

ORDAINED SERVANT



The Committee on Christian Education of the O.P.C.

Back row: Strange, Pribble, Tyson, Shishko, Gidley, Hart, Winslow, Galbraith, Olinger
Front row: MacDonald, Dyer, Deliyannides, King, Reynolds, Williamson, Muether

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ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement of Purpose

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

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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Please send all materials intended for possible publication in *Ordained Servant* to the Editor, G. I. Williamson, 406 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201. (Or you can send a text file, by Email to: williamson.1@opc.org).

EDITORIAL NOTES

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we want to put the focus on the third ordination vow.

(3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

It is generally recognized that the *Book of Church Order*, containing the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for Public Worship is subordinate to the Bible and the Westminster Standards. In other words, the Bible is the highest—and only absolute—standard. The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms have the next highest authority subordinate to the Bible. That is why we refer to these documents as our ‘Secondary Standards.’ Finally, subordinate to both is the *Book of Church Order*, commonly referred to as a Tertiary Standard (meaning third in order of authority).

This difference in degree of authority is clearly indicated in the terms ‘believe’, ‘receive and adopt’, and ‘approve.’ To believe the Bible to be the Word of God is to ascribe to it something that cannot be ascribed to anything else. To receive and adopt the Westminster Standards (in the way stated) is to confess that this system of doctrine faithfully expresses what the Bible teaches. To approve of the *Book of Church Order* is—in my opinion—simply to agree to function within the principles set forth in this book. It is not my conviction that the *Book of*

Church Order says everything that can be said about Biblical church government, or the wisest procedure for the exercise of discipline. Indeed, in my own experience in the OPC I have seen certain particular rules—good rules, in ordinary circumstances—which have been set aside as unusual circumstances arose. These instances are few and far between, and are always subject to review by wider assemblies. But they do come about—everyone knows they do—and no one cries ‘foul’ because of a particular exception taken. And in my opinion this illustrates the difference between the level of authority belonging to these documents and the secondary standards.

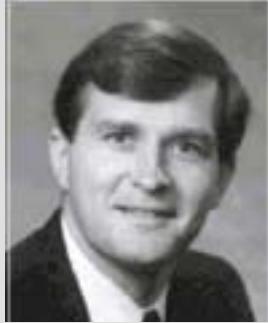
Let me express it in a different way. It is not to be expected that we agree as fully on the particulars of the tertiary standards as on the secondary. This is clearly seen in the sphere of our worship. As long as I have known the OPC there have been congregations that sing only the psalms in worship. This is certainly not required by the *Book of Church Order*. Indeed, it is very clear in saying otherwise. And the general practice among most OPCs is to sing more hymns than psalms. Yet no one has ever taken the view that those who sing only the psalms are violating the third ordination vow because it does not say that every church must use both. And it does say that the psalms ought to be sung, frequently!

In our recent history much work has been done by a special committee seeking to revise

the Directory for Public Worship. It has been a very difficult assignment. The reason is that there is such a wide variety of practices in this area. Our churches do not all use the same song books. We have some that are more traditional, and others that are less so. And the difficulty arising from these differences is to say what we can all agree on.

One thing that has struck me as very interesting is the fact that churches of the Continental Reformed tradition tend to be much more uniform in their practices in worship than we do. And yet they do not have any officially adopted ‘Directory for Public Worship.’ They have far fewer suggested rules or regulations, and yet much greater unity in practice. This leads me to the conclusion that legislation in this matter—though intended to generate greater uniformity—may in fact work against it. Might it not be better to reduce the quantity of material setting forth our doctrine of public worship, in order to give more powerful emphasis to the bed-rock principles stated in our secondary standards?

Much of what passes for acceptable practice in worship today can hardly be said to measure up to these standards. I am therefore not convinced that we need new, and ever-increasing-in-size, legislation. I am rather convinced that what we need is a revived conviction as to the scriptural fidelity of our secondary standards, and a renewed zeal to apply them as office-bearers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.



TAKE HEED TO YOUR ATTITUDE TO MINISTRY - Part 1

by

Joel R. Beeke

Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35) is warmly affectionate, yet full of solemn warning. Acts 20:28 is the heart of that message, and shows how we ministers must overcome wrong attitudes toward ministry with regard to ourselves and to our work. Acts 20:28 says, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*"

Paul gives three directives to consider as we face opposition in the ministry: take heed to yourselves, take heed to your flock, and take heed to feed the church of God. He enforces each mandate with persuasions to persevere in our work. "Take heed," Paul says. Stop whatever you are doing. Pay close attention. Deny yourself, and consider what I say, for it is most important.

In this address, I want to focus on one aspect of Paul's first directive, namely, that we should take heed to ourselves re-

garding our attitude toward ministry. Within this theme, I want to focus with you on our need as ministers (1) to fight pride, (2) to cope well with criticism, and (3) to develop a positive attitude toward ministry itself.

Ministers can develop two paralyzing attitudes to the ministry: pride and pessimism. Both are worldly at heart

Fighting Pride

Ministers can develop two paralyzing attitudes to the ministry: pride and pessimism. Both are worldly at heart, for both show that the world is not crucified in us.

God hates pride (Proverbs 6:16-17). He hates the proud with His heart, curses them with His mouth, and punishes them with His hand (Psalms 119:21; Is. 2:12, 23:9). Pride was God's first enemy. It was the first sin in paradise and the last we will shed in death. "Pride is the shirt of the soul, put on first and put off last," wrote George Swinnock.

As a sin, pride is unique. All sins turn us away from God, but pride is a direct attack upon God. It lifts our hearts above Him and against Him. Pride seeks to dethrone God and enthroned itself.

Pride is complex.

"It takes many forms and shapes and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion—when you pull off one layer, there is another underneath," wrote Jonathan Edwards.

We ministers, who are always in the public eye, are particularly prone to the sin of pride. As Richard Greenham wrote, "The more godly a man is, and the more graces and blessings of God are upon him, the more need he has to pray because Satan is busiest against him, and because he is readiest to be puffed up with a conceited holiness."

Pride feeds off nearly anything: a fair measure of ability and wisdom, a single compliment, a season of remarkable prosperity, a call to serve God in a position of prestige—even the

TAKE HEED TO YOUR ATTITUDE TO THE MINISTRY

honor of suffering for the truth. “It is hard starving this sin, as there is nothing almost but it can live upon,” wrote Richard Mayo.

If we think we are immune to the sin of pride, we should ask ourselves: How dependent are we on the praise of others? Are we more concerned about a reputation for godliness than about godliness itself? What do gifts and rewards from others say to us about our ministry? How do we respond to criticism from people in our congregation?

Our forefathers did not consider themselves immune to this sin. “I know I am proud; and yet I do not know the half of that pride,” wrote Robert Murray M’Cheyne. Twenty years after his conversion, Jonathan Edward groaned about the “bottomless, infinite depths of pride” left in his heart. And Luther said, “I am more afraid of Pope ‘Self’ than of the Pope in Rome and all his cardinals.”

Pride spoils our work. “When pride has written the sermon, it goes with us to the pulpit,” Richard Baiter said. “It forms our tone, it animates our delivery, it takes us off from that which may be displeasing to the people. It sets us in pursuit of vain applause from our hearers. It makes men seek themselves and their own glory.”

A godly minister fights against pride, whereas a worldly one feeds pride. “Men frequently admire me, and I am pleased,” said Henry Martyn, but adds, “but I abhor the pleasure I feel.” Cotton Mather confessed that when pride filled him with bitterness and confusion before the Lord, “I endeavoured to take a view of my pride as the very im-

How do we fight against pride? Do we understand how deeply rooted it is in us, and how dangerous it is to our ministry?

age of the Devil, contrary to the image and grace of Christ; as an offense against God, and grieving of His Spirit; as the most unreasonable folly and madness for one who had nothing singularly excellent and who had a nature so corrupt.”

Thomas Shepard also fought pride. In his diary entry for November 10, 1642, Shepard wrote, “I kept a private fast for light to see the full glory of the Gospel... and for the conquest of all my remaining pride of heart.”

Can you identify with these pastors in their struggle against pride? Do you care enough about your brothers in ministry to admonish them about this sin? When John Eliot, the Puritan missionary, noticed that a col-

league thought of himself too highly, he would say to him, “Study mortification, brother; study mortification.”

How do we fight against pride? Do we understand how deeply rooted it is in us, and how dangerous it is to our ministry? Do we ever remonstrate with ourselves as did the Puritan

Richard Mayo: “Should that man be proud that has sinned as thou hast sinned, and lived as thou hast lived, and wasted so much time, and abused so much mercy, and omitted so many duties, and neglected so great means?—that hath so grieved the Spirit of God, so violated the law of God, so dishonoured the name of God? Should that man be proud, who hath such a heart as thou hast?”

If we would kill worldly pride and live in godly humility, let us look at our Savior, whose life, Calvin said, “was naught but a series of sufferings.” Nowhere is humility better cultivated than at Gethsemane and Calvary. When pride threatens you, consider the contrast between a proud minister and our humble Savior. Confess with Joseph Hall:

*Thy garden is the place
Where pride cannot intrude;
For should it dare to enter there,
T'would soon be drowned in blood.*

And sing with Isaac Watts:

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died;
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

Here are some other ways to help you subdue pride:

- **Stay in the Word.** Read, search, know, memorize, love, pray over, and meditate upon such passages as Psalm 39:4-6, Psalm 51:17, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 12:1-4, and 1 Peter 4:1, all in dependency upon the Spirit. The Spirit alone can break the back of our pride and cultivate humility within us by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us.

- **Seek a deeper knowledge of God,** His attributes, and His glory. Job and Isaiah teach us that nothing is so humbling as knowing God (Job 42; Isaiah 6). Spend time meditating on God's greatness and holiness in comparison to your smallness and sinfulness.

- **Practice humility** (Philippians 2:3-4). Remember how Augustine answered the question, "What three graces does a minister need most?" by saying, "Humility. Humility. Humility." To that end, seek greater awareness of your depravity and the heinousness and irrationality of sin.

- **Remember daily** that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). View your afflictions as God's gifts to keep you humble. View your talents as gifts of God that never accrue any honor to you (1 Corinthians 4:7). Everything you have or have ever accomplished has come from God's hand.

- **View overcoming pride as a lifelong process** that calls you to grow in servanthood. Be determined to fight the battle against pride by considering each day as an opportunity to forget yourself and serve others. As Abraham Booth writes, "For-

get not, that the whole of your work is ministerial; not legislative—that you are not a lord in the church, but a servant." The act of service is intrinsically humbling.

- **Read the biographies of great saints**, such as Whitefield's Journals, The Life of David Brainerd, and Spurgeon's Early Years. As Dr. Lloyd-Jones says, "If that does not bring you to earth, then I pronounce that you are just a professional and beyond hope." Associate, too, with living saints who exemplify humility, rather than arrogant or flattering people. Association promotes assimilation.

- **Meditate much on the solemnity of death, the certainty of Judgment Day, the vastness of eternity, and the fixed states of heaven and hell.** Consider what you deserve on account of your sin and what your future will be on account of grace; let the contrast humble you (1 Peter 5:5-7).

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ABOUT PREACHING

by

Mark Larson

Easter Sunday, 2003

Dear Mr. Salutes,

I very much enjoyed our conversation yesterday regarding the vacant pulpit at Redemptive-historical OPC. Our discussion of matters relative to Reformed theology and biblical preaching was very stimulating. It appears that you are looking for a minister who is narrowly committed to a fairly contemporary redemptive-historical approach largely arising out of the perspectives of certain twentieth-century biblical theologians standing in the Reformed tradition.

My own approach—practiced over the course of the last twenty-five years of preaching—stands more in the mainstream tradition of such theological giants as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. This approach, articulated by Augustine in the fifth century, recognizes that while the biblical text centers upon Christ, we are also to come to the biblical text with three concerns—ever asking three questions. First. On the

basis of this passage, **what are we to believe?** (This is what Augustine called the allegorical dimension.) Second. On the basis of this pericope, **what are we to hope for?** (This for over a millennium has been called the analogical thrust. The importance of this is seen in the work of the contemporary German Reformed theologian J. Moltmann who rightly points out that

The necessity of tropological preaching rests in the necessity of instructing the people of God in the doctrine of sanctification.

the Bible is a book of promises.) Third. On the basis of this text, **what are we to do?** (This, as I stated, has been called the topological emphasis.) The allegorical dimension cultivates faith, the analogical nurtures hope, and the tropological develops us in love. Faith, hope, and love—as Thomas Aquinas expounded them—are the three theological virtues (the fruits of grace, not natural human ability).

The tropological nature of the one sermon which we discussed

is far from moralistic preaching—which is properly defined as proclaiming moral virtue as the ground of man's justification (this indeed was the Semi-Pelagian error of the late medieval church reflected in such a theologian as Gabriel Biel). The necessity of tropological preaching rests in the necessity of instructing the people of God in the doctrine of sanctification.

Beyond that, however, the tropological side of preaching is rooted in the position of the apostle Paul articulated in such a passage as 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11—that the historical narratives pertaining to Israel in the wilderness should be understood as exemplary narratives, teaching us what we ought—and ought not—to do in terms of our moral conduct. Indeed, the same apostle declares in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is God-breathed and is therefore profitable “for training in righteousness.” The point is that historical narratives do not have a Christo-centric focus exclusively. This unfortunately has been the error of some of the contemporary redemptive-historical advocates.

ABOUT PREACHING

It is the apostolic position that the historical genre of Old Testament material is also to be properly used as a basis of moral conduct, for training in righteousness. It is this very Scripture which has this tropological dimension which is to be preached by the man of God (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

As the prophets and the apostles demonstrate, preaching entails not only the setting forth of Christ, but also the proclamation of what moral

conduct which is pleasing to God actually entails. Read, for example, the preaching of Amos in his prophecy and that of Paul in his letter to Titus. It is also most fascinating to note Luke's summary of Paul's teaching given to Felix. It is true that Felix "*heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.*" But this was not the totality of the public preaching of the apostle. Luke goes on to say that "as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened" (Acts 24:24-25). I would suggest that this is what truly constitutes a well-rounded ministry. Here we have the inclu-

sion of the three elements of concern for exegesis and preaching. Paul's teaching included the doctrine which must be believed—that righteousness is provided by God, by grace, which is to be appropriated through faith alone. This indeed is the heart of the gospel. But his discussion con-

As the prophets and the apostles demonstrate, preaching entails not only the setting forth of Christ, but also the proclamation of what moral conduct which is pleasing to God actually entails.

cerning self-control shows that his teaching also included significant discussion on the matter of appropriate moral conduct, on what it is to live a life of moral virtue. Surely no one of us would dare to accuse him of moralistic preaching! And there was the eschatological element of his teaching as well—the fact that history ends on that final day in which there will be an ultimate disclosure of the righteous judgment of God. Here, by the way, is one place among many where Augustine shows that he was thoroughly saturated in Pauline thought—his emphasis upon reading and preaching Scripture so that the

Word develops faith, love, and hope arises directly from the Great Apostle himself.

I would urge the elders in your congregation to look beyond some of the rather narrow positions which have been articulated by some contemporary redemptive-historical preachers. Beware of putting your minister in a theological and homiletical straitjacket formulated by some overly zealous writers in the redemptive-historical camp (some of whom have never spent significant time as a pastor in

the parish). Consider also the approaches taken by the some of the real giants of the Christian church—Augustine, Luther, and Calvin—theologians whose sermons will endure throughout the church age. I personally have never been disappointed with their work, nor with the preaching of contemporary men of God who stand in the same classical tradition.

May the Holy Spirit guide and direct you in the days to come. I wish you the best.

Sincerely, Calvin Turretini
Pastor at Geneva OPC

Mark J. Larson currently serves as pastor of the Catawba Valley Presbyterian Church (OPC), in Granite Falls (formerly known as Lenoir), NC



PASTORAL PAGEANTRY

by

Peter Stazen II

We are all too familiar with the beauty pageant wherein the contestants parade before judges who select the winner from among a bevy of beauties. Initially the contestant enters along with many others seeking a title. This larger group is significantly reduced to a particular number and in short order the viable contestants are reduced to a dozen. The number dwindles as the judges tally points based on the contestant's beauty, charm, talent, and intelligence. Intensity and excitement builds as the finalists compete for the top prize. The final countdown begins : five, four, three, the most important runner-up, and then the winner is announced and crowned.

Recent years have fostered much debate on various aspects of these type of pageants and even their continuance. Whatever the outcome may be, it does suggest an interesting parallel issue within the church. I would like to challenge the readers of *Ordained Servant* to consider whether we in the church of Jesus Christ have allowed such a practice to determine the selection of the pastors who fill our pulpits. Some may well take of-

fense to such a suggestion, but please bear with me.

Following is a portion of a letter which accompanied my ministerial data form to the churches under consideration for the pastorate over a decade ago. A few comments will follow.

Dear Pulpit Committee,

I have recently come to some convictions concerning pastoral candidacy and want you to be aware under what conditions I would allow myself to be a candidate.

Since it is my desire to maintain good relationships with my fellow ministers as well as preserve the congregations from serious division I will not allow myself to be pitted over and against another fellow minister as a candidate. In other words, I will not be involved with the pro-

cess where two or more men candidate simultaneously. This process has the potential for fostering bad feelings among ministers and promoting and maintaining separation among the congregations.

The arrangement under which I will candidate allows the congregation to vote upon an individual candidate before moving on to another candidate (assuming the first candidate is voted down or fails to accept the call). The pulpit or search committee does its research through ministerial data forms, additional questionnaires, taped sermons, etc., and chooses the one who is, in their opinion, the best man. Then he candidates and the congregation votes. If he is rejected the search committee recommends another man

PASTORAL PAGEANTRY

who in turn candidates and upon whom the congregation votes.

I believe considering one candidate at a time is the best procedure for the well being of the minister and congregation.

Those “recent” convictions (of over a decade ago) came about because of Dr. Jay Adams thought provoking chapter on candidate in Volume 1 of *Shepherding God’s Flock*. In fact, what is proposed in my letter is reflective of Dr. Adams’ sentiments on the subject. This point of view needs to be revisited in light of the current practices of seeking ministers for our churches because there is a new twist to candidacy.

It appears in most situations nowadays that a man only “officially” candidates after he has been permitted to parade his ministerial credentials and qualifications along with other ministers, albeit at various dates. A case in point has recently come to my attention where a man spent a weekend at a church with a vacant pulpit, preaching twice, teaching an adult Sunday school class, and meeting with an elder and others, yet he was not “candidate.” He is apparently one of many ministers invited to do such.

Granted, churches need to supply the pulpit with capable ministers to feed the flock as they await a pastor. But more often than not, the supply preaching is provided by men who are available for call. We have all heard of practices where pulpit committees have invited an “available man” to preach several times on various occasions (in order to fill the pulpit) and have afforded other men the same opportunities. Are we blind to what we are doing? Is it any wonder that there are a “glut” of ministers and many churches with vacant pulpits? Should we be surprised that it takes so long to obtain a pastor? Could it be that too many of us are vying for the same “job”? Does not the reason become self-evident when we hear stories of mission works or established churches not being of one mind or having to regroup because they were divided over the choice of a pastor between three men. May the Lord graciously save us from an “eenie, meenie, miney moe” mentality in the way we select God’s men to fill our pulpits. We need to come to grips with what we’ve been doing!

Solutions?

Now it should be obvious that a minister who determines not to participate in the pastoral pageantry may immediately curtail his opportunity to serve in a

given pulpit. So be it. I dare say, however, that if enough ministers would take a stand on such a practice it would force the pulpit/search committees to proceed to select men in a more orderly and decent manner.

Some might think that one weekend will be insufficient for a congregation to get to know the man and for him to get to know the congregation. Reiterating a portion of the letter above, let the pulpit/search committee do its homework and then make the arrangements for a man to come and candidate. Adams suggests that “the ideal is for a man to preach twice on Sunday, conduct a midweek meeting, visit around the congregation and meet with the elders during the week, and preach again the following Sunday.” Amen! Let’s keep it to one candidate at a time after which the congregation proceeds to vote.

Peter Stazen II is currently serving as Pastor of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Metamora, Michigan.

THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE

by

John Calvin



What is meant by conscience?

“...we must first understand what is meant by conscience. The definition must be derived from the etymology of the term. As when men, with the mind and intellect, apprehend the knowledge of things, they are thereby said to know, and hence the name of science or knowledge is used; so, when they have, in addition to this, a sense of the divine judgment, as a witness not permitting them to hide their sins, but bringing them as criminals before the tribunal of the judge, that sense is called conscience. For it occupies a kind of middle place between God and man, not suffering man to suppress what he knows in himself, but following him out until it bring him to conviction. This is what Paul means, when he says that conscience bears witness, ‘our thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing each other’ (Romans 2:15).

“While the whole world was shrouded in the densest darkness of ignorance, this tiny little spark of light remained, that men recognized man’s conscience to be higher than all human judgments.”

Only what is imposed by God is binding on the conscience

“The whole case rests upon this: if God is the sole lawgiver,

men are not permitted to usurp this honor. Consequently, we ought at the same time to keep in mind these two reasons already mentioned why the Lord claims this for himself alone. The first is that we should have in his will the perfect rule of all righteousness and holiness, and thus in knowing him possess the perfect knowledge of the good life. The second is that he alone (when we seek the way to worship him aright and fitly) has authority over our souls, him we ought to obey, and upon his will we ought to wait...the law is said to bind the conscience when it simply binds man, without regard to other men, or without having any consideration for them. For example: God not only teaches us to keep our mind chaste and pure from all lust, but forbids any obscenity of speech and outward wantonness. My conscience is subject to the observance of this law, even though no man were alive in the world.” (IV:10,8)

It is not legitimate for the Church to legislate!

“Let us, therefore, remember that all human laws are to be weighed in this balance if we wish to have a sure test which will not allow us in anything to go astray.” (IV:10,8)

“The power we have now to consider is, whether it be lawful for the Church to bind laws upon the conscience? In this discussion, civil order is not touched; but the only point considered is, how God may be duly worshipped according to the rule which he has prescribed, and how our spiritual liberty, with reference to God, may remain unimpaired. In ordinary language, the name of human traditions is given to all decrees concerning the worship of God, which men have issued without the authority of his word. We contend against these, not against the sacred and useful constitutions of the Church, which tend to reserve discipline, or decency, or peace.” (IV:10,1)

The Traditions of men are therefore of no legitimate authority over the conscience!

1. They rest on fictional claims

“...to trace the origin of these traditions (with which the church has hitherto been oppressed) back to the apostles is pure deceit. For the whole doctrine of the apostles has this intent: not to burden consciences with new observances, or contaminate the worship of God with our own inventions. Again, if there is anything credible in the histories and ancient records, the apostles not

John Calvin on Conscience

only were ignorant of what the Romanists attribute to them but never even heard of it." (IV,10).

2. They conflict with the Crown Rights of Christ

"It has become common usage to call all decrees concerning the worship of God put forward by men apart from his Word 'human traditions.' Our contention is against these, not against holy and useful church institutions, which provide for the preservation of discipline or honesty or peace. But the purpose of our effort is to restrain this unlimited and barbarous empire usurped over souls by those who wish to be counted pastors of the church but are actually its most savage butchers. They say the laws they make are 'spiritual, pertaining to the soul, and declare them necessary for eternal life. But thus the Kingdom of Christ (as I have just suggested) is invaded; thus the freedom given by him to the consciences of believers is utterly oppressed and cast down."

ARTICLE 24 OF HUMAN CONSTITUTIONS

Ecclesiastical constitutions, such as those concerning fasting, the choice of food, abstinence from flesh, and many others, truly oblige in the forum of conscience, even to the exclusion of all offense (RC Council of Trent).

ANTIDOTE TO ARTICLE 24

"*There is one Lawgiver,*" says James, (James 4:12) "*who can save and destroy.*" And the rea-

son for this is twofold; because the will of God is to us a perfect rule of righteousness and holiness, and he alone possesses authority over souls — an authority which he resigns to none. Therefore, the Lord everywhere urges obedience, and obedience to himself alone. Hence those expressions, "*Obedience is better than sacrifice*" (1 Samuel 15:22). Likewise, "*Whatever I command you, that observe and do. You will not add ought or diminish.*" Likewise, "*Let not every one do what seemeth to him good, but do only what I command you.*" Likewise, "*Did I ever command your fathers to offer sacrifices to me?*" and not this rather, "*Hearing, hear my voice,*" (Samuel 15:22; Deuteronomy 12:8, 32; 4:2; Jeremiah 7:22). Paul declares it unlawful to bind the conscience by any human laws. "*Stand fast,*" says he, (Galatians 5:1,) "*in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage.*" He elsewhere gives the reason (Colossians 2:23). For even those things which have a show of wisdom are frivolous and vain, if they are according to the precepts and traditions of men. In like manner, he declares, when he treats of marriage, that he is unwilling to lay a snare for believers (1 Corinthians 5:35). Therefore, the spiritual kingdom of Christ is violated, and his authority over souls infringed, when men usurp the right of binding consciences by their own laws. Besides, it is abomination in the sight of God to frame to him a worship which he does not require, or to embrace one devised by man without the sanc-

tion of his word, as Isaiah testifies, (Isaiah 29:13) when for this cause he denounces dreadful judgments from God upon the people, because they worshipped him with the commandments of men. And we have the well-known declaration of Christ, "*In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,*" (Matthew 15:9). As to the choice of meats, we have the doctrine of Paul, "*Let no man judge you in meat or in drink,*" (Colossians 2:16). Also, "*The kingdom of Christ is not meat and drink,*" (Romans 14:17). We have also the declaration of Christ, "*That which entereth into the mouth defileth not the man,*" (Matthew 15:11). And in another passage Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, predicts that impostors would arise, prohibiting the use of meats, which God had created, and also of holy matrimony (1 Timothy 4:3). It is impossible to listen to the quibble, that, in the former passages, Paul is disputing with the Jews, and that this prophecy is directed against the Tatians and their followers. For if God has abolished the distinction of meats which he had introduced into the law, and has subjected all meats indifferently to the power of men, who can now assume to himself the right of making new laws, by which the liberty allowed by God is taken away? If Augustine, even in his day, justly complained that the Church, which God in his mercy wished to be free, was so burdened, that the condition of the Jews was more tolerable, in what terms shall we deplore the bondage which now exists?



“YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

by

Jack Sawyer

As we concluded our studies on the Directory For Public Worship in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church recently, I was struck by a phrase in the welcome that the Pastor is to give to all those who have made public profession of faith. The phrase in particular that gave me pause for reflection was, ‘*I welcome you to all the privileges of full communion with God’s people*’... the charge goes on to enumerate in particular that one is now free to partake of the Lord’s supper.

While access to the Supper is a great blessing, I think it important to note that this welcome also indicates a corporate reality that is often overlooked when a person professes his faith. So often folk merely think vertically. Ah yes, he has professed his or her faith, accepting Christ as Savior. Important truths to be sure. But what is overlooked in this madly individualistic age in which we live is the horizontal dimension. When we profess our faith we are not only declaring our individual faith and relationship with Christ in heaven above, we are also confessing that we are one with the people of God whom Christ has gathered in this particular congregation. We are declaring that we have full communion not only with Christ, but also with the folk He has made together with me into members of His household.

In seed form we see this atti-

tude in the Old Testament matriarch, Ruth the Moabitess. Clinging to her mother in law Naomi who is trying to send both she and her fellow widow Orpah back to Moab, Ruth enunciates a passionate profession of her love for Naomi, but more importantly her trust in Naomi’s God and her desire to be a part of the family of Naomi’s people.

*Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following
after you;
For wherever you go I will go;
And wherever you lodge I will
lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die,
And there I will be buried.
The Lord do so to me, and more
also,
If anything but death parts me
from you.*

Being a widow and a stranger to Israel and Israel’s God it would have been easy, only natural, for Ruth to have taken the path of Orpah her sister in law: to go back to the land of her birth, her own biological family, her old religion, to find a new husband. But no. Evidently Naomi’s loving character and her faith had made such a great impact on Ruth in spite of the overwhelming grief of the loss of Naomi’s husband and her two sons, that Ruth is swayed decisively to embrace Naomi, her people, and her God. Whatever the future

may hold, wherever she must sojourn, she has counted the cost and her lot is cast with covenant people of Israel.

Of course the story goes on, and by faith, and through the sovereign providence of God, Ruth will become the great grandmother of David the King and a matriarchal ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ruth’s history thus ultimately points us to the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom and her profession of faith as a member of His old covenant people becomes instructive for God’s people through the ages.

How so? Back to our opening thought. We are joined through faith not only to Christ but to His people. Public profession of faith is a corporate and covenantal activity, not merely a personal and subjective one. We say in effect with the congregation of the Lord’s people...your people shall be my people...and your God my God. Thus we enjoy the privilege of full communion, the communion of the saints, with God’s people. So deep and vital is this communion, fellowship, and sharing in one another’s gifts and graces, that we actually become dependent upon that which every joint and member supplies so that the body of Christ among us may build itself up in love, so that we may all attain to the unity of the faith and the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ..

"Your People Shall be My People!"

Reflection upon the implications of this truth, this our public covenant with Christ and His people, is surely a necessary tonic for the rampant and corrosive individualism and independentism that is wracking churches today. People seemingly live their lives, wholly unlike Ruth, in total disregard of their covenantal obligations. They neglect in daily decision making to weigh up the ultimate implications of their actions for their own spiritual well being. And rare indeed is the jewel of a saint who prioritizes the needs of his or her fellow family members in the house of God, like Paul who said...to depart and be with Christ is far better, nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you...I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.

Thus, like Ruth and like Paul, we must learn the discipline of thinking covenantally. Covenant theology necessarily entails a vital, living awareness of the communion of the saints. Covenant theology is not merely a convenient interpretive scheme for understanding the Bible. It is not merely a helpful rationale for legitimizing the baptism of infants. Covenant theology must live and breathe as surely as we members of the body Jesus Christ live and breathe. And that means... 'let this attitude be in you which was also in Christ Jesus' ...the things of others must be counted as more important than our own. The spirit not of Orpah but of Ruth must animate us. The servant example of the Lord Jesus himself must inspire us, not the base instinctive desire of every sinful heart that says...me, myself, and I, first, foremost and last.

In our beloved Southland, one of the remaining attractive features of the culture is the lingering emphasis still placed upon family ties and family loyalty. In many ways this is a virtue but it can easily become an ugly, unthinking idol. Our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that his brothers and sisters, and even his mother were those who hear the word of God and put it into practice (Mark 3:33-35). And that greater love and loyalty must be given to him than to any of one's earthly kin or we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37-39). In fact bringing sword and division, our Lord at times causes His disciples to face the ire and opposition of the members of their own household. Once beloved parents, brothers and sisters, even the children of our own flesh and blood, can become enemies as the fiery sword of the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings not peace but compels us to declare publicly where our ultimate allegiances lie (Cf. Luke 12: 51-53).

So then where do our ultimate loyalties and priorities lie? With our genetic kin? With a geographical region? With Orpah in husband and children, living in our own country, being close to our family. Indeed not. In the plan of God, our concern for and commitment to all the above may exist in perfect harmony with faith in Jesus Christ. And blessed is the man whose experience is such! But sometimes that same faith in Jesus compels us to take the stand of Ruth. Denying every lofty pretension and claim of kith and kin to a higher loyalty, sometimes we simply must proclaim that we are one in communion with Christ and His people, that this is the preeminent loyalty in our lives. His people shall be our peo-

ple, our brothers, our sisters, our parents, our children. There, amongst the faithful of the land where we sojourn, lies our loyalty wherever it may lead us and whatever it may cost us. For it is far better to endure reproach (like Moses) with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, and kin. Rather than dwelling with every convenience, and creature comfort in Moab, it is far better to go out with father Abraham and his descendants, living in tents and not knowing where we are going, so that we at the last may attain, with Ruth and all the assembly of the faithful, to that city whose builder and architect is God.

Every caring Pastor should pray that the faith of Ruth will be the faith of his parishioners as well; So also your Pastor is praying that the communion of the Saints will not be an irrelevant abstraction or an irritating distraction to us but a precious privilege to be fully enjoyed; that we may live out the days of our sojourning in the joyful confidence that Christ, by His Word and Spirit has gathered us into this family of believers which is the Pineville Presbyterian Church; that together we may, in seasons both of prosperity and adversity, lovingly confess together... your people shall be my people and your God my God.

Jack Sawyer is currently serving as Pastor of the Pineville Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Pineville, LA.



THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND THE SPIRIT OF HERESY

by

Meindert Ploegman

In stating the doctrine of the Church, the opening paragraphs of chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) are in one sense its strength. Yet in another sense—in terms of its practical out-working—they are its weakness as well.

Helping us to see the Church as earthly and visible, as well as heavenly, and therefore invisible, is indeed a strength. The Church is both, and no view of the Church is complete without both perspectives. No church can survive in history clinging to just one of these perspectives, regardless of which one she chooses. God has constituted the Church to be both, so she can not be anything less. Other Reformed Confessions lack this important teaching; most notably the Belgic Confession with its widespread influence.

In looking at it as a weakness, it should be noted that this weakness is not so much in the Confession itself, as in the ignorance of the human condition since the fall. Because of this, many of God's good gifts are distorted and frequently profaned. One example of this is the wide spread misuse of this visible/invisible distinction. In its most extreme form professing Christians simply do not join local churches anymore. An ever increasing number seek to simply cultivate their own personal walk with the Lord apart from any visible manifesta-

tion of the church. They regard themselves as part of the invisible Church. There is an abundance of good material available in the form of books and tapes and on the internet. There are ministries to get involved with and so to have Christian fellowship. As such visible churches simply become extra and unwanted baggage. Countless others 'worship' God in the privacy and comfort of their own homes by means of radio or television.

There is however a more subtle manifestation of this disease; one from which most churches suffer to some extent. It is perhaps best described by the phrase 'poor churchmanship.' Little is made today of missing worship, even several Lord's days in a row. Even when the Lord's Supper is celebrated few make an extra effort to be there. Little is made of proper preparation for celebrating the Lord's Supper. Lord's day observance is at a low ebb among professing Christians. Attendance at congregational meetings as well as for evening worship is generally less than half of those who ought to be there. Many do not contribute at all, and others contribute very little to the work of the Church financially.

With great ease Christians change churches today, as though they were changing supermarkets; attending whichever one they like better for the moment. Yet most of

these people still regard themselves as faithful Christians because—first and foremost—they see themselves as members of Christ's invisible Church. Only secondary are they also members of a visible church on earth, and in their understanding there is no essential connection between the two. Thus the high view of the Church expressed in our confession has suffered setbacks comparable to an outgoing tide which lowers every vessel in it. Even the best of us suffer to some extent from this misunderstanding of the teaching of our confession.

Churches under the teaching of the Belgic Confession seem to have fared better in this respect. Since it does not emphasize visible and invisible aspects of the Church what could be considered a weakness in this confession, has tended to work out—in practice—as more of a strength!

How are we to understand this low view of the visible Church, and how does this relate to other ills that she has suffered in time past and today? In 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7 we have the fundamental principle of the spirit of Antichrist identified for us. It is said to be a denying of the true humanity of Christ; a denying that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. In grasping the significance of this statement it is helpful to bear in mind the fourth rule for interpreting the ten com-

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mandments, as given to us in Q and A 99 of our Larger Catechism. It tells us that where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and where a sin is forbidden the contrary duty is commanded: so where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included. It might be said, in other words, that each commandment is reversible. Each command is given to us in seed form; yet out of that seed grows a tree with many branches. We see that particularly in our Larger Catechism's treatment of the ten commandments, and the whole of Scripture bears out its validity.

Similarly, what we are given in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7 is a truth in seed form. God, in Christ, united true humanity to true deity, and failure to affirm either the true humanity or deity of Christ as the God-man effectively denies his work of redemption, and his being the person of the Messiah, our Savior. In the first century it was the true humanity of Christ that was denied by many; in more recent centuries it has been his deity. But either way we are to recognize in it the workings of the spirit of Antichrist as defined for us by the Apostle John. It is a separating, and thereby a denial, of what God has joined together.

However, having seen that—by implication—John's statement about the spirit of Antichrist includes a denial of the deity of Christ, we have not yet exhausted what is included here. The Person of Christ does not exist in isolation. He has entered into a vital union with the body of God's elect.

They are inseparably joined to him and he to them, so much so that he can say: "*Because I live, you will live also,*" John 14:19; and the Church can say: "*we are members of his body, of His flesh and of His bones;*" Ephesians 5:30. He can say on the last day: "*inasmuch as you did, or did not, do it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did, or did not, do it to me*" Matthew 25:40,45. The words, which Christ spoke when coming into the world: "*a body you have prepared for me*" Hebrews 10:5 are true regarding his earthly body which was crucified and resurrected for us. In this sense they are given in Hebrews 10. However there is an analogy to these things with respect to his mystical body, the Church. Here too he can say to the Father: '*A body you have prepared for me.*'

As in Christ's incarnation the invisible God is inseparably joined to visible man, so also in his Church, spiritual things are joined to visible things. In Christ God has joined heaven to earth; God to man, and form to Spirit. The same is true with respect to the Church; and what God has joined together, man is not to put asunder. As the human and divine natures of Christ coexist in the one person without contradiction, conversion, composition or confusion , so also in Christ's mystical body there is a dwelling together of heavenly and earthly things in a union that is without contradiction, conversion, composition or confusion. In this light for example, think of the sacraments, preaching and prayer.

As the spirit of Antichrist would separate what God has joined together in Christ—and so destroy

our faith in him as our savior—so he would separate what God has joined together in Christ's Church, and so destroy her integrity also. What goes for the head also goes for the body since God has made the Church one with Christ.

John's warning that the spirit of Antichrist denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, by implication also means that the Spirit of Antichrist is going to deny that Christ's Church has come "in the flesh." And where the Spirit of Antichrist denies the supernatural nature of Christ's person, by implication it is going to deny the supernatural nature of Christ's Church.

Those who embrace the invisible Church, to the exclusion or minimizing of the visible church, fall into the same kind of error as the first century Christians who embraced Christ in his divinity, but rejected him in his 'coming in the flesh.' Not only did Christ 'come in the flesh', but the Church has also come 'in the flesh;' that is both have made a real, historic appearance in this world. It belongs, according to the apostle John, to the spirit of Antichrist to separate what God has joined together, and so to destroy our faith in both Christ's person and work. We need to discern the workings of the spirit of Antichrist in our age. In liberal circles we see him denying Christ's deity, and in evangelical circles the Church is often spiritualized to some extent, thus becoming a mystical, non-earthly entity.

Virtually all Christian heresies when traced back to their beginnings, fall in one of four categories. They are according to the working of the spirit of Antichrist.

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There is either a denial of the deity of Christ—and therefore of his Word—as in today's Modernism, or there is an embracing of deity to the exclusion of real humanity as in the first century Gnostics, or today's New Age religion. Here you have an unknown and unknowable God who is disconnected from our humanity.

A similar thing happens with the Church when her heavenliness eclipses her earthliness. History has many illustrations. One example is the Church of Rome, which claims it can speak infallibly; it can magisterially forgive sin, even its traditions are sacred apart from God's Word, and in it a mere man represents Christ on earth. A different manifestation from the same root would be the Church's being filled with mysticism and all manner of superstitions. Again we need not look further than the Church of Rome and the Christianity she produced in lands such as Central and South America. Also the modern Charismatic Movement, and the Deeper Life Movement, capitalize on the heavenliness of the Christian faith, and often at the expense of an orderly earthly presence.

Hyper-Calvinism is yet a different variation on the same theme. Mr. Harold Camping and his Family Radio followers believe the earthly Church has perished altogether; all there is left is an undefined spiritual entity without any earthly form. There is modern Dispensationalism with its emphasis on the Church as God's heavenly people in contrast to Old Testament believers as God's earthly people. With this emphasis they have greatly contributed to the demise of the visible Church. Finally

there are those who cling to the invisible Church. They often cast off all that is earthly so that they may have a body that is only spiritual. It is the triumph of Spirit over form and heaven over earth which is seen as a good thing, yet it is nothing but heresy, for the God who gave the Spirit also gave the form; he who gave the heavenly also gave the earthly. Jesus Christ *did* come in the flesh, and so did his Church, and we may not separate what God has joined together; both in Christ and in his Church.

In the last category the Church is out of touch with heaven. She becomes humanistic; focused on earthly concerns and enjoyments. More subtle forms would include the man-centeredness of many churches, which is increasingly common today, and dead Orthodoxy, where a dependence on the Spirit's working with the Word is missing. Here we find Arminianism also, with its dependence on man's natural abilities, and this to the expense of what is Spirit-worked, and supernatural. Many other examples could fit in this basic framework.

The apostle John continues in 2 John 9: "*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*" What has perhaps not been sufficiently appreciated by many is the close relationship that between the doctrine of the person of Christ and the nature of the Church. It is an analogous relationship. In both we have a dwelling together of heaven and earth—form and Spirit—the divine and the human—in a relationship that is without contradic-

tion, conversion, composition or confusion. Yet it is even more than two analogous relationships. We can even speak of a union of these two relationships. The doctrine of union with Christ brings these two relationships together.

Christ's union with his Church is also without contradiction, conversion composition or confusion. So the two become virtually one; they end up in such a close relationship with each other that, if we brought them any closer, they would begin to lose their distinctiveness. So God has constituted the Church a helper suitable to the nature(s) of Christ.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy is for us today: "*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*" 1 Tim. 4:16. In the same spirit the elder John exhorts the elect lady and her children: "*Look to yourselves, that we loose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward*" 2 John 8.

Meindert Ploegman is currently serving as the pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Bohemia, Long Island, New York. This paper was written as part of his assigned work for an MTI course on the Westminster Standards. We thought it was worthy of being more widely read.

SOFTWARE REVIEWS

BibleWorks 6. A Review by Arthur Fox (Price: \$299.95 for new full version; \$125 for upgrade from version 5, \$150 from earlier versions)

If you have the ability to purchase just one Bible Software Program for yourself, or perhaps for your pastor, this is the one to buy. I have been using this program for several years, beginning I believe, with version 1. And each upgrade surpasses the last. This current edition, version 6, is more than an electronic concordance. It is, as they have noted on the box, Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research.

I could go on for pages about its features, which include, yes, an electronic concordance that produces a set of references for any word in any version of Scripture within mere seconds, Hebrew and Greek Bibles in several editions (all the latest editions), 92 Bible translations in 28 languages, all of them included and unlocked, grammatical tools for Greek and Hebrew (Burton's Moods and Tenses, and Futato's Beginning Biblical Hebrew Tutorial, both unlocked), a tool for diagramming verses in any language, 3 Bible Encyclopedias, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Josephus' Histories, and I could go on. There are also more grammatical tools to be unlocked, (Bauer's Greek Lexicon and The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, also known as HALOT) as well as the Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts.

All of that is important information, but what those of you who study the bible carefully, especially ministers, ruling elders, licentiates and seminary students, need to know is that this program is easy to use. It has an easily understandable manual and four hours of videos that demonstrate how to use the various features of the program. In less than an hour you will be finding information in the Bible at lightning speed, and in just a few hours you will master the basic tools for research that this program has available to you. You will spend much longer learning new ways this program can help you in your research.

I use this program each day to help me translate my text for preaching or teaching. I find my Greek and Hebrew have remained sharp because there is a parsing tool included in the program, and my vocabulary skills have remained stable and I am learning more about syntax. I can do the basic research for a sermon or a lesson, including translation, in just a couple of hours or less with this program. I no longer need to pore through pages of a lexicon to find definitions, nor do I need to examine small type to find cross references. Easily 10-12 hours of research is reduced to 2-4 hours at most because of this program. I cannot imagine doing what I do as a minister without Bible-Works. Version 6 has made it all that much easier—quite a feat, since each earlier version did the

same thing! You can go to www.bibleworks.com for full details on ordering.

An Appendix: Using *Bible Works 6* with a Macintosh Computer, by the Editor.

I've used the Macintosh computer for the past twenty years and still consider it the most user friendly. But I will admit that I have sometimes envied those who are part of the Microsoft Empire because of the far greater number of Bible programs available to them. However, I recently secured a copy of the Virtual PC program. Originated by the Connectix Corporation, this was recently bought out by Microsoft. This program puts a Microsoft operating system (mine came with Windows XP) on a Macintosh computer. This has made it possible for me to finally make use of the premiere Bible program called BibleWorks. And I was not disappointed. Within a few hours I was experiencing—and enjoying—the riches of this amazing software just as many of you non-Mac users do.

Now I don't claim any technical erudition in computer things. But it is my understanding that Virtual PC simply adds a software layer on top of the Mac operating system. This obviously results in a slight slowing down of non-Mac programs, as compared with those written for the Mac system. It took quite a bit of time to set all this up (perhaps I'm just impatient). And starting

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up the BibleWorks program the first time also seemed time consuming. But once it was set up I was amazed at how fast it performed. And that is not all: when I wanted to close down Bible-Works the Virtual PC ‘layer’ allowed me the choice of saving the page I was working on in such a way that I can start up much more quickly next time, opening to that very page. And while my computer may be faster than many Macs currently in use (mine is 1 GHZ) in using the program I felt hardly any loss of speed as compared with my other (native) Mac programs.

And—most important of all—what this amazing Bible program will do far surpasses anything else that I’ve used or seen. The best Mac program that I had seen is Accordance, but it simply does not compare with BibleWorks 6. This is even true when it comes to the cost. You can get a start with Accordance for less money. But to get anything like parity with BibleWorks 6 would, by my calculations, cost far more. This program comes with 92 Bible translations in 28 different languages! The English translations ‘unlocked’ and ready to use include the NIV, NAS, NKJ, ESV, and many others. There is also the full text of the Bible in Hebrew and Greek — (including the full Septuagint) — in various editions ranging from the Greek Textus Receptus tradition to the critical editions of Westcott and Hort and others.

I’ve only scratched the surface. But I can already say that I have been amazed. I’ve been teaching the book of Hebrews to an adult Bible class, so I brought up the text of Chapter 8 in both the ESV and one of the Greek bible texts. As I moved my cursor over a Greek word of interest a small text box instantly appeared informing me that the word I was looking at was an indicative, perfect passive verb, 3d person plural! I then clicked on the icon that calls up lexical and grammatical help and was instantly presented with a window giving me information from at least ten authorities as to the meaning and use of this term. Quite frankly, I’ve never seen anything quite like this array of resources—and I’ve only begun to get acquainted with this program.

It will take time to learn how to make use of the incredible riches of this program. And I’ve already come to the conclusion that there are things one can do with this program that are—and may remain—beyond me. Some of us will never reach the highest level of research that can be done with BibleWorks. But there is no reason to be afraid of it for this reason. Why? For two reasons. First: BibleWorks 6 provides several hours of video tutorials to make it easy even for beginners.. (I hasten to add that I did not use these at all. As a Mac user accustomed to intuitive software I just followed my

usual practice. and for me, at least, there was no need). Second: BibleWorks provides three different levels of complexity for people of differing abilities and needs. I myself started by using the ‘Beginner Mode.’ It was very easy. So, it wasn’t long before I went on to try the ‘Standard Mode.’ One can do much more with this level. Indeed, it could have been all that I would ever need. But then, as I got the feel of the program, I couldn’t resist going on to the ‘Power User Mode.’ Now I’m feeling sufficiently comfortable with the program that I doubt that I’ll ever go back, even though I already sense that I’m not of sufficient scholarly erudition to do some things that can be done with this program. The important thing for me is that I’m doing more than I ever could before. And at no point in the process of learning BibleWorks have I felt vexed or frustrated. Anyone who uses a computer should be able to appreciate that!

The bottom line, therefore, is this: Macintosh computer users no longer need to deny themselves the best computer Bible resource. BibleWorks 6 is the best, and while it will cost something extra to make use of it on the Macintosh (Virtual PC with Widows XP costs about \$230 new but I was able to buy mine on an eBay auction for half that) it will do more for the money than any of the Mac only programs that I have seen.



ON THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

by

R. D. Anderson

Note to Readers: The references to the Church Order in this article are to the Church Order of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated).

From Art. 5 of the Church Order it becomes clear that our churches acknowledge the laying on of hands at the ordination of office bearers as a biblical symbol. In this article it is said that this symbol should be used when ministers of the Word are ordained. It is a good biblical gesture that makes clear that an office bearer, in name of the Lord, sets this person apart to his appointed task and symbolically transfers the necessary authority. (As Reformed churches we also know of other biblical gestures - think, for example, of the raising of the hands when the blessing is announced).

The question is: why are we obliged to use laying on of hands when ministers are ordained and not when elders (and deacons) are ordained? As we can see below, Scripture makes no distinction in the laying on of hands between ministers and elders. Why do we find that distinction in the Church Order? We shall see that this is because of practical prob-

lems which can arise in larger congregations, which is why the churches are not compelled to ordain elders and deacons with the laying on of hands. But whenever the situation allows for it, it is indeed a good biblical gesture. Furthermore, by this gesture it becomes so much clearer for the congregation that...

a) Christ separates each office bearer to a special task. Christ requires that the congregation see this man from now on as His special representative.

b) The Church Council (represented by the minister, if it is he who performs the laying on of hands) is ordained by Christ as the means through which He rules the congregation. In the name of Christ, the Council (and not the congregation) installs the new office bearer.

c) This separation unto the office is just as seriously meant for elders and deacons as it is for the minister. All elders (including the minister) have the same responsibility before the Lord (Hebrews 13: 17); by virtue of their office they all speak in the name of Christ, have the same authority, and must in the

same way keep the example of Christ before the congregation.

What Does the Bible Say About the Laying on of Hands?

In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul speaks again about the elders in the congregation (he had already spoken of them in chapter 3). In verse 22, he warns Timothy with the following words, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure."

When Paul admonishes Timothy not to lay hands suddenly on any man, he means to say, "don't be hasty to install anyone into office." In the New Testament, separation of someone to a special task, i.e. the office, was almost always attended by the laying on of hands, Cf. Acts 6:6 (the 'seven'); 13:3 (Paul and Barnabas before their first missionary journey) and 1 Tim. 4:14 (Timothy himself). As we already said above, no distinction was made between the several offices.

The apostles really did nothing more than was customary in their day. The ordination of rabbis was also performed by the laying on of hands. But where

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did this practice begin? When we take account of the fact that this practice had deep roots in the Old Testament it becomes clear it was not something only pertaining to the culture of the first century. The Lord Himself charged His people to use the laying on of hands.

When we study what the Old Testament has to say about the laying on of hands, we are at first confronted with the fact that there are two distinct Hebrew expressions used which are often translated as “laying on of hands”. These two distinct expressions, however, actually denote two different gestures, namely a) the simple placement of the hands on someone, and b) the leaning or pressing of the hands on someone. A study of these two gestures shows that they are used in quite different contexts. Placing one’s hands on someone is a gesture whereby a particular person is deliberately indicated and is used when praying for that person or speaking a blessing over that person. Leaning one’s hands on someone not only indicates a particular person but also symbolizes the transfer of something from oneself to the person upon whom the hands are pressed. In biblical studies concerning the laying on of hands, this distinction has often been missed because in the New Testament the same Greek expression is used to translate both ges-

tures. This can naturally lead to some measure of confusion.

a) The simple placement of the hands on someone

A good example of this gesture is found in Genesis 48 where Jacob lays his hands on the sons of Joseph to bless them (see especially vv. 14 and 18). Although two different verbs are used to describe this action, both indicate the placement of the hand on the head of the person concerned. In this way Jacob indicates the persons over whom he will speak the blessing.

from the Old Testament we see that the leaning or pressing of hands always had something of a symbolic transfer.

Of course when a multitude of people were blessed then the one who is blessing can no longer place his hands on all the individual heads. Instead of this the hands are raised to indicate that the blessing is intended for all those at which the palms of the hands are directed (Cf. Lev. 9:22; Luke 24:50). This gesture is commonly used in Reformed worship services.

In the New Testament Jesus placed his hands upon the children who were brought to him and spoke a blessing over them (Mark 10:13-16). In Matt. 19:13-15 the same incident is told, but here Jesus is described as pray-

ing for the children while placing his hands on them. It would seem probable that Jesus spoke this blessing in the form of a prayer.¹

We should probably interpret some of the examples of the use of hands when healing in a similar way. The person engaged in healing uses his hand to indicate the person whom he wishes to heal. In many of the relevant texts there is no suggestion of prayer being offered or of a formal laying on of hands to symbolize some kind of transfer;

compare for example Mark 5:23 where Jesus is asked to lay his hands on Jairus’ daughter, and the actual healing in Mark 5:41 where he simply takes the girl by the hand and tells her to get up.

There are also many healings which take place without touching the person concerned. And yet it is clear that many other healings did take place with some kind of formal laying on of hands, see the discussion below in the following section.

b) The leaning or pressing of the hands on someone

If we summarize the data from the Old Testament we see that the leaning or pressing of hands always had something of a symbolic transfer.

i) When sacrificing, the hands had to be pressed upon the head

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of the sacrificial animal (Cf. Exodus 29:10, 15, 19; Leviticus 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; etc. and especially 16:21). This had to do with the symbolic transfer of the sins of the one bringing the sacrifice to the sacrificial animal. The animal was then punished by death for these sins. It is clear from these texts that the use of one hand was sufficient.

ii) When a curse had been heard, the hearers (= eye witnesses) had to press their hands upon the head of the one who cursed (Leviticus 24:14). Hereby the guilt of the curse that had been heard was symbolically transferred to the one who cursed. In later times, whenever there was a court case, all eyewitnesses had to lay their hands on the head of the accused while they testified.²

iii) The Israelites had to press their hands on the heads of the Levites when they were installed for the service of the Lord instead of the firstborn sons from other tribes (Numbers 8:10). Here we have the symbolic transfer of the task which was originally given to the firstborn sons.

iv) Moses pressed his hands upon Joshua when he was installed as his successor (Num. 27:18-23). The authority to lead the people was here symbolically transferred.³ This text is of particular importance. Note that the leaning on of hands occurred at

the moment that Joshua received his mandate. The symbolic transfer does not, however, mean that Moses lost his authority at that moment. It is this text which was later used as the basis for the practice of the installation of rabbis and therefore also functions as the basis for the New Testament practice of the laying (i.e. leaning) on of hands at the installation of office bearers.

It is remarkable that with the installation of the three great offices in the Old Testament (king, high priest and prophet) no use is made of the laying on of hands.

It is remarkable that with the installation of the three great offices in the Old Testament (king, high priest and prophet) no use is made of the laying on of hands. Instead of this they were anointed. Yet elders in the New Testament are not a continuation of the Old Testament kings, high priests or prophets. These three offices are fulfilled in Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 3:21-22 with 4:14-21). It would therefore be improper to anoint elders and deacons to office.

As noted above, a formal laying on of hands was used in some (but not all) of the examples of miraculous healing in the New Testament (i.e. healing granted by someone with a spe-

cial gift of healing, such as Jesus, his apostles, and those upon whom the apostles had granted such a special gift of the Spirit by the laying on of hands). We can see this in texts such as Luke 13:13; Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8 and in general Luke 4:40 and Mark 16:18. Given that the New Testament does not verbally distinguish between the placement and the leaning of hands it is difficult to say which category this formal use of the hands in healing falls under. But the context would suggest some kind of transfer of healing power (from God's Spirit?) and therefore this kind of laying on of hands should probably be interpreted in terms of

pressing the hands to symbolize transfer. It is clear from Acts 28:8 that this use of the hands is separate from prayer for the person to be healed. Paul first prayed for the father of Publius and thereafter laid his hands on him for the purpose of healing.

Of course, as already suggested in connection with the installation of Joshua (Num. 27:18-23), the laying on of hands for the installation of office bearers in the New Testament should be considered to come under this category of leaning the hands to symbolize a transfer.⁴

In 1 Tim. 5:22 Timothy was told not to lay hands hastily (i.e. install elders into office). Of course, Timothy was a special

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office bearer in the church of Christ. He was a prophet and therefore had special authority. Yet it is not so that the authority to use the laying on of hands was only given to these special office bearers. Timothy himself was installed into office by the laying on of hands of the local elders (1 Timothy 4:14). Here we see the Biblical principle that the Church Council (= joint elders, see Article 36 C.O.) has the responsibility to appoint new office bearers and install them into the office. It was for sake of wisdom that the churches have decided to ask for advice from the congregation via the call for names and also via voting (Article 20 C.O.) But after the advice of the congregation has been given through their vote, the consistory must make the decision and bear the responsibility of appointing men to office.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH ORDER SAY?

Laying On Of Hands Since The Revision Of The Church Order

General Synod, Kampen 1975, published a provisional version of the (revised) Church Order. Nothing was established as yet. In the Acts article 106, it was decided that all statements of this Synod concerning the church order were “provisional judgments” and “could not be seen as decisions.”

This Synod published a version of Art. 4 (our Art. 5) that — concerning the matter in question — is not substantially different from our version, i.e., that the laying on of hands is required for the ordination of ministers. This was nothing new, since this requirement is to be found in the Church Order of Dordt of 1618/19.⁵

The Bible makes no distinction in the laying on of hands between the office of minister and the office of elder.

Synod made no remark or judgment about the commentary on the content of this article in the report of the deputies. But this commentary can enlighten us as to the motivations of the deputies, even though it was not taken over as the grounds of Synod’s decisions.

The following Synod established the text of our C.O. article 5 without grounds or discussion (concerning the laying on of hands).

The content of the Church order on the laying on of hands

The church order requires the laying on of hands at the ordination of ministers (article 5).

The church order is silent about the laying on of hands when ordaining elders (art. 20).

The motivations of deputies who served the 1975 General Synod

The deputies grounded this distinction in the ordination of ministers and elders in their remarks concerning a proposal with respect to Art. 4 (our art. 5). There they say:

“The laying on of hands is a Scriptural symbol. The regulation concerning this remains restricted to art. 4. One can think of the separation of the office of the minister of the Word for all of his life. In other respects too the entry into this office receives a heavier accent than with elders and deacons. Moreover the laying on of hands at the annual ordination of elders (often of more than one office bearer) makes for liturgical difficulties and this can lead to loss of meaning.”

With this the deputies made known why it would not be wise to require the laying on of hands for elders and deacons. The regulation for the laying on of hands is therefore restricted to Art. 4, i.e., the office of minister. Regulations for the laying on of hands for the offices of elder and deacon are left to the local churches. And the deputies were right. In large congregations the laying on of hands at the ordination of a great number of office bearers could meet with practical problems. That is why we should not plead for a change to art. 20 of

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the Church Order. The deputies hereby made an attempt to explain the omission of the laying on of hands for the other offices. This explanation was only given as suggestion. The reason for this is not hard to discover. The Bible makes no distinction in the laying on of hands between the office of minister and the office of elder.

Conclusion

According to the Church Order every minister must be ordained with the laying on of hands, but the laying on of hands at the ordination of elders and deacons is left up to the local churches. The Church Order does not prohibit laying on of hands for the latter offices. A small church does not necessarily have the same practical problems as a larger congregation. For this reason the laying on of hands at the ordination of elders

and deacons in a small congregation could symbolically enrich the meaning of what is actually going on (see above). This Scriptural symbol also underlines the fact that the offices of minister and elder have an equal worth.

Footnotes

1. Normally, in Bible times, the hands of a person engaged in prayer would be lifted with the palms facing toward God (directed either at the temple in Jerusalem or towards heaven) to whom the prayer is made, cf. 1 Kgs. 8:54; Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Lam. 2:19; 3:41 and 1 Tim. 2:8.
2. The first evidence of this practice (that I know of) is Susanna (and thus before the time of the New Testament).
3. Moses' "glory" in this passage has the meaning of "authority".
4. The Reformers in the time of the Reformation did not generally see the distinction in the Bible between leaning and placing the hands, nor did they note the significance of

Joshua's installation in this respect. This led Calvin and others to suggest that the laying of hands at the installation of office bearers was to take place during the blessing instead of during the charge to faithfully execute the office.

5. The only change is in the fact that this laying on of hands is no longer practiced by all the ministers present, but only by the acting minister. The laying on of hands in which all ministers participated was only introduced in 1905 and was, in my opinion, rightly abrogated with the revision.

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