

# Ordained Servant



Published by

The Committee on Christian Education

of

**THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

April, 2003

**ORDAINED SERVANT**

**Statement Of Purpose**

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

**Editorial Policy**

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All material in this issue is subject to U.S. and international copyright laws and may not be reproduced without prior written approval. Interested parties are invited to obtain permission to reproduce material found in this publication by writing to the editor.

Copyright 2003 by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. All rights reserved

Published for the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church under direction of the Subcommittee on Resources for Church Officers

**Contents: Vol. 12, No. 2**

*Editorial Notes*..... 23  
*On Revising the OPC "Directory for the Public Worship of God,"* by Larry Wilson..... 24  
*Keeping Current*, by William Shishko..... 30  
*"Whatever..."*, by Paul Treick..... 31  
*Fatigue in the Christian Ministry*, by Lawrence Bilkes..... 32  
*Turning Points in American Presbyterian History (#1)*, by D.G. Hart & John Muether..... 34  
*The Lord's Supper: A Key to Reformation and Revival*, a book review by Larry Wilson..... 37  
*The Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures*, a book review by William Shishko..... 41  
*How to Assess a Sermon*, by William Shishko..... 43

*Ordained Servant* (ISSN: 1525-3503) is published quarterly by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Copies to ordained officers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are paid for by the Committee. It is also available to others in the U.S. who remit \$12 per year; foreign subscribers remit \$17. Periodicals postage is paid at Carson, ND. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Ordained Servant*, 5645 73rd St SW, Carson, ND 58529.

Please send materials intended for possible publication in *Ordained Servant* to the Editor, G. I. Williamson, 406 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201. (Or send it in a text file, by Email to: [williamson.1@opc.org](mailto:williamson.1@opc.org)). Please send all requests for additional copies of back issues, to the distributor, Mr. Stephen Sturlaugson, 5645 73rd St SW, Carson, ND 58529. Ph: 701-622-3862 (Email: [Sturlaugson.1@opc.org](mailto:Sturlaugson.1@opc.org)), or you can download all back issues of *Ordained Servant* from The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Web site on the Internet at: <http://www.opc.org>.

## Editorial Notes

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we have a number of short articles that need no comment from us, but some merit special mention.

One is a thought-provoking article by the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education (Larry Wilson) who is also currently serving on the General Assembly's committee working on revision of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. This work of revision has already taken a number of years and it may seem, at times, as if it is just too long! But what can be of greater importance than to worship the true God in the right way? It is therefore our hope that Larry Wilson's article will be carefully read by all officer-bearers of the OPC, and that it will contribute to a better end result.

We are also impressed with the work of another member of the Committee on Christian Education (Gregory Reynolds). The review of his book on the supremacy of the word—the preached word of God—in communicating the saving knowledge of truth should make us all want to get his book and read it.

And then there is an article by Dr. Lawrence Bilkes of the Free Reformed Churches, dealing with the problem of fatigue in the ministry. Those who have never been ministers are not to be expected to fully understand how great this problem can be. But Pastor Bilkes understands this well, and also gives very wise counsel to us in dealing with it. We thank him—and the editor of *DIAKONIA*—for permission to reproduce this arti-

cle in this issue of *Ordained Servant*.

In the near future we hope to devote an issue to *the State of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. We invite two to four page articles for consideration on such things as: *What is Right with the OPC! What is not Right with the OPC!* One of the mottos (or is it really a mere cliché?) of the Reformed says 'a Reformed Church is ever reforming.' So how do we now stand as a Reformed Church? What enables us to rightly claim that honored name? And what do we need to do to improve upon it? Please send your possible contribution to the editor (as directed on the second page of every issue of this publication).

“We fail to accord to the Reformers our debt of gratitude when we cease to prize our heritage. Other men labored and we have entered into their labors. But far greater is the sin of failing to give praise to God. This heritage is not only one to be cherished; it is one to be propagated. The Reformation was the rediscovery of the revealed counsel of God on the most vital issues of the Christian faith. It might be summed up in the rediscovery of salvation by grace. But the Reformation was the reassertion of the whole counsel of God, to the refutation of error and

display of the truth. *Sola gratia* and *sola scriptura* were its fundamental principles. By one line of logical connection or another, all Reformation doctrine and practice are dependent upon and traceable to these two principles. These principles need to be propagated with renewed zeal and zest.

Reformation, however, must not consist only in retrospect nor in the re-*pristinatio*n of the legacy furnished by the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Reformation is a present duty. It is true that we cannot properly engage in the present task if we discard our moorings in the past. If we do not build upon the foundations laid in the Reformation principles, then, to say the least, there will be something naïve about our present efforts and the product of them. But Reformation as a task here and now is complexioned by the different context in which we live.”

— John Murray



## On Revising the OPC *Directory for the Public Worship of God*

### ***Seeking Peace, Purity, and Unity in the Body of Christ and Coming to a Consensus on Essential Contours of Worship that is Reformed According to Scripture***

by

Larry Wilson

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is in the process of revising her *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. To do so was by no means a rash decision. In 1948, the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly elected a Committee on Revisions to the Form of Government. This work spanned three decades, five versions of a new proposed *Form of Government*, additions and changes to the personnel of the committee, and finally a revised *Form of Government*. In all, 13 members served on the committee. The committee recommended its proposal to the 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978); the Assembly recommended it to the presbyteries, which concurred. The 46<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1979) declared the revision adopted and discharged the committee.

At one point, the General Assembly had added revision of the *Book of Discipline* to the task of the Committee. But, persuaded that this would cause further delay, in 1967, the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly erected a separate Committee on Revisions to the Book of Discipline. In 1974, the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly added revision of *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (DPW) to its task. Six different members served on this committee during its existence. The 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1983) finalized the adoption of a major revision of the Book of Discipline.

The committee worked on revisions to the DPW from 1983 until 1989, when its three members resigned. The 56<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1989) renamed it the Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Public Worship and elected new members. That Committee is still working. So far, eight different members have served on it. The committee presented a Proposed Revised Version of the DPW to the 69<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2002), which sent it to sessions and presbyteries for study. This is the point at which we now find ourselves in the process. Again, getting to this point was by no means a rash decision.

#### **Is it really worth it to debate about worship?**

In our day, however, it is common for believers to think of differences over worship as matters of mere preference over “style.” In spite of that, very little can occasion greater controversy in the church than disagreement over worship. In such a climate, any effort to write or revise a directory for the public worship of God seems at best to be a quixotic tilting at windmills and at worst to be a malicious rending of the peace and unity of the Church for the sake of trifles. Given the potential for divisiveness, is it really worth it to debate about worship?

It should give us pause, however, to learn that John Calvin insisted that concern for *worship* was one of the pivotal

reasons why the Reformation was needed: “...the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, *first, of the mode in which God is duly worshiped*; and secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained” (from “*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*” in *Calvin’s Selected Works, Vol. 1* [Baker, 1983], p. 126). But it should not surprise us, since God insists that he is “jealous” for faithful worship (Ex. 20:4-6).

We often apply that word *jealous* to romantic relationships. This is true of the Bible as well. Someone told me that asking the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to adopt a revised *Directory for the Public Worship of God* is like asking her to adopt an official marriage manual. He was jesting, but I think he came closer to the mark than he imagined. The Bible describes the covenant relationship between God and his people as a *marriage*. JHVH was the Husband; Israel was his wife. Christ is the groom; the church is his bride. In fact, God designed human marriage with the very intention of so picturing his covenant (Eph. 5:31–32). Therefore, when JHVH established his covenant with Israel as a nation, he first identified himself and the covenant relationship in the prologue: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the

## On Revising the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God

land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2). Then he required the faithful, exclusive love of his wife: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). He continued to discuss worship in the second, third, and fourth commandments (Ex. 20:4-11), reminding his wife that “I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:5). Throughout the Old Testament, God saw violations of the first and second commandments not just as *idolatry* but as spiritual *adultery* (see for example the book of Hosea). And so when we talk about worship, we are talking about the enjoyment and renewal of the covenant relationship between the Lord and his bride. This is the core reason why worship is so very important and so very central to the faith and life of the people of God. It is at the very heart of who we are as individuals created and being refurbished in the image of God. It is at the very heart of who we are as the covenant people of God. It is at the very heart of our relationship with God. This very centrality and importance of worship is why issues of worship can provoke such passion, including passionate disagreement.

This passion—and the consequent risk of division—tempts us to avoid facing our differences on worship. It tempts us to classify *all* of these differences as matters of mere preference over “style.” But our God calls us to do precisely the opposite. Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that *God is seeking worshippers* (Jn. 4:23-24)! “Nowhere in all the Scriptures do we read of God’s seeking anything else from the child of God,” writes Robert G. Rayburn (*O Come, Let Us Worship* [Baker, 1980], p. 15). As we grow in our love and zeal for God, we—like John Calvin—will grow in our zeal that God will be truly known and that God will be

truly worshiped. Such zeal, if our Lord grants it, will drive reformation and renewal in every aspect of the Church’s life. For example, it will renew our evangelistic and missionary zeal. John Piper helpfully exhorts: “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man...Worship ...is the fuel and goal of missions. ...When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God’s true worth, the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth...Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to “declare *his glory* among the nations” (Psalm 96:3). Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claim upon the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God” (John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* [Baker, 1993], pp. 11-12).

### Why should the OPC revise her DPW?

The founding fathers of the OPC are heroes to whom we owe a great deal. The current OPC *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (DPW) is a sterling example of a remarkable salvaging of sound, biblical principles and their application during an age of widespread apostasy. When the OPC was formed, it was an attempt to rebuild a faithful church after a long period of infidelity and devastation. Framing and adopting the DPW was a noteworthy step toward reforming a faithful church in our day. I am persuaded that it is still a very good and very useful document. Its positive thrust and even some of its very language trace through historic presbyterian directories to *The*

*Directory for the Publick Worship of God* agreed upon by the Westminster Assembly in 1645. It is not insignificant that—with the exception of the suggested forms appended to the document—the DPW is part of the *Constitution* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It gained that status in 1939 by action of the Sixth General Assembly. This implies that if the DPW is to be revised at all, any revision should be undertaken with the utmost care. I strongly sympathize with those in the Church who prefer simply to retain the current DPW. I am convinced, however, that it would actually be a serious mistake for the Church merely to retain her DPW without vigorously renewing her commitment to its underlying principles. I have two major reasons.

First, I am concerned that too few holding office in the Church really “own” the DPW. On the one hand, it seems that many officers mistakenly believe that the DPW was not part of the *Constitution* of the OPC until the 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978), when the revision of the *Form of Government* that took effect expanded the third ordination vow to read, “Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” Before that, the vow read, “Do you approve of the government and discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” At some point during the process of revising the *Form of Government*, someone interpreted the words “government and discipline” to mean the *Form of Government* and the *Book of Discipline* to the exclusion of the *Directory for Public Worship*. Somehow the Church became persuaded of that interpretation. However, that same formulation—“government and discipline”—had historically been used in the Presbyterian

## On Revising the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God

ordination vow in a broader sense (analogous to the way it is used in the fourth membership vow—to “submit ... to the *government...*” and “heed the *discipline* of the church”). It refers to the way the exalted Christ guides and guards his church by his Word and Spirit through biblical officers, biblical courts, and biblical standards. The OPC had simply preserved this historic Presbyterian language in her third ordination vow. That language *included* the tertiary standards of the Church, but it was not limited to them. The 1978 action, then, was based on an erroneous understanding of this vow. Due to this widespread misunderstanding, many who were ordained before that point sincerely believe that they are not bound by the DPW. In fact, however, the DPW has been part of the OPC *Constitution* and has been binding on officers since the Sixth General Assembly in 1939.

On the other hand, it appears that there are officers, particularly some ordained in the last several decades, who—knowing that work was progressing on a revision to the *DPW*—took ordination vows without consciously committing to the existing DPW. Whether or not that is true, it does seem clear that too few holding office in the Church really “own” the DPW. I am convinced that this situation gives occasion for confusion and division within the Church. It is therefore urgent that the Church forthrightly face these issues and vigorously renew her commitment to underlying principles of worship which are Reformed according to the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.

Second, I have also become persuaded, with many in the Church, that our good DPW can be made even better and even more helpful to the Church. If

the DPW is a remarkable salvaging of biblical principles in an age of apostasy, now—standing on the shoulders of our fathers—we have an opportunity to make the salvaging even more thoroughgoing. What are some ways the DPW could be improved?

1-First, the DPW could more consistently work out the implications of the fact that public worship is “divine” (II:4) and that it is “before all else a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people” (II.2). It could do so by being less abstract and theoretical and by more plainly expressing and encouraging the believing expectation that our exalted Lord himself works supernaturally and effectually in worship to gather and perfect his elect by and with his ordained means of grace (WCF XXV:3). This deepened emphasis could serve to summon us to biblical reformation in faith and worship at a much more radical level than current debates over “traditional” and “contemporary” worship.

How we need such a summons! I am persuaded that one of the great pitfalls to which we in our day are easily liable —(I confess that I personally struggle to keep repenting of this sin)—is what I call “Reformed deism.” This is the practical attitude that our situation is *as if* the Lord is “way up there” watching us and we are “way down here” serving him. He has given us our “marching orders” and, in the Reformed faith, we have an especially detailed understanding of them. And now it is *up to us* to obey them and to implement them. This represents a practical disconnect from what we profess and believe. It is nothing other than

“unfaith” or functional unbelief. It is to have a form of godliness, but to deny the power thereof.

How we need to be challenged to repent! The DPW could more plainly issue that challenge; it could lend itself less to aiding and abetting “Reformed deism.” For instance, does the following statement—typical of the DPW—adequately challenge such functional unbelief? “Through public worship on the Lord’s Day Christians should learn to serve God all the days of the week in their every activity, remembering, whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God” (II:3). That statement is true as far as it goes. But does it go far enough? Should it not also call us to expectantly trust our exalted Savior to himself actively, supernaturally work such consecration through his means of grace? This is what our Confession of Faith does: “Unto this catholic visible Church *Christ* hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world; and *doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto*” (XXV:3). In an age of unbelief and “self-help” religion such as ours, how we need to be challenged by this scriptural supernaturalism!

2-Second, and very closely related, the DPW could be brought into more perfect harmony with the Church’s Standards in its treatment of the sacraments. At one point, the DPW actually conflicts with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). WCF XXI:5 lists “the due admini-

## On Revising the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God

stration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ” with reading, preaching, and hearing the Word of God and the singing of psalms as “all parts of the *ordinary* religious worship of God.” In contradiction, however, DPW IV:A:1 identifies the sacraments as “*occasional* elements of the public worship of God.”

Moreover, in its direction for the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Lord’s Supper, it could more clearly represent the Church’s commitment to the Calvinistic doctrine of the sacraments (that the Supper is an objective means of grace by which *the Lord* grants true supernatural communion, applying himself and his benefits to those who observe the sacrament in faith), affirmed in its Confession and Catechisms, and lend itself less to a Zwinglian understanding (that the Supper is a mere devotional tool by which *we* examine ourselves and remember what the Lord did for us long ago). This entire area of the sacraments seems to be closely intertwined with the first concern. Again, the DPW could more adequately advance a scriptural supernaturalism.

3-Third, the DPW could much better spell out the *corporate* implications of the sacraments. In the covenant, the Lord joins us not only to himself but to one another. And so, in union and communion with Christ and his church, believers have reciprocal obligations. We are “members one of another” (Rom. 12:5). A biblical understanding both of baptism and of the Lord’s Supper includes this component. How increasingly important this factor has be-

come in our individualistic and voluntaristic culture!

4-Fourth, the DPW could more explicitly spell out some of the positive commitments of church membership in the membership vows, and the corporate character of our covenantal faith. Again, how increasingly important this factor has become in our individualistic and voluntaristic culture!

5-Fifth, it should show greater sensitivity to the fact that according to our Standards, our baptized covenant children are full *members of the Church*, albeit non-communicant members. This is especially egregious when the DPW treats the public profession of faith by a covenant young person identically to the public profession of faith of a new convert from paganism. It may be wondered, does this reflect a low view of the covenant or does it reflect a low expectation that the Lord will actually convert people? In either case, the DPW could be improved at this point.

6-Sixth, the DPW could make more evident its reason for making provision for public professions of faith. As it is, it appears arbitrary or a matter of mere human tradition.\

7-Seventh, the DPW could more explicitly show the integral relation between the Sabbath day and public worship. We should bear in mind that the first chapter in the DPW does not appear there in order to declare the Church’s theology of the Sabbath. The Confession and Catechisms already do that. Why does a chapter on the Sabbath appear in a directory *for public worship*, except that there *is* a relationship between the Sabbath and

public worship? The connection is implicit, but it could be more clear-cut. How this clear-cut explication is needed in our **age of ignorance and irreverence!**

8-Eighth, the DPW could be brought into greater harmony with our Confession and Catechisms by explicitly stating the regulative principle of worship. It is peculiar that it neglects to do so, since the regulative principle is regarded as a great distinctive of the biblically Reformed approach to worship.

9-Ninth, it could clarify the issues surrounding the leadership of worship. Chapter III gives numerous directions concerning what a minister should do in conducting public worship. Then, conspicuous in its incongruity, III:8 says “Nothing in the preceding sections shall be understood so as to prohibit ruling elders from leading...” Clearly, this amendment was inserted into the document later than its original drafting without much regard for its consistency with the whole. This issue of leadership in worship needs to be addressed more comprehensively so as to bring inner harmony to the document.

10-Tenth, the DPW could give guidance for the inflicting and removing of the censure of excommunication in relation to public worship. Again, it is peculiar that it neglects to do so, since Scripture calls for this to be done in the public assembly (1 Cor. 5:4) and older American Presbyterian directories did include such direction.

11-Eleventh, the DPW could give a more complete survey of the elements of worship in chapter III. It lists six elements:

## On Revising the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God

the public reading of Scripture, preaching, blessing the people from God (the salutation and benediction), public praying, congregational singing, and the bringing of offerings. Later, the document makes provision for additional elements: the celebration of the sacraments and public profession of faith. Are these not elements of worship? And if there is biblical warrant for *personal* profession of faith, is there not biblical warrant for *corporate* profession of faith, e.g., by means of something like the Apostles' Creed? If so, should not some direction to that effect be included?

12-Twelfth, it could show greater care in some of its allusions to Scripture. For instance, II:6 applies John 4:24 in a manner which is equally true of worship under the old covenant and worship under the new covenant. But this is clearly insensitive to what our Lord actually announces in that context—the great transition between the two administrations. This seems once again to relate to the aforementioned need more adequately to express scriptural supernaturalism. This use of John 4:24 has the effect of obscuring a believing expectation that the Holy Spirit supernaturally works to effect a literal “meeting of the triune God with his chosen people” (II.2)

13-Thirteenth, some statements of cultural preference without Scripture warrant could be winnowed out. For example, the DPW insists that “simplicity ... is an evidence of sincerity” (II:7); that “beauty and dignity ... are a manifestation of holiness” (II:7); and that “the stately rhythm of the choral is especially appropri-

ate for public worship” (III:6). But where does our God say these things in his Word?

14-Fourteenth, the Building Dedication Service is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed faith. With the coming of Christ, the worship of God is no longer localized in a holy site on this earth. The living God is rather worshiped in spirit and in truth in the heavenly sanctuary where Christ the Mediator is (Heb. 8:1-6; 10:19-25; 12:22-24). Moreover, he indwells believers by his Spirit so that they themselves—both individually and corporately—are his house (1 Cor. 6:19; 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22). It is therefore not consonant with the gospel to regard any earthly place as holy. Yet the Building Dedication Service directly applies psalms which spoke of the shadowy old covenant holy place—Psalms 100, 122, 84, and 24—to an earthly church building in this era of new covenant heavenly worship (cf. Hebrews 8; 10:19-25; 12:18-29) and repeatedly calls such a building God's “house.” Does not this section clearly need to be reformed according to the Scriptures?

15-Fifteenth, the whole DPW could be formatted in a manner that makes it easier for a pastor to use (with headers and paragraphs and forms adapted to different needs). If the logical flow were more readily apparent, the pastor should be able more easily to speak the forms in his own words, rather than merely reading them, thus increasing their effectiveness in edifying the congregation.

These examples should suffice to demonstrate that our very good document could be made even better. And if it can be

made better, then—in our current climate of confusion and division over these matters—should it not be made better? Is it not *all the more important* as our Lord has been so blessing our church planting efforts with growth and expansion, that we give scriptural guidance concerning the goal and fuel of the biblically Reformed ethos to those who are just beginning to discover that ethos?

### **Presbyteries need to make time to face these issues together**

No matter what the Church decides to do concerning revising her DPW, is it not a matter of critical importance that she directly face these issues so that she can agree upon and renew her commitment to worship that is vitally reformed according to Scripture? Even if the OPC somehow would be miraculously presented with a thoroughly scriptural, utterly inerrant directory for public worship, it won't do any good unless the Church herself embraces and owns it (“You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink”). But the Church can never embrace and own her DPW unless *the leaders* of the Church embrace and own it. And the leaders of the Church can never embrace and own it unless they forthrightly face these thorny issues together as brethren, discussing them in love, with much prayer, and in the light of God's Word and the secondary standards, communicating honestly and seeking to come to a genuine consensus. Somehow we need a forum for this kind of discussion so the leaders of the church can come to such a consensus. The best place for such discussion is in the presbyteries. In a presbytery, each local church can be represented and such a consensus can be fleshed out over a period of time.

## On Revising the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God

Time! Ah, there's the rub. The obstacle to this process is the proverbial "tyranny of the urgent." Each presbytery faces many demands; it has ministerial candidates to work with, discipline issues to resolve, outreach challenges to face, and many other urgent claims upon its time. How *can* our presbyteries find time to discuss worship issues with the goal of coming to a consensus on what are the essential contours of worship that is reformed according to Scripture? They can't. They simply cannot find the time. The urgent things will always press this discussion to the back burner, *unless* a presbytery is so persuaded of its importance that it intentionally chooses to *make* time for it. But when we recall that worship is at the very heart of our covenant walk with God and one another, when we remember that worship is the goal and fuel of biblically Reformed faith and life, can we really afford *not* to make time for it?

I know how two presbyteries made time for carefully considering the *Proposed Revised Version of the DPW* that the 69<sup>th</sup> General Assembly sent to the sessions and presbyteries for study. The Presbytery of Ohio has a standing committee—the General Assembly Liaison Committee—which is charged with guiding the presbytery in disposing of General Assembly-related matters. That committee corresponded and met in preparation, and then the Presbytery of Ohio had a special meeting which was devoted to a discussion of this matter. The presbytery considered the matter "as a

committee of the whole," which allowed for very free discussion without the pressure to make motions and vote. After hours of such discussion, the "committee of the whole" rose to report to the presbytery, which then re-committed the matter to the General Assembly Liaison Committee to bring a recommendation to the next stated meeting of the Presbytery. The Presbytery of New Jersey took a different tack. They parceled out the *Proposed Revised Version of the DPW* to different sessions and ministers for study. Then they docketed two hours at a stated meeting for each to report on the assignment they (or he) had received. Those reports were given, one after another, without discussion or debate. Someone was made responsible to compile a summary of the reports in order to communicate to the Committee on Revisions to the DPW after approval by the presbytery. In both cases, the time spent listening to one another, becoming aware of deep concerns, proved to be very valuable. It may well be that other presbyteries have done other things. I mention the two with which I had first-hand experience in order to suggest possible models for other presbyteries.

It seems that, if a presbytery has no standing committee that could serve it toward pursuing this purpose, it would be helpful for the presbytery to set up a temporary, special committee to be responsible to guide it in discussing the central principles of worship. When there is a conscientious committee, a lot of work can be done off the floor that can save the presbytery time in its

actual discussions. However this is done, I hope that you are persuaded that it *ought* to be done.

R. B. Kuiper included a very telling chapter entitled "Progressiveness" in his book, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, 1983, pp. 79–85). He insisted that a faithful, vital church must be both conservative and progressive. "Never may it, after the manner of liberalism, tear down the foundation that has been laid. That would mean retrogression and even destruction. But neither may it be satisfied to guard the foundation without building upon it. That would spell petrification. *It must maintain the foundation with a view to building upon it and withal proceed to build.* That is at once healthy conservatism and true progressivism" (p. 84, emphasis mine). He concluded the chapter with these words: "There is a Latin sentence, long used by churchmen, which expresses aptly the church's duty to be progressive: *'Ecclesia reformata semper est reformanda.'* That simply means that a reformed church must ever keep on reforming. It is not too strong an assertion that when a church ceases to reform itself it forfeits the right to be called reformed. And that is just another way of saying that complacency is a most heinous sin in any church. A self-satisfied church is either dead or dying. When a church boasts: 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' the Head of the church stands ready to spew it out of his mouth (Revelation 3:16, 17)" (p. 85).

---

*Larry Wilson, a minister in the OPC, is the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education. He teaches the class, Reformed Worship (Liturgics), for the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC. He also serves as a member of the Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Public Worship.*

---



# KEEPING CURRENT

by

William Shishko

While current events and popular trends are not (or ought not be!) the pacemaker for the Church, they are something of a blood-pressure gauge for the body social in which we minister. And as delightful as it is to delve into ancient tomes of theology and to muse on the glories of halcyon days past when the Church was in a golden age of reformation (!!!), it is also important that we, as officers of the church, take some time to be aware of what is going on in our world today. The problem is that with so many news periodicals available and a plethora of special interest publications calling for our attention (let alone thousands of books that are published monthly), how do we use our time and money in the most effective way to help us keep current?

I have found three resources to be particularly helpful in meeting this challenge. I commend them to you as, to my mind, some of the best resources, at reasonable prices, to help us be more informed about and discerning regarding our rapidly changing world.

The first, and no doubt the most well known, is *World* magazine (and its related publications for children). This 50 week per year publication, edited by men who are committed to the Reformed faith, is a popular news weekly that presents the news with a distinctively and genuinely Christian viewpoint. The editorials by Joel Belz and Marvin Olasky are always thought provoking, and the cultural insights of Lutheran scholar Gene Edward Veith, Jr. are most valuable. Brief book,

movie, and music reviews also help you to be aware of what's new in the popular media. *World* costs \$49.95 for a one year subscription. Call 1-800-951-6397 for more information or to place an order. (*World* also has an excellent book club that is especially useful for home schooled children).

The second resource is *Current Thoughts and Trends*, a monthly publication produced by The Navigators. This approximately 32 page monthly presents a digest of articles from dozens of other periodicals. Divided into categories of "Christian", "Family", "Ministry", "Church", "Nation", and "World", *Current Thoughts and Trends* offers well digested summaries of material that has appeared in publications as wide-ranging as *Psychology Today* to *Mission Frontier Bulletin*. One will certainly not agree with everything here (although there are generous doses of material from Reformed publications such as the *Chalcedon Report* and *Modern Reformation*), but I know of no better publication to help church officers be aware of the currents of opinion in the Christian church and, to some extent, in our society today. Cost is \$36 per year. Call (760) 781-5219 for subscriptions. Their web-site is [www.currentthoughts.com](http://www.currentthoughts.com).

The last resource, and unfortunately least well known, is "*Mars Hill Audio*", produced by Ken Myers. Ken formerly served as a cultural editor for National Public Radio. He attended Westminster Theological Seminary in the 1970's, and now brings his Reformed perspective to bear on cultural issues

via interviews with greater and lesser known modern cultural analysts. His Mars Hill Audio tapes arrive 6 times per year, and include 90 minutes of magnificently edited "talks" dealing with topics as diverse as genetic engineering to apocalyptic scenarios. These tapes are great for listening to as you drive. The thoughtful interviews are refreshingly stimulating to the mind, and informative without being tedious. For a free demo tape or subscription information call 1-800-331-6407.

## A note for Sessions:

Since the cost of all three of these resources (which are complementary, not overlapping) may be somewhat prohibitive for a pastor's budget, perhaps the church would consider purchasing these subscriptions for their pastors. Together they will provide a wealth of insight for pastors who ought to be aware of current trends. This, in turn, will bring an added dimension to the pastor's ministry to you and to the congregation. Churches should consider these types of purchases as *investments* rather than mere *expenses*.

**Rev. William Shishko is pastor of the Franklin Square, N.Y. Orthodox Presbyterian Church and a member of the Committee on Christian Education. He also serves as one of the instructors in the Ministerial Training Institute.**



## ‘Whatever...’

by

Paul Trieck

With the passing of time, some words have lost their meaning and others have taken on new ones. There are some words you want to just avoid, because of the improper connotations that are associated with them.

The word “Whatever” (having replaced “So What?”) has been grating on me. I’ll admit that the intonation of the voice (dropping off at the end of the word) has a lot to do with it. The speed at which it’s spoken and the accompanying sigh gets to me like fingernails on a black-board. Body language doesn’t help either. The rolling of the eyes or the shrugging of the shoulders is designed to leave either the “I could care less” attitude, or just an air of superiority.

Words mean things. It might appear like this word tells us nothing. It is mainly used to cut off further discussion, with the erroneous conclusion that whoever says it last, wins. Unlike the word “Amen,” we are left with the impression that there really is no truth - no right or wrong- and it doesn’t matter.

What sounds like a meaningless word does tell us something. “Whatever” reveals a lot about a person. Usually it means they really don’t know enough about a subject to talk about it. Or, if they do know something, it just doesn’t matter. There are a few times when this latter meaning is appropriate, but more often than not issues do (or ought to) matter.

This is one of those words we usually associate with teenagers. The word itself is a pronoun, but in our postmodern world it has become a subject, verb, and direct object all

rolled into one, and yet it is not a finished thought. It is an elliptical expression where what is considered to be irrelevant or easily understood is omitted. It is like the sentence, “What?” when really, what we mean to say is “What did you say?”

Sometimes the word “whatever” is not spoken, but it is a position taken. When people say “whatever,” that is not a non-position, but it is their position. And it’s a bad one. It’s not meaningless. It expresses more meaning than we’d like to admit.

In matters of faith, we have noticed more and more people assuming the position of “whatever.” Once again, it may be used because people either can’t defend their stance, or it does not matter to them, or they are too lazy to study the matter thoroughly, or they want to appear tolerant of all doctrines. Whatever.

More seriously, it may betray the belief that there is really no right or wrong and if there is, it doesn’t matter very much. That being said, there is no absolute truth left—just a type of generational relativism where the truth changes to suit the age we live in.

Too many theological and ethical debates seem to end with “whatever” instead of “Amen.”

We certainly don’t need “whatever Christians” with a “whatever faith.” God will not tolerate a “Laodicean lukewarm” faith. We need to see Christians catechized, convinced, convicted, and committed to the truth as revealed in the Bible.

This means we will have to take our stand on the Bible alone. This also means that we need to

spend some precious time in study. Pray that God’s Spirit will open our hearts and minds to His teaching. Reading it each day will help us get over the “whatever” syndrome and move to an “amen” steadfastness.

Maybe we could all learn to use this word as God intended. The Bible uses the word “whatever” in a more instructive and all-inclusive manner: “whatever is not of faith is sin.” (Rom. 14:23) In speaking of Christian liberty he has been saying that what you eat or drink may be a “whatever” matter, but why you do it is not. Every action of a Christian must have a clear purpose. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.” (Phil. 4:8)  
Amen.

**Paul Trieck is a ministerial member of the Reformed Church in the United States. He also currently serves as editor of the RCUS publication called the Reformed Herald where this editorial first appeared. It is used here with his permission.**

# FATIGUE IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - ITS CAUSES (AND CURE)

by

Lawrence Bilkes



Many in our day complain of being busy, stressed, and overworked. This phenomenon does not escape those in Christian ministry, whether they be ministers, missionaries, or office-bearers. Statistics tell us that more and more Christian workers suffer from burnout. Meanwhile, there is a widespread denial that Christians could ever be overworked. Doesn't Paul exhort us not to be weary in well doing and not to faint (Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:13)? We would do well to look at some of the causes of fatigue in Christian ministry and some cures as well. I will focus on the gospel ministry, but most of the principles apply to any office in the church.

## Causes

**1. A minister has a full workload.** He must give himself to prayer and preaching. There are the sacraments, the feasts, weddings, funerals, catechism, meetings, reports, meditations, visiting the sick, dying, and the families, the vacant churches, and denominational work, etc. He works many evenings as well as days. He often works Saturdays, and Sundays require a lot of energy. As the letter of call states: he is responsible for "all that pertains to the work of the minister of the Gospel so that it is testified to all that it shall go ill with the wicked and only those who are justified by the blood of the Cross can have eternal peace."

**2. Ministers have a heavy workload.** It is not only the amount of work, but the type of work that often takes its toll. In many congregations there are serious conflicts. Marital breakdowns are increasingly common. Young people have many questions and sometimes many problems. Many older people struggle with loneliness and

wayward children. A minister often meets a lack of spiritual life among his members. It is a joy to visit with those who speak a great deal about the Word and ways of the Lord. But to visit those who do not look to the Lord is very difficult. To visit couples whose marriages are breaking or broken, to visit a family in which there has been conflict or abuse, requires a great deal of energy. We can carry them home as heavy burdens.

**3. The work of the ministry is never done.** When he comes home from work, he has not left his work behind. The telephone rings, and family's time together is interrupted. Often the problem is not the heavy workload, but the awareness that so much work is left undone. This can prey upon a minister's mind.

**4. There is a change in how people view a minister.** At one time, a minister was viewed as a respectable man in society. He spoke out on issues and the whole town or city took it seriously, even if they weren't Christians. Now, the minister is

seen as a peer and the authority he used to have is gone. His words are easily discarded or disputed. I do not wish to say that everything was better in the past, or that a dictatorial minister matches the biblical model. Nevertheless, the "double honour" that Scripture demands for a minister (Titus 5:17) is fading.

**5. A minister can easily suffer under a lack of spiritual life himself.** It may be that the life of faith becomes routine and commonplace, or spiritual exercises few and half-hearted. There may be laxity, faintheartedness, misguidance, or other issues, but chiefly this is a problem with faith. Sometimes fatigue can lead to spiritual decline; other times spiritual decline can lead to fatigue, and often the two foster each other.

## Cure

What guidance can we offer Christian ministers who suffer from fatigue?

**1. A minister must see the duties of the ministry in Scriptural light.** He is not to be the

## Fatigue in the Christian Ministry — Its Causes and Cure

chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4), but an undershepherd. We cannot substitute for the work of the Spirit. We are to give ourselves especially to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). We must decrease and Christ increase (John 3:30).

**2. A minister must keep his own spiritual vineyard** (Song of Sol 1:6). A diminished emphasis on communion with God will result in diminished spiritual supplies for ministry. Luther wrote in a letter to a friend: “I am now so terribly busy that I can't afford not to spend two to three hours a day in prayer.” Our logic typically is the reverse: We are so busy, we can not afford to be long in prayer. Luther thought the opposite, and so did his Master (Luke 5:16).

**3. A minister must set his priorities in consultation with his consistory.** The ministry is to be shared with the elders and the deacons as well as many of the members of the congregation. This will be different depending on the size of the congregation and the experience of the pastor. A consistory should offer to have reading a few extra times a year to alleviate the burden of a young minister. It can be helpful to exchange pulpits with other neighbouring pastors. We pastors also need to realize that the

ministry requires cooperation and brotherly love within the consistory.

**4. A minister must distance himself emotionally from crisis situations,** when he leaves a particularly tense meeting or difficult situation. This sort of self-protection has nothing to do with insensitivity or hardness on our part. When we are with members in crisis, we must be there for them according to Scriptural guidelines, but when we leave, we should no longer be completely bound up in the situation, but distance ourselves from it.

**5. A minister must take time for study as well as rest.** In terms of study, he must work through new and old works in theology. This deepens and enriches his insight and enables one to give spiritual guidance in the ministry of the Word to the congregation. The congregation should allow for study breaks and conference attending in addition to allotted vacation. He should not short-change his time for personal rest and time with his wife and family. A consistory and congregation should not frown upon it either, but rather encourage it.

**6. A minister must recognize his limitations as well as his**

**gifts.** We do not all have the same gifts and character. There are pastors who have received from the Lord an enormous energy; others have not. We may not compare ourselves with others, but rather every one must know himself to be accountable to the Lord. He knows the strengths He has given us. He also knows our infirmities. He also knows that we need rest and relaxation (Mark 6:31). He knows we need to be given refreshing grace to resume the ministerial labours. Sometimes it simply involves days off; sometimes it involves a few days or weeks away.

**7. A minister must be resolute in important matters and not entangle himself in unimportant ones.** The book of Proverbs lays emphasis on being resolute with our tongues in order to promote truth and harmony. In Proverbs 15, for instance, the Holy Spirit gives very practical instruction in this regard.

In conclusion, let us continue to be sober - biblically sober - redeeming the time (Col 4:5). Let us, indeed, not be weary in well doing; but neither allow ourselves to become weary in well doing. This involves much wisdom to be found ultimately with the Lord.

**Dr. Lawrence Bilkes is currently serving as pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Abbotsford, B.C. We first saw this article in the Canadian publication *DI-AKONIA*, and were struck by its balanced assessment of a common pastoral problem. We therefore asked, and received, permission to reproduce it for the readers of *Ordained Servant*.**



## Turning Points in American Presbyterian History - #1

by

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether



Americans, let us admit, have a problem with history. History is bunk, said Henry Ford. A disdain for the past is long-established feature of the American temperament. Ours is a culture that achieved political independence and evolved into a world power by jettisoning old-world values.

American evangelicals also have a problem with history. For most of them, history is bunk too. The American religious experiment was conceived in nearly Edenic terms: the New Adam and the New Eve starting afresh in a new world. Moreover, American evangelicals are activists and not contemplatives, crusaders and not pilgrims, which only adds to their disregard for the past.

In contrast, Orthodox Presbyterians have a far better appreciation for history. It is impressive to see how many members of our churches are familiar with the events surrounding the founding of the Church. They know about the Auburn Affirmation and the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Some can even identify Eritrea on a map of Africa and know how to pronounce “Peniel.”

Still, the OPC has its own problem with history. While we may be well-versed on the life of Machen, his struggles in the Presbyterian church, and the

controversies that gave birth to our denomination, we may know little of Presbyterian history that came before Machen. So central are the events surrounding the founding of our church to our identity that the tendency is to reflect less on our American Presbyterian antecedents. The impression left is that the story of Presbyterian-ism in America was one of orthodoxy and stability until the turbulent events of the early twentieth century. Consider this example, from an OPC brochure: “In the 1800s and early 1900s the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was, for the most part, a strong and faithful church. One could point to able theologians on its seminary faculties and gifted preachers in its pulpits. It was definitely holding forth a light in this world.” While historical shorthand is necessary in a brief evangelistic tract, such a simplistic overview may generate confusion and misunderstanding about our Presbyterian past.

OPC historical amnesia also arises from two surprising sources: Geerhardus Vos and Cornelius Van Til. Among their followers there is a great appreciation for their exegetical and apologetical insights that made deep impressions on the history and identity of the OPC. We share that respect and admiration. However, a strong temptation exists, especially among students and younger ministers within the church, to regard the insights of these men

as so Copernican that developments in the church prior to Van Tillianism and redemptive history become an unusable past. It is as if Vos and Van Til have rendered Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield passé – a sentiment, of course, that is far removed from their personal convictions.

So there is a form of OPC exceptionalism which may not say that history is bunk, but it implies that history before 1936 is bunk. This series which we are beginning in *Ordained Servant* is designed to challenge that mindset, by surveying key events or “turning points” throughout three centuries of American Presbyterian history. The accompanying chart indicates some of the events that we plan to cover. It includes unions and divisions, from colonial times to contemporary times. We believe that it is important for OPCers to remember that we are American Presbyterians. We must locate ourselves within Presbyterian developments in North America, understanding that our denomination's history is part of a larger story. We need, in short, to put the “Presbyterian” back in OPC.

Of course, the nature of that larger American Presbyterian tradition is strongly contested, even within the OPC. At its founding, the OPC sought very self-consciously to identify itself with its American Presbyterian past. It was, according to J.

## Turning Points in American Presbyterian History

Gresham Machen, the “spiritual successor” of the PCUSA. But what did Machen mean by those words? What inheritance was the OPC claiming? Many voices in our church’s past have left the OPC because of their perception that it had abandoned the American Presbyterian tradition. For example, Carl McIntire insisted that the young church had to keep the 1903 revisions to the Westminster Standards if it were to lay legitimate claim to American Presbyterian succession. And Gordon Clark and his sympathizers argued that the OPC had to be culturally engaged with other evangelicals in fighting modernism if it were to “preserve the American tradition in Presbyterianism.”

The church had forsaken its inheritance, in the eyes of McIntire, Clark, and others, because of the un-American leadership within the church especially from the faculty of Westminster Seminary, including Van Til, B. B. Kuiper, and Ned Stonehouse (all Dutchmen) and John Murray (a Scotsman). This influence, they feared, diverted the church from its mission to America and into a narrow sectarian oddity. For their part, these men, though equally committed to Machen’s ideal of “spiritual succession,” pled innocent of that charge, and they turned their opponent’s argument around. They saw in the Americanism of McIntire, Clark, et al., merely a more subtle form of sectarian provincialism. The Old School Presbyterian of the American past that they sought to inherit provided a grander, richer, and

more glorious expression of Reformed faith and life.

In reflecting on its American Presbyterian heritage in these and other debates, the OPC continues to wrestle with the question of how the adjective, American, relates to the noun, Presbyterian. Where have Presbyterians carefully adapted to (“contextualized”) their American environment? Where have they foolishly assimilated? What features of American culture either support or undermine the church’s cultivation of self-consciously Reformed piety? These are questions that a close study of history will help to answer and which we want to explore in our study.

We cannot speak intelligently of the American Presbyterian tradition unless we know that tradition better. In describing that tradition, this series is designed to interpret its significance for Orthodox Presbyterians. Our aim is less to win readers over to our interpretation of these events (although that would be nice), than to get Orthodox Presbyterians to focus more carefully on Presbyterian history.

The chart of Presbyterian family connections<sup>1</sup> portrays the diversity within American Presbyterianism. This will be an important theme in our study. Presbyterians came to the new world at different times for different causes. Some immigration, such as the Covenanters and the Seceders,

owed to particular circumstances in Scottish Presbyterian history. The tensions among these groups, the unions and divisions that they generated, the willingness of some to Americanize and the insistence of others to cling to old world values – all of this sheds important light on the present picture of American Presbyterian diversity in which the OPC is located.

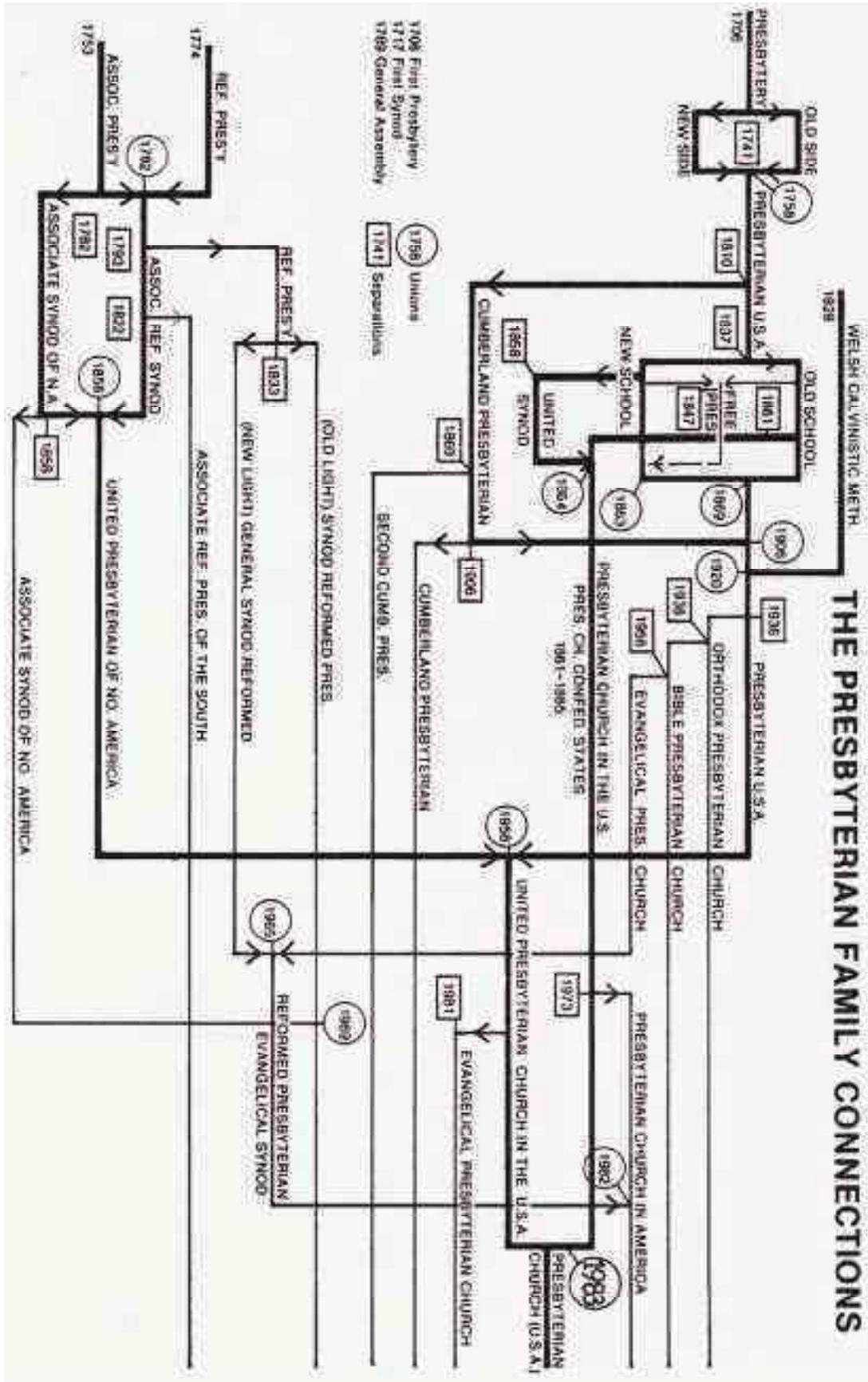
Finally, in presenting these studies, we want to make a case for memory and not nostalgia. Nostalgia, as the American historian Christopher Lasch argued, creates an idealized and frozen past that serves to undermine a proper use of the past. Memory, on the other hand, draws lessons from the past in order to enrich an understanding of our times. That will be our goal for these studies. Our desire is not to return to 1936 or to 1861 or to 1789, nor to re-pristiniate any “golden age” of American Presbyterianism. American Presbyterianism cannot be reduced to a Thomas Kincaid landscape. Rather, what will unfold is three centuries of Presbyterian struggles over strikingly familiar issues such as biblical interpretation, ecumenicity, social activism, confessional subscription, and worship.

What we may discover is that the very debates that our church is presently engaged in are old debates, and they are part of a perennial challenge to be Reformed and Presbyterian in American culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> See page 36.

## Turning Points in American Presbyterian History





## The Lord's Supper - A Key to Reformation and Revival

(a review article)

by

Larry Wilson

"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7).

Ours is not a day of spiritual strength. Doctrinally sound churches seem by and large to be sterile and powerless. Vital active churches seem by and large to be marked by instability and laxity. One seems to have something of a handle on holiness and reverence; the other seems to have something of a handle on love and joy. Must we choose? What they both seem to have in common is this: they put their confidence more in what *they* do (or don't do) than in the supernatural God of the Bible. It brings to mind something that Francis Schaeffer said. He said that it's possible to counterfeit holiness in the flesh and it's possible to counterfeit love in the flesh, but it's impossible at the same time to counterfeit holiness and love in the flesh. Only the Holy Spirit can produce both simultaneously. That seems to pinpoint the source of our dilemma. In my opinion, a humble, repentant, trusting return to the fully supernatural religion of the Bible is absolutely necessary if we are to experience reformation and revival.

This is why I think that all OPC officers should read and discuss *GIVEN FOR YOU: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of*

*the Lord's Supper* by Keith A. Matheson (published by P&R, 2002. Paperback, 376 pages, list price \$15.99). I know what you're thinking: "Why? Why bother to read a whole book on some 16<sup>th</sup> century doctrine?" But, dear brothers, this is no mere matter of abstract academic trivia. It is a matter of returning to the fully supernatural religion of the Bible.

### • The point of the book

Keith Matheson is director of curriculum development for Ligonier Ministries and assistant editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. While one might wish that Matheson relied more on primary sources, his purpose is to popularize, to digest important material for a wider readership. This is tremendously important if the biblically reformed faith is ever to grip the heart of Christ's bride once again. Matheson explains his goal:

"The primary purpose of this book is to introduce, explain, and defend a particular doctrine of the Lord's Supper—the doctrine taught by John Calvin and most of the sixteenth-century Reformed confessions. This is not the doctrine that is taught in most Reformed churches today.

"During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, two distinct views of the Lord's Supper gained some measure

of confessional authority in the Reformed church. The first view traces its roots to John Calvin, while the second traces its roots to Ulrich Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger. Zwingli's own strictly memorialist view was generally disowned by the Reformed churches and confessions of the sixteenth century. However, from the seventeenth century onward, it has gradually become the dominant view in the Reformed church.

"It is the thesis of this book that the gradual adoption of Zwingli's doctrine has been a move away from the biblical and Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. It is the thesis of this book that Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is the biblical doctrine, the basic doctrine of the sixteenth century Reformed churches, and the doctrine that should be reclaimed and proclaimed in the Reformed church today." (pp. xv-xvi)

### • The Calvinistic view

The book is laid out in three parts. Part 1 traces the historical development of the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper. He lays out Calvin's view. Then he shows how other sixteenth-century Reformed leaders and confessions advocated the same view. When he moves to the seven-

## The Lord's Supper - A Key to Reformation and Revival

teenth and eighteenth centuries, he demonstrates that the Westminster Standards also advocate essentially the same view. Then he explores some of the developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He particularly spends time summarizing the debate over the Lord's Supper between Charles Hodge and John Williamson Nevin.

In my opinion, this first section of the book (four chapters) is outstanding. It brings together material that one is hard-pressed to find in such summary form. I was particularly struck to see the slow but steady drift *away from* the supernatural Calvinistic view of the sacrament, that it is an objective means of grace which the exalted Christ uses to work *in us*, by which he effectually applies himself and his benefits to his elect. Little by little, humanistic elements were embraced so that in its place grew a more naturalistic understanding of the Lord's Supper as a devotional tool by which *we* can internally examine ourselves and remember what Christ did *for us* long ago. What I found particularly astonishing and horrifying is that some of our greatest defenders of orthodoxy — Charles Hodge and Robert L. Dabney — actually opposed the sacramental view of Calvin, the Reformers, and the Reformed confessions. Unwittingly, they actually contributed to the drift from the robust supernatural religion of the Protestant Reformation to a kind of “Reformed deism,” my nickname for the practical attitude that our situation is *as if* the Lord is “way up there”

watching us and we are “way down here” serving him. He has given us our “marching orders” and, in the Reformed faith, we have an especially detailed understanding of them. And now it is *up to us* to obey them and to implement them. This represents a practical disconnect from what we profess and believe. It is nothing other than “unfaith” or functional unbelief. It is to have a form of godliness, but to deny the power thereof.

This is very important material. It helps us to understand where we really are and how we got here. From Zwingli to Bullinger to Turretin to Hodge and Dabney to thousands of orthodox American Presbyterian pastors, there was a subtle backsliding from a vital, supernatural Reformation orthodoxy to the sowing of the wind of a kind of “Reformed deism.” Finally, we reaped the whirlwind of full-blown Protestant liberalism in the twentieth century. We have not yet recuperated from the devastation. We have not yet repented of all our “Reformed deism.” We have not yet recognized it as *unbelief*. And that is why this is such an important topic. It is also why recovering Calvin's scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper is a key to reformation and revival.

### • The Scriptural basis

But is Calvin's doctrine really scriptural? Part 2 discusses relevant Scripture passages, first Old Testament, and then New Testament. Matheson makes a particularly helpful observation when he notes the important connection and dis-

tinction revealed in the Old Testament between a sacrifice and a sacrificial meal. A sacrifice was offered to God for atonement; then it was eaten by the worshippers to personally appropriate the benefits of atonement. Matheson points out that this important background to the New Testament Lord's Supper shows the connection and distinction between Christ's once-for-all sacrifice and our appropriation of Christ and his benefits through his means of grace (like the Lord's Supper). There is other very helpful material here, but for the most part, these Scriptures—especially 1 Corinthians 11:17-34—are given too cursory a survey.

### • Application to theological controversies

Part 3 addresses theological and practical questions. Chapter 7 critiques the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian doctrines of the Lord's Supper. Chapter 8 recapitulates the salient points of the Calvinistic view of the Lord's Supper. Both chapters are outstanding.

Strikingly, the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic views agree on the *real presence* of Christ in the Supper. They totally disagree, however, on the *mode of his presence*. Matheson collects compelling arguments against “transubstantiation” (the Roman view), “consubstantiation” (the Lutheran view), and coins a new word “suprasubstantiation” to express the Calvinistic understanding of Christ's Spiritual presence in the elements. Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists also disagree on

## The Lord's Supper - A Key to Reformation and Revival

the *manner of partaking of Christ*. The Calvinistic view stresses *faith* as the mouth that feeds on Christ. Again, Matheson gathers potent arguments to vindicate the Calvinistic view as the scriptural view.

Most of us regard ourselves as holding the Calvinistic view. After all, we are Calvinists! But unhappily, in practice most of us have never known anything other than two options: either a Roman Catholic superstitious view or what is in reality a Zwinglian mere memorialist view of Christ's *real absence*. Because we see Christ as really absent, we expect little of the Word and the sacraments. This contributes in no small part to the sterile and powerless religiosity that I have nicknamed "Reformed deism." It also contributes in no small part to our so-called "worship wars." Some try to remedy this impotent sterility by putting the "Reformed wine" (doctrine) into revivalist or pentecostal "wineskins" (forms). But that is merely cosmetic. It is only another form of "self-help" religion. How desperately we need instead to recognize the root problem for what it really is—*unbelief*—and to humble ourselves before the living God in repentance and faith, so that we begin expectantly to look to him to work supernaturally through the means he has promised to use, the Word and sacraments!

### • Application to practical questions

Having laid the foundation with such outstanding chapters, one expects Matheson to really tighten the screws in his ninth

and final chapter—"Practical Issues and Debates." But in contrast with the rest of the book, this chapter disappoints. Ministers and elders are left largely on their own to draw out the pastoral implications of the scriptural teaching. Matheson addresses three areas: (1) the frequency of communion; (2) the elements of communion; and (3) the partakers of communion.

In regard to *the frequency of communion*, Matheson makes a strong case that it should be observed at least weekly. But given the rest of the book, one might expect his argument to be even stronger. For example, earlier in the book, he demonstrates how the Lord's Supper has been downgraded over the centuries from an objective means of grace—something that *God* gives to us—to an internal subjective devotional exercise—something that *we* give to God. When people protest that having the Lord's Supper every week would make it lose its meaning, what they are really concerned about is losing the intensity of this subjective devotional experience. But that is *not* the sacrament's biblical meaning. Nor is God's grace in Christ something that *we* have to work up. This is a very important pastoral insight, but somehow it seems to be forgotten in this chapter.

When the book deals with *the elements of communion*, it is more disappointing. Should we use leavened or unleavened bread? This book doesn't tell you. Should we use a whole loaf of bread which is broken

before the congregation, or is it OK to slice and cube it in advance? This book doesn't say. Does it matter whether we use a common cup or pour the wine into little separate cups? Again, there's no guidance. Who should administer the sacrament? No guidance. Does it matter if the people partake in their pews or come forward? Whether they sit or kneel? Nary a word. I don't mean to suggest that there is necessarily only one right answer to these questions. The disappointment comes in their not being discussed at all. The one and only issue addressed here is: should we use grape juice or wine? Matheson argues for wine. I tend to agree, but I think he blows this out of proportion. The Bible calls the liquid that comes out of the winepress *wine* (*yayin* or *oinos*), even when it is freshly crushed (i.e., before it ferments).

When the book addresses *the partakers of communion*, it is more disappointing still. Here the issue is the debate between paedocommunion (the view that *all* baptized members of the church—adults and children—should come to the Lord's Table) and what Matheson calls "credo-communion" (the view that only baptized, *professing* members of the church should come to the Lord's Table and that covenant children are to wait until the elders admit them when they profess their own faith). The book does point out that "credo-communion" is the confessional view and it does give godly advice concerning what those persuaded of "paedocommunion" should do if they

can't help but suspect that either this part of the book is very poorly researched or it is disingenuous, intending to tilt readers to favor paedocommunion. That's a real tragedy, and that for two reasons. First, it undercuts the purpose of the book: to recover Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Mysteriously, all the excellent summary of Calvin's views, especially his insistence on the mode of partaking of Christ with the mouth of *faith*, seems to be utterly forgotten at this point. Second, this weak chapter, especially this weak section, tempts one to forget the excellencies of this book. I think that the book would be much better if this one chapter was not included. May I suggest that it be regarded as an optional appendix? Most of the book is really exceptional!

• **Still, please read this book!**

Let me rehearse some of its strengths. Its survey of the history and development of the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper is noteworthy. His collection of arguments against Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and

Zwinglian views in vindication of the Calvinistic view is outstanding. His emphasis on the Old Testament background to the Lord's Supper, especially the connection and distinction between a sacrifice and a sacrificial meal, is very helpful. His summary of the components of the Calvinistic view, and his insistence that they are scriptural, is excellent. The book is nicely laid out, with footnotes at the foot of the page (where footnotes ought to be), a good bibliography and good indexes.

In his foreword, R. C. Sproul calls Matheson's book "the best and most comprehensive treatment of the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper I have ever seen" (p. x). I think that pastors especially, since they are responsible to teach about and administer the sacrament, really ought to read this book. But they ought to supplement it with *The Lord's Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread* by Robert Letham (P&R) and *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments* by Ronald Wallace (Wipf and

Stock). The former is a clear and concise introduction to Calvin's view and would probably be the place to start in seeking to educate a congregation on this theme. That is the book I would recommend for lay people to begin with. Wallace's book copiously quotes Calvin's works, especially his commentaries, so as to give not only a comprehensive and systematic presentation of his views, but also a good notion of where Calvin saw biblical warrant for them. It can be heavy going, but pastors should really familiarize themselves with this material, which gets at the heart of the Reformed ethos. Matheson's book falls somewhere between those two; it has strengths (and weaknesses) not found in either of the other two. If this is not a mere matter of abstract academic trivia, but a matter of calling Christ's bride back to the supernatural religion of the Bible, would it not help if all OPC officers read and discussed this book in light of God's Word?

**Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 170 - How do they that worthily communicate in the Lord's Supper feed upon the body and blood of Christ therein?**

**A. - As the body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses; so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death.**

*The Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures*, by Gregory Edward Reynolds (Wipf and Stock Publishers: Eugene, OR. 2001) Pb. 504 pps. List Price \$47.50. Available from the author for \$30.00 + \$3.00 shipping & handling. (Dr. Gregory R. Reynolds, 827 Manchester St., Manchester, NH 03104). Reviewed by pastor William Shishko, of the Franklin Square OPC in New York.

Some years ago on the bargain table of a local drugstore I came across a little hardback volume with the intriguing title *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse In The Age Of Showbusiness*. Written by Neil Postman, a conservative Jew and Professor of Communications at New York University, the book was a probing exposé of how visually-oriented communication (rather than word-based communication) seriously alters the way we learn, and, ultimately, how we understand reality. Building on the earlier work of Marshall McLuhan (e.g., *The Medium is the Message*), Postman saw communication media as a metaphor, and, hence, as an essential element of the message being communicated. As a preacher I understood that well: God ordained that the Gospel be communicated by preaching, a medium that, in itself, communicated the authority of the message and the messenger, and the absolute necessity of response from the hearers. To alter the mode of communicating the Gospel

would necessarily alter the authority and the urgency of the message. I regarded Postman's book then (and still regard it now) as a primer for preachers in the field of what has come to be known as "media ecology", i.e., the study of how media of communication are both influenced by and influence their surrounding cultures.

Now, less than a score of

. . . easily qualifies as a textbook for Christian college communications theory classes. It is also a rough but rewarding read for preachers who want to be aware of the big issues surrounding communication in a television, computer, and stage-based era.

years after the publication of Postman's volume, comes an in-depth evaluation of the whole subject of media ecology, not just from a Christian perspective, but from a distinctively Reformed perspective, and written by a preacher who makes special application to the media of preaching. Aptly titled, *The Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures*, and sub-titled "*Preaching in the Electronic Age: A Resource for Preaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*", Dr. Gregory Reynolds offers two books in one: (1). An extensive, thorough, and richly thoughtful history and evaluation of media communication theory, and (2) an overview of "the ecology of preaching", defending the historic Christian understanding of the unique excellence of live preaching. Written as a Doctor of Ministry dissertation that is truly worthy of the title "Doctoral Dissertation", Reynolds begins this remarkable volume by giving a biblical-theological overview of the

theme of idolatry in the Bible, and how that paradigm bears on communication. Drawing on the seminal thoughts of Christian apologists ranging from Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer to G.K. Chesterton, the author introduces his thesis that "(media) are not simply tools in that, while they are not inherently good or evil, they do change the way we interpret the world and relate to others, including God" (p. 58). He challenges his readers, and especially preachers, to preach the whole counsel of God as "the weapon of the wise preacher, who like

Paul studies his audience at every level, out of a passionate desire to see God's word penetrate to the center of (man's) ultimate allegiance" (p. 61). The entire section is an excellent presentation of the apologetical task of those who will challenge the icons (like communication modes) of their culture.

Part II delves into the history of communication theory. Many readers may prefer to skip this introduction to the names and the theories of some of the intellectual figures who have contributed to the modern understandings of media. This reviewer did find the section entitled "Landmarks in Communication Study" or the section entitled "An Historical Sketch of the Development of the Electric Media" (from the telegraph to the personal computer and the Internet) to be particularly interesting.

Part III, and the heart of the book, offers the author's Christian evaluation of the subject of media ecology. Beginning with the assertion that "(media) ecology offers a perspective on media which, mutatis mutandis, is compatible with a Christian worldview", Reynolds works out that thesis with clear-headed understanding of the various schools of Christian and non-Christian response to media, e.g., technophobes and technophiles, progressives and conservatives. His treatment is rich with application to the various forms of cultural responses to any technological developments, and makes the section valuable for understanding issues well beyond communication theory. His information on the religious presuppositions of communication theorists such as Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Neil Postman is both fascinating and illuminating. He also gives a helpful introduction to the responses of such Christian figures as Malcolm Muggeridge, Quentin Schultze, and Joel Nederhood. Following that, Reynolds devotes three sections to develop his own self-consciously Christian view of media. His section on "The Compromise of the Church" (including his thoughts on the current trend toward "theological education at a distance") ought to be read carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully. If it is full of implications for churches that have either been too quick in making uncritical use of modern communication methods, or that, ostrich-like, avoid even thinking

of the challenge and opportunity before it in this new age of electronic media.

For preachers, the last part of the book, will be the most rewarding. In introducing "an ecology of preaching", Reynolds demonstrates the primacy and uniqueness of live preaching, from the Scriptures, church history, and from the nature of the medium itself. "Preaching is a natural medium raised to a new height and for a unique redemptive purpose by the supernatural

**Preachers will be refreshed and challenged by this summary of the historic understanding of the preacher and preaching, and they will find the practical counsels by the author (who has been a preacher and pastor for over 20 years) to be most helpful.**

power and definition of God. The agency includes the man, body and soul, his voice and his message." (p. 333). Further, there are "unique excellencies which make preaching without peer among media, and therefore irreplaceable as the center of the church's worship and life." (p. 334). These "unique excellencies" are presented in detail in sections that offer superb insights into the meaning of preaching and how the public ministry of a live speaker to a living and present congregation are distinctively different in their ethos than any electronic communication can offer. One hopes that Reynolds will develop this section of his book into a separate volume on "Preaching in the Electronic Age."

The nearly 60 page annotated bibliography that completes *The*

*Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures* is a model of what such a bibliography ought to be. Here is a magnificent compendium of the titles and authors (from Augustine to C. S. Lewis!) who have addressed issues regarding media theory, and an equally superb compendium of works on homiletics and rhetoric. Preachers will value this last section in particular.

Though *The Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures* is not for the lazy reader, it is a feast for the

disciplined and thoughtful one. It is gratifying to see such a fine academic work produced by a man with unashamed Reformed convictions. It is equally gratifying

to have a fresh defense of preaching in the context of a live church community, and to have that defense set against every modern attempt to replace preaching with those things that may appeal to the senses, but which do not transform the mind as God has ordained be done by His word communicated through a living preacher who truly represents the Word made flesh.

**Gregory E. Reynolds is the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church, a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in Manchester, NH.**



## HOW TO ASSESS A SERMON: A CHECKLIST FOR RULING ELDERS

by  
William Shishko

The Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (X:3) requires ruling elders to “have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.” This is “in order that the church may be edified, and may manifest itself as the pillar and ground of the truth” (Directory for Worship, VI:B:2). No small part of this duty is fulfilled as the ruling elders thoughtfully assess the preaching that comes to a congregation on a weekly basis. Whether the preaching is by the church’s pastor or by a visiting speaker, e.g., another minister, a licentiate, or an intern, ruling elders have a responsibility to assess the preaching both to assist the one who preaches and to provide for the edification of the church.

Ruling elders often feel ill-equipped to fulfill this responsibility because they do not have objective criteria for assessing sermons. Not wanting to be critical of the servant of the Lord who ministers, and not wanting their subjective reactions to become a standard for assessing preaching, by default they leave this aspect of their ruling work undone. This deprives a preacher of what could well be invaluable assistance in improving his preaching, and it may well deprive the congregation of the kind of pulpit ministry which elders ought to seek to provide for the congregations they are called to serve.

The following list is designed to help ruling elders look

for specific elements which should mark every sermon. It is not designed to encourage ruling elders to be unnecessarily critical of sermons, but rather to help them grow in their understanding of what an edifying sermon ought to be or to include. May the list be of help to you as you listen thoughtfully, make suggestions wisely, and as you oversee both ministers and congregations with a view toward their growth in grace and in knowledge.

- Was the sermon *textual*, i.e., confined to a verse or small portion of Scripture, *topical*, i.e., dealing with a theme that is not confined to one text but rather refers to many verses used to develop a particular point, or *consecutive expository*, i.e., part of a sermon series on a book or a particular extended portion of Scripture, e.g., the Lord’s Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount? Is the preacher clear as to what type of sermon he is preaching?
- Was there an introduction? Does the introduction capture the attention of the congregation and, at the same time, actually introduce the sermon?
- Did the preacher give his outline and develop the sermon so that it was easy to follow where he was going? Were the points so impressed upon the hearers that they were memorable? Can you state the basic points of the sermon after the sermon is complete?

- Did the preacher deal with the actual words and phrases of his text(s), or did he seem to fly over them? (There is a difference between preaching *about* a text, and *preaching* a text or texts. Good preaching does the latter.) Did he explain and apply the texts in their context?
- Were there sufficient illuminating devices in the sermon, e.g., illustrations, metaphors, so that the more difficult points were made clear to the congregation? Were the illustrations (biblical or extra-biblical) appropriate?
- Was the argument of the sermon compelling? Were your mind, your will, and your emotions persuaded by the preacher’s message?
- Did the preacher make applications of his text(s) throughout the sermon? Did the applications legitimately grow out of the text(s) as he developed them? Did he take the time to impress the applications on the consciences of the hearers so that the hearers knew how they need to think, feel, and act differently based on what the Word of God says?
- Was Christ preached or was the predominant theme something other than Christ and the Gospel? Would an unsaved hearer understand clearly what the Gospel message is as a result of that sermon? Are believers chal-

- lenged to specific repentance from sin and renewed faith in Christ as Savior and Lord? Was the fulfillment of Christian duties presented as coming from the grace, strength, resources, and motivations of Christ and the Gospel, or were the hearers cast upon their own resources to do what God tells them to do?
- Was there a conclusion to the sermon, or did it just stop? Did the conclusion serve to make a final impression on the hearts of the hearers, or did it simply summarize what was said?
  - Did the preacher preach with earnestness, and with something of a life and death conviction that his message *must* be heard, or was there non-chalance in the preacher's manner and delivery? Did the preacher actually *proclaim* the truth as a representative of Christ the King, or was he content to simply impart knowledge of the Bible?
  - Did the preacher actually labor to communicate with the congregation or did he speak over the heads of those present? Was there material in the sermon to which even the children could relate and appreciate? Did he so labor to communicate that he cheapened or distorted the message he was delivering?
  - Was the preacher's language suitable to ministry of the Word? Were there glaring grammatical errors or misuses of words or phrases?
  - Was there superfluous material in the sermon? Would less have been more?
  - Did the preacher make use of "you" in his applications, or did he continually use the inclusive expression "we"? (Good preaching will include the frequent [but not necessarily exclusive] use of the second person, i.e., "you" throughout the sermon).
  - Did the preacher's dress, overall appearance, and pulpit manner befit a representative of Christ? Was it obvious to all that the preacher was a "man of God" (2 Tim. 3:17).
  - Did he preach so long that it was beyond his ability to hold the attention of the congregation? Did he preach long enough to accomplish what needed to be accomplished by the message? Did the elements of his sermon serve that purpose or not?
  - What kind of congregational response (if any) did you get regarding the message?
  - Was the sermon well prepared? Was it obvious that the preacher did not deliver something that cost him nothing (cf. 1 Chron. 21:24)? Could you sense that time, study, prayer, and much thought had gone into the message?
  - Were you moved to change in some way(s) as a result of the message preached? Why or why not?
  - Was this preaching edifying to the congregation? Did it faithfully reflect the doctrinal position of the church? Did it contribute well to the church's testimony as a pillar and ground of the truth (cf. I Tim. 3:15).
  - What encouraging words can you give to the preacher about his sermon? What constructive suggestions could you make? Do you need to make them? If so, prayerfully determine how and when, and make them.

---

*Ordained Servant*  
5645 73<sup>rd</sup> St. SW  
Carson, ND 58529

Periodicals

Address Service Requested