

Ordained Servant

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A Journal
for
Church
Officers

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Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

Dedicated to G. I. Williamson

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✦ From the Editor



The retirement of the Rev. G. I. Williamson as the editor of *Ordained Servant* at the end of 2005 signaled a period of transition for *Ordained Servant*. This journal for church officers is one of the means employed by the Committee on Christian Education to fulfill its mandate to help equip ordained officers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Shortly after Mr. Williamson's resignation I was appointed by the general secretary as the new editor. Words cannot adequately express either my enthusiasm for this new endeavor or my appreciation for my predecessor. I am humbled and honored to be given this responsibility. My goal is to build on the pioneering work of Mr. Williamson.

You hold in your hands something entirely new, even though much of its content has been reprinted before in *Ordained Servant* issues printed from 1992 to 2005. Periodicals on the Web are either print based and made available on the Internet after their initial publication in print or they are entirely Web based and never printed. *Ordained Servant*, breaks the mold by being first Web published and only then printed in an annual edition. It is my firm conviction—as well as the committee's—that a serious periodical must be printed in order to be taken seriously. I hope you will enjoy reading this volume, the first of its kind in the new format, as much as I have enjoyed putting it together.

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

In building on the foundation already laid by G. I. Williamson I want to add some new dimensions to OS. Among these is the exploration of culture through the lens of historic Christianity, bringing the biblical and confessional perspective of our church to bear on the world in which we are called by our Lord to be witnesses of his grace and glory. I want to challenge officers in the OPC to be more thoughtful stewards of media, because technology, especially electronic technology, subtly impinges on every area of life. What we most often fail to see is how these inventions change the world, the way we see the world, and the way we relate to the world, one another, and God. We need to be more aware of how our Presbyterian and Reformed convictions are being altered by the new environment.

I have always thought that *Ordained Servant* is a wonderfully appropriate name for a journal of this sort. Paul tells us that at the heart of living transformed lives all Christians should “be fervent in spirit, [and] serve the Lord” (Rom. 12:11). Peter tells church officers to clothe themselves with humility toward one another (1 Pet. 5:5), as an expression of being servants of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who served in the ultimate way by living and dying to become our covenant head—the firstborn of a new servant people. I have sought to reflect this biblical emphasis in the graphics of the journal name and the various feature headings. The title graphic accents the fact that we are servants before we are officers, reminding us that in office we must seek to humbly serve the Lord and his

church. Only grace can counteract the tendency noted by Peter, in 1 Peter 5:3, to domineer, seeking to control others for our own benefit. The feature graphics, while focusing on the unique feature, whether history or worship, etc., attaches “servant” as a background reality, imbuing everything we do with servanthood.

Let me explain some of the features of the new OS. Many features cover subjects often dealt with in the first fourteen years of OS. I mention them in the order in which they appear in this first annual printed volume. At least four others will soon appear, first on line, and then in the next volume. *Servant Thoughts* is my monthly editorial, focusing on the theme of that issue, seeking to provoke discussion of various aspects of our ministries as church officers, especially as we are both challenged and blessed in our cultural setting. *Servant Realms* deals with the church as a denomination, and in its general assembly, presbyteries, and sessions. *Servant Word* explores various aspects of the homiletical task of ministers and the elders who oversee their pulpit work. I will especially seek to encourage preachers that their task involves the medium—the preacher himself, as God’s spokesman—that God has chosen to communicate the message of his incarnate Son. *Servant Worship* focuses on various aspects of public worship. This was one the central concerns of the Reformation. The Reformers understood that worship is where doctrine affects spiritual formation. Thus the way we worship is the primary expression of what we believe and sets the course for Christian living. *Servant Heart* will deal directly with various attitudes and habits of thought that should characterize the servanthood of church officers. *Servant Work* explores the many dimensions of the tasks involved in each of the three offices of the church. *Servant World* explores what it means to be a confessional church in the midst of contemporary culture. This will involve apologetics and cultural criticism as well as suggesting ways in which we may benefit from the common blessings provided by God in common culture. *Servant History* investigates ways in which the history of the church may guide us in our servant tasks. Finally, *Servant Reading* reviews books of significance to church officers, including short book notices, normal length book reviews, and review articles.

There are several things to note regarding the OS page at www.opc.org/os.html. The archives for all past issues of *Ordained Servant* are available and updated monthly. *Publication Information* includes: contact information; *Submissions*, *Style Guide* and *Citation* information; *Subscription* information; *Editorial Policies*; and *Copyright* information.

I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger for giving me this marvelous opportunity for service; the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Paul MacDonald for their guidance, encouragement, and enthusiasm for the work; the many people who have made this volume possible, including, Stephen Pribble, Diane Olinger, Andrew Moody for editorial and graphic help in publishing the online issues; the many fine writers who have labored beyond the call of duty—there would be no *Ordained Servant* without them—Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work on the printed volume itself; my congregation for allowing me the time to do this work; my many friends, especially on the Committee on Christian Education who have encouraged me along the way; my wife Robin for her perseverance, love, and insight; and finally G.I. Williamson for being a pioneer in this work, and so graciously turning over his pen to a new editor.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
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✚ Servant Thoughts

Galvanized Iron: A Tribute to G. I. Williamson for His Pioneering Work on *Ordained Servant*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* 15, no. 1 (2006)¹

Gregory Edward Reynolds



My copy of G. I. Williamson's classic study guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith was signed by him in 1985, when he preached at our church in Mount Vernon, New York, as part of a Bible conference being held at Franklin Square OPC. G. I. had recently returned from New Zealand where he lived for the better part of two decades. I had purchased a first edition of this informative book in its academic blue cover (standard fare for the old Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), now with duct tape on the spine, at Covenant College in 1974. It was a time when I was becoming a Presbyterian and was learning the Reformed faith under the ministry of George Miladin and the professorships of Gordon Clark, Lou Voskuil, John Sanderson, Reggie McClelland, and Henry Krabbendam. G. I. was, unwittingly, one of my earliest mentors.

What G. I. Brought to His Editorship

G. I. was born Gerald Irvin Williamson in Des Moines, Iowa, on May 19, 1925. After being graduated from Drake University in 1949 (the year I was born) and Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary in 1952 with that wonderfully antique degree, the B.D. (bachelor of divinity), he was ordained on June 1, 1952, by the Presbytery of Des Moines in the United Presbyterian Church of North America. He served UPCNA churches in New Bedford, Pennsylvania, and Fall River, Massachusetts. In 1954, he was received into the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, where he served a church in Monticello, Arkansas. In 1955, he was received into the Presbytery of New York and New England of the OPC. His article "What's So Special about the OPC?" tells why he came into the OPC. For the next seven years, G. I. ministered at Grace OPC in Fall River, Massachusetts. From 1963 to 1983, he pastored two churches in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, sandwiched around a four-year stint with an RPCNA congregation in Park City, Kansas.

Finally in 1983, G. I. returned stateside for good—both his and ours. He served the OP churches in Carson and Lark, North Dakota, until his "retirement" in 1993. While it may have been a retirement from the pastorate, it certainly was not one from serving his Lord's church. From 1993 to 1995, G. I. helped plant a church in Hull, Iowa. In 1995, the congregation joined the newly formed United Reformed Church. It was in 1992 that G. I. began editing a new OP periodical, *Ordained Servant* (which was made possible by the willing assistance of God's people at Bethel OPC in Carson, N.D.)

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=4

And now, after publishing his fifty-third issue in his eightieth year, he has handed over the reins.

G. I.'s extensive experience in various Reformed churches solidified his firm commitment to historic, confessional Presbyterianism. His passion has been to instruct the church in its Confession and Catechisms, and to inculcate that faith in the worship and life of the church through the ministry of an active, pastorally oriented eldership. These twin passions are evident in the pages of *Ordained Servant*.

Like his soldier namesake, G. I. stands for “galvanized iron.” In every aspect of his ministry, G. I. has proved to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ—stalwart, steadfast, and reliable. The original meaning of *galvanize* is “to stimulate as if by electric shock.” Its figurative meaning is “to arouse to awareness or action.” Having come from churches that did not take their historic confessional tradition seriously enough, G. I. recognized the importance of our secondary standards. He viewed them as a vital part of the faith and life of the church. Consequently, he has challenged the church to a renewed consciousness of them. Early in his ministry, G. I. sought to recover “with certainty the rich heritage of the Reformation Faith.”² In 1964, he published the first edition of *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. In 1970, he published another study guide, entitled *The Shorter Catechism*, in two volumes. His publication of a commentary on *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1993) is a testimony to his Reformed ecumenical instincts. His years of service on the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations expanded this experience. This, too, is evident in the pages of *Ordained Servant*.

His writings have displayed further the range of his interests as he has sought to teach confessional orthodoxy's implications for every aspect of the church's life. For G. I., the academy serves the interests of the church. Thus, he has published books on worship (*The Singing of the Psalms in the Worship of God*, 1967), ethics (*Wine in the Bible and the Church*, 1976), apologetics (*Understanding the Times*, 1979), and biblical exposition (*The Song of Songs*, 1981).

It is a great honor of my ministry to follow in the footsteps of G. I. Williamson as editor of *Ordained Servant*. I hope to continue his fine efforts to cultivate confessional consciousness in the mind of the church through the faithful ministries of its officers, that Scripture may be understood and lived to the glory of God.

How I Intend to Build on G. I.'s Work

On October 5, 2005, the Committee on Christian Education (CCE) approved the recommendation of the Subcommittee on Resources for the Churches to cease publication of *Ordained Servant* in its present form, and publish it in electronic form on opc.org throughout the year, and annually as a print journal on a trial basis from 2007 to 2009. The new editor has, in consultation with the general secretary, solicited new articles to appear on the OPC website, beginning in 2007.

This year I have redesigned both the content and the look of *Ordained Servant*. I would like feedback from you, the church officers of the OPC. If we are to make a good thing better, we must hear from those whom we are seeking to serve. While I do not intend to lead by consensus, I wish to do everything within my power to make future issues of *Ordained Servant* a blessing to you. I want to grow into this position so that we can each grow together in fulfilling our offices in the church as servants of the great Servant of the Lord.

During 2006, I posted a sampling of the best of past issues from our archives.³ As part of our tribute to G. I. Williamson, we begin with one of his editorials that, more than anything I have read, sums up

² G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), vi.

³ http://opc.org/os_archive.html.

his principled love for the Orthodox Presbyterian expression of our Lord's church.

The general secretary and the CCE have given me considerable latitude in redesigning *Ordained Servant*. This was my main concern in 2006. One aspect of my work has been to identify and recruit writers for new articles to be published, beginning in 2007. At the end of 2007, we will begin publishing all of the new articles in a single annual volume.

Along with continuing to print articles and reviews that cover the range of the past fourteen years of *Ordained Servant*, I have begun expanding the magazine's scope. Exploring the implications of ministering in a digital world is an example of this expansion. The combination of digital and print publication represents a frontier for *Ordained Servant*, its new editor, and I suspect the library and periodical publishing worlds. In January 2006, I attended a lecture and discussion by David Seaman⁴ entitled "Electronic Books, Digital Readers, and the Future of America's Libraries," at the Boston Athenæum. I hope to offer material on electronic communication's effect on the ministries of church officers. The challenge is to balance the efficiency and accessibility of the World Wide Web with the more thoughtful and enduring quality of a printed journal. There are benefits and liabilities to each medium. This topic has been of intense interest to me since I bought my first computer, an Apple IIC, and began a doctor of ministry project (both in 1990) on preaching in the electronic age.⁵

I am convinced that officers need to understand more deeply the battlefield on which we find ourselves engaged in a fierce conflict. So I hope to include thoughtful analyses of different aspects of our culture, so as to better minister within it and to it.

I will seek high quality writing in both articles and book reviews in order to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism. I will try to bring new books to your attention through both brief and article-length reviews. I am working on developing submission standards and a style sheet. The look will fit the content, as I will seek to develop a layout and typography that communicate the seriousness of our endeavor.

I will continue building on G. I.'s pastoral and confessional themes, as these form the core of our focus. As a church planter, I have grown to appreciate the importance of sound doctrine, worship with reverence and awe, passionate expository preaching, and the training of gifted elders who fulfill their pastoral callings. The latter is the key to implementing everything else. For anyone interested, I have written several articles in each of these areas.⁶

Finally, I would like to propose our own J. Gresham Machen as a model of piety, doctrinal integrity, and intellectual cultivation. Many men in the OPC, both living and dead, have followed in Machen's footsteps. Our own "Galvanized Iron" Williamson is a fine example of such a Christian soldier. I hope to explore those riches that are right under our noses. Machen is particularly useful because he lived in the same world we inhabit. He excelled in understanding the modern world and engaging it from a distinctly confessional perspective.

There are two things in particular about Machen's Christianity that I hope to see mirrored in *Ordained Servant*. First, he was able to communicate profound ideas with cogency and clarity. Such clear thinking and its excellent expression in print is what we will aim at. Second, his strong convictions were always held as a true Christian gentleman. He was not afraid to disagree passionately, but he

⁴ David Seaman was the founding director of the Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia Library from 1992 to 2002. He currently serves as executive director of the Digital Library Federation.

⁵ See Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

⁶ www.pilgrimcrossings.org is the audio and literature resource of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in Manchester, NH.

always did so compassionately. I wish to continue promoting this tone in *Ordained Servant*, and, thus, “avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient . . .” (2 Tim. 2:23–24 NKJV). Let’s grow together in imitating Machen, Paul, and our Lord Jesus in these and all things.

“Reading at Risk” Means Preaching at Risk

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* 15, no. 2 (2006)¹

Last month I mentioned that I would attend a lecture by David Seaman, entitled “Electronic Books, Digital Readers, and the Future of America’s Libraries,” at the Boston Athenæum. Dr. Seaman is the executive director of the Digital Library Federation. Prior to this post, he was the founding director of the Electronic Text Center of the University of Virginia Library. In his quest to help make the world’s greatest academic libraries more accessible to everyone, Seaman is perhaps, and understandably so, too optimistic about the future of the book. I found his presentation to be a healthy antidote to my own growing pessimism. There is evidence that obscure, limited subscription, special interest journals are getting wide exposure through the powerful search engines of Google and the like. Furthermore, archived special collections that have barely seen the light of day will become widely available. But, of course, the fact that books sales are up, and obscure texts are getting thousands of Google hits, does not answer the question of what people are doing with these books and texts.

“Reading at Risk” Signals a Cultural Crisis

Introducing a report at the New York Public Library in 2004 entitled “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America,”² Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), warned: “This report documents a national crisis...The concerned citizen in search of good news about American literary culture will study the pages of this report in vain.” Most disturbing is that the already alarming rate of decline in “literary” reading (novels, short stories, poetry, plays) since the last report in 1994 has worsened. The report says that “at the current rate of loss literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century.”

Did you hear that “virtually disappear”? There is an unintended pun in that phrase. The rapidity of decline coincides with the “cumulative presence and availability” of “an enormous array of electronic media.” The “virtual” competition is very real. Gioia says of reading in general:

Reading a book requires a degree of active attention and engagement. Indeed reading itself is a progressive skill that depends on years of education and practice. By contrast, most electronic media such as television, recordings, and radio make fewer demands on their audiences, and indeed often require no more than passive participation. Even interactive electronic media, such as video games and the Internet, foster short attention spans and accelerated gratification.

While oral culture has a rich immediacy that is not to be dismissed, and electronic media offer the considerable advantages of diversity and access, print culture affords irreplaceable forms of focused attention and contemplation that make complex communications and insights possible. To lose such intellectual capability—and the many sorts of human continuity it allows—would constitute a vast cultural impoverishment.³

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=6

² *Reading At Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, Research Division Report #46, (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004), <http://www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*, Dana Gioia, Preface, vii.

Here is a brief summary of the bad news. For the first time in modern history fewer than half of all adults read literature, as defined by the report. Between 1982 and 2002 literary readers declined by ten per cent. In the last decade the rate has nearly tripled. Twenty million potential readers have been lost. Gioia observes that “Reading develops a capacity for focused attention and imaginative growth that enriches both private and public life. The decline of reading in every segment of the adult population reflects a general collapse in advanced literacy. To lose this human capacity—and all the diverse benefits it fosters—impoverishes both cultural and civic life.” More alarming still is that the rate of decline in the youngest age group (18 to 24) was fifty-five percent greater than that of the total adult population.

While illiteracy is a problem everyone laments, *aliteracy* goes almost unnoticed because it is so subtly pervasive. An aliterate is someone who can read, but chooses not to. While the number of books published and purchased increases, the quality of reading is in rapid decline. Kylene Beers, professor of reading at the University of Houston, distinguishes between two types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. Efferent is from the Latin *efferre*, to carry out or away. It is reading which has a useful purpose. Aesthetic reading is reading for the pure pleasure of immersing oneself in the world created by the artful words of a good writer.⁴ In my opinion all worthwhile reading—which includes non-fiction as well as literature—is a combination of both the efferent and the aesthetic. Such worthwhile reading slows us down, cultivates thoughtfulness, counteracting the all-at-once electronic frenzy of the modern world. Being “connected” is so often actually being disconnected from the things, and most importantly the people, that really matter.

Gioia’s warning may have fallen largely on deaf ears, but our ears as Christian leaders must not be deaf to this alarm. Here is the substance of that alarm. It is not the quantity of books but the quality of what is being read and how it is being read that counts. The very act of reading has a significant effect on our development as human beings. If reading is holding its own in any area it is in the ephemeral reading of newspapers and blogs from which little of value is taken away.

We would do well to read and heed literary critic Sven Birkerts’s book *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (1994), is a convincing apology for the written, printed and read word. As the electronic media spread our sensibilities over the surfaces of life and culture, the “vast lateral connectedness,” and thus rob us of the interiorizing strength of reading and writing, the human presence is seriously diminished. Depth is replaced with shallowness. “Our postmodern culture is a vast fabric of competing isms; we are leaderless and subject to the terrors, masked as freedoms, of an absolute relativism.”⁵

How Does “Reading at Risk” Affect the Church?

How does this literary impoverishment affect church officers? We are a people of the Book, and, therefore, of books. Our forefathers labored hard to cultivate literacy in order for people to read the Bible. Reading the Bible, in turn, created a hunger for good reading. Now if a reversal of that pattern is taking place the church is in serious trouble. This is already painfully evident. From simplistic PowerPoint sermon outlines to the shallow sentimentality of many modern worship songs, the “dumbing” down is inundating us like a cultural tsunami.

Birkerts notes perceptively for someone raised in a non-religious family that churches, temples, and ashrams are “places that have traditionally served as repositories of the sacred. Whatever else they may

⁴ Linton Weeks, “The No-Book Report: Skim It and Weep.” *Washington Post* (May 14, 2001), C1.

⁵ Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1994) 228.

be, our religions are grand stories that make a place for us.”⁶ Birkerts believes that the church is one of the last outposts, and therefore hopes, for preserving literacy. Our hopes, as Christian leaders, should be considerably more profound and definite. The church is called to preserve a message which is true for all people, in all places, and in all times. Paul writes to a new generation of preachers when he tells Timothy: “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.”⁷

Recently, as we were setting up our book table at our new mission work in Dover, New Hampshire, I was reminded of the importance of literacy and reading in the planting and developing of churches. The very act of reading is directly related to the centrality of preaching of God’s Word. The ministry of the Word is at the center, not the end, of the historic Reformed liturgies, for very good reason. The liturgy we use in our congregation⁸ is like a *chiasm*⁹, one of the most common literary structures in the Bible. For example, confession of sin and assurance of pardon in the approach to the Lord complement the Lord’s Supper at the conclusion. The ministry of the Word is at the center. Word-centered worship is also God and Christ-centered, because so is the Bible. As I have said, the reading and preaching of Scripture have historically been the motivation for literacy among Christians. Now we witness a dramatic decline in worthwhile reading, but we wonder why we hear “I didn’t get anything out of the sermon.” Assuming the preaching is good, we answer, “You need to put something into the act of listening in order to get anything out of preaching.” But unless people are trained in worthwhile reading they will be less capable of taking anything meaningful, which is to say useful and beautiful, away with them.

I cannot tell you how Christians are doing, measured against the bad news of the NEA report, because the report does not give us that data. My suspicion is that we are faring better than average because of the high quality of some Christian education. Notice I said, “some.” I did so because some Christian education is also below the standard of public education. But more important is the fact that the church in America has a nasty penchant for mimicking the worst aspects of our culture, even when it thinks it isn’t, or worse when it mistakes its imitation for being “spiritual.” Eschewing the value of a liberal education and the cultivation of intellect would be a case in point. In any case, while the church may have reason to be more hopeful than the culture in general, the NEA report ought to temper our optimism.

Literacy is important to Christians not just for reading the Bible. That is where we begin, but it must not be where we end. As Calvin observed, we see the world through the spectacles of Scripture. A good education gives us entrance into the conversation of the ages of recorded history, the intelligent world in which the Lord has situated us. Then we come full circle to a richer understanding of God’s Word as a word relevant in all ages and cultures.

Many, even in our circles, are succumbing to the plea to keep all writing at an eighth grade level of literacy. We must not give in to this. If this editor is ever required to lower the reading level of this journal to that standard he will be resigning *posthaste* (look it up!). We must cultivate thoughtfulness

⁶ Ibid., 196, 197.

⁷ 1 Tim. 3:15, 16.

⁸ www.amoskeagchurch.org.

⁹ Latin *chiasmus* means cross piece, or placing crosswise, a literary pattern shaped like an arrow with complementary points centering on the main point.

and intellectual inquisitiveness, especially among the young. We must give them something to reach for, a worthwhile standard to attain. This is not to say we are to be pedantic and purposely obscure. Preaching in particular must be understood by the whole congregation, but everyone must engage in the challenging task of hearing.

Good readers make thoughtful listeners who bring something to the business of hearing sermons, and, thus, take something significant away with them into the life of the family, the church, and the community. What I am ultimately pleading for is a kind of efferent listening, which can only be cultivated through the same kind of worthwhile reading. Oral and written communication go hand in hand.

The Reformation conception of preaching is stated lucidly in the *Second Helvetic Confession*: “The preaching of the word of God *is* the word of God.” Our Lord, the incarnate Word, has identified the preaching of his ordained spokesmen with his Word: “He who hears you hears Me” (Luke 10:16). Romans 10:14 should be translated as the *American Standard Version* has it: “And how shall they believe in Him *whom* they have not heard?” as opposed to “Him *of whom* they have not heard?”¹⁰ Thus it is “the preached Word rather than the written Word” which is the primary means of grace.¹¹ Christ is immediately present as the true Speaker in the preaching moment. “The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation.”¹² So Calvin comments on the same passage: “This is a remarkable passage with regard to the efficacy of preaching...”¹³ Preaching is not speaking about Christ, but is Christ speaking. Nothing less than this is at stake in “Reading at Risk.”

Lose a generation of good readers and you lose a generation of good listeners. What can we do? Sounding the alarm is only the beginning of a solution. We should encourage a disciplined use of passive and interactive electronic media. What must follow is a concerted effort by church leaders and parents to cultivate the best reading of a wide range of the best literature. We should encourage reading aloud and discussion of what is read. We must encourage sermon discussion. We need to get the young hooked on the joys of deep reading. We must also help train a generation of preachers who know how to communicate the text of Scripture in a winsome, interesting, and spiritually captivating way. Then there is hope that the next generation of the church will fall in love with God’s Word. Stay tuned.

¹⁰ David H. Schuringa, “The Preaching of the Word As a Means of Grace: The Views of Herman Hoeksema and R. B. Kuiper.” Th. M. thesis (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1985) 18-22. Later in chapter III (34-43) a convincing case for the grammatical correctness of this translation is made.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44; John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) 398.

On Being Connected

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Last month I lamented the contribution of electronic media to the decline of worthwhile reading with the comment: “Being ‘connected’ is so often actually being disconnected from the things, and most importantly the people, that really matter.” Much of what the modern world considers “being connected” is a superficial exchange of basic information. While I think that even information exchange—one of the best uses of electronic communication devices—is overwhelming our lives, something more profound is happening to our world. Firsthand experience—especially face to face—is being diminished in every arena of life. Like fish in water, what surrounds us is difficult to see. But we must work hard at observing if we are to be the wise leaders our Lord has called us to be.

It is not only the electronic “communications” media that are disconnecting us, but all of our technologies in combination. For example, we tend to think that the automobile has always existed—as if it had been created on the sixth day. However, everything created by fallen people should be the subject of our critical inquiry as Christians. As the Canadian scholar Harold Innis insisted, transportation and communication technologies change everything about the way we live and the way we view the world. Like the railroad, the automobile altered the cultural, social, and intellectual landscape of America. The very automobiles that separated and dispersed us have now become necessary to maintain face to face relationships.

One of the most remarkable quotes I have ever read on this subject comes from Booth Tarkington’s novel *The Magnificent Ambersons*, published in 1918, just as the automobile was emerging as a major force in American culture. When tactless George Amberson summarily dismisses automobiles as “a useless nuisance,” his would-be father-in-law, Eugene Morgan, a manufacturer of the new-fangled automobile, answers perceptively:

I’m not sure he’s wrong about automobiles. With all their speed forward they may be a step backward in civilization—that is, in spiritual civilization. It may be that they will not add to the beauty of the world, nor to the life of men’s souls. I am not sure. But automobiles have come, and they bring a greater change in our life than most of us expect. They are here, and almost all outward things are going to be different because of what they bring. They are going to alter war, and they are going to alter peace. I think men’s minds are going to be changed in subtle ways because of automobiles; Just how, though, I could hardly guess. But you can’t have the immense outward changes that they will cause without some inward ones, and it may be that George is right, and that the spiritual alteration will be bad for us. Perhaps, ten or twenty years from now, if we can see the inward change in men by that time, I shouldn’t be able to defend the gasoline engine, but would have to agree with him that automobiles “had no business to be invented.”²

While we cannot stop what is happening technologically we must be aware of what is happening in order to be good stewards of that little corner of God’s world where he has placed us. We might call

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=8.

² Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Illustrated by Arthur William Brown (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), 199-200.

it *technology ecology*. From my vantage point, I am not aware of much critical analysis going on among Christians—or anyone else for that matter—about this subject. Our unvarnished optimism about all of our inventions is really aping the culture around us. Part of the mind renewal enjoined in Romans 12 involves assessing technology in terms of the ways it either enhances or diminishes our relationships with God and other human beings.

Put boldly, cars and computers may be robbing us, as officers in the body of Christ, of the kind of face to face, incarnational ministry of which our world is in such desperate need. The intangible mystery of being human, image-bearers of the living triune God, must not be misinterpreted to give us the false impression that there is no difference between primary, firsthand experience, and electronically-mediated experience. The inability to describe precisely or define something profound and complex does not mitigate its reality.

Last February, after descending from a winter climb in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, I drove south through dramatic Franconia Notch. As I entered the notch, with Cannon Mountain on my right and snowcapped Mount Lafayette on my left, I was listening to the 1943, electronically remastered recording of the great Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker playing Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. As I passed the base of Lafayette, the second movement—one of the profoundest pieces of orchestral music ever written—was playing. On a Bose system in such a setting, this would appear to be the pinnacle of concert listening experience.

But it wasn't. This February I heard the same piece of music live, conducted by James Levine, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, in Symphony Hall. Some bright audiophile will ask "What's the difference?" or perhaps even prefer the Franconia Notch performance. While not denying my intense enjoyment of both, the difference is overpowering, but profoundly difficult to define. Perhaps that is just the problem.

Consider, for example, the difference in hearing this performance during World War II in Berlin, not knowing if you would live to hear Beethoven again. It is the same as asking, Why can't I get a good theological education on the web instead of the difficulty and expense of doing it in person? Pastors may ask, Why won't an email or a phone call do? Why is house to house visitation so important?

For the same reason, live pastoral preaching can never be replaced by an Internet connection, a video conference session, or enhanced by PowerPoint in a sanctuary. Human presence and experience in God's world is a matter of body and soul. Its profundity is not quantifiable, or easily definable, precisely because we image our majestic Creator.

Here is a practical challenge—a communications IQ (incarnational quotient) test. How much of your daily experience is mediated through a computer on theological discussion lists, "distance learning," sending and answering e-mails, occupational or recreational web surfing? Then there is the TV, the cell phone, and the list goes on. How many people are being visited? How much real communion is going on among the saints in your congregation? How many of our young people are learning basic social skills, or even experiencing a loving, giving, intelligent community? The problem is not merely a matter of time, but more importantly the ways in which we understand and relate to God, his world, and his people. From automobile to personal computer, our real connectedness is being undermined and that in the name of a communication revolution. True communication involves the body and soul communion of persons.

Listen to the way Paul describes his ministry in Ephesus in Acts 20:17–21. "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the

Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’ ”

John closed two of his letters with a profound sense of the importance of personal presence, which even an inspired letter could not replace. “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of your elect sister greet you” (2 John 1:12–13). “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” (3 John 1:13–14). Even the ancient technology of pen and ink is no substitute for face to face communion.

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God” (2 Cor. 2:2-3).

The church is in a unique position to act as a counter environment against the dehumanizing tendency of our fallen culture. In our growing congregation, along with working on being more consistent in visiting each member at least annually, several young mothers use the church building during the midweek to get together for play and conversation. We are exploring new ways to be involved in the lives of others. Sessional visits help to stimulate appreciation for the importance of personal relationships. Such visits should be seen as visits from our Savior, who has called ministers, elders, and deacons to represent him with their personal presence to his people.

Princess Adelaide and Presbyterianism: The Death of Context and the Life of the Church

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What on earth does Princess Adelaide have to do with Presbyterianism?

Contextless Information: The Telegraph

On February 3, the *Washington Post* published the obituary of the telegram (1844-2006).² Thus, over a century and a half ago, began the dramatic redefinition of space and time. Like the obsolescence of the “horseless” carriage, the death of the telegraph represents, not an end, but the end of the beginning of a new cultural environment.

Henry David Thoreau was one of the few intelligent critics to point out the most significant negative consequence of the new wonder. In the seclusion of Walden Pond (1845-1847) he opined: “We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate . . . We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad flapping American ear will be that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough.” By decontextualizing information the new medium would change the nature of discourse, trivializing the profound and making the irrelevant relevant.³

Not everyone was thrilled with the idea of a national village either. In 1889, *The Spectator* mused over “The Intellectual Effects of Electricity”: “The world is for purposes of intelligence reduced to a village.” The incompleteness of information as well as the lack of time to reflect on its significance causes “perpetual dissipation of the mind.”⁴ The problem of “information overload” and its concomitant lack of teleology was already being noticed by our grandfathers.

As for the rest, even the most thoughtful men of letters, such as Whitman, Emerson and Van Wyck Brooks set their eyes on a glorious future in which the democratic ideal would be realized in the universal dissemination of the best knowledge.⁵ So you see that it is not a matter of intelligence, but rather a matter of cultivating the ability to stand back and analyze, that makes one a media ecologist. The solitude of Walden Pond, and well cultivated habits of mind, suited Thoreau to be an astute observer. Like Trivial Pursuit, knowledge without context floods us with meaningless information, thus undermining all hierarchies of value, and the very idea of truth. Perhaps rather than Postmodernity we should call this Modernity in bloom.

One of Marshall McLuhan’s favorite metaphors comes from an Edgar Allen Poe short story titled “A Descent into the Maelstrom.” In the Arctic Ocean, off the coast of Norway, there is an area teem-

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=11

² Mike Musgrove, “The Telegram, 1844-2006,” *Washington Post*, February 3, 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/02/AR2006020202467.html> (p. D01 print version).

³ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1985), 65-69. Cf. Thoreau’s *Walden*.

⁴ Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

ing with fish in which few dare to navigate due to the nearby presence of a deadly whirlpool called the Maelstrom. The sinister swirl is known for swallowing boats and men alive. But one brave fisherman and his two brothers regularly pass the edge of the vortex in order to mine the bounty. One day a violent storm causes them to be caught in the Maelstrom. One brother dies by tying himself to the mast, which snaps and pulls him to his watery death. Another stays with the ship and is drowned in the whirlpool. The third, however, recognizes a pattern in the way different objects behave when they are sucked into the vortex. While most descend rapidly to the destructive rocks at the bottom, certain objects go less rapidly into the Maelstrom and then slowly ascend to safety. He notices that they are cylindrical in shape. Thus, he ties himself to a barrel and ends up surviving the hellish waters. On shore he is met by an incredulous crowd which doesn't believe a word of his account.⁶

This dramatic story poignantly illustrates the nature of the electronic environment. The all-at-onceness or simultaneity and pervasiveness of our media experience is impossible to safely navigate without standing back and observing the nature and patterns of what is going on. Without such navigational skills the electronic whirlpool can be deadly, especially to the life of the church, and its leaders. How does this affect Presbyterianism?

Our Context: Confessional Presbyterians in God's World

Communication technologies subtly transform the ways we think, and our social institutions and structures. The printing press brought down the Pope by undermining his authority through making the Bible and other Christian literature available to a wide audience. The image-based hierarchy of the Papacy was no match for the new medium. Printing fostered trade, nationalism, and universal literacy. While it also tended toward radical individualism it promoted logical and historical thinking, along with unity in text-based communities. Reasoned discourse was enhanced.

In a similar way, the Internet threatens to undermine Presbyterianism, which thrived in the Gutenberg world as a literacy-based institution. The egalitarian bias of the Web is powerful; and partly because we are so close to it, it goes largely unnoticed. The word "web" symbolizes the nature of the Internet, as it promotes thinking in and relating to complex networks. It is changing the social structure of every institution, including the church. The old news outlets are weakened under the pressure of an expanding menu of choices. The tyranny of experts is weakened. But this good news has a downside. Information without any meaningful context is proliferated at an astonishing rate. All social space is altered. Everyone potentially becomes an expert and a fool at once. While it may help us avoid manipulation by mass media, it may also delude us into thinking we know something important when we don't. Henry Ford's considered opinion that "history is bunk" takes on new meaning in the electronic assembly line.

A medical doctor recently told me of a patient who came with his own diagnosis from WebMD. When the doctor insisted that the diagnosis was wrong the patient stormed out. He wanted a confirmation of his own opinion, not an accurate diagnosis from someone who knows more than he does. Thus, pastors may be tempted to preach in polo shirts because they are no longer the "experts in the Bible" of Machen's biblical ideal. But Machen's view of ministry was one that promoted true liberty in the church, united in a knowledge of the whole counsel of God.

Apart from the obvious problem of our tending to spend more time staring at the pixels of our

⁶ Edgar Allen Poe, "A Descent into the Maelstrom" (Charlottesville, VA: Electronic Text Center of the University of Virginia Library, 2000), <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/Plist.html/> accessed March, 27, 2006.

computer screens than we do into the eyes of our families, parishioners, and neighbors; on the web we are also forming opinions and coming to conclusions in a new ecclesiastical space, unauthorized by the Bible. Our tendency, after our Gnostic caucusing is complete — though it seems like an endless stream — when we assemble in sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies is to push an agenda rather than truly deliberate issues. The speed of light does not tend to foster careful thinking, writing or deliberating. A disembodied, electronically isolated spirit tends not to be as accountable, or as thoughtful in listening, as when face to face as *imago dei*. The incarnation implies that our embodied existence is what constitutes the image of God. Anything that diminishes that real life context will tend to undermine the church and its biblical way of doing things.

Think of what video streaming, or even daily posting of debates, of the General Assembly would do to the deliberations of that body. Out of context conclusions may be drawn before the matter at hand has been decided by the assembly. Why not have a gigantic video conference? Think of all the airfare we'd save. The god of efficiency is taking center stage in the pantheon of modernity. The importance of the incarnation is becoming less plausible as our out-of-body experience in the electronic world increases.

This is a maelstrom we must learn to navigate or we will find ourselves in deep spiritual and ecclesiastical trouble. So what shall it be: conformed or transformed? Romans 12:1-2 leaves us in no doubt: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*"

Let me suggest that inefficiency should be more prized among us. Taking time to go through rigorous steps to achieve or create something seems to me more consistent with Paul's idea of "presenting our bodies a living sacrifice." More uninterrupted meditation, reading and discussion. Fewer but better meetings and visits. Less e-mail "discussion" and more face to face community and communion.

Living in space and time as embodied creatures, there is a pace without which life is no longer worth living. Too much unwanted and unneeded, contextless and meaningless information about Princess Adelaide will make it so. Epic poet Wilmer Mills considers the fast pace of our culture to be the reason people have no patience with epic poetry. As a sawmill operator and furniture maker, he prizes the slow processes of producing lumber and craftsmanship. Process enables us to think of life as a story,⁷ whereas the instantaneous electronic world tends toward self-absorption in lives without creaturely contexts.

To slow the pace, we need to consider ways of protecting church, family, and private spaces, modeled more after the biblical narrative than the modern maelstrom. Cultivating the context in which we live — in which God has placed us in his created order — is the only way to navigate the swirling currents of modern life. We cannot change the nature of the environment, but we can wisely navigate it. That is what Paul calls us to do. When electronic means of communication enhance our experience in space and time as creatures of God in relation to the world, those around us, and him, then we are navigating the whirlpool and need not give Princess Adelaide's whooping cough a passing thought. The important things will claim our attention and devotion.

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⁷ Ken Myers, "Guest: Wilmer Mills, the Interview in Brief," Mars Hill Audio Journal 57, (July / August 2002), http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/segment_detail.asp?ID=453054365.

Avoiding the Dangers of Distance in Officer Training

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“Learn to hear God’s voice, Spirit-led distance learning.” So proclaims the Internet ad for a “Christian university.” How odd to think of the Person who conceived the human nature of our Lord in the womb of the Virgin Mary; filled him throughout his earthly ministry; and raised him from the dead on the third day, as leading in disembodied education!

Books and printing were the first technologies to really offer education at a distance. One could read an author’s thoughts anywhere and at any time, well out of earshot of the writer. Yet how few of us would champion the idea that the sum of a man’s internship or seminary training would require him to hole himself up in a library somewhere and study books on preaching, pastoral theology, and the like. Why then are we so enthralled with the concept of “distance learning” when it comes to this new so-called “delivery system” of the Internet? I have argued in previous editorials that there is no such thing as a mere delivery system when it comes to communication. All messages are embodied in various media. Since education involves communication of the highest order, we should ask some tough questions about distance learning before we use it extensively. How does such technology affect education in general and theological education in particular? Such questioning must not begin with an analysis of technology itself, but rather of the nature, aims, and means of historic theological education. Then we must ask how the proposed technologies either promote or diminish such aims and means.

In an insightful address to a joint meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Theological Library Association and the New York Area Theological Library Association in May 1998, Darryl G. Hart expressed grave concerns about the negative impact of educational technology on theological education. His concerns center on what he calls the “three R’s of seminary education ... reading, writing and religious communities.”²

Hart contends that “digitized text,” and especially searchable Bible software, lends itself to an “engineering” or quantitative hermeneutic. Word searches give the illusion of study, while obviating the kind of “deep reading” that cultivates thoughtfulness. “Would such a search produce real learning, or simply a lot of citations? ... The point of these questions, of course, is that the automation revolution at least indirectly promotes the hermeneutics of engineers rather than that of humanists, and this development is harmful for the kind of readers we should try to nurture at good theological schools.”³ Engineers may take umbrage at these remarks, since they, too, would favor the thoughtful gathering of data. However, the point should be well taken that there is a danger in such software of merely quantifying information rather than thoughtfully assimilating texts in their contexts as must be the habit of students of the humanities.

We should all hope that the intern spends a healthy portion of his time in solitary reading and reflection, disconnected from the domination of the computer. If he does not learn to carve out time for such things amidst the rigors of pastoral activity, he will probably never develop this essential and

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=14

² D. G. Hart, “The Three R’s of Theological Education,” *Nicotine Theological Journal* 2:3 (1998), 1-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

salutary habit. Of the eight wisely chosen ingredients for a good internship recommended by Pastor Trice in this month's republished article, study is missing, probably because he assumes private study to be a predilection of Reformed and Presbyterian candidates. I am not sure that should be assumed any longer. So let me add a ninth ingredient: mentoring in media stewardship with attention to the discipline of study and thoughtful discussion of theology and ministry.

While we should be alert to the dangers of which Hart warns, we should not minimize the enormous benefit which searching an electronic text of the Bible or even a classic work of theology can afford the assiduous student. I would argue that the time saved in searching for various grammatical constructions and word usages in the biblical text may be used for the kind of deep reflection advocated by Hart. In reacting to the liabilities of electronic media, which many Christians seem to blithely overlook, the Christian must also be appreciative of the benefits of those media, which God has graciously allowed us to develop in common culture.

As goes reading, so writing. Internet education involves very little term paper writing. This is contrary to what used to be considered the pinnacle of a good education, namely, the writing of a dissertation, the longest of research papers. So if technology makes it possible for students to stay home rather than come to campus, and if it tempts theological educators to offer an education that does not include library research and the writing of a term paper, then the automation revolution may not only be furthering poor reading skills but also rearing a generation of students who don't know how to write.⁴

The use of the Internet and word processing, for the thoughtful user, may actually enhance writing and research in some significant ways, as long as the new efficiency is not used to sidestep the disciplines of thinking and writing. Perhaps learning to write without modern equipment is the best way to learn to use the new technology to its greatest advantage. This has certainly been the experience of the computer crossover generation. It remains to be seen how the next generation will fare in this regard, since the tendency of computing is toward carelessness in writing and thinking, because texts are so easily changed. E-mail engenders this tendency with a vengeance.

The most provocative question of all is: Does information technology give students the skills they need to become a part of a religious community's conversation? Hart answers a resounding "No!" The failure of community conversation is rooted in the neglect of the seminary's two greatest resources: its books and its faculty.⁵ The difficulty of defining the uniqueness of the personal presence of the mentor—a uniqueness that we simply assume in our internship programs—should not deter us from recognizing this profound and complex reality. The difficulty of articulation should rather move us to affirm the irreplaceable nature of the incarnate learning experience.

Sadly, Hart observes that those who raise such questions become the objects of ridicule, and are labeled "old fashioned" or "out of touch," a kind of "untouchable" caste in a technological society. A recent article titled "Computing the Sermon" ends with the patronizing statement, "If your church or pastor has not gotten into the computer age, the time has come!"⁶

"Distance" is the operative word in the pedagogy. Overcoming distance may, in some cases, be a great benefit. It will avoid the disruption of family life often associated with traditional theological education. The transfer of information and documents from all over the world enhances all forms of education. However, the decrease in face-to-face encounter, combined with the loss of the community of learning, is a clear liability of the new system. As Douglas Groothuis points out: "seminaries have

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John R. Tinsley, "Computing the Sermon," *New Horizons* (July 1997), 5.

traditionally ‘disrupted’ students’ lives, and for good reason. To prepare for ministry, one must immerse oneself in biblical exegesis, theology, apologetics, ethics, practical ministry, and more. This requires a shift in one’s whole life.”⁷ The rigors of seminary are only a prelude to the rigors of pastoral ministry. If habits of intense commitment are not developed in the community of pastor-scholars, where else will they be developed? Those on the avant-garde may end up being the ones who are “out of touch,” after all.

Beyond this, Hart’s warnings point to one of the greatest dangers of the “Information Revolution”: the atomizing and de-historicizing of the text of Scripture. Douglas Groothuis recalls the warning of Mark Noll that the church has tended since the nineteenth century to treat Scripture like a jigsaw puzzle. Bible software may exacerbate this problem. Groothuis remarks: “Users may end up dissecting the Bible into info-chunks instead of understanding the Scripture’s context, historical setting, and overall theological significance.”⁸ Hard intellectual and spiritual work can easily seem unnecessary to the novice student armed with loads of software.

In a 1997 article, Steven Vanderhill, former executive director of ministry resources at Westminster Theological Seminary, expressed unalloyed enthusiasm for the advent of the “virtual classroom.” Through electronic mail the student and the professor can “personally interact.” He believes that “Internet assisted” seminary programs will enhance three “central concerns: interactivity, accountability, and community.”⁹ What is missing in this article is even a moment of caution for the potential liabilities of this new technology. The questions are not even being asked, much less answered. E-mail may supplement existing face-to-face relationships, but it can never replace them, even though that is their tendency.

Church officers need to teach God’s people to ask these difficult questions at every level of Christian education. Interns need special training to be stewards of technology, in order to understand its impact on the church and find ways to employ its benefits and counteract its liabilities. In an effort to supply supplemental theological and pastoral training to ministers and candidates, our own Ministerial Training Institute is seeking to thoughtfully use the Internet, combining distance education with intensive training seminars.

As church officers, we must promote embodied learning. This must inform our uses of technology.¹⁰

⁷ Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997, Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 152.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹ Steven Vanderhill, “The Internet Seminary.” *New Horizons* (July 1997), 8-9.

¹⁰ Portions of this editorial come from Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

Clarity on the Covenants

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Dan Brown’s use of “historical facts” in *The DaVinci Code* exemplifies the postmodern penchant for blurring the difference between fact and fiction. Recently I have noticed another blurred focus—our understanding of the covenants. Some would say “covenant.” Therein lies the blurring. In this case it is thankfully not a blurring of fact and fiction, but of two kinds of covenants: works and grace. Our Confession clearly distinguishes between the two as it seeks to accurately represent Scripture. While we may live with many differences on our doctrine of the covenants, certain elements of the doctrine must be deemed “essential.”

The first major Bible purchase in my Christian life was made in Geneva Switzerland. Ironically it was the Scofield Reference Bible, published by Oxford University Press. Wouldn’t Calvin have been dismayed! That was 1972. A year later I cut my teeth on covenant theology by studying Charles Ryrie’s *Dispensationalism Today* at the Bible Institute of New England under the tutelage of a Dallas Theological Seminary grad. Following the footnotes convinced me that covenant theologians such as O. T. Allis, snidely referred to as “Allis in wonderland” by Dallas students, were more biblical in their understanding of the Scriptures’ structure. By the time I started Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1976, I was primed to fortify my soul on the unity of the covenants in the covenant of grace. A good dose of John Murray was just the theological vitamin I needed.

Then came Meredith G. Kline, who flew in each week in my middler year, teaching Old Testament Prophets, reminding us of the discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, as well as distinguishing between the two different types of covenant found in Scripture. To my novice mind, he sounded like a dispensationalist. While fortified in my commitment to Reformed theology, I left seminary in 1979 very confused—although I was not fully aware of it—about the covenants or the covenant—which is it? It wasn’t until the early nineties, as I re-examined the covenant constructions of theonomy and of Dr. Kline’s biblical theology, that things began to come into focus. One need not agree with Kline in many other areas to appreciate that his covenant theology is essentially the confessional doctrine.

Shortly after that time, a couple visited our church. After a mid-week Bible study, during which I had explained the covenants of works and grace in an historical diagram on the chalk board, the husband expressed his delight at hearing what he had never had explained to him, an overview of the biblical doctrine of the covenants as our Confession sets them forth. This was a mature Christian man who has been in the OPC for many decades. I was astonished—even dismayed. I realized I was not alone in my former confusion. We are in need of clarity on the covenants. With over three hundred biblical references and half a millennium of theologizing it would be hard to overestimate either the importance of this doctrine or the clarity with which it is articulated in our confessional standards.

My purpose is not to present a comprehensive view—that would be impossible—or even to summarize the voluminous debate presently going on in Reformed circles—that would be unwise—but rather to focus on what we have committed ourselves to as a confessional church. Our Confession is clear on several important points regarding what the Bible teaches about the covenants. Remember, the Westminster Confession is *our* consensus on what the Bible teaches. Whatever else may be debat-

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=16.

able—and there is plenty—this confessed system of Reformed doctrine must be clearly believed and taught by church officers. If we believe the Confession to be unbiblical in its teaching on a given doctrine, then we must seek through painstaking exegesis to prove the point to the church. Meanwhile, we are bound by our vows to uphold what we corporately confess. To do otherwise threatens the unity of the church which our Confession is designed to promote.

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms were composed after a century of exegesis and formulation of the doctrine of the covenants. Our standards represent a mature statement of this doctrine and the first Reformed confession to make it prominent. The following are several of the essential features I see articulated by Scripture and embodied in our doctrinal standards.

Our Confession Teaches a Comprehensive Definition of Covenant

In defining covenant we must include all of the covenants in the Bible. If we define only redemptive covenants then we, by definition, eliminate the covenant God made with Adam before the fall. Thus, a covenant in our Confession is a divinely initiated and sanctioned administration of God's kingdom. Without this there could be no relationship of union and communion between God and his people, either before or after the fall. Our Confession is clear in identifying the creation covenant as a covenant of works. "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works..." (WCF 7.2).

Our Confession Teaches a Plurality of Covenants

The question around which my own quandary centered was: Is there only one type of covenant with two aspects: promise and obligation? Or are there two types of covenant? I now recognize that my greatest confusion on the doctrine of the covenant was my failure to distinguish two essential types of covenant in Scripture and Confession: covenants of works and covenants of grace. I mistakenly thought that the works principle, wherever it appeared in Scripture, was simply accenting the obligation side of a single kind of covenant, rather than indicating another type of covenant altogether.

In what follows I do not mean to neglect the most fundamental covenant between Father and Son in eternity, in which the Father gives the elect to Christ through the covenant of grace which the Son incarnate secures through his active and passive obedience, fulfilling the covenant of works as the second Adam on behalf of the elect. This first, heavenly covenant, called the covenant of redemption or peace, forms the eternal basis for the bi-covenantal arrangement revealed in history: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. As Geerhardus Vos says: "The covenant of redemption is the pattern for the covenant of grace. However, it is more than that. It is also the effective cause for carrying through the latter."² This covenant is assumed by our Confession, as is evident, e.g., in the chapters on God's eternal decrees, God's covenant with man, and Christ the mediator.

While all covenants have obligations, not all are covenants of works. Mono-covenantalism insists that there is really only one kind of covenant—a combination of promise and obligation.³ While it is true that every covenant makes demands on both parties, this does not mean that there is only one kind of covenant in Scripture. Scripture and our Confession clearly teach a bi-covenantal structure. Paul sums up federal theology pointedly in Romans 5:12-21, whereby the obedience of the two representative heads is imputed to those represented. The obedience required to inherit eternal life, that the first Adam failed to render, was perfectly rendered by the second Adam. Thus, the covenant of works forms

² Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 252.

³ Norman Shepherd, "My Understanding of Covenant" <http://www.spindleworks.com/library/CR/shepherd.htm>.

the foundation of the covenant of grace.

The Abrahamic covenant is the essential expression in the Old Covenant of the covenant of grace to which Moses hearkens back (Deut. 4:31, 5:3). Jeremiah in 31:31-32 declares the provisional nature of the Mosaic covenant, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.” Paul emphasizes this distinction in Galatians 3:17-18. “And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.” The promise of the Abrahamic covenant of grace runs like a golden thread through the entire Mosaic economy, while that economy itself, accenting the law, and recapitulating the probation of the first Adam, cries out for the obedience and grace of the second Adam.

Paul clearly distinguishes between covenants of works and faith:

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (Rom. 11:5-6)

Our Confession Accounts for the Legal Character of the Mosaic Covenant

This point grows out of the previous one. While there has been a range of opinion on how to account doctrinally for the strong legal accent in the Mosaic covenant, its presence in Scripture and Confession is clear.

Geerhardus Vos puts it succinctly from the perspective of historical theology: “the older theologians did not always clearly distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant. At Sinai it was not the ‘bare’ law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.”⁴ The Confession in chapter nineteen clearly identifies the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works. “This law [given to Adam as the covenant of works, 19.1], after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments . . . Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works . . .” (WCF 19:2,6). While there has been a range of terminology and doctrine to account for this legal element in Moses, we must account for it in a way that mono-covenantalism is not equipped to do.

Paul accentuates this aspect of the Mosaic covenant by contrasting the works demanded by that covenant with the faith called for in the New Covenant:

For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will

.....
⁴ Vos, 255.

be saved. (Rom. 10:5-9)

This certainly does not mean that there was no grace revealed in the Mosaic covenant, as was noted above regarding the continuous thread of the Abrahamic covenant throughout the Mosaic period, but, even when referring to it as an administration of the covenant of grace, the Confession calls it the “time of the law” (WCF 7.5). It also makes clear that there can be no eschatological inheritance of the created order as man’s eternal dwelling without fulfillment of the covenant of works, typified in the Mosaic covenant. Both Scripture and the Confession refer to the Mosaic administration as a “law” covenant. “For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). But the revival of the covenant of works in the Mosaic administration was, as Vos stated, in the interest of revealing both the need for and God’s provision of grace in the mediator, Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the Confession elaborates on the present usefulness of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, not as a way of salvation but as a rule of life: “Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly...” (WCF 19.6). Those who were saved under the Mosaic covenant were saved the only way sinners can be saved since our first federal head failed: through the grace of the second federal head, Jesus Christ.

Our Confession Teaches Grace to Sinners Based on the Merit of Christ

While our tradition lacks unanimity on the question of a gracious element in the covenant of works with Adam, it seems clear that both our Confession and the Scripture use “grace” in a strictly redemptive way, as the undeserved favor of God toward sinners. Our Confession, it seems to me, avoids using the term in the pre-lapsarian situation, while at the same time affirming the Creator-creature distinction in affirming God’s condescension: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant” (WCF 7.1). The danger of using “grace” otherwise is that it may confuse its definition and even diminish its power after the fall. I say this may be its tendency, not the intention of those whose choose to use the word otherwise.

The meritorious obedience required of Adam was defined by God, not Adam, as the requirement for attaining eternal life. WCF 7.2 states, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” This also was reiterated in more demanding language in WCF 19.1: “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.” If we deny merit in the first covenant arrangement with Adam, we will undermine it in the second arrangement with the second Adam, Jesus Christ. According to Paul in Romans 5:19, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” Thus, denying the covenant of works and its consequent demand for merit may tend to undermine the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and its reception by faith alone.

It is not accidental that the specific term “merit” is used by the Confession writers in connection with Christ’s intercession and perseverance of the saints (WCF 17.2; WLC 55).

Our Confession Teaches the Practical Importance of the Covenants

Clarity on the covenants helps the church to understand the Bible. It provides a hermeneutical structure by which to interpret particular texts properly. If ministers teach this doctrine clearly it will help the church understand the Bible more clearly.

Clarity on the covenants helps to preserve free and sovereign grace in justification by faith by providing a righteousness that not only cancels the debt of our sin, but establishes us as righteous and pleasing in God's sight. The scope of Christ's accomplishment is succinctly summed up in the Shorter Catechism's definition of justification: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (WSC 33). In terms of historical theology, distinguishing between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace avoids semi-Pelagian anthropology. Semi-Pelagian theology always undermines assurance, because it bases salvation partly on human merit. The Confession and Larger Catechism teach differently:

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof. (WCF 17.2)

Christ maketh intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring his will to have it applied to all believers; answering all accusations against them, and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services. (WLC 55)

Clarity on the covenants helps define the church's identity and task. It is not accidental that a more mono-covenantal view often forms the basis for believing that the modern state is mandated to enforce the Law of Moses, or at least the Ten Commandments. Every American cultural reformation movement, from Christian reconstruction, to the call to restore Christian America, to the liberal social gospel, is rooted in a failure to properly distinguish between the Old and New covenants. The proper response to the cultural denial of dispensationalism is the spirituality of the New Covenant church as a gracious embassy of Christ, not the reformation of the culture of this present evil age. This is Paul's description of the church's witness:

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

Clarity on the covenants fosters genuine obedience to God's law. A very legitimate concern of those who hold a more mono-covenantal view is to foster repentance and obedience to God's commands. The entire doctrine of the covenants is to be viewed from the perspective of the Christian life in the fullness of our relationship to our Lord: "The covenant is neither a hypothetical relationship, nor a conditional position; rather it is the fresh, living fellowship in which the power of grace is operative. Only by the exercise of faith does it become a reality. It is always believers who act as true covenant partners with God. They who are partners also have the promises in their entirety sealed to them as believers. The covenant is a totality from which no benefit can be excluded."⁵ Thus we should be satisfied with the way in which our Confession guarantees obedience among justified sinners by recognizing that in union with Christ, while faith alone justifies, "yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love" (WCF 11.2).

In conclusion, to change the metaphor from optics to architecture, when the structure of a building is right everything added to it follows suit. So when we get our covenant theology right, the entire structure of our system of doctrine will be right. Isn't this why we are united around our Confession? Can anything be more practical than understanding the basis of our relationship with the living and true God?

A Suggestion for Our Continuing Conversation

While discussion of the doctrine of the covenants is healthy, we must distinguish between what is confessional and what is not. In other words, those of us who have taken vows to uphold the Confession as what the Bible teaches must defend and teach those doctrines as non-negotiable. Our in-house discussion among those who affirm the Confession's teachings must be within those bounds. We must each be willing to alter our theology to be more consistent with Scripture and our Confession. Isn't this what *semper reformanda* is all about?

Suggested Reading

Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology."

Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*.

Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology*.⁶

⁵ Ibid., 256.

⁶ See my review of this book on page 90.

Baseball and the Supernatural

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As Barry Bonds makes his way, one swat at a time, toward Hank Aaron's lifetime home run record (755), we are brought face to face with a profound modern conflict. Can humans ultimately control everything, given the development of the proper techniques? Christians may quickly answer, "No, of course not." But this underestimates one of the most fundamental assumptions of our time: technique solves every human problem, technology being the greatest facilitator of technique. One of the temptations of church officers is to fall tacitly into thinking that ministry is a matter of technique, of finding the right means of communication and organization to achieve the church's glorious ends. Or, as Francis Schaeffer once asked himself: if the Holy Spirit were to withdraw himself from the church, would it make any difference in the way we live and serve?

We moderns labor under the illusion that anything is possible, given the right technique and technology. *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, A Report by the President's Council on Bioethics (2003), asks some of the most important ethical questions about human control over the "phenomena of life." The traditional domain of medicine has been the therapeutic, seeking to heal the human body of disease. Emerging biotechnologies, however, go beyond therapy to enhancement, from the frivolous (body-building steroids) to the pernicious (super-pathogens used by bio-terrorists).² The quest to redesign humanity is supremely dangerous, even if the goal is impossible to achieve. The political tyrannies of the last century are cautionary tales of the havoc that redefining the "good life" can inflict on whole nations.

Since Adam's fall, autonomous man has sought to redefine the purposes and goals of human life according to his own rebellious, self-glorifying agenda. Thus, it should not be a surprise to church officers that, given the enormous power of modern technology, people should decide to redefine and redesign humanity itself. Rationalism and relativism form a perfect partnership in this insidious enterprise. The idea that we can control the created order—and define that order as we wish—is as old as Adam. But new capabilities have made the promise of this forbidden fruit all the more seductive.

While we Christians understand that our humanity cannot be altered fundamentally, we must also recognize the dehumanizing tendencies of all modern technologies, especially when they are developed and used without asking about their purposes. We dare not underestimate the pervasiveness of the myth—I should say lie—that humanity has ultimate control over its own destiny. Nor should we, as church officers, think that the church is not susceptible to the subtler, as well as the more blatant, forms of this lie. "The myth of control" has made tremendous inroads into the American church. I regularly get mailings for fundraising methods which claim guaranteed results if the advertised technique is simply put into practice. There is no mention of prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, or God's command to tithe. In short, it is all a matter of human technique. The supernatural God of the Bible is unnecessary. Schaeffer's troubling question about what difference the Holy Spirit actually makes in our lives and ministries is one we must ask.

I would like you to read the following excerpt from John Nevius's classic nineteenth-century work

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=18.

² *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, A Report by the President's Council on Bioethics (New York: ReganBooks, 2003), 6.

The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches. As Nevius explains how to begin a mission work, he gives a very clear statement of the spiritual nature of such work. Relying heavily on the book of Acts as his model for missions, he understands the spirituality of mission work to consist mainly of trusting God to bless as his appointed means are faithfully employed.

How Best Expend One's Time?

1. The dominant idea of a missionary should be duty, and not immediate individual success as judged by human standards. If the desire for tangible results should take the form of a wish to gather into the Church as soon as possible the greatest number of professed converts it may become a dangerous temptation and snare.
2. It will be nearly fifty years hence to determine with positive certainty what any individual life has or has not accomplished. Only in eternity will every man's work be fully made manifest of what sort it is. Results of apparently great importance may attract attention and secure general commendation, and yet prove only temporary and illusory. On the other hand, a good book or a word spoken in season, may produce important results, though the world may never be able to trace them to their true source....

Missionaries but Instruments in Spiritual Work

In the spiritual work of the conversion of souls and building up Christ's Kingdom on earth, we of ourselves can do nothing except as instruments.

1. This is a fact so familiarly known and universally acknowledged that it may well be regarded as a simple truism. Theoretically, we learned this lesson almost in infancy; practically, it is difficult for some of us fully to learn it in a lifetime. It is so natural for us to feel that with a good knowledge of the language, sincere earnestness and sympathy with the people, together with prudence, common sense, zeal, hard work and perseverance, sooner or later great spiritual results must certainly be accomplished. This is by no means the case. Our labors may combine all the above conditions and yet be fruitless in the conversion of souls. If we depend upon our gifts or acquisitions, our zeal in the use even of God's appointed means, with an underlying and insidious desire for a result which may be regarded as something which we ourselves have accomplished, we shall probably be disappointed. If we are cherishing a feeling of self-dependence in any form, God will probably humble us before He will use us. We must feel that if anything is accomplished it will be by the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, and be ready to ascribe all the glory to Him. Otherwise He will probably leave us to ourselves to learn the lesson of our own weakness. The natural tendency to depend on self, or on anything else rather than God, has been a prominent sin of God's people from the earliest times. I am disposed to think that this tendency now prevails to a great extent among Christians at home and that missionaries commence work in foreign lands too much under the influence of it.

2. In this commercial age a commercial spirit has crept into the Church. As in business matters generally, so in religious enterprises, it is supposed that a certain amount of capital, judiciously expended, will naturally work out a certain result. The success of a mission society is gauged by the amount of money in its treasury. In order to secure more liberal contributions, only the more favorable and encouraging facts are welcomed and laid before the churches, so that they may feel that they

are contributing not to a failing but to a prospering cause. Let me not be understood as implying that money is not important and that the duty of giving to missions should not be pressed home upon the hearts and consciences of all, whether native converts or home Christians. The danger I would guard against is of giving such disproportionate prominence to money as to divert the mind from what is of much greater importance. In a word, it is making money or what money can command, rather than the Holy Spirit, our main dependence. I am quite aware that all Christians would earnestly disavow any such intention. It is not an uncommon thing, however, to find ourselves doing indirectly, or unconsciously, what we could never be induced to do deliberately and knowingly. The work we are prosecuting is distinctly and emphatically a work of God's Spirit. If we fail to recognize and act upon this fact, the mission work will decline even with a full treasury; while with the Spirit's presence it will prosper even with a depleted one.³

Nevius was remarkably prescient about the temptations facing the modern church. They were already evident in the Western culture of his day.

No wonder so many people are troubled about the possibility of Barry Bonds (who may have been indicted on perjury and tax evasion charges by the time you read this) breaking Hank Aaron's all time home run record (755; Bonds has 35 to go). Bonds and Aaron have remarkably similar careers on paper. Each starting their major league careers in their early twenties and lasting for over two decades; each hitting forty or more home runs in a season eight times (the last time for both Aaron and Bonds at age 39); each hitting career highs in their mid-thirties (Aaron 47 at age 37; Bonds 73 at age 36). But the differences are evident even in the statistics. While Aaron's homers trail off in his last three seasons, Bonds's statistics ballooned like his upper body between 2000 and 2004. We have an innate sense that records like Aaron's should be achieved legitimately by employing human gifts in a disciplined way, and not through the augmentation of muscle-enhancing drugs.

So we ought to have an innate spiritual sense as Christian leaders that the building of Christ's kingdom can only be achieved by doing it God's way—as revealed in his word—and by his supernatural power.

³ John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Hancock, NH: Monadnock Press, 2003), 95-98.

Old, Content, Reformed: The Resurgence of Calvinism?

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The magnificent pallet of fall colors, here in New England, always evokes thoughts of Reformation history for me. Our annual Reformation lecture is a highlight of the fall's activities, reminding us of our colorful past. This year will mark the twenty-fifth Reformation celebration over which I have presided. This year my thoughts have focused on two significant post-Reformation dates: 1706 and 1936. Two important firsts for American Presbyterians: the first presbytery meeting on American soil; and the first general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

But then, lest we get stuck in the past, or mired in ecclesiastical provincialism, the question that should also be on our minds: Whither Calvinism? Does the Reformed faith have a future? Fourteen years ago, Jim Gidley lectured at a celebration of Calvin's birthday (July 10) at Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, on "The Future of Calvinism." His conclusion in this thoughtful piece (republished in this volume) is that the future is always in the hands of our sovereign and gracious God; but our duty is to grow in faithfulness to our calling as God's people in this world. By his amazing grace we have a glorious future, whatever may happen to us between now and then. Wisdom tells us that the past guides our trajectory into the future, and helps us to be faithful to our calling as the church, even in the worst of times.

However, on the immediate horizon there may be a powerful ray of light penetrating the clouds hanging over the American church. After all of the publishing, praying and preaching of the Reformed since the mid-twentieth century and before, there may be a significant change underway. What are we to think?

Christianity Today features a story in its September issue that surprises and excites even a cautious old Calvinist like your editor. But should it? Should we be amazed that the doctrines of the Reformation are holding a renewed sway in the churches of the land? Depicted on the cover of that September issue is a sweatshirt with a picture of Jonathan Edwards and the caption "Jonathan Edwards Is My Homeboy." Not exactly my choice of sweatshirts, wording, or methods of promoting JE, but read on. The feature article is titled "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is making a comeback—and shaking up the church."² I am told by a reliable source, however, that it is now "cool" to say you're a Calvinist on the campus of a well known evangelical seminary in New England. And in many cases, beneath the label there is not much real understanding of the Reformed faith. So what are we to make of this latest phenomenon, especially since it is surprisingly about *us*?—I don't mean just the OPC, but the larger body of Presbyterian and Reformed churches throughout the world, especially in America, which is the focus of *CT*'s feature.

Where We Have Been

In 1992, Jim Gidley already had noted a "resurgence of interest" in Calvinism.³ But when one

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=21. I owe the first part of this title to elder Jim Graves, colleague and friend.

² Collin Hanson, "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is making a comeback—and shaking up the church," *Christianity Today* September 2006, 31-36?

³ James S. Gidley, "The Future of Calvinism," *Ordained Servant* 2.2 (April, 1993).

looks at the early to mid-twentieth century, the picture was bleak. The OPC and similar “remnant” organizations, like the Banner of Truth Trust, were among a few lone voices crying in the wilderness of the American ecclesiastical scene. Actually BTT thought they were mainly addressing Brits. But as it turns out, their influence in the United States has been far greater than in the United Kingdom. As a case in point, the *Banner of Truth* magazine launched its maiden issue in September, 1955. It was a modest quarterly on a very slim budget with a tiny readership. No beautiful color covers with carefully crafted typography. During this time, the republication of Puritan and Reformed classics began, and a nascent interest in Reformed Protestant roots can be detected. Noticeable in the first four years of the *Banner of Truth* magazine is the paucity of contemporary contributors. J. I. Packer was a rare exception. And it was so on this side of the pond as well. But also notable is the ecumenical range of books referred to in the first four years (16 issues). An alphabetical index of authors and books includes: Augustine, Calvin, Knox, Bucer, Zanchius, John Flavel, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, C. H. Spurgeon, J. W. Alexander, Charles and A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, W. G. T. Shedd, John Murray, and N. B. Stonehouse. In his 1960 introduction to the bound volume of the first sixteen issues, editor Iain Murray already expressed optimism:

When we first put pen to paper in 1955 it was because, as far as our limited knowledge went, there was no other magazine in England expressing the burden which we felt. Happily the situation today is considerably changed. We are now in the midst of a movement back to the Theology of the Reformers and the New Testament. These are early days and no one can predict what this rising interest in old truths will lead to, yet there can be no question that through various influences which God has raised up, a movement is quietly progressing...⁴

As historian George Marsden recently noted (in his lecture prior to our last general assembly in Chicago), the early OPC was top-heavy with leadership. Murray observed the same regarding the “theological awakening” in 1960. He considered it to be “largely confined to students and ministers.” But it would not remain so for long.

When I became a Christian, a decade later, in 1971, I soon became aware of Calvinism while studying at Farel House at L’Abri Fellowship in Huemoz, Switzerland. I sat next to C. H. Spurgeon—well, actually his dozens of volumes of sermons. Iain Murray’s *The Forgotten Spurgeon* caught my attention. Before I knew it, I had entered a world I never knew existed, a vast world of literature and lives stretching back centuries—a mansion filled with treasures. At Covenant College and Westminster Seminary, I discovered that I was not alone. As I entered the ministry in 1980, I was still painfully aware that little was known of the rich heritage I had discovered—been given—outside of a well connected remnant network of Calvinists, including a number of very small denominations.

A decade later in 1992, as noted above, Jim Gidley would single out the proliferation of Reformed seminaries and the optimism James Montgomery Boice expressed in his 1985 essay, “The Future of Reformed Theology,” as signs that things might be looking up for us Calvinists. His was a prudently cautious optimism.

Now comes Collin Hanson’s article in the September 2006 *CT* in which he suggests: “While the Emergent ‘conversation’ gets a lot of press for its appeal to the young, the new Reformed movement

⁴ Iain H. Murray, “Introduction,” *The Banner of Truth: Volume 1* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 9.

may be a larger and more pervasive phenomenon.”⁵

The Next Generation: A Recipe for the Resurgence

“Baby boomer” has a slightly nicer ring to it than “generation X,” so I prefer to call the latter the “new” or “next” generation. For the healthy church there will always be one of these; and we should expect and encourage great things from these members of the body of Christ. But we must also pass on our loving concerns. I have a few ingredients that should be part of our recipe for feeding the resurgence.

Three large measures of humility. In pitching and real estate, there are three necessary ingredients to success: location, location, location. So in restoring the church to its Calvinistic roots: humility, humility, humility are essential ingredients. This must be the basic seasoning of our recipe. New generation Calvinist pastor Joshua Harris recalls: “I remember some of the first encounters I had with Calvinists. I’m sorry to say they represented the doctrines of grace with a total lack of grace. They were spiteful, cliquish, and arrogant. I didn’t even stick around to understand what they were teaching.” We have all encountered such attitudes, perhaps even in ourselves.

One large measure of historical awareness. Here is where location will help. Knowing where we are in history—where we have been—guides us into the future. We must convince this new generation that it is not the first generation to know the liberating truth of Christianity. Nor, as far as we know, will it be the last. Hanson quotes Whitefield to the effect that he never read Calvin; his doctrines were from Christ. What easily passes for humility is actually what we might call an “arrogant humility.” This, not surprisingly, is an underlying theme of the article. But, disdain for the insights of those who have gone before us, especially those whose writings have endured, is the ultimate hubris. Had Whitefield taken the time to read Calvin he might have had more respect for the visible church. Which brings me to the next ingredient.

One large measure of commitment to the visible church. Reformed theology must form the church and all of the living stones which make up its architecture. The *CT* article does not include the doctrine of the church in its description of Calvinism. The “Five Points” takes center stage. But that is accurate reporting, since many of the “Reformed” fail to see the centrality of the church in Reformed theology. Doctrine and intellect must not be pitted against Christian piety and practice. The two are of a piece. This is where the church comes in. It is where doctrine and life coalesce. The church gives form to the Christian life. A major weakness of the last half century of resurgence is underestimating the centrality of biblical ecclesiology to reformation—and to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Calvin’s treatise “The Necessity of Reforming the Church” stood at the heart of his life’s work. What is it we are re-forming? Individual beliefs? Para-ecclesiastical organizations? No—the visible body of Christ. In this regard our consumption of Reformed literature often borders on narcissism. “Feed me, feed me. Meet my doctrinal and intellectual needs.” This demon will not come out easy in this new generation. Whether it’s the mind or the emotions, such self-centeredness is all the same disease.

As Iain Murray (and others) sought to call Christians to a renewed interest in the old truths, he recognized the centrality of the church in that hoped-for resurgence. “The old truths have to be re-applied in new ways and the visible church has to be reformed...” Since the doctrine of the church is integral to Reformed theology, many of us who embraced historic Christianity in the sixties and seventies invested our reforming energies in the church. We believed this was the calling of our Lord, however

⁵ Hanson, “Young, Restless, Reformed,” 34.

despised the church might be in the modern situation. This, Machen had done so eloquently a generation before. He, too, was largely ignored.

We also need *one large measure of critical awareness of our culture*. I worry about the new generation's involvement in electronic culture: the generation that knows little of such things as books, conversation, and letter writing. There is an illusion of sophistication that knows no bounds with some. Technological snobbery is a major manifestation of Lewis's "chronological snobbery" — the idea that the latest gadget bestows wisdom and superiority. Meanwhile, the memory of what deep reading, meaningful conversation, and thoughtful writing are, is actually disappearing before our eyes. Do not be fooled by the fact, dear church officer, that *you* are interested in these things. Much of the culture around us is *not*.

Beyond these concerns we need to be critical of the church's accommodation to culture along the lines of Ken Myer's quip: "The church is *of* the culture but not *in* it." Allowing pop to culture inform worship while neglecting significant cultural involvement is the reverse of the way the church ought to be. We must help the new generation understand how the forms of things, especially electronic things, have everything to do with the messages they send both overtly and covertly. The doctrines of creation and the incarnation commit us to the idea that form and substance are inextricably united. If we are naïve about this, the message we send to the world is that we are no different than they, except that we labor under the illusion that we are somehow superior. Thus, the need for the next ingredient.

One large measure of service in our culture. If the church is an embassy of the risen Lord, we must never be content with simply protecting the identity of the embassy and the message of its King. We will need to demonstrate to our neighbors, in Jeremiah 29 style, the beauty of Christianity by serving them for their temporal and eternal good.

Then we need to add *one large measure of biblical ecumenicity*. This means that the church knows no national or ethnic boundaries. She is a heavenly nation among the nations, and made up of the elect from every nation. Doctrinally this means we will be as narrow and as broad as our confessional standards. We must convince the next generation of the value of such standards, but not by using them to promote a narrower agenda. We must demonstrate how our Confession and Catechisms work to truly unite Christians, rather than divide them. Then, when genuine heresy threatens, we can take a sure-footed stand, showing the life-preserving importance of boundaries.

The recipe is finally seasoned with an additional healthy sprinkling of *humility* to top everything off. Yes, we already had three large measures of this at the beginning of our recipe. But truly one can never have too much of this precious seasoning. Sprinkle generously. It will never ruin the flavor of the whole. Remember in a moment when you struggle with pride that *CT* does not list the OPC among "leading institutions of the resurgence."

After re-reading the *CT* article several times, I came away thinking there is a slight uneasiness in Hanson's report. While he properly points out a healthy desire among the Calvinists he interviewed to promote "humble orthodoxy," the last section of the article is titled "Scripture Triumphs Systems." And we might add "institutions," especially the church.

What Next? Christianity Tomorrow

With all of our concerns, we must refuse to harbor that hand-wringing generational provincialism — obtuseness? — that says "I don't know what will become of this generation." Precisely because I worship a sovereign God — who incidentally rescued many of us from the swagger of the countercul-

ture—I believe that what *Christianity Today* has reported represents something wonderful—if nascent—occurring in our midst. Marshall McLuhan insisted that, however much the electronic world may sap energy and wisdom from us humans, the God-imaging souls of people cannot be eradicated. We must not underestimate the God-sized space in every human being waiting to be filled. This is what we have been praying, waiting and hoping for for decades. Now the work of spiritual formation really begins. So let's not wring our hands. Let's put them to the plow where they belong. Let's embrace these young men and women with enthusiasm and wisdom.

I have titled this editorial in a way to get your attention—“Old, Content, Reformed.” However, this is not entirely accurate. I am old, but not yet very old—maybe by the Galbraith-Williamson standard just a little over half way. And while I am content with my confessional convictions, I am still very restless. I cannot wait to preach another sermon, to speak to another person about Jesus Christ. I am restless to see the church grow in likeness to its risen Lord. I am restless to see churches mature by being formed by the whole counsel of God. And I am Reformed—yes, that I mean without reservation, but with one addition—I am hoping to continue reforming. Whatever is happening with Calvinism in American Christendom, it is only a beginning; and one that promises to involve us in as much toil as our former obscurity. Our posture must be that of Paul, who commended his ministry to the trendy and easily impressed Corinthian church: “as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:9-10).

What Is the Church For?

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We live in a confused world. That doesn't surprise us. But when the church is confused about its own identity and task, we should be alarmed. Perhaps worse is thinking that the Bible really does not define the church and its ministry, and so it is up to us to do the defining. Then we may unwittingly end up articulating the church's role in a way that tempts us to neglect what we ought to be doing. Worst of all, the world is happy to identify the church as simply another service organization helping to make the world a little better. Such a reduction subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, mutes the message of the cross and the supernatural reality of the gospel—the church's chief *raison d'être*. The spirituality of the church is the Reformed answer to this pressing problem.

The title of this editorial is a purposeful take-off on Wendell Berry's book *What Are People For?* His title is a challenge to define what it means to be human. Mine is a challenge to define the church and its mission.

What the Church Is Not For

One often gets the impression that the only alternative to Pietism is the reformation or reconstruction of culture with a special emphasis on political power or church organization (usually in the form of parachurch organizations) as the means of doing so. Perhaps the evangelical church's awakening from her pietistic slumbers in the middle of the last century accounts, at least in part, for her penchant to think politics is the key to securing her place in American culture. The church has struggled with this tendency ever since Constantine muddied the ecclesiastical waters.

Tocqueville observed that America, for all her flaws, is irrepressibly religious in outlook, giving a healthy buoyancy to her character and institutions. In the midst of the so-called culture wars, the church often finds herself resorting to carnal, that is political and cultural, weapons, when the Bible is quite clear that those are not the weapons of the church. This is, of course, not to say that individual Christians do not have a political or cultural duty, or may not engage in politics at every level and culture in every field of endeavor. It is only to say that this is not the church's business. Jesus defined that business very concisely in the Great Commission.

Several years ago a former United States senator, who was running for governor of New Hampshire, asked to speak in our church. After all, I had his sign on my front lawn, and did intend to vote for him, and I believed he was a fellow Christian. I politely refused the request, however, citing the nature and purposes of the church's ministry. It is interesting that both political and theological liberals and conservatives are guilty of this Constantinian confusion. It makes me wonder if the hope of many is not, after all, more in this world than in the next.

Recently I read several reviews of Jim Wallis's latest book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong, and the Left Doesn't Get It*. For those who know Wallis's writing there is nothing new here. But a notable absence in the reviews, and hence the book itself, is any substantial discussion of the church's role in society. In one sense, of course, this reflects the New Testament's silence on the idea that the church should espouse a particular view of politics or pursue a specific cultural agenda. The only New

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¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=23.

Testament imperatives regarding the state command Christians to subject themselves to this common grace institution, and if the state commands them to stop preaching the gospel, they must humbly submit to the punishment for disobeying. Of cultural agendas there is silence. In another sense, the absence of a substantive exegetical and confessional discussion of the church's mission in Christian books on politics is itself an American problem because we simply assume a version of the Constantinian compromise.

It is certainly true that the Reformed often have been in the vanguard of the transformationist tradition. The Kuyperian view of church and state seeks to transform every cultural institution, every sphere of life, as part of the Christian world-and-life view. While it is true that Christians view all aspects of life in the created order through new eyes, as we perceive reality through the lens of Scripture, is this the same as a call to transform every arena of culture in a specifically Christian way? Would Beethoven have written better symphonies had he been a Christian? Can one develop a Christian world-and-life view without seeking to transform each discipline, as opposed to contributing to that discipline as a Christian?

A third way or alternative to the Pietist or transformationist view is what Machen called "consecration."

Instead of obliterating the distinction between the kingdom and the world, or on the other hand withdrawing from the world into a sort of modernized intellectual monasticism, let us go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God. . . . The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavor.²

A subtle temptation lurking just beneath the surface of a culture transforming agenda is a dissatisfaction with the disenfranchised position of the church. The widespread cultural resentment of past Christian cultural dominance that is so visible today tempts many Christians to long nostalgically for the good old days when America was a Christian nation. In the New Testament, the church is disenfranchised by its very nature as a pilgrim people. The disenfranchised prisoner Paul had to convince the proud Roman citizens of the Philippian church that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

The holy nation in the New Testament is not a political entity as it was under Moses. Rather the church, according to 1 Peter 2:9-10, is "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." The Confession makes this crucial distinction: "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law)" (WCF 25.2). To identify the holy nation with America, or any other nation, is a dangerous error. Transforming her culture and her politics is not within the purview of the church's mission. In this sense the church transcends all political and cultural realities, not as a Gnostic denial of creation and culture's value, but as a witness to the intrusion of a new order of grace and glory in the risen Christ.

The Civil War is a tragic example of what happens when the cause of Christ is identified with

² J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 402-403.

political entities. The idea in both north and south that God covenants with nations meant, ironically, that the same God was on each side. Each thought itself to be on the side of the kingdom of God and would have the church identify itself with it.

Our Confession equates the visible church with the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is the church, although by no means is the kingdom in its final form, as Geerhardus Vos points out. While many in our tradition take exception to equating the kingdom with the church in our confession, it is important to note that even the Puritans, with all of their theocratic instincts, knew better than to define the kingdom of God in broader terms.

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25.2).

To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require (WCF 30.2).

Interestingly, our Confession also makes clear that there is an absolute boundary between the institution of the church and the state. “Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and Sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith” (WCF 23.3). The concerns of the kingdom are infinitely higher than the temporal concerns of the state. These concerns must be carefully understood.

What the Church Is For

How then should we define the church and its role in this world? The New Testament must be our ultimate source of truth on this question. I say New Testament because Israel was a geo-political entity unique in the history of redemption. It was a nation ruled by Yahweh the King, as David attests in Psalm 110; it was limited to a particular piece of real estate in Palestine; it had a typological purpose picturing the eschatological glory to be ushered in by Judgment Day. The church is now no longer a geo-political entity. It is the pilgrim bride of the risen Lord, an embassy among the nations of the earth, awaiting its land inheritance in its resurrection glory, calling the nations to repent and believe the good news of the amazing amnesty offered by heaven. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. This not only defines the limits of church power, but the focus of her purposes as well. She is to preach the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.

The New Testament does have a keen interest, however, in the church’s relation to society and the state, but it is not in the interests of Christian civilization. Luke in Luke-Acts sets forth an apologia for the church’s “good citizenship,” making clear that the people of the Way do not intend to subvert the limited temporal mission of the state, whatever pretensions it may have about itself—as Rome surely did. Christians are engaged in a more enduring spiritual enterprise: subverting the insurgency of the kingdom of darkness. Secondly, the church is an embassy of the risen Lord, given a message that it is commanded to teach the nations in word and deed.

The conservative fundamentalist side of the culture wars tends to be weak in its diplomatic skills,

whether it has a transformationist or a separatist agenda. These agendas appear as the self-righteous imposition of traditional morality because there is little or no gospel in them. Instead of engaging culture with the gospel, this approach tends to build barriers to the gospel, and in an ironic twist, noted by Ken Myers, the church ends up *of* the world, but not *in* it. Of the world, in the sense that it uses the world's weapons in the warfare, whether it is electronic media-informed worship or the formation of political action committees.

This year, for the first time since 1979, the year I was graduated from seminary, I am not a card-carrying Republican, even though I continue to be a constitutional republican when it comes to political philosophy. That is the way I vote and discuss political issues and fulfill my political duties. The reason for this change is that it is a logical consequence of my belief in the spirituality of the church. Now, I am not saying that being a member of a political party is wrong for Christians or even for ministers. But at this point in history, I do not want to commit myself to a particular political position when membership in a particular party is so often thought to be an essential requirement of Christian commitment.

Positively, we are called to engage our culture as servant-witnesses not as cultural warriors. There are no Christian nations, but all of the nations are to have thriving, bold embassies of heaven, pilgrim outposts of the risen Lord. Acts is the inspired record of the kingdom of God moving from being identified with a typological religious nation to an embassy of Christ. The idea of Christian civilization does not appear in the New Testament. The kingdom of God is God's redemptive rule in the lives of his people, the church. There is no other institution on earth identified with this rule. His kingdom is a new creation originating in the heavenly head of the church, who is the firstborn of that new creation. The full realization of the kingdom is not completed until all citizens have been gathered by the risen King and the land of the new heavens and new earth is inherited in the resurrection. Until then we are pilgrim-witnesses with a wonderful message of reconciliation from our King (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

As officers in the visible church, it is important for us to teach our members what the church is for and what it is not for. The work of maintaining a faithful embassy of Christ in a foreign and sometimes hostile place is no easy task, but since it has eternal consequences we need to be clear about our mission or our labor will be in vain.

The Seductive Image

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The so-called “image culture” is a great concern to the church. The Second Commandment forbids the use of certain images (or certain use of images, i.e., as means of worship, as idols) unless they are commanded by the express warrant of Scripture. Yet the visible world, including creation and culture, is God’s gift to those made in his image, who have eyes to behold his manifest excellence in what he has crafted, and enabled us to craft.

But, of course, it is what we have crafted, and what we think about what we have crafted, that becomes problematic. When we add original sin and total depravity to the mix, we can identify certain obvious corruptions of culture such as Internet pornography.

My granddaughter is fascinating to watch as she develops her knowledge of the images and sounds surrounding her. Her world is not, however, as one wit put it “a blooming, buzzing confusion,” but rather a world of meaning awaiting her growing ability to interpret and understand it.

Why Do Images Tend to Seduce Us?

Why is the image so seductive? Let me suggest that it is because of its high value in the created order. Like sex, its social counterpart, images are so integral to our experience as image bearers of God that their corruption becomes so powerful; and because God gave us eyes, pervasive. For this reason, I believe we need to begin thinking about the seductive power of images in terms of creation.

In Genesis 1:29, the Creator bids Adam and Eve, “See...” i.e., “Look at all that I have given you. Now cultivate it for my glory.” We are visual creatures because we image a seeing God. “God saw everything that he had made, and, indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Our eyes are finite replicas of God’s “eyes.” It is sin that corrupts our visual faculties. “[W]hen the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (Gen. 3:6). Our eyes are our windows on the world. We are interpreting what we see as we see. Our eyes are connected to our thought-lives and our covenant loyalties. The inner life is the lens through which we look. In the Garden we saw the revelation of God’s glory in every glance.

Thus, the image only becomes seductive when viewed by the sinner as a would-be autonomous person. Then, of course, since the fall images are created by people with the intention of seducing sinners. That is the force of the Second Commandment, which forbids “carved” images, i.e., images created by sinners as means of worship and as expressions of ultimate commitments that seek to replace the true and living God. These images become alternatives to God—God-replacements. The modern world has simply expanded the menu of choices.

Daniel Boorstin—former librarian of Congress and American historian of the broad stroke and the big picture—first drew our attention to the power of the image, especially under the magic sway of electricity in his ground-breaking study *The Image: or What Happened to the American Dream?* published in 1962. He explored the image, not as a simple, static symbol, but rather as a complex of propaganda disseminated by the mass media through electronic as well as printed media. He was the first to refer to the “pseudo-event”—a media created event. He went on to describe the phenomenon

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=27.

of celebrity, a human pseudo-event, people who are famous for being famous. In our increasingly mediated lives, he maintained that “[t]he shadow outsells the substance.”² Boorstin was describing the emergence of virtual reality. Now the magical world of computing and the Internet has empowered a whole new generation of fallen people with the ability to create its own “reality”—I should say realities. The possibilities for idolatry are almost endless.

At this point it is important to distinguish among various ways we communicate: images, words spoken, written, and printed. Remember, when you look at words on a page you are looking at images. Written words are an incarnation of speech, just as spoken words are an incarnation of thought. The invention of the phonetic alphabet simply drew out the implications of language, i.e., that each distinct set of sounds has meaning. Phonetics codifies this meaning in an efficient storage and transmission system. This is a part of cultural development for which man was created in God’s image. Printing made this accessible to a wide audience as a mass medium. But, lest we idolize the printed word, we should remember also that the early church was built in the era of oral and written speech. Individuals ordinarily did not have Bibles. Churches had handwritten manuscripts, which were rare, and very expensive. Thus, the oral word, especially the preached and taught word, was more precious to the ancient church than it is in print cultures. Images were limited to two- and three- dimensional individually produced works of art. The printing press enabled both word and image to be mass produced. Each of these developments changed the ways that people perceive the world and relate to each other. Electronic communication and high speed travel have fueled yet another massive alteration in our culture.

Standing back from the ethical issues, which inform analyses such as Bill Shishko’s, we must become more aware of how electronic communication technologies have changed not only their messages or even the way we interpret the world, but the very social fabric of our society. Applied to the problem of pornography, this means that the age-old problem of sexual lust has been given new avenues of expression and gratification only possible in a rearranged electronic world. The anonymity provided by the Internet has largely removed the public shame attached to pornography. However, so-called Internet “addiction” is not just a problem with pornography, but is more generally indicative of the alienating tendency of the computer itself. So-called “online communities” often mask the fact that many space-time communities, such as the family and the church, are suffering from the isolation caused by the Internet. So the seductive power of the image is directly related to the means by which images are disseminated. It is this, rather than images per se, that needs to be understood critically for us to be able to navigate the electronic sea change.

“Seduce” means to lead apart or lead astray. It was not only images in Eden that were used by the Serpent to beguile Eve. It was the power of the spoken word to undermine God’s authority. Remember that God has ordained humanly crafted visual images as means of worshipping him. The tabernacle and temple were full of divinely mandated images. So the New Covenant sacraments are what Augustine called the “visible word.” So, as God has given us all of our senses, we are called to consecrate them all to his worship and service.

But when images dominate over words, their seductive power is enhanced. Satan reversed this order by intruding a rebellious interpretation of the visible fruit. It became a seductive power under this intentional influence. Without God’s interpretive word guiding our understanding, images may lead us toward worshipping the creation more than the Creator. Images may seduce us because by themselves they reinforce our autonomous interpretations of God’s world. They tempt us to create virtual

² Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: or What Happened to the American Dream?* New York: The Atheneum, 1962.

realities independent of God, and, thus, destructive to our humanity. Without the proper framework for understanding, images have an immediacy that defies contemplation and thoughtful assessment of their meaning. This tendency is only amplified by electronic communication.

Why Should Words Have Priority?

In the history of creation and redemption, the word, first spoken and then written, has priority. God spoke all things into existence. He spoke the creation covenant to Adam and Eve. He spoke the first gospel to Adam and Eve after the fall. Moses spoke and then wrote the Pentateuch. God himself wrote the Ten Commandments (lit. “ten words”) with his own finger (Exod. 31:18). So the Reformers correctly understood the word to be the primary means of grace. But remember the preached word took priority even over the written word, and thus the printed word.

Speech as a medium of communication is central to our bearing God’s image. For this reason, the preaching of the word is central to the redemption of God’s image bearers. Church officers should be busy cultivating this priority in the congregation of God’s people. Preaching is the most excellent medium for communicating God’s word because it is ordained by God; it is an authoritative monologue; it is the voice and presence of the Good Shepherd; and it is the powerful re-creative voice of God at work in the new creation.³

Yet this certainly does not mean that writing and print are unimportant. At its best, the written and printed word enhances our experience of the oral word. In the church, the act of reading Scripture privately strengthens the church’s ability to listen properly to preaching and everything else that is heard in worship.

While it is true, as I have said above, that reading written or printed words is a visual experience, it is, in some very important ways, quite different from viewing an image. The abstract symbols of speech we know as letters and words have several unique benefits attached to them. The printed word is rational and logical. It tends toward organization and clarity. It also fosters historical understanding moving from a beginning to an end, even as history is conceived in the Bible, often understood as the Augustinian or linear view of history. Print as writing has an aura of permanence, and, thus, of authority, reinforcing a biblical view of truth, but also giving the illusion of being true even when it is false. Furthermore, as Plato feared, it tends to undermine memory, which oral culture reinforces by necessity.

Finally, print is both private and communal. It can undermine some communities and traditions, while building others. Print was used in the Reformation to undermine the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. But it deepens individual understanding, because one is able to reflect on a text at one’s own pace, referring to it at will. When texts are shared by a community like the church, passing its wisdom on to another generation in exact form, it binds such a community together.

Giving God’s word its proper place in our lives, and maintaining the proper balance among our senses consecrated to God’s service, we will inoculate ourselves and the people we serve against the onslaught of the seductive images and words surrounding, and at times threatening to engulf, us. The intentions we bring to all we see, hear, read, write, and say, function at the heart of our spiritual formation. As Christian men and officers in our Lord’s church, we must devote ourselves to guarding those intentions.

³ See the ninth chapter (“God’s Chosen Medium”) of my book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 313–353.

✦ ServantRealms

THE CHURCH

What's So Special about the OPC?

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by **G. I. Williamson**

I well remember my own entrance into the OPC. It was in 1955 after I had already faced two crises—the first in the old United Presbyterian Church of North America, and the second in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.² When a group of people in the old Rock Street UP Church in Fall River, Massachusetts, called me to return to serve them as founding pastor of an OP church there, I answered the call with fear and trembling.

The “fear and trembling” was due, in part, to the fact that the OPC, at that time, seemed so formidable in doctrine that I was afraid they just might not accept someone like me. After all, I was not trained at Westminster Seminary (which, to me, was the preeminent citadel of the Reformed faith). But when the Presbytery of New York and New England met on that memorable night for my examination, I was in for a big surprise. No one seemed much interested in where I had gone to school. No, what they wanted to know was what I believed! They were not easy on me. The examination lasted into the wee hours of the morning. But it was, to me, absolutely thrilling. Here, at last, was a church that cared about God’s truth—about sound doctrine—and my commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible. I still look back on that night as a wonderful experience, and thank God for it. So, that is number one.

And, I might add, it kept showing up all the time. I remember, for example, a vigorous debate that took place in that same Presbytery concerning, as I recall, the legitimacy of doing *medical* mission work. The late (and, in my eyes, great) John Murray was there. And there were other professors of some note there, too. I rather expected that they would be the ones to speak, and that would settle things. But that is not at all what happened. No—and to me this was simply wonderful—men whose names I cannot even remember now were not about to keep their convictions hidden. And it soon became evident that in the OPC it didn’t so much matter *who* was speaking, as *what* he was saying. How very different this was from what I had previously experienced.

Another thing—(so this is number two)—is the wonderful way that the OPC has been willing, and therefore able, to respect differences (so long as they are within the doctrinal boundaries of the Confession and Catechisms). I came to the firm conviction in 1956 that only the inspired Psalms should be

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=5.

² The first crisis came when I came to realize the magnitude of the disaster that came on the UPC when it adopted the 1925 Confessional Statement as authoritative instead of the Westminster Standards. The second came when I encountered the sinister working of the old boy network of the Masons in the ARPC. But I mention this only in passing.

sung in worship. And I still believe the arguments of the minority report of 1948 have not been successfully answered. But I mention it here for another reason, and that reason is that in spite of being out of step with the twentieth-century (and now twenty-first-century) majority, I have never been discriminated against by my majority brethren. To the contrary, I've been treated with respect (more than I deserve). I think this is because it is widely recognized that my view is that of historic Presbyterianism and that, even if I am wrong, I should not be persecuted for it. This is a very rare thing in the Christian church today. Indeed, it has come to the place in some denominations where being out of step with the majority view is the one thing that can bring discipline upon you.

A third thing that has always impressed me in the OPC is the integrity of its Presbyterianism. That may sound strange. But I think it is true. Let me give you a scenario that I have heard about in contrast. The pastor of a certain church is having difficulty with his elders. So what does the Presbytery do? Well, it creates a commission. The commission goes to the church and invites people to come and meet with it so it can hear what they think of the pastor. Some very serious charges are heard by the men of the commission. But they are *not* heard directly by the pastor. No, they are only relayed indirectly without naming the person who said them. And then the commission determines what should be done—usually by trying the “Solomonic method” of cutting the baby in two (by which I mean dividing the blame about half and half between the pastor and the others). Well, it doesn't work that way in the OPC. No, in the OPC people who make charges are (as a general rule, at least) held accountable. And those against whom the charges are made get to face their (known) accusers. The result is that what is done is *not* the Solomonic solution. Rather what is usually done is to try to deal with specific sin, and to bring about genuine repentance. I use the term *usually* because of what our Confession says in 31.4. There is no such thing on this earth as perfect justice. No, but the kind of Presbyterianism practiced in the OPC is the nearest thing to it that I know of. I regard this as a very important virtue.

A fourth thing that is unique about the OPC has been *its ecumenical outlook*. There are Reformed churches that seem to me to be virtually fixated on the particular crisis that gave them birth. They seem to me to know what they are *against* much better than what they are *for*. What impressed me from day one of my involvement in the OPC was its *lack* of such a fixation. The only fixation that I saw was rather *for* the promotion of the Reformed faith. It is this that has made us a strong, mission-minded church (both at home and abroad). It is this that led us to help build a Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the mid-twentieth century—and then to separate from it when its Reformed integrity was fatally damaged. And it is this that has enabled us to seek—with other churches that seek to profess and maintain this Reformed faith—a new ecumenical body. We have never been (as a corporate body) afflicted with the conviction that “we are the people” and that “the truth will die with us.” The OPC, in and of itself, has never been our supreme object of devotion. I believe we've always been willing to see the OPC swallowed up in something greater: *if it is truly Reformed!*

A fifth distinctive, as I see it, has been *our willingness to face vital issues*. This was true in the very early days of our existence as a church. Some, just out of the old church, wanted to impose a legislated morality on the whole church (total abstinence from all beverages with any alcoholic content). It is not difficult to imagine how painful it was to contemplate the loss of entire churches, in those early days, if this was resisted. Indeed, it *did* result in such a loss. (And this has been the case in other instances in our history, too.) Yet the bottom line was that the OPC was not willing to compromise what the Bible

teaches in order to avoid unpleasant consequences.³ In those days—I was told this some years ago by some of the “old timers” of that era—the following was a popular motto in the church: *Resist the beginnings!* Well, I thank God that they *did* resist the beginnings of the path of expediency rather than fidelity to the Bible. This has made a very great difference.

A final point of distinction is the freedom to seek greater fidelity to the Word of God in the life of the church. Don’t get me wrong. I certainly don’t think I’ve done much to this end. No, but my whole experience in the OPC is to the effect that I am not only free to seek—but even expected to seek—a more perfectly Reformed church through all constitutional means.

I am not one of those people who thinks that all is well in the OPC. I don’t think it will ever be. That awaits the consummation. But, by the grace of God, we are what we are—and we need to be profoundly grateful for the heritage the Lord has given us. We also need to be on *our* guard today, so that we “resist the beginnings.”

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³ See my little book *Wine in the Bible and the Church*, made available again by Westminster Discount Book Service.

✦ Servant Word

PREACHING

Especially the Preaching of the Word

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by **Larry Wilson**

It's very revealing that so many of us express doubt when we hear it said that: "The Spirit of God makes the reading, but *especially the preaching of the Word*, an effectual means" to evangelize the world, to extend the church, and to build up believers (WLC 155). "*Especially* the preaching of the Word"? Today the majority report seems to be that there have to be better ways to make disciples than preaching—*much* better ways! But in his Word, our Lord insists that "*the foolishness of preaching*" is the principal means he has chosen to use (1 Cor. 1:21).

This importance of preaching grows out of the fact that our Lord Jesus really is alive, really is exalted, and really is himself supernaturally working to save sinners and to gather, build, and rule his church. It pleases him to do so by his Spirit through his Word—*especially* through the preaching of his Word. Note the chain of reasoning the Holy Spirit pursues through the apostle Paul in Romans 10:13–17:

...‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

“Especially the Preaching of the Word”?

First, to be saved, sinners need to *ask* the Lord to save them. “For ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved’” (v. 13). You need to ask, but mere words aren’t enough. They must flow from sincere faith. “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?” (v. 14a).

Second, sinners have to hear about the Lord before they can believe in him. Romans 10:14b asks, “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” Moreover, in order to believe in the Lord you must believe the Lord. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=7.

righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). You need to do more than believe certain truths about the Lord. You must believe the Lord.

But in order to believe the Lord, you must *hear* the Lord. So it’s striking that Romans 10:14b more literally says, “And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard?”² Sinners must hear Christ himself so they can believe him and call upon him and be saved. This is so important that Jesus stressed it repeatedly. He taught that in order to be saved, sinners must “hear the voice of the Son of God” (John 5:25). He said, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Mere human words just don’t have the supernatural power that it takes to effectually call sinners out of spiritual death into spiritual life. This fact made the apostle Paul determine to rely on the Lord sovereignly to use “the foolishness of preaching” (see 1 Cor. 1:17–2:5). What sinners need to hear is Jesus Christ himself addressing them personally and powerfully by his Spirit through his Word. And that’s the point of Romans 10:14, “And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard?”

Third, for sinners to hear the Lord’s own voice, the Lord has chosen to use preachers as his conduit. “And how are they to hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14c). The word translated “preacher” (*kēryssontos*) literally means a herald or public crier. In the ancient world—without press conferences and modern media—a king would send out heralds, official representatives who would publicly proclaim his deeds or decrees. Preachers of God’s Word are the heralds or official representatives of King Jesus.

The apostle Paul was intensely aware that this is the preacher’s role. And so he frequently made claims like these:

And of this gospel I was appointed a herald. (2 Tim. 1:11)

We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Christ is speaking through me. (2 Cor. 13:3)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake... But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Cor. 4:5–7)

Preachers are heralds or servants whom the living, exalted Christ is pleased to use as his conduit—like transporting “treasure” in “jars of clay”— in order to speak personally and powerfully to sinners. This is why Jesus tells them, “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me...” (Luke 10:16).

Fourth, in order to do this, the Lord uses his church to *send* those preachers. Romans 10:15 asks,

² “In accordance with normal grammatical usage, the phrase ‘*the one of whom (hou)*’ should be translated ‘*the one whom*’ and so means the speaker rather than the message” (John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* [InterVarsity Press, 1994], 286). Cf. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1965), 58.

“And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!’” The word translated “sent” is *apostello*, from which we get the word “apostle.” An “apostle” is “one who is sent.” Jesus Christ directly set apart and commissioned (“sent”) twelve apostles (“sent ones”) to represent him and to establish the New Testament church (Eph. 2:20). The Twelve represented Jesus as no one else can. But in addition to these “apostles of Jesus” there were also “apostles of the churches,” men whom the churches *sent* out as their special messengers (2 Cor. 8:23).

God’s Word insists that before someone can be a preacher (an official herald), he must be “sent.” The Lord Jesus directly sent his twelve apostles. The same Lord Jesus indirectly—through his church, the body over which he is Head— sends his preachers. The Son sends his preachers by his Spirit through the saints. The Lord works in the church to enable his faithful people to recognize and publicly commission or ordain (“send”) those whom he himself has chosen and gifted to serve as his authoritative heralds (see, for example, Acts 13:1ff.). It’s been observed that “some were sent, but others went.” But unless the preacher is “sent” through the church, he simply does not have the Lord’s authorization to act as his official herald. You see, God insists that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). This is why Romans 10:15 so decidedly insists, “And how can men preach [‘herald’] unless they are sent [‘apostled’]?”³

In short, in Romans 10:13–17 God insists that his church must commission (ordain) certain people for the task, or else there won’t be any gospel preachers. And the gospel must be preached, or else sinners won’t hear Christ’s voice and message. And sinners must hear Christ’s voice and message, or else they won’t believe the truths of his saving work for sinners. And they must believe these truths, or else they won’t call out to him. And they must call out to him, or else they won’t be saved. In other words, God insists that “the Spirit of God makes the reading, *but especially the preaching of the Word*, an effectual means” of grace to save sinners and to build up believers and churches.⁴ This is the Lord’s work done in the Lord’s way by the Lord’s might. God has chosen to use a weak and foolish *message* communicated through a weak and foolish *means* in order that it will be crystal clear that he alone is the one who supernaturally saves (1 Cor. 1:17–2:5).

³ “We need to realize that the New Testament teaches that the main business of spreading the gospel is the work of men specially commissioned to do so. (This in no way lessens the responsibility of all believers to bear witness to Christ.) God calls these men to his work by causing their gifts and graces to be recognized in the churches, which are then expected to commission them to the work to which he has so obviously called them. Nobody has authority to go unless he is sent in this way. Free-lance preachers, commissioned by nobody, and answerable to nobody, are a prostitution of the New Testament’s understanding of the work of gospel preaching” (Stuart Olyott, *The Gospel as it Really Is* [Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1979], pp. 93–94). Matthew Henry comments, “How shall a man act as an ambassador, unless he have both his credentials and his instructions from the prince that sends him? This proves that to the regular ministry there must be a regular mission and ordination. It is God’s prerogative to send ministers; he is the Lord of the harvest, and therefore to him we must pray that he would send forth laborers, Mt. 9:38. He only can qualify men for, and incline them to, the work of the ministry. But the competency of that qualification, and the sincerity of that inclination, must not be left to the judgment of every man for himself: the nature of the thing will by no means admit this; but, for the preservation of due order in the church, this must needs be referred and submitted to the judgment of a competent number of those who are themselves in that office and of approved wisdom and experience in it, who, as in all other callings, are presumed the most able judges, and who are empowered to set apart such as they find so qualified and inclined to this work of the ministry, that by this preservation of the succession the name of Christ may endure for ever and his throne as the days of heaven. And those that are thus set apart, not only may, but must preach, as those that are sent.”

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:23–25, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God ... And this is the word that was preached to you.” Heb. 4:2, 12, “We also have had the gospel preached to us ... the word of God is living and active ...”

The Great Problem

Does this mean that God doesn't permit unordained believers—believers who are not *sent*—to tell others about Jesus? Of course not! God calls every believer to confess Jesus Christ openly (Rom. 10:9–10). What this does mean is that when they do so, unordained believers do not function as Christ's authoritative heralds.

Well, does that mean that the Lord will never use the witness of an unordained believer as an instrument to effectually call sinners to salvation? Of course not! The Lord is sovereign, free, and infinitely compassionate and gracious. He *often* uses the witness of his faithful people. We see this both in Scripture and in Christian experience. What it does mean is that he especially promises to bless the preaching of his Word as an effectual means of grace.

The great problem we have in the modern church is not that too many unordained believers are too diligent to bear witness to Jesus Christ in their daily vocations. Far from it! Our great problem is that we moderns are no longer confident that preaching really *is* the means by which Jesus Christ *especially* works to save sinners, disciple believers, and build his church.

As a result, we increasingly consider preaching to be outmoded and ineffective. So instead, we look to other things to produce our growth. We rely on business and marketing techniques, programs, groups, and activities.

The Gravity of this Problem

These things aren't all wrong. But don't we have to ask whether the modern insistence that we *must* do these things in order to minister effectively in our day doesn't reflect unbelief? Unbelief! Unbelief that God will use his *message*—the gospel—through his *means*—the foolishness of preaching—as the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe! Ask yourself honestly—does it really matter *in practice* that our Lord Jesus Christ is alive and exalted? Does it really make a difference *in practice* that he has poured out his Holy Spirit?

When we don't trust the exalted Christ to work by his Spirit through his Word, we'll replace the authoritative proclamation of the gospel with “sharing,” political lectures, self-help speeches, dramatic or artistic or musical performances, multimedia presentations, special effects, puppets, clowns, films, etc. Not only that, but when we lose sight of Jesus Christ's supernatural involvement in the ministry of the Word—we'll expect churches and ministers to meet people's every “felt need.” Ministers will be expected to be CEOs, managers, pace-setters, motivators, change-agents, counselors, facilitators, fund-raisers, etc.—everything and anything *except* heralds of King Jesus and stewards of the mysteries of God!

Eventually, not only does God's gospel *means* get forgotten. Even God's gospel *message* gets forgotten! All because preachers, elders, deacons, other believers and churches no longer expect the exalted Christ to use the preaching of the Word to evangelize the world, to grow his church, and to edify believers. What this means is that—in practice—preachers, elders, deacons, other believers and churches are not trusting the living, exalted Christ. To the extent that this is true of us, we're guilty—in practice—of unbelief!

The Great Need

What about you? Are you earnestly praying that the sovereign, exalted Christ will transmit his treasures through the jar of clay he's placed over you? Are you urgent and persistent in asking the Holy Spirit to give you ears to hear? When you come to a worship service, do you expect to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd through the under-shepherd he has placed over you? Do you expect the Holy

Spirit to work powerfully? Are you regularly asking the Lord of the Harvest to send out *preachers* into his harvest field? If your congregation has no pastor, do you see it as a driving necessity to look for one? If you are looking for one, what are you looking for? Are you especially praying that God will provide you a faithful *preacher* of his Word?

If these things are not true of us, then we're failing to trust Christ. If we don't *expect* him to bless the message and means he has appointed, then we need to admit that we are guilty of unbelief. We're relying on "broken cisterns that cannot hold water" when all the while "the fountain of living water" is right here (Jer. 2:13).⁵ Pastor Steve Miller puts it this way: "People do not feel urgently the need to pray for their pastors each Sunday morning before they come to church. They expect nothing, so they automatically get up and go to church unprepared, prayerless, harried and hurried, and basically (though they might not recognize this as accurate) with irreverence. They don't really expect to meet with God or to be awed and subdued by His presence. Nor do they expect amazing things, such as conversions, changed hearts and minds, new attitudes, repentance, a new gaining of assurance of salvation."⁶ Dear brothers and sisters, can you not see? This is unbelief.

Since this is so, is not the time long overdue for us to get down on our faces in repentance before our living, sovereign Lord Jesus Christ? Is not the time long overdue for us to cry out in contrition for his forgiveness and mercy and refreshing? Should not we who are preachers be the first in line to repent?⁷

Unless we do repent, should we not expect our churches to languish with ineffective or vacant pulpits? And whose fault will it be? Our own ... no one else's. Could our Lord be speaking to us when he says,

⁵ Rom. 10:6-8 "But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)..." You don't have to fly up to Toronto to encounter Christ! You don't have to drive down to Brownsville to meet with the Lord. He comes to you! He comes to you by his Spirit through his Word, especially through the preaching of the Word!

⁶ Steve Miller is the pastor of Nashua OPC in Nashua, Pennsylvania. In personal correspondence, he continues: "The latter is a matter about which I feel more and more keenly. I have noticed that people in our churches don't have assurance of salvation. This is a major matter in our experience of salvation. It is an important doctrine in the system of doctrine as its set out in the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechism. Our Puritan fathers considered this element of the subjective experience of salvation to be foundational in many ways. I think of it as a primary major step in building a really mature and active congregation. This occurs to me now because the older preachers who wrote our standards used to preach what they believed people needed to hear in order to be assured of their salvation, speaking to the 'inward graces unto which the promises are made,' which is a fundamental element in assurance. Is there inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made? How will people know unless they are made aware of these graces, unless the preacher calls to these graces and seeks their response from the hearts of his hearers, and unless the preacher sets out the promises—making them as promises in his sermons with real sincerity arising from his own experience with them?"

How impoverished our pulpits have been from this sort of preaching as of late! So let the people plead with God for such preaching and such preachers, but, dear Lord, let us be such ourselves to the saving of our own souls and the salvation of those who hear us. We need to change first ... we, the preachers! When we know what sacred thing we are to do and participate in ourselves, when we are the sort of men we would expect could do such a thing, and when we actually begin to preach in that way, then I believe people will believe in preaching again. O, may God work in us preachers today. Savior, please give us preachers of the sort that really preach. Then watch the view of preaching change."

⁷ I would recommend that every preacher read at least the following books with much prayer and self-examination: Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998); John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990); *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Vol. 10, 1999, "Preaching" (Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 229 Seminary Drive, Dyer, IN 46311).

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent? (Rev. 3:17–18).

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✦ Servant Worship

J. Gresham Machen and the Regulative Principle

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by **D. G. Hart and John R. Muether**

One of the lesser known episodes of J. Gresham Machen's (1881-1937) stormy career was his nomination in 1926 to be Princeton Seminary's professor of apologetics. Since 1906 he had taught New Testament at Princeton and distinguished himself in works such as *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) as the foremost conservative biblical scholar of his day. Yet, the field of apologetics was not foreign to Machen, as evidenced by his popular books, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) and *What is Faith?* (1925), works that defended forcefully historic Christianity and the importance of theology. Nevertheless, what made Machen's nomination to the chair of apologetics unusual was not his lack of formal experience but rather the opposition his nomination aroused.

The election and promotion of any Princeton professor required confirmation by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.'s General Assembly. This step in the nomination process was usually a mere formality. In Princeton's history, no nominee had ever been vetoed. Yet, a different outcome awaited Machen. The 1926 General Assembly received a report that questioned his soundness because of his attitude toward Prohibition. At the spring meeting of the Presbytery of New Jersey, Machen had voted against a resolution that endorsed the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act. He did not want his vote recorded because he knew his position differed from most American Protestants. The prohibition on the sale and distribution of alcohol enjoyed widespread support as an effort to retain the Christian character of the nation at a time of unprecedented non-Protestant immigration to the United States. Machen's opposition to Prohibition was a major reason for the General Assembly's failure to confirm his nomination. As one of his friends later told him, the Assembly was "rabidly Prohibitionist"; commissioners could not understand why a good Christian would not support such an obviously good and biblical cause.

Machen opposed Presbyterian support for Prohibition, however, not because he approved of drunkenness or preferred unpopularity. Rather he did so for important theological—even Reformed—reasons. In a statement defending his position (never published again because of the damage his friends believed it would have caused), Machen argued that the church had no legitimate rationale for taking a side in this political question. Aside from the question of the relations between church and state, he believed that the church was bound by the Word of God and so all of its declarations and resolutions had to have clear Scriptural warrant. The Bible did not, however, provide support for Prohibition. It taught the idea of temperance, that is, moderate consumption of alcohol and the other good things of God's creation. This meant that Scripture forbade inebriation. But even here the Bible did not give directions to government officials for abolishing drunkenness. Should this be a matter for the federal government to regulate

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=25.

or should states and local governments? Was legislation the best way to shape public sentiment or was an educational program more effective? Was regulation of private citizens' behavior even a proper concern of the state? The Bible did not answer these and various other questions. So, Machen concluded, the church had no business meddling in the politics of Prohibition or any other matter where Scripture did not speak.

Machen's reasoning here was an extension of the Regulative Principle. In the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition this principle has typically been applied to public worship. It teaches that we may only worship God as he has commanded us to worship him in his Word. People who hear this doctrine for the first time often understand it as overly negative and restrictive, as if we have no freedom in worship. Though the Regulative Principle does limit what we may do in worship, just as important is what it teaches about liberty of conscience and the Lordship of Christ. As the *Confession of Faith* teaches (20.2), "God alone is Lord of the conscience." To bind the consciences of believers only on the basis of teaching of Scripture is to recognize and extend Christ's Lordship. But to do so only on the basis of human wisdom or preference is to usurp his rule. This principle is what separates Presbyterians from other Protestants. Unlike Lutherans and Anglicans, who believe that churches may do whatever God's word allows, Presbyterians and Reformed teach that churches may only do what Scripture commands; hence the name Reformed: "reformed according to the Word."

The Regulative Principle applies not only to worship but to all aspects of the church's life and witness. Unless the church can find a clear warrant from Scripture for a particular teaching or practice, it may not speak or act. Otherwise, it runs the risk of binding the consciences of believers and usurping the Lordship of Christ. In this broader sense, the Regulative Principle is only a variation on the formal principle of the Reformation, namely, *sola scriptura*. The Reformers believed that Rome had substituted the word of man (i.e. the papacy) for the Word of God. John Calvin grappled with just this issue when he responded to the argument that he should submit to the laws of the Roman church even if they were unjust because God commands that Christians submit to the powers that he has ordained. Calvin responded that it was not a question simply of enduring "some grievous oppression in our bodies." The real issue was "whether our consciences shall be deprived of their liberty, that is, of the benefit of the blood of Christ." According to Calvin this was no trifling matter. "No necessity ought to be imposed upon consciences in things in which they have been set at liberty by Christ," he wrote, because without this liberty man could have no peace with God. "If [believers] wish to retain the grace which they have once obtained in Christ; they must submit to no slavery; they must be fettered by no bonds."

The wider implications of the Regulative Principle are important considerations for officers charged with governing the witness and practice of the church. Especially in an age when congregations are taking on more and more responsibilities, from day care to Christian aerobics, the Regulative Principle counters with a wise reminder that the work of the church is prescribed by her head, the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking through his Word, and that he has commissioned officers to make disciples of all nations, not on the basis of human wisdom or ingenuity but by the faithful proclamation of his Word.

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Some Timely Thoughts from John Calvin on Differences Among Christians

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by **Stephen Doe**

How do we deal with the differences among Christians? There are different views and various practices within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, between the OPC and other Reformed churches, and, most broadly, between Reformed churches and other Christian churches. How do we handle these differences? How do we gage the relative importance of doctrines and practices which exist in Christianity?

Not surprisingly, John Calvin, the devout servant of Christ and devoted son of the church, thought about these things. Calvin makes three key distinctions in his writings which can be very helpful to us.² He spoke of “the essential,” “the important,” and “the indifferent.” This schema helps to explain many things about Calvin’s reactions to people who differed from him on a variety of points.

First, Calvin spoke of “the essential,” dogmas which are essential or fundamental for salvation. These are the things most certainly believed among us (Luke 1:1), the things received as of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3). For Calvin these essential matters cohere to three points:³ 1) the only authority is the Word of God (Eph. 2:20), 2) Jesus Christ must be confessed as the Son of God and the object of faith to those who are saved (1 Cor. 3:11, 1 John 2:22), 3) the church is the place where faith is to be expressed as the pillar of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Only errors which deny “the essentials” may truly be called heresies for rejection of any of the above three endangers one’s eternal salvation.

Secondly, Calvin spoke of “the important.” His understanding of this category is significant. It encompasses things which are often lumped in the final category of the “indifferent.” By the “important,” Calvin meant anything that is taught in Scripture, certainly “the essentials” but also whatever God has seen fit to record in his Word. We cannot be unconcerned about any biblical revelation, but not all things revealed in Scripture are essential for salvation, so men may differ on the “the important” without endangering their eternal salvation. Calvin, for instance, would have put church polity in this category.

The third category for Calvin was that of the “indifferent” (adiaphora). These are matters which are

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=17.

² This is fully developed in an unpublished doctoral dissertation by David Anderson Bowen, *John Calvin’s Ecclesiological Adiaiphorism: Distinguishing the “Indifferent,” the “Essential,” and the “Important” in His Thought and Practice*, 1547-1559. (Vanderbilt University, 1985) which first attracted my attention. Cf. Martin I. Klauber, “Calvin on Fundamental Articles and Ecclesiastical Union,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 54 (1992) 341-48.

³ *Ibid.*, 71-108.

not dealt with in Scripture and therefore, cannot be made a matter of church discipline. Fundamentalists, like the Anabaptists of Calvin's day, have too often taken those things which are not discussed in Scripture (like attending movies) and elevated them to the status of disciplinary matters. Heresy cannot be defined nor schism justified with the matters in this category.

There are implications here for our relations with those with whom we disagree. Calvin would warn us not to be dogmatic about such things which are not addressed in Scripture directly. One man's "good and necessary" consequence from Scripture is not always another's. It was the category of "the important" in which Calvin saw the greatest room for developing unity among the churches. Those things which are "essentials" are not subject to negotiation or compromise. Those things which are "indifferent" are never obstacles to church unity because they are not grounded in Scripture and, therefore, cannot be reasons for separation or schism. Frequently division has come in the area of "the important." Calvin, never one to seek vacuous organic unity, nonetheless saw the need to discuss "the important" doctrines of Scripture, reach the greatest possible degree of clarity in understanding, and then recognize that even disagreement over "the important" does not end the fundamental unity of churches where "the essentials" are held.

We deal best with the disagreements within the churches by attempting to see things in their "proper proportions."⁴ As Reformed believers we must be careful that we not forsake what we believe to be the teachings of Scripture as summarized in the Reformed creeds. Perhaps, however, we must also give renewed attention to Calvin's approach to what is important and what is essential if we, like Calvin, value the peace, purity, and unity of the church.⁵

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.

What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion [the "essential"]. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith [the "important"]. Suppose that one church believes—short of unbridled contention and opinionated stubbornness—that souls upon leaving bodies fly to heaven; while another, not daring to define the place, is convinced nevertheless that they live to the Lord. What churches would disagree on this one point? Here are the apostle's words: "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be of the same mind; and if you be differently minded in anything, God shall reveal this also to you" [Phil. 3:15]. Does this not sufficiently indicate that a difference of opinion over these nonessential matters should in no wise be the basis of schism among Christians? First and foremost, we should agree on all points. But since all men are somewhat beclouded with ignorance, either we must leave no church remaining, or we must condone delusion in those matters which can go

⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁵ Anyone wishing to see how Calvin handled his doctrinal disagreement with Melancthon may contact the present writer.

unknown without harm to the sum of religion and without loss of salvation.

But here I would not support even the slightest error with the thought of fostering them through flattery and connivance. But I say we must not thoughtlessly forsake the church because of any petty dissensions. For in it alone is kept safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which piety stands sound and the use of the sacraments ordained by the Lord is guarded. In the meantime, if we try to correct what displeases us, we do so out of duty...we are neither to renounce the communion of the church nor, remaining in it, to disturb its peace and duly ordered discipline.⁷⁶

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⁶ *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.1.12 (Battles translation).

Servant Work

Start Those Home Visits Now

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by **David Winslow**

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

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

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

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

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

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=9.

Beginning with these three elements as soon as is politely possible sets the tone from the very beginning for serious ministry to the family. My point is that you, the ruling elder, need to prepare a passage ahead of time appropriate to the occasion. For example I have found John 15:1-17, Colossians 3:1-21, Hebrews 12:1-24, and 2 Peter 1: 2-12 excellent passages to read at home visits.

Create a home visit call sheet that helps you fulfill the goals of the home visit. The very first issue of *Ordained Servant* (yes, that's Vol. 1, No.1) had a calling record sheet that you might like to copy.² But what I have in mind is one that our session uses, one that spells out a number of questions centered around the threefold service for Christ that the OPC Form of Government speaks of in Chapter II 4. "The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness." It is our goal to find out how our families are growing in their life of worship, mutual edification, and witness for Christ. We want to be sure that they are receiving and giving in these areas. Are they being equipped for this manifold service for Christ, and are they in turn contributing to the life of the church according to the measure of grace given them in Christ? Our Sessional Calling Record contains questions that we hope will allow us to see the Lord's work in their lives and enable us to stimulate them in their sanctification, encouraging them to make use of the means of grace.

Is your own house in order? Your ability to deal with problems that are brought to your attention during home visitation will be greatly affected by your own godliness. How can you exhort a family to tithe if you don't? Will you have boldness or insight into the father leading family devotions if you fail to lead devotions in your own home? Can you encourage them to share gifts of, say hospitality, if you don't? This is to say that undershepherds must reflect the life-transforming glory of the Great Shepherd if they are to guide effectively the flock to the green pastures and quiet waters for his sake.

Questions for Elders to Consider:

1. How important is a home visitation program to our discipling of the congregation?
2. What are the most common impediments to accomplishing this ministry?
3. Have we defined our purpose or goals for this year's home visitations?
4. What would make our home visitation more fruitful this year than last year?
5. Do I/we need someone (like the pastor or an experienced elder) to show us how to do home visitation?
6. Can our deacons help us in this ministry?

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² *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 1 (1992); available online at <http://opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV1N1.pdf>.

Home Visitation and Family Devotions

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by **David Winslow**

When you visit in the homes of your congregation this coming year, I predict that one of the more pervasive problems that you and fellow elders will note is the lack of family devotions. You will hear families who say they don't have the time, schedules are too chaotic with working parents passing each other like two ships in the night, or fathers who feel inadequate so they don't feel comfortable doing it ... excuses, excuses, excuses. My own personal favorites were that my wife didn't keep a Bible handy or that I had to go to a Session or Trustees meeting. Yes, that's right, too busy with church work to lead my own little ones to Christ. Those excuses can be embarrassing, can't they?

My fellow elders, we do need to address the excuses in our own lives if we are to deal with those in the lives of the congregation. We need to lead by example. Pastor Bill Warren's example was the most helpful to me as a young father and new elder. He would have short devotions with his family after each meal. Over the last dozen years we have been able to develop consistency in doing the same thing in our home. When we eat together as a family, we finish with Bible reading and prayer. Now my Bible sits within hand's reach. My wife and children expect me to read and pray even if I need to be brief because of other commitments. Needless to say, our enjoyment of our God, and even his glory, have been advanced by these humble efforts.

As Orthodox Presbyterians, we will be visiting in homes where the parents promised at the time of their child's baptism to instruct their children in the Reformed faith, pray with and for them, endeavor by all the means appointed by God to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Directory for Worship, IV.B.4). On the basis of these promises elders may urge the flock to make use of family devotions as part of the fulfillment of those promises. Two of the three ordinary means of grace are at hand in family devotions, and I do not believe that it is appropriate to shift all the responsibility for the nurture of our children to the weekly church meetings or to the Christian school. Christian households must necessarily reflect the glory of Christ that is in the greater household, the church. And since the church is marked by her devotion to Christ in prayer and attention to his Word, the Christian family should be also.

In our home visits we must encourage fathers to exercise headship in this area of family life and mothers to assist their husbands in this covenantal responsibility. There is a partnership the balance of which must be maintained. Unfortunately, it is often upset by the husband who shirks his duty to lead mother and children, or conversely the gifted mother who usurps the father's role. As the visiting elders discuss with the family what they are doing for family devotions it would be good to be prepared with ideas that can be of help in various situations.

"Nourish the body, nourish the soul" is my simple way of stating a concept that young children can readily understand. For thousands of years it has been the practice of devout Christian homes to join the fellowship of breaking bread together with the fellowship of Bible reading, singing, and prayer. While this custom appears to have fallen victim to dual income families, to our American love affair

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=10.

with sports for all ages, and to endless electronic entertainments with little recreational value, it is one worth preserving if at all possible. In our household, mother does the morning devotions at the breakfast table before the children go off to school and father does the evening devotions at the dinner table. The other time for family devotions with young children is before the youngest goes off to bed. That is a great time for gathering in the family circle for Bible reading and family prayer.

Materials for devotions can be an important aid in helping make the family worship meaningful to all members. The Christian family must have devotions that are Christ-centered. It is after all the word of Christ that is to dwell in us richly; he is our life, we have died with him and our lives are now hidden in him. We can no longer read our Old Testaments as if it were still 400 BC! The family that is in Christ is part of the new creation; the old has gone the new has come with all the heavenly glory of the Son of God himself. But doing this is not always as easy as one would think. We seem to have almost a natural tendency toward a moralistic approach to the exercise of our religion. This is true of many of the devotional aid materials that are available as well. Another problem is that so many books use pictures of Jesus to depict the biblical scenes of his life. I think this is more than unfortunate; it is a violation of the second commandment as question 109 of the Larger Catechism clearly states.

Three Suggested Aids for Families:

1. *The Child's Study Bible* by Catherine Vos. This is excellent with a theocentric-christocentric approach to the stories that probably reflects the fact that her husband Geerhardus Vos did a good job with his own family devotions, as well as assisted in editing the book. A razor can easily remove the pictures of our Lord without damaging the text. Good for ages three to ten years.
2. *Leading Little Ones to God* by Marian Schoolland. Bible teachings (more than just stories) covering who God is, the work of the Son and the Spirit, the response of faith and obedience, prayer, and the ministry of the church. Each section includes songs and suggested prayers. The text does contain pictures of Jesus, which we simply did not show to our children. Good for ages three to ten years.
3. *Promise and Deliverance* by S. G. De Graff. This four-volume set covers the narratives of the Bible from Genesis to Acts. Designed to help Sunday school teachers, De Graff's basic approach is to see that the narratives are given a redemptive-historical flavor that focuses on the Lord of the Covenant and his gracious saving of his people in Christ. This is very helpful material to use along side reading through the Bible. Good for ages five to adult.

Questions for the Elders to Consider:

1. Are our own "devotional houses" in order so that we are examples to the flock?
2. What devotional materials can we as elders recommend to our members for their use?

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Ingredients of a Meaningful and Successful Intern Program

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by Nathan Trice

It has become my fervently held conviction that a pastoral internship should be considered *indispensable* to a man's preparation for the ministry, a rule that has, I believe, few exceptions. I hold this strong opinion as one who has just recently completed the first year of his first pastorate, and who can attest to the immeasurable benefit received from a well-placed internship in a local church. If my own experience gained as an intern could be likened to a well, then I could say that the bucket over it has rarely been still, as I've dipped innumerable times into it for assistance in adjusting to new pastoral responsibilities. As every minister will attest, the first year of ministry is filled with unique challenges, perhaps chief among them simply being the number of routine responsibilities assumed for the *first time*. I've called these the endless "first timers" that confronted me at the beginning of my pastorate: the first time to administer the Lord's supper, the first time to teach a membership class, the first time to moderate a congregational meeting, and so on, all of which require that extra thought and effort to perform, and which, when in quick succession, can be somewhat overwhelming to a new pastor. An internship is at the very least an effective way to reduce the harrying number of "first timers" that a new pastor encounters in his first pastorate.

However, I'm convinced that an internship provides even more than this. Though I could write here as many words in support of the traditional structure of seminary education in which men undergo rigorous academic training for the ministry (I am not a critic of the seminary model!), I would yet insist that no formal educational program should be considered the sole means by which men are rendered "prepared" for the ministry. Such a program is invaluable for the *equipping* of men with many of the tools needed for the ministry, but it should not be assumed (or even expected, I would suggest) to fully *prepare* men for the pastorate. That, it seems to me, falls to the work of the local church, to the oversight and instruction that can be best provided through the attention given to a candidate for the ministry in an internship program. Only through such an internship that specializes in the day-to-day applications of the tools and methods learned in seminary can a man be fully prepared for the day-to-day responsibilities of the ministry, I believe.

So what are the ingredients of a meaningful, successful internship? It has become clear to me, through the experience of many of my colleagues in their pursuit of the ministry, that not all of the church programs that bear the name "ministerial internship" prove to be either meaningful or successful. Based on the happy experience I have had in a solid internship program—still somewhat fresh in my memory—and the further insight I've gleaned in my first year of becoming acclimated to the pastorate, I'd like to submit what I consider to be eight essential ingredients to a meaningful and successful internship program.

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¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=15.

1. Concerted time and attention from a mentoring elder. For an internship to have a meaningful role in a man's preparation for the ministry, it must be more than the typical staff position in a local church. The greatest need of a candidate for the ministry is to be "taken under the wing" of the minister himself (or one of the teaching elders), who can provide him the instruction and feedback that is vital to the assessment and improvement of his gifts. The ministerial candidate needs a mentor! For this reason, though in many ways the addition of an intern to the church staff can lessen the load of a minister, in other ways it should be expected to increase it. A mentoring minister or elder should schedule weekly blocks of time with the intern to, among other things: (a) review the sermons preached and provide encouragement and critique, (b) consider the sermons being prepared and provide direction, (c) review and discuss other designated responsibilities, and (what I found highly profitable) (d) conduct a course of study and discussion on a topic relating to the ministry (for example: study together Charles Bridges's *The Christian Ministry*, or a similar work). An alert and inquisitive intern will be brimming with "How do you?" and "What about?" questions, and this would naturally furnish opportunity for the mentor to "download" invaluable experience to his disciple. All of these opportunities to converse on the responsibilities of the pastorate will prove invaluable for the intern.

2. Consistent preaching and teaching responsibilities. Not only is this at the heart of the gospel ministry itself, but for many (certainly for me) it is also the most daunting of responsibilities to assume at the start of the pastorate. Even the best practical theology department in a seminary cannot provide the consistent preaching experience necessary to the steady improvement of a man's gifts. Preaching at least once a week should be the goal, in my opinion, for it provides that critical opportunity for weekly assessment and progress. Here it is vital for the intern to receive a straightforward critique of the clarity and exegetical integrity of his sermons, as well as practical pointers concerning delivery and pulpit demeanor. Strengths should be warmly reinforced and weaknesses gently corrected. If preaching is to be at the center of the ministry, it should also be central to an internship, and the greatest energy of the mentor should be focused on the further development and refinement of the intern's preaching gifts.

3. Frequent leadership in worship. Since a certain ease and presence of mind before people is necessary for most forms of leadership in the church, an intern will benefit from all responsibilities that put him "on the platform." However, it is of special importance, I would suggest, for an intern to cultivate an effective manner of leading in worship. As much as possible, the intern should be given responsibility for leading the congregation in worship, including the so-called "pastoral prayer." (If one is licensed to preach, presumably that includes the license to lead in the pastoral prayer!) The principles of Samuel Miller's book *Thoughts on Public Prayer*, as well as Spurgeon's remarks on the subject in *Lectures to My Students* would be helpful to underscore at this point, along with the regular *doing of it*.

4. Regular participation in the session's business. It may be of concern to some to allow an intern to be privy to all the session's deliberations, but there is undoubtedly no better way to prepare a man to be a member and moderator of a session than to give him prior exposure to the inner workings of one. As a recent intern, I was granted privilege of the floor as a matter of routine, presented monthly reports along with the pastor, and entered fully into the discussions (and occasional debates) of the elders. Such a setting provides the intern with invaluable insight into the rudimentary elements of parliamentary procedure, as well as allows him to gain a "feel" for the leadership role of the moderator. On countless occasions in my own internship it was in the session meetings that I learned about those

duties of church leadership “that they never teach you in seminary”—as we used to say with humor.

5. Regular exposure to the deacon’s business. I do not say “participation” in the deacons’ business only out of recognition of the differences in office, and the fact that a pastoral intern is one who “aspires to the office of an overseer,” not a deacon. However, I’m strongly inclined to think that an intern will benefit greatly from at least being exposed on a regular basis to the work of the deacons. Attendance at their stated business meetings should be a minimal goal. But further direct exposure to the diaconal ministries themselves, along with the deliberations and decision-making that accompanies them, will stand the future minister in good stead, especially as he begins to interact with a diaconal board within his own congregation.

6. Assistance in counseling and pastoral oversight. This is an area in which a measure of discernment is necessary, of course, but which ought not be excluded in a normal internship. While there are some counseling situations in which it will be inadvisable to include an intern, there are certainly many in which his presence would be welcomed. In such situations, the intern will learn inevitably a great deal about how to address pastoral issues in a more personal setting, as he observes and perhaps even participates in a minister’s or elder’s work. A particularly good opportunity for this kind of experience is in the pastoral visits of the elders. A practical suggestion would be that the overseeing elders as a matter of routine, while scheduling a visit, ask something to the effect: “Would you mind if I came with John, our ministerial intern?” This practice of including the intern in such pastoral situations will, if nothing else, serve to give him even more of a “pastor’s heart.”

7. Responsibility for administrative duties. If an intern has preaching and teaching gifts, but weakness in administrative duties, he might as well be confronted with this, and begin to account for it in an internship program! Otherwise, in countless ways he will be ill-equipped for the work of a pastor. An excellent way to develop the organizational and administrative gifts of an intern is to build into his job description a certain project or task. My intern experience included the organization and supervision of a new Vacation Bible School program for the church: a project that tested and strengthened my ability to supervise and motivate other people in a working relationship. The development of a specific evangelistic program, or small group ministry, or the like, could be similar ways to develop the administrative gifts of an intern. However, some such projects can become all consuming, and should not be allowed to distract the intern from what are even more central duties of the ministry, his preaching and prayer.

8. Attendance at meetings of the regional church. For reasons similar to those given regarding participation with the session, the intern will benefit greatly from being exposed to the work of the presbytery, and even of the general assembly. It should be a priority of the mentoring session to provide for the intern to attend all such meetings, if possible. He will, it is hoped, get a valuable head start on his growth as a functioning member of the regional church.

These, I would propose, are the main ingredients of a meaningful internship. But there is one further element needed to make an internship truly successful. At times it may prove to be the most difficult part of the role of mentoring minister or session; for it will require serious deliberation and sometimes very sensitive dealing with an intern. I’m referring to the honest, summary assessment of an

intern's character and gifts that ought to come during the internship program. Whether an internship is pursued before, during, or after the completion of a seminary education, the church and its leaders, who provide such oversight and assistance, ought to have this question as their fundamental concern: "Can we see in this man, by virtue of his character and gifts manifested among us, evidence of God's call upon him to the gospel ministry?" In a day in which the call to the ministry is too often seen as a merely private matter between God and a man's heart, churches that provide internship programs should take on the difficult responsibility of providing either outward confirmation, or, when necessary, a disapproval, of his call to the ministry. In the latter case, the session, after careful deliberation, and informed by the judgment of the church as a whole, will need to submit their serious reservations as to whether the one serving as an intern is truly called to the ministry. In the former, more pleasant case, the session will be able to offer a ringing affirmation of his sense of the call. But it is here, in the context of the local church, and specifically a local church that has received a well-rounded representation of the man's character and gifts, that a man's desire and personal sense of call to the ministry can be given its needed external counterpart: the recognition and affirmation of the church. For this reason, I remain convinced that an internship program is indispensable in preparing for the ministry.

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Servant World

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

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by David King

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

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

While the twentieth century saw exponential increases in the speed of communication over distances, using high-speed communication can be expensive. What pastor has not had the frustrating experience of wishing he could call two or three trusted brothers in distant places to thrash out the exegesis of a difficult passage or work out a questionable doctrinal point or seek counsel on a thorny pressing problem—but the reality of long distance phone rates killed the wish? So you write letters, and maybe it takes a week or two to get answers, possibly too late to help when help was needed most. How many times have you driven home from a presbytery meeting wishing the agenda and everyone's busy schedules had allowed sufficient time for real ministry to each other, and you regret that time and money keep us from getting in our cars and meeting somewhere just for the purpose of fellowship

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=12.

and mutual edification? A number of ministers have drifted off in unorthodox directions who might have been kept on course if they had been in regular and immediate communication with brothers who could have helped them at the outset to think through their aberrant ideas to sound conclusions (though it's quite likely at least some of them would have followed their deviant course in any case).

Enter the modern communications technology that enables instant and nearly cost free (after you pay \$1,000 or more for the equipment!) written communication via e-mail and the Worldwide Web. The struggling session can now send out an emergency appeal for counsel to scores of other sessions and hope to receive good advice while the problem is still gestating. Pastor-teachers can ask each other questions, propose ideas for critique, and share new insights across thousands of miles, as if next door. Young ministers can keep in touch with older mentors. Three, four, ten, fifty people can carry on an active conversation without needing to drive long miles and tiring hours to meet.

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

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

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

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

I mentioned above sharing of ideas with other elders for critique and seeking counsel. Currently (1998) I am involved in an e-mail discussion group for Orthodox Presbyterians (managed by the *Christian Observer*, at presbyterians-opc@xc.org). Several times sessions have described serious problems they face, and have received timely and (in my opinion) good advice. Individuals ask for the names of the best books on various subjects; they ask questions about difficult subjects; they offer commentary on current events from a biblical point of view. In the course of these discussions, over the last six months, I have been delighted to receive some of the finest exegesis and most weighty theological reasoning one can hope to encounter. I have learned a great deal about biblical church government, both theologically and practically. Membership vows, the nature and extent of church power, the relationship of the church and civil government, questions about taxes, usury, marriage and divorce, and church discipline, arguments about the use of instruments in worship, and the application of the Second Commandment to church decoration, etc. Some of this has struck me as trivial or wrong; but some I have copied gladly to permanent disk storage for future reference.

There Are Problems

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

2. Gossip and offense. There is something seductive about a medium in which one retains near ano-

nymity while “speaking” back and forth to people almost as if they were right there with you. You converse, but through a wall; you are safe. Some people, I suspect, undergo the kind of personality change that others experience in automobiles—when courteous, diffident, quiet people turn into aggressive pit-bulls on the highway. I think it is too easy to ignore the Christian “rules of etiquette” on the Internet. Matthew 18:15 and the Golden Rule still apply, but you don’t see, and may not even know, the people with whom you exchange postings; you are alone in a room with their words on a screen. How easy to forget the law of love and pass on gossip or lash out at perceived stupidity and error. In this way the speed of the Internet is a liability. Your fingers fly with brilliant repartee, the barbs shining bright—you are a valiant warrior for truth against heresy, you press the “send” key and away it flies, irretrievably, to pierce its target and reach scores of other readers (maybe hundreds, thousands?). A letter would have taken longer to type. You would have slept on it before handing it to the postman. There would have been time for your better angels to whisper caution to your conscience. Think twice and pray well before you “send.”

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

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

5. Caveat emptor. Balancing the outstanding exegetical and theological material I have seen have been a few examples of the very opposite (in my opinion). A lot of worthless junk floats around on the Internet. Remember how Pierre Salinger made a fool of himself by believing—and loudly proclaiming—a total fabrication about Flight 800, and don’t be a naive guppy yourself. Can Christians spread baseless rumors through the Web? You’d better believe it, or you will believe it.

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

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The Perils of Pornography on the Internet

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by William Shishko

Get Your Head Out of the Sand!

We cannot escape the fact that we live in a culture that is increasingly fueled with sensuality. Advertisers have realized for scores of years that an attractive female connected with products ranging from shaving cream to cars will enhance sales. I buy the product, I get the girl—so the twisted reasoning goes. Today sexuality has overrun and almost completely destroyed all barriers that have been put up against it in the media. It is impossible to scan the range of cable channels without, in seconds, seeing immodesty and sensual conduct, if not explicit acts of fornication and adultery. Even some movies that are rated PG-13 are noted as having “nudity” and “adult situations.” (One wonders what R rated movies contain!) To make a trip to your local Blockbuster is to put yourself just one step away from disreputable “Adult Shops.” Catalogues that come into our homes (even if they are not “Victoria’s Secret” catalogues) contain explicit pictures of women in immodest and sensual attire; so also do the advertisements for tanning spas, athletic clubs, and travel agencies in weekly “Shopper’s Guides” that are sent freely to our homes. Daily newspapers contain the same, especially on the sports pages. And, increasingly, pop-up ads on computers or cleverly tagged “spam” come before our eyes as we make use of e-mail or the Internet. All of this may fall short of *Playboy* or *Hustler* magazine, but any one of these things can become a mental halfway house to men as they struggle with the problem of sexual lust.

My plea to pastors in this article is that you get your heads out of the sand! The ostrich knows that an adversary is present, but avoids the problem by looking away instead of bravely facing it. My fear is that too many pastors have their heads in the sand because they: a) are not aware that the problem is really as bad as it is; b) do not think that we should be so alarmed by it; c) think that their only responsibility is to go about their ministerial duties of generally preaching and teaching in the hope that the problem will take care of itself in the people to whom we minister.

Brothers, I have news for you: a) the problem is *worse* than you can imagine; b) unless you want to deal with a lot of spiritual wreckage in yourself and others, you better be alarmed by it; c) if you don’t get beyond “preaching the word” and “preaching Christ” in broad generalities, you will not be addressing the problem, and *it will not take care of itself*.

It’s a temptation to think that the problem of sexual lust that leads to the viewing of and eventual addiction to pornography (and worse!) is something that is *so* modern (because of the mass media and technology) that it is not addressed in Holy Scripture. That mindset can easily create a “hands off” attitude when we think of our ministerial duties: “I will minister good doctrine, and the Holy Spirit will make the necessary applications in individual lives.” Such an “ostrich view” is not countenanced by the Word of God for a moment. It is a view that is *dangerous*!

It is helpful to keep in mind that the first century Roman empire, into which Christ and the gospel of the kingdom came, was no less riddled with unbridled sensuality than is ours. In Romans 1:26ff., the apostle Paul describes homosexual and heterosexual fornication as the primary fruits of a culture that is

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=26.

“given up” to false worship—particularly the worship of self. Yet it is to this culture that Paul says that “the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). In first century Corinth, hundreds of male and female temple prostitutes were available at all hours of day or night for “worshippers” to gratify their lusts in acts of pagan “devotion.” (Is this really much different than the problem of Internet porn?) It is to that city that Paul speaks of the grace of God in Christ coming with power such that some were *no longer* “fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites...” By the Gospel they “were washed, ...sanctified, ... [and] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 11). Let’s not be ostriches, brothers! Face the enemy with the always powerful Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ!

It is also important to keep in mind that Christ and the apostles were not backward about dealing specifically with destructive sins like sensual lust. I fear that too many ministers today are shy when their inspired patterns predecessors were quite bold:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off 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. 5:27-30)

Brothers, does this have *no application* to radical measures for today’s eyes and the lusts that are prompted by pictures on the Internet, television, and in magazines?

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. (Eph. 5:3-7)

Brothers, do you really believe that “not even a hint” of such uncleanness should mark God’s people?

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. (1 Thess. 4:3-7)

Brothers, have you gotten *beyond* the interpretative debate over whether “his own vessel” is one’s wife or one’s body and then have you dealt *honestly* and *practically* with what it is to live in holiness rather than uncleanness? “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). Brothers, are you keeping your hearts

pure, are you teaching others to do the same, and are you fleeing “youthful lusts” as a model to help others do the same?

My fellow pastors, I urge you to *be aware* of the challenge that lust and pornography pose to men *and women* (yes, women have their battles in this area, too!) in our increasingly sexually charged society. Don't be ostriches. *Be honest* in realizing that the congregation you pastor is simply not immune to the problem facing our culture at large. Then consider and implement *practical strategies* for teaching your people, helping them individually and as couples, and providing the accountability necessary for long-term victory in the battle for purity of mind and body.

I recommend the following resources to help increase your awareness of the peril of pornography. These all provide practical suggestions to help you make our younger and older men and women better soldiers on this bloody field of our modern culture wars.

1. *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* by Ed Welch. This is by far the best treatment of addictions of any type and the way to confront them by the Gospel. This is a must-read for pastors.
2. *Every Man's Battle* and *Every Young Man's Battle* by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoker; *Every Young Woman's Battle* by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn. The theology of these books leaves a lot to be desired, but their frank, down-to-earth treatment of the subject of the battle with lust and pornography is engaging and practical.
3. *The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn. Someone can read this book in an hour and be changed by it. It hits you between the eyes, it is rich with memorable statements, and it continually goes back to the riches of Christ that enable believers to face the demand for purity and be successful.
4. *Not Even a Hint* by Joshua Harris. This 175-page book is my favorite. It is theologically “right on”; it is realistic; and it clearly comes from a pastor's heart. The book is designed for single men and women, but it is also most useful for couples and for older men and women whom we train to help others in the work of guarding ourselves against lust. I particularly recommend this as a book parents should give to their teenage children and discuss with them.

Internet Pornography

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. Twenty percent of men admitted accessing pornography while at work, as did 13 percent of women. Some 40 million adults in America regularly visited pornographic websites. Ten percent of them admitted to Internet sexual addiction.

And 47 percent of Christians admitted that pornography was “a major problem” in their homes. (Fifty-three 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?

I have dealt in general above 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. Now 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, my family, and 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 fornication 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 is 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 you eyes away from those explicit images, don't ever go to a video rental store. "Come on. Everyone goes into those stores." No. If it causes you to sin, you shouldn't. Period. (pp. 64ff)

Specifically with respect to controlling the Internet, Alcorn counsels:

Use family-friendly Internet service providers (see 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).

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 Seventh 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 pleasures 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 Pet. 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 ac-

ceptance 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 Pet. 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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The Myth of Influence

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by **D. G. Hart and John R. Muether**

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

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

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

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=19.

The Strategy of Influence

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

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

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

Overall, conservative efforts at denominational politics were ineffective. The Special Committee of 1925, appointed to study the controversy in the denomination, reported to the next year's general assembly that liberalism, as Machen had defined it, did not exist in the church and blamed conservatives for starting the struggle in the first place. This report only paved the way for the 1926 general assembly to call for the investigation of Princeton Seminary, the source of so much conservative opposition to liberalism. When that investigation recommended the reorganization of the denomination's oldest seminary, the die was cast. In 1929 that recommendation took effect and conservatives lost control of the only denominational agency that voiced their views.

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

Missions and the Mandate

The institution-building strategy continued in 1933 when, in response to a report on Protestant foreign missions (*Re-Thinking Missions*) that denied the uniqueness of Christianity and argued for

cooperation with indigenous religions, conservatives, again led by Machen, formed the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Conservatives had sent overtures to the general assembly that sought the reform of the denomination's official Board of Foreign Missions. But once those failed, they founded another agency to voice dissent from denominational policies and to stand for the Reformed faith.

Not surprisingly, the Independent Board looked to denominational leaders like a rival organization. To squash it, denominational officials drew up the Mandate of 1934, passed by the general assembly the same year, which declared that the Independent Board was unconstitutional and ordered Independent Board members to resign or else face trial by their presbyteries. At this point, strategy was no longer the issue. Instead, the question facing conservatives was whether they would obey the church's ruling. And this question bore directly upon the matter of authority in the church. Were church officials acting lawfully or were they usurping the authority given them by the Word of God and the church's constitution? If conservatives were convinced of the latter then they had a solemn obligation to make that case in the courts of the church. Machen said that because he believed the official board of missions was "unfaithful," he could not support it nor urge others to support it. Neither could he simply withdraw from the Church because such evasion would be "a violation of my ordination pledge to maintain the purity and peace of the Church, whatever 'persecution or opposition may arise' unto me on that account."

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

The Real Influence of Christ's Church

Did the OPC lose influence within the most prominent circles of mainline Protestantism when it was formed in 1936? To be sure it did. And did the formation of the OPC deplete the witness of conservatives in the PCUSA? This question is harder to answer since by the estimates of conservatives who remained in the Northern Presbyterian Church there were many more sound ministers and congregations than the small number (i.e. 5,000) of Presbyterians who left to join the OPC. Blaming the woes of the PCUSA on the OPC will not exonerate the responsibility of those conservatives who did not leave.

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

the Word of God.” In the end, this is the only way to evaluate the influence of the church.

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The Future of Calvinism

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by James Gidley

As we consider the future of Calvinism,² we might pause to ask what right we have to meddle with this topic at all. Does not the future belong to God? Shall not his counsels come to pass, whatever we might think or do? Can we speak of the future without special revelation from the Lord of the future?

But having paused to ask these questions, we must also ask whether we are to approach the future passively, as if it were about to be let down from heaven before our eyes and we were only spectators of it. Does not the future depend on our choices and actions also?

The answer to all these questions is yes. This is the paradox of Calvinism and of the Bible: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:12–13, NIV). Thus, we are warranted to proceed: looking to the future is part of working out our salvation.

Now, how shall we look to the future? Robert Pirsig has formulated the ancient Greek view as follows: “They saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes.”³ This view has much to commend it. Others have spoken of the future of Calvinism before, and the only reasonable way to attempt it is to describe the tendencies of the past and present and to ponder where they may be heading⁴. Yet we must not approach the exercise as spectators but rather as participants. A biblical perspective on the future must not be an intellectual diversion, but a call to action—and a call to repentance if need be. Thus, a proper discourse on the future of Calvinism will have to include brotherly advice and exhortation.

Now what is this Calvinism whose future we are to ponder? Many in our tradition have preferred to speak of “the Reformed faith,” lest we should attribute to any man—even so great a man as John Calvin—the credit for what we regard to be the way of God revealed in the Scriptures, and lest it should be thought that we are disciples of a mere mortal. As Paul said of his apostleship, and by implication of his gospel: “not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal. 1:1, NIV). In the main I agree with this sentiment in our tradition, but I do not shrink from the historical connection with Calvin, and it is fitting as we meet in honor of Calvin’s birth that we should keep this connection before us and remember a man who was blessed of God and in whose blessing we share. So I shall speak of Calvinism.

But whether we call it the Reformed faith or Calvinism, does it have a future? Perhaps the vast

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=22.

² This lecture was originally given on July 10, 1992 at a celebration of Calvin’s birthday at Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pennsylvania. I have edited the lecture somewhat and have added a few footnotes. Nevertheless, I have tried to preserve the spirit of an oral address, and I hope that the reader will forgive me if he finds a rhetorical device where a more careful argument might be expected in a written paper.

³ Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York: Morrow, 1984 edition), 1.

⁴ The astute reader will notice that I have already transformed the subject given in the title. You may now expect that I shall say little about the future and shall concentrate on the past and present.

majority of people today, if they even know what Calvinism is, would regard it as a thing of the past—a dead thing of the past.⁵ And we must not be too elated by the modern scholarly interest in Calvin and Calvinism. The dispassionate approach of the scholarly historian, even when it issues in measured scholarly appreciation and praise, too often is a sign that the scholar regards the object of his study as a lifeless carcass on his dissecting table. When men speak passionately, prejudicially, even bigotedly about Calvinism, then you may know that they see it living still.

Is there then a future for Calvinism? You know its liabilities all too well. Its view of human depravity seems too morbid and pessimistic for our age. Its conundrums surrounding divine sovereignty and human responsibility seem futile to impatient modern minds. Its moral code seems hopelessly repulsive to our modern licentiousness.

But we might ask in return: Is there a future for a world *without* Calvinism? Where is the confidence of this world? For what do men hope when they lay aside their Madison Avenue promotions and consider the naked future? If Calvinism is dead, then perhaps we would do better to pray for its resurrection than to inter the corpse.

When we turn to the church, the future of Calvinism does not seem so bleak. There seems to be a resurgence of interest in it. Reformed seminaries seem to sprout up like mushrooms, and Reformed world-and-life views seem to be in vogue. One evidence of resurgent interest is a book of essays entitled *Reformed Theology in America*.⁶ The concluding piece in the volume is “The Future of Reformed Theology,” by James Montgomery Boice. Boice holds out the hope of bright days ahead—if four important flaws are corrected and nine positive elements are stressed. While I shall not review Boice’s points with you, his essay is another example of speaking of the future of Calvinism and of offering advice for action.

In the introductory essay⁷ in the same volume, George Marsden classifies the Reformed into three groups: doctrinalists, culturalists, and pietists. The doctrinalists, of whom he uses the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as an example, see being Reformed as a matter of doctrinal faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Confession(s). The culturalists, with whom he associates the “progressive wing of the conservative Christian Reformed Church,”⁸ see being Reformed as a matter of applying Christian principles to all areas of life. The pietists, whom he exemplifies by evangelicals who incline towards Reformed theology, see being Reformed as “find[ing] in Reformed theology the most biblical and healthiest expression of evangelical piety.”⁹ Marsden hastens to point out that these categories are not mutually exclusive; for example, a culturalist may have a high appreciation for sound doctrine and fervent piety. But they do represent important tendencies or emphases.

Marsden’s classification provides a helpful starting point for coming to grips with Calvinism as a living force today. Doctrinalists stress right belief. Culturalists and pietists stress right action. Culturalists stress collective action, and pietists, individual action. Belief and behavior constitute a way of life, and so we have here different emphases within a way of life.

I hope that there will be no disagreement that Calvinism ought to embrace all three emphases.

⁵ I am here thinking primarily of conditions in the USA. Those familiar with conditions elsewhere must decide for themselves how well this statement describes those conditions.

⁶ David Wells, ed., Eerdmans, 1985.

⁷ “Reformed and American,” *Ibid.*, 1-12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. Marsden identifies himself with this wing of the CRC. I wonder if J. Gresham Machen would have described himself as a leader of the regressive wing of the liberal Presbyterian Church in the USA?

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

We ought to have correct belief, and we ought to live correctly, both individually and collectively. But it does not follow that we may simply blend these three emphases together to create an appropriate composite Calvinism, like spiritual bakers trying to produce the perfect cake. There is a more profound assessment of Calvinism which is capable of unifying all three emphases and of judging and correcting the deficiencies and aberrations of their devotees.

Fundamentally, Calvinism is that way of life, or that religion, that seeks God's glory in all things, and in so doing seeks the enjoyment of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as its preeminent joy¹⁰. The true Calvinist seeks to live before God and for the glory of God in thought, word, and deed. Remember Calvin's own motto: "My heart I give to thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely." Out of the heart are the issues of life—in giving God our hearts, we have given him our all.¹¹

Let us then consider how the doctrinalist, the culturalist, and the pietist measure up to this exacting standard. My comments will necessarily be brief, and my criticisms may seem harsh. But if we are to hold to a high standard, we must not flinch at stating hard things.

I shall begin with pietism. Among the pietists we see a laudable concern for evangelism and discipleship. We see strenuous efforts to turn men's hearts to Christ and to live for Him. Thus far we see genuine effort to live out the fundamental principle of Calvinism.

Continuing to examine this wing of the Calvinistic mansion, I see those evangelicals who prefer Calvinism in one form or another as the best expression of evangelical theology and yet who do not unite with a conservative Calvinistic church.¹² Thus far I follow Marsden. I go one step further and infer that this group would tend to see Calvinism principally, if not exclusively, as a theology, rather than as a way of life. Evangelical piety is seen as primary, but when intellectual support is needed, Reformed theology is preferred to some other theology.

The evangelical pietist thus fails to be a Calvinist ecclesiastically, and thus fails to exercise or obscures the exercise of that true church discipline which historically has been a hallmark of the Reformed churches. The evangelical pietist can be content to be a member of a liberal church. Therefore while his theology, teaching, and preaching call for repentance from liberalism as a necessity for salvation, his ecclesiastical action—or inaction—says that no such repentance is necessary. To be content to sit down in ecclesiastical fellowship with those whom one regards to be enemies of the cross of Christ contradicts in deed what one preaches in word.

Thus the church loses its character as the community of those who are being saved. And however much the pietist may take refuge in the concept of the invisible church, his ecclesiastical compromise with liberalism contradicts his gospel.

Or the evangelical pietist becomes an independent, severing organic ties with any congregation except his own local one.¹³ Here there is simply a failure to live out the oneness of the body of Christ ecclesiastically, with the consequent disruption of sound discipline. And I marvel at anyone who might criticize denominationalism, only to take refuge in independency, in which each local congregation is a denomination unto itself.

¹⁰ See WSC 1.

¹¹ I am indebted to the Rev. Lawrence Semel for the last expression.

¹² I use the word "church" here for what is often called a "denomination." Evangelical pietists may be members of local churches that are more or less Calvinistic, but by (Marsden's) definition, do not belong to a conservative Calvinistic denomination.

¹³ Some Calvinistic pietists no doubt are united to conservative evangelical denominations, to which these criticisms would not apply, at least not in the same way or with the same force. The question would remain, however, how far Calvinism as a way of life is brought to expression in such churches.

Now let us turn to the culturalists. First notice that there is a pietist-culturalist connection. At least since Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, published in 1947, there have been voices for social concern from within evangelicalism or fundamentalism. Perhaps the most visible recent manifestation of this has been the emergence of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and the alliance of the religious right with the political right.

Just as Calvinism proves to be a theological treasure-trove for the pietist, it becomes a worldview warehouse for the pietist turned culturalist. If one is to make an impact on society, eventually one needs some intellectual weight. This, Calvinism can provide.¹⁴

But culturalism has much deeper roots in Calvinism and an honorable history. In the modern era, the work of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and others have provided a sweeping Calvinistic view of culture. Even more recently, the theonomists or Christian Reconstructionists have developed comprehensive plans for the detailed application of God's law to civil society.

We must praise the culturalists for their all-embracing vision, their desire to bring all of life into obedience to Christ. They have endeavored to rouse the church out of its insularity and absorption in individual piety. Their watchword "All of life redeemed" is a great and fundamental biblical insight.

In a short lecture, it is impossible to go into any detail in analyzing the various movements in the culturalist camp. In keeping with my purpose, I shall simply raise what I believe to be an important warning sign. For all varieties of culturalists there is the danger of making the preservation or transformation of society into the primary aim of the church and the Christian. This obscures the eschatological hope of the church or even supplants it.

The hope of eternal glory, being perceived as something remote and intangible, can slip from our attention to make way for more tangible results in this life. Insensibly our agenda for this world becomes our hope. Pragmatism is not far behind, and the longing for visible results infects everything. Spiritually, this means the eclipse of the glory of God as our aim and the loss of the enjoyment of God as our preeminent joy.¹⁵

Now let us turn to the doctrinalist camp. At the outset we must be on guard against the temptation to think that the doctrinalist camp must be the true heir of historic Calvinism. I say this not only because I have rather strongly criticized the pietists and culturalists, thus possibly leaving the impression that I would now sing the praises of the doctrinalists, but also because I think that we gathered here on this occasion would most likely identify ourselves with the doctrinalist camp. And if we are blind to any faults, it is most likely that we are blind to our own.

Having said this, I must also say that I am deeply indebted to the doctrinalists. Those whose concern has been to remain faithful to God's truth have both taught the church of the glories of her Redeemer and have set a godly example in many a dark day. "Defender of the faith," when deserved, is an honorable title in the church.

We have already seen that doctrine can be valued for its effect on piety or culture. But the doctrinalist sees doctrine as valuable in its own right. With this attitude comes the temptation to intellectualism and dead orthodoxy. I am reminded of the old joke about a departed saint coming to a crossroads at which there are two signs: "This way to heaven" and "This way to discussions about heaven." The doctrinalist may pause a good while at such a crossroads.

¹⁴ I do not mean to say that Calvinism is the only place where pietist/culturalists are turning for intellectual support, but only that it seems to be one of the current options.

¹⁵ The pietists and the doctrinalists are by no means exempt from similar temptations. As culturalism can degenerate into social activism, so also can pietism degenerate into self-improvement programs, and doctrinalism into scholarly prestige.

A related danger into which we may fall is that we may fail to *act* for God's glory when that is required, particularly in the ecclesiastical arena. A prime example of this is afforded us in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the Presbyterian Church in the USA in the 1920s. In 1924, a large group of Presbyterian ministers published the Auburn Affirmation—which really should have been called the Auburn Denial. The Auburn Affirmation essentially denied that it was necessary to believe in the infallibility of the Bible, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, and the continuing life and supernatural power of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Eventually nearly 1,300 Presbyterian ministers signed this statement. Not one was ever brought to trial for violation of his ordination vows.¹⁷

Where were the doctrinalists? Not even J. Gresham Machen, who certainly had the resolution to act on other occasions, appears favorably in this dark episode. In the year before the Auburn Affirmation was composed, Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* had been published. Machen argued clearly and forcefully that Christianity and liberalism were not only different religions, but different types of religions. Yet his clarion call was for the liberals to withdraw *voluntarily* from the churches whose confessions they no longer conscientiously upheld.¹⁸ If Machen's analysis was correct, this amounted to calling wolves to a voluntary cessation of biting and devouring the sheep.

Even for Machen, there is a sense in which his failure to bring judicial charges against the Auburn

¹⁶ See article IV of the Auburn Affirmation, the text of which is reprinted in Rian, Edwin H., *The Presbyterian Conflict*, Eerdmans, 1940, reprinted by the Committee for the Historian, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992, pp. 205-208.

¹⁷ For the history of the controversy, see Rian, *op. cit.* See also Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, first edition, Eerdmans, 1954), 364.

¹⁸ Machen writes: "A separation between the two parties [liberal and conservative] in the church is the crying need of the hour" (*Christianity and Liberalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1956; original copyright, 1923; p. 160). "Whether it be desirable or not, the ordination declaration is part of the constitution of the Church. If a man can stand on that platform he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church; if he cannot stand on it he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church ... Finding the existing 'evangelical' churches to be bound up to a creed which he does not accept, he may either unite himself with some other existing body or else found a new body to suit himself ... By withdrawing from the confessional churches—those churches that are founded upon a creed derived from scripture—the liberal preacher would indeed sacrifice the opportunity, almost within his grasp, of so obtaining control of those confessional churches as to change their fundamental character ... But liberalism would certainly not suffer in the end ... The liberal preacher would obtain the full personal respect even of his opponents, and the whole discussion would be placed on higher ground" (pp. 164–165).

"If there ought to be a separation between the liberals and the conservatives in the Church, why should not the conservatives be the ones to withdraw? ... But in remaining in the existing churches the conservatives are in a fundamentally different position from the liberals; for the conservatives are in agreement with the plain constitutions of the churches, while the liberal party can maintain itself only by an equivocal subscription to declarations which it does not really believe.

"But how shall so anomalous a situation be brought to an end? The best way would undoubtedly be the voluntary withdrawal of the liberal ministers from those churches whose confessions they do not, in the plain historical sense, accept. And we have not altogether abandoned hope of such a solution." (pp.166–167).

"But is not the advocacy of such separation a flagrant instance of intolerance?" (p. 167). Machen then argues for about two pages that this is not intolerant because the church is a voluntary society.

"What is the duty of Christian men at such a time? What is the duty in particular, of Christian officers in the Church?" (p. 173). Machen enumerates four things: (1) The intellectual defense of the faith should be prosecuted vigorously (here he argues against those who would forgo all intellectual defense in favor of evangelism); (2) Christian officers in the Church should oppose the ordination of those who are not true believers; (3) Church members should not call liberals as pastors of their churches; (4) Christian education should be pursued vigorously (pp. 173-177). He then calls for true Christians to gather together for consultation and encouragement (reminiscent of Luther's idea of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—the (little) church within the church).

Seeing that Machen had to contend with conservatives who opposed making even an intellectual defense of the gospel and with those who thought that even the suggestion of voluntary withdrawal was intolerant, I sympathize with his predicament. Yet the way of the Cross is never easy.

Affirmationists contradicted his teaching and preaching.¹⁹ There is a time when sermons and declarations are not enough. Action is called for. If we are not alert, the time when action can be effective may pass us by unawares. Too late we realize that the moment is gone. Machen realized this in later years.²⁰

Thus we come full circle back to pietism. The doctrinalist can be tempted to passivism in ecclesiastical or civil affairs, thus acting like a pietist.

Who then is the true Calvinist? Whose future is the future of Calvinism? To answer this, I venture to call your attention to a familiar document, the Shorter Catechism, and in particular to one question. No, not the fundamental first question nor the enlightening second question, but the third “What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.”

There are two main parts to the answer, and the rest of the Catechism is structured into two corresponding parts. From what I have said so far, I think you will agree that the danger for the pietist and the culturalist is to place undue emphasis on the second part—our duty to God; while for the doctrinalist, the danger is to place undue emphasis on the first part—what we are to believe.

Now the corrective to these tendencies is not simply that the Catechism puts these two things together. If this were all there was to it, then we would have a sort of unstable equilibrium. Picture two children balanced at opposite ends of a seesaw. They cannot remain forever at the same level. Likewise with the attempt to “balance” doctrine and duty. Now and again doctrine will fall too low, now and again, duty.

Neither is it sufficient to say, “Right doctrine leads to right living,” though this is true as far as it goes. This watchword still leaves us in an unstable equilibrium. Is the intent to say “All we need to do is to pay attention to doctrine, and right living will follow automatically”? Or do we mean “Right living is preeminent, and right doctrine is a means to that end”?

No, we must turn again to the words of the Catechism. I ask you, why does it say “what man is to believe concerning God”? Why not simply “the truth about God”? I believe that the writers of the Catechism have grasped a profound biblical insight at this point. The Bible never encourages us to take an abstract or purely intellectual view of doctrine. The truth about God never comes to us merely as a set of ideas for contemplation. Rather it comes to us as that which demands assent. The truth about God *ought* to be believed.

Therefore, the study of theology is always a moral and spiritual matter. It is not merely an error but a sin to embrace a false doctrine. True Calvinists have always seen this, as did Calvin himself. If you want to know the reason why Calvin dealt so rigorously with his theological opponents, this is it. A man’s theology reveals not only his mind, but also his heart.

To put it in a nutshell, in matters of religion, doctrine and duty are one. Moral midgets do not make theological giants.

The same coalescence of doctrine and duty appears in the second part of Shorter Catechism answer 3. The duty God requires of man is *taught* by the Scriptures. In contrast to modern agnosticism about ethics, the Bible teaches that our duty to God is something that can be transmitted from one

¹⁹ I do not mean to imply that it was his responsibility alone. Nor do I wish to detract from that just admiration and gratitude to God that we ought to have for such a faithful defender of the truth.

²⁰ Machen, writing in *The Presbyterian Guardian* (in 1936) immediately after the formation of what was later to become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in an article entitled “A True Presbyterian Church at Last,” said: “What a fearful sin of omission it was, for example, that an effort was not made in 1924, in every single presbytery in which any of us stood, to bring the Auburn Affirmationists to trial!” (quoted in Stonehouse, op. cit., 501).

mind to another. Not only is doctrine duty, but duty is doctrine. And so it is not quite the whole story to say that questions 4 to 38 of the Catechism²¹ focus on doctrine, while questions 39 to 107²² focus on duty. It is all doctrine, and it is all duty. Which brings us back again to the true character of the Calvinist as one who seeks to live before God and to the glory of God in every thought, word, and deed.

The contest with liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s may have left us with the impression that the defense of the faith is primarily or even purely an intellectual matter. After all, the hallmark of liberalism was its belief in morality. But the battle was not purely intellectual then, and by no stretch of the imagination is it so now. Few people are captivated by subtle heresies and philosophies. Multitudes are enslaved by the idols Eros and Mammon. Many, if they knew themselves truly, would have to list their “religious preference” as “Mammonist”—worshiper of money; or “Eroticist”—worshiper of sensual pleasure. One need only turn to daytime television talk shows or late-night television “get rich” advertisements to see how respectable it has become to be a worshiper of Eros or Mammon.

If the church is to survive the onslaughts of these cruel and destructive idolatries, she must recover a high view of the law of God. It is not only the gospel that is under attack, but also the law. In such a time, that middle portion of the Catechism that expounds the ten commandments will be a strong tower to those who will take refuge therein.

A church that is scintillating in theological orthodoxy but lax in obedience is of little worth in the kingdom; as our Lord said, “Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19, NIV).

Let it not be thought that preaching and teaching our duty to God must obscure the gospel. Whoever considers the purity of God’s law in comparison to the corruption of his own heart and life will be driven all the more completely to trust in Jesus alone for salvation. Moreover, salvation is unto obedience (Eph. 2:10), and though obedience cannot be perfect in this life, the true believer will be marked by that striving after “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14, KJV). The preaching and defense of the gospel includes the preaching and defense of the law of God.

Finally, let us return to the future. The culture around us offers little hope for a resurgence of Calvinism, particularly that true Calvinism that I have attempted to describe. What appeal can we make to the world, and what shall preserve us from the pitfalls of pietism, culturalism, and doctrinalism?

Calvinism’s future would indeed be bleak if we have only to appeal to unregenerate human nature for approval. And if we have only our own resources to rest upon, we too shall all fall away. But thus it has always been. Calvinism not only preaches the sovereign grace of God as the source of all blessing, but it also depends for its very survival upon that same sovereign grace. “When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps. 104:28–30, NIV).

Calvinism has a future as long as the Spirit of God renews the hearts of men and women, of children and infants, and leads them to live to his glory and to find their joy in him.

But we have been looking at the future as merely that which follows upon and grows out of present conditions. The Scripture invites us to turn our gaze from the swiftly receding present to the eternal future. For as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Jesus “must reign until he has put all enemies under his

²¹ Concerning the nature of God, God’s decrees, sin, Christ, Christ’s work, and salvation.

²² Concerning the law of God, faith, repentance, and the means of grace (the Word, sacraments, and prayer).

feet ... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:25, 28, NIV).

The great consummation of all things is that which the true Calvinist lives for and longs for—that God may be all in all. The future that really matters belongs to Calvinism.

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The Spirituality of the Church

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by **D. G. Hart and John R. Muether**

What is the Christian's duty to society? Such a broad question suggests many different answers and conjures up images as diverse as the Good Samaritan, who loved his neighbor despite ethnic and religious differences, and the American Presbyterian John Witherspoon, who was the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. Typically, Reformed answers to this question are easily distinguished from those of other Christian traditions. For instance, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., a theologian in the Christian Reformed Church, has argued that the Calvinist perspective on society has generally been regarded as "conversionist" or "transformationist" or "world-formative," as opposed to the Lutheran or Anabaptist traditions that have harbored isolationist impulses.² Plantinga's assessment reiterates the classic statement of H. Richard Niebuhr on the relation of Christ and culture. Unlike Luther, who made sharp distinctions between the temporal and spiritual, or body and soul, Calvin, according to Niebuhr, had a more "dynamic" notion of the Christian's responsibilities in the world. Niebuhr also detected differences between Lutheran and Calvinistic understandings of the state.³ While Luther sharply distinguished the kingdom of grace from the kingdom of the world, Calvin argued that the state not only restrained evil but also promoted human welfare to such an extent that magistrates contributed in some way to building the kingdom of God.

As popular and as well-accepted as this interpretation of the Reformed tradition is, it fails to make sense of those Presbyterians who adopted a more restrained idea of the state and its relationship to the kingdom of God. Unlike some Reformed theologians who have posited a basic harmony between church and state in the execution of God's sovereignty, American Presbyterianism also has nurtured an understanding of society that stresses fundamental differences between the aims and task of the church and the purpose of the state. Sometimes called the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church and attributed to the southern Presbyterian tradition, this conviction also informed the views of Charles Hodge who adhered to this doctrine at a pivotal point in the history of the United States.

Though he is rarely cited as an exponent of the teaching, in 1861 Hodge articulated a view of the church's spiritual purpose and means that, though shorter, rivaled anything James Henley Thornwell or Robert Lewis Dabney could have written. Hodge was writing in response to the Spring Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church that not only split the denomination along regional lines but also declared that the Presbyterian Church had an obligation to "promote and perpetuate" the integrity of the United States and the federal government. Hodge, however, denied that the church had any duty to take sides in the emerging struggle between the North and South. He wrote: "the state has no authority in matters purely spiritual and that the church [has] no authority in matters purely secular or civil." To be sure, in some cases their spheres of responsibility overlapped. Still, "the two institutions are distinct, and their respective duties are different." To substan-

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=24.

² Cornelius Plantinga, "The Concern of the Church in the Socio-Political World," *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983), 192.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, 1951), 217–218.

tiate his point, Hodge went on to quote from the *Confession of Faith*, chapter thirty-one, which states that synods and councils must handle only ecclesiastical, as opposed to civil, matters. He then added a statement that showed his understanding of the point germane to the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church, namely, the extent and nature of church power. “The church can only exercise her power in enforcing the word of God, in approving what it commands, and condemning what it forbids,” Hodge wrote. “A man, in the exercise of his liberty as to things indifferent, may be justly amenable to the laws of the land; and he may incur great guilt in the sight of God, but he cannot be brought under the censure of the church.”⁴

Hodge’s political sympathies were clearly with the Union. Four years later he would weep at the news of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. Still, he recognized that in the political questions surrounding the war between the North and the South—that is, whether the federal government or the states were ultimately sovereign—the church had no warrant from Scripture to take sides or to compel her members to choose sides. Christians must be obedient to the government, and the church had a duty to teach and encourage such obedience. But the Bible did not settle the matter of the states versus the federal government. “*The question*,” Hodge wrote, “*is, whether the allegiance of our citizens is primarily to the State or to the Union?* However clear our own convictions of the correctness of this decision may be, or however deeply we may be impressed with its importance, yet it is not a question which this Assembly has a right to decide.”⁵ To take sides in this matter, Hodge concluded, was tantamount to singing the “Star Spangled Banner” at the Lord’s table.

Four years later, Hodge would continue to assert the Spirituality of the Church, even though the political issue that had provoked the war between North and South had been settled at Appomattox. He asserted that the power of the courts of the church was precisely circumscribed by the Bible. They derived “all their authority” from Scripture and could “rightly claim nothing but what is therein granted.” This meant that as church courts they had “nothing to do with matters of commerce, agriculture, or the fine arts, nor with the affairs of the state.” Their proper sphere was the “conduct of public worship” and the “administration of God’s house.” But with secular affairs they had “nothing to do.”

The distinction between secular affairs and church matters might strike some Presbyterians as a departure from the Reformed world-and-life view that regards all aspects of life as having religious significance. Yet, the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church, as understood and articulated by Hodge, is nothing more than a restatement of what Reformed theologians and churchmen have confessed about the nature and ministry of the visible church. Though this doctrine could look like a Presbyterian brief for the separation of church and state, it also meant that the church is a spiritual institution with a spiritual task and spiritual means for executing that task. Here it is significant to remember what John Calvin wrote about the lordship and kingdom of Christ, writings that suggest the Genevan reformer was no stranger to the kind of dichotomy between churchly and secular concerns implied by the Spirituality of the Church. For instance, in the *Institutes*, at the beginning of his discussion of the state, Calvin clearly distinguishes between the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. The civil realm is concerned with “merely civil or external justice” while the church “rules over the soul or the inner man, and concerns itself with eternal life.” Calvin goes on to say it is a “Judaic folly” not to recognize that “the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things far removed from one another.” A similar understanding of the Spirituality of the Church appears in Calvin’s description of Christ’s office as king, which he writes

⁴ Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 33 (1861), 557.

⁵ *Ibid.*

is strictly “spiritual in nature” (*Institutes*, II.xv.3). Calvin adds that Christ’s kingdom is “not earthly or carnal and hence subject to corruption, but spiritual” and because of that “lifts us up even to eternal life” (II.xv.4).

Proponents of the Reformed world-and-life view may be dubious of such statements in part because of the widely accepted notion, running from Max Weber to H. Richard Niebuhr, of the Reformed tradition’s this-worldly spirituality and transformation vision of culture. But a closer reading of Calvinist piety, such as that found in that portion of the *Institutes* repackaged as the *Golden Booklet of the Christian Life*, suggests that Reformed spirituality can sound just as otherworldly as that of any fundamentalist. In other words, the Presbyterians who articulated the Spirituality of the Church may not have been betrayers of the Reformed tradition if they saw a fairly sizeable gap between things civil and ecclesiastical or between matters temporal and eternal. Nevertheless, showing some precedent for the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church does not automatically make the teaching attractive. For example, it is still associated with the southern Presbyterian Church’s defense of slavery and more generally with Christian abdication of social responsibility. Yet, the other side of nineteenth-century Presbyterianism, those New Schoolers who opposed the Spirituality of the Church in favor of the church’s activism, do not, in hindsight, look much better in applying Christianity to social involvement. Their reliance upon Christian teaching about the magistrate to support the Union and to baptize the agenda of the Republican Party suffers just as much from self-interest and partisan politics as did the southern Presbyterian defense of slavery. So even though we should concede that the Spirituality of the Church has been a doctrine subject to abuse, so has the notion of an activist Reformed world-and-life view. We might even go so far as to argue that narrowing the arena of Christ’s kingdom to the church was much healthier than using Christ’s name to endorse specific political measures. In other words, which is more appropriate, to identify the cause of Christ with the keys of the kingdom (preaching and discipline) or with the platform of the Republican Party?

Thus, for the same reason that some look to the Lutheran notion of two kingdoms as a way to escape civil religion, the Reformed doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church provides relief from all efforts to politicize the faith, from American flags at the front of the church to singing the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” during the Sunday service closest to Independence Day. Yet, in this case Presbyterians and Reformed do not have to go to Lutheran sources to justify a restrained and transcendent understanding of the nature and work of the visible church. The Spirituality of the Church is the Reformed way of keeping religion and politics separate and of letting the church be the church. As the Lutheran sociologist Peter Berger has written, neither the left’s nor the right’s political agenda “belongs in the pulpit, in the liturgy, or in any statements that claim to have the authority of the Gospel. Any cultural or political agenda is a manifestation of ‘works-righteousness’ and *ipso facto* an act of apostasy.”⁶ Presbyterians should not have needed a Lutheran to tell them that. To the extent that their forefathers in the faith taught and expounded the Spirituality of the Church, they already knew it.

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⁶ Peter Berger, “Different Gospels: The Social Sources of Apostasy,” *This World*, 17 (1987), 13.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Review: *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* by Michael Horton

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology, by Michael Horton. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 204 pages, \$19.99.

Here is a book I wish I had read thirty years ago. It is the only full, popular treatment of the biblical covenants, as far as I am aware, that distinguishes between the covenants of works and grace in the way our Confession and Catechisms do, and does so as part of a full blown federal theology. The very brief treatment of Calvin Knox Cummings' excellent little booklet, *The Covenant of Grace*, is also helpful, and is available at the OPC website.² Unfortunately, Owen Palmer Robertson's full-length treatment *Covenants: God's Way with His People* takes a more mono-covenantal approach, and is less consistent with the classic covenant theology of our Confession. Horton makes this plain.

The majestic superstructure of Reformed theology that emerged in the century before the Westminster Confession was formulated deserves the thorough treatment accorded this important subject by Professor Horton. Building on the more recent work of Geerhardus Vos and Meredith G. Kline, Horton explains the essential features of the doctrine of the covenants that give the mature Reformed expression of Westminster its unique flavor.

The three essential covenants of redemption (*pactum salutis*), among the persons of the Trinity; works or creation (*foederus naturae*), by which God's kingdom is inherited by obedience; and grace (*foederus gratiae*) by which God's kingdom is inherited as a gift through the works of the Mediator, are clearly explained.

Horton demonstrates that the two historical covenants of works and grace have analogues in the international treaties of the ancient Near East of the second century B.C. Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties are a model for covenants of works, as are royal grant treaties for covenants of grace. These sovereignly arranged models serve as proof of the antiquity of the Pentateuch. As incorporated into inspired Scripture, they also form the basis of a fundamental distinction upon which the entire fabric

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=20.

² <http://www.opc.org/cce/covenant.html>.

of Reformed doctrine is constructed. Covenants of law, which are conditional, must be distinguished from covenants of grace, which are unconditional.

Horton asserts the historical presence of the works-grace scheme (rooted in the essential Reformation law-gospel distinction) in the magisterial reformers Calvin and Ursinus, the primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism (Chapter 5, “From Scripture to System”), and as a central theme running through Reformed theology to the present. The concept of the covenant of works is historically affirmed by Reformed theologians.

Careful exegesis demonstrates the covenant of grace model running through Abraham and David to its fulfillment in the new covenant. The covenant of works is revealed in Eden and then in Moses as the need for the obedient Christ is accentuated typologically in the national entity of Israel. Horton is especially adept at explaining the relationship between “testament” (διαθήκη *diathēkē*) in the New Testament and the Old Testament word “covenant” (ברית *berith*) (62-73). The two types of covenant are reiterated in the New Testament, but the Sinaitic covenant pictures a demand that can only be achieved by the Mediator’s obedience, death, and resurrection; and freely given to the elect in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. “It is only in the new covenant as the realization of the Abrahamic-Davidic covenant that... [the] release from sin’s bondage and guilt is actually secured” (71).

Horton rightly understands Israel as a nation to be the true parenthesis in Scripture (rather than the church, as in the dispensational construct, 101), providing a provisional revelation of what the obedient Mediator would achieve for his people, but of which Adam’s children are entirely incapable. “Israel’s probation pointed to Christ in two ways: by reiterating the inability of humanity to fulfill the law because of sin and by establishing ceremonies, sacrifices, a temple, a kingship, and a priesthood as shadows of the coming One, the true and faithful Adam-Israel” (94).

Horton’s understanding of common grace wisely opposes the Constantinian error of identifying the church with political entities. Embracing Augustine’s two-kingdom approach, he believes that the nations rule civil government by general revelation, not the law of Moses (122). Calvin, despite the confusion caused by his medieval context, understood this (126).

While Horton does not major on polemics, he wisely interacts with several contemporary Reformed theologians who espouse a more mono-covenantal scheme. Owen Palmer Robertson, as his mentor John Murray, tends to blur the works-grace distinction, believing that all divine-human relationships require grace before and after the fall. Horton appreciates many of Robertson’s insights, but notes a fundamental flaw in his failure to recognize the Mosaic covenant as a law covenant (100). Covenantal nomism sees the conditional element in the Mosaic covenant as essential to the new covenant as well (101). But, as Horton points out, this does not explain why Moses was denied entrance into the land of promise (103).

Horton presents a rich treatment of the sacraments by charting a careful course between the Scylla of sacerdotalism “which fails to distinguish the sign from the thing signified,” and the Charybdis of memorialism, which fails to recognize the union of the two (157).

Finally, Horton removes the charge of antinomianism from covenant theology by asserting that, while the new covenant is not a covenant of works, it is rooted in Christ’s obedience to the covenant of works as the foundation of the covenant of grace and thus calls for *our* obedience as a response of gratitude. Recognizing that we are saved by Christ’s works, the Reformed have always affirmed the third use of the law as a guide to the Christian life, exemplifying the holiness of our Savior, which is the goal of our redemption. The indicative of Christ’s accomplishment and our union with him “drives” the imperatives (192).

The book is loaded with Scripture references, which are too numerous to quote in a review. Historical, exegetical, biblical, systematic, and creedal theology inform Horton's masterful treatment of his subject.

I have only one theological quarrel with the book. On pages 133 ff., Horton takes a postmillennial position on the future of ethnic Israel, referring to a "large-scale conversion of ... Jews at the end of the age" (131), without any exegesis of Romans 11. This seems inconsistent with his otherwise amillennial interpretative approach.

My editorial complaints are few. The first is a failure of the publisher to provide subject and Scripture indexes. These would make the work so much more useful, especially for the novice for whom an "introduction" is ostensibly designed. Whether in an academic or popular work, endnotes are annoyingly inconvenient. When will publishers realize that, especially with popular works, footnotes are so much more accessible? If footnotes are considered a distraction in popular works, then don't have them at all, or limit end notes to a page or less. Also future editions should correct the mistaken endnotes on chapter 7, notes 3, 4 and 7. Notes 3 and 4 are a mystery since they have page numbers 269 and 272 when the book ends on page 203. Note 7 should be page 99 not 14.

Finally, as an introduction, this book would be slightly more useful if it were twenty-five percent shorter. Chapters 5 and 8 were especially, and I think unnecessarily, long. Applying Occam's razor would help.

The Reformed community should be grateful for this excellent book. It would make a wonderful adult education text. It is truly worthy of the name "federal" theology, and worth the thirty year wait.

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