Proposed Revision of the  
Book of Discipline of 1858

Presbyterian government and discipline was originally formulated under the parish system in Scotland where virtually every resident of the parish was a baptized member of the same church.

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<sup>1</sup> “Dr. Samuel Miller to the Rev. Smith Sturges,” June 21, 1847, quoted in Samuel Miller, Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D.* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869) II, 485.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is taken from chapter nine of my dissertation, “*The Bond of Union: the Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861*,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2004) available at <http://www.peterwallace.org/dissertation.htm>

Even after the American church had made several changes, the principles in the Presbyterian Book of Church Order did not always correspond to the practices of American Presbyterians. The conversionist piety of the nineteenth century rendered certain traditional Presbyterian practices nearly obsolete. The proposed revisions to the Book of Discipline, offered to the 1858 General Assembly, suggest that Old School Presbyterians were wrestling with how to maintain a balance between their contemporary setting and their more covenantal heritage.

At the Assembly of 1859 the committee, represented by its chairman, James Henley Thornwell, explained the most significant changes. The committee wanted to produce a shorter, more direct statement of Presbyterian discipline. Removing many statements of principle, the committee believed that the Book of Discipline should refrain from “preaching” or explaining the principles of discipline. “The doctrine upon which discipline is founded, and the motives with which it should be enforced, must all be presupposed.”<sup>3</sup> The new book would focus less on principles and more on statutes. It included significant changes in principle as well.

One of the most radical proposals was the removing of baptized non-communicant members from the discipline of the church. Thornwell argued that “it was no

more illogical to exempt them from discipline, than to exclude them from the Lord’s table.”<sup>4</sup> He claimed that a church member only becomes subject to church discipline through a profession of faith. Since a profession of faith was required for admittance to the Lord’s Supper, he argued that such profession should be required for discipline as well.<sup>5</sup>

The new book also proposed allowing communicant members to renounce membership by stating that they no longer believed themselves converted. Such persons then could be dropped from the membership rolls without a trial. Since Thornwell viewed the church as the assembly of the converted, it made no sense to make the unconverted remain. “It had been objected besides, that this right of withdrawal at pleasure made the church a voluntary society. He was surprised at such an objection. The glory of their church was that it was a voluntary society. God wanted no worshippers but voluntary worshippers.” Thornwell argued that no censure should be inflicted upon the spiritually dead. “He would have them bear in mind that the church did not punish—it did not bear the sword; its censures were designed as penitential—as a means of restoring an erring brother.” The unconverted were not brethren at all. “The proper way to deal with a member who wished to withdraw, was not to drive him out disgraced

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<sup>3</sup> J. H. Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” *SPR* 12.3 (October 1859) 376.

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<sup>4</sup> “Book of Discipline,” *CP* 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

<sup>5</sup> “General Assembly” *Presbyterian* 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

by censure, but simply to reduce him from the position of professed believer, to the condition of a non-professor—to the condition of the baptized children of the church-members over whom the church is watching—with whose errors it is bearing, and whom it is ever remembering in its prayers.”<sup>6</sup>

### 1. *The Status of Baptized Children*

The change that called forth the most controversy was the proposal to move baptized children outside of the discipline of the church.<sup>7</sup> Many were initially sympathetic. The editors of the *Central Presbyterian* noted that the revision would subject only communicant members to judicial proceedings. Since they had never heard of a case where judicial proceedings were instituted against a baptized non-communicant, it would not be much of a change. Besides, they claimed that it would be useless “to excommunicate one who has never communicated and who has no desire to communicate.” When the Virginia Baptist newspaper, claimed that this was “a manifest departure from Presbyterian Pedobaptism of the Old School,” the *Central Presbyterian* replied that baptized persons were still church members—only not subject to judicial process. The editors insisted that discipline was a far broader term than mere judicial process, and since baptized children were disciples, they were properly under the discipline of the church, in this broader sense. But in the end, they regarded this revision as simply bringing the book into conformity

<sup>6</sup> “Book of Discipline,” *CP* 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90. For the sake of space this essay will not deal with the debate on this second point.

<sup>7</sup> A survey of southern sacramental debates can be found in E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978) chapter seven.

with Presbyterian practice.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in 1853, the Synod of Pittsburgh had declared that baptized children were not properly the subjects of church discipline.<sup>9</sup>

Others, however, thought that the Virginia Baptists had a point. J. E. L. argued in the Philadelphia *Presbyterian* that forbidding discipline practically denied that baptized infants were in fact “members of the household of faith.”<sup>10</sup> Many feared that the change would move the church towards a more Baptist conception of church membership. The *Home and Foreign Record* reprinted an excerpt from the Rev. Joshua H. McIlvaine’s article in the *Princeton Review* warning that such baptistic views of the relation of children to the church “was deeply embedded... in the principles of the Puritans.” The author insisted that children should be treated as though they were “presumably of the elect,” being trained under the teaching and discipline of the church. He objected to the tendency in Presbyterian churches to speak of children “joining the church” when they came for their first communion, noting that revivalism

<sup>8</sup> “The Committee’s Report,” *CP* 3.36 (September 4, 1858) 142. It is interesting to note how often Pittsburgh and South Carolina concurred, in spite of their radical difference on slavery.

<sup>9</sup> *Presbyterian Advocate* 16.19 (February 22, 1854); cf. *Presbyterian Advocate* 16.5 (November 23, 1853). While young children were often left at home during worship services, one Virginian complained that parents were leaving their eight to fourteen year old children home in order to take care of their younger siblings. Whatever might be done with the younger ones, by the time children reached the age of eight, it was expected that they would at least come to worship. “Children Absent from the House of God,” *W&O* 7.12 (Oct 30, 1851).

<sup>10</sup> J. E. L., “Revised Book of Discipline,” *Presbyterian* 28.38 (September 18, 1858) 149.

and other “spasmodic efforts” had been relied upon rather than “religious education and discipline, the Divine ordinance to which the promise of regeneration and salvation for the children of believers” was attached.<sup>11</sup>

Concerned that “baptistic” views were growing in the Presbyterian Church, an anonymous author in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* set forth the case that all baptized members should be subject to the discipline of the church. He argued that failure to profess faith could be grounds for discipline at a certain point. He disagreed sharply with Thornwell that “voluntary assent” was necessary for discipline. Presbyterians had historically rejected the idea that the church was a “voluntary society.” Further, the emphasis on personal profession destroyed the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. “If the act of the parents in bringing

<sup>11</sup> [Joshua H. McIlvaine], “Covenant Education” *Home and Foreign Record* 12.4 (April 1861) 105-6. The full essay was, “Covenant Education,” *BRPR* 33.2 (April, 1861). McIlvaine (PTS 1841), who had been ordained in the New School, brought the First Presbyterian Church of Rochester into the Old School in 1853. From 1860-1870 he was professor of Belles Lettres at the College of New Jersey. His claim that New England Puritanism was friendly to Baptist principles is borne out by the phenomenal growth of the Baptists in New England during the Great Awakening (from 1740-1800 New England Baptists went from around 40 churches to 300 churches—largely drawn from the Edwardsean movement), contrasted with their poor growth in regions dominated by Presbyterians (from around 20 churches to 40 churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, largely drawn from English and Welsh immigrants). See Peter J. Wallace, “Visible Saints and Notorious Sinners,” at <http://www.peterwallace.org/baptism.txt>

the child under the covenant of baptism cannot properly place him under church jurisdiction, except it be confirmed by the child's own assent, why should they perform it in his infancy at all? Let the baptismal covenant be *something*, or *nothing*." Thornwell's proposal gave away too much to the Independents and Baptists. Rejecting the voluntary principle, he insisted that "God has not given to any human soul the right to choose whether he will belong to His visible kingdom or not."<sup>12</sup>

In reply, Thornwell insisted that he was not challenging the doctrine of infant baptism—he agreed that all baptized persons were "bona fide members of the Church."<sup>13</sup> But just as baptized children were excluded from the "privilege of the Lord's Table," he argued that they should also be excluded from the "the disability of judicial discipline." Both, he claimed, were determined by profession of faith: "To those who profess no faith in Christ it is as unmeaning and absurd to dispense the spiritual censures of the Church, as it would be to tie a dead man to the whipping post and chastise him with rods." For Thornwell, profession of faith included a claim to be

converted: "The possession or non-possession of faith divides the Church into two classes so widely apart, that it is simply ridiculous to think of treating them in the same way." The church seeks the conversion of baptized children, who should be considered dead in their sins. The converted are "already alive, and are to be dealt with as living men," whereas baptized children are "dead, and the whole scope of spiritual effort is to bring them to Him who can quicken the dead. Discipline is for the living and not for the dead."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Thornwell argued that his opponents erred in seeing discipline as "a punishment for the offender." Rather, Thornwell insisted that "There are no punishments in the Church of God, it is founded upon a dispensation of grace and not of law." Indeed, "When men show by their contumacy that they were not sons, they are then cut off from the Church, on the very ground that they are incapable of discipline."<sup>15</sup> Excommunication, for Thornwell, was not really discipline at all, but the declaration that discipline had failed.

Thornwell particularly objected to the idea that baptized members could be disciplined for failing to profess faith. Citing the Directory for Worship, he agreed that "when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's Supper"<sup>16</sup> Thornwell stood within the historic Presbyterian mainstream when he claimed that baptized children should not be

disciplined for lack of profession and declared that the church should not "revoke their privileges, but bear with them as patiently as her Master;" but he departed from the traditional view because he failed to see that the Directory did not require a profession of conversion. Indeed, the Directory did not even require a public profession, but only that they be "free from scandal, appear sober and steady and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body." But for many on both sides of the debate this requirement had long been overlooked.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Profession and Discipline: the Edwardsean Background

Thornwell's proposal grew out of a gradual alteration of Presbyterian sacramental theology and practice. For over a generation, Presbyterians had been diverging from the formal requirements of their Directory for Worship. Presbyterians had traditionally taught that baptism gave "an interest in and a right unto" the Lord's Table, which right could be exercised by faith. At baptism the infant entered into covenant with God and with the church. Therefore all baptized persons were members of the church. Admission to the Lord's Table did not change the person's relation to the church, but was merely the proper response of the one who had been baptized into Christ.<sup>18</sup> This approach had grown

<sup>12</sup>Anonymous, "The Changes Proposed in our Book of Discipline" *SPR* 12.1 (April, 1859) 49-50.

<sup>13</sup>J. H. Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," *SPR* 12.3 (October 1859) 398. One Pittsburgh writer went further. He argued that the long practice of calling baptized persons "*Church members*... is a misnomer." He insisted that a "profession of faith in Christ" was necessary for both government and discipline. "Without 'faith in Christ' the merely baptized are not a whit better than others." The only advantage they have is the "special interest, sympathies, and prayers of the Church for their conversion and salvation." L. D., "The Revised Discipline--Baptized Members," *Presbyterian Banner* 6.52 (September 18, 1858).

<sup>14</sup>Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 400.

<sup>15</sup>Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 401.

<sup>16</sup>Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 401-402, citing "Directory for Worship" 9.1 (1839).

<sup>17</sup>Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 405.

<sup>18</sup>For more on traditional Reformed and Presbyterian sacramental theology and practice, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Lewis Bevens Schenk, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Cove-*

out of the parish system in the established church of Scotland, where virtually every member of the community was also a member of the church. Prior to the advent of revivalism in Scotland in the eighteenth century, it was common to have 75-80 percent of the adult population of the parish partake during communion.<sup>19</sup> Revivalism would gradually alter Scottish practice in some places, but its effect in America was quicker and more comprehensive due to the voluntary nature of the church.

In 1857 Charles Hodge suggested that a careful analysis of Presbyterian baptismal statistics over the past fifty years indicated that the Old School was seeing a fourfold decline in the number of infant baptisms. While the birthrate had dropped perhaps 50 percent since 1800, that was inadequate to explain the dramatic drop in the baptismal rate. But traditional Presbyterian baptismal practices had changed considerably since 1800. Through the eighteenth century Presbyterians had baptized the children of all members, and since all baptized persons were considered members, they did not require parents to profess to be converted before bringing their children for baptism.

Edwardsian influence led to a growing number of Presbyterians

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*nant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). Also see Peter J. Wallace, "Visible Saints and Notorious Sinners" at <http://www.peterwallace.org/baptism.txt> for a study of the eighteenth century debate.

<sup>19</sup>John Macpherson, "The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology" in *Anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed Literature* Vol. V, edited by Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1992). For a brilliant study of the development of Presbyterian discipline in Scotland, see Michael F. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

who would only baptize the children of those who had personally professed to be converted. When the Synod of New York and Philadelphia refused to endorse the Edwardsean view in the 1770s, the Rev. Jacob Green formed the independent Morris Presbytery in 1780. In 1794 the General Assembly insisted that all that was necessary was a "visible and credible profession of Christianity," refusing to require a profession of conversion.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, by the 1810s a number of younger ministers were switching to the Edwardsean practice. Jacob's son, Ashbel Green, however, returned to the Presbyterian church and defended the traditional Presbyterian practice, resisting his father's innovations throughout his life.

After the excision of the New School, the baptismal rate increased slightly because the New School was largely Edwardsean in its baptismal practice, whereas the Old School was divided. By 1857, however, many Old School churches had adopted the Edwardsean plan of baptizing only the children of communicant members—and only allowing those who believed themselves to be converted to become communicant members.<sup>21</sup> The traditionalists were now in the minority. Hodge's statistics reflected this clear change in Presbyterian baptismal practice.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judiciary of the Presbyterian Church...* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 81.

<sup>21</sup>B. "Is Infant Baptism Neglected?" *Presbyterian* 27.5 (January 31, 1857) 17. He cites Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander as two defenders of the traditional Presbyterian practice. (B. and L. were writers in the *Presbyterian*. I have been unable to identify them for certain, though I have my suspicions!

<sup>22</sup>Editorial, "The Supposed Decline of Infant Baptism," *True Witness*

All changes in practice have effects on the theology of the church. The emphasis on conversion as a prerequisite for both the Lord's Table and the baptism of one's children led to a corresponding decrease of attention to the nurture of baptized children.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps not accidental that the early nineteenth century saw a declining emphasis on catechetical training, and a growing emphasis upon "Sunday school" as a means of converting children.

By 1841, "L" was concerned that many Presbyterians did not consider baptized children to be true members. In response he declared, "There are no empty forms in the institutions of our holy religion; there is a living, practical import in every ordinance. But where is the efficiency? where the great utility of this covenant relation, when parents and pastors and church sessions, for the most part, treat it as a mere name, a theoretic not a practical relation?" Urging the church to take its covenant obligations more seriously, he urged the church to consider baptized children as "indeed 'baptized into Christ.'"<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the 1840s discussion had continued as to the nature and import of baptism. The *Charleston Observer* reflected the

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3.47 (February 26, 1857).

<sup>23</sup>Glenn A. Hewitt has provided a study of some of the theological paradigms in the controversy. Glenn A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

<sup>24</sup>L. "Baptized Non-Professors" *Presbyterian* (August 14, 1841) 130. The Synod of Virginia addressed these concerns in their "Pastoral Letter Of the Synod of Virginia on the Baptism and Instruction of the Children of Church Members," *Watchman of the South* 8.11 (Oct 31, 1844) 41.

New England influence in a debate between “Justice” and “Discipulus.” Discipulus insisted that “The seed of unbelievers are not regarded as fit subjects for the ordinance of baptism”; therefore only the children of communicant members should be baptized.<sup>25</sup> Justice, however, pointed out that this was not the historic Reformed practice. Citing Samuel Rutherford and Theodore Beza, he argued that all who professed the true religion should have their children baptized—and a professor was “one who having been baptized and thus incorporated into the visible Church, makes an outward profession of his faith by a continued attendance upon public worship.”<sup>26</sup> If baptized persons were truly members of the church, then so long as they were a part of the covenant community, their children should also be baptized. Both sides acknowledged that baptism was a sign of the covenant, but for those influenced by New England theology, the covenant was mediated directly through the parent’s individual faith, while for traditional Presbyterians, a profession of faith included their continued attendance upon the means of grace.

In 1847, Horace Bushnell published *Discourses on Christian*

*Nurture*, a pamphlet that caused no small stir in New England for its attack on the premises of revivalism. Charles Hodge responded by suggesting that while Bushnell’s views might be “strange” and “distorted” in certain respects, his “organic” treatment of the relationship of the child to the church had a downright “‘Old school’ cast.”<sup>27</sup> While disagreeing with Bushnell’s naturalistic mode of expression, he agreed entirely with the basic thrust of Bushnell’s argument, endorsing “a confident expectation, in the use of the appointed means, that the children of believers will become truly the children of God.”<sup>28</sup> While appreciative of the effects of revivals, Hodge objected that under the revival model, many “seem to regard this alternation of decline and revival as the normal condition of the church,” forgetting the regular means of grace.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. *Profession and Discipline: Excommunicating Non-Communicants*

The changing understanding of the relationship between baptized children and the church is illustrated in the 1856 debate between George D. Armstrong and “Old School” over the issue of whether baptized children could be excommunicated. Armstrong argued that while baptized children were subject to “discipline,” this did not include judicial discipline. Indeed, he agreed with Thornwell that bap-

tized children cannot be removed from the “communion” of the church because they have never been received into communion in the first place.<sup>30</sup> Baptized non-communicants have no “vital union with Christ,” and so they are shut out from the table. Armstrong took a literal definition of the word and argued that excommunication cut one off from the communion of the church.<sup>31</sup>

“Old School” replied that scripture and church order defined excommunication more broadly than just being cut off from the “communion of the church.” Rather, it cut one off from the church itself. He took four weeks to trace the exegetical and historical understanding of excommunication, demonstrating that “the term ‘excommunicated’ is equivalent to ‘being destroyed from among the people,’ and the former expression is used instead of the latter because it is shorter and more convenient.” Since baptized children formed part of the visible church, they were, by definition, subject to the penalty of excommunication if they refused to “hear the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

Armstrong replied by citing Thornwell: “The baptized non-professor is actually in the very position in relation to the sacraments and communion of the church, in which excommunication put the professing offender. The key is turned and both are shut out from the inner sanctuary.”<sup>33</sup> None-

<sup>25</sup>Discipulus, “The Proper Subjects of Infant Baptism,” *CO* 15.7 (February 13, 1841) 27.

<sup>26</sup>Justice, “The Children of Baptized Parents the Proper Subjects for Baptism,” *CO* 15.11 (March 13, 1841) 43. Justice noted that Beza had urged that even the children of the excommunicated should be baptized in hope of their repentance. This was part of Beza’s argument for the validity of Roman Catholic baptism: “Popery is an erring of the Christian Church. Wherefore the Lord hath in the midst of that gulf of Papistry preserved baptism, that is, the first entering into the Church.” Justice cites Beza’s “Epistle 10,” *Works* (London, 1574) 623.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” *BRPR* 19.4 (October 1847) 501.

<sup>28</sup>Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 503. It is not accurate to say that Hodge initially approved of Bushnell’s work, and then later came to question it. Hodge states serious objections both at the beginning and the end of his review, stating only that he approves of Bushnell’s goal, not his naturalistic explanations.

<sup>29</sup>Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 518.

<sup>30</sup>GDA, “The Relation of the Church to her baptized children No 2,” *CP* 5.40 (October 6, 1856) 157.

<sup>31</sup>GDA, “The Relation of the Church to her baptized children No 3,” *CP* 5.41 (October 13, 1856) 161.

<sup>32</sup>Old School, “The Relation of Baptized Children to the Church—No 2-5,” *CP* 5.42-26 (October 20-November 17, 1856) 169, 173, 177, 181. Quote from p177.

<sup>33</sup>GDA, “The Relation of the church to her baptized children No 4 (in reply to Old School’s No’s 1 and 2),”

theless, Armstrong also agreed with Hodge's presumption of election—that the church baptizes a person because “we presume he is one of the elect.”<sup>34</sup>

In their lengthy debate over the meaning of excommunication and whether baptized non-communicants could suffer it, both assumed that if discipline were applied to non-communicants, then it would require the church to excommunicate those who failed to profess faith.<sup>35</sup> This reflects the degree to which Edwardsean principles had gained a foothold in the Old School. As covenant theology became more and more identified with individual conversion, the idea of an adult non-communicant member was becoming increasingly difficult to hold together with the idea that all baptized persons were full members. The Thornwellians, therefore, reduced baptized non-communicants to nominal members, while their opponents sought to eliminate the category of adult non-communicants altogether.

#### 4. *What Is a Profession of Faith?*

Only a few recognized the false dichotomy. The Rev. J. G. Shepperson was one. He published a defense of the traditional Presbyterian view in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in 1853.<sup>36</sup> The editors (who included Thornwell), noted that they preferred the Edwardsean view, but would allow

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CP5.48 (December 1, 1856) 189.

<sup>34</sup>GDA, “The Relation of the church to her baptized children No 5,” CP 5.49 (December 8, 1856) 193.

<sup>35</sup>The debate continued almost weekly until May 4, 1857.

<sup>36</sup>Rev. J. G. Shepperson, “On the Nature and Importance of a Christian Profession, and its Connexion with Membership in the Visible Church,” *SPR* 6.4 (April, 1853) 484-507. This essay is available at <http://www.michianacovenant.org/sermons/shepperson.html>

Shepperson to present his case. Shepperson argued that “A Christian profession does not consist, either wholly or in part, in a declaration that he who makes it either is, or believes himself to be, a regenerate person.” Shepperson rejected the claim that “the Church is to consist solely of regenerate persons,” and fretted that Thornwell and others claimed that members could dissolve their connection with the church simply by claiming to be unconverted.<sup>37</sup> He pointed to both the Old and New Testaments, where professions of faith made no claims to regeneration or conversion but simply declared belief in “the Lord Jesus.”<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, Shepperson argued, “The Church is the visible kingdom of God, distinguished from every other society by this important circumstance, that all her members, and no others, are bound by a solemn and public covenant to the evangelical service of Jehovah.” Through baptism, each member is obligated to keep covenant with God: “As it is by baptism one is made a member of the Church, it is, of course, by that ordinance he is brought into this covenant. And a Christian profession is simply a cordial and open acknowledgement of the obligation which the covenant imposes.”<sup>39</sup> Shepperson emphasized the objective reality of the sacraments. Whether infant or adult, baptism “is the same, and its symbolical meaning the same; moreover, it seals the same promises, and imposes the same obliga-

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<sup>37</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 490.

<sup>38</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 490-491. R. J. Breckinridge made a similar argument at least on this point in “The Nature and Import of a Christian Profession,” *Danville Quarterly Review* 1.2 (June, 1861) 230-247.

<sup>39</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 494.

tion.”<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Shepperson argued that very young children could make valid profession of faith: “it cannot be consistently maintained concerning any human being, that he is too young to become a communicant, unless it is maintained that he is likewise too young to become an evangelical believer; and that the command to believe has, as yet, no application to his case.”<sup>41</sup> In reply to those who claimed that children were “not competent to transact serious business,” Shepperson argued that “a child is capable of deciding, which is preferable, the service of Christ, or the service of Satan.” Indeed, he argued that it was “*in the Church* we enjoy those means which the Saviour has appointed for *confirming the souls of the disciples*; hence the more pressing the danger, the more urgent the necessity for such a connexion.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore the only proper ground of excommunication was when someone explicitly, by word or deed, “renounced the baptismal covenant...his allegiance to the Lord Jesus.”<sup>43</sup> While Thornwell might wish to allow a member to withdraw, Shepperson argued that withdrawal from the church was nothing less than excommunication—and excommunication required an “explicit avowal” that the offender was an apostate—an enemy of Christ.<sup>44</sup>

#### 5. *The Creation of a New Ritual: Public Profession*

But as Presbyterians gradually adopted the New England practice

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<sup>40</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 500.

<sup>41</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 504.

<sup>42</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 504.

<sup>43</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 505.

<sup>44</sup>Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 506.



of requiring a personal profession of conversion, they also began adopting the Congregationalist ritual of public profession as well. The Presbyterian Form of Government stated that the session had the power to receive members. Traditionally this had been done by examination. The only public ritual that accompanied the admission of a person to the Lord's Table was the Lord's Supper itself. Gradually, however, Presbyterians began to imitate the rite of public profession found in the New England Congregational churches.<sup>45</sup> Predictably, the New School took the lead, but even they were cautious. In 1865, the New School General Assembly declared that new members were received by the vote of the session, and except in the case of new converts who needed to be baptized, no further rite was required. Nonetheless, they permitted sessions to "prescribe a public profession of faith before the whole church as a convenient usage, and for this purpose may employ a church confession and covenant." But they insisted that these public professions were entirely optional and must never be presented as though this were the real entrance into church membership.<sup>46</sup> The reunited General Assembly of 1872 added that if a session chose to have a public profession for covenant youth it must show a clear distinction from that used for public professions associated with adult baptisms.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup>The Dutch Reformed churches also practiced public profession, but I have been unable to find any Old School references to this.

<sup>46</sup>Moore, *Digest* 129. The irony is that the OPC Book of Discipline is more Congregational than the New School, presenting public profession as the real entrance into church membership, rather than the session's action.

<sup>47</sup>Moore, *Digest* 671-678. Again, our Directory for Public Worship uses identical forms for baptism and public profession, showing our de-

The Presbyterian church, though influenced by congregational forms, was still intent on keeping the sacrament of baptism distinct from its new rites of public profession.

But these official developments simply reflected the growing practice of the church. Numerous churches were creating a new ritual in Presbyterian worship—the public profession of faith. But these changes did not come without objections. In 1847 Samuel Miller declared that the practice of receiving members by public profession was "not a child of Presbyterianism, but wholly inconsistent with it, and the real offspring of Congregationalism. . . . The church with us is regulated by the *Session*, made up of *representatives* of the church members." Miller went on to insist that "Our fathers of the Church of Scotland know nothing of the public parade in the middle aisle now so common."<sup>48</sup>

Several presbyteries also weighed in on the issue. In 1855 the Presbytery of Elizabethtown in New Jersey wrote a letter to all sessions throughout the Old School, urging them to return to the Presbyterian practice of receiving communicants directly by the session, "without receiving publicly on consenting to a confession read to them."<sup>49</sup> In 1856 the Presbytery of Cincinnati received a complaint regarding the practice of the Seventh Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati which had permitted the public profession of baptized persons at the same time as the baptism of new converts. One observer

parture from the historic Presbyterian practice.

<sup>48</sup>"Dr. Samuel Miller to the Rev. Smith Sturges," June 21, 1847, quoted in Samuel Miller, Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D.* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869) II, 485.

<sup>49</sup>*St Louis Presbyterian* 11.45 (May 10, 1855).

commented, "in coming to the ordinance of the Lord's supper for the first time nothing is required of them in the constitution of the church, but simply, 'that they shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety.' That is all." Indeed, he suggested that anything more communicates the wrong message. He feared that this would "necessarily lead to error in doctrine as well as disorder in practice."<sup>50</sup> New rituals invariably led to new theology. By introducing the innovation of public profession, some feared that Old School Presbyterians were functionally creating a new sacrament.

In 1862 "A True Presbyterian" objected that many Kentucky churches had begun to "ask the member or members received, to stand up in the aisle or pew, and give their assent to certain articles, and make pledges in regard to their future conduct, and avow their sense of the fearful responsibility connected with a public profession of religion." He argued that this approach placed the focus on the new communicant himself rather than Christ. The session should call him to fix his eyes on Christ as the source of his hope, and not point him to his own profession. Further, it "conveys the impression that the person thus assenting is then and thus introduced into the Church. Whereas, according to the theory of the Presbyterian Church, such an one was 'engrafted into Christ,' and partook of the benefits, (to some extent) of the New Covenant, and became members of the visible Church, when baptized." In addition, he said that such public professions created a new catechism for the church, ignoring the church's catechisms.<sup>51</sup> The editor,

<sup>50</sup>Observer, "Unconstitutional Practice in the Church," *PW* 16.1 (September 25, 1856).

<sup>51</sup>A True Presbyterian, "Mode of Admitting Baptized Persons to the Lord's Supper," *True Presbyterian*

Stuart Robinson, concurred that the practice was foreign to Presbyterian doctrine. He pointed out that the Synod of Kentucky had “formally censured the use of the abbreviated creeds framed by pastors for such purpose” many years before.<sup>52</sup>

#### 6. *The Consent of the Governed?*

The Thornwellian view assumed a theory of republicanism that insisted upon the consent of the governed—or in this case, the consent of the disciplined. William Engles, editor of the *Presbyterian*, agreed with Thornwell that baptized children were not proper subjects of discipline: “they have made no covenant vows; they have never, by any act of their own, acknowledged their subjection to the authorities of the Church.”<sup>53</sup> While admitting that they had a preferred status to the heathen, Engles argued that baptized children were “heirs of promises which they have not yet embraced.” As such they had the “status of avowed unbelievers,” and were considered “dead in trespasses and sins.” Further, excommunication would be pointless, since “the baptized nonprofessor is actually in the very position in relation to the sacraments and communion of the Church, in which excommunication puts the professing offender.”<sup>54</sup>

But others objected to this line of reasoning. “Conservative” wrote in the *Presbyterian* objecting to the “radical” implications of this change. Claiming that the “consent of the governed” was not accurate even in politics, he pointed out that we have no choice as to whether we

will be born into God’s covenant, any more than whether we will be born into civil citizenship.” A citizen cannot avoid the penalties of the law by claiming that he did not agree to it personally. Further, “Conservative” wondered what the church could then do about gross immorality in a baptized person? Thornwell had argued that the church only has jurisdiction of baptized persons through their parents—but what happens under that theory when they reach the age of 21? “It is incorrect to say that our system of government predicates discipline on the possession of spiritual life in its subject, and that its object is only to reclaim the backslider and recall to repentance.” Thornwell had failed to articulate the correct doctrine of discipline: “A just excommunication of a church-member proceeds on the supposition that he has now done something so thoroughly inconsistent and obdurate that it shows he is not a true child of God.” Another object of discipline, therefore, was to lop off dead branches. But “Conservative” did not then side with those who desired to discipline adult non-communicants for unbelief. “As long as they live morally, and attend the means of grace regularly, the privileges of that minor citizenship in Zion will by no means be cut off by expulsion.”<sup>55</sup> Standing firmly with Hodge, Shepperson and McGill, “Conservative” refused to surrender the traditional Presbyterian doctrine of children in the covenant.

#### *Conclusion*

David McKinney, editor of the *Presbyterian Banner* of Pittsburgh, summarized the concerns of many when he claimed that Thornwell’s view “*unchurched* our baptized youth.”<sup>56</sup> Appalled that Thornwell would consider baptized children to be “of the world,” and no better than excommunicants, McKinney declared that Thornwell had “no right so to speak of the children of the Church. They are born in the family. They are the offspring of God’s handmaidens. He says of them: They are mine.” He admitted that the church’s practice fell short of this doctrine, but that simply meant that “We have been sinners against the Word of God and our Standards; and now the effort is being made to alter our Standards, so as to make them conform to our sinful practice.” Calling upon the church to return to its roots, he called upon the Pittsburgh region to “teach our children that they are Christians, educate them as Christians, and treat them as Christians,” in the confidence that God would in fact give them the grace promised in their baptism.<sup>57</sup>

The revised Book of Discipline was never adopted—in part due to the division of the church in 1861. But subsequent discussions made it clear that Thornwell’s chief supporters resided in the South. The southern church generally had a lower view of the status of baptized children, which may well be connected to southern appreciation for revivals. While many northern Presbyterians recovered a more covenantal emphasis on Christian nurture, southerners increasingly emphasized conversion as the central moment of Christian identity. Not surprisingly, the southern Pres-

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(June 12, 1862).

<sup>52</sup>Editorial, “Mode of Admitting Baptized Persons to the Lord’s Supper,” *True Presbyterian* (June 12, 1862).

<sup>53</sup>*Presbyterian* 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

<sup>54</sup>Editorial, “Revised Book of Discipline,” *Presbyterian* 30.16 (April 21, 1860) 62.

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<sup>55</sup>Conservative, “The Revised Book of Discipline, Concluded,” *Presbyterian* 30.1 (January 1, 1860) 1. William Engles, the editor, replied that he remained convinced by Thornwell’s argument “that you cannot apply spiritual discipline except to those who profess to be spiritually minded.” Editorial, “Revised Book of Discipline,” *Presbyterian* 30.1 (January 1, 1860) 2.

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<sup>56</sup>Editorial, “The Proposed Changes,” *Presbyterian Banner* 7.32 (April 30, 1859).

<sup>57</sup>Editorial, “The Revised Book of Discipline,” *Presbyterian Banner* 8.35 (May 19, 1860).

## COVENANT AND CONVERSION

byterian Canons of Discipline adopted Thornwell's distinctive view, while the northern Presbyterian Book of Discipline maintained the traditional Presbyterian view.

### *Contemporary Appendix*

It is, perhaps, of some interest to point out that the PCA has abandoned Thornwell's position. They affirm that "All baptized persons, being members of the Church are subject to its discipline and entitled to the benefits thereof." (PCA BCO, 27-2). They go on to make it clear that adult non-communicants should not be excommunicated for their non-profession: "Adult non-communicating members, who receive with meekness and appreciation the oversight and instruction of the Church, are entitled to special attention. Their rights and privileges under the covenant should be frequently and fully ex-

plained, and they should be warned of the sin and danger of neglecting their covenant obligations." (PCA BCO, 28-4).

Likewise, the PCA follows the historic Presbyterian practice of receiving members through the session's action, and does not require public profession, except in the case of adult converts: "Communing members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table." (PCA BCO 6-2). With respect to children professing faith, "It is recommended, as edifying and proper, that baptized persons, when admitted by the Session to the Lord's Supper, make a public profession of their faith in the presence of the congregation. But in all cases, there should be a clear recognition of their previous relation to the church as baptized

members." (PCA BCO 57-4)

As for other historic Presbyterian churches, the RPCNA permits public profession (RPCNA Directory 1.7), but requires only the session's interview, while the ARP goes so far as to say that beyond the session's private interview, "the session shall not impose additional conditions of membership." (ARP FG V.C.1). Both churches require the membership vows to be taken before the session.

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The First Book of Discipline indicates that communicants were expected to know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the summary of the Law. From an early date, prior to admission to the Lord's Supper, members of the congregation were catechised by the minister and elders, and strenuous efforts were made to resolve disputes and tensions between members of the congregation. Tokens admitting to the Lord's table were issued to all those whose lives and doctrine were acceptable.... Visitors from other parishes who wished to receive Communion were expected to bring 'testimonials' as to their Christian faith and life from their own church. This examination of the congregation occupied a number of weeks prior to the Communion season, and each member had to be admitted afresh to the Lord's Supper.

In the Church of Scotland admission to the Lord's Supper for the first time was not marked by any special ceremony until the nineteenth century. The Assembly of 1570 had provided for the examination of children in 'the trew religion of Jesus, Christ' at the ages of nine, twelve and fourteen. But such arrangements had no status as qualifications for admission to the Lord's table. In fact the age at which children or young people first received Communion varied widely. James Melville records doing so when he was twelve, and Robert Blair when he was eleven. Walter Steuart of Pardovan mentions a French regulation that children should not be admitted until they 'be above twelve years of age'. He then continues, 'But I am sure, if children at nine years of age can express themselves piously and knowingly, shewing that they have the grace signified and promised, the seal of the promise cannot warrantably be denied unto them' (*Collections*, E., 1709, II.iv.2.). St Andrews Kirk Session decreed in 1595 that no one younger than sixteen should be admitted. But there was no general legislation or binding convention on the matter.

— Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology (pp. 5 & 6)



# FIRST CORINTHIANS 11:17-34:

## The Lord's Supper: Abuses, Words of Institution and Warnings

by

George W. Knight III

### Introduction

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is an important section in the letter to the Corinthians and therefore also an important section in the life and teaching of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and its Confessional Standards and *Book of Church Order*, as well as that of other Presbyterian and Reformed Churches<sup>1</sup>. The Confessional Standards refer to these verses more than fifty times and especially to the warning verses over twenty times.<sup>2</sup> It, therefore, demands our most careful attention.

### Outline and Persons in View

#### Outline

For us to understand well the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, we need not only to outline the account, and note the change in the persons addressed, but also to go through it in a careful way. The account divides itself into four parts. They are as follows:

1. Verses 17-22 - The statement of the problem: some are eating their own supper and not sharing with others with the result that those oth-

ers are hungry, and the Lord's Supper is not observed.

2. Verses 23-26 - The Apostle Paul reiterates the words of institution with their emphasis on "in remembrance of me"<sup>3</sup> (vs. 25) and "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (vs. 26), as the basis for his response to these and all other mishandlings of the Lord's Supper.

3. Verses 27-32 - This section, with its introductory "therefore" (vs. 27), is written in response to verses 23-26, and says that one must "discern the body" (of the Lord) as one eats, or one is in danger of eating and drinking "judgment on himself" (vs. 29). This is the section based on the significance or intention of the Supper.

4. Verses 33-34 - With its introductory "then," these verses now return to verses 17-22 and give Paul's explicit instruction for overcoming the problem mentioned in verses 17-22. They are "to wait for one another" "when they come together to eat" (vs. 33).<sup>4</sup> This is the section which most particularly returns to the original problem found in 17-22.

### Persons in View

The previous four-fold outline is also undergirded by a change in the person(s) and number(s) of the ones in view in each section.

1. Verses 17-22 - This section uses primarily the second person plural "you" (vss. 17-20 & 22), interspersed with Paul's own first person singular "I" (vss. 17-18 & 22 at the end), and a third person singular (vs 21). In this first section Paul is interacting with their abuses.

2. Verses 23-26 - Paul reports Jesus instituting the Supper with Jesus' own third person singular "he" throughout (vss. 23-26). This account is also given to the "you" who are the recipients (vss. 23-26). Paul introduces the account with his "I" (vs. 23).

3. Verses 27-32 - Paul applies the account of the words of the Lord's Supper and its meaning and significance. Here we find two steps on his part.

a. Paul applies the warning generally (verses 27-29), that is, to all, with his words given in the third person "whoever" (vs. 27), "a person" (vs. 28), "anyone" (a participle with an article, vs. 29), with verb forms in the same third person singular throughout verses 27-29, and with "himself" (vs. 29) referring back to the "anyone" that begins vs. 29. (It is for this reason that these words have been utilized by Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.)

b. Paul applies this section to his immediate hearers (verses 30-32) with the second person plural "you" (vs. 30) with the introductory words "that is why . . .", and also in the

<sup>3</sup> The translation usually cited or quoted is that of the English Standard Version (ESV). When other versions are cited, or my own translation is used, this will usually be noted.

<sup>4</sup> I am partially indebted to G. D. Fee, in his commentary on *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 532, for this outline, which has, however, been revised.

<sup>1</sup> Compare for example the *Belgic Confession*, Article 35, the *Second Helvetic Confession*, XXI, esp. sections 9 and 11, and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. and A. 81.

<sup>2</sup> See page 44 of Stephen Pribble, *Scripture Index to the Westminster Standards* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1994), which, however, does not include the relevant pages from the *Directory for Worship*.

specific words "many of you . . ." and "some of you . . .", which are then changed into a "we" in which he then includes himself with them (vss 31-32).

4. Verses 33-34 - Paul applies this teaching even more particularly to those who have committed the abuses in verses 17-22 in these verses 33-34. The language here is primarily second person plural "you" (vss 33-34), made even more specific by a third person "anyone" and "him" (vs 34). The whole section closes with Paul saying that he will give further directions when he comes, using the first person singular "I" (vs 34).

#### Abuses at the Lord's Supper

##### *Verses 17-22*

This first section is devoted to Paul's bringing the abuses to their attention.

He begins the section by saying immediately that he is not commending them in the following instructions (vs. 17, as he had in vs. 2, and he comes back to this lack of commendation in vs. 22), because with reference to the Lord's Supper they are not following what he had taught but rather "when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" (see near the end of the discussion of this section for further comments on this statement).

The significance of this "worse" "not for the better" is given in verse 18, namely, that in their coming together there are "divisions." He adds the interesting caveat "and I believe it in part." This is an oral report that he has heard. His caveat indicates that he is still inclined to believe what he has heard, even if only some of it may be true. His referring to "divisions" with the same Greek word as found in 1:10<sup>5</sup>, may make us

<sup>5</sup> The Greek word *scisma* is used elsewhere by Paul only in 12:25 in the sin-

think that Paul is saying that the abuses of the Lord's Supper are caused by that same party spirit that is dealt with in the first chapters. However, it is doubtful that this is true for several reasons: (1) the former divisions were further defined as "quarrels" and "jealousy" (1:11; 3:3-4), which is missing from this section, and here the divisions are along sociological lines (vss. 21-22; 33-34); (2) 1:12 mentions four names, here there are only two groups, and there is no anti-Pauline quarrel as there was in the first chapters; (3) the divisions are related here to their coming together (vs. 18), not to false allegiances to their leaders (cf. 1:11-12); (4) "I believe it in part" (vs 18) does not fit the situation described in 1:10-4:21, but it does fit this situation.<sup>6</sup>

Paul recognizes that the divisions are brought about by evil men (vs. 18), but that they are used by God's good sovereignty and providence for a good end: "for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (vs 19).

In verses 20-22 Paul deals with why there are divisions when they come together to eat. We can gather what Paul is rebuking by noticing those three key ideas or word-groups that are in this section: (1) "come together" (vss 17, 18, 20); (2) "eat" (vss 20-22); and (3) "divisions" or "factions" "among you" (vss 18-19, cf. vss 21, 22).<sup>7</sup>

Paul says categorically that they are not eating the Lord's Supper

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gular. The word is used elsewhere in the NT only in Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21, and then only three times in John, 7:43, 9:16, 10:19.

<sup>6</sup> The overview of the argument is from Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 527, but changed considerably.

<sup>7</sup> Again from Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 535, but presenting the material slightly differently.

when they come together (vs. 20). The reason for this absolute statement to them is given in the next verse, indicated by the introductory "for": "For in eating each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk" (vs. 21). This is further explained by a series of rhetorical questions in verse 22, the centerpiece of which is the question: "Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"

These charges and questions show that the "you" in view are not the whole church but only those he is charging with this abuse. We are led to this conclusion from three facts in his discourse. First, those he is rebuking are distinguished from those who are hungry (vs. 21), who are not being rebuked. Second, those who are being rebuked are the ones making the divisions and factions and they are distinguished from "those who are genuine among you [who] may be recognized" (vs. 19). Third, the questions asked are directed to the abusers who in verse 22 are distinguished from those they are humiliating because they "have nothing." Therefore, the statement of Paul in verse 17 that "when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" is primarily for those abusing the Lord's Supper, rather than being an indictment for the whole church.

Verses 21 and 22 taken together give the essence of Paul's outrage at them. It is that those that have their own meals do not share it with those who have nothing ("goes ahead with his own meal", vs. 21). The outcome is that the "have nots" are "hungry" and the "haves" are sated to such a degree that Paul may even say that they get drunk. The theological outcome of this selfishness is that there is no shared Lord's Supper for them and "the church of God" is "despise[d]" and those you "have nothing" are "humiliate[d]" (vs. 22).

Paul concludes this section by writing "What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not" (vs. 22). And by this he means the ones abusing the Lord's Supper.

### The Words of Institution and Their Significance

#### *Verses 23-26*

Since the abusers are not keeping the tradition which Jesus gave to Paul and which Paul gave to them, he feels constrained to repeat it in this section word for word. And he draws their attention to this institution by his opening "for" (vs. 23). In giving the institution in Jesus' own words, he is confronting them with our Lord's own words and intentions. Paul will then draw upon these intentions in his general words of warning in verses 27-29, as is evidenced by the transitional word "therefore" (vs. 27). (The purpose of this paper does not require a detailed consideration of these words which are so well-known and highly esteemed.)

The two intentions given in the words of institution, as well as the words of institution themselves, are referred back to with the "therefore" beginning vs. 27. Because these words are given not just for the Corinthian church but for every church and believer, what we learn from them applies to us and our church as well.

The first item is the statement by our Lord that the Supper is to be taken, "as often as you drink it," "in remembrance of me" (vs 25). This teaching of our Lord, as is demonstrated in the words "as often as you drink it," must govern our every reception of the Lord's Supper as an act "in remembrance of me." We may not forget this remembrance, as some of the Corinthians had done by their action of "each one goes ahead with his own meal" (vs 21). Every

receiving of the Supper must be a receiving of the Supper from Christ, and in so receiving it we must remember him in all his graciousness in laying down his life for us to satisfy God's justice (cf. Rom. 3:24-26). Just as they needed to be reminded to remember Christ, so must we, because these words are not just given by our Lord to the Corinthians, but in Paul and also in Luke they are the words of Christ to all who partake (cf. Luke 22:19, where it is stated after the bread, "Do this in remembrance of me"). In this passage Paul restates the words of institution (given to every church and believer) so that it may be used in the warning and for this particular church's problem. But we all need to acknowledge in our actions that we know what these words require of us.

The second item is the words of verse 26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Here we have the reminder that remembering our Lord Jesus Christ in this Supper is also a proclamation of his death and that until he comes. The Greek word "proclaim" (*katangelōw*) is used only in the NT by the Apostle Paul and in the Book of Acts.<sup>8</sup> It means generally to make known in public and thus here it is accurately translated "proclaim." The proclamation takes place when, or as often, "as you eat this bread and drink the cup". The partaking of this remembrance of our Lord's death does itself ensure that his death is thereby proclaimed. Since every partaking of the Lord's Supper is to be done in remembrance of him and particularly is a procla-

<sup>8</sup> The Greek word (*katagelōw*) is found eleven times in the Book of Acts and seven times in Paul, 1 Cor. 2:1; 9:14; 11:26; Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:17, 18; and Col. 1:28. It means to make known in public, with implication of broad dissemination, and in the NT is usually rendered in English as "proclaim" (as here) or "announce".

mation of his death, the Supper may not be partaken in any unworthy manner.

The Application of the Intention of the Supper: *First, in General*, to "Whoever" with the words of Warning (vss. 27-29; *then to the Corinthian Situation* (vss. 30-32)

#### *The Words of Warning Verses 27-29*

The first sentence in this section is very much taken up with what has been said in the preceding section. The Supper is in view with the words about eating the bread and drinking the cup and the guilt in view in doing so "in an unworthy manner" is "profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (vs. 27). Not only the contents, but also the transitional word "therefore,"<sup>9</sup> connects the contents of this verse with the words of institution and its intentions and thereby points to what follows as the consequence of that connection.

Furthermore, the relative pronoun "who"<sup>10</sup> is combined with a particle<sup>11</sup> "ever" so that it is properly translated "whoever." The meaning of this combination is given by the well-known Greek-English Lexicon (BDAG) in rather technical language (see footnote).<sup>12</sup> In summary form it

<sup>9</sup> The Greek word *wste* introduces independent clauses and means "for this reason, therefore, [or] so" according to W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1107. Hereafter referred to as BDAG.

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word *oj*.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek word *an*.

<sup>12</sup> The two Greek words *oj an* taken together with a subjunctive mood in the verb forms a relative clause that is virtually the protasis [the first part] of a conditional sentence. With the future tense of the verb in the apodosis [the second

may be said that the statement indicates that whenever this action is done in an unworthy manner by anyone, it will mean that that one will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

The qualification "in an unworthy manner" is the important element in this warning of the Apostle Paul. Here Paul uses an adverb to describe the activity (not the person's own inherent standing before God; for Paul's unworthy manner is not speaking about the person but about his action or way of partaking) as a partaking by him in an "unworthy" or "careless"<sup>13</sup> manner, and thus the translation of this one word is rendered with the phrase "in an unworthy manner." The unworthy manner is explicated by Paul in verse 28 as requiring him to "examine himself" and also in verse 29 as not "discerning the body," that is, there are two dimensions to this unworthy manner of partaking, within oneself which demands examination, and concerning the body which demands discernment. If the person partakes in an unworthy manner he "will be guilty of profaning,"<sup>14</sup> in the sense of liable for, the body and blood as if he had committed the deed of death against that one, and

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part], as here, it shows that the condition spoken of [in an unworthy manner] is thought of, as here, as resulting in a future guilt [i.e., he will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord], BDAG, 56, sections I, (b) and a.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG, 69. The Greek word is *anaxiwj* and it occurs only here in the NT (except for a later, and variant, reading found in verse 29 in the Majority text).

<sup>14</sup> The translation of the ESV of the Greek word *enocoj*. The NIV renders this by "will be guilty of sinning against", and the NASB renders the same section with the words "shall be guilty of" (without either "sinning against" or "profaning"); all renderings are followed by "the body and (the, NASB) blood of the Lord." BDAG has a similar suggested rendering for 1 Cor. 11:27.

thus must give an account of his actions. It is very clear that this guilt is seen with reference to the Lord's Supper and to what it represented, i.e., the giving of Christ's body and blood in his death.

There are those that would argue that the unworthy manner means only that kind of action of which the Corinthians have been found guilty in verses 17-22. They, in effect, want to restrict the application to them or at least to the kind of sins that they were guilty of and to nothing else but those. Calvin takes up this argument in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:27.

Some restrict it to the Corinthians, and the abuse that had crept in among them, but I am of opinion that Paul here, according to his usual manner, passed on from the particular case to a general statement, or from one instance to an entire class. There was one fault that prevailed among the Corinthians. He takes occasion from this to speak of every kind of faulty administration or reception of the Lord's Supper. . . .

To *eat unworthily*, then, is to pervert the pure and right *use* of it by our *abuse* of it. Hence there are various degrees of this *unworthiness*, so to speak; and some offend more grievously, others less so.

I think that Calvin's argument is a significant one<sup>15</sup> and even more so when it is connected with the general or generic tone of this section with its use of "whoever" and of the third person singular verb forms and also of the future tense verb.

Paul's instructions move on to verse 28 which is introduced by a particle which is appropriately translated by the ESV as "then"<sup>16</sup>,

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<sup>15</sup> As do a number of renowned commentators. For a partial list see footnote 23.

<sup>16</sup> The NASB utilize "but", and the NIV does not translate the Greek word *de*.

that is, this "then" is the appropriate action demanded by the preceding requirement. This verse is very instructive. It reads "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." The instruction is very personal and very direct. It calls on every human being<sup>17</sup> to engage in this examination of himself.<sup>18</sup> And it uses a verb (*dokimazw*) which expresses that in the third person singular "let him, i.e., a human being, examine himself." Every person individually is to look into his own being to determine if he or she is taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Any one who objects to this method prescribed by Paul in favor of elder oversight at this particular juncture will need to face the fact that he is objecting to apostolic instruction.

Paul gives no specific guidelines for this action of examining oneself. The only guidance that we can ascertain is the meaning of the verb "examine."<sup>19</sup> BDAG indicate that the verb in this place (*dokimazw*) is used with the general meaning "to make a critical examination of someth[ing] to determine genuine-

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<sup>17</sup> The word used by Paul is *anqrwpoj*; it is a word that means a human being.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek word is *eautou* which means that the one who is requested to do the examining is to do that within his own self.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek verb *dokimazw* is used 22 times in the NT, 3 times in Luke, and 17 times in Paul (Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor. 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4 (2x); 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10) and once in 1 Pet. 1:7; and once in 1 John 4:1. In 1 Corinthians it is used 3 times, and in 2 Corinthians it is used 3 times. BDAG puts 1 Cor. 11:28 and 2 Cor. 13:5 together because in these two instances the verb is followed by the reflexive pronoun *eautou*. They list Gal. 6:4 next because there the reflexive pronoun is also used to qualify one's own works. The ESV translates this passage as follows: "But let each one test his own work...."

ness"; thus they offer "put to the test, examine."<sup>20</sup> Paul uses the verb in 2 Cor. 13:5 in the context where one's faith is examined ([our verb is rendered by "test" not by "examine" in this statement] "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you fail to meet the test!") and in Gal. 6:4 where one's work is examined ("But let each one test his own work.... cf. 1 Cor. 3:13). Thus both faith and work in oneself are subject to examination, as well as sin that may impinge upon either or both (cf. 1 Tim. 3:10, "And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless"). Whatever else one may say about this admonition to examine oneself ("himself"), it is certainly a looking into oneself to ascertain whether he is partaking in an unworthy manner, that is, in a manner that would make the person guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. There are certainly more ways of doing that than were manifested in the Corinthian errors of 1 Cor. 11, as are seen in 2 Cor. 13:5, Gal. 6:4 and 1 Tim. 3:10, and Presbyterian and Reformed Churches have sought to lay that out in various statements that instruct one as one is examining oneself.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> BDAG, 255.

<sup>21</sup> Particular exception has been taken to the phrase found in the *Directory for Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* on page 148, i.e., "and those who secretly and impenitently live in any sin" (which in the revised form is slightly changed into "are living willfully and impenitently in any sin"). Several remarks can be made in response to this criticism. First, this is not the first or the only remark that is made in the fencing of the table, but rather the last. And in this last comment the authors are trying to follow our Lord in moving from external sins to internal sins, as our Lord does in the Sermon on the Mount as he unpacked and applies the teaching of the Ten Commandments. It is also

The examination is to be done with a view to taking the Supper. This is made evident in the text by the word "so"<sup>22</sup> following the "and" so that the two words taken together give us the usual, and meaningful, "and so." An examination is called for, but it is to be followed, as the hoped for result, by the partaking ("and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup"). After examining oneself a person may do "thus" (or, so), that is, after having done so, one is then encouraged to eat and drink. The two verbs used for eating and drinking are in the imperative so that they underline the sense already gathered from the "and so." This perspective is caught in the NASB

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stated with qualifying words that are significant, namely "secretly", hid from others, and most importantly, "impenitently", unwilling to repent of this, or any sin, in contrition to God. Secondly, the dire consequences of this way of stating the matter, as charged by the critics, are all removed by the words that are found in the next sentences, i.e., the "Nevertheless" and all that is stated after this warning flag. Those words say that "this warning is not designed to keep the humble and contrite from the table of the Lord" "as if the supper were for those who might be free from sin". The following sentence begins with "On the contrary" and continues by saying that those who are invited to the table come "as guilty and polluted sinners without hope of eternal life apart from the grace of God in Christ". The last statement of the warning encourages us "to the end that we may partake" of the table. It is my considered judgment that those who take the entire account into consideration should not be opposed to the statement as it is found in the context of the warning and as it should be considered in the context of the teaching of the Word of God. Cf. also the Q and A of the *Larger Catechism* 172 about one that doubts, especially "of his due preparation", it is said in the final analysis that "he may and ought to come to the Lord's supper, that he may be further strengthened."

<sup>22</sup> The Greek word *wste* is used to introduce independent clauses with the meanings "for this reason, therefore, or so" (cf. BDAG, 1107).

translation that properly renders the verbs "let him eat . . . and drink" in the rendering "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Before we delve into verse 29, we must note the differences between the King James version of this verse and that of the more modern translations, or between the Byzantine or Majority Greek text and the older Greek text. The Majority text adds for clarification after the first reference to eating and drinking the understood word "unworthily" and after the word body the understood words "of the Lord" so that it reads "for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, . . . not discerning the Lord's body." The older Greek texts do not include these understood words and so the translation following them reads without these words as follows: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." We are utilizing this shorter text found in our translation because we believe that it more likely reflects Paul's writing since it is found in the oldest manuscripts. We can understand why the words giving the appropriate clarifications to the verse may have been added by scribes copying the text.

With the "For" that begins verse 29, Paul wants to indicate that in examining himself one must particularly be concerned about "discerning the body". The text reads "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." Two important items are contained herein. The need for "discerning the body" before one eats and drinks, and the solemn warning that a failure to do so will result in the chastisement of the Lord which is here designated "judgment."

This verse, just as the two that preceded it (vs 27 & 28), are an application of the words of institution



## THE LORD'S SUPPER: ABUSES, WORDS OF INSTITUTION AND WARNINGS

to "whoever" reads these words of Scripture. Just as the words of Jesus speak of his body (vs 24), so the very first verse of this warning warns us not to be "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" by partaking "in an unworthy manner" of the bread and cup (vs 27). And right after Jesus spoke of his "body," he also urged them to "Do this in remembrance of me" (vs 24). Therefore our remembrance of him is to be done in the midst of partaking of that which signified his body, namely, the bread. That is why people will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord who take the bread or the cup in an unworthy manner (vs 27). Furthermore, the examination of oneself that is called for in verse 28 is to be done just because they are in the midst of partaking of the Lord's Supper ("and so eat..."). This is all involved in the fact that the Supper is a remembrance of the Lord Jesus and a proclamation of his death. So likewise in this verse 29. The body of our Lord Jesus that has been mentioned in verses 24 and 27 is surely the body in view in this verse 29.<sup>23</sup>

Insight into the meaning of the word "body" and into the significance of the phrase itself, "discerning the body," is also to be sought in

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<sup>23</sup> Most commentators on 1 Corinthians understand the reference to the body in this sense at this place in the text, cf., e.g., F. W. Grosheide, Charles Hodge, Simon Kistemaker, Leon Morris, Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, and Geoffrey Wilson. Gordon Fee is the one exception among commentators that I know of. He takes it as referring to the body of Christians in Corinth and cites 1 Cor. 10:17 as his warrant. It needs to be noticed that even there the preceding verse, which gives rise to verse 17, refers to "the body of Christ." But even if the reference in 10:17 might give some warrant, it is too far removed and the reference back to the words of institution is that which is at hand and is being utilized in this section which is building on it.

determining the meaning of the Greek word translated by "discerning."<sup>24</sup> The evidence of the Greek lexicon (BDAG) indicates that "recognize" or "discern" are the correct understandings in this context. We are to recognize that the body represented in the Lord's Supper is that of Jesus indeed and that the Lord's Supper is distinct and different from an ordinary meal. We will then escape the judgment warned in this verse, if we do not take the meal in an unworthy manner. We will therefore need to discern the body of our Lord signified by the elements in the Lord's Supper.

The "judgment" referred to in this verse is an awesome word to be given in a warning, but fortunately it is not as awesome as one might take it to be. Yes, it does result in the significant situation of many of them being weak and ill, and also of some having died (vs 30). That is indeed awesome. But the full meaning of this word is not grasped until one understands it in the light of the words of verses 30-32, especially verse 32. There we see that the judgment in view is the chastening or disciplining of the Lord to keep us from being "condemned along with the world." And when put in this perspective we realize that the judgment is God's gracious action to keep us from that condemnation.

What Paul has been calling us, "whoever" we may be, to do in these three general verses is to exercise that judgment on ourselves and with

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<sup>24</sup> The Greek word in the text is a participle form from the verb διακρίνω. This Greek verb means generally in this place, according to BDAG, 231, "to evaluate by paying careful attention to," or specifically "evaluate" or "judge." Thus more precisely in our verse "recognize the body." The Greek word occurs 19 times in the NT, 3 times in the Gospels (Mt. & Mk.), 4 times in Acts, 7 times in Paul (Rom. 4:20; 14:23; 1 Cor. 4:7; 6:5; 11:29; 11:31; 14:29), 3 times in James and twice in Jude.

reference to the body so that we would not partake in an unworthy manner, with the result that we would not have to be judged by God (as vs 31 indicates, "But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged).

### *To the Corinthians Verses 30-32*

With verses 30-32 Paul turns from his general and generic warning, based on the words of institution, and turns back again to the Corinthians and their particular abuses. He applies what he has just said in verses 27-29 to them in verses 30-32. First, in verse 30, he delineates his apostolic perspective on that which they have suffered and indicates with the words, "That is why," why these things have happened to them (notice the second person plural ["you"] in this verse in distinction from the third person singular of verses 27-29). He urges upon them the very judging or discerning in view in their self-examination ("but if we judged ourselves", vs 31), and in their discerning of the body, so that they will not be judged by the Lord. But now in verse 31 and also verse 32 he includes himself with them and uses the first person plural ("we").

Then finally, in verse 32, he points out that being "judged by the Lord" is done "so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

This judgment, although very serious, is designed to keep them from the condemnation in view for the world of unbelievers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This judgment is very gracious even as it is severe. It is brought about by the Lord himself (vs 32, "But when we are judged by the Lord") on those who are misusing or abusing the Lord's Supper ("... without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself," vs 29, followed by "That is why ..." of vs 30 and the statements of judgment). Cf. the ex-

Explicit Instructions to Overcome the Problem at Corinth Vss. 33-34

Paul continues with the second person plural ("you") giving explicit instructions to those who needed it among the Corinthians so that they may overcome their problem which he had raised in verses 17-22. He harkens back, for the first time, to the specific abuses mentioned in verses 17-22, and does so with the same Greek word as found at the beginning of verse 27, but now translated as "then" (wste, see footnote 9).

Paul does two things at once in verses 33 and 34. He urges that they (and most likely with an eye particularly directed to the "haves" or the abusers with the gracious phrase "my brothers") when they come together to eat to "wait for one another" (vs. 33). The Lord's Supper is to be a communion of believers with the Lord and with each other. It needs to be taken and enjoyed together. And if someone says he is hungry, or even has brought his own meal (cf. vs 21), Paul says that if "anyone" is hungry he should "eat at home" (vs 34). Only by waiting for one another and not eating before one another can they avoid the judgment that will fall on them if they do not heed his warnings and admonitions ("so that when you come together it will not be for judgment" vs 34).

Finally, Paul indicates that he will "give directions when [he] come[s]" "about the other things"

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cellent treatment of the blessings and curses of the Lord's Supper by Herman Ridderbos in his *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, translated and published 1975), 425-428. His conclusion is excerpted as follows: ". . . blessing and curse are not automatically given with the elements nor are both joined to them in an equally essential way, but it is the living Lord himself who . . . deals with the church according to his gracious and righteous redemptive will", 427.

(vs 34). What these other things are, when he gave this instruction and what it consisted of, we do not know because we have not been told. All that this verse teaches us is that he promised to give directions on these matters when he came.

#### Conclusion

What we do know is that he gave instructions to all those, "whoever" they may be, who partake of the Lord's Supper<sup>26</sup>, as well as several particular and explicit matters to the Corinthians. The matters that we need to heed as a general rule are contained in the three verses of 27-29. We are not to partake "in an unworthy manner" and thus be "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (vs 27). We are "then" called to "examine himself" (ourselves) so that we may indeed eat but not in an unworthy manner (vs 28). We are also called on to discern the body (of the Lord, understood) so that we will not be judged by God (vs 29). It is these matters

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<sup>26</sup> Compare several noteworthy commentators, namely, Leon Morris on *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, reprinted 1964) at 163 in the first full paragraph under iii., and especially Simon Kistemaker on 1 Cor. 11:28 in the following words: "Is Paul counseling the Corinthians to conduct self-examination before coming to the Lord's table? Should a pastor exhort the parishioners to examine themselves before they celebrate Communion? The answer to these two queries is a resounding yes. Here are the reasons: (see his *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993], 401). An excerpt is as follows: "First, . . . Paul prescribes self-examination for everyone who desires to partake of the bread and the cup of the Lord. He understands the word *man* generically to exclude no one. Next, the meaning of the verb *to examine* is applicable both to the original readers of this epistle and to the members of the church universal. . . This holds true for all Christians everywhere. . ."

that we are warned about in the fencing of the table. These words of warning (and invitation) are given to us by our standards for use at the Lord's Supper. We will do well to practice these fencings and heed these warnings. There are good and necessary consequences which have also been drawn from these words of instruction and incorporated in the Confessional Standards<sup>27</sup>. I think that since they are both good and necessary they too should also be heeded.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf., e.g., the latter part of the answer to question 177 of the *Larger Catechism*, which indicates that the Lord's Supper is to be administered "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves."

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER TO SHUT-INS  
STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT FOR CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.  
OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES

Editorial Note: At the June 1-2, 2004 meeting of Central Classis US it was decided to appoint a committee "with the mandate to study and submit recommendations on the administration of the Lord's Supper to members in good standing ex ecclesia." The mandated report was brought to the January 11, 2005 meeting of the Classis at which I was present as a fraternal delegate. I thought this report would benefit others, as it had benefited me, so I asked — and received — the permission of the Classis to use the body of this report in *Ordained Servant*. (The only thing omitted here is the brief history of the setting up and work of the committee).

OVERVIEW

This report seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is a shut-in?
2. May the Lord's Supper be administered to shut-ins?
3. Is remote participation in communion by means of a live broadcast real communion?
4. May the Lord's Supper be administered to those suffering from mental impairment?

WHAT IS A SHUT-IN?

A shut-in may be defined as someone who is incapacitated by a chronic illness or injury. A person who is shut-in is someone confined, usually by illness. The key ideas are "incapacitated" and "confined." When used in relation to church members we generally mean someone who is incapacitated to such an extent that they are unable to attend church services on a regular basis.

Shut-ins can include the home bound, nursing home residents or those isolated from the worship services of the church perhaps by incarceration.

Although we generally do not call someone a shut-in who is only briefly incapacitated or confined, or someone who expects a full recovery, yet we recognized the right of any consistory to administer the Lord's Supper, according to biblical principles, to any professing member even if he is only temporarily unable to attend church. However, consistories should consider whether serving the Lord's Supper to someone not incapacitated by a chronic condition may lead to a superstitious use of the sacrament or elevate it in importance above the ministry of the Word.

MAY THE LORD'S SUPPER BE ADMINISTERED TO SHUT-INS?

It is necessary to ask this question because in the history of the church there have been many

abuses of the Lord's Supper with regard to its administration outside the regular worship services of the church. This led the reformers to denounce private masses or serving persons who were alone or serving anyone not present in the congregation. (See for example the Westminster Confession of Faith 29:3-4). The Belgic Confession, Article 35 says that "we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God."

Administering the sacrament in the context of the congregation gathered for worship reflects the Biblical teaching that the Lord's Supper not only unites us to Christ but also to one another. In 1 Corinthians 10:17 the apostle affirms, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." In 1 Corinthians 11 the Apostle Paul describes the administration of the Lord's Supper as taking place "when you come together." In that one chapter, the phrase is repeated five times emphasizing that the

proper context for celebrating the Lord's Supper is a coming together of the congregation. He not only stipulates that we celebrate when we come together, he also requires that participants wait for one another. Being together and waiting for one another gives witness to our unity in Christ. Therefore any celebration of the Lord's Supper for shut-ins must give expression to the unity of the body of Christ or else it risks being a denial of one of the basic meanings of the Lord's Supper.

In light of the foregoing, if the Lord's Supper is to be administered to shut-ins, we believe there are three essential requirements for it to be a proper celebration:

1. It must be administered by one authorized to do so, namely by a minister of the Word and sacraments.
2. It must be administered in the context of the church gathered for worship where the Word is read and proclaimed. Even though the celebration may involve only a few members of the congregation, nevertheless it should not be viewed as a private ceremony or devotional exercise but as a ministry of the church which is represented by those officebearers and members who are present. Announcing such a celebration to the full congregation in advance underscores that it is a ministry of the church which all can support by their prayers.
3. If non-members are present with the shut-in and wish to

participate, they may be admitted only on the same basis that they would be admitted if they came to the regular worship service and wished to participate there. Such admission to the Lord's Table should include the approval of a plurality of elders. Since there will most likely not be a plurality of elders present when the shut-in receives the Lord's Supper the non-member's request to participate will need to be made in advance so that the elders can consider the request prior to the event.

In short, in order for the Lord's Supper to be administered properly to shut-ins they must receive it under the same circumstances as the rest of the congregation—in a worship service of the church. The worship service of the church (not just the bread and wine) must be brought to the shut-in so that they receive the sacrament in the context of the Word and in fellowship with other believers. The worship service need not be identical in every respect to that which is done for a large congregation, but all the basic elements of worship should be present.

#### IS SIMULTANEOUS REMOTE PARTICIPATION REAL COMMUNION?

What has been described above is the generally accepted practice among those Reformed and Presbyterian churches which have allowed the Lord's Supper to be brought to shut-ins. But the technological advances of the last century have created new options and raised new questions. Live broadcasts of worship services by

radio or television allow shut-ins to participate in the worship service simultaneously with the congregation without actually being present.

The question with which your committee struggled was whether being present through a live broadcast enables the shut-in to participate in a communion service without violating the Scriptural norm that the Supper be administered in the context of the congregation coming together. The situation is analogous in some respects to congregations who have outgrown their facility and have part of the congregation worshipping in the fellowship hall watching a live television broadcast of the activity in the main auditorium. We believe that participation at a remote location by a live broadcast does meet the biblical requirements for a proper celebration of the Lord's Supper if certain provisions are made:

1. To give expression to the unity of the body of Christ witnessed to in the Lord's Supper, the names of the shut-ins and those participating with them at a remote location should be announced to the congregation or published in the bulletin.
2. To give expression to the unity of the body of Christ witnessed to in the Lord's Supper, the consistory should designate one or two willing church members to be present with the shut-in at his or her remote location for the entire service. These persons can also assist the shut-in if assistance is needed in finding the right station or channel, in preventing distractions or in handling the

elements at the proper time. It is desirable, if possible, that at least one of the designated assistants be an officebearer or former officebearer to visibly represent the officebearers of the church, even though distributing the elements is not an essential part of the supervision required of the elders.

3. If there are a number of residents in a nursing home who are all members of the church, an attempt should be made to bring as many of them as possible into the same room with a few other designated members of the church to assist them.

#### SHOULD THE LORD'S SUPPER BE ADMINISTERED TO THE MENTALLY IMPAIRED?

Participation in the Lord's Supper requires an active faith. In baptism, we are passive recipients of the promised blessings, but in the Lord's Supper we are required to exercise the will in response to the commands to "take," "eat" and "drink." Eating the Lord's Supper is symbolic of receiving Christ by an active and obedient faith. An active faith is also necessary to obey the command to examine one's self prior to participating (1 Corinthians 11:28) and to discern the body while participating (1 Corinthians 11:29.). The promised blessings of the Lord's Supper are received by those who receive the elements in faith.

When elders examine someone desiring to make a public profession of faith, they look for evidence of an active faith. Elders

look for that evidence in what the person confesses about Christ and in the way the person lives. The type or nature of the evidence they look for may not be the same in every case. It may vary based on age, education or background. Each one is dealt with individually on the basis of his or her circumstances and abilities. The elders pray for wisdom to be able to make good judgments and apply the objective standards of God's Word in an appropriate way.

The same kind of individual assessment needs to be made regarding those who suffer from mental impairment. It is difficult to formulate a set of rules that will be appropriate in every situation except that the basic requirement for participation remains the same: an active faith. Those who suffer from mental impairment, whether age related or caused by accident, illness or birth defect, should be visited regularly by the elders. During such visits the elders should attempt to assess the spiritual life of the individual and whether the person is exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

With regard to progressive dementia, often found in the aged, one way the elders can usually determine if a person still has an active faith is by the unprompted request from the individual to receive the Lord's Supper. If such a person remembers on his own to ask the elder when he comes to visit, it is a good sign (but not the only sign) that he can participate in a meaningful way, that is, with an active faith. Such requests should be treated as pertaining to only one

instance of the Lord's Supper rather than one request leading to repeated administrations. However, shut-ins who are obviously mentally sound and only physically impaired should not be expected to make repeated requests.

Ascertaining an active faith can be done with direct questions like: "Who is Jesus?" "What did Jesus do for you?" "What's your favorite Bible verse?" "What do you pray about?" or other similar questions (avoiding questions that can be answered merely with "yes" or "no"). Elders should observe what they answer as well as how they answer. This type of visit is not essentially different than other pastoral visits; that is, in all visits elders should be taking the spiritual pulse of the congregation by listening, observing, and asking a few appropriate questions. In age related dementia, the ability of the believer to respond appropriately will decline over time. When the time comes that such a person no longer expresses or demonstrates an active faith, it will generally be the case that such a person will no longer initiate a request for the Lord's Supper nor will family members bring their loved one to church to participate since there is a high risk of embarrassment through inappropriate behavior.

Consistories should not be afraid to make a judgment of charity regarding borderline or difficult cases. There may be other factors that have bearing on the situation and which need to be considered to preserve peace in the congregation. What is to be avoided is giving the wrong message about the nature of the

Lord's Supper to the rest of the congregation by continuing to serve those who obviously no longer understand what they are doing.

The loss of the ability to exercise faith should not be viewed as the loss of one's salvation. We are taught in Scripture not to doubt the salvation of our covenant youth who die in infancy even though they have never exercised an active faith (2 Sam. 12:23 and CD I.17). How much more ought we not to doubt the salvation of those who once exercised faith but are now prevented from doing so by providential circumstances beyond their control.

#### CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

1. In determining whether to administer the Lord's Supper to shut-ins, it should be noted that the Bible does not require elders to serve the Lord's Supper to shut-ins. Nor does the Bible forbid the practice. It is something elders are permitted to do.
2. Since faith is created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the Word but not through the sacraments, and since the sacraments are dependent upon the Word to give them their meaning, it is evident that the relationship between the Word and the sacraments is not one of equality. The ministry of the Word can stand alone, if necessary, but not the ministry of the sacraments. Given the supplementary role of the sacraments, the person who is not able to at-

tend to the Lord's Supper, either occasionally or permanently, should not be made to understand that all is thereby lost. The Scripture alone does in fact present Christ to us in all his fullness. It is, indeed, better to have both the Word and the sacraments. But if the needs or changes of life make that impossible, let the perfect Word suffice to nourish faith. Let the person who is shut-in not feel disconnected from Christ even if all he or she has access to is the Word of Christ in all its power and majestic glory.

3. Church Order Article 45 reads, *The Consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord Table. No member shall be admitted to the Lord's Table who has not first made public profession of faith and is not living a godly life. Visitors may be admitted provided that, as much as possible, the Consistory is assured of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk.*

It has occurred to our committee that this article might benefit from an amendment which would make mention of administering the Lord's Supper to shut-ins. A possible addition might be: *"The same regulations apply [or care and caution applies] when administering the Lord's Supper to shut-ins."*

Such a statement would indicate the need for the Consistory to supervise participation, both for shut-in members and for any visitors who may be present with the shut-ins. Supervision includes

making sure the shut-ins maintain a godly life (an active faith) and that any visitors with the shut-ins are approved in advance. Supervision may also include having assurances that the shut-in will partake at the right time. This can be obtained by designating willing members to assist the shut-ins.

However, we are aware that we do not have the authority or mandate to bring such an amendment to classis. We suggest that a like-minded consistory pursue the matter through the procedure of an overture to classis and synod.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Our committee has been mandated to "study and submit recommendations" but we are reluctant to submit a list of formal recommendations regarding the administration of the Lord's Supper, lest they be adopted (as given or as amended by classis) and then be viewed as canon law binding on all. We think it wiser to let consistories study the suggestions in the report and make a judgment regarding what would be best in their own circumstances. Therefore we make only one recommendation.

We recommend that our report be referred to the churches for study and that our committee be dismissed.

Rev. Patrick Edouard  
 Dr. Nelson Kloosterman  
 Rev. Ralph Pontier, secretary  
 Rev. Jacques Roets  
 Elder Norm Van Mersbergen, chairman



## PASTOR TO PASTOR:

### The Peril of Pornography - Part 2

by

William Shishko

Everyone has gone to bed. You're catching up on that vexing pile of e-mails that has accumulated in your "in box." It's late. You're tired. It's been a rough few weeks, but you need to get these things done so that you can get on with other things tomorrow.

Suddenly, as you come to the next item of "spam", you are face to face with a beautiful woman who is looking you straight in the eye. Her expression is obviously one that says "Come, and get me!" You are stunned at first, you're ready to go to the "Delete" key... and then you hesitate. "I wonder what I'll see if I connect to this link?" "It's only the human form." "God made women to be attractive, didn't He?" "No one will see me." "It's only one look." You struggle with your conscience a bit. But the soldier is weary. He gives in to what he knows is an enemy to his soul. You double click to a new world of "Internet porn." The rest, as they say, is history. A history that begins with a lacerated conscience and continues into bondage, alienation from spouse, dissipation of time and energy into what becomes a substitute for devotion to Christ, and, if left unchecked, actual fornication and infidelity.

By the end of the year 2003 there were 4.2 million pornographic websites (12 percent of the total number of websites with a total of 372 million pages of pornography). Daily pornographic search engine requests totaled 68 million (a total of 25 percent of total daily search engine requests.) Each day 2.5 billion pornographic e-mails were sent (8 percent of total e-mails, an average of 4.5 per Internet

user). Each month an average of 1.5 billion pornographic items were downloaded (35 percent of all downloads). In the entire year there were 72 million visitors to pornographic websites worldwide. 20% of men admitted accessing pornography while at work, as did 13 percent of women. Some 40 million US adults regularly visited pornographic websites. 10 percent of these admitted to Internet sexual addiction. And 47 percent of Christians admitted that pornography was "a major problem" in their homes. (53 percent of Promise Keeper men admitted to having viewed pornography "in the last week.") Do you think that you are immune? Or are you already included in one or more of the statistics above?

In my previous article I dealt in general with "The Peril of Pornography," and I included a number of resources that I have found helpful both for myself (Yes, I too struggle to keep myself pure on the street, in motel rooms when I am alone and there is a TV, in stores with prominent displays of magazines that used to be kept behind the counter, and on the Internet) and to help me minister to others. In this article I want to zero in on strategies to help pastors fight a battle that has the potential to destroy them, their families, and their ministries. I write it as one who is acutely aware that it has the same devastating potential for me, for my family, and for my ministry. I do not want that devastation for myself, or for anyone else. The Christian Church has received too many black eyes from ministers who are required to be "blameless" especially by being "one wife husbands" (1 Tim. 3:2) and yet have fallen into "moral lapses" that

bring reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ. Brothers, we are at war for our own salvation and the salvation of others (1 Tim. 4:16). Consider these weapons in the war against lust, pornography, and, especially, pornography that can be just a couple of mouse-clicks away.

1. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself. God's standard is exacting: "*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people*" (Eph. 5:3). Practice "Judgment Day honesty with yourself." Has your mind become a sex playground by daily fantasies? What do you watch as you scan the various cable channels when no one else is around? What would a record of the Internet sites you have accessed indicate? Have you been lying to yourself and to others about your succumbing to the temptation to look at porn? This is not to condemn, brothers, but it is to make us alert to the extent of the problem as it affects us.

2. Be aware of those times, places, persons, and particular circumstances that tempt you. Because of background, our physical condition, and just the way we are "wired," we each have our own customized package of "temptation prompters." Loneliness, fatigue, discouragements, strains in relationships with a spouse, and even the influence of a glass of wine late at night can increase your vulnerability. Our resistance is broken down by regular exposure to immodesty, advertisements that use sexuality to entice, television programs, movies, or even radio stories, that treat sexuality casually and that treat forni-

cation and adultery with acceptance or even humor. Let some or all of these be the constant influences of our day, and then give yourself some time to just “surf the web”, and you may soon find yourself in the waters of pornography. *“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.”* (Rom 13:14).

3. Use whatever crutches you need to keep yourself pure. Jesus’ prescription is a radical one. *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”* (Matt. 5:29). While your “right eye” and “right hand” offenses may be different than someone else’s, you still must pluck out those things that jeopardize your soul. (Yes, that’s exactly what Jesus meant when he said it is better that we pluck out an eye than that we go, body and soul, to hell!). Where you must use crutches, use them!

Randy Alcorn, in his helpful little book *THE PURITY PRINCIPLE*, puts it this way:

“The battle is too intense, and the stakes are too high to approach purity casually or gradually. So...if you can’t keep your eyes away from those explicit images, don’t ever go to a video rental store. ‘Come on. Everybody goes into those stores.’ No. If it causes you to sin, you shouldn’t. Period.” (p. 64f.) Specifically with respect to controlling the Internet, Alcorn counsels: “Use family-friendly Internet service providers (see [www.afafilter.com](http://www.afafilter.com)). Install a pornography-filtering program on your computer, realizing it can’t screen out everything. Ask someone else to hold the password. Ask someone to regularly check on your internet usage history to confirm you’re not compromising your walk with God. Move computers to high traffic areas. Unless you have a proven record of going on-line safely, don’t log on to the Internet if you’re alone. Be sure the

monitor always faces an open door, where others can see what you’re looking at (see 1 Cor. 10:13). Check out practical resources for Internet accountability (see [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com)). If you’re still losing the battle, disconnect from the Internet. If that’s not enough, get rid of the computer” (p. 69).

Does this sound too severe? Too “Puritan”? I suggest that you re-read Matthew 5:29 and ask yourself what you think it means. You might also read the exposition of the 7th Commandment in the Westminster Larger Catechism (questions 137 – 139). Do what it takes, brothers, to have the mind of Christ regarding sexual sin.

4. Consider the consequences if you don’t change. Pornography will drain you, chew you up and, eventually, spit you out. With it will go your marriage, your family, and your ministry. “For by means of a harlot, a man is reduced to a crust of bread, and an adulteress will prey on his precious life.” (Prov. 6:26) Harlots and adulteresses are not only found on street corners in the seamy sides of town. They abound on band widths and cable lines and they come through an electronic box that brings “the seamy side of town” right into your office or study. I highly recommend that each of you reading this article secure and read the article “Hooked” in the Winter, 2001 edition of *Leadership Journal*. I now require it of all of my students in Pastoral Theology. It makes its case unforgettably.

5. Seek superior pleasure in Christ and His wonderful gift of sexuality in the bonds of marriage. You cannot fight this battle by just saying “No!” You must come to Christ moment by moment to keep you even as you work to keep yourself pure (cf. 1 Peter 1:5 and Jude 21). Enjoy communion with your greatest Lover and Spouse as you read His Word and pray every day and as you yourself are fed on the means of grace in the church that you serve. Do not permit

anything to mar your felt sense of acceptance with Christ and His love for you. And, at the same time, do not permit anything to mar the intimacy of your communion with your wife. “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?” (Prov. 5:18-20). You must fight the sparks of lust with the superior fire of the Gospel and its benefits!

6. If you need help, get it! Lone rangers are dead rangers in this battle. *“Confess your transgressions one to another, and pray for one another that you may be healed”* (James 5:16). Whether it be accountability to your session or one or more of your elders, or something more elaborate, get the help that you need to get from others. There’s too much at stake to let pride keep you from honestly humbling yourself before those who can help you. *“Pride goes before destruction...”* *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* (Prov. 16:18, 1 Peter 5:5).

“I have seen many ministers begin well” wrote a wise observer of a past day, “but I have seen fewer run well; and I have seen far fewer still end well.” May the Lord grant us all grace to run well and to end well, especially as we run a course full of “lusts of the flesh and the eyes” that would make us stumble and fall to the harm of ourselves and so many others.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life*, by Sean Michael Lucas. Published by P&R Publishing Co., 2005. Hardback, 295 pages, list price \$24.99. Reviewed by Jacques Roets, pastor of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa.

Luther characterized the sinner justified by grace alone through faith alone as *simul iustus et peccator* (at once righteous and a sinner). A Christian biography that is worth its price will set before us both the saint and the sinner. Measured by this standard Sean Lucas has given us a fine example of such a biography. He neither idealizes nor vilifies Dabney, but presents a well balanced portrait of a very complicated individual who lived in very complex times.

The great theologian, Robert Lewis Dabney, who wrote the only complete nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian systematic theology, was born on March 5, 1820 and died on January 3, 1898. He lived all his life in the South; in fact he crosses the Mason-Dixon Line only three times during his life. "It is not surprising, Then, that Dabney's devotion to the South shaped and colored his entire worldview" (24). What makes Lucas' work so valuable is that he impresses upon the reader that "Dabney was in many ways a representative man, one who embodied the passions and contradictions of the nineteenth-century Southerners" (16). It is also the central thesis of the book that "Dabney was a repre-

sentative Southern conservative and provided a window into the postbellum Southern Presbyterian mind" (17).

This is helpful because often when we isolate individuals from their immediate contexts it is easy to vilify them or idolize them. Dabney's defense and justification of slavery and his "unbiblical antipathy towards African Americans" (24), for which he is often rightly condemned, was not merely his personal opinion but was a representative expression of the Southern mind. This should be a reminder when criticizing Dabney, for it is difficult for the best of us to see clearly what are the unbiblical cultural prejudices that influence, shape and mold us. It is very easy and hypocritical for us to look down on the racism (46-47, 118-128, 143-150) which was so evident in his life and to question how it is possible that such a deeply committed Calvinist can be so blind to such an obvious sin. But having grown up in South Africa in the Apartheid years, I know how powerful racial prejudices are and how deeply they can be ingrained in us. It was painful to read about his racism because it brought home how deeply I myself still struggle with the issue.

My challenge to everyone who reads this biography is to take seriously the words of our Savior: "*And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and look, a plank is*

*in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matthew 7:3-5).

This is not a plea to justify racism. It never can be defended biblically, even though many have tried. And Lucas on pages 122-128 has a beautiful biblical corrective to Dabney's book, *Defense of Virginia*, in which he defended slavery. But whenever we read about the sins of others it is first of all an opportunity to see again the seed of every sin that lies in our own heart. It is a reminder of the wickedness and deceitfulness of sin. Lucas provides a wonderful insight which should serve as a warning to all of us on this issue: "Dabney's public theology failed by sacralizing the secular. By assuming that God was a Southern gentleman, by embracing a form of culture-Protestantism, Dabney had no place from which to exercise his considerable critical abilities upon Southern culture and his own public theology" (242).

Not only should Lucas be recommended for his accurate representation of Dabney the sinner but he provides us with a valuable description of the saint. Dabney credits his profession of faith in Christ to a "powerful and genuine awakening" that occurred at Hampden-Sydney, a Presbyterian college, in 1837 (36). Dabney's vibrant faith was described by one observer as follows: "Religion was never a sham with him. It was the business of his life" (30). He was all

## BOOK REVIEWS

his life whole-heartedly committed to the Presbyterian Church. After serving as a pastor in Twinkling Springs Presbyterian Church (Virginia) for just over six years, he spent over forty years of his life training ministers for the Southern Presbyterian church; first at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and then at the Austin School of Theology, in Texas.

As a theologian Dabney upheld the “comprehensive ideal” for theology’s task that is “theologians were charged with applying theology to every sphere of life” (18). Lucas brings out well Dabney’s pursuit of this ideal when he summarizes and discusses his most significant works on a vast array of subjects, from his Syllabus and *Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemical Theology* (87ff) and other theological works to his biography, *Life of Jackson* (128ff), and critique of evolutionist and positivist philosophy in *The Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century* (170ff).

This biography will be a good introduction to the life and thought of Dabney for someone who is not acquainted with the works and the specific contribution of this great man. It will also change current opinions and stimulate further reflection on his contribution from those who are already familiar with his work. Lucas’ work serves as a corrective to those who have over idealized or vilified him. The marker placed over Dabney’s grave sets before us a valuable standard to evaluate his

life and this biography: “*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*” (215).

*The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts (The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as adopted by The Orthodox Presbyterian Church)* published by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005. Available from either the office of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Phone 215/830-0900 or Great Commission Publications, Phone 800/695-3387. Hard cover, price \$12.00. Reviewed by the Editor.

I consider this a very important event in the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. From the very beginning of our history there was a concern for the publication of a carefully edited text of both the Westminster Confession of faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as officially adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. And there was also a concern to carefully edit the proof texts cited in support of the text of these documents. As the preface shows, a long process of diligent work went into the final product which has now been made available to the church (and to others in the Presbyterian and Reformed world).

While the official text of our Confession and Catechisms have been available for many years without the printed proof texts, we all had to rely on out-

side sources for editions that provided these in full. Now this is no longer the case.

The most important thing, of course, is the content of this wonderful resource. But it is an added blessing that what is inside is so well packaged externally. The type used is easy to read and each proof text cited is noted in bold type to make it easy to navigate between them. The book is also bound in very sturdy material, and is 5 inches by 7 inches in size. It makes a fine companion volume to the *Book of Church Order*.

To illustrate the kind of diligent work that went into this production we mention a citation found in some editions that cited a text in Hebrews (abbreviated Heb). Some excellent detective work finally revealed that this had been a simple typographical error that should have been Hab for the book of Habakkuk. It is this kind of careful work that will give this book enduring value. And while there will be some who will continue to prefer the original text of the Westminster Standards, there are also many throughout the world—in such churches such as the Presbyterian Church of America, and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand—who hold to the same revised text of some or all of these documents as we do.

It is our hope that this publication will not only be warmly received by many in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church but also many in the wider Presbyterian and Reformed family.



## A W E O R A C C E S S I B I L I T Y

by

Paul Flodquist

Evangelicalism there has developed, over the past several years, a false dichotomy between awe and accessibility in worship. Although many congregations are unaware of this “either-or” mentality, it is far too prevalent to be mere coincidence.

How many churches now refer to their services as celebrations, rather than worship? There is something more than just semantics involved here. Language is important in that it defines the activities of our everyday lives. Celebration is man-centered and has reference to exuberance within the human heart. Worship is directed toward God, as an act of devotion from human beings for their Lord. Worship is not primarily something that Christians receive but rather it is something that we give.

Some might object that both worship and celebration consist of giving and receiving. The offering of our praise to the Triune God, and the subsequent receiving of blessing from Him. The distinction is one of emphasis, but the difference is not subtle.

A celebration presupposes that we know enough to rejoice in the right things. But for human beings with our limited knowledge and understanding, this is often not the case. How many of us are pious enough to celebrate the trials which inevitably challenge our faith? True we might go through the

motions of celebration, vainly trying to convince ourselves that we should be rejoicing in the midst of sorrow, but this is not the reverence that our Heavenly Father and ascended Lord deserve.

A true heart of worship offers praise to God whether times are good or bad. This is because the focus is not our own condition, but the nature and character of Almighty God. Through the centuries, the Church has recognized that praise is due to the Lord no matter what the human condition might suggest. The words of the prophet Habakkuk are instructive, “though the fig tree may not blossom, nor the fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls — yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (3:17-18).

I wonder how much pragmatism rather than faith dictates the form and content of many Sunday morning services in North American churches. The assumption of those who promote the celebration model seems to be that worship must be accessible. And that to be accessible, it must be friendly. As we look back over the many centuries of Church history, this is a novel approach.

Yet in democratic societies where consumerism prevails, it is perhaps inevitable that a certain amount of religious salesmanship is to be found. In order to fill the

church on Sunday, an attractive product must be offered. This explains why the celebration model relies heavily upon a multimedia presentation, rather than focusing upon the intrinsic power of God’s Word. Film, deafening music, and emotional testimonies are designed to engage the senses of the audience — as if truth were to be absorbed through the senses, rather than being filtered through the mind. This explains why the result of such celebrations is more a sense of emotional well-being, than any lasting spiritual comfort or moral challenge. Such spiritual depth can only be communicated by a faithful presentation of the Word of God, and cannot simply be absorbed on the level of human emotion.

The force and influence of God’s Word can be mitigated, and even emptied of its power, by an improper presentation. The Apostle Paul understood this clearly when he wrote to the Corinthian Church, “For God did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the Cross of Christ should not be made void” 1 Cor. 1:17. Even if a sermon is biblically sound, the weight and force of the minister’s words can be decreased and trivialized by what surrounds the divine communication from God to His church. Although the inherent power of God’s Word cannot be compromised, the impact of Scripture in the hearts and minds of those who hear can be adversely affected, if the tenor of the presentation diverts attention away from the meaning of the biblical text. Such a diversion is easier than

## AWE OR ACCESSIBILITY

any of us would like to admit. The fickle and insincere nature of the human heart is always ready to receive a substitute for the message of God's Word. Especially if what is being substituted is presented as being in support of, rather than in competition with, the sermon.

This argument presupposes two things. First, that the centerpiece of the worship service is the sermon. Second, that the purpose and focus of every sermon is to produce a sense of awe for God in the heart of the worshipper. Whatever else the sermon attempts to achieve, a sense of being humbled by the majesty of God, is to be communicated to those in attendance.

Some will certainly raise the objection that it is not necessary or even desirable, for the sermon to be central to the service of worship. As forms of worship within the church vary, there exists freedom within such forms. One might prefer a liturgical form of worship, others something less formal. While the expressions of worship are many — song, prayer, preaching, dance, sacrament and drama; what is central to all is an awareness on the part of the worshipper that they have been in the presence of God who is at the same time love (1 Jn. 4:16) and a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Such awareness inevitably produces within the human spirit a sense of awe and profound humility above all things. It is only after a sense of wonder has been experienced, that the human heart can then move on to the responsive emotions of joy and gratitude.

Unfortunately, the celebration model, in its desire to be relevant and accessible, has focused upon joy rather than awe as the central core of worship. But without the

foundation of awe, such joy is only superficially God-directed.

It makes little difference whether praise songs are repeated, or hymns are sung just once, if the instrumental accompaniment does not foster reflection upon the lyrical content of the song. What the celebration model does not recognize is that praise and worship is created primarily by words, which give birth to reverent thought. Not by musical instruments, lighting, decoration, or any other external props which either subdue or excite the emotions.

From the very beginning, Protestants believed that the faithful exposition of God's Word is central to worship. Such preaching, supported by song, prayer and the sacraments, were the approved means whereby man offered praise to the Lord. Protestantism only betrays the beliefs of its founders, if it turns to non-verbal stimulus in an effort to draw closer to God.

Without lyrical depth and integrity, "praise and worship" songs become little different than the religious icons used within Non-Protestant traditions of Christendom. Such music stirs the emotions in much the same way as icons stir human imagination. Yet neither emotion nor imagination is the principal way in which God communicates His Presence to those who draw near in worship. As beautiful and wonderful as they might be, music and works of art constitute a man-made rather than divine revelation. Helpful — yes, instructive — perhaps. But only of peripheral importance in relation to the Word of God as it is discovered and explained through expositional preaching.

King David's example is instructive to all who would draw

near to the Lord with true praise and integrity in worship. *"So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness. And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod"* (2 Sam. 6:12-14). David's exuberance in worship was condemned by some, but it was accepted by the Lord because it had its origin in both awe and sacrifice. His celebration was the result of his drawing near to God with reverence and wonder.

Where the celebration model of worship falls short is in its failure to recognize that emotional response of the worshipper — be it dancing, tears, or the silent meditations of the heart — must flow naturally from a genuine encounter with God. There is no need to try to "lead" the congregation into an attitude of praise before they have encountered the object of their rejoicing through the preaching of the Word, prayer or sacrament. It is not being unkind to say that celebration without reflection is entertainment, not worship.

Paul Flodquist is currently serving as a ruling elder in the Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Westminster, CA.