

Ordained Servant



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ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement Of Purpose

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

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

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

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A • D • D • I • C • T • I • O • N • S

by

M. Van Luik



We live in a world where sin manifests itself in the heart of mankind, for man refuses to submit to God and enslaves himself to every form of idolatry. Addiction is a form of idolatry that takes complete control of a person's life. The goal of idolatry is enslavement. We will begin with a working definition of addiction. This definition deals with the behavior of addiction, but does not take into account the moral aspect. The purpose of this article is to provide information about addiction that will better equip the office bearers for their work.

Definition: Addiction is any substance, activity or state of mind which takes a person captive so that it becomes the center of a person's life, affecting their relationships, their work and their faith life in a detrimental way. An addiction is progressive in nature as a person becomes more and more controlled by the addiction.

Areas of Addiction: Addictions are generally divided into two categories: (1) *Substance Addiction*. These are addictions to a chemical or drug. The best known are alcohol and drugs. They can also include caffeine and nicotine commonly associated with coffee and tobacco. (2) *Process addiction*. A process addiction is not dependant on a foreign substance, but is the result of becoming hooked on a series of actions and interactions. They include areas such as eating disorders, gambling, sex, work, sports, physical exercise, romance and relationships, and religious activities. These activities are engaged in to excess in order to give a high that makes a person feel good. It affects the chemical balance of the brain to give a euphoric high, and therefore has a chemical component to it.

How Addictions Work: All addictions seek satisfaction by mind altering or physical sensations. Alcohol and drugs are chemicals that affect the brain so that it gives the person a pleasant feeling that hides the misery and drudgery of life. Addictions to sex, pornography, romance, gambling, eating, exercise etc. also affect the brain to give pleasant sensations. If something feels good it is very difficult to resist. When something *feels* good it sends the message that it must *be* good. Anything that feels good cannot be bad.

God has created us with physical needs and desires. When those needs and desires are kept in check by faith, it can lead to good and genuine pleasure. God has created us to enjoy the things of life. But addiction is an obsession for those pleasurable things of life. A person becomes enslaved to his desires so that lust takes over the heart. The sad reality is that the more a person pursues the lust of the heart, the more fleeting and elusive the pleasure they seek becomes. The pleasure lasts only as long as the high is maintained. For example, the sex addict only experiences pleasure for as long as he indulges in his perversion,

while in a good marriage relationship the sexual relationship gives lasting satisfaction, for the intimacy that is experienced is not quickly forgotten.

The addict, over a period of time, falls into a vicious circle. In the early stages of addiction, the heart demands satisfaction and for a time some satisfaction is felt. But as a person becomes more and more enslaved to his addiction, his heart increasingly demands satisfaction but never experiences it. There is the constant demand for more, but satisfaction is never felt. The result is that on the one hand the addict wants out of his addiction, yet he is unable to get out because his heart demands more. There is both loathing of the self as well as a craving for more of the same. It is a cycle extremely difficult to overcome.

End result of addiction: The heart becomes a slave to the physical demands of the body. The body rules the heart of the man. To illustrate this we can use the cravings that we all experience from time to time. Many have a craving for sweets. When you have this craving, either it must be resisted or it will be acted upon. When you see a

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tray of sweets, you may rationalize that this once you will have one; you deserve it; but tomorrow you will make up for it. Against your better judgment you take that chocolate. Another example are those who begin a diet. They start with resolve, but a few days later they stop for they're unable to discipline themselves. They will feel guilt and try again only to fail once more. That is the way an addict feels. You are not able to rationally explain your desires, for you know it is harmful to you, yet your body craves it. It is extremely difficult to deny the desires of the flesh.

We need to understand that control and self-discipline over our bodily desires is an exercise of faith that must be practiced for a life time. Everyone has experienced lapses in their own lives, but we do not become enslaved to those desires. For an addict, a lapse leads him back into a situation that he cannot control. When our idols control us, they always entice us with the promise that the next time it will be better and it will give us the satisfaction we desire. One more drink and I will be happy; one more affair and I will be satisfied; one more lottery ticket and I may get my money back or make it rich.

Living in faith means that we know the lies of the devil. Faith knows that the things of the world cannot give satisfaction, for our only comfort is found in Jesus Christ. Many addicts know this in their minds, but they do not expe-

rience it in their lives. They seek comfort in the gods of this world for they have become ensnared to her idols.

Addiction: Disease or Sin Model. *AAA and the Modern Medical approach.* Alcoholics Anonymous and modern medicine see addictions as a disease, for that seems the best way to explain the out of control factor of an addiction. Although they speak about addiction as a disease, yet they are inconsistent in their approach to addictions. A disease model means that a person is not responsible for their situation. Just as you cannot determine whether you are a diabetic or not, so you are not responsible for your addiction. A medical approach would also mean that the addiction can be overcome with the proper medication. The inconsistency is apparent when AAA stresses that everyone is responsible for his or her own actions. AAA stresses personal responsibility, which explains why AAA can be very helpful even for a Christian addict who is recovering.

Genetic Predisposition. There is no genetic or physiological predisposition that will irresistibly lead someone into alcohol addiction. Just as there is no gene that causes adultery, theft or lying, so no gene causes alcoholism. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that genetics does not play a role. There is no doubt that a person's genetic makeup will affect the way he or she processes alcohol in the body. Our bodies do not process alcohol in the same way. Japanese,

Europeans and Indians process alcohol differently in their body.

While genetics can influence the way a person deals with alcohol, it is not the determining factor in addiction. That lies in the desire of one's heart. Those who have a physiological tendency toward alcohol need to be more vigilant with the use of alcohol. Everyone remains responsible for his or her actions.

Addiction a Moral Issue. We need to maintain that addiction is a moral issue of the heart. An Addict worships the gods of his heart and is therefore breaking the first commandment. Using alcohol to fill a need is a moral issue for which everyone must be held responsible. While addiction is a moral issue, we need to be aware of what is happening in the life of an addict. The natural procession of sin is that when one follows a god of the world, that god always comes back to enslave the person. It is impossible to worship something other than the Almighty God and not become enslaved to it. A person can become so enslaved to alcohol that the addiction has taken control of his life. Sin masters man so that he loses control over his own actions. Therefore alcoholism feels like a disease for it controls a person's whole life. For that reason the admonition, "Stop it" or "Just say no", generally has no effect on changing a person caught in addiction. They may stop for a period of time, but always return to their god.

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Most Addicts do not like what they have become. Although an addict has been mastered by alcohol, usually they do not like what the addiction is doing to their lives. They do not like what is happening to their marriage, to their children nor what is happening at work. Instead of taking the blame themselves, they deny their own responsibility and place the blame for their problems on others. They may want to change the situation, but find it impossible. They may have tried to stop the addiction for a time but always return. The great paradox for the addict is that he is hopelessly out of control and yet always shrewdly calculating. While out of control, yet they are shrewd enough to keep feeding their idol until they finally crash.

Addicts are out of Control. E. Welch makes the following argument: if you deny the out of control nature of addictions; if you deny the power of sin to enslave (Rom. 7), then you have to take the stand that everyone has the power to change themselves. This makes counseling easy for all you need to say is, "Stop your drinking." Although there has been the occasional person who has simply decided to stop drinking and done so, generally it is impossible to free oneself of addiction by his own will-power. To deal with an addiction a person must first be aware of his or her own helplessness and desperate need for help. When people believe that they can make the change away from sin by their own power, the result is failure. An

awareness needs to arise for the need of Christ's redemption and His power to overcome the power of sin in our lives. The one master must be replaced with another master, Jesus Christ. That is the only way in which real change is possible.

There are three things that need to happen for an addict to begin to walk the road of recovery: (1) He must confess his sin to the Lord, taking full responsibility for his actions. (2) He must look to Jesus Christ in faith for his deliverance. (3) He must believe that he cannot win the struggle in his own power but trust completely in the power of his Savior. He must through the power of the Holy Spirit dedicate himself to a lifetime of thankful service to the Lord. For many recovering addicts it is liberating to live in the assurance that their life rests in the hands of the Lord. To know that the Lord watches over them and is ready to protect them gives great encouragement as they daily struggle with temptation.

Recognizing Addiction. *The problem.* (1) Since there are no medical tests that are able to diagnose an addiction, there is always a subjective element to it. You may determine that a person is addicted to alcohol while the alcoholic denies it. (2) The progressive nature of an addiction makes diagnoses very difficult. When it becomes clear to everyone that someone struggles with an addiction, he has already been in the addiction for a long time. It is impossible to determine when someone is in

the beginning stages of an addiction. (3) Tolerance of the body to alcohol makes detection difficult. The human body adapts to the use of alcohol and other substances such as drugs. The body is able to tolerate more and more of the substance without showing outward signs of intoxication. What may kill one person is tolerated in the body of an addict. (4) The most we can do is to look for signs that a person may be in danger of falling into addiction and warn them that they are heading in a dangerous direction. E. Welch suggests the following rule of thumb for Christians who live in a community where moderate use of alcohol is permitted. Anyone who takes more than 2 drinks every 24 hours and uses alcohol more than 4 days a week needs to be aware that they are heading in a dangerous direction.

Indications of addiction:

Work: - Have work habits changed? - Are they late? - Bring home less money? - Are student's grades suffering, attendance down, or concentration poor. - Substance abuse cannot leave work and school unaffected. *Relationships:* - Has their peer group changed; are they more secretive? - Do they begin to have drinking buddies? - Do moods change, become depressed, talk about suicide? - Have you caught them telling lies and breaking commitments? - Have they had recent problems with the law? *Spiritual life:* - The difficulty with addicts in the Christian community is that they will maintain the outward forms

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of religion. They conform to community standards. - Change must be observed more in whether their inner attitude is changing and is there is hardening against the Lord? This can only be seen by taking the time to speak about what lives in the heart. *Health:* - Are they losing weight; prone to colds and sinus problems? - Are they restless at times; pupils either very small or large and blood shot? - Have they become bloated because of a build up of fluids in the body? - Have they become malnourished for alcohol contains few nutrients *Underage use of legal drugs.* - Underage smoking or drinking often indicates use of illegal drugs. They are the gateway to illegal drugs. *Drugs and Drug Paraphernalia.* - If drugs and drug paraphernalia are found on a person or in their room, it is a sure indication of drug use, although usually the person will have an explanation for its presence.

Confronting the Addict:

When an addict is confronted with the suspicion of having an addiction, they will deny any problem. Rather than come with accusations, the most effective way is to question a person about his or her alcohol (or any other addiction) use, making them think about their actions. A door should always be left open for that person to come and talk about their problems. To come immediately with a judgmental attitude will close any possibility of getting through to the person and gaining their confidence. Office bearers should use op-

portunities that present themselves to deal with addictions in people's lives. Situations can arise in which it becomes very difficult for a person to deny they have a problem. A person may be arrested or fined for drunk driving or drug use, or sexual offenses. Such situations present opportunities to help a person.

Intervention: Interventions are another method that has been used with varying degrees of effectiveness. Many experts argue that interventions are ineffective tools while others enthusiastically encourage the use of this method. From experience I have seen interventions work effectively, although they may have worked for different reasons. What is an intervention? In an intervention, family and friends come together to confront the person with his addiction. In a coordinated effort they confront the addict with the many situations in which the addiction has affected his relationship with family and friends and demand that he get help for his addiction. Such an intervention needs the support of the family including the spouse, older children, friends or respected acquaintances as well as the office bearers. The group comes together to plan the confrontation. The group will piece together the many incidences in which alcohol played a negative role in his life. These events clearly indicate he has a problem and will not allow him to sidestep the issue nor make excuses. The group must convey very clearly to the addict that they are concerned for his physical

as well as his spiritual well-being. They also have concerns for his marriage and his children. It is clearly conveyed that they have come not to hurt him but to care for him and are willing to stand beside him as he struggles with his addiction.

Goal of the intervention: The goal is that the addict gets help. Before the intervention takes place, proper arrangements should be made. If the person is still drinking, you need to have a place ready in a detox center. If he has not been drinking recently, an opening will be sought in a treatment facility.

Consequences: If the addict refuses to go along with the intervention, the consequences must be clear to everyone before hand. The addict will be placed before a choice. He will have to make a choice either for his wife and family or for his alcohol. If he refuses to seek help, that will have consequences for his marriage and family. The addict also needs to realize that his choice will affect his spiritual life. If he refuses to seek help and be reconciled with his wife and family, discipline will be brought to bear by the Church. It is here that the office bearers have an important role to play in the intervention.

Prevention of a Relapse: The brain does not forget what it has learned. After a person has conquered his addiction, the brain does not forget the release that alcohol gave; the high from drugs; the adrenaline rush from pornography

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or a sexual affair. For that reason addicts often find it difficult to stay away from the addiction or easily fall into another addiction. Not only does the addiction beckon when stress and difficulties arise, but also when they find themselves in situations that remind them of their addiction. The temptation is a powerful force difficult to resist when the mind reminds a person of the sensations that the addiction gave them. The recovered addict must be on constant guard. For that he needs support. The church community must be a support surrounding the recovered addict. The difficulty that recovered addicts face in the church is that fellow Christians do not understand them nor their thought processes. Rather than getting support they often feel that others approach them with a judgmental attitude. Office bearers and close friends need to form a close-knit support group. Those involved in an intervention would form a natural base of support. If the recovered addict is held accountable to the elder and the members of the support group, this can be very beneficial. Many recovered addicts will find support in AA. Recovered addicts understand each other very well and know all the lies and excuses that are used to cover up. While we should question the disease model of AA, the support that is found here can be crucial for many who fight the addiction. The Church community also needs to take into account the temptations that recovered addicts face. Therefore the church also needs to ask, how does alco-

hol function in our social gatherings?

There is controversy over the question whether alcoholics should ever drink again. AA has a slogan, "One drink is too many, and all the drinks in the world are not enough." Abstinence from all alcohol is advocated in North America. Others argue that a recovered alcoholic should learn to drink responsibly. I do not believe that you can argue from scripture that a recovered alcoholic must learn to drink responsibly. Abstinence is a biblically responsible way of keeping from temptation. (Prov. 23:30,31) In the case of sexual addiction, recovery means that there cannot be any tolerance for pornography in a person's life, both as an ethical consideration, but also as a means to keep one from temptation.

Spiritual renewal is a continual process. The recovered addict must daily live out of God's grace.

Spouse and Family. The spouse and children need much support for they are directly affected by the addiction as well. It may be beneficial for wives of husbands who struggle with an addiction to meet together as a support group, learning to better understand what is happening in the home and how best to confront certain situations that develop in the home. Office bearers often do not feel competent to deal with these kind of situations with the result that often much is not done to support the family. The office bearers

might make a visit or two and that tends to be the end of their involvement. Office bearers need to inform themselves about the issues around addiction as well as organizing the support that a family needs. They can make good use of the gifts that are present in the communion of saints.

Prevention in the Church: Office bearers often feel like firemen who are called to put out the fires in the church and have little time to prevent fires. One of the most important tools for the prevention of fires is an effective use of the pulpit. Since the preaching is the tool used by the Holy Spirit to work change in the hearts of God's people, we may trust that it has an effect in the lives of God's people. The preaching can also touch the hearts of those who struggle with sin in their lives. Therefore the preaching should also address the wickedness that tempts so many of God's people. God's people need to hear how sin has the power to enslave them for eternity. The necessity of the preaching does not take away the need for hard work in the trenches of the congregation. The preaching is the foundation on which the office bearers can do the work in the congregation. The reality is that the preaching alone will, in most cases, not liberate someone caught in an addiction. In the church the spiritual baffles must also be fought in the trenches of daily life. Addictions can be overcome if brothers and sisters are willing to reach out and help those in need.

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Collins suggests the following areas where we need to work at preventing addictions. (1) *Stimulate a Healthy Home life.* Children need to have a home where they are respected, loved, disciplined and raised by sensitive, concerned, stable parents. As office bearers, through the preaching and visits we need to encourage the congregation to create home environments in which the children receive a healthy spiritual upbringing. Providing seminars and speeches or workshops on family life can be beneficial, especially in the kind of society in which we are living today. (2) *Parents also need to give an example of the proper and careful use of alcohol in the home.* Parents need to show by example that they respect the power of alcohol. The same is true for every area of life. (3) *Instill a healthy religious faith.* Parents need to take the time to speak to their children about their faith. Speaking and teaching the children about the faith needs to be as natural as breathing air. (4) *Provide education on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse.* Education is not the Holy Grail that the world thinks it is to prevent abuse. Children today have more knowledge than ever and yet the use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes continue to be used in high numbers by young people. Education must always come in the context of our faith. It is the heart hat needs to be right with the Lord. (5) *Teach people how to confront the struggles of life.* Many people have real struggles dealing with the stress and problems of life. Many do not know how to deal with their struggles in

the light of their relationship with the Lord. There-fore many still opt for the short term solutions of filling their needs and desires with alcohol, drugs, pornography etc., rather than submitting themselves in faith to the care of their Father in heaven.

An office bearer will notice in his pastoral work how God's people begin to relax and feel comforted in the midst of their struggles when they speak to them about the promises of God and pray with them for the Father's care. God's children need to be encouraged to go to the Lord in their time of stress and need, knowing that the Father hears their cry. Healthy spiritual life makes it easier to deal with the daily stresses of life. Living out of faith gives real and lasting comfort to all God's children.

Resource Material

1. "Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology", David
2. "Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide", Gary R. Collins, Word Publishing (This book deals with different issues in counseling from a Christian perspective. It should be on the shelf of every pastor and elder.)
3. Edward T. Welch and Gary Steven Shogren, "Addictive Behavior", Baker Books. (This book has an excellent chapter on a Biblical View on addictions, as well as confronting the Addict in love.)
4. Oakley Ray, Charles Ksir, "Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior" McGraw-Hill (Expensive Text Book, worth its weight in gold. It is a medical

book that deals with how the brain works and drugs act upon the brain. It gives a good medical insight into addictions covering the area of stimulants, depressants, psychotherapeutic drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, over-the-counter drugs, opiates, hallucinogens, Marijuana, hashish, steroids etc. as well as treatment methods that are being used.)

5. Rich Buhler and Gaylen Larson, "The First Book of Self-Tests: Personal and Confidential Tests to Help You Learn More About yourself", Thomas Nelson Publishers. (Helpful checklists to help determine if there are signs of addictions with regard to alcohol abuse, eating disorders, drug use, sexual abuse etc. This book can be helpful.)
6. Harry Schaumburg, "False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction", NAVPRESS (An excellent book dealing with sexual addiction from a Christian perspective.)
7. Stephen Arterburn, "Addicted to Love: Understanding Dependencies of the Heart: Romance, Relationships, and sex." (A book that deals with obsession with love that in men gravitates to sexual addiction and in women gravitates to addiction to romance (fantasy or relationships).

Matthew Van Luik is currently serving as pastor of the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church in British Columbia. This article was originally seen in *DIAKONIA* and is reproduced here with permission.

The rest of the family was completely unaware that it was happening. My father, an elder in a solid, orthodox church (Reformed in doctrine, Presbyterian in government) sexually abused my sister over an extended period while she was in her early teen years. But we did not hear about the abuse for decades. We did not even think about the possibility of such a thing going on. I guess we were blind.

You might think that we should have discerned the symptoms. My sister failed to thrive. She was thin and nervous. She struggled at school. She married young and chose a mild-mannered man whom she could control. Oh yes, and she came to hate Reformed churches and the Reformed faith. She still does.

But there were other factors as well, by which we could explain my sister's behavior. My mother and father were constantly fighting—mostly about money. Mom was a real go-getter. She was often desperate as to how she would pay the bills. She worked full-time and then was also a full-time traditional mother who received no help around the home from her husband. Dad's income was unsteady. Mom resented his apparent "laziness." She argued with him—some would even say she hounded him. Dad resented her constant criticism. He felt that she would never be content. He would ignore her for a while and then explode in anger and beat her. It was not a happy home.

Reflections

Twenty years after the abuse, when my sister revealed what had happened, we wondered how it was even possible. Sure, Dad had a violent temper.

But we could almost explain it as part of his family temperament — (like James and John, "the sons of thunder" Mk. 3:17). A character trait can almost seem as if it is excusable. But how could he have done this to his daughter? She is still suffering from the effects of his sin against her. What allowed him to "get away" with this sin for twenty years?

As I have been thinking about this issue, I have been trying to find answers to the following three questions:

(i) How was it possible that an elder in an orthodox Reformed church could commit the sin of sexual abuse/incest against his own daughter without being detected?

(ii) What could have been done differently by members of the family—and by members and officers of the church—to protect my sister from this great evil and prevent my father from falling into this sin?

(iii) What could our pastor have done that would have made a difference?

The following seven points are a distillation of my thinking so far.

1) A "fortress mentality" protected sin in our home.

Our home was shielded from the "outside world." People knew that my mother and father did not have a good marriage. I think some even knew of my father's violent behavior toward his wife. But very few knew the full extent of the problem. We kept silent. Mom was ashamed of what went on in our home. So she never wanted the world to know about it. The appearance of a godly, Christian home was very important to her. Mom was also afraid of what would happen if others knew of my father's violent behavior. She did not suspect the sexual abuse since she was often at work. We needed the money. And Dad was not exerting himself enough to provide it. As far as Mom was concerned, Dad's main sins were both his failure to provide and his violent temper—something she was willing to live with "for the sake of the children." Mom did not want the family to be broken up. She felt that a two-parent dysfunctional family was better for her children than a single-parent divided family.

These two factors—fear of public humiliation over a failed marriage, and fear of our family being broken up—led Mom to encourage a conspiracy of silence about what was going on in the home. Somehow we imbibed the philosophy that the public reputation of the family

was more important than the faithful exposure of sin. We even thought we had scriptural support for this. (*“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* 1 Pet. 4:8) Dad sensed our dilemma and was therefore enabled to think that he could get away with the abuse.

It is also quite possible that the “fortress mentality” was a factor in my sister’s silence over many years. She didn’t want her shame to become public. Neither did she want to bring shame on the family. She heard the fifth commandment every Sunday in church, by which she was commanded to honor her father—not to report his gross sin and thereby dishonor the family. Furthermore, my sister was not even sure she would be listened to or believed if she did speak out. In our authoritarian circle, where adults were honored and respected—and where children were “seen and not heard”—she believed that *his* denial would be preferred over *her* accusation.

This “fortress” thinking was wrong. As Paul told Timothy, “those [elders] who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.” (1 Tim. 5:20) But, even here, it is not easy to see how she could have dealt with the problem! The preceding verse tells us that the church must “*not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.*” (1 Tim. 5:19) We would never have been party to any testimony against our father. Our collective sense

of shame was too powerful. So it was endured silently.

A pastor needs to challenge this mentality. He needs to warn his people that unconfessed sin will eventually be revealed. Moses warned the Israelites that, “*you may be sure that your sin will find you out.*” (Num. 32:23) Paul wrote to Timothy that, “*the sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.*” (1 Tim. 5:24) Some sin will come to light immediately, of course, but it will come out eventually. Unconfessed sin hinders our prayers. (1 Pet. 5:16) A conspiracy of silence merely builds a barrier between the Lord and ourselves. (Isa. 59:2)

2) *My mother’s deep commitment to her marriage was seen by my father as permission for “sin without consequences.”*

Mom did not want to be the initiator in any divorce proceedings. To her, marriage was sacred. In fact, she finally left Dad only after all of us children had left home—and only then to protect herself from his increasingly violent attacks. She never divorced him because she was not aware of any adultery that he might have committed. She was also not sure that her forced desertion was a proper ground for divorce. If, at the time, she had been aware of what had happened to my sister, I believe she would have left sooner. But it would not have been out of anger. It would have been to protect her children.

Mom was committed to her marriage and was willing to suffer a great deal for it.

No pastor should encourage divorce. Far too many Christians simply look for an excuse to opt out of an unhappy marriage. Yet, while preaching the sanctity of marriage, pastors also need to constantly challenge husbands to “*be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*” (1 Pet. 3:7) I don’t think my father ever fully appreciated the spiritual consequences of his violent behavior towards his wife. He did not understand the seriousness of his sin and the immense spiritual damage he was doing. Here was a pastoral failure.

Christian marriages ought to be mirror images of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-30) Therefore, it’s often central to a child’s spiritual growth and understanding. The behavior of a father towards his wife is a daily “sermon” to his children—more powerful, in some ways, than the preaching they hear from the pulpit. Your congregation hears your sermons one day a week, but they see this “sermon” every day. It is vital, therefore, that we who are Pastors recognize its importance and structure our teaching and preaching plan accordingly.

3) *My father somehow compartmentalized his theology and ethics.*

Dad was superb in theological debates. He loved the Reformed system of doctrine. He was a zealous “defender of the faith.” He taught us a great deal as we discussed theological issues with him. In fact, this was one area of our spiritual development that he encouraged and participated in enthusiastically. But we always felt that there was a disconnect between what he *said* and what he *did*. Surprisingly, this did not seem to bother my father and we were too afraid to confront him about it. Yet, I often wondered how he handled the Letter of James—especially the injunction to “*not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*” (Jas. 1:22) When this was coupled with the warning that, “*faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*” (Jas. 2:17), Dad should have been very worried indeed. Yet, somehow, he was able to combine a sound intellectual understanding of God’s Word with a horrible sin against his own daughter.

David did the same thing when he sinned with Bathsheba. His reaction to Nathan’s parable clearly demonstrates that he knew that what he was doing was evil (2 Sam. 12:5,6) While David righteously condemned the evil behavior of others, he also minimized his own sinful behavior. He remained orthodox but he tried to separate his behavior from his theology. Psalm 32:3 tells us how foolish David was to do this. (“*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*”) In reality, we cannot

successfully compartmentalize theology and ethics.

A pastor needs to constantly remind his congregation of this truth. His preaching must include a close, personal application of the Word to daily living. The apostle Paul said “*all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) A preacher must be on his guard against an emphasis on “*useful for teaching*” at the expense of “*useful for ... rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*”

4) Our church's priority was theological orthodoxy.

Dad was an elder in a church that was established in reaction to theological liberalism. The *raison-d’etre* of his church was the defense and definition of orthodoxy—something Dad was very good at. However, the depth of doctrinal commitment was not faithfully accompanied by an equally deep commitment to holiness of life. He and his fellow elders knew that, “*from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked*” (Luke 12:48) But somehow, in the realm of daily practice, this was applied more to being theologically orthodox than to being ethically pure.

There are several passages reminding us of the increased

obligations placed upon those for whom much has been forgiven. (e.g. Mat 18:21-35) My understanding is that this does not so much refer to the actual number of sins that we have committed, as it does to *our recognition of our own sinfulness*. Like Paul, we Calvinists need to realize that we are *the “worst of sinners”* (1 Tim. 1:15, 16) But then, having been forgiven much, we need to remember that our Lord is therefore demanding more of us than others. A pastor needs to challenge his congregation that authentic commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy is only certified by the fruit of the Spirit. Faith without works is dead.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we must “*not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” Holy living should flow out of right understanding. But this is *not* automatic. The warnings in the Letter to the Hebrews about the danger of falling away are real and need to be preached. (e.g. Hebrews 6:8 warns us that “*land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*”) Yes, we depend completely upon the Lord for our salvation. But within the context of that divine sovereignty, we retain our full responsibility to “*be holy in all [we] do*” (1 Pet. 1:15)

A pastor must not weary of exhorting the members of his congregation to purify “[them-]selves by obeying the truth” (1 Pet. 1:22)

5) *We did not think this sin was even possible in our church.*

In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, the Lord warns us that the absence of a healthy sexual relationship within marriage can become an occasion for “*Satan [to] tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*” All of us recognize how powerful the sex drive is. The danger of adultery is always there. But, when I was growing up, there were very few people who even thought of the possibility of sexual abuse within a Reformed Christian family. It was not mentioned from the pulpit. Our men were not warned against it. It was a sin that we thought of as belonging to the most perverted of heathen communities. We simply did not think that Reformed Christians could fall that far.

Nowadays, with the scandalous behavior of many TV evangelists and Roman Catholic priests being brought to light, we are more aware of the depths to which men can fall. But there is a danger that we will think that the degree of their immorality is directly related to the extent to which they deviate from orthodoxy. How foolish we would be, however, if we were to exclude ourselves from the possibility of falling into the worst of sins. If king David, a man after God’s own heart, could commit adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11), so could we. If the apostle, Peter, who had already been forgiven and restored for the sin of denying his Lord, could then fall into the sin of denying God’s people (Gal. 2:11-13), then we must

humbly acknowledge our own vulnerability to all kinds of sins.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, the apostle Paul reminds the church that it has been given Scriptural examples of all types of moral failures by the people of Israel (idolatry, sexual immorality, and grumbling), in order “*to keep us from settling our hearts on evil things as they did*” (1 Cor. 10:6) The Scriptures describe every sin into which man can fall. And we pastors have a responsibility to warn our congregations about those sins. Some sins—such as those more prevalent in our society and culture—need to be addressed with particular care and regularity (e.g. pornography, homosexuality, etc., in present-day Western society)

6) *Our elders were close friends who sometimes ‘protected’ each other.*

Our church was a close community. People were deeply committed to each other. The elders were men who had worked tirelessly together over many years to plant and build up a church. They became good friends. Indeed, all of our close friendships were within the church. In many ways, this was good. But it is not easy to exercise spiritual discipline against a friend. I’m convinced that, if Dad’s fellow-elders had known the full extent of abuse that was going on in our home, they would have begun the process of church discipline. But I also wonder if his friends were not too reluctant to challenge him about things they *did* know (his

violent temper) and to inquire more deeply into what was going on in the home. I know we lived in a culture that respected the privacy of the home. But could they not have been more sensitive to the “danger signs” which *were* there. I think they ought to have been more concerned about the impact of domestic violence on the children than the privacy of the home. The elders’ reluctance to intervene in the “lesser sin” of my father’s violent temper probably persuaded my sister that coming forward to reveal the sexual abuse would be fruitless. She could not have any confidence that she would be protected from him. She had already ‘learned’ that she could not trust God—after all, he had failed to protect her from abuse in the first place. How then could she trust God’s servants who had already shown little inclination to intervene where they should have?

A pastor is often something of an “outsider” to his session. He comes from another pastorate and generally serves for some years, but seldom for a lifetime. This puts him both at an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that it takes time to learn all the “dirty little secrets” of a congregation. The advantage is that the pastor can challenge his congregation’s behavior more easily than family members or close friends can. But, in order to have his session’s support, the pastor has to persuade his elders that they are friends of Christ before they are friends to each other (John 15:15) Their primary obliga-

tions are, therefore, to him and his children before they are to each other. Their duties as ordained servants of God, in other words, must over-ride all of their personal friendships and commitments.

7) *My father did not know the path to restoration.*

What would have happened if my father had come under conviction for his sin? He knew he would have to confess his sin and repent of it. He may have felt that he could do that personally and privately to God. But that was not enough. He also needed to seek forgiveness from those others against whom he had sinned—his daughter, his wife, his family and the church. But here was his dilemma. If he publicly confessed his sin, he could only expect such serious consequences, that he must have wondered whether the pain of revulsion and rejection before his possible restoration would be worth it. He would be removed from the eldership. He could face criminal proceedings. He might even lose his family. Were those prospects too frightening for him?

The path to restoration is laid out in Scripture. The expelled “immoral brother” of 1 Corinthians 5 became the restored offender of 2 Corinthians 2:6-8. But I was not aware of our church having anticipated and rehearsed how we would act if, for example, one of our members was caught in this particularly gross sin. What would we have done to protect our children? Would we have

gone and informed the civil authorities? I agree that the session has an obligation to act as privately as possible in cases of church discipline. But I believe there is also a responsibility on the part of the pastor and elders to train the congregation as to how they should respond to gross sin and, especially to a repentant sinner. The biblical response is not instinctive. Like all other life lessons, it must be learned. I believe that when Paul wrote to Timothy to say “*the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others*” (2 Tim. 2:2) he was not referring to doctrine alone. I believe he was referring to the whole corpus of biblical teaching, including his teaching on how to exercise church discipline. My father needed to know that ‘there was light at the end of the tunnel’ of repentance in order for him to be willing to enter it. I’m not sure that he did.

Conclusion

The bitter consequences of the sin of sexual abuse on my sister have lasted for many years now and they are extensive. I was greatly helped in my understanding of the impact of this on her by reading Dan Allender’s, *The Wounded Heart* (Nav Press, Colorado Springs, 1990, revised 1995). I would highly recommend this book to all who seek to understand sexual abuse, its consequences and the path to healing. Another book that deals with healing for adult children of dysfunctional families is *Secrets of Your Family Tree* by

Carder, Henslin, Townsend, Cloud and Brawand (Moody Press, Chicago, 1991). In addition, I would also strongly recommend Ralph Venning’s, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA, 1993) as very helpful for understanding the evil of sin and the extent of its impact.

Sexual abuse by church leaders is incredibly destructive. My father was caught up in this sin and faced the terrible consequences some decades later—when he probably thought it had been forgotten and buried forever. The Lord was gracious, however. Dad eventually found forgiveness in the Lord and was given the opportunity to ask for forgiveness from his daughter. The Lord showed mercy to “the worst of sinners.”

The Editor has known the author of this article for many years, and therefore asked him to write this article. You will understand what a difficult thing this was for him. And we feel confident that you will fully understand why, in this instance, we will not reveal the author’s name.

A Response to the Previous Article

by

the Editor

The purpose of these pages is to suggest a few possible lessons to be learned from the previous article.

1. As pastors and elders we must first take heed to ourselves and then to all the flock. In the case described here, one sin in the life of this elder was well-known: namely, intemperate anger. Had this been faithfully dealt with—as it ought to have been—it is conceivable that the ensuing tragedy might have been averted. There should be no ‘free pass’ on any persistent sin that manifests itself in a pastor or elder. If we do not deal faithfully with each other first of all, then we have no right to claim that we’re dealing faithfully with our people.

2. As pastors and elders we need to be “as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves.” We need, in other words, to be discerning. The Scripture says *“the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”* Therefore we can anticipate that sinning people will find all sorts of ways to cover up their sin—even to the point of self-deception. The elder described above was, in a word, ‘super-orthodox.’ He was difficult to work with because he was overly zealous or strict in upholding orthodoxy in the church. The lesson is that harshness of spirit in the way elders deal with each other is a serious danger sign.

3. There’s nothing in the Bible that we can just ‘skip over’ with the naïve assumption that ‘it couldn’t happen here.’ In the

early years of my own ministry I remember a visit by an older minister who had come back to visit his former congregation. He read from the law of Moses until he came to some unpleasant things. He apologized as if it was not good—and certainly not necessary—to hear such things in the house of God. But he was mistaken. All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for God’s people. And never was this more true than it is today.

4. As pastors and elders we need to make sure that God’s people under our care have adequate understanding. The pastor who wrote the previous article is not sure his father was given a sufficient understanding—at the time of his transgression—of the path of reconciliation. We fully agree as to the importance of this in the teaching ministry of the pastor. We need to make it very clear to our people that none of us has the right to remain silent when there is persistent sin, no matter who the sinner is. Wives need to know that they too must follow Matthew 18:15ff even in dealing with their own husbands. Even children should be taught this. It should also be made clear that the pastor and the elders see it as their duty to respond—in line with Matthew 18:15ff—to those who may need their assistance. It is not wrong, for children to confront their parents: if there is persistent sin. We can’t help but wonder what might have happened if some who endured in silence had simply spoken up.

5. We do not wish to say anything that could be taken to support the modern feminist movement. Yet, in opposing this modern error, we must be very careful that we do not lend even the slightest degree of support to the kind of male tyranny that has sometimes masqueraded itself under the banner of ‘male headship.’ Surely we can see—from this account—how wrong it is for a wife to willingly submit to real abuse simply to keep up appearance. It certainly does not deceive the children. They are much too discerning of the reality of the situation. The pastor who wrote this account is surely right, then, in reminding us pastors of the importance of clear, and indeed passionate, preaching as to the duty of husbands to love their wives and deal with them after the pattern of our savior’s love for the church.

6. Let me put it this way. Jesus told us to do something about it when ‘our brother’ sins. We are to go to him, and tell him what his fault is, and appeal to him to repent. If that fails we are not to shout it from the housetops. No, but we are to take one or two others and go back to him again etc. This is not mere ‘good advice.’ It is the command of our Savior. Why did not the wife do this first of all for the good of the man she married? Was it not her responsibility to care about his eternal welfare? To prefer a masquerade is not piety. Yet this is what she chose. And so did other members of the household. I therefore think

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the author is wrong to seek to point the finger at others outside the household. I say this even though the sin of incest is 'more heinous in the sight of God' than these other sins, and it is very much 'aggravated' by the fact that this incestuous man was serving as a ruling elder in the church. He was well grounded in Reformed doctrine, knowing very well the enormity of the sin he was committing. But my point here is simply that being able to say that the sin of A is much more heinous than the sin of B does not let B off the hook at all. All sin needs to be recognized for what it is, and repented of before God.

7. We all need to "take heed lest we fall." It is precisely those who think they stand far above such things as the sad events described above who are in the greatest danger. As the author of this article says: if even David, a man after God's own heart, could succumb to the power of sexual temptation, then who are we to think ourselves to high to fall?

8. A subtle assumption seems to underlie this article. It goes something like this: **'If only the pastor and other elders had performed their task more perfectly this never would have happened.'** It is true, of course, that it is better to prevent a disease in the first place than to try to cure one after it is there. But it is not Scriptural to imagine that God has given pastors and elders either the responsibility—or even the ability—to prevent people from sinning, although it certainly is their responsibility to teach the whole counsel of God.

9. The author emphasizes 'a fortress mentality' resulting in 'a conspiracy of secrecy and silence' in

the home in which he grew up. What this seems to suggest is that he wishes that it had been easier for outsiders to see what was really going on in that home. Yet even the author himself—who was in the home—did not realize what was happening. If even he could not discern this, then how could any outsider? I therefore do not think this should be considered a cause of the tragedy. Christian homes—and families—ought to be guarded sanctuaries. **It is not the business of the pastor and the elders to go around suspiciously trying to find out what the 'real' state of things is in various households.**

10. The author is rightly horrified at what his father did. For the sin of incest there is, and can be, no excuse whatsoever. As the Shorter Catechism rightly says, "Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others." Yet that should not prevent us—indeed, must not prevent us—from keeping a balanced perspective. It is quite understandable to me that the author himself has great difficulty in doing this. Yet, in spite of this, he still conveys a picture (however unintentionally) of a domestic disaster that is by no means all about Dad! What about Mother's incessant nagging? What about her incessant desire to attain to a higher standard of living, materially speaking, which lead her to work outside of the home where she was most needed, and when she was most needed? And what about her manipulation of the family in order to keep them in line with her desire to hide the real situation so as to give the false appearance of a well-ordered Reformed household? Surely these sins needed correction too.

11. Surely readers of this article will feel sympathy toward those who kept silent even though they were aware, however dimly, that a 'false front' was being maintained. Who would not be afraid to follow the course prescribed by our Lord (Matthew 18:15ff) in such a context? But, as John Murray used to say, **'it is costly to be a Christian.'** And that is true for all of us. It is not just someone else who is called on to trust and obey. You are too. And so am I.

12. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the church did exercise faithful discipline in this sad case when it did at last come to know the facts that required it. **We must learn to resist the temptation to desire some 'magic bullet'—to think, in other words, that there ought to be some nice easy way to prevent sin and thus avoid church discipline.** There is no substitute for faithful church discipline, and we must not succumb to the temptation to seek one.

13. No two people are exactly alike. No two sin-scenarios are either. What we are saying, in other words, is that **this article—and the editor's response to it—are not intended for any kind of direct application to any other case.** It is our hope that something of value can be learned from this case. But every case is unique. We therefore hope that no one will try to use this writer's wrenching experience—or our comments in response to it—as a model, or a template, for other difficult disciplinary problems in the church.

14. **Above all we must remember to constantly teach our people that, with the Lord, there is forgiveness.** The only unpardonable sin is to refuse to repent and believe.

Book Review

The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary by Johannes G. Vos, edited by G. I. Williamson. P&R Publishing Co., 2002. Paper, 615 pages. List price, \$19.99 Reviewed by Larry Wilson

Pastors, men intending the gospel ministry, elders, deacons, heads of households, and church librarians: if you don't buy another book this year, make sure you get and use *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* by J. G. Vos!

J. G. Vos (1903-1983) was one of my professors at Geneva College—a very beloved professor! I regard him as the most under-rated theologian America has produced. The son of Geerhardus Vos, J. G. graduated from Princeton University in 1925 with a A.B. and from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1928 with a Th.B. In 1938 he earned a Th.M. from Westminster Theological Seminary. Vos aligned himself with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). He pastored two RPCNA congregations, served as a missionary in Manchuria, and later served as a professor in Geneva College's Bible and Philosophy department, chairing that department for 19 years. In each of these callings, J. G. was cheerful and zealous. He never lost his missionary vision or his passion for biblical reformation in the church. In addition to his full-time labors, he edited *Blue Banner Faith and Life* for 29 years, a quarterly magazine of Bible and doctrinal instruction. He wrote most of the articles himself. Our Lord had given J. G. a gift for digesting complex material and explaining it simply and clearly without distorting it, and he used it with diligence.

G. I. Williamson has performed a tremendous service by combing through old issues of *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, where this material first appeared in the form of multitudinous serial articles, and collecting it into this one-volume commentary.

Don't let that title, "commentary," scare you away. Prof. Vos wrote with great simplicity and clar-

ity—in a readable, interesting style—aimed at instructing lay people in sound doctrine. His pastoral heart shines through on every page as he stresses the Scripture warrant for these Reformed truths, and their implications for both faith and life. He comments on the Larger Catechism by first listing Scripture proof texts and summarizing their import for the point in question. Then he gives a series of brief questions and answers explaining various aspects and ramifications of the question he is discussing. Of course, one would not ordinarily sit down and read this book cover-to-cover. It is more likely that one would use it as a resource when studying various themes.

One thing that makes it so useful as a resource is a good Scripture index. As one studies the Scriptures, he can use this tool to see if the Larger Catechism or Vos's commentary has anything to say about it. Another tool is a very thorough outline of the catechism by Jeff Boer.

An excellent article by W. Robert Godfrey—"An Introduction to the Westminster Larger Catechism"—introduces this volume. Godfrey asks the question, "What is the continuing value [of the *Larger Catechism*] for the church today?" In answer, he makes five points, each of which is also a superb reason for one to get and use this book. First, the *Larger Catechism* gives outstanding summaries of doctrine. One example—one which is particularly needed in our day of doctrinal confusion—is its full-orbed discussion of the biblically Reformed understanding of justification and sanctification. Dr. Vos gives very helpful commentary on these doctrines, including a chart of points in which justification and sanctification are the same and points in which justification and sanctification differ.

Second, some have argued that the *Larger Catechism* actually improves on the *Confession of Faith* in its statement of certain doctrines. For example, John Murray alleged that this is the case in the teaching on the covenant of grace and on the relation

of the imputation of Adam's sin in the *Larger Catechism*. Are these not controversial issues among us even today? Vos gives very clear instruction on the catechism's teaching on these points and their Scripture warrant.

Third, the *Larger Catechism* provides an especially full discussion of the Ten Commandments. Prof. Vos is painstaking in providing very valuable and very practical (and very convicting) comments on the implications of the Ten Commandments. Have I ever kept a single one of these commandments? Sadly, no. How grateful I am for the perfect righteousness of my Redeemer! And as I seek to show my love and gratitude, this book gives very helpful instruction.

Fourth, the *Larger Catechism* develops a full-orbed doctrine of the church. I had not realized that this subject is almost entirely absent from the *Shorter Catechism*. Dr. Godfrey points out that the *Shorter Catechism* deliberately focused on individual believers, while the *Larger Catechism* is intended more to focus on the Christian community. But in our day of rampant individualism, how we need the more comprehensive emphasis on the church! Dr. Godfrey explains, "The doctrine of the church is an integral element of true Calvinism. Indeed, a distinctive doctrine of the church is of the very essence of Calvinism. Calvinism is a form of Christianity that avoids two extremes in its understanding of the church. On the one hand, it rejects a form of sacramental Christianity that sees the offices and sacraments as inevitable or automatically bearing the grace of God. On the other hand, it rejects an interior, mystical form of Christianity that sees the outward means of grace as irrelevant. The institution of the church as the mother of the faithful is essential to genuine Calvinism." Again, Vos gives very keen, careful instruction on the church and the means of grace entrusted to her.

Fifth, the *Larger Catechism* gives a "full, balanced, edifying summary of the Christian faith." Prof. Vos's

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commentary provides an important resource to help believers access and profit from this “neglected tool the church needs today to help believers develop a balanced Christian faith and life.”

Let me give some examples of Prof. Vos’s approach. In his commentary on question 1—“What is the chief and highest end of man? Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”—Vos answers the following questions: (1) What is the meaning of the word *end* in this question? (2) Could a consistent evolutionist agree with the catechism’s answer to question 1? (3) What is wrong with the following statement: Man’s chief and highest end is to seek happiness”? (4) What is wrong with the following statement: “Man’s chief and highest end is to seek the greatest good of the greatest number”? (5) Why does the catechism place glorifying God before enjoying God? (6) Why can the human race, or any member of it, never attain true happiness apart from glorifying God?

On question/answer 25—“Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell? The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consisteth in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called original sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.”—Vos addresses: (1) What are the two principle kinds of sin? (2) Why is only the guilt of Adam’s first sin imputed to his posterity? (3) What righteousness did mankind lose by the fall? (4) Besides the guilt of Adam’s first sin, and the loss of original righteousness, what other evil resulted from the fall? (5) Does total depravity of nature mean that an unsaved person cannot do anything good? (6) What is the modern attitude toward the doctrine of total depravity? What practical les-

son may we learn from the doctrines of original sin and total depravity? (9) Is it possible for a person to save himself from his condition of original sin and total depravity?

On question/answer 71—“How is justification an act of God’s free grace? Although Christ, by his obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice in the behalf of them that are justified; yet inasmuch as God accepts the satisfaction from a surety, which he might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, his own only Son, imputing his righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is his gift, their justification is to them of free grace.”—Vos discusses: (1) What is the meaning of the expression “God’s free grace”? (2) Why does it seem contradictory to say that justification is an act of God’s free grace? (3) How can our justification be both a purchase and also a free gift? (4) Why was it necessary that our justification be purchased by Christ? (5) Was it not unjust for God to take the sins of guilty human beings and lay them on the innocent Christ? (6) What is the meaning of the word ‘surety’? (7) Where in the New Testament is Jesus Christ called a ‘surety’? (8) How should we answer those who say that a God of love would be willing to forgive sinners without any atonement, and that a God who will not forgive sinners unless his Son is crucified is a harsh and vindictive Being? (9) What does God require of sinners for their justification? (10) In addition to giving his Son to die for our sins, what else does God provide in order that we may be saved? (11) Where does the Bible teach that saving faith is a gift of God? (12) What do we mean by saying that “faith is a gift of God”? (13) If faith is a gift of God, does this mean that God makes people believe in Christ whether they want to or not? (14) What has been the history of the doctrine of justification by God’s free grace? (15) What objection has been raised against the doctrine of justification by free grace? (16) How can this objec-

tion be answered? (17) But if we are not to do good works in order to save our soul, then what is the Christian’s motive for practicing righteousness? (18) Prove from the Bible that good works are the fruit and not the ground of our salvation. (19) Why have many people been bitterly opposed to the doctrine of justification by free grace? (20) Why is a new Reformation needed at the present day?

I’m tempted to continue in this manner, but I hope this suffices to whet your appetite. One last example, just to give you a sample of the pastoral clarity of this book—in his discussion of the Fifth Commandment, Prof. Vos comments: “What is the effect of the sin of envy on the envious person? This sin, besides being a grave offense against the law of God, inevitably has a spiritually and psychologically destructive effect upon the person who is guilty of it. The envious person is himself the victim of his own sin, and his personality becomes corroded by envy until he becomes either sour or brittle. Such a person will be suspicious, resentful, easily offended, difficult to deal with, and a ‘problem’ to his friends and associates. The Scripture calls envy ‘the rottenness of the bones’ (Prov. 14:30). The person who tolerates this sin in his life is playing with an acid which, if not checked, will eat away at his personality until his disposition is ruined and he is wholly dominated by envy. Only the almighty power of God can save a person from such a pitiable state of spiritual bondage.”

My only real quibble with this book is that the publishers put it out in paperback form. Surely such an important resource deserves to be published in a very durable, attractive hardcover. One can hope that this deficiency will soon be remedied. In the meantime, this book is so important and its content is so excellent that I hope this one shortcoming won’t discourage people from purchasing and using it.

Very highly recommended.

The Unity of the Church in the Westminster Tradition – Part 2

Rev. Prof. W. D. J. McKay

A paper presented at the 2001 International Conference of Reformed Churches



James Bannerman: maintaining the tradition

The greatest work on ecclesiology from the pen of a Scottish Presbyterian in the 19th century is undoubtedly *The Church of Christ* by James Bannerman, published in 1869. With great thoroughness Bannerman sets out and defends the view of the Church held by his Reformed forefathers in Scotland. We will note first his views on the nature of the Church and then consider his response to a proposed reunion of churches in Scotland, expressed in an address in 1867.

Bannerman sets great store by the distinction between the invisible Church and the visible Church, devoting an entire chapter of the first volume of his treatise to the subject.⁴² Having made the customary statement that the distinction does not indicate the existence of two separate churches, but one church under two aspects, he makes two important points which are designed to clarify the distinction. He states first, “The Church invisible stands, with respect to its members, in a inward and spiritual relationship to Christ, whereas the Church visible stands to Him in an outward relationship only.”⁴³ Bannerman

emphasises the point by stating that the visible Church’s outward relationship involves “no more than the promise and enjoyment of outward privileges”,⁴⁴ which he defines in terms of outward government, outward ordinances and outward discipline. Members of the visible Church have been brought, according to Bannerman, into a real, though external, relationship to Christ which may be termed an external covenant relationship.

The second statement Bannerman makes in order to clarify the distinction is this: “The Church invisible is made up of true believers, and of none else; whereas the Church visible is composed of those who outwardly profess their faith in Christ, and may include not only true believers, but also hypocrites.”⁴⁵ As he points out, without an infallible knowledge of men’s hearts it is impossible to secure a visible body consisting only of true believers. Hypocrites have always been included in this external covenant: “Such has always been the condition of the Church in all ages, and such was it always intended to be.”⁴⁶ Bannerman argues that this has always been God’s way. He provides an outward framework of ordinances for the benefit of his people but in addition, says

Bannerman, “To the external privileges of that visible society even sinners are invited, not that they may rest there, but that they may go on to the invisible and spiritual society within. And even formalists are permitted to mingle in outward fellowship with true believers, in order that, if possible, they may be brought to seek for something higher and more blessed.”⁴⁷

This he justifies with reference to Jesus’ parable of the tares growing together with the wheat until the Last Day, although we should note that Jesus states, “The field is the world” (Matt. 13:38).

Bannerman believes that it is vital to make the distinction that he has expounded so that biblical statements can be correctly applied either to the invisible Church or to the visible Church. Thus statements about the perfect unity of faith in the body of Christ must be applied only to the invisible Church. Great harm has been done, in Bannerman’s estimation, when Rome has applied to a visible organisation biblical descriptions of the invisible Church.

In the following chapter Bannerman considers the Church’s twofold character as catholic and local. Catholicity as applied to the invisible Church relates to the Holy

⁴² James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1869 edition (London, 1960), 1.2940.

⁴³ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.29.

⁴⁴ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.30.

⁴⁵ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.32.

⁴⁶ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.33.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

Spirit's indwelling all true believers wherever they are to be found. Catholicity as applied to the visible Church is rather different "because the bond of union among its members is a common public profession, and an outward federal relationship to Christ".⁴⁸ The geographical separation of particular congregations does not in any way destroy this unity. Even numerous differences of opinion may coexist with unity as long as churches do not cease to be true churches of Christ.

Thus, in Bannerman's view, the Church is one, whether considered in its invisible aspect or in its visible aspect. The spiritual unity of the invisible Church is to be regarded as of a "higher" kind, whereas the unity of the visible, being outward rather than spiritual, is less exalted and less complete in degree, allowing as it does many diversities. Bannerman indeed admits that "it is one of the greatest difficulties in the application and interpretation of Scripture language in reference to the Church, to discriminate the occasions on which it refers to the higher unity of the invisible from those on which the lower and less perfect unity of the visible Church is spoken of".⁴⁹

We have a most interesting in sight into Bannerman's application of his principles to practical situations in a speech on "the Union Question" delivered on 9th January, 1867. He makes a vigorous appeal for the Free Church to pursue unity on the basis of the

statements made in Chapter 26 of the Westminster Confession of Faith which we examined previously. The requirements of Christ are of more importance than church traditions, and he requires mutual help not only of individual Christians, but of Churches. Quoting the confessional phrase "As God giveth opportunity" (26.2), he stresses the duty to seek unity. "It is a doctrine to be held, and a duty to be prosecuted at all times and by all Churches; and if in any particular instances, separation, and not union, is advocated, most certainly the onus probandi rests upon those who defend or seek to perpetuate separation".⁵⁰

Only two factors, according to Bannerman, should prevent union: first, if it is impossible to acknowledge the other party as Christian men or Churches; second, if, while acknowledging them as such, it is impossible to work together with them without sin. Lesser reasons are deemed insufficient. Thus with regard to the first factor, Bannerman states, "If in fundamentals the creed and practice of a religious society are in accordance with the Word of God, we are not only justified, but bound to acknowledge that society to be a Church of Christ".⁵¹ However much it may differ from oneself in nonessential matters, it is to be recognised as a Church.

The second factor is equally important: "Can the Churches, and the members and officebearers of the Churches, work together in union without

the sacrifice of conscience or principle on either side?"⁵² Where no unscriptural sacrifice is required, union is a duty. If, on the other hand, the union would impose "a compromise of creed or duty amounting to what is wrong",⁵³ the separation cannot lawfully be healed.

Dealing with the church situation of his day, Bannerman concluded that, although he could acknowledge the Church of Scotland as a true Church, he could not be a minister in it since that would entail compromise with Erastian principles involved in that Church's link with the State. On the other hand he could see no obstacle to the proposed union with the branch of the Secession Church which was then under discussion.

R L. Dabney: and the issue of denominations

The centuries since the Westminster Assembly sat in London have witnessed an increasing fragmentation in Presbyterianism worldwide, resulting in a plethora of presbyterian "denominations" in many countries. However unacceptable this would have seemed to the Westminster Divines, it is a situation which presbyterian theologians have had to reckon with and, to some degree, accept. This was reflected in the work of McCrie and Bannerman already considered above. In the United States it was considered explicitly by one of the great Southern Presbyterian theologians

⁴⁸ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.44.

⁴⁹ James Bannerman, op. cit., 1.50.

⁵⁰ James Bannerman, op. cit., 2.335.

⁵¹ James Bannerman, op. cit., 2.337.

⁵² James Bannerman, op. cit., 2.338.

⁵³ *ibid.*

Robert L Dabney, for many years a Professor at Union Seminary, Virginia. The focus of our attention will be his article “What is Christian Union?”, first published in the Central Presbyterian in May, 1870, and reprinted in his *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, Volume 2.⁵⁴

Dabney begins his article by endorsing the pursuit of the spiritual unity of God’s people. He states, “No one who is governed by the principles of the gospel can fail to deplore the bitterness and injustice of Christians towards each other, which have too often attended their unavoidable differences. Every rightminded Christian, accordingly, rejoices in the legitimate means of increasing and evincing the spiritual unity of the whole body of God’s people. Where this can be done without compromising conscientious convictions, we hail it as an unmingled blessing to our common Zion”.⁵⁵

He exhibits a very different attitude to contemporary projects to bring the whole body of believers into a “universal church union”. He clearly does not share the excitement with which some are pursuing such a goal. The question that must be asked, according to Dabney, is whether organic unity is necessary to promote spiritual unity among believers. His outlook is immediately evident when he states that “this conviction did actually haunt and pervert the thinking of the Christian world for

centuries”.⁵⁶ It is a view characteristic of Romanism and one which the Reformation did not succeed in removing from the minds of Protestants, according to Dabney’s reading of church history.

Dabney believes that he can discern why this error arose in the early Church: “the history of this delusion is especially instructive, as it shows us that its advocates from the first were chiefly led astray by disregarding the scriptural distinction between the visible and invisible church”.⁵⁷ In Dabney’s view scriptural texts describing the unity of the invisible Church were erroneously applied to the visible Church, resulting in a demand for visible, organic union. Dabney compares the invisible Church to the human soul which for a time inhabits a body (the visible Church). He grants that the perfection of the visible Church (or churches) is to approach as nearly as possible that of the invisible, but can never fully achieve that goal because of its very nature as a visible organisation. Hence, says Dabney, “the unity of the visible church will evince itself in ties of affection and brotherhood rather than in external conformity.”⁵⁸

Having listed many of the New Testament passages which he believes apply to the spiritual community of believers, Dabney contends that this is the Church which is catholic and which is one. God has also provided for the presence of that Church on

earth in “visible organised societies”, the churches which together constitute the “visible church catholic”, whose highest bond of union is not an outward organism but a bond of faith and affection. None of these churches is perfect, but the closer they approach to the biblical standard, the closer they will come even in outward form.

“Meanwhile”, says Dabney, “their separate existence beside one another does not mar the catholicity of the visible church as one whole”.⁵⁹ Indeed the separation is the “inevitable and designed result” of geographical and cultural separation and of human imperfections. The different churches are even likened to different parts of a single army. “We are but different denominations of citizens in one kingdom.”⁶⁰ In Dabney’s opinion, it is not possible to remove the causes of diversity since the Church does not have an infallible expounder of the Bible, believers’ consciences have been left free of human commandments and also men, being fallible, have always differed honestly over details. On such grounds, unity is impossible and attempts to force it are misguided. Historically, such attempts have often led to persecution.

Dabney concludes, “I am convinced that a general organic union is no means to promote Christian union.”⁶¹ He recognises, however, that a true union of principle and love would be of great benefit to believers. He therefore

⁵⁴ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, 1891 edition (London, 1967), 2.430446

⁵⁵ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.430.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.433.

⁵⁸ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.434.

⁵⁹ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.437.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.438.

⁶¹ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.444.

offers five suggestions regarding progress in unity:⁶²

(1) Where denominations in the same region are agreed in principles but kept apart by “unessential differences of usage”, they should unite.

(2) Where the differences preclude such union, the denominations should “recognise in the others a valid church character”.

(3) Each denomination should recognise the validity of the ministry and sacraments of every other denomination, including practising intercommunion.

(4) The disciplinary acts performed by one communion should be held valid by every other.

(5) Lastly, “all Christians should study moderate and charitable feelings towards others, and should sincerely seek to grow in the knowledge of revealed truth.”

The limits which Dabney put on interchurch cooperation are interestingly illustrated in his response to a proposed PanPresbyterian Alliance published in the Southern Presbyterian Review in January, 1876.⁶³ Dabney vigorously opposed the involvement of the Southern Presbyterian Church in this international body for a number of reasons. One was the lack of clarity regarding the authority which the Alliance would claim, and the probable conflict that would arise with the duly constituted courts of the member churches.

⁶² Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.4456.

⁶³ Robert L. Dabney, op. cit., 2.52842.

Of even greater concern to Dabney was the fact that membership of the Alliance would entail contacts with churches with which Southern Presbyterians would not permit contact in other settings. Dabney was concerned by the liberalism of some member churches, for example in Britain, and reserved his strongest condemnation for those Presbyterian Churches which had severed fellowship with his denomination because of its support for slavery. “Abolitionism”, even in the Northern Presbyterian Church, Dabney regards as the fruit of unbelief. These churches once rejected his denomination. Though slavery is abolished, the position of Southern Presbyterians has not changed. How could there now be fellowship between the two? Indeed the very idea of organic union sought by the Alliance is clearly contrary to God’s will for the visible Church. The principles behind the Alliance are, to Dabney’s mind, the essence of Popery. The Southern Presbyterians, in Dabney’s view, should “leave the manifestation of Christian unity, where the Bible leaves it, in community of principles, spirit, and affections.”⁶⁴

John Murray: a different perspective

A common feature of the views expressed by each writer considered thus far is an attempt to make a clear distinction between the invisible Church and the visible. It is constantly stressed that only one Church is in view, although it seems clear that some are legitimately

⁶⁴ John Murray, “The Church: Its

members of the visible Church who cannot possibly have any share in the invisible, namely those who make a hypocritical profession of faith. Without a definite visible/invisible distinction, however, these writers believe that all kinds of harm will follow.

This approach was challenged vigorously by John Murray, a Scot who was Professor of Theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia from 1930 until 1966. He states his position thus: “The distinction between the church visible and the church invisible is not wellgrounded in terms of Scripture, and the abuses to which the distinction has been subjected require correction.”⁶⁵ He does not for a moment deny that the Church has invisible aspects, or that God alone knows those who are really his, but he argues that in the New Testament the term “church” normally designates that which is visible.

Murray examined this issue in an address given at the Leicester Ministers’ Conference in 1964 under the title “The Nature and Unity of the Church”.⁶⁶ Having established the continuity between the Church in the Old Testament and in the New, on the basis of texts such as Acts 7:38 and 1 Peter 2:910, he goes on to show that in the New Testament too the idea of “assembly” or “congregation” is at the forefront of usage regarding the Church. He notes the numerous references to

Definition in Terms of ‘Visible’ and ‘Invisible’ Invalid” in *Collected Writings* (Edinburgh, 196782), 1.232.

⁶⁶ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.32135.

“churches” located in various places, such as Jerusalem and Ephesus, and also the inclusive use of the word “church” as in Matthew 16:18 (“I will build my church”). When Jesus speaks as he does in the latter text, says Murray, “he is thinking of those gathered and knit together after the pattern provided by the Old Testament as the people for his possession, as the community which he is to constitute, and which stands in relation to him comparable to the congregation of the Lord in the Old Testament.”⁶⁷ Such an inclusive sense is also to be found in Paul’s writings, as for example in 1 Corinthians 15:9 (“*I persecuted the church of God.*”).

Murray goes on to argue that even in Ephesians and Colossians, where some texts appear to view the Church as the whole body of the elect in all ages, i.e. the invisible Church, a visible body is in view. A striking example would be Ephesians 5:25,26, where the Church is said to be subject to Christ. According to Murray, “In the context there must be a concreteness that is parallel to that which is enjoined, namely, that in like manner wives should be subject to their husbands. The exhortation would be bereft of its strongest appeal if the analogy is something that belongs simply to the invisible and transcendental realm.”⁶⁸ After dealing in a similar way with texts such as Ephesians 1:22,23 and Colossians 1:24, Murray concludes, “It is the church, exemplified in the saints and faithful brethren in

Ephesus and Colosse, which Christ loved and of which he is the head.”⁶⁹

This exegetical study paves the way for Murray’s summary statement, “The church may not be defined as an entity wholly invisible to human perception and observation.”⁷⁰ He contends that in the New Testament, whether the Church is viewed as the entire communion of saints or as a local assembly, it is always a visible entity. The spiritual facts which constitute someone a member of the Church are always expressed in an observable way.

Given human fallibility, there will always be some admitted into membership who do not belong to the body of Christ. This has given rise, says Murray, to a definition of the visible Church in terms of mere profession in an attempt “to allow for the discrepancy between the church ideally considered and the church realistically considered”.⁷¹ Murray concludes, “This allows for a definition that is embracive enough to include those who are not really members of Christ’s body. This, I submit, is an error, and contrary to what we find in Scripture.”⁷² When Paul writes to the church at Corinth and addresses “them who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”, Murray states, “he did not construe the church in such terms as would allow for the inclusion of those persons who might have borne the Christian name, and had

been admitted to the privileges of the church, but who were not sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints.”⁷³ Murray finds support for his view in 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul recognises the presence of “old leaven” to be purged out, but does not address the church as a community to be defined in terms of new leaven and old leaven.

Murray sees here a vital distinction, namely, “that between what a situation may existentially be by reason of the sin, hypocrisy, and infirmity of men, on the one hand, and the terms in which the church is to be defined, on the other.”⁷⁴ A correct definition is required in order to maintain the character of that to which the promises of God apply. It is only to the covenant people of God that Peter’s words in 1 Peter 2:9,10 can be applied. The same holds true for promises such as that of Christ that the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church.

Developing this point further, Murray provides a careful consideration of the scriptural designation of the Church as “the body of Christ”. He notes, among other things, that the New Testament use of this language makes clear that there is one, united body of Christ, and that this truth is stressed by Paul on several occasions in the face of strife and division in particular, visible congregations. He concludes, “In a word, the unity of the body of Christ is not a tenet that may be relegated to the transcendental

⁶⁷ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.323.

⁶⁸ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.325.

⁶⁹ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.326.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² John Murray, op. cit. , 2.327.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

realm of invisible, spiritual relationship, but a truth that governs, regulates and conditions the behaviour of the people of God in that communal, covenant relationship which they sustain to Christ in the institute of the church.”⁷⁵ Considering the Church in its most universal sense, Murray says, “Hence, to maintain that the unity belonging to the church does not entail ecumenical embodiment, is to deny the catholicity of the church of Christ. If the church is catholic, then unity is catholic.”⁷⁶

Murray then goes on to demonstrate that the unity of the church relates to each person of the Trinity and focuses particularly on Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17:20-23. He notes that the terms in which the unity of the Church must be conceived are the transcendent oneness of Father and Son. Such unity, argues Murray, cannot be divorced from faith in Christ (as verse 20 shows), it must be based on the doctrine of the Father and the Son which the apostolic witness provides, and it is the unity to which Jesus himself continued to bear witness through his apostles. Whilst spurious unity is to be condemned, the lack of unity among churches professing biblical faith in its purity is, according to Murray, “a patent violation of the unity of the body of Christ, and of that unity which the prayer of our Lord requires us to promote.”⁷⁷ The unity prayed for is to be a witness to the world and must

⁷⁵ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.332.

⁷⁶ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.3323.

⁷⁷ John Murray, op. cit. , 2.335.

therefore be observable.

Whilst recognising the difficulties that seeking to remedy disunity entails, Murray argues that the complacency of so many on this matter must be exposed for the evil it is, “dishonouring to Christ, destructive of the edification defined by the apostle as “the increase of the body into the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16), and prejudicial to the evangelistic outreach to the world.”⁷⁸

When we realise how evil this failure is, he says, we will then “be constrained to preach the evil, to bring conviction to the hearts of others also, to implore God’s grace and wisdom in remedying the evil, and to devise ways and means of healing these ruptures, to the promotion of united witness to the faith of Jesus and the whole counsel of God.”⁷⁹

“Document 5” of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church⁸⁰

The purpose of this study has been to provide an overview of the ways in which the tradition growing out of the Westminster Assembly has approached the unity of the Church. It will thus provide an appropriate background for the ICRC’s consideration of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s document “Biblical principles of the unity of the church”. Only a few general comments will be made here regarding that document.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Proceedings of The International Conference of Reformed Churches, October 1523, 1997, Seoul, Korea, 97102.*

Sections I and II present a useful summary of biblical material on the nature and unity of the Church. The terminology of visible and invisible Churches is avoided, whilst it is recognised that the spiritual community of the people of God takes visible form. The stress on “covenant” which runs through these sections is helpful in reminding us that the Church is the fruit of the Covenant of Grace.

Section III on ecclesiastical union begins to apply biblical principles to the fragmented state of the Church. There is a commendable attempt to balance legitimate diversity, which should not be suppressed by ecclesiastical union, and necessary unity. Most unions, however, will require some degree of change, probably in both bodies, and it may be very difficult to decide whether healthy diversity is being impaired. It is not entirely clear what diversity is being described as manifesting itself “in differentiating historical development”, and so it is impossible to assess the claim that any argument supporting continued separation “must be false”.

The biblical evidence in support of union is helpfully set out in this section—where echoes of John Murray may be heard—particularly in relation to Jesus’ prayer in John 17. Part E, dealing with the kingdom of Christ, raises more specifically governmental issues. It is unusual to find the pattern of authority in the Church described as a “descending hierarchy” from Christ to the apostles and then

to the presbyters. Presbyterian writers have generally related the presbyterate directly to Christ, although the role of the apostles is correctly described in the OPC document. In discussions of polity, however, “hierarchy” may tend to create confusion. It is also important to stress that the “delegated authority” of the presbyterate is delegated by Christ, through his apostles, not by any “higher court” of the Church. Rightly, no higher office that the presbyterate is acknowledged. The phrase “making the presbyterate as inclusive as is consistent with loyalty to Christ and the faith of the gospel” may puzzle and concern some. The inclusivity would appear to relate to the bringing together of likeminded churches under one form of government by elders.

Section IV seeks to set out practical steps that can be taken by churches to foster closer relations and, ultimately, effect unity. Much of this section should receive hearty approval from all who seek

Godhonouring biblical unity. Both what is possible at present and what may be hoped for in the future are clearly delineated. Many in the presbyterian tradition, as we have seen, would query Part C, “The ultimate goal of the unity of the church is nothing less than one worldwide presbyterian/reformed church”. Few have believed that, in the light of human frailty on this side of the eschaton, such a worldchurch could be viewed with anything other than foreboding. For many the spectre of the Papacy looms large in their thinking. Great care needs to be taken in dealing with the issue of “sin” where churches are separate. Part E states, “The present division into separate denominations is because of unfaithfulness to God”. No doubt sin has always been present in divisions, but not necessarily on both sides. Some denominations exist because faithful people took a stand for the truth which others were forsaking. It may now be sinful for them to remain separate

from other faithful churches, but such a situation must be dealt with sensitively and with the wisdom afforded by the Holy Spirit. Where two churches hold firmly to principles which they believe to be soundly biblical but which nevertheless keep them apart, we need to be wary of language about “the sin of separate existence”, since there is also “the sin of compromising the truth”. Such practical difficulties should continually drive us back to the Head of the Church for necessary grace.

David McKay, a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland, is pastor of the Cregagh Road congregation in Belfast. He also serves as Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics at the Reformed Theological College, in Belfast, since 1995, and as the editor of *The Covenanter Witness* since 1991.

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