Complaints

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From the Editor

I wrote a book on preaching back in 2015: *The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Proclaiming the Gospel in the Electronic World*. A British publisher had asked me to expand the last two chapters of my 2001 book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* which dealt explicitly with preaching proper. The first eight chapters of that book covered the development and criticism of the study of media and its effect on the church, society, and preaching. The publisher decided that the book was too long and therefore had too narrow an audience to warrant publication. Since then, two Reformed homiletics professors and a well known English professor have written very positive endorsements, so I have decided to publish it with Monadnock Press after serializing its sixteen chapters in *Ordained Servant* over the next sixteen issues. I welcome my readers' comments.

Joseph Keller brings his years of experience to the subject of formal judicial complaints in "The Bringers and Receivers of Complaints: OPC Book of Discipline 9.1." His clarification of ambiguities in chapter 9.1 of the Book of Discipline should prove helpful to our various judicatories. Ambiguities are not necessarily a bad thing in our standards, especially the BD, since it is not designed to be a casebook. But sometimes the intent of the original authors has been forgotten and needs elucidation.

As new generations of ministers, elders, and deacons are ordained to serve in Christ's church, we are focusing on clarifying an understanding of our Form of Government and our Book of Discipline by publishing the commentaries of Alan Strange.

Our new series, "Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder," written by an experienced ruling elder is a compelling series aimed at helping young elders develop godly ministries. A seasoned fellow minister communicated his pleasure with the first letter on the danger of pride. He said he was convicted by it. This reminded me of the great value of this twelve letter series for all church officers, not just younger elders. I am delighted to have the privilege of editing and publishing them. The second letter, building on the first, focuses on the importance of a lowly heart.

John Fesko's review article, "Justification: A Lutheran Perspective," identifies similarities and difference between the Lutheran and Reformed doctrines of justification. He points out that the author, Jack Kilcrease, tends to read Luther's doctrine of justification through modern categories. In the end, the Reformed understanding proves superior.

Our own James Lee, formerly an English professor (and now in seminary), provides the poem this month in free verse, "Regeneration." Remember that free verse has no formal structure, while blank verse has formal metrical structure but no rhyme pattern (cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*). Although the former has dominated most modern poetry, when done well it is an important way of writing poetry.

The cover photo is of an aviary quarrel in the backyard of Chestnut Cottage in Manchester, New Hampshire. The cardinal, being a prelate, has the upper hand, but the chickadee is complaining.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

ServantWord

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Understanding the Voices of the Electronic World, Chapter 1

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

For from day to day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army, like an army of God. . . . Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do. . . .

—1 Chronicles 12:22, 32

If we as Christians today see idolatry only at life's margins, we will be ill-equipped to use this powerful critical tool as the apostles and prophets did—to understand and challenge the surrounding world.

—Richard Keyes[1]

The Idol is the measure of the worshiper.

—James Russell Lowell[2]

The contemporary preacher must project his message into the teeth of the gale of the mass media. The air is full of voices.

—Merrill R. Abbey[3]

Today, in the electronic age of instantaneous communication, I believe that our survival, and at the very least our comfort and happiness, is predicated on understanding the nature of our new environment, because unlike previous environmental changes, the electric media constitute a total and near instantaneous transformation of culture, values and attitudes.

—Marshall McLuhan[4]

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[1] Richard Keyes, "The Idol Factory," in Os Guinness and John Seel, eds. *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 30.
[2] in Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image or Whatever Happened to the American Dream?* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 74.
[3] Merrill R. Abbey, *Preaching to the Contemporary Mind* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1963), 32.
[4] Marshall McLuhan, "A McLuhan Mosaic" in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald, (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, Inc., 1989), 1.

The Electronic Landscape[5]

Faithful preaching has always required awareness of the cultural milieu, especially the communication environment in which the preaching of God's Word takes place. This is the preacher's environment, the world in need of the good news. Such awareness must be motivated by a deep desire to understand, respect, and genuinely care for those we wish to address. This insight will also equip us to challenge the idolatrous patterns woven into every fallen culture. The modern situation demands special attention to the new electronic environment since most people, especially Americans, are naïve, largely because they are unaware of the pervasive influence of the media on their thinking and living—the ways in which media shapes us.

There are increasingly alarming signs relative to the ubiquitous, dominating presence of electronic media in our lives. Rejection of electronic media is not an option, but nor is uncritical embrace. Wise navigation is the order of the day. This is the task of the preacher and his hearers.

BBC One's "Inside Out: West Midlands" explored how one family unit survived under the strain of a technology detox.

> The Stones family from Coventry was given the tough task of living without technology for four days. Professor Russell Beale, from the University of Birmingham's School of Computer Science, monitored their coping strategies and the changing interactions between family members.[6]

The very existence of such experiments, as well as the many emerging programs and places designed to help people overcome electronic addictions, should sound an alarm.

When I lecture on media stewardship, I begin by asking people to turn off their cell phones because I do not want anything to come between them and me. Now we are so immersed in our electronic environment that we are usually unaware of its presence. McLuhan used the analogy of fish, "We live invested in an electric information environment that is quite as imperceptible to us as water is to fish."[7]

This new electronic environment has expanded over time. On May 24, 1844, the first electric communication was transmitted by telegraph, the Victorian Internet, thirty-seven miles between Baltimore and Washington, DC. Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791–1872) sent the famous message "What Hath God Wrought!" His daughter had chosen the quote from Numbers 23:23 in the King James Version, "God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox. . . . 'What has God wrought!' Behold, a people!" Morse used the statement as an exclamation, not a question, as some have erroneously thought. He was proclaiming this revolutionary form of communication to be a

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[5] Some of the material in this chapter is adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 1–61, and from lectures given in a course, "An Ecology of Preaching in the Electronic Age," taught at Westminster Seminary in California in January 2015.

[6] "Technology Detox," BBC One West Midlands, October 6, 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04knnt8.

[7] Marshall McLuhan, *Counterblast* (McLelland and Stewart, 1969), 5.

wonder of God's Providence. What we now take for granted had the appearance of a miracle to mid-nineteenth century perceptions.

Between 1838 and 1882 photography, the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, and movies were invented. Then in 1902 the first wireless radio signal was sent across the Atlantic. Thirty years later the first television broadcast was made from the Empire State Building. A little over twenty years later (1953) the first computer, used by the Defense Department, was invented. By 1970 this comprised a network of computers. Just five years later in January 1975 the first microprocessor-based computer was marketed to the general public. In 1980 the first Internetwork, linking scientific and academic networks, was operational. The next year the first personal computer (PC) was sold. By 1990 the Internet and World Wide Web were becoming household realities. Most recently in 2005, the Web, often referred to as Web 2.0, went mobile with smart phones and text-messaging, and a variety of social media appeared on the Internet.

The magic has never left. When Steve Jobs introduced the iPad, he declared it "magical and revolutionary."[8] High tech engineers and their promoters are the new alchemists. Magic became a reality as the scientific order began to take form in the sixteenth century. This should not be a surprise as the ultimate goal of magic is autonomous human control over God's world. The Enlightenment unleashed these powers through science and its progeny, technology. C. S. Lewis explores the relationship between science and magic in *That Hideous Strength* (1946). The book's name comes from Scottish knight and poet Sir David Lyndsay's *Ane Dialog* (1555), in which he describes the Tower of Babel, "The shadow of that hyddeous strength sax mile or more it is of length." The evil Lord Feverstone—a telling name—states his agenda, "If Science is really given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal."[9] Jobs seems to have had the connection between science and magic in mind.

Not only has the electronic environment grown over time, but it also has done so with increasing rapidity over time and thus manifests several unique characteristics. Many would say inventions like the printing press have always ushered in change, but consider the difference. Arthur Boers, the author of *Living in Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions*, enumerates several ways in which the contemporary technological situation is unique.[10] It has precipitated an unprecedented rate of change, which leaves us no time to adapt discerningly to the new technology, thus technology overpowers us. Gutenberg's moveable type took two centuries to take hold of western culture. Furthermore, the new environment is artificial, separating us from the natural world. As author Wendell Berry reminds us, "The Bible is an outdoor book."[11] So the new technology tends to distance us from the world of the Bible. Technology is also pervasive and ubiquitous—it dominates everything everywhere, so there is no rest, no sabbath or

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[8] http://www.cnn.com/2010/TECH/01/27/apple.tablet/

[9] C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 41.

[10] Arthur Boers, "Open the Wells of Grace and Salvation" at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary conference June 2013 "From the Garden to the Sanctuary: The Promise and Challenge of Technology."

[11] Quoted in Arthur Boers, *The Way Is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 167. Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 103.

vacation. Finally, its universal dominance tends to demand conformity, thus undermining the uniqueness of local cultures.

So, we are challenged to change Morse's exclamation into a probing question: What hath God wrought? Unpacking this question requires us to ask the right questions. As preachers we must let Scripture set the questioning agenda. God tells us through Paul the pastor-preacher:

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2)

So, the default position of every child of Adam is world conformity. Thus, the first question to ask is, Does the electronic environment disciple us? If so, how? Electronic media, along with all technology, as extensions of man, are a gift of God, but they also have created a powerful environment of world conforming influence in which the powers of spiritual darkness have found new means of influence.

What do we mean by environment? In the world of vinting wine, "terroir" refers to the combination of factors including soil, climate, and sunlight that gives wine grapes their distinctive character. It is a total and complex environment. In his book *Propaganda*, French sociologist Jacques Ellul reminds us of the power of the cultural environment: "People manipulated by propaganda become increasingly impervious to spiritual realities."[12] The terroir of the world is the totality of its culture, the soil or habitat in which its inhabitants grow.

We should never forget that the genius who invented Facebook is telling us how to organize and view our world—Mark Zuckerberg's worldview. "Friend" and "Like" are juvenile, binary delineations of human life. Technologies are never neutral. They are altering the social structure and intellectual climate of our world. We need to challenge this idea. We must ask: What has been gained and lost? How does this new environment affect my relationship with God, his world, his people, and my culture?

The terroir of the Christian is the church and the Word—this is where the preacher cultivates and exercises his preaching. This is where McLuhan's idea of forming a "counter-environment" may be applied to the kingdom of God—the Word saturated Church, transformed by the renewal of the whole person through the ordinary means of Word, sacrament, and prayer.

Asking the Right Questions

We live in a brave new electronic world—new in the sense that our level of technological skill and control is unparalleled in history. Electricity has given us an "almost" magical power to control the created order and our cultural environment. The Baconian logic of Enlightenment control, disconnected from the constraints of faith, has left us living off of the borrowed capital of Christian ideas and aspirations while divorcing those from transcendent reality—meaning which can only be found in the

[12] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 229.

Trinity. Thus, we are left with technology disconnected from purpose and ultimate meaning. Technology without *telos* is enormously dangerous.

Jacques Ellul defines the technological society as the climate in which we live and move and have our being. He defines "Technique" as "the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in *every* field of human activity."[13] Technology, including all of the inventions of man, is a larger category of which electronic media is a subcategory, but electronic media are now present in almost every mechanical device. Autonomous efficiency is a chief god in the pantheon of modernity. Ellul gloomily predicted the pervasive effect of this efficiency over half a century ago,

> The effects of technique are already too far advanced for us to begin again at the beginning. There is no doubt that all the traditional cultures and sociological structures will be destroyed by technique before we can discover or invent social, economic, and psychological forms of adaptation which might possibly have preserved the equilibrium of these societies.[14]

However difficult it may be to navigate this new environment, the Christian, and especially the preacher, has resources unknown to the world.

It is incumbent upon us, therefore, not to ask the wrong questions, or fail to ask any questions at all. Asking no questions at all unwittingly invites and even guarantees world conformity. Most Americans, including most Christians, have greeted every advance in electronic communications with uncritical enthusiasm, naively asserting that media are just tools that assist us in progress. There is a sense, of course, in which they are tools, wonderful tools, but they are so much more, as we shall see. Back in the sixties, Bishop Fulton Sheen, a genius in the early use of television for religious purposes, declared, "Radio is like the Old Testament, hearing wisdom without seeing; television is like the New Testament, because in it the wisdom becomes flesh and dwells among us."[15] Unfortunately, such uncritical enthusiasm still largely prevails in the evangelical community.

A recent example of technological boosterism is Sebastian Thrun, a Google technological genius. He helped develop "street view" and is now working on driverless cars. He recommends breaking all the rules and disrupting all the old ways. His online artificial intelligence class was a huge success. His enthusiasm knows no bounds:

> The AI class was the first light. Online education will way exceed the best education today. And cheaper. If this works, we can rapidly accelerate the progress of society and the world. If you think FaceBook is neat, wait five to ten years. So many open problems will be solved.[16]

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[13] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. by John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxv, emphasis in original.

[14] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 123.

[15] Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 188.

[16] Andy Kessler, "Sebastian Thrun: What's Next for Silicon Valley?" *The Wall Street Journal* (June 16–17, 2012): A11. http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303807404577434891291657730.

Marshall McLuhan did not mince words when he observed: "Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot."[17] The term "idiot" is only *apparently* uncharitable. The original Greek word (ἰδιώτης 1 Cor. 14:24, "unlearned," 2 Cor. 11:6 "untrained in speech") indicated ignorance of a particular language. The point is that, as a culture, we are largely ignorant of what we are doing with media or, more precisely, what the media are doing to us. That too was McLuhan's point—technological ignorance.

The new Pharisaism is technological: "more technologically sophisticated than thou" or "cooler than thou." We are told that we must use the new media in the church to be relevant. The secular doctrine of progress, that new is always better, rules—"More relevant than thou." Those considering new contemporary forms of worship almost never consider the nature of media. For example, even secular statistician (called "Leonardo da Vinci of data" by *The New York Times*) Edward Tufte explains the deficiencies of PowerPoint presentations in the business world. It alters the cognitive situation.[18] Formatting rules content. So, in worship, PowerPoint tends to mold worshippers in its image. More generally, the use of pop culture, which is electronically performed and marketed, in worship music tends to undermine reverence and awe. The medium of worship is a powerful implementation of the message of Scripture. As we will see in Part 2, God's chosen medium for the central act of worship, which is the ministry of the Word, is you the preacher-pastor.

Tools to Assess the Electronic Environment

Ever since Adam uttered his first words, stewardship of communication became essential to fulfill the great purposes of our God. When sin entered communications, communication ecology became a complex enterprise. Add to that electronic media and the complexity multiplies. In his Providence, God has gifted us with electronic media. Appropriate use means assessing its benefits and liabilities—understanding how the medium shapes the messages we intend to communicate. Several thinkers have given us tools to help understand and navigate the media environment.

Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan, professor of English at Saint Michael's College in the University of Toronto and founder of the academic discipline media ecology, was an innovator, who probed the nature of our new electric environment. His famous aphorism "The medium is the message" is a purposefully thought-provoking professorial "probe." A veteran punster, he expressed many variations of this saying, among them: "the medium is the massage" and "the medium is the mess-age" (making a mess of our age) and "the medium is the mass age" (that is creating mass communication). His most well-known books are *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962); *Understanding Media* (1964); and *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967).

The gist of this maxim is that every medium is an essential aspect of every message. The form of a given medium shapes the message. Form and content are inextricably bound together. But there is more: as the subtitle of McLuhan's major work

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[17] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 18.
[18] Edward R. Tufte, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics, 2003).

Understanding Media posits, all inventions are extensions of man. As extensions of man, electronic media together form a total environment and thus alter not only messages but also the way we see the world and all social, political, and religious structures and relationships in our world.

Think about the ways in which all technologies as extensions of man change not only the way that we view the world but also all of our relational structures. Consider the way the automobile changes how you see the street you live on in contrast to the way you see that street when you walk, and the way that you relate to the people that live in the houses when you walk down the street, as opposed to when you drive down that street. Look at the difference between knowing people on FaceBook and knowing them face-to-face. Richard Louv is concerned that the way of knowing the natural world via electronic media and actually going into the wild are radically different, whereas many people prefer the virtual to the actual to their own tremendous impoverishment.[19] These are concerns for the preacher.

The simplest tool of assessment is consideration of the benefits and liabilities of each electronic medium? How does my cell phone effect my relationships to my family, friends, the church, and the Lord? We can learn to navigate better by enjoying the benefits and avoiding the liabilities.

The metaphor of navigation was a favorite of McLuhan's, based on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841). Fishermen are swallowed up in a whirling ocean vortex. One fisherman learns how to survive by observing the way a barrel descends and then ascends out of the vortex. By discovering the patterns of its forces and acting accordingly, he is able to swirl to safety. Pattern recognition is a major theme of McLuhan's. While we cannot alter the overall environment of our culture, we can learn to navigate it wisely. Preachers must help their congregations do so. McLuhan insisted, "There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening."[20] Mere contemplation and awareness, however, is not enough. Action must be taken to navigate the new environment. To put it more bluntly, McLuhan advised us to know where the off button is and use it.

Late in his career, Marshall McLuhan teamed up with his son Eric and wrote a book called *The Laws of Media*.[21] These four laws, known as the Tetrad, are a very sophisticated set of perspectives to help understand the ways in which a particular medium effects other media. Each new technology:

> **#1 Obsoletes** – It replaces another technology, like the automobile replaced the horse-drawn carriage. This explains why it was called a "horseless carriage" for a long time and why we still refer to internal combustion engine power as "horsepower."
>
> **#2 Retrieves** – It restores an old technology's best features. Cell phones restore the communication of a village, email retrieves the telegraph.

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[19] Richard Louv, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin 2006).

[20] Marshall McLuhan, "A McLuhan Mosaic" in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald, (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, Inc., 1989), 219.

[21] Marshall and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

#3 Enhances – It enables, as an extension of man, to do something better, like word processing extends the capacity of typewriters to produce documents. The automobile extends the human capacity to travel, overcoming space.

#4 Reverses – It becomes or does something unintended when pushed to an extreme, like the automobile causing traffic jams and accidents and dispersing neighborhoods and families

The Media Metaphors of Joshua Meyrowitz

In trying to develop critical awareness to overcome this naiveté, I have found communications scholar Joshua Meyrowitz to be very insightful. As Meyrowitz points out, the environmental aspect of media, which is the least appreciated in media studies, helps us understand the ways in which social structures are changed by media. He goes on to express his preference for the label "medium theory" because such analysis asks: "What are the relatively fixed features of each means of communicating and how do these features make the medium physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction."[22]

Meyrowitz offers the thoughtful preacher a helpful synthetic approach to media criticism by combining the metaphors used to analyze media in the history of communication study. Media are viewed as *conduits* in which the content of messages are analyzed, as *languages* in which the grammar of a medium is analyzed, and as *environments* in which the environment created by a medium is analyzed.[23] In this way the media critic will foster an awareness that no single way of viewing media is sufficient for understanding communication. Of course, each medium involves all three aspects, but analyzing them separately aids our understanding of the subtle dimensions of the media environment.

1. Medium as a conduit of information. "Conduit" is related to the word "content," that is medium as a tool of communication. This most obvious and, therefore, most discussed dimension of media is not specific to particular media but crosses "easily from medium to medium and between mediated and unmediated interaction" and deals with "behaviors, themes, and topics."[24] Assessing the impact of sex and violence on television is a classic example of this kind of analysis.

2. Medium as a language, or grammar. This aspect of media analysis focuses on the "unique 'grammar' of each medium and the ways in which the production variables of each medium . . . interact with content elements" and are thus used to "shape perception and response to mediated communications."[25] This form of analysis "demands some understanding of the specific workings of individual media . . ." such as the television's camera-ability to make close-up and personal shots and distance shots, which focus more

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[22] Joshua Meyrowitz, "Taking McLuhan and 'Medium Theory' Seriously: Technological Change and the Evolution of Education," Chapter 4 in *Technology and the Future of Schooling: Ninety-Fifth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*. Part II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79.
[23] Joshua Meyrowitz, "Images of Media: Hidden Ferment—and Harmony—in the Field," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 3 (summer 1993): 55–66; "Multiple Media Literacies," *Journal of Communication* 48, no. 1 (winter 1998): 96–108.
[24] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 98.
[25] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 99.

on social roles.[26] Clear comparison among grammatical elements of a medium or media requires the content to remain constant, such as a murder shown from the perspective of the victim or from the perspective of the murderer. Unlike content, the more effective the grammar is the less obvious it is to the audience.[27]

For example, such analysis might discover that a producer favored a political candidate in a televised debate by having the camera zoom in for close-ups at favorable moments in the debate, and from the best perspective, and perhaps more frequently than with the opposing candidate. Close-ups of the opposing candidate might be done when the candidate is blowing his nose or looking confused. The Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate in 1960 is the classic example of this metaphor in action. Kennedy was calm and dignified while Nixon had been up late and was nervous and sweating. Nixon lost the television debate badly but won on the radio, where verbal content took center stage, rather than appearances. This diverse outcome through two different media covering the same event shows the importance of media grammar.

3. Medium as an environment. This metaphor is the most subtle and thus most difficult to grasp. As an environment it draws us into itself but is also connected with the larger macro-environment of culture. Observe how media change our perception of the world around us. They change the way that we look at reality, teach us what is important, molding our perceptions and ultimate commitments. This aspect of media analysis focuses on "the particular characteristics of each medium. . . . The nature of the medium shapes key aspects of the communication on both the micro-, single-situation level and the macro-, societal level."[28]

Macro-level analysis assesses the social changes effected by a medium in terms of social boundaries, situations, and institutions. It also takes into account the contextual social, political, and economic forces that foster media development. This form of analysis is most difficult, because it is the least obvious of the three aspects, especially after a medium becomes culturally pervasive.[29] The fact that television, as a medium, discourages rational discourse and encourages "all-at-onceness" may explain why Johnny has difficulty reading because print is linear and logical in its essence. At the macro-level this will lend insight to discussion of the failure of the traditional curriculum, which is based on a literary model.

An important dimension of this way of looking at media is the often unrecognized reality that media alter social space. Joshua Meyrowitz's groundbreaking book *No Sense of Place* (1985)[30] adds to McLuhan's analysis of media's messages by incorporating the paradigm of situational sociologist Erving Goffman, whose seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959),[31] looks at the ways that access to information alters social structures. Because electronic media alter access to information, they have transformed the social landscape of our world. Neil Postman, who directed Meyrowitz's doctoral work at New York University, followed this insight in *The*

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[26] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 100–101.
[27] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 102.
[28] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 103.
[29] Meyrowitz, "Multiple Media Literacies," 105–106.
[30] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[31] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

Disappearance of Childhood,[32] demonstrating how television exposes children to undifferentiated communication, including adult themes, which were once imparted gradually through reading and conversation and rites of passages, when the gatekeepers were parents, clergy, and teachers. Children are now exposed to the adult world via adult information, before they learn to read. Social space and structure have been profoundly transformed. Old world children grew up in a closed environment, carefully controlled by parents. They gained access, their rite of passage into adult world, through reading and conversation. This is not only true of communication but also transportation. Harold Innis's *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railroad* [33] showed how the transcontinental railroad changed the social structure of Canada. This was a powerful influence on McLuhan's thinking.

Many secular researchers are sounding an alarm in this area. Professor Sherry Turkle, who was once very positive about the influence of technology on human beings and their relationships, has written *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.[34] She is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, the founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, and a licensed clinical psychologist. She reports a change in her early assessments.

> I reported on this work [focus groups exploring the boundaries between real and virtual worlds] in my 1995 *Life on the Screen*, which offered, on balance, a positive view of new opportunities for exploring identity online. But by then, my optimism of 1984 [*The Second Self*] had been challenged. I was meeting people, many people, who found online life more satisfying than what some derisively called "RL," that is, real life.[35]

Church leaders and parents are becoming aware of some of the dangers associated with online life. Mediated relationships open people up to deception about who they really are. This is a special temptation for teenagers, who are forming their identities and learning habits of human interaction. Things are expressed online that would never be expressed, or at least in the same manner, in face-to-face situations. In some cases, social skills are so stunted that young people actually fear face-to-face interaction. The church has a definite advantage in this area because we believe in the vital importance of meeting together for worship, learning, and fellowship—face-to-face.

Preachers need to be aware of how the new media environment effects the lives of our congregants. *Back to God Hour* preacher Joel Nederhood maintained that preaching is the only bridge between Scripture and this present age. The Bible is the only "alternative environment" to the pseudo-environment of the electronic media. God is a great user of media. His creation is a great medium. Jesus Christ as the Mediator bridges

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[32] Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte, 1982).
[33] Harold Innis, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railroad* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1923).
[34] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
[35] Turkle, *Alone Together*, xi.

the gap between the infinite and the finite. Due to sin, man tends to pervert media. So, the preacher needs to discern the nature of man's inventions.[36]

The Benefits and Liabilities Test

A more popular tool of analysis, best for preaching and teaching media stewardship to the church, is what I call "The Benefits and Liabilities Test." What are the consequences of our inventions in terms of their benefits and liabilities? Take the examples of email and FaceBook; how are they beneficial? Email is a fine tool for document transfer, administrative work, quick messages for meetings, etc. FaceBook is great for sharing pictures, personal info, and staying up to date with the activities of family and friends.

But both also have serious liabilities. Both tend to undermine face-to-face communication; FaceBook isolates and narrows one's world to "friends." Most are unaware that they are being used for the largest focus group in history. Facebook uses its clients for marketing. Email's efficiency encourages sloppy composition, and thus careless thinking. Text messaging exacerbates this tendency by seriously apocopating language. There is much more that could be said on both sides of the ledger. This is a simple sample. Preachers should encourage people to develop plans and patterns of change in order to better navigate the new environment. Challenge the church (and yourself) to ask the tough questions of how various media effect their relationships to God, the church, other people, themselves, and God's world.

Understand the Idols of the Age

An important element in assessing our cultural environment is the biblical concept of idolatry. Preachers will benefit from understanding the ways that modern technology, especially electronic media, enhances the creative possibilities of idolators, thus presenting the preacher with a formidable enemy.

The prophet Habakkuk described the enemies of God, who are about to brutally conquer his people Israel, in a startling way: "Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!" (Hab. 1:11). Ultimately idolatry can be reduced to its most basic loyalty—human autonomy. In this case, power is the far idol made concrete by the various war gods, locating the trust and fidelity of their worshippers. No age is without its idols.

Defining Idolatry[37]

The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 34, Question #95) has a concise definition:

> "What is idolatry? A. It is, instead of the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word, or besides Him, to devise or have something else on which to place our trust."[38]

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[36] Joel Nederhood, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age," class notes, Westminster Theological Seminary in California, 1990. Cf. Joel Nederhood, "The Back to God Hour: Mission Television Report," in *Christian Reformed Church Synod Report*. Report 1:A, Supplement, 1977, 168.

[37] For an excellent treatment of idolatry cf. G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

[38] G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 165.

Idolatry is the substitution of an element in God's creation for him in an effort to suppress the truth. Idolatry is the worship of a substitute for the true and living God. True worship is the ascription of worth to the Lord as the ultimate source of reality, meaning, and redemption. False worship is the ascription of ultimate worth to a lesser, created object. "Idolatry is the ultimate sin. It is also, in a sense, the root of all other sins."[39] It is a matter of ultimate loyalty, which at bottom devolves around the self. The prophet Jeremiah sums this up in terms of trust, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). An idol is a means of harnessing power to enable fallen man to assert his independence by controlling God's world. Idolaters view reality as infinitely manipulable, given the right scientific knowledge and technological ability. Autonomous people are free to refine and redesign everything, especially human beings. Modern technology has simply fueled this conceit.

Originally creation was designed to be a medium of revelation of the glory of God the Creator (Rom. 1:20). Humans were designed to cultivate and guard the temple-garden for communion with God. Since Adam's rebellion, idolatry is the native instinct of fallen man. In his rebel quest to "be like God," he harnesses the powers and resources of creation for his own sinful, self-exalting purposes. Culture is corrupted by the worship of the creation in place of the Creator, as Paul says, "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom. 1:25). Rebel man creates God-substitutes known as idols, which function as media to communicate, cultivate, and legitimize man's rebellion. Idolatry is an effort to assert autonomy by diminishing God to a manageable size, thus seeking to control Him. Calvin observed that idolaters "wish to reduce God, who is immeasurable and incomprehensible, to a five foot measure."[40]

The visual appeal of the forbidden fruit, in Genesis 3, lies at the heart of the temptation. "So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (v.6). The underlying assertion of autonomy in Eve's act forms the basic motive of idolatry. She "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The God-given beauty of the tree and its fruit became a seductive image through the perception of a rebel. Visual as well as verbal appeal became the primary media of deceit. Created reality became the locus of man's devotion. What was created to reflect the glory of God became the object of worship in an effort to usurp God's sovereignty. Man as the "image" (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ Gen. 1:26–27) of God turned his creative and interpretive powers into an evasion and suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18). This endeavor has polluted all of our cultural activities ever since.

The power and immediate presence of the visual elements of the serpent's seductive interpretation of the covenant of life lend themselves to the purposes of idolatry. In the hands of sinful men the visual image becomes a means of defining reality, even purporting to create reality, independently of God and controlling the powers of his creation. Idols impressively package various forms of the lie that the true and living God

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[39] Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 165.

[40] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed., John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.11.4.

is not who he says he is in his Word. The medium is closely associated with the message. Visual images are used by idolaters to give form to their idolatry. They capture the oral interpretations and rituals associated with the idol. Images give earth-bound coherence to the idolatrous perspective on life. By giving a sense of historical concreteness, the idol lends credibility to the beliefs and practices of the idolater. The suppressing activity of the fallen mind is positively expressed in its attitudes toward created reality. All media become potential modes of communicating the great denial of God's glory.

The fallen imagination, using the Adamic powers of lordship, thus names and controls the objects of its affections in forms which embody their own sinful agendas. Idolaters are controlled and discipled by their idols in a covenant with emptiness and death; because they live in God's world, which is cursed due to idolatry, their endeavors are thwarted. As the psalmist Asaph observes of the apparently successful unbelievers, "Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin" (Ps. 73:18).

Furthermore, idolatry and immorality are inseparable. Man's ultimate ethical commitment determines the objects of his affections and devotion. His rebellious stance is both reflected in and cultivated by the idols he constructs. "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them" (Ps. 115:8). Idolatry always dehumanizes. The preacher must therefore be alert to the ways in which idolatry is expressed in the electronic environment.

Applying Idolatry to the Critical Task of Media Ecology

Idolatry is the most comprehensive biblical concept by which to understand people in their fallen situation—culture. It gives concrete expression to man's natively sinful heart. Along with presuppositional apologetics, this concept should be used to develop a distinctively Christian approach to the electronic media. Idolatry is at the heart of the thought forms and moral habits of every fallen culture. Media, especially electronic media, create a pervasive environment. Thus, the vast and world-encompassing Babel-like Paradise project of modernity highlights the use of technology to create a culture independent of God.

The digital world is designed for maximum binary efficiency—remember Ellul's definition of technique. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an example of fallen human beings using their God-given intelligence to seek ultimate control by creating and manipulating others. Because digital technology cannot possibly replicate human consciousness, cognition, and values, much less human beings, we tend to let computer programming control us, rather than using it to assist human life. Thus, we end up promoting the discipling power of idolatry.

God has designed his own media of special revelation to communicate, cultivate, and reassert his Lordship over his creation. Thus, he has entrusted his Word to his chosen people, the church, especially preachers of the Word (*Verbi divini minister*).

In the Old Covenant the tabernacle and temple, their rites, priestly order, and the Word were the media God used. God chose a medium suited to his message. The problem of imagery is not located in material representations of religious truth as such, but rather in the *source* of those representations. The God of Israel goes to great lengths to prescribe the architecture, furnishings, clothing, personnel, and rites of the tabernacle and temple in great detail. The Author of all meaning precisely chose material representations suited to

his redemptive purposes.[41] The presence of the cherubim accented the difference between the temples of idols and the temple of Yahweh. Their wings overshadowed the ark of the covenant, signalizing the invisible presence of the LORD between them, so the cherubim function as guardians of the divine glory.[42] The divinely prescribed cherubim defined and accentuated that distinction by not reducing God himself to a visual image.[43]

In the New Covenant the mediatorial presence of the incarnate, glorified Son through his Word and Spirit, prayer, and the sacraments are God's chosen media. The Lord re-orients the idolatrous misuse of the visual for his creational-redemptive purposes by choosing the media of worship. The Word is central in reasserting this control. In common culture the restrictions of the Second Commandment do not apply in the same way. While idolatry is forbidden for all people, God has allowed fallen mankind to develop media of communication as part of his common order and blessing, i.e. common grace. The Christian is called to consecrate these media to God's glory in his everyday cultural endeavors.

Idolatry is still the chief temptation of the church. It is the central means by which the church is tempted and corrupted. Thus, ministers of the Word are called to teach and warn God's people of the nature and dangers of idolatry so that they can develop a paradigm, or pattern of spiritual perception, to understand and resist the idolatrous elements of fallen history and culture. The use of this paradigm is central to the church's task of discipling the idolatrous nations under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

> The Mosaic legislation, in the Second Commandment, directly challenges idolatry: You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exod. 20:4–6)

This commandment deals with the exclusive allegiance required by the LORD of his people. The First Commandment defines, in negative terms, the object of worship, while the second negatively defines the means of worship. Both forbid idolatry, although the second is usually the commandment associated with it. The media used in worship are central to the LORD's concern because the medium communicates the message.

Media critic Neil Postman found this commandment to be formative in his own exploration of the nature and uses of media, "The second commandment was unique in the world of its day."[44] No other ancient law code expresses this concern for images:

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[41] Meredith G. Kline, "Investiture with the Image of God," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (No. 1, Fall 1977): 41.
[42] Meredith G. Kline, "Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (No. 2, Spring 1977): 251. Cf. Kline, "Investiture with the Image of God," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (No. 1, Fall 1977): 44.
[43] Calvin, *Institutes*, 102.
[44] J. D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962). S.v. "Idolatry," by J. A. Motyer.

> In studying the Bible as a young man, I found intimations of the idea that forms of media favor particular kinds of content and therefore are capable of taking command of a culture. I refer particularly to the Decalogue, the Second Commandment. . . . It is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system *unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture.*[45]

Postman, viewing the commandment in terms of cultural criticism, does not deal with idolatry *per se*, but he puts his finger on a crucial point. The form in which God's character and the nature of his relationship with his people is communicated plays a critical role in determining the content of that communication. Marshall McLuhan observed a similar connection in Psalm 115:

> The concept of "idol" for the Hebrew Psalmist is much like that of Narcissus for the Greek mythmaker. And the Psalmist insists that the *beholding* of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them. "They that make them shall be like unto them." This is a simple fact of sense "closure."[46]

The point of both Postman and McLuhan is not to comment on the nature of idolatry but rather to demonstrate the culturally formative power of media. It should not be inferred from their statements that the visual is inherently idolatrous. The Second Commandment deals specifically with the means or media of worship, thus while Postman deals with culture formation, the biblical commandment deals with cultic formation, that is a connection between the forms of divine communication and the quality of the worship and community which they affect. Although the forms of media in common culture are not divinely prescribed, that does not mean that there is not a connection between those forms and the culture they form. The powerful grip of idolatry on men's souls is evident in the very socio-economic fabric of fallen culture. The preacher should be concerned first with the cultic implications of this commandment, but then also its cultural implications. The embassy of the church, having turned from idols to worship the true and living God through the grace of God in Christ (1 Thess. 1:9), is commissioned with the task of confronting the idolatrous world with the transforming message of the Good News. Paul's ministry in Ephesus provides a poignant example of this. The local silversmiths profited from crafting shrines to the idol Artemis (Acts 19:21–41). The preaching of the gospel changed human hearts and aspects of their culture.

It is God's plan that the church should inhabit the world of idolaters (1 Cor. 5:10–11) precisely because it is an embassy among the nations, representing the program of our sovereign God. The urgent mandate to Christians to "flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14; Col. 3:5, 10) is in order that the new order of humanity created in Christ should be visible to the lost world. The centrality of this imperative to the gospel cannot be overestimated. John sums up all that he has to say about assurance of faith in his first epistle with the comprehensive pastoral plea, "keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

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[45] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1985), 9 (emphasis in original).

[46] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 45. McLuhan wrongly attributes this quote to Psalm 113. It may be a typographical error.

The Christ of Scripture is the only antidote to idolatry. Only the grace of the Mediator, God incarnate, can overcome idols, as Zechariah predicted long ago:

> On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, *I will cut off the names of the idols from the land*, so that they shall be remembered no more. (Zech. 13:1–2, emphasis added)

The image of God in Christ is the ultimate challenge to the worship of idols. All idols are counterfeit mediators. But now the true Mediator has invaded history. The writer of Hebrews indicates that the Son is the *final* medium (πολυτρόπως, Heb. 1:1) of God's self-revelation (ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, Heb. 1:2) in this the final epoch (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων, Heb. 1:2) of redemptive history. He is the "exact imprint" (χαρακτήρ, Heb. 1:3) of God, such that he who has seen the Son has seen the Father (John 14:9; cf. 1:14).

The Creator-Son has made himself *visible* in history to draw our attention away from the worship of created things (εἰκόνος, Rom. 1:23) to which we are so powerfully attracted by our fallen natures. Jesus the Christ is the full and final speech of God to lost humanity. In him the brightness of God's glory consummately shines (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης, Heb. 1:3). He is the original image (αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα, Heb. 10:1) of which the Old Covenant law, in its prescribed forms, is but a dim shadow (Σκιὰν, Heb. 10:1). He is the only antidote to idolatry.

For an exposition of the biblical material, I recommend the summary I provide in Chapter 1 of *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*; the implications of idolatry for the church in Chapter 2; as well as the superb exegetical work of G. K. Beale in *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (2008).

This Paradigm Is for Preachers

The preacher as an apologist should be a joyful iconoclast like G. K. Chesterton, turning the weapons of unbelief back on the critics themselves. As pastor-apologist Richard Keyes reminds us:

> Like someone held at gunpoint with his own pistol, Christians have been threatened and attacked for two hundred years on the basis of their own view of idolatry, turned against them. Such celebrated critics of the gospel as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud based their debunking of religion on the insights that originally came from the Biblical notion. They claimed that religion was not true, but merely a projection of the believer. Curiously, however, now that these critics and their philosophies are themselves in bad shape, Christians have been surprisingly slow in reclaiming their own best weapon.[47]

The beliefs of the idolater are projections of their unbelief in the face of God. The wise preacher will challenge unbelief in all of its dimensions. The church is called to be a witness lamp, a menorah (Rev. 1–3), in the midst of an idol-building world.

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[47] Keyes, "The Idol Factory," 29.

The whole counsel of God is the weapon of the wise preacher, who like Paul studies his audience at every level, out of a passionate desire to see God's Word penetrate to the center of ultimate allegiance, exposing the idols of his time by bringing them under the searching light of Scripture and toppling them with the preaching of Christ, crucified and risen.

He will understand the means of communication as a critical element in exegeting his culture. He will believe in the power of God to speak to this generation, use the medium of live pastoral preaching in the historical presence of people made in God's image to bring sinners to repentance, and build a new servant-humanity after the glorious image of the incarnate Son.

Pastor Timothy Keller has been dealing with what he calls "late modern" people in the intensely secular urban environment of New York City for more than three decades. He has sought to answer the question: How do we engage late moderns with the gospel without compromising Scripture? He points to Paul's approach in Athens, where he notices that they have a religious instinct, but it is misdirected (Acts 17:22–31). He quotes the Greek philosophers Epimenides and Aratus who say, "In him we live and move and have our being," and "For we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28). He proposes the pattern of looking for the reflection of God's image in the idolator's thinking, then showing how Christianity challenges that thinking, and finally bringing the good news of the gospel as the perfect answer. We might summarize this so: Yes / No / Good News.[48] Here is a simple example:

Take a person who believes that humanity can be perfected with artificial intelligence and/or robotics. We could agree that yes, humanity is imperfect and in need of perfecting. However, the Bible shows that your solution will fail, since it is not according to the image of God. Robots at best cannot replace humans and will only reflect our imperfections as their creators. We need a model of true humanity from outside of the human condition. You fail to take into account that the historic fall of mankind in Adam and Eve is the reason for our imperfection. Jesus Christ is the perfect model of a new humanity. The good news is that Jesus Christ came to save us from our imperfection. His substitutionary death pleases our perfect Creator and thus, when we turn from our sins, our imperfections, and trust Christ's righteousness and his sacrifice, he enables us to have a living relationship with him, and we can know true perfection.

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[48] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), Chapter 4, "Preaching Christ to the Culture," and Chapter 5, "Preaching Christ to the (Late) Modern Mind," 93–156. Cf. my discussion of what modernity and postmodernity have in common in Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 36, 205. Immanence limits reality to what is on the human horizon and human autonomy which deals exclusively with the open ended surface structures of culture.

ServantStandards

The Bringers and Receivers of Complaints: OPC Book of Discipline 9.1

By Joseph Keller

At its January and May 2021 meetings, the Presbytery of the Southwest struggled to understand whether a non-officer could bring a complaint against the presbytery. At its June 2022 meeting, the General Assembly of the OPC discovered it disagreed as to whether a session had standing to bring a complaint against a session in another presbytery.

I spoke to both these issues and have combined my remarks into one article that deals with both these questions with regard to Book of Discipline 9.1. I will not present the arguments set forth at General Assembly for a different view. I invite someone who argued for it to write an article that sets forth his viewpoint.

OPC Book of Discipline 9.1

> A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency or error. It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject, by one session against another session, by a session against the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, or by one presbytery against another presbytery.

Standing for Personal Complaints

The phrase "to which he is subject" is the ambiguous phrase, capable of being interpreted in several different ways. One interpretation, based on the prima facie (first sight) reading**,** is that it allows all officers and church members to complain against an action or decision of the session of their church and against an action or decision of the presbytery their church is in, because they are all ultimately subject to their jurisdiction, but not against other sessions and presbyteries, because they are not subject to their jurisdiction.

But there are problems with this view that make it highly unlikely that the authors and General Assembly had this in mind.

- First, while ministers and commissioned (voting) ruling elders can bring motions, debate, and vote in a presbytery meeting, other members of local churches have no standing to bring motions, debate, or vote in a presbytery meeting. Presbyteries

do at times allow other individuals to address the body, but this does not give them privileges of the floor to make motions, debate, or vote.

- Secondly, while our Form of Government and Book of Discipline do trump Robert's Rules, nevertheless, in order to allow a non-officer to bring a complaint against the presbytery, the authors of BD 9.1 would have had to intend for BD 9.1 to overrule the most basic law of deliberative assemblies, found in Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 1:4, which only allows members of the deliberative body to make motions, debate, and vote.

All of this makes it extremely likely the authors and the General Assembly that adopted this had some other view in mind.

A second view is that the phrase, "to which he is subject," refers to the judicatory which has original jurisdiction to hear charges against the individual. This interpretation is far more likely than the first interpretation. This interpretation would allow church members and ruling elders to bring complaints only against their session, since it is the judicatory that has original jurisdiction over them (BD 2.A.1). And it would allow ministers to bring complaints only against their presbytery, since it is the judicatory that has original jurisdiction over them (BD 2.C.2). Local church members and ruling elders could only bring complaints against actions of their presbytery by means of persuading their session to bring a complaint against the action of the presbytery.

While this view makes more sense than the first view, nevertheless, the unlikeliness of this interpretation is revealed in that a minister would not be allowed to bring a complaint against his own session, simply because it is not his court of original jurisdiction. But his session is a body in which he has standing to make motions, deliberate, and vote, so there is no reason why he should not be allowed to bring a complaint against his session. For this reason, it is very likely a third view is the best interpretation of this passage.

A third view is that the authors chose the looser and more general phrase, "to which he is subject," to include two different kinds of subjection.

First, it includes the idea that all members (including ruling elders) of a local church may bring a complaint against their session because they are subject to the original jurisdiction of their session and that all ministers may bring a complaint against their presbytery because they are subject to the original jurisdiction of their presbytery.

But second, it also includes the idea that all ministers may bring a complaint against their session because they are subject to their session as "members of the session" (see Form of Government 13.4–5), that is to say, subject to the session as members of that deliberative body. And it includes the idea that commissioned (voting) ruling elders may bring a complaint against their presbytery because they are subject to the presbytery as "members of a judicatory" (BD 8.2), that is to say, subject to the presbytery as members of that deliberative body. The basis for this is found in FG 14.3, which states: "Meetings of the presbytery shall be composed, insofar as possible, of all the ministers on the roll and one ruling elder from each congregation commissioned by the respective sessions."

This interpretation explains that ministers, ruling elders, and members of a local church may bring a complaint against their session. And it explains that ministers and

commissioned ruling elders may bring a complaint against their presbytery without having to bring it by way of an action of their session.

- BD 8.1 states: “Any member of a judicatory who is entitled to vote on a question and who votes against the action or judgment of the judicatory thereon may request that his vote be recorded in the minutes of the judicatory.” And BD 8.2 states: “Any member of a judicatory may file a written protest stating his reasons for objecting to an action or judgment of the judicatory.”

  Notice in both: “Any member of a judicatory.” If we view “member of a judicatory” as always referring to one’s court of original jurisdiction, then these statements would prohibit commissioned ruling elders from having their negative votes recorded and from filing a written protest in the presbytery.

  Most certainly in this context, commissioned ruling elders are being included as “members” of the presbytery as a deliberative body (not in the sense of being under its original jurisdiction) and are entitled to participate in these actions. Why would they not be allowed to do so? BD 8.1 makes it clear that commissioned ruling elders were included among those who voted on the question.

- Why would a commissioned ruling elder not be allowed to bring a complaint against his presbytery when he has standing to make motions, deliberate, and vote in a meeting of his presbytery? After all, a complaint is essentially a motion to rescind an action or decision, and an appeal is essentially a motion to reconsider an action or decision.

  (Note: Complaints and appeals are also needed in our standards because our church is not merely composed of one deliberative body/judicatory but many related deliberative bodies/judicatories, and therefore complaints and appeals are needed for our judicatories to gain access to other judicatories in our church.)

For all these reasons, I think this third view is the interpretation of BD 9.1 intended by the General Assembly that adopted it.

Now, I think it helpful to comment that none of the above denies non-officers access to the courts of the church. It simply means that they must seek to persuade their ministers and/or ruling elders to address their presbytery and the General Assembly concerning matters about which they are concerned, and that they must seek to persuade their local session regarding any complaints they think should be brought against sessions or presbytery.

Standing for Sessional Complaints

Can a session bring a complaint against a session in another presbytery?

At the 2022 General Assembly, the Committee on Appeals and Complaints proposed amending our BD 9.1 by the addition of the bold text in the following:

> A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency or error. It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject, by one session against another session *in the same presbytery*, by a session against the

presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, or by one presbytery against another presbytery. (emphasis added)

Ground 3 of the Committee's report stated: "The Committee thus wishes to add the four words ("in the same presbytery") so that the matter is clarified in the direction that it believes to be correct."

The Assembly was strongly divided on whether to amend it to read "in the same presbytery" or "whether in the same or another presbytery," and no change to the text was adopted.

Ground 9 of the Committee's report stated:

> "In each of the other three cases, the complaint may only be brought by a party subject to the same judicatory (the session, presbytery, or general assembly, as the case may be). In the case of a complaint from a session in one presbytery against one in another, there is no shared or joint judicatory."[1]

Notice that this argument states that in three of the cases, the BD clearly states that the party that brings a complaint against a judicatory must be "subject to the same judicatory." Notice also that this argument states that if a session is allowed to bring a complaint against a session in another presbytery, this situation fails this requirement, because there is no "shared or joint judicatory."

But what is the basis for this requirement? First of all, this is drawn from the principles of deliberative bodies. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (12th ed.) 1:4 states that a person must be a member of the body in order to make motions, deliberate, and vote. That is to say, he must have "standing" before the judicatory in order to do these things. This paragraph in chapter one of *Roberts Rules* expresses the most basic and foundational principle of parliamentary law upon which all other principles in *Roberts Rules* and in our Form of Government and Book of Discipline rest.

Members of a local church may bring a complaint against their session because they are members of the local church and subject to the session's discipline, even though they are not members of the session. Officers may also bring a complaint against their presbytery because they are members of the presbytery as a deliberative body and subject to it. Sessions may bring complaints against their presbytery because they are subject to its jurisdiction. Sessions may bring complaints against other sessions in the presbytery because both of them are subject to the jurisdiction of the same presbytery. And presbyteries may bring complaints against other presbyteries because both of them are subject to the jurisdiction of the General Assembly.

The writers of our Book of Discipline did not unambiguously state whether a session can bring a complaint against a session in another presbytery or only against one in their own presbytery. Evidently, the matter was obvious to the General Assembly that adopted it, but unfortunately, it is not obvious to us today.

If we answer the question as to why presbyteries in the same denomination can bring complaints against one another by saying that they are both subject to the jurisdiction of the General Assembly, then we have our answer that only sessions that are subject to the

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[1] Agenda of the 88th (2022) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1207.

authority, oversight, and discipline of the same presbytery can bring a complaint against one another.

Notice that the first half of BD 9.1 deals with individuals bringing complaints, and the second half deals with judicatories bringing complaints, but the two are parallel.

Consider a situation in which a couple divorce and then attend different local churches in the same presbytery. One or both of them might have valid reasons to be upset over actions taken by the ex-spouse's session but cannot bring a complaint against it because this individual is not a member of that church, is not subject to that church's authority, and (except for the case in BD 3.6 when bringing charges that do not warrant a trial) cannot be disciplined by that session. In short, the individual has no standing to bring a complaint.

Notice that this situation involving two individuals in different churches is parallel to the situation of two sessions in different presbyteries that want to bring complaints against each other or their presbyteries. Our presbyterian forefathers clearly did not see the need to grant these two individuals standing to bring a complaint to a session where there is no shared or joint judicatory. It does not make sense to argue that our book grants standing to a session to bring a complaint against a session or presbytery where there is no shared or joint judicatory.

Working These Things Out

But how then do we resolve such sticky issues between two such parties? Does this tie our hands from being able to resolve it? Does this make dealing with such situations terribly burdensome? No, it does not, for two important reasons:

First, this is not burdensome because both in the case of individuals and judicatories, handling such a matter should always begin with much informal conversation and discussion and peacemaking by the different representatives of the judicatories, before ever thinking about a complaint. Complaints and charges should always be viewed as a last resort, to be used only after all other steps of biblical conflict resolution have been pursued and failed.

> BD. 3.5 specifically requires this in the case of charges. It says:
> No charge of a personal private offense shall be admitted unless the judicatory has assured itself that the person bringing the charge has faithfully followed the course set forth in Matthew 18:15–17; nor shall a charge of a private offense which is not personal be admitted unless it appears that the plaintiff has first done his utmost privately to restore the alleged offender.

Our judicatories have a solemn responsibility to require that the parties diligently seek to work out their differences personally and privately before escalating the matter to that of a trial. Additionally, we should keep in mind that a trial is far less likely to result in reconciliation than is private face-to-face peacemaking effort; and, very sadly, a trial often even fails to convince the party that the court judges to have sinned that he ought to repent.

Likewise, in situations where complaints are often quickly brought, the respective parties ought to seek to sit down and work together informally to resolve the conflict before bringing a complaint.

Secondly, this is not burdensome because BD 9.1 deliberately puts pressure on us to respect the oversight that is in place instead of trying to do their job for them. And this is a very important thing for us to recognize and do.

This prevents the rare, but very possible, abuse of a session bringing complaints against many sessions throughout the country. Even if only one complaint is brought against one session in another presbytery, we should realize that that session already has an overseer that is responsible to shepherd and correct it as necessary, namely, their presbytery. We should trust their presbytery to do their job or, if necessary, should informally encourage members of that judicatory to do their job, and then we should seek to show respect for their authority, oversight, and jurisdiction. Surely, if this is a serious error, there must be some officer in the other session or presbytery that we can persuade to address the matter.

It appears to me that allowing sessions to bring complaints against any session in the denomination is based upon a misunderstanding of the principles underlying our standards, damages the lines of Presbyterian authority, oversight, and jurisdiction that undergird our standards, and may impose a great burden upon the session to deal with multiple conflicting complaints.

To return to the example I gave above concerning two ex-spouses holding membership in different churches, notice that the rules for complaints in BD 9.1 deliberately place pressure on the individual to work through his own session and ask his own session to address the matter with the other session and, if necessary, that his session file a complaint against the other session. This pressure might also encourage the individual to seek someone in the ex-spouse's church (preferably an officer who understands our standards) to address the matter. This would wisely involve others, and especially officers, to examine whether this really is a wise idea or not before doing it. And it would also prevent the rare, but very possible, abuse when a disgruntled person brings many complaints against a session that does not have the oversight or authority or jurisdiction to shepherd the individual with regard to these matters.

Such situations like this are very messy and may be referred to as a "perfect storm," like the 2000 film "The Perfect Storm," in which there was no way out of the storm for the sailors. A perfect storm in church discipline occurs in situations when two individuals are at odds with each other and seek to carry their fight to the judicatories of the church but are under the oversight of different judicatories. And due to these circumstances, the two judicatories are very likely to each take the side of their own member, because there are plenty of wrongs for everyone to be upset about. The result is that the fight escalates through the sessions to the presbytery and the general assembly. And the result is that it is almost impossible to achieve reconciliation between the parties, or the judicatories.

In such perfect storms it ought to occur to us that the best way to handle such volatile situations is for the two sessions to informally sit down together and resolve to work together as one before Christ in order to seek the peace of the couple and the church. This can also be done in other difficult but similar situations. Representatives of two factions in one presbytery can informally sit down together and resolve to work together as one before Christ in order to seek the peace of the church. And representatives of two

different presbyteries that are at odds can informally sit down together and resolve to work together as one before Christ in order to seek the peace of the church.

Even in cases in which charges have already been filed, there are still other possibilities. In one case in which the accused pled guilty to one of four charges, the moderator of the presbytery asked for a recess for the parties and their counsels to meet with him and talk. They repeatedly met together with the moderator serving as a mediator, and each party repeatedly met separately with their counsel. Over a period of eight hours they came to a resolution. The accused pled guilty to two charges, and the bringers of the charges agreed to drop the other two charges. A censure and conditions for its removal were agreed upon, and all of this was presented to the presbytery which quickly adopted it. As a result, a case that might have taken a week to hear was resolved in one day's time, with everyone satisfied with the result.

I want to be clear that none of the above encourages us to turn a blind eye to sin but rather encourages us to strive to work with our brothers, rather than against our brothers, in other jurisdictions.

It also helps us to avoid meddling in our neighbor's affairs unnecessarily. We should remember that "good fences make good neighbors." We should endeavor to stay out of our neighbor's business (1 Tim. 5:13). We are much removed from the details of what is going on and have very likely only heard a very incomplete and distorted account of the issues.

We can certainly offer advice and help if we are willing to spend the many, many hours listening to both sides of the story, but we should not try to get involved where our help is not requested. Just as our Lord said that each day has enough problems of its own for each of us to deal with (Matt. 6:34), so also each day has enough problems of its own for each of his judicatories to deal with. Let us not unnecessarily multiply them.

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ServantStandards

Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter 3.7–8

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7. a. If a charge in the form prescribed in this chapter, Section 3, is presented to the judicatory of jurisdiction by an individual or individuals, the judicatory shall proceed to conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether judicial process shall be instituted. A committee may be appointed for this purpose, but its findings shall always be reviewed by the judicatory.

b. The judicatory, or the committee, shall consider (1) the form of the charge; (2) the form and relevancy of the specifications; (3) the competency of the witnesses named in the specifications; (4) the apparent authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any documents, records, and recordings adduced in support of the charge and specifications; (5) whether the specifications, if true, would support the charge; and (6) also, whether the charge, if proved true, would constitute an offense serious enough to warrant a trial. It shall also prepare a statement of the facts of the case, arranged by date in the form of a chronology.

An offense which is serious enough to warrant a trial is: (1) an offense in the area of conduct and practice which seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church, or (2) an offense in the area of doctrine for the nonordained member which would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith as reflected in his membership vows, or (3) an offense in the area of doctrine for the ordained officer which would constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system of doctrine is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

The judicatory, or committee, should it be persuaded that the charge and specifications, if proved true, would constitute an offense serious enough to warrant a trial, shall not dismiss the case on technical grounds but shall require that the charge and specifications be put in proper form. If the person bringing the charge fails to do this, it shall become the responsibility of the judicatory.

c. Furthermore, if a person who has brought the charge requests the judicatory to assume responsibility for prosecuting the case, the judicatory shall bring the charge, provided the preliminary investigation warrants instituting judicial process.

d. When the form of the charge and specifications has been approved by the judicatory, it shall fix the time, date, and place for the trial of the case and shall cite the accused to appear at that time.

Comment: This section begins with an important condition: *if* a charge in the form previously prescribed in this chapter is brought to the relevant judicatory (the session or presbytery) by an individual or individuals, then the judicatory shall proceed in the fashion specified. This should not be quickly passed over but carefully attended to.[1] This section particularly points readers to a previous section in BD 3—namely, section 3, to flesh out, in part, what it means by "the form previously prescribed in this chapter." Please refer to the comments on BD 3.3 to recall that any valid charge must not be an exploration

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[1] Stuart Jones deals helpfully with the whole pre-trial process, though he and I tend to see the preliminary investigation (3.7–8) a bit differently. I tend to see it as more substantive and less *pro forma* than he does. For his views on BD 3 (including useful materials on the history of charges and specifications in some of the leading historic cases like Barnes, Beecher, Swing, Briggs, Machen, etc., 26–44), see Jones, *Commentary on the Orthodox Presbyterian Book of Discipline,* 56–63.

of whether its allegations *might* be an offense; rather, any allegations of offense *must* be ascertained to be an offense before proceeding in the judicial process.

Thus, section 7.a. is very important. If and only if all the previous sections of this chapter have been duly observed and attended to, then and only then may the judicatory proceed to conduct a preliminary investigation. The purpose of a preliminary investigation is to determine whether judicial process shall be instituted, i.e., whether the judicatory shall proceed to a trial of the charge(s) brought. This preliminary investigation, if warranted, may be conducted by the judicatory itself or a committee, either a standing judicial committee or an *ad hoc*/special one erected for that purpose. In any case, the findings of a preliminary investigation, whether conducted by a committee or the judicatory itself, shall be reviewed by the judicatory.

The next section (7.b.) proceeds to describe in some detail precisely how any such preliminary investigation (PI) that is deemed warranted is to be conducted. The judicatory, or its committee, shall attend to a number of specific matters in conducting a PI. First, it shall consider the form of the charge (7.b.1). The charge should be in a form that corresponds more or less to the sample form provided at the conclusion of the BCO. It should identify *who brings the charge against whom and for what offense*. It should not cite multiple offenses (if such are alleged, these should form additional charges), though it may have multiple instances of the same charge (e.g., someone violated the seventh commandment, specified on various occasions). It should not contain slander, gossip, or anything untoward, but it should be a clear, dispassionate statement of the facts as perceived by the bringer(s) of the charge. If the charge is not in such form, the judicatory may help to put it in such form in consultation with the bringer(s) of the charge.

Secondly (7.b.2), the judicatory, or its committee, conducting the PI shall consider the form and relevancy of the specifications. The specifications are the alleged specific instances that support the contention of the charge that a certain offense has been committed. So, as noted, if the allegation of the charge were that the offender had violated the seventh commandment, the specifications would detail those particulars: on such a date he (the alleged offender) was seen entering her house alone, emerging the next morning; on another date he (the alleged offender) sent the following text to her, etc. As many of these as needed to support the charge may be adduced. Every charge would have to have at least one specification but may, in fact, have several or more specifications. The specifications do all need to be relevant to that charge. One should not use the "kitchen sink" approach and simply throw in things as specifications that are dubious or clearly not relevant to the charge.

The competency of the witnesses (7.b.3) highlights that every charge must have witnesses, whether personal or evidentiary (like emails, texts, etc.), that indeed testify to what is contained in the specifications of the charge(s). In other words, these witnesses cannot be mere character witnesses who would testify, e.g., to the bad character of the alleged offender. The point here is not that character witnesses, or witnesses who have particular expertise relevant to the charge, never have a place in judicial trials; the point is that witnesses named under a particular specification should be able to testify to the matters contained in that specification.

If someone were charged with violating the seventh commandment, it would not be proper to cite under a particular specification someone who once heard the alleged offender make what might be deemed as a salacious remark. For a witness to be a competent one in the sense of this section, he must, for example, have seen the alleged offender enter her house unaccompanied and spend the night, or the like. Further matters

that may be considered for competency would be the age of the putative witness and the fundamental beliefs of any potential witness: some denominations require witnesses to at least affirm belief in God and a future judgment, since such has historically been thought necessary for valid oath-taking in the name of the Lord. This is because any witness will have to affirm the oath at BD 4.A.4.b. and the judicatory, in considering competency at this point, must consider whether the witness has the necessary age, mental capacity, and fundamental beliefs to take such an oath honestly invoking the name of the Lord.

Next, according to 7.b.4, the judicatory, or its committee, in conducting a PI shall give attention to any documents, records, and recordings. What the judicatory shall ascertain is the "apparent" situation (thus requiring only a tentative judgment to go to trial, during which such materials can be further challenged and impeached by the defense) pertaining to the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any such materials. A document, record, or recording must in the first place appear to be authentic, i.e., genuine, not forged, photoshopped, doctored, etc. The voices on a recording must be demonstrably those of the proper parties, handwriting must be verifiable, etc. Secondly, the materials must be admissible: not something illegally obtained in the jurisdiction (as a secret recording may be), purloined papers, or the like. Such ill-gotten items may not be admissible. And lastly, any such materials must be relevant to the charge and specifications, not something that might simply make the accused look bad but has no evident relevance to the matter(s) under consideration.

Now the judicatory, or its committee, conducting a PI must carefully attend to the specifications at this point (7.b.5): do the specifications support the charge? This is a task that must be most carefully executed. Say, for example, that the charge is failure to submit to due authority. And the specification is "x did not do what the session advised him to do." The session of a church has the authority, and thus the proper power, to command that which God commands in his Word and, on the other hand, to forbid what God forbids in his Word. If the specification, however, is that the session forbade the member from doing x, it must then and there, no later than the PI (preferably earlier), be established that what the session forbade is indeed forbidden by the Word of God. Say the session forbade a member from moving to a place where there was no OPC within an hour. A session might advise against such, but it has no power to compel such, and in such a case the specification would not in fact support the charge. So, the judicatory, or its committee, at this point in its PI must carefully consider whether the specifications, were they to be proven true, support the charge.

It should also carefully be noted that the task before the body conducting the PI is *decidedly not to determine whether the specifications supporting the charge are true*. The task of the PI is to determine, *if proved true*, the specifications would support the charge. The truthfulness of the specifications is determined in the trial. It is good to say here what is said elsewhere in this commentary and bears often repeating: the purpose of an ecclesiastical trial, similar to a civil one, is to establish the facts of the case and to apply the law of the church (the Bible and the church's constitution) to them. It is not the place of the PI to conduct a trial. It is the place of the PI to determine whether a trial is warranted, based on all the findings of the PI. The point of 7.b.5 is to ascertain if the specifications, were they to be proved true (in a trial to follow), would, in fact, support the charge of which they are a part. If they do support the charge, it then becomes the remit of the trial itself, not the PI, to determine whether said specifications establish or disconfirm the guilt of the accused.

Taking into consideration the first five subsections, we now come to 7.b.6. Even if everything is in order in the first five parts of this, consideration must be given finally to the question of whether the alleged offense is one serious enough to warrant trial. Many, if not most, offenses that we allege respecting other Christians can be covered in love (1 Pet. 4:8), as we have noted above. Some warrant us to think about and to pray with a forgiving heart for the other person (Mark 11:25). Some offenses cannot be easily surmounted and break fellowship with other Christians, requiring us to go to them in accordance with Matthew 18:15–17, as we have extensively commented on in BD 3, especially in the beginning of our comments on this chapter and in sections 4 and 5.

Having done all that, the question remains: when is an alleged offense serious enough to warrant a trial, i.e., when does it merit full process before a judicatory of the church? Notice how it is put: the judicatory must consider whether the charge, even if proved true in the course of continued judicial process, would warrant a trial. There is also a note to conclude this section that the judicatory considering whether to proceed to trial should "prepare a statement of the facts of the case, arranged by date in the form of a chronology." Such will help the judicatory in assessing the case as a whole and also as part of its consideration of whether, even if the charge proved true, it would warrant a trial.

The BD proceeds (in the second paragraph of 7.b.) to help us understand when an offense is indeed serious enough to warrant a trial. It lists three circumstances, and these are worthy of consideration and comment. The first area applies to all members alike in the church, those holding special office (minister, ruling elder, and deacon) as well as non-officers, i.e., those holding the general office of believer but no special office. This first area involves "an offense in the area of conduct and practice which seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church." This then pertains to an alleged offense in life (conduct and practice) as opposed to an offense in doctrine.

Such an offense must be one that seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church." This means that minor peccadilloes are not in view but rather impenitent sin that disturbs the peace—the well-being, or health—of the church more broadly (not just the individual member). It also disturbs the purity of the church, meaning that it besmirches the church, which must acquit herself of any involvement with the sin, seeking to die to it and live to righteousness, thus maintaining purity. And lastly, it disturbs the unity of the church: the church is one in Christ, and sin can create disunity with heaven and with each other as members of Christ's mystical body.

The first area of offense, then, that is serious enough to warrant trial is a violation of the law of God (one of the Ten Commandments) on the part of any member of the church that seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church. By the way, I must relate a remark from a floor speech that I heard almost twenty-five years ago in the Presbytery of Philadelphia (to which I was on an envoy from the Presbytery of New Jersey) by senior churchman John Galbraith: reflecting on someone who had made remarks that appeared to pit the purity of the church against her peace and unity, Galbraith asserted that these were a "package deal" and that one could never secure any of those attributes at the expense of the others.

The second area that demonstrates an alleged offense is "serious enough to warrant a trial" is in the case of doctrine for a member of the church who is a holder of the general office of believer and not a special officer ("the non-ordained member"). In such a case, his wrong belief, or doctrinal error, must be of the sort that "would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith as reflected in his membership vows." This means that a

member of the church has come to hold views at variance with what he affirmed in his membership vows, which cover the basic areas of Christian belief and practice. Examples of this would be someone who came to believe that the Bible is not the Word of God, that Jesus Christ is not the eternal Son of God, and that salvation is not by faith in Christ alone.

One would not hold the unordained member to everything that is in the doctrinal standards in the same way that we would hold the ordained officer to such. While there are branches of Presbyterianism that hold all members to the doctrinal standards of the church, the Presbyterianism of which our church has always been a part does not require confessional subscription for unordained members but only for those ordained to special office. For the unordained member, the standard is a credible profession of faith, and in this we are pointed particularly to the five vows and that which violates those vows as they constitute a credible profession of faith and membership in the local church. That which the judicatory (the session in this case) finds to constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith would warrant a trial.

The third area of offense serious enough to warrant a trial would be an offense in doctrine for the ordained officer. As just noted, the doctrinal standard to which the ordained officer is held is different than that for the unordained member. For the latter the standard is a credible profession of faith; for the former the standard is fidelity in accordance with the subscription vows of an officer. Officers in the OPC take the Confessions and Catechisms of the Church as giving true expression to the system of doctrine that is contained in the Bible. Notice how this is put: the Holy Scriptures contain a "system of doctrine," and that system of doctrine is given expression in our secondary standards: it is "set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms." Note also here that the doctrinal standards are not said to be simply the Westminster Standards, because in American Presbyterianism and in the OPC some changes have been made over the course of time. Thus, that which determines whether a charge is serious enough to warrant a trial for the officer in doctrinal cases is his fidelity, or lack thereof, to the doctrinal standards as adopted and currently held by the church.

The last paragraph of 7.b. merits comment as well, especially in light of my prefatory comments to the BD. I noted there that the elements of church law historically are chiefly inquisitorial and not adversarial (as in American civil law). In an adversarial system nothing is more important than process: sometimes, in fact, observing the proper technicalities seems to trump the pursuit of justice. The inquisitorial approach is certainly concerned about substantive due process but does not let lesser technicalities derail the pursuit of the truth, which is always a necessary part of the pursuit of justice. This is why this paragraph exists: to point out that if a PI has determined that a charge and specifications, if it were to be proved true, would indeed warrant a trial (for all the reasons just discussed), then the judicatory should not dismiss the case on technical grounds. Rather, the judicatory should require that the charge and specifications be put in proper form (if warranted and if that is possible) and not be dismissed merely for technical deficiencies.

The judicatory ordinarily would require the bringers of a charge(s) to put any such charge(s) and specifications in good order (in proper form), so that the case might proceed and not be dismissed on narrow, technical grounds, showing unconcern about the truth of the matter. If those bringing the charge are not able to put the charge and specifications in good order, either through incompetence or simple failure to do so, the judicatory itself shall take this on and put the charge and specifications in their proper form.

It is important that a judicatory not simply dismiss a case because the charge being brought before it, though it has an obvious serious concern, is constructed in an inferior or wrong manner. In particular, the judicatory must not deny justice by insisting that unordained members observe all the niceties of the BD, with which the person in the pew is largely unfamiliar. Indeed, many presbyters profess to be unskilled when it comes to employing the BD; we should thus not hold the general membership to an unduly high standard in this regard but be sympathetic to even clumsy attempts to navigate the BD by those largely not practiced in it.

The next section, 7.c., further extends the idea of a judicatory helping the bringer of a charge to put it in proper form by requiring a judicatory to bring the charge itself when requested by the bringers. To be sure, this applies only to a charge that has been thoroughly vetted by the judicatory, demonstrated in part by the judicatory's PI concluding that the charge before it clearly warrants the institution of judicial process. In other words, if private parties bring a charge to a judicatory that a PI deems worthy of a trial, then if the bringers request that the judicatory prosecute the case, the judicatory shall indeed assume such responsibility and itself bring the charge.

And lastly, section 7.d. stipulates that when the form of the charge and specifications, at the conclusion of a PI, has been approved by the judicatory, said judicatory shall determine the initial logistics of the trial. That is to say that at the point of approving the charge, after a PI has determined that such should be done, the judicatory will fix the time, date, and place for the trial of the case and shall cite the accused to appear at that time, at the First Meeting of the Trial (BD 4.C.1). It should be noted that the First Meeting of the Trial has a limited agenda and is restricted only to those matters. The First Meeting of the Trial, while *pro forma* largely, must not permit any of the matters that pertain only to the Second Meeting of the Trial (BD 4.C.2) to occur in the First Meeting.

8. a. A judicatory may contemplate bringing a charge of an offense against a person subject to its jurisdiction. If a charge in the form prescribed in this chapter, Section 3, is presented to the judicatory by the judicatory, it shall conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether judicial process shall be instituted. A committee may be appointed for this purpose but its findings shall always be reviewed by the judicatory.

b. The judicatory, or the committee, shall consider (1) the form of the charge; (2) the form and relevancy of the specifications; (3) the competency of the witnesses named in the specifications; (4) the apparent authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any documents, records, and recordings adduced in support of the charge and specifications; (5) whether the specifications, if true, would support the charge; and (6) also, whether the charge, if proved true, would constitute an offense serious enough to warrant a trial. It shall also prepare a statement of the facts of the case, arranged by date in the form of a chronology.

An offense serious enough to warrant a trial is: (1) an offense in the area of conduct and practice which seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church, or (2) an offense in the area of doctrine for the nonordained member which would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith as reflected in his membership vows, or (3) an offense in the area of doctrine for the ordained officer which would constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system of doctrine is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The judicatory, or committee, should it be persuaded that the charge and specifications, if proved true, would constitute an offense serious enough to warrant a trial, it shall not dismiss the case on technical grounds, but shall require that the charge and specifications be put in proper form.

c. When the form of the charge and specifications has been approved by the judicatory, it shall fix the time, date, and place for the trial of the case and shall cite the accused to appear at that time.

[Suggested forms for filing a written charge and for citing the accused to appear can be found on pages 169-70.]

Comment: BD 3.8 is similar in most regards to BD 3.7. Section 8, however, details what happens when a judicatory itself, as opposed to a private party (as set forth in BD 3.7), seeks to bring a charge against an alleged offender. It should be noted here that this section (BD 3.8) pertains only to the case of a judicatory having original jurisdiction over the one who is alleged to have offended. In other words, only the judicatory having jurisdiction over the accused can bring a charge *as a judicatory* against the accused under the rubric of BD 3.8. If a judicatory other than the judicatory of the accused wished to bring a charge against the accused, it would have to do so under the rubric of BD 3.7, i.e., it could not bring the charge *as a judicatory* but only as a collection of private parties bringing a case against an accused, alleging that he has offended in the way charged and specified.

One might think, if a judicatory having original jurisdiction brings a charge(s) against an alleged offender, that a preliminary investigation (PI) might be unnecessary because there is already a strong presumption of guilt. This section makes clear that it is not. This is why BD 3.8 more or less repeats much of the process for conducting a PI that is found in BD 3.7: whether a charge is brought by a private party or brought by a judicatory itself, great care needs to be taken to assure that the particulars of fair judicial process are followed. The judicatory needs, in other words, to ensure justice for all parties—the alleged offender(s) and the offended; in all cases we need to remember the golden rule and to do unto others what we would have them do to us. We should listen to those alleging offenses as we would want to be heard if others had similarly sinned against us. We should provide a fair hearing for the accused as we would want to be provided if we were accused of offenses.

It is one thing for a judicatory to believe that an offense might have occurred, another for it to look at the specifics of that alleged offense through the lens of all that a PI requires. Similarly, if charges survive a PI, it is still another thing for those charges to be taken to trial and in the context of a trial to hold up and demonstrate that the accused is indeed guilty and should be duly censured. At each point of the judicial process, in other words, a judicatory must assure itself that it has what is needed to proceed and to assess all the evidence, witnesses, etc. with scrupulous fairness and disinterestedness. A judicatory should do its very best to take seriously all allegations brought to it, seeking to deal justly with and for offended parties. Similarly, the judicatory must conduct any PI (and subsequent trial) with a proper sense of justice and due process in dealing with those accused of offenses.

It does not appear to this commentator that a separate set of comments need to be made for BD 3.8 beyond what has just be noted, since everything addressed in section 8 has already been addressed in section 7 and commented upon there. So, for comments on this section please see the comments on BD 3.7, and realize that the comments there all apply here, *mutatis mutandis*.

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ServantWork

The Importance of a Lowly Heart

Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 2

By an Older Elder

Dear James,

What a delight to get your response to my last letter. I am glad you found it helpful. To God be the glory. The Lord is the ultimate source of all that is truly helpful to our souls. He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:7). He pours out the most refreshing water and serves it to us in various vessels, but he himself is the "fountain of life" (Ps. 36:9). It is a joy to be his cup. As we travel along serving within the sphere the Lord has given to us, nothing is more pleasing than to be his glass of goodness to another soul.

Now, you asked if I would comment further on a topic which I introduced briefly in my last letter, namely, the nurturing of a lowly heart. I will do my best in a few words to handle a large subject. I think it would be best to begin by explaining what I mean by a lowly heart first, then to share some thoughts on how to pursue it.

A lowly heart is a heart brought low by what sin has done. I think you will find this a helpful definition and a lens by which to see your own soul. Sin has ruined this world and mankind to a degree that words struggle to express. In a moment, one sin plunged all creation from perfection into misery. Where there was only life, there came universal death (Rom. 5:12). Sin brought corruption into everything. Sin traded away peace and gave war. Sin exchanged cleanness for filthiness. Sin stole heaven and gave hell.

A lowly heart carries about this deep sense of sorrow for what sin has done. This begins, first and foremost, with a sense of *our own sin*. You asked for practical advice on developing a lowly heart. So here is the first thing—*cultivate a sense of your own sin*. Be specific. Call it out by name. Is it greed? Is it laziness? Is it selfishness? Is it lust? Is it ambition? No one can go to war with an invisible enemy. You cannot repent over nameless sins.

Your capacity to minister to others effectively will depend upon this. God's greatest servants in Scripture saw their own sin and were deeply moved by it. Abraham did. David did. Isaiah did. Paul knew himself to be the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). This is a secret to fruitful ministry. Spurgeon once put it this way, "A sense of our own poverty drives us to Christ, and that is where we need to be, for in Him our fruit is found."[1]

[1] C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Evening, August 28.

Listen. There are some who have served in this office of elder who, sadly, do not seem to have much of this sense of their own sin. Maybe the Lord has spared them from some of the greater vices, and they mistake this for holiness. Maybe they are too busy focusing on the sins of others to see the evil in their own heart. It is a most painful thing for the church to endure an elder that does not seem to know himself a sinner. Ask the Lord, dear brother, to search your heart often.

And that leads me to the second piece of practical advice. Use this sense of your own sin to foster a deep sorrow for what sin has done to others. Every lamb in your flock is suffering, in some way, the horrible effects of sin. Have they lost loved ones? Sin did that. Are they sick? Sin, ultimately, is the cause of every sickness in this world. They may also be suffering from the miserable consequences of personal sin in their lives. Stir up a sympathy for these precious sheep of the Lord Jesus who are being hunted and wounded by the wolf of sin.

This was most eminently true of our precious Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore he, above anyone who ever walked on this earth, was most "lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29). None were moved as much as he was by what sin had done to mankind. None wept as he wept over our sin. None cared like he cared about the consequences of our sin. And no one suffered as he suffered to undo the terrible effects of sin for his people.

If you want some practical advice on cultivating a lowly heart, I can do no better than to point you to Christ, dear brother. As you move among his people, do so with a sense of what a mess sin has made of this world and our lives. Bear that burden. Plead for God's mercy. May the Holy Spirit put the heart of that publican in your soul, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). And then go to the flock with love and compassion, bringing them to Jesus. That is what is meant by a lowly heart.

Your soul's well-wisher,
An older elder

ServantReading

Justification: A Lutheran Perspective

A Review Article

By John V. Fesko

Justification by the Word: Restoring Sola Fide, by Jack D. Kilcrease. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022, xi + 442 pages, $39.99.

A steady stream of books and articles on the doctrine of justification continues to flow from presses, and this latest contribution comes from Jack D. Kilcrease, professor of historical and systematic theology at the Institute of Lutheran Theology in Brookings, South Dakota. This book is about the doctrine of justification within the framework of Lutheran soteriology. The book consists of seventeen chapters with the first four discussing the doctrine from Genesis through the Pauline corpus; the following seven chapters provide a historical-theological survey that begins with the early church, has two chapters on Martin Luther's (1483–1546) view, and then covers post-Lutheran developments. The following six chapters treat justification and election, the sacraments, and the Christian life. The final chapter presents six theses on justification as a summary of the book.

There are three strengths in this book that commend it to readers. First, Kilcrease writes from a Lutheran perspective. For readers that come from a Reformed perspective, studying the doctrine of justification from a Lutheran vantage point offers a good opportunity to see things differently. Rather than rehearsing important but common arguments, the reader can see how Lutherans employ the doctrine. There is confessional agreement between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions on the doctrine of justification, a point attested by John Calvin's (1509–64) subscription to the modified Augsburg Confession and Theodore Beza's (1519–1605) supervision of the creation of the *Harmony of Confessions of Faith* (1581), a collection of Reformed and Lutheran confessions that Reformed theologians used to demonstrate agreement among the Reformed and Lutheran churches. At the same time, the respective doctrines function differently within the context of each tradition's theology. Kilcrease's book showcases this difference.

Second, the book delves into exegetical arguments for the doctrine of justification, and in light of recent debates over the New Perspective on Paul, the book critiques this contemporary movement in a nuanced way. Kilcrease persuasively argues, for example, that the New Perspective "has projected the modern, post-secular problem of how to create unity in the midst of radical pluralism onto the first-century situation" (79). He also insightfully captures the eschatological nature of justification and presses this point against N. T. Wright's (1948–) claims of a twofold justification, one based on faith in the present and a second based on faith-wrought works (94).

A third strength lies in the book's two chapters on Luther's doctrine of justification. Luther was a chief figure in the articulation of this biblical doctrine. In popular Reformation mythology, Luther was fully persuaded of the doctrine of justification when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the castle door at Wittenberg, but students of church history often read his Theses searching in vain for the doctrine. The author traces the development of the young Luther and the various biblical and theological influences upon him until he had his Reformation breakthrough. This is not to say that everyone will agree with every historical claim the author makes, but tracing Luther's maturation process helps readers obtain a more nuanced understanding of Luther's doctrine of justification.

There are at least three areas that warrant further consideration. First, the book lacks a strong introduction and thesis. The book's introduction is a mere four pages. Introductions need not be long, but they should present the book's chief thesis and briefly explain how each chapter supports the thesis. The author, for example, writes: "Instead of 'justification through faith' it might be appropriate to characterize Luther's position as 'justification by the word.' In this book, we will endeavor to show that, although it has been neglected and misunderstood by Protestants and Catholics alike, Luther's 'justification by the word' is a better model for understanding salvation in Christ" (4). This is the book's thesis, but the author does not clearly explain what he means by *justification by the word* in the introduction. There are hints that point to the "sacramentality of the word, and not justification by faith" as an important difference, but what the author means is unclear. Readers must wade into the book to determine what the author specifically seeks to substantiate.

Related to this is the fact that the author does not explain the plan of his argument. How do each of the following chapters support the thesis? How will each chapter prove that justification by the word is preferable to justification by faith? Once again, the reader must wade into the book to ascertain how each chapter supports the book's thesis. There is a clear statement of the book's main point at the end of chapter eleven that crystalizes the author's thesis: he argues that justification by faith alone must function with an anchor in sacramental realism and the sacramentality of the word (258). In other words, the chief claim of the book is that justification by faith alone is incomplete apart from the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation (though Lutherans object to this term)—that Christ is truly present in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Apart from this sacramental objectivism, *sola fide* degenerates into a form of subjectivism and legalism.

Second, the author writes for a Lutheran audience who will probably nod in agreement with his claims. Those from a Reformed perspective, however, will likely be unpersuaded because he relies more on assertion rather than careful exegetically and theologically persuasive arguments. For example, the author claims that sacramental realism is a bulwark against subjective doubts of faith. Christ is truly present in the supper and therefore assures believers of their saved state (304). This view is supposedly superior to Reformed views of assurance because they must rely upon the *practical syllogism*. Yet, something the author never addresses is how does a believer truly know whether he is saved? For the sake of argument, assume consubstantiation is true and Christ is physically present in the supper; in contrast to the Reformed, Lutherans teach because Christ is truly present apart from faith in the participant, even the unregenerate consume Christ. The *manducatio impii* seems to be a looming fear for the true believer,

does it not? Just because Christ is present in the supper does not guarantee that the person who partakes is saved. He could be unregenerate and nevertheless consuming the physically present Christ to his condemnation. Moreover, what of Scripture's call for self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10; Luke 6:43-44)? The book dismisses calls for self-examination as subjective and legalistic quests for assurance. Such self-examination may very well be, but apart from exegetical and theological treatment of these passages, claims of the superiority of sacramental realism border on assertion rather than proven points.

Another example appears in the book's scant engagement with Reformed views. Calvin and Zwingli are the representatives for the Reformed tradition. The problem is that both of these theologians are not fountainheads of the tradition the way that Luther is for Lutheranism. The Reformed churches employ their confessional and catechetical corpus to define Reformed theology, and yet the book never interacts with these documents; the Westminster Standards, Three Forms of Unity, and Second Helvetic Confession never appear. When the book engages Zwingli (e.g. 304, 329), it only mentions the early memorialist views of the reformer and not his later views that commend a spiritual presence of Christ. Related to this limited exploration of the Reformed tradition is the book's rejection of the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. The book only cites a secondary source as the "Reformed tradition" and never shows by exegesis, theology, or engagement with primary sources why the Lutheran view of sacramental realism is the correct position (313–14). The book also does not wrestle with more recent historical-theological claims by Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves that Calvin's *extra-Calvinisticum* is not unique to Calvin or the wider Reformed tradition but also appears among the patristic theologians and should be called the *extra Catholicum*.[1]

Third, at key points I wonder how much the author reads Luther through modern ideas that end up distorting the reformer's doctrine. The book begins with the claim that justification is central to Christian theology. He rejects the notion of a *central dogma*, a single doctrine from which one deduces an entire system of thought (1). On the other hand, he nevertheless argues that justification is central to Christianity but never explains in what way and how his idea of centrality differs from central dogmas. This becomes relevant to questions of interpreting Luther when the author periodically invokes the interpretations of Oswald Bayer (1939c), a contemporary Lutheran scholar (178). The author cites Bayer's explanation of Luther's doctrine through speech-act theory, which is a contemporary linguistic school of thought associated with J. L. Austin (1911–60). The book simply assumes the legitimacy of this interpretation. Moreover, Bayer constructs justification along the lines of a central dogma and has argued that sanctification is not something that follows justification but is nothing other than justification. Similar types of modern interpretations of Calvin abounded in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography that necessitated works like Richard Muller's *The Unaccommodated Calvin*,[2] i.e., a reading of Calvin situated within his early modern context defined by primary sources, not accommodated by modern misreadings. The book's use of modern

[1] Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

[2] Richard A. Muller, The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

interpretations of Luther apart from argumentation warrants the question, does the author present the unaccommodated Luther?

Lutheran readers of this book will likely find its claims and arguments familiar and agreeable, but Reformed readers will find key arguments unpersuasive. This does not mean that people should not read the book. The book can be read for profit, and it is especially important for readers with Reformed convictions to engage Lutheran sources so they have a first-hand knowledge of what Lutherans believe. However, Reformed readers should also be aware and will detect the shortcomings of this book. The book succeeds as a treatment of the function of justification by faith alone within a Lutheran view of salvation but fails to persuade this reviewer of its superiority over Reformed confessional views.

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ServantPoetry

Regeneration

James Lee (1980–)

Of the quickened mind, the renewed will,
God's work that we might embrace Christ,
the girl was curious.
Her recently pierced ears were fitted with delicate pearls.
As to time, it was without question, but the duration—
How long did it take? she asked there in the makeshift
classroom. Without thinking, I said,
The hairpin turn to dark, the onset of night
when streetlights flare and shadows fall
surrendering—that interlude.
Adults began making their way in for refreshments.
I was partly relieved thinking of all the condiments.
Mostly, that honey requires no refining of any kind,
keeps at room temperature, is used as a simple
sweetener.