Ordained Servant

John Muether's MTIOPC Class meeting in Orlando, Florida – January 2002

ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement Of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Published for the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
under direction of
Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, Rev. William Shishko and Rev. Stephen Pribble

Contents: Vol. 11, No. 2

❏

In this issue we have the rest of the fine paper by Dr. James de Jong on the unity of the church. This paper was written, in part at least, in response to our own OPC paper entitled ***Biblical Principles of the Unity of The Church.*** That paper is available on the internet at www.opc.org and can easily be downloaded for comparison with Dr. de Jong's paper.

❏ ❏

We devote special special attention in this issue to the momentous task of preaching. It is God himself who has chosen this as the primary means of converting sinners and of building them up in holiness. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we who are preachers to make use of anything and everything that will enhance our ability to preach. We hope that you preachers will find these articles stimulating and helpful. And we welcome good material from *you* in response to what you read here.

❏ ❏ ❏

In the next issue of *Ordained Servant* we hope to put the focus on ecumenical issues. Perhaps you've written something of value on this subject! If so we invite you to consider sending it to us for possible use in this publication. You can send it to the editor on paper (the old fashioned way), or in a Word format file on a CD or as an attachment by email. The address for sending this to theeditor is found on the page inside the cover.

❏ ❏ ❏ ❏

By the time this issue goes out we anticipate the publication of a 'new' Commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism. We say 'new' because it is only new in the sense that it has never before been published as a book. Now it will be. It was originally written in serial form for the *Blue Banner Faith and Life* magazine, by J.G. Vos, who was the editor. When I asked his widow for permission to publish this material, a few years ago, Mrs. Vos responded favorably. Then the Board of Publications of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America—to which Rev. Vos bequeathed the rights to his writings—also gave me permission to go ahead. I'm very thankful this permission was granted because I believe the Larger Catechism deserves far more attention than it has received. We here give a sample of what Dr. Vos has written. These are his comments on the second part of Q/A 159.

1. Why must ministers preach the Word of God faithfully, honestly and fully?

Because it is not their own message, but God's message, that they are handling. A minister is an ambassador; therefore he has no right to tamper with the message entrusted to him. It must be delivered accurately and in full.

2. What is meant by the expression "the whole counsel of God"?

This expression, which is taken from the apostle Paul's words in Acts 20:27, means the entire revealed truth and will of God. Ministers are to preach the whole truth of the Bible. They have no right to preach a limited, deformed or partial message.

3. How are ministers to preach "the whole counsel of God"?

It is of course impossible to preach the whole counsel of God all at one time. Ministers can proclaim only a small part of the counsel of God in any one sermon or address. To attempt too much at one time would only result in confusion and spiritual indigestion on the part of the hearers. But ministers must make it their aim to preach, in due time, all that God has revealed in His Word, omitting nothing of the system of divinely revealed truth.

4. Are all truths of the Bible equally important?

No. All are equally true, but all are not equally important. The most important ones are the ones which receive the most emphasis in the Bible itself. While aiming at proclaiming the whole counsel of God, a minister must take care to place the chief emphasis on the most important truths or doctrines, which are given the most prominence in the Bible itself, or which are most in need of emphasis because most neglected or denied at the present day. No minister should indulge in fads or hobbies, specializing on certain truths to the neglect of all others.

5. What temptation to deviate from preaching the whole counsel of God must be faced and resisted by ministers?

The temptation to say little about, or remain silent about, those truths of the Bible which are commonly regarded as "unpopular," while emphasizing and saying much about those truths which are commonly called "popular." Thus a minister may face the temptation to say little or nothing about sin, death and eternal punishment, while preaching much on the love of God, the teachings of Jesus about love to our neighbor, and the like. Ministers have no right to "soft pedal" part of God's message because it may be distasteful to their hearers. As servants of God they must preach the whole truth without "trimming" it to suit human prejudices.

6. Why must ministers take "the necessities and capacities of the hearers" into consideration in their preaching?

Because if they fail to do this, their preaching will be largely ineffective and useless. The truth of God is always the same, but it must be preached in a somewhat different manner to different groups of people. The manner or method of preaching that would be suited to an audience of non-Christians on a foreign mission field would be different from that suited to a congregation of Christian believers in the same country, and the latter again would be somewhat different from that suited to a congregation of Christian believers in America. The minister may not deviate from the truth of God, but he must try to present the truth of God in such a way that his hearers, whoever they may be, will really "get the point."

7. What is meant by preaching the Word of God "zealously"?

This does not necessarily mean an emotional pitch of excitement, but rather a deep spiritual attitude, which the Catechism describes as "with fervent love to God and the souls of his people." That is, a minister of Christ is to preach the Gospel earnestly, regarding it as an extremely important matter, not something trifling or indifferent. The minister's motive should not be popularity or applause, but devotion to God and desire for the spiritual welfare of His people.

2 Church History & Government

2.1 Historical Patterns

The *hic et nunc* gathering of the church around the world includes a diversity of historical patterns and contours. The family of Reformed Churches around the world is very diverse, and the family of Reformed confessions of the world has a rich and diversified history. The church is gathered "from all tribes and peoples, and tongues," Rev 7:9. Therefore a fundamental given in the understanding of the unity of the church is that it can never be asserted without a conscious recognition of the widespread cultural diversity of its many manifestations.[34]

This cultural-ethnic diversity includes essential and integral confessional components. The Reformed confessions differ in the formulation and extent concerning the major doctrines of the Reformed faith, and in some cases the diversities are more substantial than in others. Specific diversities appear in the relationship between the continental confessions and the unique tradition of the English and Scottish churches. It is only a matter of honesty and integrity that these differences of formulation be acknowledged and that the relative weight of the differences be

properly and fairly set forth to the respective communities dealing with these churches.

Respect for each other's traditions will also entail a cautious approach to confessional amendments. While confessions remain human documents and cannot be equated to Scripture in authority, they do stamp a historical tradition and leave their marks through many generations. It is neither realistic nor necessary to demand faithful federated communities of distinct geographical, historical and cultural-ethnic traditions to bring their confessional documents fully in harmony with each other. Greater harmony can best be realized after a period of cooperation in which each fellowship achieves a greater understanding of the thought processes of the other's confessional and historical background, and how the relative weight of various creedal expressions needs to be viewed and evaluated.[35] It might best be done through the adoption of special supplements (*addenda*) whereby memoranda of understanding be formulated to cross bridges between varied

confessional traditions.[36] Mutual fellowship cannot be articulated or practised where substantial or fundamental doctrinal and polity differences exist between church bodies. In such cases, even though there may be doctrinal proximity in a number of important areas, the churches must seek to establish closer ties by a resolution of differences, and ultimately leave the final judgment to God. Given the dynamic aspect of the church as set forth above, meaningful fellowship can only be asserted and practised in situations of a manifested progressing convergence, within the framework of one common confessional perspective.[37] The degree and extent of organizational and corporate fellowship will vary proportionately with the proximity ascertained in terms of confessional and church governmental understanding.

2.2 Polity Considerations

2.2.1 The manifestation of the church

Fundamentally the church is manifested in two ways in Scripture, that is, as a universal entity and a local organization. The use of the body image (*sôma tou*

---

[34] Hence pursuing the goal of "one world-wide presbyterian/reformed church" should be qualified by a respect for this diversity through which nationally structured federative communities can continue to pursue patterns of self-government according to their distinct ecclesiological traditions, cf "Biblical principles of the unity of the church" *Proceedings ICRC September 1997* (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1997) [hereafter *Principles*] 101. See also J. A. Heyns, *The Church*, 125. Heyns defends a cultural-ethnic motive for the pluriformity of the church in the midst of its essential unity.

[35] Hence, while one can generally concur with the OPC statement's position that "the obliteration of denominational separateness is an obligation resting upon these churches of Christ," this would not necessarily involve the obliteration of *all* historical distinctives, especially in an international context. Within a national setting, it ought to be the aim of all like-minded churches to seek integrated federated unity on the basis of a commonly accepted church order. But where historical differences are deeply rooted, the impetus to unity should allow for a careful maturation process for all parties, and tiered arrangements of fellowship through which integral unity can be fostered over extended time periods, cf. *Principles*, 98

[36] See the defence of the WCF formulations by Rowland S. Ward, "Recent Criticisms of the Westminster Confession of Faith" *Proceedings of the ICRC September 1-9 1993*, (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1993) 184-202

[37] It is not clear in this connection why it would be necessary to recognize "several levels of separateness (i.e. degrees of purity) among the churches," as proposed in the OPC statement, cf. *Principles*, 101. Rankings of this sort would tend to foster static models of the church's diversity, and negatively affect the concentrated focus that must persist on the dynamic aspect of Christ's church gathering work. The suggested categories also present certain ambiguities that would detract from the usefulness of this approach.

Christou) includes both the universal and local dimensions, while the use of the term *ékklesia* is often coupled with territorial qualifiers.[38] From the evidence of Scripture we are to think of the church as both a local and a universal entity, with no specific emphasis being given to one or other of these two dimensions. Invariably the context determines which dimension is being highlighted, and systematic formulation would require that consistently both dimensions are factored into the overall perspective on the church.

If the unity of the church is to be a living attribute, it must be experienced and practised in both the local and universal manifestations of the church. Unity at the local level is the most vital to the Christian, since it is especially in a local context that the consciousness of being a part of a corporate and living body comes to expression. It is particularly at the local level that the confession concerning the church as the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*) manifests its truth. However, at any given moment, unity as an attribute of the church universal must be confessed and expressed. For the believer this can occur in a number of concrete ways.

Besides the local manifestation of the church Scripture introduces the church as a regionally and nationally qualified entity. Scripture speaks of local churches in one province, a country, a region and so on. Regional and national federational ties are crucial for maintaining the unity of the church, and form part of the obligation that believers have to each other. Churches as local entities governed directly by Christ must also bind themselves together and provide mutual support and assistance to each other.

2.2.2 The nature of church power

The scriptural testimony clearly places church power at the level of the local church, Acts 20:28, Phil 1:1. In the local church, church power is entrusted to the entire congregation and is not strictly limited to officers.[39] To be sure, officers are directly called by Christ, and are not responsible to the congregation first of all. But at the same time, they always exercise their authority through the congregation and with the approbation of the congregation. In other words, the eldership model of church government as found in Scripture and practised in the early church steers away from congregationalism, but activates the congregation as much as possible in all aspects of church government.

In this regard it is important to avoid any leaven of episcopacy as if church officers would share any church power beyond that imparted through a congregation. While there is a line of tradition from the apostles to the church officers of today, that line runs through the local church as a body, and cannot be conceived of in terms of a personal or an abstractly official succession in any sense of the term. All apostolic succession is strictly a teaching succession (*successio doctrinae*), and the calling and cooperating congregation always functions as the instrument in passing it on.[40]

2.2.3 The Officers of the Church

There is a general consensus in the Presbyterian and Reformed world that Scripture isolates three offices which have a permanent character in the church of the New Testament. The *episkopoi* of the New Testament, which are identical to the *presbuteroi*, form the original teaching and ruling office. Later in the New Testament period this office became two distinct offices, the ministerial or teaching office and the distinct ruling office, (cf. Rom 12:8, 1 Cor 12: 28). Those appointed to serve at tables in Acts 6 can be seen as a prototype of the more specialized diaconal office existing in the church today.

The Reformed confession attributes a difference of church power to the various offices, all associated with the nature of the task entrusted to the officers. However, a fundamental criterion is that there is equality among these offices in such a way that no one officer can lord it over another. Ministers do not possess greater authority than elders or deacons. To be sure, for the good

---

[38] For the texts see H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, I (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1928) 61

[39] Here there is a substantial difference between the continental tradition and the Presbyterian system of church government. Classical Presbyterianism holds that church power proper comes to ruling elders, and not to the "community of the faithful", see David W. Hall, (ed.) *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiaistici or the Divine Right of Church-Government originally asserted by the Ministers of Sion College, London, December 1646* (revised edition, Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1995). The view that church power comes to the congregation was attributed both to the congregationalists, and to the "independents" at the assembly: Thomas Goodwin and Phillip Nye, with followers. But this is not in itself a congregationalist principle. By definition, congregationalism includes the notion that in the exercise of church power, church officers remain accountable to the congregation as the final ruling body in the local church.

[40] In this regard the OPC statement is unclear with regard to the current role of the apostolic testimony. The apostolate cannot be taken to be supreme "to the end of time" because it no longer exists as a distinct office or institution in the church, cf. *Principles*, 100. The church only has the *testimony* of the apostles. And while the apostolate exhibited a strong hegemony, one can hardly posit a "descending hierarchy" from the apostolate to the church today. It is doubtful whether the gifts of Christ to the church should be characterized in terms of a "descending hierarchy", since they are given directly to the local congregation in its entirety, and from there branch out to cooperative efforts of congregations federated together.

government of the entire church, the work of the deacons will also be subject to the government of the ruling council. This, however, represents strictly a difference in function, and in no way implies any ranking among the church officers in themselves. In terms of their offices, all share equal authority.[41]

2.2.4 Limitations to the Power of Church Officers

A cardinal principle in the continental Reformed tradition concerns the limitation of church power to local communities. All church officers have strictly local power, and the authority of the officer does not transcend in any way the limits of the local church. Where power is exercised beyond the local church in a federative capacity, this is only by common consent of the churches, and in itself does not represent the authority of church officers, but the authority of the assemblies entrusted with specific federatively designated tasks.[42] The authority

inherent in the binding declarations of broader assemblies is not hierarchical in character, but functions in the churches by mutual agreement, coupled as it is with the principle that only the Word of God can bind the conscience, and no decision of any assembly can bind the conscience beyond the dictates of the Word of God. This is not to say that decisions of broader assemblies only receive binding authority upon the declaration of ratification given by local churches. The decisions are binding by virtue of the authority voluntarily granted to them by agreement, but at the same time are bound strictly to the authority of the Word of God.

Two limitations to church power need to be isolated here. In the first place, in the federative (national) body, all federative authority is limited by the specific agreement adopted by the churches in their common Church Order. Specifically, disciplinary measures are primarily local in nature, and all federative involvement is designed primarily to provide suitable safeguards to what is essentially a local matter. Therefore it is of utmost importance that broader assemblies do not arrogate to themselves power beyond that clearly specified in Scripture and the Reformed confessions, *viz.* that the power of the officer is limited to the local congregation.[43]

Second, given the constraints imposed by culture and tradition, church power cannot effectively transcend national boundaries. Cooperation on the international level is best maintained as voluntary and ministerial, and decisions of ecumenical councils can and should not be implemented with binding power. Firstly, the federative body manifests itself distinctly as a nationally qualified institution, dealing federatively and locally with the respective civil authorities.[44] This cannot suitably be done in any other way than through federative arrangements structured on a national level. Secondly, disparities between various national federations often are so broad that binding statements on an international level would be counterproductive. In most cases they would be regarded as too remote from the common believer in the local congregation. Given the great historical and cultural diversity among Reformed churches in countries around the world, the potential for misunderstanding and error is too great to allow for any binding authority placed upon national federations on an international level.

The realization of ecclesiastical unity on an international level is best promoted through the development of more intensive forms of cooperation

[41] Here another difference arises between the continental tradition and classical Presbyterianism. The continental tradition sees substantial differences of function between the offices, but no difference in rank. Classical Presbyterianism, on the other hand, posits a certain *ordo* among the offices. For example, J. MacPherson says: "According to the principles of Presbyterianism already laid down, the Minister is indeed of a superior order, as holding a superior office to that of ruling elder." See J. MacPherson, *Presbyterianism* (Edinburgh: T.T.Clark, 1949) 114. To be fair, it should be mentioned that in other places MacPherson insists on a general parity of the offices, cf. *op. cit.* 80. However, differences in rank manifest themselves also in the constitution of the presbytery and assemblies: "Ministers are standing members of all church courts," 115. This is not true of ruling elders.

[42] There is some ambiguity in the OPC statement on this point. The statement refers to the "delegated authority of the presbyterate" which, while subject to Christ and to the apostolic testimony, is seen as "nevertheless supreme in this sphere of government". However, there is no delegated authority outside of congregational approbation, and hence the notion of "supremacy" in a specific "sphere" appears to unduly limit the more subtle interconnections and interactions of ecclesiastical government as presented in the

scriptural evidence. Scripture speaks of the authority of the council of elders (_____), but this authority is mediated through the congregation as an instrumental channel (cf Acts 14:13), and cannot be regarded as absolute or "supreme" in this context.

[43] Still another difference arises here between the Presbyterian system and continental Reformed church governmental practice which is not to be disregarded: in the continental tradition the officer's power is categorically limited to the local congregation. In Presbyterianism, on the other hand, the officer takes his invested (ordained) power with him to all church courts, cf. *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, 218, 219, 226. See also note 23

above. The background to this viewpoint seems to be that according to classical Presbyterianism, the ordinary power of jurisdiction comes to the presbytery first of all, not the local church, see S. Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries or, A Peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland, etc,* (London, 1644) 301, 302

[4444] A Kuyper, *Tractaat van de Reformatie der kerken* (Amsterdam: Höveker & zoon, 1884) 33, 47; see also H.J. Wotherspoon and J.M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland,* second (revised) edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) 8,9

between member bodies in such a way that national communities can foster a deeper collective sense of being involved together in the work of the gathering of the one catholic church of God. This is best realized through cooperation in those areas where member churches have common interests and a common goal – the most specific example being the work of the world-wide mission of the gospel and the training for the ministry and missionary outreach.

2.2.5 The Role of Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The above is not intended in any way to detract from the necessary role of the ecclesiastical assemblies as divinely instituted means in order to preserve and maintain unity and concord in the church of Christ. While the continental Reformed, and particularly the Dutch Reformed, have always sought to distance themselves from any leaven of hierarchy in church government, at the same time they have sought to avoid the extremes of independentism and congregationalism. The churches' assemblies, including their broader assemblies, are, by virtue of mutual agreement, authoritative in their own right, and not simply to be regarded as advisory bodies. While we cannot insist on any specific form these assemblies must take on the basis of the scriptural data, one may assert that the existence of assemblies per se is a divine mandate (*jus divinum*) for the church. One can deduce from the meeting described in Acts 15, from Paul's own labours for the churches in common, and from the unity inherent in the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor, that cooperative fellowship in the concrete form of assemblies held in order to resolve common problems and issues of mutual concern is a binding law for the churches of Christ.[45]

Particularly the importance of the broader assemblies as instruments for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity cannot be underestimated. Synods or assemblies on the regional and national levels serve to maintain the Reformed doctrine, and to guard the church against the errors of spiritual apostasy or binding above Scripture. It belongs to the province of these assemblies, in dealing with matters brought forward lawfully for their consideration, to test issues in the light of Scripture, and in doing so, uphold the confessional standards of the church as a living confession which are always tested in the light of Scripture and augmented where necessary according to Scripture. It is through the vehicle of brotherly concord or *consensus* that confessional truth is reasserted and articulated, and peace, unity and fraternal harmony are preserved.[46]

2.2.6 The Life of the Church

With the blueprint charted above it will be clear that the unity of the church is a visible and functioning reality primarily on the local level, but at the same time extending to the whole world. Local congregations manifest most clearly the living service (*diakonia*) and gifts (*charismata*) of the believers and the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*). Through living fellowship

---

[45] For a detailed discussion of the scriptural evidence see J. Kamphuis, "The Calling and Duty to Maintain the Church Federation" in J. De Jong (ed.) *Bound Yet Free. Readings in Reformed Church Polity*, (Winnipeg: Premier, 1995) 203-249. The original article, entitled "Roeping en recht tot oefening van het kerkverband" appeared in *Verkenningen III. Opstellen over kerk en kerkrecht* (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1966) 59-130

[46] For a discussion of the factor of consensus in the advance and codification of church doctrine, see J. Kamphuis, *In dienst van de vrede. De kerkelijke consensus als dogmatisch factor* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1980) 71-78

(*koinonia*) the church shows its face to the world. But the unity of the church is also realised on a national and international level, and particularly in areas such as mission and education for ministry, the church relies heavily both on federative and international cooperation, which are important vehicles for manifesting the unity of the body of Christ.

2.2.6.1 The church as missionary body

One of the ways to show the ecumenical face of the church is the avenue of missionary activity. Given the nature of this work and the costs involved, churches need to think in terms of pooling resources to create more effective means of outreach in foreign settings. At the same time, these outreach activities should respect the limitations of church power and the essential prerogatives of the local churches. Essentially, to adequately ensure the involvement of all, *all local churches* need to be missionary churches. However, local churches cooperating together in federational ties, or in internationally established liaisons, can be a way of shaping not only a more productive missionary enterprise, but also fostering the unity of the church in both its national and international manifestations.

2.2.6.2 The church as pastoral and teaching fellowship

Another important function of the church is its local outreach. It must show its love for outsiders in offering leadership and guidance to a lost and broken world, especially in its current postmodern context. In other words, in local and regional settings, the church will seek to be an institution of evangelism, holding forth the gospel of Christ as the healing salt for the lost and those estranged from Christian values and beliefs. In this more limited sense one can

speak of being the church "for others" and the church for the world, without thereby detracting from the continued task of mutual edification, internal training and Christian apologetics.

The older continental Church Order specified that one of the duties of elders was to "exhort others to the regular profession of the Christian religion."[47] The provision obviously envisioned a situation in which the church as the leading religious institution in the community felt a deep sense of responsibility for all the citizens of the community. The development of greater religious freedom and the birth of denominationalism preclude such a specific church order provision today. However, the essential principle embodied in the old provision should be maintained. The church must be an outreach community, appealing to neighbours with the love of Christ. This instruction will invariably include the pastoral and ministerial elements setting forth pathways to healing and nurture in cooperation with civil agencies designed to provide assistance in the midst of brokeness and suffering – especially that brokeness and suffering so characteristic of modern day inner cities.

Efforts also need to be undertaken to reach out to various ethnic communities that have taken shape within the current post-christian and postmodern context of our western apostatised culture. Every effort should be expended to demonstrate that the Christian values underlying some of the deeply rooted traditions in western culture still live among those who take the gospel message seriously,

and that these vibrant communities of Christians are ready to assist and instruct migrant communities concerning the way of life in Jesus Christ.[48] This will involve active evangelism teams under the supervision of elders, along with supporting diaconal agencies. Precisely such an outward directedness of the local congregation aids in preventing factionalism, and fosters the cause of internal unity and spiritual growth. Since projects of this nature will invariably involve several congregations, such an outward focussed perspective will also serve to strengthen regional and national ties.

2.2.6.3 The church as diaconal community

A third way the church shows its witness in the world is as a diaconal community. The church must be eager to extend the love of Christ beyond the borders of the church to fellow human beings, especially those who are burdened under the yoke of suffering and hardship near to the gatherings of God's people. A nurturing community will also be a sharing community, showing the love of Christ not simply in words but especially in deeds. This will involve a specific and separately administered diaconal component to the outreach ministry of the local church. It must show the love of Christ to the broken and the lost, and especially seek, in the context of the announcement of the

scriptural patterns to spiritual healing, to confirm the call to salvation and the riches of the promise with tangible gifts of mercy that project the image of the church as a caring community and a haven of hope in a lost world. Here again, the cooperation of congregations working together will serve to promote internal spiritual growth and foster the strengthening of regional and national ties.

3.0 Practical Considerations

The foregoing may allow a number of more practical considerations to be set forth.

3.1 Unity and proclamation

Holding to our starting point that unity is a divine gift granted to the church, it must be clear that this gift is not maintained through human effort first of all but through the working of the divine Word. Unity in the local congregations is essentially shaped by the chief mark of the presence of God (*presentia Dei*) in the church, that is, the true preaching of the word. The Second Helvetic confession says: [W]hen this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed..."[49] It is the Word active in the presence of the congregation that binds hearts into one will and purpose, and unites souls in the worship of God's name.

However, this implies that the Word must be, as the older terminology has it, "rightly divided." Often in circumstances where widespread dissensions and factions exist in a local congregation, the fault lies in the way the Word has been expounded and applied. It is crucial for preachers to isolate the intention of

---

[47] See Church Order of Dort, Article 23. I am quoting the American translation of the 1618-1619 edition as found in D.J. Meeter, *Meeting Each Other in Doctrine, Liturgy and Government* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 70

[48] Here the church puts its catholicity into practice. Note in this regard the remark of J. Faber, *Essays*, 93-94: "Also the catholicity of the church is grounded in the work of God the Father, in His work of creation – the unity of the human race – and in His work of re-creation. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn 3:16). Can there be a stronger motive for the catholicity of the church than this world-wide love of God? God will be everything to everyone, all in all (1 Cor 15:28). Is there a more embracing aim for the catholic church?"

[49] Quoting from A. C. Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1966) 225

the Holy Spirit (*intentio Spiritus sancti*) in any text of Scripture, and to allow this intention to guide them in sermon preparation. It is particularly harmful for a congregation when a preacher has allowed himself to harbour a specific theological mental construction, and has begun to preach various texts of Scripture within the grid-lock of his previously adopted and self-crafted theological construction. The minister must not impose a particular perspective on the text, but must let the truth of the text emerge from Scripture, all in accordance with the context, the canon, and the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*). Even in situations where preachers are bound by subscription to the Reformed standards, the preacher's own theological constructions can have such a dominating impact that the preaching yields greater polarization and factionalism in both local and national settings. Rightly dividing the word is the first rule of maintaining the true unity of the church.

3.2 Unity and liturgy

Churches stemming from the Reformation are known to maintain a strict allegiance to Scripture in the adoption of their forms of worship. They reject the position that all things not forbidden in Scripture are lawful for worship, and take the view that worship must comprise what Scripture commands. This results in worship practices that are reverent, focussed on the preaching of the gospel and the greater glory of God.

This principle has been worked out in different ways in the Reformed and Presbyterian world. In the continental tradition there has been a greater willingness to adopt human or man-made regulations and customs with regard to the life of worship, as long

as these do not conflict with the order and rule that Christ has instituted. Hence not only the songs and hymns, but also liturgical forms and prayers as well as regulations for the afternoon services have been adopted by these churches. This differs markedly from the Presbyterian tradition, which has always been hesitant with regard to the adoption of specific formularies, and allows the ministers greater freedom in the way the sacraments are administered and worship is conducted.

In our view, the possession of a church book with a common binding to the use of adopted liturgical forms and with the adoption of a specific tradition of psalmody all serves to enhance the unity and fellowship of the churches together in one federation. The church order of Dort provides for the adoption of specific metrical psalms and hymns, regular catechetical preaching according to the Heidelberg Catechism, and services on days of commemoration.[50] Since the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), the churches have also adopted suggested orders of liturgy commonly in use, and all churches follow the adopted orders. All this serves to promote unity of practice among various local churches, and to curb the tendency to develop churches of a specific persuasion or modality.

---

[50] On the issue of catechetical preaching and its advantages, see N.H. Gootjes, "Catechism preaching" *Proceedings ICRC 1993* Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications) 131-163. It may help to point out that the early Scottish Protestant tradition was also characterized by regular catechetical preaching, cf. James K. Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline. With Introduction and Commentary,* (Edinburgh: the Saint Andrew Press, 1972) 181-182. See also G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 33. See also W. McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550-1638. The Hastie Lectures in the University of Glasgow,* (London, James Clark and Co., 1931), 133-135.

At the same time we need to respect the freedom of different traditions to develop their own liturgical patterns especially in the ministry of worship and praise. There should be such a deep respect for the freedom of exegesis that churches united in international cooperation would refuse to bind each other to any one form of praise or ministry of worship and song. The only binding rule should be one of allegiance to the teaching of Scripture and conformity to the confessions, a position which would rule out those songs or hymns containing expressions deviating from God's Word.

3.3 Unity and ethics

The practice of unity in local contexts requires great magnanimity in dealing with each other as members of one body. Churches of the Reformed family have always defended the principle of Christian freedom. This implies that the conscience may not be bound in any ethical matter beyond the call and dictates of the Word of God. With respect to daily activities and the pursuit of one's calling one may freely live out his calling in the world with no constraint placed by any ecclesiastical body.

However, for the sake of the unity of the body, self-imposed restraints to Christian freedom will invariably be applied. One must never let himself be bound by another's conscience in the flock of Christ, 1 Cor 10:29. At the same time one must consciously avoid putting a stumbling block in his fellow believer's way, (1 Cor 10: 32,33; Rom 14:21). The ethics of Paul's letters here charts a code of conduct by which, in the framework of genuine personal freedom, individual sacrifices in conduct are made for the greater unity and well-being of the body and the mutual support and

upbuilding of the whole.[51]

Paul's words as applied to individuals can also be applied to churches in their mutual relationships. Given the deeply rooted historical traditions that make up churches of the Reformed family, it is only a matter of forbearance, respect and mutual love that churches will allow each other the freedom to live out their calling in the world without in any way instituting overarching legally binding regulations that could form stumbling blocks in the pathway of local churches.

3.4 Unity and catechesis

The continental tradition in the Reformed churches is marked by the institution of Reformed ecclesiastical catechesis, an extensive program designed to train young people in the Christian faith. Reformed catechesis is the tool through which young people are schooled in the church's confession and the doctrine of the Scripture to the point that they may present themselves for admission to holy communion.

The Reformed tradition has always understood catechesis to comprise training in the catholic faith as summarized in the Apostles' Creed in accordance with the doctrine as developed in the Reformed churches.[52] This doctrine was then later embodied in the Reformed confessions called the Three Forms of Unity. These confessions can perhaps more

exactly be called the Three Forms of Unanimity, or the three formulae engendering and promoting unity. The very name of the confessions was chosen to point out that the church's unity is founded entirely in the binding power of the church's doctrine, and reflected only a fraternal agreement or common assent to this doctrine which was then put into common practice in the life of the churches.[53] The confession itself forms a concordat or bond expressing the inner consensus and unity of mind represented among all who travel under its banner. This formula of concord demands allegiance of all its members and obligates them to defend and promote its terms in all situations of human life. Together the confessional forms summarize the catholic faith of the Reformed church around which true believers everywhere may be united in the Lord.

The implications of this principle for catechesis are too numerous for us to work out in this paper. However, it may suffice to point out that Reformed catechesis is an instrument not only designed to pass on the heart of the good news to successive generations, but also bind young believers together in common commitment to Christ, expressed by adhering to the scriptural testimony summarized in the Reformed confessions. Precisely the institution of Reformed catechesis forms the best refutation of that ill-conceived slogan: "Deeds unite, doctrine divides." In fact, only doctrine unites in a manner that truly endures through time.

In the Reformed churches officers are bound to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity while members in confessing their faith

give a public testimony of adherence to the Apostles' Creed as presented in the teaching of the ministry. Implicit in this public confession is that the Three Forms of Unity embody the teaching of Scripture, that is, the testimony of the catholic faith as it was handed down through the generations. In this way, new generations of young believers profess their unity with the catholic church of all ages.

3.5 Unity and truth

In the practical affairs of the church, officers are obligated to hold the congregation to the true confession, and at the same time to ensure that as much as possible the congregation lives and grows in harmony and peace. In the every day life of the local congregation, it is not always easy to balance these apparently contradictory demands. While compromise of the truth is wrong in every case, there must be a genuine willingness to pursue the truth in a spirt of love and understanding. That also includes much forbearance, temperance and patience in dealing with each other. Not every sin needs to be punished with ecclesiastical discipline. Members who espouse opinions deviating from the confessional standards of the churches, can, if these matters are on lesser points of doctrine, remain full members of the flock, as long as they do not propagate their opinions and are willing to be taught. Here the church maintains the call to unity, not as a pursuit of unity for its own sake, but unity for Christ's sake, who in gathering his church is also merciful to the weak, and deals gently with human failings and shortcomings. Our love for the truth will always recognize that believers as human beings have "great weaknesses" which need to be dealt with in a spirit of compassion and mutual trust.

3.6 Unity and tolerance

---

[51] On these passages, M. Van Beveren says: "[I]f Christian liberty does not include love for the brother, it is no liberty at all." Cf. M. Van Beveren "The Strong and the Weak in Paul's Letters" *Koinonia*, Vol. 4 , no.1 (1981) 10. In these matters, it is the way of *love* which shapes and preserves unity in the flock.

[52] The reference to the Apostles' Creed should preferably be retained in the continental Reformed (Dutch) liturgical forms, see G. Van Rongen, "Unity of Faith and Church Unity in Historical Perspective" in idem, *The Church*, 182-183

[53] J. Kamphuis, "Eénheid en 'enigheid'" in *Nader Bekeken* Vol. 2, no. 11 (November 1995) 275-277

Dealing judicially with the flock also requires a measure of sound Christian tolerance. J. Kamphuis has shown that the church needs to oppose that idea of tolerance and toleration which has its root and basis in man, and in which man is seen as the measure of all things. Such a view of tolerance is based on the fictitious notion of human self -autonomy; hence it soon manifests itself as the most virulent form of intolerance when issues of truth and justice are at stake.[54] Toleration as was practised, for example, by the Remonstrants, is something the church must strive to avoid.

However, all this does not detract from the call to practise Christian toleration according to the principles of God's Word. Christian toleration entails respect for each other's histories and traditions even if on several points there are marked differences. To be sure, honest and honourable interaction may well require special provisions by which cooperative relationships can be regulated in different situations for the greater stability, unity and betterment of the individual members of the whole. However, even where additional qualifying regulations have been established, churches of a common family should seek to establish cooperative relationships as much as possible, especially those which offer opportunities for greater understanding and mutual encouragement.[55]

4.0 Conclusions

---

[54] J. Kamphuis, "Remarks on Church and Tolerance" *Proceedings of the ICRC September 1-9, 1993* (Neerlandia, Inheritance, 1993) 213-226

[55] For a proposal regarding qualified regulations for the church body to which I belong, the Canadian Reformed Churches see J. De Jong "Sister Church Relationships and the Church Order" *Clarion* Vol. 48 #5 (March 5, 1999) 98-100.

It may be helpful in the interest of further discussion to formulate some conclusions to which this study directs us:

4.1 Doctrinal conclusions

4.1.1 While the essence of the unity of the church is spiritual, the visible, structural and organizational aspects of this unity cannot be relegated to a secondary level, as if they are of lesser importance. The spiritual unity drives true believers to realize this unity in concrete structural and organizational channels.

4.1.2 While we avoid a formal distinction between the church visible and the church invisible, these are two aspects of the church which are present at all times, and both aspects must be factored into a scriptural view of the unity of the church.

4.1.3 All attributes of the church include both a real and normative dimension, that is, attributes which always exist among his people from God's side form for believers, in their situation of the ongoing battle with sin and brokeness, norms for them to pursue and put into practice through a life of self-denial and determined, concrete acts of obedience.

4.1.4 Unity as an attribute cannot be distinguished from any other attribute of the church, but belongs in close harmony with the other attributes, and remains intertwined with them. Therefore, promoting true ecumenicity will require conscious attention to all attributes of the church.

4.1.5 The scriptural images of the church demand a unity which is both vibrant and ordered, a living dynamic reality in the context of the implementation of the scriptural norms for the administration of the means of grace, and the supervision and government of the church.

4.1.6 The catalyst in a vibrant unity is the spiritually motivated and scripturally required "will to ecumenism" which is an essential mark of true believers. The will to ecumenism, while recognizing and working within the context of the gains granted in history in terms of unity in the truth, will always seek to foster deeper and broader channels of unity in accordance with the eschatological focus of the church's mission.

4.1.7 We need to recognize God's hand in the historical continuum of the gathering of the assembly of God's people. Just as all God's deeds through human beings are marked by a real and conscious entry into our historical continuum, so the work of the Spirit in the church represents an ongoing gathering in history towards the perfection of the kingdom of God.

4.2 History and Government

4.2.1 Respect for various strands in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition implies that forced or premature confessional harmonisations are neither necessary nor desirable. Continued investigation and study in the various issues of polity and structure can and should be discussed in a climate of mutual acceptance and cooperation. In practice, points of similarity often outweigh points of dissimilarity, and in some cases, there may be more convergence in practice than evident in a collected set of stated provisions on church government.

4.2.2 Clarity needs to be gained in the area of the nature and exercise of church power. Ultimately all church power is the functioning of the power of the Word of Christ among his flock. However, in practice this requires a carefully delineated view concerning the agents of church power and their relation to each other.

4 2.3 Scripture highlights the local church as the primary agent of the exercise of church power. Patterns of church government must recognize this priority and draw out its implications for polity and practice in the daily life of the churches. The primary experience of the unity of the church for the believer is the relationship maintained with the local congregation. Maximum effort must be maintained by all officers to preserve and foster this unity first of all.

4.2.4 Broader assemblies are crucial to the well-being of the church, and form a necessary and important channel for providing mutual help and support among churches. However, the power of these assemblies must always be seen as secondary to that given to the local churches. Binding decisions can be made by broader assemblies only if they are faithful to Scripture and serve to enhance the well-being and growth of the local churches.

4.2.5 Ecumenical or international assemblies can be of great service to the church, but, given the constraints of language, race and culture, they are most serviceable as non-binding forms of discussion and mutual encouragement.

4.2.6 The church needs to be and remain a missionary church, showing its face to the world, and turning to the world with its life-saving message. Next to internal upbuilding and solidification in catholic doctrine, the church must reach out to the lost and suffering with the gospel of peace and healing. This includes the neighbour far away, through mission enterprises, and the neighbour nearby through evangelism programs developed and maintained in local churches. Precisely this bi-focussed vision of the church is an integral factor in preserving and fostering its unity.

4.2.7 Churches of a common family and background existing within one geographical area or national entity ought to promote the greatest forms of fellowship and unity possible. This implies that churches upholding the same confessional standards within one geographical area should pursue merger, or federative unity. The Reformed view of the church as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity mandates believers in this direction.[56]

4.3 Practical Conclusions

4.3.1 The means of grace should be maintained in a way that fosters as much as possible the true unity of the church. This can only happen when the preaching of the Word expounds the text according to the intention of the Holy Spirit.

4.3.2 Catechetical preaching aids in promoting the unity of the church, and congregations which seek to maintain a Reformed heritage need to reflect on the merits of this means of maintaining and teaching true doctrine. It should be coupled with an extensive program of ecclesiastical training designed to lead young members to profession of faith.

4.3.3 For the sake of the unity of the congregation and the unity of the congregations together, church discipline must be applied with great moderation and patience. Admonitions need to be based on Scripture and done in love for the well-being of the flock.

4.3.4 In the interests of promoting unity in worship, the principle of Christian freedom should be factored into the determination of the structure and practice of the Reformed liturgy. At the same time, worship should be based on the norms of Scripture, and should not include binding the conscience to human "inventions or laws" above Scripture, (Article 32, Belgic Confession).

4.3.5 The leadership of the church must consciously avoid placing any stumbling blocks in the way of members, just as members must consciously avoid placing stumbling blocks on each other's way. This principle of Christian freedom best promotes the unity and well-being of the flock.

4.3.6 The church must be engaged in its evangelism task in order to function as a living light in the community in which it lives. Active involvement in local or regional outreach programs under the leadership of local councils can also be a positive means for fostering unity at the local level.

4.3.7 One essential aspect of the church's missionary task concerns the ongoing "creation of the one new man in the place of two," Eph 2:20. The culmination of the missionary enterprise, also in the interchange between Jew and Gentile, will result in the perfection of God's goals concerning the building and creation of the "one new man", the eschatological united family of God formed after the image of Christ.

---

[56] For a summary of the continental confessional statement on the church as it relates to the pursuit of ecclesiastical (federative) unity with other Reformed bodies, see J. De Jong, "Theses Concerning the Doctrine of the Church as Confessed by the Canadian Reformed Churches in Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession" *Clarion* Volume 48, no. 16 (August 6, 1999) 373-374 with *Clarion* Volume 48 no. 17 (August 20, 1999) 402

Dr. James de Jong is Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Church-es. Our thanks to Dr. de Jong for permission to reprint this paper, presented at the 2001 ICRC, in *Ordained Servant*

Rudiments of Preparing an Expository Sermon

by

Larry Wilson

I suspect that many Orthodox Presbyterian pastors could give better instruction than what follows. I know that a great deal more could be said. But there may also be some benefit in a brief overview of rudiments of preparing an expository sermon. What follows is a survey of steps that I more or less follow in my own preparation. I hope that this can be a helpful model for others, especially for men getting started in preaching.

1. **Prayerfully choose a text. Pray for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.**

2. **Read the whole book to get a basic grasp of its overall themes and structure.** (This is one reason why there is practical value in preaching through entire books, or sections of books.)

3. **Translate the text. Compare various English translations.** (I find it helpful at this point to print the text in a column on the left side of a page and to keep jotting down notes as I go.)

4. **Prayerfully read, reread, and meditate on the text in its context.**
    (a) Exegete the text using sound principles of interpretation:
       (i) Simplicity (look for the *natural* sense)
           Pay attention to common rules of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax.
           Study key words.
           Pay attention to figures of speech.
       (ii) History (look for the *original* sense)
           Consider the situation (e.g., when? Where? To whom? Why?)
           Consider the style (e.g., prose or poetry? Narrative or didactic? History or prophecy?)
       (iii) Harmony (look for the *general* sense)
    Interpret Scripture by Scripture. In particular, interpret what is unclear by what is clear. Interpret narrative texts in light of didactic texts.
           Study your text in its context:
           • immediate (paragraph, chapter, book)
           • ultimate (the whole Bible and its unfolding covenant)
    (b) Try to get a clear grasp of the basic point of the text in its context ("the melodic line," Dick Lucas; "the big idea," John Chapman). Keep asking: why does God say this particular thing at this particular point in this particular way?
    (c) Keep mulling over the text, prayerfully asking questions like:
       (i)   What does God reveal in this particular text about himself, the living God?
       (ii)   What does he reveal about Jesus Christ, the covenant Mediator?
       (iii) What does he reveal about his covenant, and his covenant community (the church)?
       (iv)   What does he reveal about the believer ("the indicative," what I am and have by God's grace in Christ) and his responsibility ("the imperative," how I should believe and behave by God's grace in Christ)?
       (v)   Are there truths to believe? Commands to obey? Warnings to heed? Promises to claim?
       (vi)   What current sins, problems, and needs do I have that this text speaks to?
       (vii) What current sins, problems, and needs does the congregation have that this text speaks to?

5. **Try to identify the central thrust of the text in relation to the paragraph, chapter, section, book, and period of redemptive history in which it is found.** (As you go keep jotting down your thoughts.)

6. **See what others have said about this text.**
    (a) Consult commentaries.
    (b) Consult biblical theologies. Use Scripture indexes.
    (c) Consult systematic theologies, creeds, and other books. Use Scripture indexes.

7. **Summarize in one sentence the central thrust (theme) of the text in its context.** Make this the central thrust or theme of your sermon. Many sermons are much less effective than they could be because the preacher "scatters his shot" too widely. Many a Christian father, at Lord's Day family worship, asks his wife and children, "What was the sermon about?". If the preacher himself cannot give a pithy, pointed answer to that question, how can Christ's little ones be expected to?

8. **Continue prayerfully to meditate on the text in light of that theme.** Consider how God calls us to respond. Ask questions like: "Who? What? Why? How?"

9. **Develop an outline in sensitivity to the text and in light of its theme and your answers the above questions.** Let the text—God's inspired Word—drive your outline. Arrange your points—whether they be two, three, or four—to be "subordinate to the theme, coordinate with each other, and collectively, so far as possible, exhaustive of the text" (R. B. Kuiper). Think of your theme as a nail and your sermon outline points as hammer blows to drive that one theme in.

10. **Develop the body of the sermon.**
    (a) Flesh out your sermon outline. Develop and expand your points. Keep prayerfully meditating on your text. Make sure that your points reinforce your theme. Make sure that they honestly explicate your text.
    (b) Illustrate. What stories, particularly from common human experience, biblical history, and church history could be useful to illuminate the meaning of this text to the need of this congregation? Make sure that your illustrations genuinely help to point to and shed light on your text.
    (c) Consider:
        (i) Does my sermon genuinely explicate the text? Will my hearers be able to follow my exposition and see my theme and my sermon points *in their own Bibles?*
        (ii) Do I clearly preach Christ from my text? Will my listeners hear the gospel of God's grace in Christ? Will they be able to see it *in their own Bibles?*
        (iii) Will a young Christian or covenant child be able to understand and profit from this sermon?
        (iv) If I had only half the time, what would I cut out? What would I leave in?
    (d) All the while, keep praying and responding to your Lord's self-disclosure in faith, repentance, and consecration.

11. **Review, revise, and prepare for delivery.**
    (a) Complete the body of your sermon.
    (b) Write the conclusion to your sermon (drive home the theme and its application).
    (c) Finally, write the introduction to your sermon (get interest and introduce the theme)

Keep praying earnestly for the Lord's gracious blessing on the proclamation and hearing of his Word.

After more than a decade of service as Pastor of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio, Larry Wilson was called to serve as General Secretary of our Committee on Christian Education. Because of his love for preaching it was not easy for Larry to say 'yes.' This article—which was written for this issue of *Ordained Servant* in response to our request—exemplifies that love his experience in expository preaching.

AN OUTLINE OF JAY ADAMS'

"PREACHING WITH PURPOSE"

by

D. PATRICK RAMSEY

I.   The centrality of purpose.
   A.   There is so much purposeless preaching today.
   A.   Purposeless preaching has made dull preachers, hindered truth and stifled service for Christ.
   A.   Purpose ought to control the preacher's thinking and actions from start to finish in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

I.   What is preaching?
   A.   There are two kinds of preaching.
      1.   Evangelistic.
      1.   Edificational.
   A.   Elements of preaching.
      1.   Content in the form of a biblical message.
      1.   A preacher.
      1.   An occasion.
      1.   Listeners.
      1.   The Holy Spirit.
   A.   Homiletics ought to teach you:
      1.   How to remove all obstacles to preaching the truth.
      1.   How to make the message as clear as possible.
      1.   How to point the listener to Christ alone as the foundation for his belief and action.

III.   The purpose of preaching.
   A.   The purpose of preaching is to effect changes among the congregation.
      1.   I Cor. 14:3 states that the purposes of preaching are edification, assistance and encouragement.
      1.   Matt. 28:20 states that the purpose of preaching is to observe Christ's word.
   A.   Preaching is to effect changes among the congregation, individually and corporately.
      1.   One must be built up to love God.
      1.   One must be built up to love one's neighbors.

IV.   The purpose of preaching the Bible.
   A.   To obey God; 2 Tim. 4:2.
   A.   To preach authority.
   A.   To preach with power; Isa. 55:10-11.
   A.   To preach effectively.
   A.   To preach at all!

V.   Determining the preaching portion.
   A.   The Spirit's telos is the determining factor. A unit of material that the Spirit devotes to a particular purpose.
   A.   Both general and specific purposes need to be kept in mind in determining the telos of a particular book or passage.
      1.   The bible itself has a telos and tele.
         a.   Telos: Glory of God.
         a.   Tele: 2 Tim. 3:15-17.
      1.   Each book normally has a telos and tele.
   A.   Avoid arbitrary factors such as "preach on a paragraph".

VI.   Determining the telos.
   A.   The telos or intention of the Holy Spirit in the passage must be sought.
      1.   Includes all valid applications that the Spirit intended to make from any principles that may be generalized from the basic thrust of the passage.
      1.   Avoid at all costs imposing your own purposes on the passage.
   A.   There are three general purposes:
      1.   To inform.
      1.   To convince (to believe or disbelieve).
      1.   To motivate.
   A.   Helps to discover the purpose.
      1.   Ask, "Now, what does this all amount to?"
      1.   Look for telic cues or statements.

VII.   Analyzing the congregation.
   A.   By means of informal contacts.

1. Necessary to preach well. To preach to people as they really are, you must see and hear them as they really are.
1. Don't limit your informal contacts to a limited group. That will distort your view of the congregation. Moreover, you must be a friend to all.

A. By means of counseling contacts.
1. Necessary to preach well. Discover the problems your people are dealing with.
1. Won't truly understand a passage until you see how it is applied in your life and in the life of your congregation.

A. By means of formal contacts.
1. New church: look at old bulletins to see what has been preached.
1. Visit representative groups of persons.
1. Review your counseling records.
1. Probe your session.
1. Go over each name on the roll prayerfully and thoughtfully. Try to evaluate each person's situation as best as you can.

VIII. The preacher's stance.
A. Must distinguish between the lecturer's stance and the preachers stance toward the bible.
1. The lecturer speaks about the bible.
1. The preacher speaks from the bible about the congregation.

A. The preacher's stance.
1. Makes the Spirit's purpose his own.
1. Concerned about the here and now.
1. Speaks largely in the present tense to the congregation, about God and themselves on the basis of what God said and did to others and to them in Bible times.
1. Engages the whole person.

A. The lecturer's stance.
1. Only purpose is to inform.
1. Concerned about the past.
1. Speaks largely in the past tense and in third person.
1. Engages the intellect.

VIII. A preaching outline.
A. The purpose of an outline is to cue you to preach.
1. Preaching is speaking and thus should be extemporaneous and not written and read or written and memorized.
1. A full sentence outline is best. Provides the best of both worlds.

A. Preaching format:
1. Here and now.
1. Second person emphasis.
1. Concrete.
1. In terms of the congregation.
1. Persuasive or motivational.

A. Lecture format.
1. Then and there.
1. Third person emphasis.
1. Abstract.
1. In terms of others.
1. Informative.

A. The distinctives of a preaching outline.
1. A preaching outline is the outline of a message directed to people in order to change them in some way that God wants to see them changed.
1. A preaching outline applies from start to finish. In one sense the whole sermon is application.
1. The difference between preaching and lecturing is not the material but in the use of the same material. The handling and orientation of the material is different.

A. Important facts on outlines.
1. Place emphasis where it belongs.
1. Make sure it is a preaching outline.
1. Make sure your outline achieves its purpose by going over your conclusion.
1. Only announce your points if it serves a useful biblical purpose.
1. Don't follow the form or division of the text unless it naturally falls into preaching divisions.

VIII. Purposeful introductions.
A. The purpose of an introduction.
1. To arrest and orient the congregation to the content of the sermon.
1. To interest the congregation in the sermon.

A. How to arrest and interest the congregation.
  1. Begin with the congregation and not the text.
  1. If interest is already high begin with a statement or series of questions or both.
    a. Don't use this format in every sermon.
    a. Don't use it when there is little or no expectancy in the congregation.
    a. Don't use it when an explanation of one sort or another is in order.
  1. If interest is not high begin with a short story or a startling statement.
    a. Startling statement.
      i. Don't use it too often.
      i. Choose your words carefully.
      i. Use it only when it is needed.
      i. Maintain the high level of interest throughout the sermon. Keep these sermons brief for a greater impact.
    a. Short story, example or incident.
      i. Never use a story that does not truly introduce.
      i. Don't drag the story out too long.
      i. Use dialogue and descriptive color.
      i. Involve the congregation in the story.
        (A) Tell a story about the congregation itself.
        (A) Tell a story about something or someone in which the congregation is interested.
        (A) Tell a story and then at its conclusion, in one sentence, apply it to the congregation.
  1. "In the introduction, economy is of the essence."

  1. Introductions will often come to you at the end of your preparation.

VIII. Purposeful conclusions.
  A. Conclusions are extremely important.
  A. How not to conclude a sermon.
    1. Do not introduce new material in the conclusion.
    1. Do not have multiple conclusions.
    1. Don't end abruptly.
    1. Don't fade away.
    1. Don't fumble around looking for a way out.
    1. Don't generally, if ever, end with a verse of poetry or hymn.
  A. The conclusion either summarizes, applies or implements truth, or, as in most instances, does some or all of the above.
  A. How to conclude a sermon.
    1. Conclude in terms of the introduction.
    1. Conclude with a story: can be effective but hard to do.
    1. Conclude with a series of appeals in the form of a command or question cluster.
    1. Conclude with some sort of implementation.
  A. The purpose of the conclusion is not merely to bring the sermon to an end but to capsulize and capitalize on the sermon telos.

VIII. Evangelistic invitations.
  A. We need to urge, exhort, encourage in our preaching. We need to press for a response.
  A. "The answer, then, to the question of invitations or no invitations is: 'Give a biblical invitation to profess faith in Christ and be added to the number in baptism.' This invitation may be issued, as Peter issued it, in the evangelistic message, usually as a part of its conclusion."

VIII. Purposeful planning.
  A. Plan six months ahead.
    1. Do the exegesis and outline your sermon in rough form.
    1. Gather illustrations and allow your thoughts to mature.

1. Put your sermon into final form a couple of weeks before you preach it.

A. Reasons for planning ahead.
   1. Allows for interruptions and emergencies during the week.
   1. Gain perspective on the text.
   1. Illustrations come naturally.
   1. Gain overall view of the book you are preaching through.
   1. Solve the problems of an exegetical conscience.
   1. So you won't ride hobby horses.

VIII. Sense appeal.
A. The purpose of sense appeal is to add the dimension of reality to truth by helping them to experience what you are teaching them.
   1. There is a great difference between thinking something and experiencing it.
   1. To experience something is to engage the appropriate emotions.
   1. The preacher needs to experience the truth if he wants to move his listeners.
   1. Need to appeal to all of the senses, not just sight.
A. Emotions may be aroused by sense appeal through the use of:
   1. Evocative language.
      a. Evocativeness depends on context and audience.
      a. The Bible is full of evocative language; Eg. Prov. 25-26.
   1. Storytelling.
      a. Three types of stories.
         i. Full stories (illustrations or parables); Luke 15.
         i. Abbreviated stories (examples); Luke 13:1-5.
         i. Mini-stories (instances); Matt. 6:26,28.
      a. Elements of good stories.
         i. Contains persons in action and/or conversation.
         i. Contains dialogue.
      a. Format of a story.
         i. Background; Luke 15:11-12.
         ii. A complication or problem; Luke 15:13.
         i. Suspense; Luke 15:14-21.

i. Climax; Luke 15:22,23.
i. Conclusion; Luke 15:24.
   a. The purpose of stories.
      i. To clarify truth.
      ii. To concretize and personalize truth, integrating principles with life today.
      ii. To make truth memorable.
      ii. To demonstrate how a principle works.
      ii. To back a claim.
      ii. To create interest.
      ii. To involve the listener.
   1. Sound.
   1. Gestures and other bodily actions.

VIII. Gathering storytelling materials.
A. Requires structure and practice.
   1. Limit yourself to the study for six months.
   1. Gather 2 illustrations every day using all of your senses.
   1. Don't limit yourself to the unusual or sensational. Use the common and ordinary.
   1. Rework them on Saturday.
      a. Put them into better form (arrangement and language).
      a. Make new uses or applications of the material.
A. Use materials in books, magazines and newspapers.
A. Avoid books of illustrations and examples and stories in other men's sermons.
   1. Makes you lazy and dependent.
   1. Find your own material! More genuine!
A. Don't use the Bible illustratively, only authoritatively.

VIII. A preaching style.
A. Styles to avoid.
   1. 'Preachy' (KJV language) style.
   1. 'Scholastic' style.
   1. 'Conversational' style. Poor grammar and vocabulary.
A. "A good preaching style is a plain (but not drab), unaffected (but not unstudied) style that gets in there and gets the job done without calling attention to itself."
A. How to better use the vocabulary you already have.

1. Be concrete. Avoid abstractions.
2. Be precise. Choose the exact term.
3. Be ruthless. Get rid of poor words, phrases etc.
4. Be persistent. Practice.

IX. Counseling and preaching.
A. Counseling uncovers problems in persons preachers must know about.
   1. Excuse making.
   2. Lack of discipline.
   3. Presence of complicating problems.
   4. Failure to repent.
B. Knowledge of counseling principles will be useful to the preacher.
   1. See *Ready to Restore*, pp. 32-38.
   2. Eg. Change is a two-factored process.
C. Implementation of biblical truth ('How to') is just as important in preaching as it is in counseling; Matt. 5-7.

X. Application of truth.
A. The Bible itself is application. God did not reveal truth in the abstract and left it up to the preacher to 'apply it'. God delivered His message not only toward the original audience but also toward the church in all ages to follow; Rom. 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 9:8-10; Rom. 15:4.
B. Therefore, it is God's task to apply the Scriptures, not the preachers'. The preacher's task is to discover what that application is and to translate the passage into contemporary forms.
C. Need to separate the basic and ongoing factors from those of the temporary and incidental.

XI. The Purpose of implementation.
A. The purpose of implementation is to enable the congregation to obey (implement) the thrust of your sermon.
B. In implementing biblical truth it is important to distinguish plainly between biblical commands, principles, practices, biblically directed 'how to' and suggested biblically derived 'how to' devised from the preacher.

XII. Preaching Christ.
A. Moralism (legalistic, ignores the grace of God and replaces the work of Christ with self-help) must be avoided in preaching.
B. All you say and do in preaching must be related to Christ; it must be related to His saving and His sanctifying work.

XIII. Delivery and purpose.
A. Delivery or manner (voice and body) is important because it communicates a certain message.
B. What to work on in delivery:
   1. Not allowing personal practices to get in the way of the message.
   2. A flexibility in the use of voice and body broad enough to match the wide spectrum of biblical teaching.
   3. A willingness to allow the biblical content to determine how your voice and body will respond, regardless of what that requires.
C. "The delivery you should seek is a delivery that is formed, informed and influenced by God's truth. The best preacher is the one who allows his voice and body to become a well-tuned instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit."

We are confident that most of the readers of *Ordained Servant* will already be familiar with the writings of Dr. Jay Adams. We thank him for permission to publish this outline of his fine book (which has the same title as the title of this outline). We also thank Rev. Ramsey for the work he did to produce this outline. We think it could help many of us to review 'what we are (or are not) doing when we preach.' We also hope it will encourage you to get the original and read it.

WHAT RULING ELDERS CAN DO TO PROMOTE BETTER PREACHING

by

Edwin J. Kreykes

The Apostle Paul left these words of instruction to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 20:28-31:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood…. Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock….Therefore watch."

With these words, the Apostle sets a standard to which all elders are called. God does not ask for men who are necessarily well equipped, articulate, friendly, or educated. The Lord asks for men who are faithful. The Lord calls to office and He equips for office. Our duty as elders is to uphold the standard for faithful office, keeping true to the requirements the Bible outlines. This does not mean, however, that elders have no obligation to read, study and dig deep into the Word of God and the Confessions of the Church for instruction. The elder who thinks he can fly by the "seat of his pants" is often ill suited for the office. While experience can be a very good teacher and the examples supplied by older and more experienced men can be very helpful, it is still necessary and desirable for elders to take it upon themselves to strive to become more knowledgeable in terms of "book learning" to be able to better fulfill the duties of their office.

With this in mind, I would like to address a trend that is often seen in many churches which in my opinion amounts to the elders abdicating much of the responsibility of their office to the minister. Many times the minister is overloaded with administrative duties and the many details it takes to keep a church running smoothly. The minister is not the C.E.O. of the church!

The primary task of the church is the preaching of the Word of God. Therefore, the primary task of the elder is the oversight of the preaching. While ministers of the church are trained, examined, and ordained to carry out this task, the elders are deeply involved as well. It is each elder in the local consistory or session that is responsible for what is said from the pulpit. This is where the conflict often comes between seeing the minister as C.E.O. versus his real calling as pastor. A minister who does not have the time to spend in his study will not be able to faithfully preach the whole word of God.

Preaching is not done in a vacuum. The faithful minister expounds and applies a portion of the Scriptures to the daily life and needs of the congregation. In order to do this the minister must be busy in his study using the tools essential to Biblical interpretation that his education has taught him to use. Elders as well must have some idea as to what these tools are and how

they are to be used. If elders are not so equipped, possibly part of elders' meetings could be used to educate and inform on this subject.

Elders must help the minister in knowing the needs of the congregation. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 *"Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and patience."* How can a minister do this without knowing the needs of the congregation? The elders are to assist the eyes and ears of the minister in this task. A minister may deliver a sermon that is beautifully phrased, exegetically correct, and orthodox in doctrine, but if he fails to apply it to the daily life of his congregation it becomes a lecture instead of a sermon. An awareness of the daily lives of the people and a finger on the pulse of the congregation is the discipline needed by the minister, with help from the elders, to pursue his weekly study and sermon preparation. A wise eldership not only can but must evaluate, critique, and give guidance where necessary to see that this discipline is being carried out by the minister in the quiet of his study.

Often elders have the feeling of being inadequate to the task of evaluating the preaching of the Word. This seems to be even truer today when we are faced with the prospect of being at odds with the "experts". In many parts of our lives those that

have advanced training or knowledge may intimidate everyone else. To counteract this feeling of intimidation we must remember what the term "elder" actually means. This term has acquired its universal respect over time from the fact that knowledge alone does not necessarily make one wise. Knowledge with experience leads to wisdom and the acquiring of wisdom takes time. Time spent living in obedience to God's Law, studying the Scriptures, and sitting under the faithful preaching of the Word. This, by the grace of God, produces wisdom and this wisdom in men leads us to respect them as elders in the best sense of the word. While the elder is the product of time, the expert is the product of training. The task of the elder is to encourage and if necessary rebuke the minister if he begins acting like the "expert" rather than a humble servant of God.

Another branch of the tree that defines the elders' responsibilities is to help the congregation understand the minister's primary task. A minister is not the coach, manager, advisor, or encourager for the whole church. It is not his task to "run the church". Too often the elders become lax and allow the minister to take on these additional duties if he is willing. This is especially true if the minister has a "take charge" type of personality. Holding back a minister like this can be a difficult part of the elder's work, but the emphasis needs to be made that the primary calling of the minister is to be in study to preach the Word. In light of this, we here at Cornerstone have made a conscious decision that a capable elder be President of the Council rather than automatically having the

minister serve in this capacity. By doing this, the congregation is more inclined to go to the President with many concerns rather than to the minister. This has helped prevent to some degree the "busy work" that often bogs down a minister and prevents sufficient study time.

While it is often assumed that the minister by virtue of education, occupation, and community recognition may exercise a higher authority in the church than does the elder; this has no foundation in the Bible. Ordination to the teaching and preaching ministry obligates the minister to the awesome responsibility of courageously and faithfully proclaiming *"the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27). Or as Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15 *"be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth".* In this responsibility the minister depends on the fervent support of the eldership. The elders' oversight of the preaching includes their encouragement to spend the necessary time in study and preparation.

While it is easy to be critical of the trend in the churches today that keeps the minister too busy to spend time in study, prayer, and sermon preparation, being negative without offering positive ideas does no good. Elders can take steps to help counter this trend while assisting the minister in his work.

Some suggestions:

1. The Bible is the guide to your relationship with the minister. The mutual commitment between elders and minister to obedience is up-

permost. Use the Bible to set your course especially if the elders and minister do not see eye to eye on things.

2. Be faithful in your oversight of the congregation and the minister including his faith and life. Do not let congregational matters slide or ignore them hoping the minister will deal with them. This is even more important in any discipline matters. The elders should always be the ones that bring admonishment when needed. This prevents the congregation from seeing the minister as the tool of the Consistory and allows him to concentrate on preaching without fear of personality conflicts. The work of the Consistory could be seen as the personal vendetta of the minister. To that end the President and the Clerk as representatives of the eldership should sign all letters that are sent from the Consistory. This is another reason for having an elder as President. Do all you can to distance the minister from difficult discipline cases. While he is a valuable resource for the elders, his primary duty lies in preaching to the whole congregation and too much involvement in specific cases can hinder this responsibility.

3. Be firm in your commitment to helping your minister to grow. All men have a need to develop and learn. Set aside money in the budget for him to use in building his library, attend conferences, continuing education and study. Encourage him to set aside time to read extensively. Ask him what he

is reading outside of sermon preparation and look at what magazines and periodicals he has in his study when you visit. Your minister is a professional, please treat him as such.

4.   Protect his time for sermon preparation and study. Preaching well is his first obligation. If he needs help in time management use the talents of the eldership in helping him. If necessary use the gifts and abilities of others in the congregation in this area as well. Encourage him to be accountable to the elders for how he spends his time. Our minister is expected to provide to the elders each month a list of the visits he has made, the books he has read, the other things he has done in addition to sermon preparation and study. This is helpful in seeing his time management in action. A young man may need more help in this area than someone with experience but do not assume that an older minister has it all together.

5.   Keep his family in mind. Do not let your minister get so overloaded that he has no time for his wife and children.

6.   Assist him in the responsibilities of teaching the congregation. This is crucial. Elders should be willing and able to teach catechism, Bible studies, and other classes and not let this fall totally on the shoulders of the minister.

7.   Be active in visits to the members. While the minister must take time to visit the congregation and get to know

the flock, the elders must be involved as well. Structured home visitation by the elders is valuable in helping guide the minister in the needs to be addressed in preaching.

8.   Anticipate the workload of the minister and be proactive in getting him help when needed. Be aware of extra busy times when he needs assistance and do not expect to get him help only when he asks for it.

9.   Be ready for the reaction that solid, Biblical preaching will evoke. To encourage this preaching without expecting consequences is naïve. *"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"* (2 Timothy 2:3). Jesus Himself says, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me they will persecute you; if they kept My work, they will keep yours also". The minister that is bold in the pulpit will generate opposition even from among the congregation. The elders must be prepared to receive complaints if they strongly encourage the minister to preach the whole truth of God. To that end the elders must be committed to stand firmly behind the minister if he is preaching the Word of God. Faithful elders must require that there be Biblical support for any complaints against the minister. Numerical church growth is not the measurement of courage in the pulpit. Elders that are timid and easily threatened by vocal members of the congregation will soon be evidenced by timid and lukewarm preaching and in time by a

lukewarm church. Be strong as elders standing on the foundation of the Scripture and the Confessions.

Preaching of the Word is the primary task of the minister. With him the elders share in the responsibility of making sure this is central in our churches. When it seems as though this task is too great lean on the Lord who supplies all of our needs. As the writer to the Hebrews comments on the duty of elders in 13:17 *"…for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give an account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief…".*

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible to God alone who is wise be honor and glory forever and ever" 1 Timothy 1:17.

References

The Holy Catholic Church and its Biblical Government by Rev. Robert Grossman (Elector Publications 1996)

Officebearer Training Materials complied and edited by Rev. Paul R. Ipema

The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders by Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster (Christian's Library Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan)

With a Shepherd's Heart by Dr. John R. Sittema (Reformed Fellowship, Inc. Grandville, Michigan 49418)

Dr. Edwin Kreykes has often served the Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Sanborn, Iowa as a ruling elder. He is a well known and highly respected Veterinarian in the Northwest Iowa region.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CATECHETICAL PREACHING

by

G.I. Williamson

One of the differences between the Continental Reformed and the Scottish Presbyterian traditions is the strong emphasis, in the former, on catechetical preaching. As one who has had experience in both traditions I write these observations with appreciation for both of these traditions, and with the conviction that both have certain inherent weaknesses.

Preaching every year under the subject guidance of the Heidelberg Catechism has several great virtues. It results in covering the content of the Christian faith as a whole in a way that is sometimes lacking in the Presbyterian tradition. I found, for example, that it was a very profitable thing to revisit the ten commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, every year. It is certainly possible, of course, to do this in such a way that people sense the heavy hand of too much repitition. But, as I hope to explain a bit further on in this article, it does not need to be this way. And it does work against the tendency that all preachers seem to have; which is to be somewhat one-sided. I think we need *more* catechectical preaching in our churches, not *less*. And there is nothing in our constitutional standards, in my judgment, that stands against this. It is also my perception that it is more and more common in our own churches to find the Heidelberg Catechism used for this purpose. And I have not found it difficult to use the Shorter Catechism in much the same way.

But in saying that we need more catechetical preaching it is very important to make clear what we mean. The editor of the Outlook (back in 1988) said: "we ought to be alert to the danger that by using the Catechism as though it were a text of the Bible, we inadvertently lead people back into the Roman Catholic error of placing church creeds and decisions beside (and, in effect, over) the Bible." That this is not a needless warning I will illustrate out of my own experience. During the early years of my ministry, as an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor in New England, I sometimes preached in Iowa during the Summer in Christian Reformed Churches. I met some wonderful people. But I also noticed an element that troubled me in the thinking of some I met—and they were invariably among the most conservative in many ways. I remember one middle-aged-couple, in particular, who said the Heidelberg Catechism was inspired by God. I could hardly believe it, and questioned them closely. But that is what they said, meant, and believed. And I think it was at least in part because they so often heard it treated as if it was. On another occasion I actually heard a Reformed pastor—in one of the soundest churches in North America—say 'the Heidelberg Catechism *is* the word of God.' To say that the Heidelberg Catechism is true to the word of God, that it is based on the word of God, and that it is a faithful summary of the word of God, etc., is one thing. But to say that it *is* the word of God is quite another.

Now in giving these two examples I do not want to suggest any deliberate attempt to move in a Romish direction, where church tradition (and that, after all, is what our Creeds and Catechisms are) is said to have the same authority as the Bible. No, but when the text of the catechism is allowed to function as the text of a catechism sermon danger is involved. I've heard catechism sermons in which the text was read—and used—as the sermon text, in virtually the same way that a bible text was read—and used—as sermon text in the other sermon of the day. I believe I am second to none in my honest love for the Heidelberg Catechism as a sound summary of Christian doctrine. But what I want—and what I need—is a sermon based on a text chosen out of the infallible word of God. Let the preacher faithfully expound *that text,* and if it ends up proving the Heidelberg Catechism to be faithful I am blessed. After all, the Apostle did not say 'preach the church's fallible word about the infallible word of God.' No, what he said is 'preach the word'—meaning the inspired and inerrant word set down in Scripture.

What I'm saying, in other words, is that Peter de Jong was right when he warned of "the danger that by using the Catechism as though it were a text of the Bible, we inadvertently lead people back into the Roman Catholic error of placing church creeds and decisions beside (and, in effect, over) the Bible." As John Murray put it: "one thing must be appreciated, namely, that tradtition—even when it is the best—has no *intrinsic* authority…This is just saying that it is never propoer to appeal to tradition as having intrinsically an authority in matters of faith or morals…tradition when right is always derived, it is never original or primary." And, continues Professor Murray, "Perhaps the best example that can be provided is that of a creed."

As Reformed Christians we need to remember that—unlike the

text of the Bible—the text of our Confession of Faith and Catechisms can be changed. As a matter of fact it *has been* changed. We only need to think of what the original text of the Westminster Confession of Faith said about the Pope, or about the powers of the Civil Magistrate, to see the point. If the Westminster Assembly had been divinely inspired, and had produced infallible documents, who cannot see that such changes would have been wrong by definition. We certainly cannot do any such thing with any part of the text of the Bible. And

right there we ought to be able to see why it is not right to preach sermons in the church of God with even the best fallible texts as the basis of our sermons.

It is my contention, therefore, that catechetical preaching ought to begin with a Scripture text. The sermon should expound that text faithfully. And then, if the catechism really is a faithful summary of what the Bible teaches, the sermon will convincingly show this. People will be convinced because they have seen proof from the word of God

that leads them to respond in the same words as the catechism—or their equivalent.

The bottom line, then, is this: the catechism is not the word of God. No, it is *our* word (corporately, as the believing church) responding in faith the word of God. So the *way in which* we do our catechism preaching is very important because we need to always make it clear that we make this important distinction.

> "…doctrinal preaching, like all preaching, must be based upon the Word of God, and that is a way of saying that it may not be based upon the creeds. Protestantism from the beginning rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of an infallible church and, therefore, has always been scrupulously careful not to place the creeds on a par with Scripture. The greatest creeds of Christendom are but fallible interpretations of Holy Writ. It does not follow that they cannot perform valuable service for preaching. They can indeed do that, for, although fallible, they are precious products of the illumination of the historic church by the Holy Spirit. Christ's promise to the apostles that the Spirit of truth would guide them into all the truth was intended for the church of all ages, and Scripture describes the generic church as "the pillar and ground of the truth." Therefore, for the minister of the gospel to stress his right of private interpretation to the practical exclusion of the illumination of the historic church deserves to be described as boundless conceit. Nevertheless, the church's interpretation of Scripture is fallible, and so its confessions of faith and catechisms can do no more than serve as helpful guides in preaching. Never may they be regarded as the source of doctrine or the touchstone of truth. Those distinctions belong to the Bible alone. And he who makes use of the creeds in preaching is in sacred duty bound to keep that fact unmistakably clear." – R.B. Kuiper (*The Infallible Word* pp. 228,229