

Vol. 12, No. 3

# ORDAINED SERVANT



Published by

The Committee on Christian Education

of

THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

July, 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.

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Published for the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
under direction of the subcommittee on Resources for Churches

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*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, or back issues, to the distributor, Mr. Stephen Sturlaugson, 5645 73rd St SW, Carson, ND 58529. Telephone: 701-622-3862 (Email: [Sturlaugson.1@opc.org](mailto:Sturlaugson.1@opc.org)), or you can download any and all back issues of *Ordained Servant* from The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Web site on the Internet at: <http://www.opc.org>.

In the April 2003 issue of *Ordained Servant* we invited submission of articles related to the present state of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Several of those which we have received appear in this issue. We wish to express our thanks to those who responded. But we also hasten to add that that we would be glad to receive further contributions. If you do respond please do your utmost to say what you have to say as briefly as possible (take your cue from the divines who wrote the Westminster Shorter Catechism). In other words try to keep it to two or three pages—four at the most—in single-spaced twelve point type.

Many churches in our time have lost the gospel because they would not work, and where necessary, fight to keep it. The alternative each church ultimately faces is: Fight for the truth or lose it! (Peter De Jong in *The Bible in Missouri*, 1972).

Time and space too, had their beginning...these two are not independent creatures, called into being by a separate mighty act of God. We read nothing of the kind in the account of the creation. Nevertheless time and space are indispensable forms of existence for created beings. God alone is eternal and omnipresent. Creatures, because they are crea-

tures, are subject to time and space, though not all of them are this in the same way. Time makes it possible for a thing to continue existing in a succession of moments, for one thing to be after another. Space makes it possible for a thing to spread out to all sides, for one thing to exist next to another. Time and space therefore...did not exist beforehand as empty forms to be filled in by the creatures; for when there is nothing there is no time nor space either. They were not made independently, alongside of the creatures, as accompaniments, so to speak, and appended from the outside. Rather they were created in and with the creatures as the forms in which those creatures must necessarily exist as limited, finite creatures. Augustine was right when he said that God did not make the world in time, as if it were created into a previously existing form or condition, but that He made it together *with* time and time together *with* the world (Herman Bavinck in *Magnalia Dei*, 1909, as translated in *Our Reasonable Faith*, 1956, p 6)

The Scriptures nowhere appeal to the unregenerated reason as to a qualified judge. On the contrary, Scripture says over and over that the unregenerate reason is entirely unqualified to judge (Cornelius Van Til in *The Defense of the Faith*, 1955 p 306).

On Thursday, June 11, 1936, the hopes of many long years were realized. We became members, at last, of a true Presbyterian Church; we recovered, at last, the blessing of true Christian fellowship. What a joyous moment it was! How the long years of struggle seemed to sink into nothingness compared with the peace and joy that filled our hearts!

To the world, indeed, it might seem to have been not a happy moment but a sad one. Separation from the church of one's fathers; a desperate struggle ahead, with a tiny little group facing the hostility of the visible church—what possible joy or comfort can be found in such things as these? Yet to us it was a happy and a blessed moment despite all. You see, we do not look upon these matters as the world looks upon them. We ground our hopes not upon numbers nor upon wealth but upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. If our opponents despise us as being but a tiny little group, we remember the words of Scripture: "There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few." If we are tempted to be discouraged because of our lack of material resources, we say, again in the words of Scripture: "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*" (J. Gresham Machen at our first G.A.)

# WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE OPC?

by

G.I. Williamson



I well remember my own entrance into the OPC. It was in 1955 after I had already faced two crises—the first in the old United Presbyterian Church of North America, and the other in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup> When a group of people in the old Rock Street U.P. Church in Fall River, Massachusetts, called me to return to serve them as founding pastor of an OPC there, I answered the call with fear and trembling.

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

experience, and thank God for it. So, that is number one.

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

The second thing that I see as significant is the wonderful way that the OPC has been willing, and therefore able, to respect differences (so long as they are within the doctrinal boundaries of the Confession and Catechisms). I came to the firm conviction that only the inspired Psalms should be sung in worship in 1956. And I still believe the arguments of the minority report of 1948 have not been successfully answered. But I mention

it here for another reason, and that reason is that in spite of being out of step with the 20<sup>th</sup> century (and now 21<sup>st</sup> century majority) I have never been discriminated against by my majority brethren. To the contrary, I’ve been treated with respect (more than I deserve). I think this is because it is widely recognized that my view is that of historic Presbyterianism and that, even if I am wrong, I should not be persecuted for it. This is a very rare thing in the Christian church today. Indeed, it has come to the place in some denominations where being out of step with the majority view is the one thing that is certain to bring discipline upon you.

A third thing that has always impressed me in the OPC is the integrity of its Presbyterianism. That may sound strange, but I think it is true. Let me describe a scenario that I have heard about in another denomination by way of contrast. The pastor of a certain church is having difficulty with his elders. So what does the Presbytery do? Well, it creates a commission. The commission goes to the church and invites people to come and meet with it so it can hear what they think of the pastor. Some very serious charges are heard by the men of the commission. But they are not heard, directly, by the pastor. No, they are only relayed indirectly without

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naming the person who said them. And then the commission determines what should be done—usually by using what some call the ‘Solomonic method’ of cutting the baby in two (by which I mean dividing the blame about half and half on the pastor and others). Well, it doesn’t work that way in the OPC. No, in the OPC people who make charges are (as a general rule at least) held accountable. And those against whom the charges are made get to face their (known) accusers. The result is that what is done is *not* by a supposed Solomonic solution. It is rather the case that what is usually done is to try to deal with specific sin, and to bring about genuine repentance. I use the term usually because of what our Confession says in 31:4. There is no such thing on this earth as perfect justice. No, but the kind of Presbyterianism practiced in the OPC is the nearest thing to it that I know of. I regard this as a very important virtue.

A fourth thing that I’ve seen as unique about the OPC has been its ecumenical outlook. There are Reformed Churches that seem to me to be virtually ‘fixated’ on the particular crisis that gave them birth. They seem to me to know what they are against much better than what they are for. What impressed me from day one of my involvement in the OPC was its lack of such a fixation. The only fixation that I saw was rather for the promotion of the Reformed Faith. It is this that has made us a strong mission-minded church (both at home and abroad). It is this that led us to help build a Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the middle of the twentieth century—and then to separate from it

when its Reformed integrity had been fatally damaged. And it is this that enabled us to seek—with other churches seeking to profess and maintain the Reformed Faith—to build a new ecumenical body (the ICRC or International Conference of Reformed Churches).

Thus far in our history we have not been (as a corporate body) afflicted with the conviction that ‘we are the people’ and that ‘the truth will die with us.’ To my perception at least, the OPC—in and of itself—has ever been our supreme object of devotion. I believe we’ve always been willing to see the OPC swallowed up in something greater: if it is truly Reformed!

A fifth distinctive, as I see it, has been our willingness to deal forthrightly with vital issues. This was true in the very early days of our existence as a Church. Some, just out of the old church, wanted to impose a humanly legislated morality on the whole church—total abstinence from any and all beverages with any alcoholic content. It is not difficult to imagine how painful it was to contemplate the loss of entire churches, in those early days, when the attempt to impose this total abstinence rule on the church was resisted. Indeed, it did result in such a loss. (And this has been the case in other instances in our history too.) Yet the bottom line was that the OPC was not willing to compromise what the Bible teaches<sup>2</sup> in order to avoid unpleasant consequences.

In those days—I was told some years ago by some of the ‘old timers’ of that era—the following was a popular motto in the church:

it said: “resist the beginnings”! Well, thank God they *did* resist the beginnings—refusing the path of easy expediency in order to remain faithful to the clear teaching of the Bible. This has made a very great difference.

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

I’m not one who thinks everything is wonderful in the OPC. (And I don’t think it ever will be. No, perfection awaits the consummation.) But, by the grace of God, we are what He has enabled us to be—and we need to be profoundly grateful for the heritage the Lord has given us. We also need to be on our guard today so that we too ‘resist the beginnings.’

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<sup>1</sup> The first crisis came when I began to realize the magnitude of the disaster that came on the United Presbyterian Church of North America (when it adopted its new Confessional Statement, in 1925, as authoritative. Wherever it differed from the Westminster Standards the new was authoritative). The second came when I encountered the sinister working of the old boy network of Masonry in the ARPC. But I mention these only in passing.

<sup>2</sup> See my little book ‘Wine in the Bible and the Church’ made available again by Westminster Discount Book Service.

# Why I Love The OPC

by

R. E. Knodel, Jr.

When talking about the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) to prospective members, I sometimes joke that we are the “last stop on the railroad.” Men seem prone to try every other option until, out of options altogether, they limp resignedly into the biblical Presbyterianism of the OPC. Our tradition goes back not even seventy years. Our church buildings, for the most part fail the ecclesiastical aesthetics test. Our men are not rich or famous. And we certainly don’t receive invitations to the White House. Neither party wants us. The only quality we have which makes us appealing is our thirst for the Scriptures. Where men find themselves directed by the Holy Spirit, toward biblical preaching, their souls resound to the spirit and speech of the OPC. I would quickly add that we are far from being completely biblical; and we certainly don’t have answers to all the questions people ask. At almost every presbytery meeting and General Assembly significant causes present themselves for important argument. But I would testify that the OPC is the best of any denomination with which I am familiar, in bringing doctrine and life into correspondence with that “which is written.”

God declares in Isaiah 66:2:  
*“But on this one will I look; On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit. And who trembles at My word.”*  
More than any other with which I am familiar, I have found the OPC to tremble at the word of God. I will try to describe this below. In my description, the reader will see that I am not objective or neutral. I have grown to cherish and love the OPC. She has adopted me and loved me

when I was lonely and forlorn. Behind her manifold congregations I see the love of Almighty God smiling through. I love her every manifestation; even those imperfections which bring me consternation. For in all her appearances, I see parts of a whole. And it is “the whole” that I have grown to love.

## General Assemblies/Faithful Elders

Psalm 46 tells us that God Himself is in the midst of the church, and that on account of that, she won’t or can’t “be moved” (Psalm 46:5). The core identifier of this phenomenon must be the Word of God! The apostle John reported the words of Jesus thusly: *“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”* (John 14: 21)

Time and time again, over the twenty-five years of my membership, I have seen this love of God shown in our midst. Signal proof has especially been manifest in the decisions of our General Assemblies. Our late historian, Charles G. Dennison, chronicled how decision after decision—whether dealing with the mysticism of the Penial movement or the entrenched power of the American Masonic movement—has finally surrendered to God’s Word.

I have witnessed this again and again in our modern church history. In attendance at our General Assemblies, I am always amazed at wonderful speeches made by men completely unknown to me! This encourages me greatly because I had nothing to do with their virtue.

As I sit listening to their biblical argument my heart rejoices with the thought: “God has raised up another biblical, honest man! His Spirit has done what I, or a thousand others, could ever do! He has created another man of clean heart and able mind who has risen to think and speak biblically on this subject!”

Already I rejoice at the biblical exegetes/elders I know. But my joy overflows by those who are the “unknowns.” In them I see God working mysteriously to raise up another generation who, in the inverted words of Moses, “knew Joseph.” Faithful elders cannot be made by men! These can only be made by the Spirit of God!

In the last twenty-five years I have seen decisions rendered on the Charismatic Movement, the Lord’s Day, Creation, Church Union, and various and sundry Schismatics and Troublers of Israel. Sometimes the debate has not gone well, and I have grimaced in fear for my church. But in the end, in almost every case, I have seen the Bible win out. For this I rejoice in my church, the OPC.

My own special theory for this involves God’s honoring those in our denomination who have preceded us. He says in his word, “(T)hem that honor me, I will honor...” (1 Samuel 2:30). Our denomination’s history is gilded with the memories of those who have forgone earthly glories for heavenly reward. They have seen such things as those after which they ought not grasp, and emptied themselves for God’s glory (Phil. 2: 5-11). The names of Machen and the early men at Westminster Theological Seminary, and

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others who followed in their stead like pastor Lawrence Eyres, who just recently went to be with the Lord - all sacrificed much to stay faithful to God. The names and their stories bring tears to one's eyes.

Quite simply put: I don't know of any other modern denomination whose men have suffered so much to be faithful to Christ. These men lost churches and homes and riches and glory. And I believe it has been their 'martyrdom' to the glories of this world, which God continues to honor with his kind goodness to our denomination.

We have not the glory after which so many in our world hunger and thirst. But we do have the God of the Bible. And in Him we have everything (Ephesians 1:3)! We are utterly dependent upon His grace. May He continue that grace, in Christ, even if it is given in the midst of our worldly ignominy! Let us take up our crosses and follow Him (Matt. 16:24). By way of post-script I would add that this posture of God-first does not always translate into abject defeatism in the world! Just a few years ago the OPC tied for #1 Fastest Growing per capita Church in America!

### **Our Love of the Brethren**

Coordinate with God's grace, given through our General Assemblies, has been the love I have witnessed between the brethren of the OPC. I believe the OPC is great because of her love for herself, that is, the Elders love for one another. This may be especially ironic to outsiders, who have heard characterizations of OPC'ers as being argumentative and combative.

All I can give is my own testimony: As a younger presbyter, my heart was touched time and again in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century, as I witnessed Elders encouraging one another, and even

embracing, after gut-wrenching debates. Whether in presbytery or general assembly, rhetorical opponents would make every effort to show that Christ and His Church were bigger than they.

OPC men seem aware that we're all trying to be biblical. And even though our argumentation doesn't always carry with it that quality - as each might perceive it - we give one another the "Philippian benefit" of "letting each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3) Is this not the precious oil of the Spirit, which is "*running down the beard of Aaron*" (Psalm 133:2)?

Of this we may easily talk, but not so easily reproduce! I have been a member of three Presbyterian denominations, but only in the OPC have I seen the love of the brethren really and sincerely manifested in this way.

### **Our Love of Debate**

Lastly I love the OPC because of her debates! Before I applied for membership in the OPC, I learned from OPC pastor Leonard Coppes that debate was a good and biblical and wonderful instrument for discerning biblical truth. His argument had the "ring of truth." He said, "How can we be so sure of our interpretation of the Bible, unless it is tested by other men's interpretations?" This hit me like a bolt of lightning! While most people today consider argument to be "of the devil" and unloving, the OPC follows the Reformation tradition of grinding out the truth in debate. If something is true, we ought not be shy about debating it. And while some debates are won merely by the appearance of an argument (rhetoric), in a truly biblical society like the OPC, men are able to separate the chaff (the ephemeral aspects of an argument) from the wheat (clear biblical notions and logic). In this case,

*"(I)ron really does sharpen iron"*  
(Prov. 27:17)

Many, even conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations, shy away from debate. They seem to consider it unspiritual and counter-productive. But in the OPC I am glad to say that we love the truth of God enough to argue about it. We don't want to go off thinking we're right, if we're not! And so, while few of us "like" debate, in the flesh, we know its value, in the Spirit!

Coordinate with this principle is the fact that when men debate, for the most part, they actually listen to one another! I have rarely seen this in other churches. Usually men have their pet theories, which they will defend at all costs. But in the OPC - again, for the most part - even as men argue vociferously for a position, I hear them listening to their adversaries. And often in the midst of our debates (which we will not limit for the sake of nicety or time) we reach consensus the "old fashioned way." We "earn it" by spirited and true debate.

### **Conclusion**

Can anyone be confused regarding my affections for the OPC? At fifty-five years of age and many years in the trenches, I make this confession. Quite simply, I love the OPC. And I'm not shy in telling others about it!

**Richard E. Knodel, Jr. has pastored in Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia. For the past twenty-two years he has pastored Grace OPC in Lynchburg, VA. He edited *Journey* magazine, and is adjunct professor of Philosophy at Christ College in Lynchburg.**



## Where Have the Children Gone?

A Reflection Upon OPC Identity and a Postmodern Generation

by

Eric B. Watkins

How many of our covenant children who are nearing college age could tell you why they are Orthodox Presbyterians, or what it means to be Reformed? Let me suggest a long-term church death strategy: lose the children, lose the church. It is just that simple. If the children in our churches do not leave home with an understanding of why they belong to a particular church and denomination, they will have no concrete loyalty to either.

I have grown up in what is called a “postmodern” generation. In public schools, I was taught to distrust authority, be it in science or religion. I was taught that the big questions only have relativistic answers, and that existentialism is as “real” as it gets. Life is what you make of it; it revolves around you. Tradition is a dirty word.

These ideas rebel against the church, and ultimately against God and his word (*his* world view). But it seems that in a subtle way, this postmodern philosophy has not been altogether avoided by the church, and many of our covenant children are influenced by it. It is most clearly seen in the way many of us view

the church itself. Some of our children are growing up with a postmodern ecclesiology.

The postmodern message declares that I must find my own way in the world. I may thank mom and dad for doing their best, but what was “right” for them may not be for me. Their church was exactly that—theirs. I must go out and find my own. That sounds very romantic and brave, but it smacks of doctrinal indifference and individualism! It is the wisdom of this present evil age. A faithful church is not a consumer product that one generation has the right to abandon for casual preferences. Religion has been called the “opiate of the masses,” akin to a mind-altering drug or a coping mechanism. But choosing a church is not a matter of finding a mere coping mechanism that “works for you”; it is a matter of finding that which pleases God. A faithful church is something worth inheriting.

Ask a high school student why they are in the OPC. Take a look over your shoulder and see how many of the children who have graduated and gone off to college have stayed in the OPC. How many have joined other

denominations, and why? My guess is that the answers will be convicting. To be sure, many are limited by the fact that work took them to a place where there was not an OPC in the area. The real question, however, is whether or not they left home for college catechized in the reformed faith and competent to explain the OPC’s history, distinctives and purpose. The OPC is not perfect, but she is faithful. Her distinctives are worth cherishing. Can our children tell us why? Do they intend to remain in the OPC if possible? If they do not, will it be for principled reasons or shallow preferences that reflect a postmodern ecclesiology?

I fear that pastors and parents in American Presbyterian churches are far more *American* than they are *Presbyterian*. We live in the land of plenty. We have a plethora of options. While these temporal blessings make life enjoyable, they also shape our identity. As Americans, we are consumers. The street and mall are busied with experts who know how self-centered we are, and they cater to our subjectivism and consumerism. The church gets caught in this postmodern web, constantly tempted

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to compete with other churches instead of simply remaining faithful to what they know to be true. Our children may be caught in this consumeristic web, seeing the church as a product like clothing; something they may wear for a while but then discard for something newer. Is there any difference between inheriting our parent's church and inheriting their clothing? Let us hope so.

I have often heard words such as these: "I don't care who my children marry, as long as they marry Christians," or, "I don't care where my children go to church, as long as they go somewhere." Though these statements may be made with the best of intentions, in my humble opinion they express a dangerous way of thinking. They are a step toward liberalism. Has God really said that he is indifferent about our children receiving the sign of the covenant or about his promise being to us and to our posterity? Is worship simply a matter of style and culture? May the doctrines of grace found in

Calvinistic preaching properly laid aside for a salvation based on personal choice and a sanctification based on trying harder?

Is the Reformed Faith grand or not? Machen sure thought it was. He gave his all to defend it. He taught us that "doctrinal indifference in one generation will lead to liberalism in the next." Our denomination's history makes the point that theology matters. We are not fussy for nothing! We are defending the faith and we hope and pray that our children will defend it after us. That is the reformed ecclesiology we hope to pass on to our children.

So where have the children gone theologically? With what did we send them away? If we have faithfully taught them the theology and history of the church, and they depart, it is between them and God. But if we have subtly convinced them that the OPC is like a shop in the mall—just one choice among many—then we have failed them.

Theology matters, and our church has a great history of defending it. Teach them about it. Teach their parents. Give them the gift that the world and its individualism cannot give them: identity. Rather than abandoning them to a postmodern ecclesiology that disdains tradition and authority and leaves them to inherit the wind, let us help our children understand what a blessing it is that God has providentially placed them in this church. Let us pray that they will be enabled stand on its firm foundation, lest one day we are left dismayed and wondering, "where have the children gone?"

**Eric Watkins is currently serving as Assistant Pastor of the Lake Sherwood Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida.**

**"If anything needs urgent attention in the church today, it is the quality of covenant living in the context of the family. Fathers must lead. Parents (the earliest and by far the most influential teachers of their own children) must diligently communicate their deepest convictions to their children. There must be clear lines of authority and discipline in the home. And consistency is of the utmost importance. When children do what is right, they must be consistently praised. And when they do wrong, they must be consistently corrected — sometimes with corporal punishment. Above all other principles, parents must insist on obedience from their children."**

**— Commentary on The Heidelberg Catechism by the Editor**



# Thoughtful Accountability

by

Jack Sawyer

Over the years a pastor will encounter situations that drive him to reflect on how theology effects life for good or ill. In my own case I have encountered cases like the following: “Pastor, I never thought I would *feel* God leading me to marry an unbeliever.” Or, “Pastor I know I am a member of your congregation but I *feel* led to attend the church up the road and God has given me peace about my decision.” Or again, “Pastor, I simply don’t *feel* like coming to worship. If I come when I don’t *feel* like coming I will be a hypocrite and God will not accept hypocritical worship. I therefore *feel* it is better that I not come until I get my *feelings* sorted out.”

How do you think you would have answered these folk? Well, needless to say, they were not persuaded by their Pastor though he implored them to reconsider.

A critique of the above cases must begin with at least two points. First it must be pointed out that feelings are not a valid barometer of the will of God. And second the Christian must recognize that faith involves accountability to authority above and beyond his own thinking and desires.

## *Thinking Not Feeling*

People today often preface remarks with *I feel* when they probably mean *I think*. There is still however in this expression a telling shift represented in the way people make their decisions. They pray about something, want it so badly, and *voilà!* God *gives* them peace about it. They then *feel* perfectly justified in doing things quite often at complete variance with the Word of God. Blinded by their *feelings* they do not see the complete incongruity of

God supposedly leading them to do (or omit doing) something that the Scriptures, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, either explicitly or implicitly command or forbid.

The problem is two-fold. First is the modern reduction of Christian piety to feeling or emotions. This tendency is most clearly seen in modern worship which is so often primarily geared to evoke emotion, to make people feel joy, to give them a spiritual lift, a high. The production of a ‘good feeling’ is determinative of whether a service is good or bad, the preacher successful or unsuccessful, a church worthy of attending or not. It must be indicated that this way of thinking ignores the wretched deceitfulness of even the renewed heart of the Christian pilgrim. How can the deceitful and often fleeting feelings of the human heart be in any way normative for Christian worship and piety, much less guidance? How sad when so many churches capitulate to the clamor for this sort of ‘feel-good’ emotionalism and thus institutionalize the promotion of religious feeling as virtually their reason for being.

The second aspect of the problem is that, sadly, this new feeling paradigm today often replaces rational thought based on the Bible as the standard of faith and practice (yes, bad worship affects theology and theology affects ethics). But are we not to bring every *thought* captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10: 5)? Indeed, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our *minds* that we may *prove* what the will of God is, namely, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2). Are we not pre-eminently to love God with our *mind* according to the

command of Christ (Matt. 22:37)? And further is it not the God inspired Scripture that is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that will equip us for every good work in the service of our God and Savior and His people (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? In this Word we are to *meditate* day and night, being careful *to do what is written* therein. Only then can we hope to make our way pleasing to God and incur his blessing over our endeavors (Josh. 1:8).

Quite simply put, while it must be stressed that a dry, heartless rationality is certainly not to be desired in the least, seeking peace in the will of God often means denying our feelings, desires, and impulses. Prayer is important. Peace about a matter is important. But of utmost import is not how I feel but what does God say. We step out in faith to do what Scripture indicates, bearing the cross of Christ, practicing self denial, and as we do the feelings by God’s grace often follow—peace, joy, gratitude, hope. Indeed as the old song *Trust and Obey* says “*when we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word what a glory he sheds on our way...when we do His good will he abides with us still...for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.*” Or in the words of the Psalmist “*My soul is joyful in the Lord. In his salvation I rejoice; To him my heart will praise accord and bless his Name with thankful voice*” (Ps. 35 Psalter Hymnal).

As with all controversies of religion, decrees of councils, opinions of authors, doctrines of men, and private spirits, so also our *feelings* must be examined and made subservient *to no other but the Holy Spir-*

## Thoughtful Accountability

*it speaking in the Scripture* (WCF 1:10). Neither do we wait for some special motion of God's spirit as if we are not bound to do our duty until we *feel* peace about it! (WCF 15:3) Life is full of things we must do even when we don't feel like it! Duty first...feelings follow.

### *Accountability not Autonomy*

The Pastor who humbly challenges the new *feeling* paradigm of the modern church will frequently encounter an ironic, harsh opposition. He will be accused of being unloving to his flock and insensitive to the leading of God. He will even be accused by some of trying to be a cult-like tyrant. But press on he must, challenging Christ's sheep committed to his charge, that they must listen to the voice of their Great and Good Shepherd and those whom he has appointed to be their guardians and guides.

Thus the Presbyterian Church needs to be reminded afresh that believing in Christ implies accountability. Our Lord commended a Roman centurion who said, "*I too am a man under authority... just say the word, Lord, and my servant will be healed.*" Jesus marveled at his great faith. And should we not marvel at how small our faith often is? We do not have faith to step out beyond the household altar of our own ideas, feelings, and desires. Anyone who challenges our autonomy is suspect, even looked upon as a would-be tyrant lacking love and sensitivity for us. Sad to say I do not exaggerate in saying this, but honestly speak from many years of ministry to Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

Feelings are deceitful and prejudices are vain, but the Word of God abides forever. The ascended Christ has given us pastors and teachers—elders and deacons—to guide and to guard his flock (Eph. 4:11-13). They are to be recognized by Christian people as their leaders having charge over them in the Lord, giving them instruction (1 Thess. 5:12), as those who will give an ac-

count for their souls. True faith recognizes that God-appointed leaders are to be obeyed (Heb. 13:17), their admonishments received (Acts 20:31), and that they are to be esteemed very highly in love and shown double honor for the sake of their work (1 Tim. 5:17). True faith recognizes that leaders must speak these things, exhorting and even rebuking with all authority. No one may disregard this ministry with impunity (Tit. 2:15).

So then, when was the last time you sought out advice from your pastor or elders when facing an important decision in your life and you needed to know what God would have you do? When you sought the will of God for your life did you follow the proverb "*in many counselors there is victory*"? Or did you act autonomously—as a law unto yourself—following not the advice of your leaders based on Scripture, but the devices and desires of your own heart? God-appointed leaders are gifts from Christ to you. They are meant to be shepherds, not tyrants lording over the consciences of Christ's poor lambs. But are we so determined to have *our* way, that whenever they remind us of our duty to *think* in light of God's Word and not elevate our *feelings* above Scripture do we ignore or excoriate them? When they gently remind us that we are not a law unto ourselves but accountable to those God chose to rule us, how do we respond?

When Paul left Ephesus for the last time, the folk he was about to leave behind—people whom he had admonished with tears night and day for three years—embraced him with great, emotional weeping. Why? Because he had told them the truth. He had challenged them with the whole counsel of God. They recognized in his life and teaching one who counted his Christ-given ministry to them as more important than his own life. And thus the bittersweet tears of farewell flowed in great profusion. How then shall *we* respond to this sort of ministry from Christ's servants to *us*? When our leaders hold

out to us the yoke of Jesus Christ, promising, in his name, rest for our souls if we are willing to heed their cry and submit our shoulders to his control, what do we perceive? Do we see the gentle heart of the Great Shepherd of the sheep reaching out to minister to our weakness and weariness, or in our blind obstinacy do we perceive only the hateful countenance of Egyptian taskmasters intent on enslaving us?

### *Conclusion*

To be a real Presbyterian one must be willing to work to dethrone one's own ideas, emotions, and aspirations. One must be willing also to cultivate *thoughtful accountability*. Can a person *feel* led by God to marry an unbeliever? Can a person *feel* led by God to attend a different church rather than his own? Should **you** wait until you *feel* peace and *feel* eager before you do your duty to worship God and serve his people? Important questions to be sure.

But I have an even more important question for you. Are you willing to *think* about the answers to these questions in light of the Bible and not just your own prejudices? In order to answer these questions, and others like them, are you willing to seek counsel from those who are **accountable** to God for your soul? If your answer is yes to both then you are beginning to grasp the essence of what being Presbyterian and Reformed is all about.

**Jack Sawyer is currently serving as pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Pineville, Louisiana.**



## DO WE REFORMED CHRISTIANS HAVE BLIND SPOTS?

BY

JOEL C. KERSHNER

I have a confession to make: I am a theological/ecclesiastical mongrel (or “TEM” for short) -- and so is my wife! On my side of the family we have had: German Reformed, Nazarene, Lutheran (LCA), Evangelical Congregational (influence), Bible Fellowship, North American & Conservative Baptist. On my wife’s side: Southern Baptist, Lutheran, United Methodist and PCA (Coral Ridge, FL). My wife & I met while on Campus Crusade for Christ HQ staff in southern CA, and since we’ve married we have been connected with these churches: PCA (in CA; by the way, my wife was the first Calvinist and Presbyterian in the family, influencing me, as also did our pastor, Dr William Woodhall), RCA (at a church that is now Pilgrim OPC, in Philadelphia), Covenant OPC in Rochester,

NY (intern under Ted Georgian), Bethel OPC, Oostburg, WI (intern under Jim Bosgraf), Reformed Pres. Mission PCA, Grundy, VA (my first pastorate); and, since 1989, organizing pastor/pastor of Grace Fellowship OPC, Mansfield, PA.

Why did I give you this long-winded listing of various churches my family has been part of? To prove that I am, in fact, a TEM. Brothers, my contention is that a large part of the OPC’s mission is to reach out to TEM’s (unsaved & saved) and draw them unto the Gospel of Christ, and the Reformed faith. In God’s providence, that is what happened to me! To those of you who have been blessed with a “pedigree,” understand the vital role that “mongrels” have in the OPC.

For a number of years now I’ve had the burden of trying in my own life (and pass on to others, as I can) to “prove wrong the stereotypes” of what Reformed Christians are like, because I’ve been on the non-Reformed side! The Lord converted me in 1973. Afterwards I was an Arminian/Dispensational evangelical, until I was brought to Reformed convictions (c.1979/80). What I intend to do in this article is to try to state different stereotypes that non-Reformed Christians (and perhaps non-Christians) have of Reformed-types like us. The following are a number of the stereotypes that I’ve heard. Some of them are often very accurate. Some are only true of a limited number of the Reformed. **All** should make us think, and prayerfully evaluate ourselves and our beloved OPC

Reformed Christians are:	Should instead strive to be: [see numbered notes after chart]
1) not evangelistic	1) concerned & active in evangelism, home and foreign missions, etc. (1)
2) uncompassionate / stoical	2) compassionate & having evident love for others (2)
3) proud / arrogant	3) humble / self-deprecating (3)
4) academic / cerebral	4) (also!) warm in our relationship with the Lord (4)
5) boring / predictable	5) able to show our individuality; plus people of faith, and stretching ourselves spiritually (5)
6) argumentative / even caustic	6) not looking for fights; although engaged in debate as needed (6)
7) picky, petty, too detailed	7) able to see and be focused upon "the big picture," by faith (7)
8) too dependent on men’s opinions	8) careful to be thoroughly Biblical in our understanding of issues, etc., as we also "stand on the shoulders" of others (8)
9) too “loose” with alcohol, etc.	9) amiable toward Christians who are total abstainers, and not flaunting any liberties we have in Christ (9)
10) too professional in our attitudes	10) careful to engage on a personal, pleasant level with others as much as possible (10)
11) unwilling to fellowship with any but “Reformed-types”	11) appreciative of what the Lord is doing in other Christians; perhaps even fellowshiping / interacting / praying with them! (11)
12) White-collar WASPs	12) Representative of all socio-economic strata, all ethnic & racial groups (12)
13) <b>Any Others!</b> Let’s challenge ourselves in how we Reformed Christians might better represent our Lord Jesus, as we should, and try to be “self-correcting” (by His Word and Spirit).	

## Do We Reformed Christians Have Blind Spots?

### Notes:

- (1) Like our Savior: Matt. 9:37-38; Harvie Conn was, and Bill Krispin is, a great example of this.
- (2) Like our Savior: Matt. 9:35-36.
- (3) Like our Savior: Phil. 2:7-8. As John Newton noted how Calvinists *especially* should be humble, since they understand that *all* they have/do is of His grace (quoted in New Horizons, 10/02 issue, "On Controversy"). Chip Stonehouse had great self-deprecating humor, and often said: "We should take our calling as ministers seriously; *but* we shouldn't take ourselves too seriously!" Time for a little joke:

Q: How many OPC presbyters does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Who knows! We must debate the issue to death before we vote on it."

- (4) Like the Puritans and their legendary "intelligent piety"
- (5) I got this one from Rev Glen Riexinger, of Scranton, PA.
- (6) Cf. 2 Tim 2:22-26.
- (7) The "OPC way" is often *too* inefficient/ineffectual, with *too much* detail. Plus, keep in mind that the world & the world of Christianity are much bigger than the OPC — get used to it!
- (8) Isa. 8:20, etc.
- (9) Cf. Rom 14:1-15:3; Gal 5:13-15; 1 Cor 8:9-13, 10:23-11:1.
- (10) Prov. 18:24 (NKJV); John Piper, whom I don't always agree with, nonetheless makes an important point with his book, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*.
- (11) Mark 9:38-40, etc.
- (12) cf. Gal 3:28. I hope we are all very encouraged re: the Black American, Hispanic, Indonesian, Vietnamese, etc. congregations that are now in the

OPC! This is how it should be: Rev 5:9-10.

I know full well that in writing this article that I am opening myself to all sorts of critiques and criticisms — that's OK, as long as the overall effect is that we all grow to be more like our Savior (John 17:17). So brothers let us, "Watch [our lives] and doctrine closely. Persevere in them because if (we) do, (we) will save both (ourselves) and (our) hearers." (1 Tim. 4:16).

Joel C. Kershner is currently serving as pastor of Grace Fellowship OPC in Mansfield, PA.

### THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Through the years I have been thankful to God for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and for leading me to be a part of it. Recently I have wished for an opportunity to share this with the church at large as Psalm 92:15 says "To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

One feature I have noted about OPC ministers, and many adherents, is that we are transplants often from other church backgrounds. Growing up in a Mennonite family in Nebraska, I learned the truth of being a sinner, and needing a Savior. My father came from Russia very young and was wary of education, feeling it led people away from God. So family members stayed home until the age 21. I went to a one-room grade school, worked at the family farm, and any monies earned were part of the family provender. Through the years I felt a compulsion to serve God and was called to the ministry at age 18. So, a week after I was 21, I left home with a tin suitcase and \$5 from my father. God graciously helped me get high school, college, and seminary education, and in the process I came to understand more completely the glories of God's Word as outlined in the Reformed faith.

What is precious to me is the OPC's faithful teaching concerning our salvation that is wholly of God Who opens our eyes to this and enables us to believe and accept His gift of salvation, and to seek to live in obedience to His Word. The emphasis on the chief end of man being "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" is directive in more completely understanding the gift of salvation. Also, the question and answer "What is God? — *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth*" — outlines a life of quality and service that is indeed satisfying and challenging with worship and trust in God. This I am persuaded is the teaching of Scripture which the OPC clearly holds.

Now retired, I rejoice in more time for Christian fellowship. My soul is blessed in the exchange of concepts of the Reformed faith and experiences in the Christian life. This fellowship is a foretaste of heaven which we look forward to with great longing and expectation. As we learn to appreciate and support one another in love and fellowship, we testify to the world that we are the Lord's disciples (John 13:35). May the Lord help us to become deeper in our commitment to Him and one another.

— Retired OPC Pastor Rev. Abe W. Ediger

# Responses to the Editor's Invitation

## for Corporate Assessment

### **Howard Currie, Pastor of Immanuel OPC in West Collingswood, NJ.**

I must begin with a confession: I love the OPC. I was not raised in it, I came into it when I was about 28; I'm now 51. I grew up as a pagan in Scotland, and as a new convert living in the USA in 1979; I attended a Dispensational Baptist Church.

I first heard about the OPC and John Murray as a 28-year-old visiting an OPC in Portland, Maine, shortly after being converted. Within about 2 months, I began attending an OPC, and within a year or so became a member. After graduating from seminary in 1986, I began to pastor an OPC on January 1, 1987, and I've been the pastor of the same church ever since.

I have—at times—felt a little lonely in the OPC. I consider myself a moderate-conservative. I have brothers in the Lord who are conservative, but I sometimes come away from theological conversations with them thinking I'm not that conservative, or that is not exactly my position on the issue. When I listen to my brothers who might be categorized as brethren on the other side of the fence, or less conservative than the conservatives, I don't think I agree with or belong to that camp either. And that is exactly why I love the OPC. Neither my brothers to the right of me or those to the left of me give me an

unbearably hard time of it; in fact we manage to get along amicably. Yes, I am occasionally badgered. I remember at one General Assembly being told by one of our esteemed fathers of the church, (it may have been G.I. Williamson), to get rid of my clerical collar. Put off the weak and beggarly things said he, but it was said half in jest, and even if he had been serious, I can wear my clerical collar, and in church, my clerical gown, and no one really troubles me about it. You see I'm in the OPC. That's a good sign and something to be commended in a denomination!

What are my hopes and prayers and aspirations for the OPC? They are best formulated in a prayer I've begun to use, and the prayer is a paraphrase from *The Anglican Book of Common Prayer*, 1938 edition: "O gracious Father, we humbly beseech thee, that thou wouldst be pleased to fill your church with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, correct it; where it is in anything amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is want, provide for it; where it is divided, bring unity and peace and reunite it, for the sake of our Lord who died and rose again, and ever lives to make intercession for us, and strengthens us by His word and Spirit, Jesus Christ, thy son, our Lord, Amen."

Is the OPC a perfect church? Obviously it is not. Does it have weaknesses? Obviously it does.

But in the OPC I can believe the scriptures and have what some might consider a "strict" view of the standards, and work and pray for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. What more could a minister want? Perfection? Yes, but that too will come. I will some day die, or Christ will return. Between now and then, I can live in the OPC and rejoice in what God is doing.

May God bless the OPC, and all who dwell in her midst.

### **Albert Salmon, ruling elder in the Cherry Hill OPC in Cherry Hill, NJ.**

1. Are we a denomination of Christians living too much on past glories? I often hear words such as these: "The OPC is a faithful church"! But just repeating this mantra doesn't make it true! I think this is a great danger. Some areas where the OPC is not as faithful as it ought to be begins with the easy acceptance of modern english bible versions. Most pastors are too busy to look into this issue and of course they have been influenced by widespread acceptance of a critical text from Wescott & Hort as superior to the text on which the KJV was based (and also the dynamic equivalence view of translation). We need to repent of this carelessness, and return to a faithful bible translation based more faithfully on the majority of Greek manuscripts, and not the text of men whose theories

are ever in flux. To be faithful, the OPC first needs a faithful bible version which, for the sake of unity, is found in every church.

2. Another erroneous tendency in the OPC is the one that says we need “new” ideas, and methods to attract people and “get them saved”. Thus we have “New Life” Churches, our denominational magazine is called “New Horizons” and of course the new “Red Hymnal” is in many pews. But I think it is more accurate to say: to be “Reformed” means to be looking BACK to the “Old Paths”—to the tried and true! What is all this “New” anyway? Are Luther, Calvin and the Westminster Divines new? What we need is renewed ambition to teach the historic faith, not to be contemporary or popular.

3. It is not a good sign that the General Assembly has had to appoint a committee to “study” what the Bible means when it says God created the world in six days! When the literal history recorded in Genesis one to eleven is doubted, everything else begins to unravel. Read the history of all the apostate denominations and then compare that history to our own present path. We are not yet apostate, true, but apostasy always begins with small matters which set a precedent for worse and worse errors which follow down the road. The OPC needs to stand fast in sound doctrine, we need Truth not Tolerance.

4. Lastly, the “Two-Office” view of the eldership has contributed to the widespread disrespect for the office of pastor. Having ruling elders preach sermons, and hold offices or positions that are only for ordained ministers destroys the respect for the much higher calling

to the office of pastor. This brings confusion to our congregations, and especially to the youth of the church. It fuels the Arminian concept of laymen out getting people saved by their witness. Gone is the reformed concept of bringing people in to Church to sit under the faithful preaching of the minister of the gospel. Again we need to repent.

5. Is there anything good or positive? Yes! Most of our churches hold to the regulative principle of worship and most still hold both morning and evening worship services on the Lord’s Day. Men are still the only ones who rule and hold office. The Westminster Standards are held in high regard as containing the doctrine of Scripture and are used as teaching tools in many churches. Also most of our churches celebrate Communion at least monthly, and discipline is practiced for at least the most scandalous sins.

In conclusion I would say that we need to remember that when churches weaken they rarely recover. The OPC is not yet a liberal denomination. But I think we have taken steps in that direction. We certainly need to see the possibility of our becoming another liberal apostate denomination. If we remain careless, then we need to start thinking about changing our name!

May God for His Glory, revive and restore and grant mercy to all his children in the OPC to again become truly Faithful.

**Finally, the moving words of J. Gresham Machen, written in 1936.**

On Thursday, June 11, 1936, the hopes of many long years were

realized. We became members, at last, of a true Presbyterian Church; we recovered, at last, the blessing of true Christian fellowship. What a joyous moment it was! How the long years of struggle seemed to sink into nothingness compared with the peace and joy that filled our hearts!

To the world, indeed, it might seem to have been not a happy moment but a sad one. Separation from the church of one’s fathers; a desperate struggle ahead, with a tiny little group facing the hostility of the visible church—what possible joy or comfort can be found in such things as these?

Yet to us it was a happy and a blessed moment despite all. You see, we do not look upon these matters as the world looks upon them. We ground our hopes not upon numbers nor upon wealth but upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. If our opponents despise us as being but a tiny little group, we remember the words of Scripture: *“There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few”* (1 Sam. 14: 6). If we are tempted to be discouraged because of our lack of material resources, we say, again in the words of Scripture: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts...”* (Zech. 4:6).

With what lively hope does our gaze turn now to the future! At last true evangelism can go forward without the shackle of compromising associations. The fields are white to the harvest. The evangelists are ready to be sent. Who will give the funds needed to send them out with their message of peace?



# General Assembly ‘Fatwas’

Stuart R. Jones

The Presbyterian Church (USA), following “definitive guidance” in 1978 amended its *Form of Government* in 1997 to disqualify practicing homosexuals from ordained office (G-6.0106b).<sup>1</sup> This, admittedly, is an unusual place in the constitution for such a prohibition. One would think the doctrinal standards might be sufficient to the task. But the amendment said something about the state of the church and its peculiar ideas about what is the “essential” doctrine of their standards. In 2003, consternation over rebellion against the rule led to attempts to call a special General Assembly that might enforce the rule. The call to meeting was undermined by the Moderator. Sin against polity was the best remaining shred on which to develop a case against homosexuality. That shred was further shredded by another attack on the polity standards.<sup>2</sup> The PCUSA has now come full circle on issues of church authority.

The universal church is constantly beset by a conflict between its fallibility and its authority. The *Westminster Confession* sets forth both sides of this conflict in its usual admirable balance (American edition, emphasis supplied):

WCF 31.3 It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His Church; to receive complaints

in cases of maladministration, and *authoritatively to determine* the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with, reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His Word.

WCF 31.4 *All synods or councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred.* Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.

Prior to 1697, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches had a fairly common view of the enactments of their highest or broadest assemblies. The “acts” of a General Assembly or Synod were settled and binding until the action of some equivalent assembly or synod overturned them. In short, the lines between the constitution of the church and its acts were blurry.<sup>3</sup> A combination of tradition and state power might elevate the significance of the Westminster Confession, the Three Forms of Unity, The Westminster Directories, and the Dordt Order in the life of the church. In this sense, the church had a constitution. Such a constitution may endure the purely individual acts of a given synod, but synodical acts assumed an authority that was little different in substance from what we would call constitutional authority. The term “settled and binding” has been used with reference to the acts of the Reformed general synods.

In 1697 the Scottish Church recognized that the potential for tyranny and disunity existed in treating the acts of a General Assembly as beyond all further review on a lower level. As a result, a provision was passed that came to be known as the Barrier Act. It specified that no action of a General Assembly would become binding on presbyteries unless a majority of presbyteries voted their agreement to the act.<sup>4</sup> This Barrier Act became a key foundation stone for constitutional Presbyterianism in America. Having neither state indemnification nor a long tradition for its fundamental confession and law, American Presbyterianism rested on adopting a constitution with more than the act of a single assembly as its claim to legitimacy. The 1729 Adopting Act did not develop out of a recognized “Form of Government” that governed the process of adopting a doctrinal constitution. Most issues of polity were determined by using Pardoan’s organized compilation of Scottish church law.<sup>5</sup> Yet the fundamental doctrinal standards of Presbyterianism were well recognized after 1729 even if the subscription debate cast some shadows. It was in 1788 that a more full-orbed constitution developed with recognized standards for both doctrine and polity. At this time, the affirmation of presbyteries added legitimacy to the decision of the General Assembly. Also, a provision was made that no “standing rules” of the General Assembly could be binding on presbyteries without

## General Assembly Fatwas

a majority of the presbyteries concurring. In a short time the phrase “standing rules” was amended to say “constitutional rules.” Thus a clarified sense of constitution emerged. It was a clarification not without confusion, however. Might the doctrinal constitution be amended, and if so, was it just as easy to amend the Westminster Standards as the church order? This question was not clarified until almost the twentieth century when an amendment to the *Form of Government* set a higher threshold for amending the doctrinal constitution.<sup>6</sup>

Constitutional limits on the acts of General Assemblies were further considered and refined by problems that arose in the life of the church. The Old School-New School division of 1837 highlighted an act of far reaching power by the General Assembly. In a single Assembly, four synods of the church were removed. Complaints about constitutional irregularity and denial of due process were made—probably with some justification—by New School men. An Old School perspective would be that the doctrinal constitution and Presbyterian polity were being preserved by this act. It amounted to an argument of substance over form. It was not very pretty from an orderly constitutional perspective, but neither was a New School compromise of Presbyterian doctrine and polity.

The power of a General Assembly to make such summary judgments was exerted again during the decade of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> The Southern Presbyterians had learned their lesson about General Assembly power. They set forth a crisp distinction between the *in thesi* pronouncements of a General Assembly that were purely hortatory and those particular processes which carried judicial weight.<sup>8</sup> Later in

1927, the Northern church would articulate this distinction with the *Auburn Affirmation* lending arguments to the cause. With respect to determining “essential and necessary” articles of faith, the Commission of the Assembly stated, “the General Assembly, when acting in its judicial capacity, has a right to decide questions of this kind only as they apply to the specific case under consideration....” Further, the commission stated that only exact quotations of the Confession, not paraphrases, might set forth required doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the odious purposes of that Affirmation, it is well for the faithful to consider the strengths, weaknesses, and ironies of our constitutional Presbyterian heritage.

The great strengths of that heritage are that it takes seriously the confessional statement that councils and synods may err. It builds protections against error. It gives place to appeals and even the need for more than the act of a single General Assembly to alter its “settled law.” Related to this concern, the constitution, properly applied, provides relief from tyranny. Many counselors may encourage wisdom, but they may also become a mob. Momentary impressions may influence a body of men sitting during one Assembly that would be tempered when time for research and reflection are afforded. Properly interpreted, the constitution safeguards pronouncements of General Assemblies from becoming judicial decrees that have never been properly vetted by well-considered judicial process. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been so conscious of the danger attending *in thesi* deliverances that it has refused to erect study committees when the prospect of a trial on a related issue is pending.

The strength of constitutional Presbyterianism becomes its

weakness when a church is high-jacked by people who are less than faithful. That especially includes “moderates” who value peace over truth. Precisely because the doctrinal portion of the constitution is hard to amend, it is not possible to quickly attack error through the amendment process. If general judicial pronouncements are outside good order, then error must be checked either at the entrance (ordination and licensure exams) or by actual judicial process. Judicial process and voting “no” on exams is not always popular. Voting “no” on exams is a lot easier, however, than bringing charges. Good presbytery exams and the courage to vote “no” may be the best insurance policy a church has for its doctrinal life. The training of ministerial students is an earlier and even more crucial point of attack.

The ironies of our constitutional heritage deserve reflection. The 1927 report probably expresses the reigning understanding of GA pronouncements in the OPC. We might ask, did this report have no relevance to the Machen case? The 1934 GA mandate against membership on the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions was regarded as purely “advisory” by Machen and his party. How was it that this GA deliverance could summon discipline when the doctrinal deliverances of earlier days against Modernism could not?

We need to put ourselves, however briefly, in the minds of the bureaucrats to see how such a contradiction might come about. The 1936 *Manual of Presbyterian Law*, which Lewis Mudge co-produced, states, “The Presbyterian Church gives liberty as to nonessentials in doctrine, but requires exact compliance with purely statutory regulations.”<sup>10</sup> The need for good order might make the latter half of the statement less objectionable if the statutory regulations entailed no more than a general acceptance

## General Assembly Fatwas

of constitutional Presbyterian polity. The problem is in the actual outworking of the statement. When it comes to doctrine, only directly denying the very words of the *Confession* is objectionable and even then it becomes a judgment call about what is “essential.” Violating a “court order” in the interpretation of polity, however, is quite another matter.

At the root of the Machen case were “constitutional studies”.<sup>11</sup> He was defying the constitution according to the General Council.<sup>12</sup> Leaving aside the relative weight of true doctrine *vis a vis* good polity, we encounter a perspicuity problem. Did those studies demonstrate a greater certainty that the Independent Board was unconstitutional than the earlier affirmations that asserted the essential nature of the virgin birth to the doctrinal constitution? If so, why was a trial not used to establish the constitutional breach in a very specific case? A licentiate in the old Presbytery of NY, refusing to affirm the virgin birth, presumably was safer than Machen from GA pronouncements. Conversely, if a summary mandate is good enough to implicate Machen, why is it not adequate to attain a dubious licentiate?

The mandate itself was quite clear. Resign or face discipline. But the constitutional case for the mandate came prior to trial and rested on dubious clarity. It was the last minute production of a General Council that had no authority in judicial matters. Using the words of the Auburn Affirmation, the constitutional studies presented “one theory” of the constitution, but one never set down in express words or adjudicated in advance by trial. The 1927 report’s applicability to the “constitutional studies” was not ignored.

As unusual as the Independent Board was from a polity standpoint,

the reunion of the Old School and New School in 1869 made provision for giving to benevolent causes outside the denomination. Declaration item six, ratified by both the OS and NS assemblies stated (emphasis added), “There should be one set of Committees or Boards for Home and Foreign Missions, and other religious enterprises of the Church, which the churches should be encouraged to sustain, *though free to cast their contributions into other channels, if they desire to do so.*”<sup>13</sup> This protection for the NS was arguably ignored when a latter-day Old School doctrine man tried to use a non-denominational board to advance the gospel. Here is irony. If the untidy 1837 acts are of any constitutional value, perhaps it is that they provide precedent for excising unconstitutional judicatories. Perhaps the emergency Modernism presented, would have justified the GA had it excised the Presbytery of New York.<sup>14</sup> But that would have taken a special will to fight and be branded unfavorably. The fight and brand would come in 1936 but not the outward victory.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. “The Constitutional Case Against G-6.0106b” and the response at [www.covenantnetwork.org/oddlcif3.html](http://www.covenantnetwork.org/oddlcif3.html)

<sup>2</sup> At last report, a complaint was pending against the Moderator’s action for his failure to call the meeting. See web traffic, especially among the “Confessing Church” movement and the *Presbyterian Layman*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. William Mair, *A Digest of Laws and Decisions Ecclesiastical and Civil: Relating to the Constitution, Practice, and Affairs of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1887) 1-2. Mair lists documents of the church that are generally recognized as fundamental and definitional.

<sup>4</sup> Baird’s *Digest* contains a good summary of elements that formed constitutional Presbyterianism in America.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1706-1788* edited by Klett. In 1786 the Church referred to Walter

Steuart’s collections (Pardovan) as containing their polity.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *The Presbyterian Review*, April 1881, especially McGill’s comments on pages 329 and 330. This article on the *Revised Book of Discipline* preceded its adoption in 1884.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the Spring resolutions, there were certain *ipso facto* resolutions that colored members of the Presbytery of Louisville in 1865. Cf. Thomas Peck article (*infra*) and Charles Hodge’s *Polity*.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Peck wrote a special article on the Southern Church’s position regarding *in these* deliverances (i.e. deliverances made without respect to a specific case brought up by orderly process). The article has been recently republished in *Paradigms in Polity*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lefferts Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 134. This had the effect of undermining the earlier GA deliverances on five fundamental doctrines.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. page 31. This is akin to the statement of the PCUSA taken in the 1980’s under the title, *Historic Principles, Conscience, and Church Government.*” See [www.horeb.pcusa.org/oga/diversity/conscience.htm](http://www.horeb.pcusa.org/oga/diversity/conscience.htm) Mudge was Stated Clerk and significantly opposed to the Machen party.

<sup>11</sup> The summary introduction is given as an appendix in the reprint of Rian’s *Presbyterian Conflict*. Loetscher indicates the studies were printed in the 1934 minutes. Though made available to GA commissioners, little opportunity was afforded those on the Independent Board to see the studies in advance.

<sup>12</sup> The General Council was an interim agency of the GA, somewhat akin to the OPC Committee on Coordination. It was first formed in 1923 and was denied any judicial powers.

<sup>13</sup> Taken from appendix A, page 458, of the 1910 Constitution.

<sup>14</sup> Loetscher indicates this was an option that was in the air on more than one occasion (*Broadening Church*, pages 110, 125). Charles Hodge is not so troubled by summary actions on the part of GA. Though I could imagine him finding the Machen trial technically constitutional, I could also picture him justifying the summary removal of all Modernist judicatories (cf. *Polity and the Church*) on the basis of extra constitutional emergency powers residing in the General Assembly.

# TURNING POINTS IN AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

## PART TWO

Origins and Identity, 1706 to 1729

D. G. Hart & John R. Muether



American Presbyterianism officially began in 1706 when the Presbytery of Philadelphia held its first meeting. Some accounts of the Presbyterian Church in the New World will speak of Presbyterian congregations going back into the seventeenth century. For instance, several churches on Long Island trace their origins back to the 1640s. The very first Presbyterian minister in New York was Francis Doughty, a New England Puritan who in 1642 came to New York because of differences over the practice of infant baptism. Doughty represents the dominant strain of Presbyterianism north of Pennsylvania, one heavily influenced by, and oriented toward, Puritanism and its practical brand of Christian devotion. In fact, New York's earliest Presbyterian congregations in Eastern Long Island started when Puritans migrated from New England into the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in search of greater prosperity.

The most obvious difference between Puritanism and Presbyterianism was in church government. As Congregationalists, Puritans located the power of decision-making in the local congregation's officers. Presbyterians, in contrast, delegated church power to the presbytery, a regional and representative body of officers from surrounding congregations. Without a presbytery, the Puritan congregations that preferred Presbyterian to Congregational church polity could not technically

be Presbyterian. For this reason, when American Presbyterians celebrate their tri-centennial in 2006, they will do so by setting their calendars to the date of the first meeting of a presbytery—1706.

The date that church historians use for American Presbyterianism's origin is actually of some relevance to the question of Presbyterian identity in colonial America. When the Presbytery of Philadelphia met its members came from two different backgrounds. One was the strain of Presbyterianism found among English Puritans, though only one Philadelphia minister, Jedediah Andrews, fit this profile. The other, and by far the dominant expression, was Scottish or Scotch-Irish. Four of the first ministerial members of the presbytery hailed directly from Scotland, the other three were from Northern Ireland. The most prominent of the Scotch-Irish was Francis Mackemie (1657-1708), the so-called father of American Presbyterianism, born in Northern Ireland, a graduate of the University of Glasgow, who ministered in his native land before coming to the colonies and laboring in various congregations on the Eastern seaboard, from Maryland to New York. Mackemie was the first moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia and he became the leader of Presbyterians thanks in part to his defense of the rights of Presbyterians like himself to minister without a license even though Presbyterianism had no official standing among the colonies' governments.

Mackemie's reputation as a defender of religious liberty has functioned as a source of pride among American Presbyterians. But as much as his arguments would later become part of the American mythology of religious toleration, Mackemie's labors also revealed American Presbyterianism's humble origins. The theological descendants of John Calvin and John Knox did not arrive in the New World with vast resources and influential connections. Unlike Anglicanism or Congregationalism, Presbyterianism had no state support in the New World. This explains in part why Philadelphia has been the traditional capital of Presbyterianism in the United States. The colony established by William Penn granted religious liberty to a variety of persecuted believers—Presbyterians among them. In fact, Presbyterianism in Scotland would not rebound from English-Scottish rivalries to become the national kirk until 1690, thus making American Presbyterianism only seventeen years younger than its European sibling. For the Presbyterian church to gain a foothold in America required the good will and kind assistance of Pennsylvania Quakers. Thanks to the continuing influx of Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigrants to the New World, by 1716, the date of the first Synod (Philadelphia), Presbyterians were located primarily in the middle colonies, especially southeastern Pennsylvania with four presbyteries, Philadelphia, New York, New Castle (Delaware) and Snow Hill (Maryland).

## TURNING POINTS IN AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

One important feature of American Presbyterianism that stems directly from its founding is the power of presbytery. Because presbyteries came first, not a synod or general assembly, American Presbyterianism, unlike its Scottish analogue, has delegated greater power to presbyteries than to higher courts. This is particularly evident in ordination where presbyteries still enjoy remarkable autonomy in the men whom they call to minister. As much as this feature of American Presbyterianism might stem from sound polity or good theology, it is also an accident of history. One of the reasons for forming a presbytery in Philadelphia in 1706 was to license and ordain men for the gospel ministry. Presbyteries in America ever since have been jealous to guard that prerogative.

Another significant development in American Presbyterian origins is the ethnic composition of the early churches and presbyteries. Although the Presbytery of Philadelphia was overwhelmingly Scottish and Scotch-Irish, the same being true for the Presbytery of New Castle, the New England Puritan strand of Presbyterianism was also present from the beginning. Its center of strength was in New York and northern New Jersey and its approach to the Presbyterian faith was at times markedly different from the Scotch-Irish element.

The strain between these two groups was first evident during the 1720s over debates about subscription. Prior to the Adopting Act of 1729 Presbyterianism in America lacked a constitution and coherent order. As such, standards for ordination varied. As early as 1724 the Presbytery of New Castle began to require ministers to subscribe the Westminster Standards, which followed Old

World practice. John Thomson (1690-1753), a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, argued for creedal subscription as something fully within the power Christ delegated to the church and as one way of restraining erroneous views. Presbyterians of Puritan background, however, resisted subscription because it smacked of ecclesiastical tyranny. Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747), a Massachusetts native who ministered in New Brunswick, New Jersey, argued that subscription conflicted with liberty of conscience, and that the way to prevent error from harming the church was to examine candidates thoroughly.

These competing views of subscription informed the Synod of Philadelphia's decision in 1729 to adopt the Westminster Standards as the confessional basis for office holders. On the one hand, the Adopting Act appeared to be a compromise document, stating the need "to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us." This required all ministers to "declare their agreement in, and approbation of" the Westminster Standards. On the other hand, the Act limited subscription to "all essential and necessary articles" of the Confession of Faith and catechisms. Ever since 1729 American Presbyterians have disputed what these words, "essential and necessary" have meant, some arguing for strict subscription and others taking those words to allow some flexibility. In the second part of the Adopting Act, the Synod of Philadelphia appeared to clarify which parts of the Standards were not "essential and necessary." Here the body referred to the Westminster Confession's teaching on the civil magistrate in chapters twenty and twenty-three, particularly the state's power over synods, as doctrines which ministers could reasonably scruple.

If that were Synod's intention, they failed because ever since 1729 Presbyterians would be divided over the nature of subscription.

During their first twenty-five years in the New World, American Presbyterians struggled to form a church that was Reformed according to the word. Almost three hundred years later, American Presbyterians eager for encouragement would be glad to know that their ecclesiastical tradition's origins in North America were noble, heroic, and magnificent. To be sure, the colonial church produced heroes, but these were not the legends of church history. Instead, they were men who labored in obscurity and under difficult circumstances. Even the major accomplishments of the American church during these years were less than dazzling. The first presbytery was a modest body of ministers struggling to carve out a Presbyterian witness in a religiously diverse environment. Moreover, the Adopting Act of 1729 sent a mixed signal about the nature of creedal subscription. Instead of adding up to a story of Presbyterian triumph, the origins of American Presbyterianism actually reinforce the truth that the history of the church this side of glory—like the church herself—is one not marked by might and glory but by militancy and strife.

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## Review of Logos Bible Software Series X - Scholar's Library V. 1.1a

by

**Stephen Pribble**

Logos Bible Software Series X is a very powerful Bible study program that enables the busy pastor to easily mine the depths of sacred Scripture. A click of the mouse brings up resources that would more than cover all the space on the biggest desktop: original language and English Bibles, linguistic resources, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, maps, reference works and many more—all organized for easy use.

Logos Bible Software Series X (also called Libronix Digital Library System, the name of the technology behind it) comes in a variety of editions: Christian Home Library (containing 60 reference books and retailing for \$149.95), Bible Study Library (over 100 books, \$249.95), Pastor's Library (over 165 books, \$299.95) and Scholar's Library (over 230 books worth \$5000 in comparable print editions, \$599.95—the one I reviewed).

Logos is definitely a high-quality tool for serious study, yet it is easy to use. Its greatest virtue is simplicity. Logos does the work for you (just enter a passage and click "go"—that's all there is to it). Its downside is that it is a resource hog; it is slow to load and slow to perform certain operations.

But it is one powerful program! Becoming a power-user with a mastery of the program involves a learning curve, but it's time well-spent. I came to see its value one evening when my daughter-in-law called with a Bible question. Her uncle, new to the U.S., wondered why his Arabic Bible had "bless God and die" (Job 2:9) while English Bibles have "curse God and die." I quickly discovered the answer

**One very handy feature for users of Microsoft Word is automatic footnoting; when an excerpt is copied and pasted into a Word document, a complete footnote in proper form is automatically created.**

with one or two mouse clicks.

My preferred way to use Logos is for the program to load using a workspace I created: the KJV and Hebrew O.T. linked in parallel columns on the screen (any translation or combination can be used). With the KJV selected, pressing Control-G (for "go-to") automatically takes the user to the Scripture reference window to type in the desired reference (abbreviations are O.K.—'ps 23.6' brings Psalm 23:6). Typing in a N.T. reference automatically substitutes the Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> Edition Greek N.T. for the Hebrew. Finding references in open books is lightning-fast—way quicker than opening two bound volumes to the same place.

For study of the Old Testament Logos utilizes a very clear and legible Hebrew screen font which is a pleasure to read. The text contains all the vowels but no cantillations. A very helpful feature: hover the cursor over an abbreviation in BDB and an explanation of that abbreviation pops up (formerly baffling abbreviations now make perfect sense). Similarly, when a Scripture verse is cited,

hovering the cursor over that reference brings up the full reference in the user's preferred translation (something the print version cannot deliver). BDB is enhanced with links to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, which goes into more detail.

One very handy feature for users of Microsoft Word is automatic footnoting; when an excerpt is copied and pasted into a Word document, a complete footnote in proper form is automatically created. Users of other word processors get the footnote information following the quotation, ready to copy into a new footnote. You will never forget where you got a quote!

Logos comes with a VHS video demonstration, and a set of video tutorials on CD-ROM is also available. The tutorial

## A Review of LOGOS Bible Software

is very helpful, but it would be even more helpful if it came with a workbook for easier reference (“to do this, follow these steps”). I recommend watching each segment of the tutorial in turn, then trying out one procedure at a time.

When I began to use Logos on my 3-year-old Pentium 866 it had only the factory-installed 128 MB RAM. Using the program’s many features gobbled up precious seconds for disk-swapping—the operating system kept having to write and rewrite information to the hard disk for later retrieval. Then I upgraded to 512 MB RAM (perhaps the best \$60 I ever spent) and realized a quantum leap in computing speed—Logos (and everything else) ran much, much faster. I definitely recommend having the fastest computer you can afford and upgrading memory to the max. Logos works on older computers with less memory, but it is slower.

Logos tech support is very helpful. I had a problem upgrading from the web on a day that the Internet was running excruciatingly slow due to a fiberoptic break somewhere in cyberspace. The download timed out, and when I tried to install the upgrade it wouldn’t work. Libronix tech support was oh-so-helpful. They rushed out new disks free of charge and patiently walked me through the reinstallation process.

Browsing the many resources available is sure to inspire sermon ideas. The Scholar’s

Library includes the following electronic books: 16 English Bibles including the KJV, NASB 1995, NIV, ESV, and NKJV; four Bible dictionaries; topical Bibles; commentaries: *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Matthew Henry, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, *New Bible Commentary* and 11 of Warren Wiersbe’s “Be” commentaries; 9 Greek texts including the Septuagint; *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; the Vulgate; Kittle; “little Kittle”; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*; BDB; Pilgrim’s Progress; Logos Deluxe Map Set; *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*; Wuest’s word

**I haven’t given up my 12-year-old QuickVerse 4.0. It doesn’t do as much, but it is faster... But for serious Bible study, nothing beats Logos Bible Software Series X.**

studies; *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*; Calvin’s Institutes; *366 Inspiring Hymn Stories*; the complete works of Josephus; and many more (see a complete list at this web site: [www.logos.com/scholars](http://www.logos.com/scholars)). More than 3,000 titles are compatible with Logos Bible Software Series X, with new books being added all the time, and notice is frequently given of pre-publication specials (brand new titles you can order in advance of publication and pay for upon shipment). Logos comes with free upgrades for life via download, so your software will never be obsolete.

A few drawbacks: Some of the smaller Hebrew fonts have truncated vowel shapes which require some getting used to. Matthew Henry’s commentary does not have the Greek and

Hebrew words in the original characters but in transliteration. There are a few minor typos (for example, “Thus prophet” instead of “This prophet”). Sometimes the “keylink” feature takes the user to a Hebrew verb of the same root rather than to its corresponding noun. In Prov. 21: 17 the program confused *ayin-sin-resh* with *ayin-shin-resh*. Similarly shomerim (Mal. 2:9) incorrectly linked to the root *sin-mem-resh* rather than *shin-mem-resh* (the holem being mistaken for the *sin* dot). The company tells me their developers are working on these issues and will be indexing vowel points and consonant distinctors (dageshes and sin/shin dots) in an upcoming update due out soon.

I haven’t given up my 12-year-old QuickVerse 4.0. It doesn’t do as much, but it is faster. I still use it for routine pasting of a verse into a church bulletin or email (it starts up and is ready to go in a blazing 1-1/2 seconds). But for serious Bible study, nothing beats Logos Bible Software Series X.

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## Book Review

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*The Imperatives of Preaching*, by John Carrick (Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), HB, \$21.99 202 pps. Reviewed by William Shishko.

According to the tried and true standard treatments of homiletics, i.e., the “art” and “science” of sermon construction and delivery, all sermons basically consist of three parts: exposition of the biblical text or texts, illustration, and application. However these three ingredients are mixed together, all are normally necessary for any particular sermon to be effective both as a rhetorical address and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit for the edification of God’s people and the conversion of the lost. Until recently it has simply been assumed that the Scriptures themselves (our final standard for determining what effective preaching is) regularly display these three elements in their own inspired examples of Old and New Testament preaching. Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to go to great lengths to prove the point.

Now comes a raging storm on the homiletical sea; at least on the sea traversed by Reformed preachers from week to week. This storm brings strong gales of opposition to any application in preaching. “Preaching is to tell the story of Christ and His great work. Application must be left to the Holy Spirit lest we add to the Word of God.” So we are told by some. Under this type of “Redemptive Historical Preaching” congregations are given grand declarations of the work of God in

Christ, but are left with little or no appeal to the heart or the will. To do otherwise is to be suspect. “Application” is seen as the intrusion of foreign (even “liberal”) elements into the purity of “Preaching Christ.”

Into what has become a veritable hurricane in some sectors of the Reformed community, comes a welcome “eye of the storm.” John Carrick, Orthodox Presbyterian minister and Assistant Professor of Applied and Doctrinal Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (and one of the principal homiletics instructors at that seminary), offers *The Imperatives of Preaching* to challenge the premises of certain types of extreme “Redemptive Historical” preaching. Subtitled “A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric”, the book draws lessons from the Bible’s own modes of sermonic address (with special emphasis on the pattern of the master preacher, Jesus Christ), and reminds us again of the way the Scriptures themselves give us the perfect model for preaching. It effectively demonstrates how the extreme “Redemptive Historical” pattern of preaching is found wanting before the pattern of the Word of God, while, at the same time, it holds forth the absolute necessity of Christocentric preaching that appeals to the mind, the will, and the emotions of the hearers.

Simply laid out, the chapters of this concise but rich book deal with the indicative, the exclamative, the interrogative, and the imperative as the four biblically given elements of preach-

ing. The copious numbers of obvious biblical examples of each seem, at first, to be overkill. Nevertheless, the effect is to convince the reader that these four elements are part of the texture of the biblical message throughout Holy Scripture, including the New Testament. Therefore, they should also be part of preaching that seeks to proclaim “the whole counsel of God.” Particularly helpful are the author’s drawing attention to the exclamative (“the exclamative, is, in effect, the indicative spoken with great emphasis and feeling”, p. 33) and the interrogative in its various forms, i.e. the analytical question, the rhetorical question, and the searching question. While much of the recent discussion regarding preaching deals with the relation between the indicative and the imperative, Carrick reminds us that passion and interaction with the minds and hearts of the hearers via questions are also part and parcel of faithful preaching of the Word of God. As a preacher of the Word, I was especially challenged by this material in the book.

In devoting two chapters to “The Imperative”, the author makes clear that this is the heart of his concern. “It is...vital to understand that, although ‘Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative’, it does not end with one...Although there is a primacy and priority about the indicative mood in preaching, there is actually an incompleteness and an insufficiency about the indicative mood considered in isolation.” (p. 83). In

## Book Review

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the first of the two chapters that consider this theme, Carrick develops this point, and demonstrates it (as he did with the previous three elements of preaching) with samples from the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Samuel Davies, Asahel Nettleton, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

The second of the two chapters dealing with “The Imperative” address head-on the views of the extreme “Redemptive-Historical” school of preaching. Citing the very champions of the “Redemptive Historical” interpretation of Scripture and the preaching that should grow out of that understanding, Carrick demonstrates conclusively that Edmund Clowney, Richard Gaffin, and Geerhardus Vos maintain(ed) the necessity of drawing out and proclaiming the ethical imperatives that flow out of the glorious “indicative” of the Person and the work of Christ. (It is particularly interesting that *Grace and Glory*, a superb collection of the addresses given at Princeton Seminary by Geerhardus Vos – the exemplar of “Redemptive Historical” preaching for those in the extreme wing of that school – was

published by The Banner of Truth Trust, a publishing agency which is known for its emphasis on applied and “experimental” Calvinism!) The nerve of the author’s assessment and critique is given in these words:

“Christocentricity is indeed vital in the preaching of the Word of God; but Christocentricity must not be permitted to degenerate into Christomonism. The Christocentric does not and must not exclude the exemplary; the indicatives of history do not and must not exclude the imperatives of ethics.” (p. 130)

While the volume is an insightful and most welcome contribution to the current discussion/debate in the Reformed community, in a couple of areas this reviewer found himself disappointed. First, the all too brief reference to “the tension between the definitiveness and the progressiveness of sanctification” (p. 96) does not do justice to the pivotal place this dynamic has in the interrelationship of the indicative and the imperative as developed in every New Testament epistle. To say simply that this tension “involves something of a paradox and might well be

said to constitute an antinomy” (*Ibid.*) is unsatisfying, given the fact that crucial indicative/imperative portions such as Romans 6 make profound applications of definitive sanctification as the ground of progressive sanctification. Second, while it was beneficial (and very convicting!) to read the homiletical examples from great men of the past, it would have made the volume even more useful if some contemporary examples (such as samplings from the preaching of Albert N. Martin, Sinclair Ferguson, and Ted Donnelly) could have been used.

This is hardly to take away from the value of *The Imperatives of Preaching*. It should be read by preachers who want to grow in preaching according to the pattern of Scripture. It should be read by ruling elders who want to improve their understanding of the elements of good preaching, and who desire to increase their ability to wisely oversee the ministry of the word. And it should be read by seminary students who want and who *need* sage biblical instruction on the essential (and all too often forgotten) elements of sacred rhetoric.

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