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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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Contents: Vol. 2, No. 2

Editorial., by <i>G. I. Williamson</i>	25
A Training Course for Elders and Deaconsk, by <i>John R. Hilbelink</i>	27
Taking Heed to the Flock (4), by <i>P. Y. de Jong</i>	38
The Future of Calvinism, by <i>Dr. James Gidley</i>	42

EDITORIAL

It was our Lord himself who gave us the master plan for faithful church discipline in Matthew 18:15-18. And one of the central things taught in this passage is the principle of due process through progressive steps. The first step of discipline—in cases of private offences—is on a one to one basis. If this fails to effect a resolution it is to be followed by further action with two or three witnesses. Then, if even this fails, the matter is to be dealt with by the church through its divinely instituted authorities, the elders. I have no doubt that this is generally accepted

among us. It does seem to me, however, that there is a common tendency (perhaps due to cultural influences) that seriously undermines this process. It is to this that I want to direct attention in this editorial.

The tendency to which I refer is to try to go back to square one in dealing with sin. I will try to make this clear by way of illustration drawn from pastoral experience.

Family A has shown an increasing dissatisfaction with the teaching of Paul the Apostle. Because he has said things that sharply contradict the feminist agenda, the

EDITORIAL

charge is even made the Paul was a “woman hater.” The elder responsible for particular oversight of this family has gently and lovingly reproved the wife for saying these things and urged repentance. But this did not effect any improvement. Since the annual home visit was almost due the elder, in the company of a fellow-elder, again raised this matter in a firm but loving way. But this time there was considerable resistance with even the husband showing irritation with the elders for upsetting his wife. And that is not all. The husband made it clear that, in his view, the real culprit was the elder—not so much because of *what* he said but for the *way* he said it. (This is a very common way of retaliation when people do not want to submit to loving discipline). He went on to make it clear that they (both husband and wife) now have a problem—not with the church, or even with the session in general, but only—with *that elder*.

It is right at this point that there will sometimes arise a serious temptation. No one likes trouble. Elders do not like trouble and they will, if possible, seek to find a way to avoid it. It is therefore not surprising that an elder may suddenly make a proposal such as this: ‘*Why don’t we send a different elder to visit this family? Maybe he will be able to speak to these people in such a way as to defuse this problem entirely.*’ Words such as these can sound very pious and very appealing. But it is my conviction that they really tend to undermine faithful church discipline that the Lord will bless. Let me briefly state my reasons.

(1) If the session decides to go back to square one by sending a different elder to visit these people it has already departed from the step-by-step process that our Lord commands. He did not say ‘go alone, and if you are not heard, go with one or two more. And then, if you are still not heard, turn it over to someone else.’

(2) If an elder has been faithful in reproving sin it is of the utmost importance, in my view, that he be upheld firmly by the session. To follow a suggestion like the one envisioned above is to undermine that elder’s authority rather than to support it.

(3) It is a universal human tendency to try to shift the blame from self to someone else. In the scenario envisioned here there is serious sin to be dealt with—the sin of dishonoring the inspired and inerrant authority of the writings of the Apostle Paul. From this real sin the attempt is made to shift the blame to the elder because of ‘the way’ he has spoken to these people. Of course there is always the possibility that an elder will sin in the way he does a right thing. But even if this is true it is imperative that this be dealt with in a proper way. This would mean that the elder should be there, with the people who accuse him of sinning in the way he spoke, so that the matter can be resolved. It is my experience that this kind

of accusation (about ‘the way’ elder so and so spoke) is often largely a smokescreen. But even if it is not, it is essential that the truth be established, and that—if it is really true—the elder then have the opportunity to show by way of personal example how sin is to be confessed, and forgiveness asked. When this is done, if it is needed, the elder’s position will be strengthened as he continues to deal with the serious sin that these people need to confess.

It is our judgment that much of the weakness in the church today arises from our individualistic American culture. In our culture the individual is king. (Having lived for some years in another nation I became much more aware of this). This is so deeply ingrained that it has invaded and weakened even the orthodox churches. Therefore, when the head of the house, or his wife, in family A says ‘*you can send any other elder from session that you want to send to visit us, but don’t send him*’ the issue is joined. Who is going to rule the church? Will it be the elders that God has called and clothed with a measure of *his* authority? Or will it really be the individual who rules as he tells the session in no uncertain terms what is acceptable to him?

Facing—and dealing faithfully with—a situation such as the one described here is difficult. It may also turn out to be painful. An elder involved in such a case will often feel overwhelmed by it. He will be saying, to himself, ‘*and who is sufficient for these things.*’ Well, the one and only answer is that our sufficiency is in Christ. That alone will sustain us in one of the most difficult tasks in the world.

And *that* is the bottom line. Another feature of modern American culture is the siren call of the instant and easy solution. We want it to be pleasant, and we want it now! But in maintaining a faithful church there is no such thing as quick and easy. If you—as an elder—have never gone to visit someone under your care with trembling knees—if you’ve never cried out to God with anguished tears—you do not yet know what it means to really be an elder. For, as the inspired psalmist truly said: “*Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seeds for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*” (Psalm 126:5,6)

With this issue of *Ordained Servant* we present the second and final section of Rev. John R. Hilbelink’s fine training course for elders and deacons. One correspondent who wrote concerning the first section of this course called it a “home-run hit.” We hope this final section will score just as well.

A TRAINING COURSE FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS

In Two Sections*

by

Pastor John R. Hilbelink

**THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT
OF
THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

I. CHRIST, THE KING AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH

1. On what do the offices of the church rest?
2. Describe the headship of Christ over his church.
3. What is the relationship of the Scripture to church government?
4. What is the relationship of the Holy Spirit to church government?

II. THE CHURCH

1. What did Jesus Christ, being exalted, erect in this world?
2. What is the "universal church visible"?
3. What are the members of this church universal to do?
4. What is the work of the church?

III. THE NATURE AND EXERCISE OF CHURCH POWER

1. How are all believers related to the exercise of church power?
2. Who exercises ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and what do they do?
3. Describe the nature and limit of church power. (III,3,4).
4. How are the decisions of church officers to be received? (III,5)

IV THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

1. How does the unity of the church in Christ reflect in her life?
2. What is the right and duty of those who rule in the church?
3. How is the church's unity shown in her relationship to the world?
4. How is the visible unity affected by the division of the church?

V. OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

1. Describe the purpose of the offices of apostle and prophet in the church of the new covenant.
2. What is the purpose of the gifts of teaching, ruling, and serving?
3. What are the ordinary and perpetual offices in the church?

VI. MINISTERS OR TEACHING ELDERS

1. What is the ministry of the Word?

* In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we publish the second and concluding part of this course.

2. What must every minister of the Word be and do?
3. How should one be able to describe his life and abilities?
4. Where should a minister of the Word be a member?

VII. EVANGELISTS

1. Describe the office of evangelist.
2. What is the work of the evangelist?

VIII. PASTORS

1. Describe the office and work of the pastor

IX. TEACHERS

1. Describe the office of the teacher.
2. What is the work of the teacher?

X. RULING ELDERS

1. Describe the office of the ruling elder.
2. What kind of character should a ruling elder possess?
3. What is the work of the ruling elder?

XI. DEACONS

1. What are the deacons called to do?
2. What kind of character should a deacon possess?
3. How are the deacons to be organized?
4. For what is the board of deacons responsible? (XI,4,5).
5. How is the board of deacons related to the session? (XI,5,6,7).

XII. GOVERNING ASSEMBLIES

1. What rights and powers do all governing assemblies possess?
2. What are the governing assemblies and how are they related?
3. What authority do the governing assemblies possess?
4. What is not permitted with regard to voting in assemblies?

XIII. THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS SESSION

1. Of what does the membership of the local church consist?
2. Who are communicant members, and who are non-communicant members?
3. Who are the officers of the local congregations, and how is their number determined?
4. Who are the members of the session, and how do they choose officers?
5. What are the requirements for calling and holding meetings?
6. What is to be done when a pastor is unable to be present?
7. What is the session charged with maintaining?
8. What records must the session keep, and who must review them?
9. What rules apply to the placing and removing names from the rolls of the church?
10. What may be done when a session ceases to exist or becomes too small?

XIV. THE REGIONAL CHURCH AND ITS PRESBYTERY

1. Of what does a regional church consist?

2. What is a presbytery, and of what does it consist?
3. Of whom are the meetings of presbytery to be composed?
4. What rules pertain to the moderator of presbytery?
5. What does the presbytery have the power to do?
6. What records must the presbytery keep, and who must review them?
7. What is required for calling and holding meetings? (XIV,7,8).
8. What are “corresponding members”, and what may they do?

XV. THE WHOLE CHURCH AND ITS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. Of what does the whole church consist?
2. What is the general assembly, and of what does it consist?
3. How often does the assembly meet, and what is a quorum?
4. What rules apply to the moderator? (XV,3,4)
5. What rules apply to the calling of an assembly in an emergency?
6. What is the work of the assembly? (XV,6,7)
7. How are the pronouncements of the assembly to be viewed? (XV,8)

XVI. CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

1. What rules apply to calling congregational meetings and to voting?
2. What rules apply to congregational meetings in mission works?
3. How must the congregation be notified about a coming meeting, and what business may be transacted?
4. What rules apply to the moderator and the clerk?
5. What rules apply to keeping minutes of the meeting?
6. When must business be transacted as a corporation?
7. What steps must a congregation take if they desire to withdraw from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

XVII. CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT PASTORS

1. Who may lead worship in a congregation without a pastor? (XVII,1,3)
2. How may presbytery supervise a congregation without a pastor?

XVIII. MODERATORS

1. Who may serve as a moderator?
2. What authority does a moderator have?
3. What voting privileges does a moderator have?

XIX. CLERKS

1. Who may serve as a clerk, and what are his duties?

XX. ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

1. Who is responsible for ordaining men to serve in the church? (XX,1,5)
2. What is ordination?
3. Under what circumstances and for what service are officers to be ordained? (XX,3,4)
4. What is installation? (XX,6)
5. Who must perform the service of installation? (XX,7)
6. What may be done for officers who are elderly, disabled, or retired? (XX,8)

XXI. LICENSING CANDIDATES TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

1. What is the purpose of licensure?

2. What steps must be taken to come under the care of the presbytery?
 3. What academic requirements are needed for licensure?
 4. What examinations are given for licensure?
 5. What other assignments may be given for licensure?
 6. How may an exception be taken to the academic requirements?
 7. Briefly describe the questions asked at the time of licensure.
 8. Briefly describe what is declared at the time of licensure and what is recorded in the minutes.
9. What is done when a candidate moves to another presbytery during the carrying out of his examination assignments?
10. What must be done when a licentiate has moved to another presbytery?
 11. Under what circumstances may a license be recalled?

XXII. CALLING A MINISTER

1. Who may be called to ministerial service, and who may issue a call?
2. What place does the presbytery have in the calling process?
3. What place does a special committee of the congregation have in the calling process? (XXII,3,4)
4. What place does the session have in the calling process? (XXII,3,4)
5. What do the moderator and the special committee do at the meeting of the congregation?
6. Describe the voting process for a congregation calling a minister.
7. In what ways may the call be subscribed?
8. What must the moderator do when a call is subscribed?
9. Describe the form of the call.
10. What must presbytery do when a call is from a congregation?
11. What must presbytery do when a call is from a presbytery, the general assembly, or from one of their agencies?
12. What procedures must be taken for . . .
 - a. a call to a pastor of another congregation?
 - b. a call to a minister serving a presbytery, GA, or an agency?
 - c. a call to a minister without charge or not in the church?
 - d. a call to a licentiate?
 - e. a call which has been declined?
 - f. leaving one's charge?
13. What procedures must be taken for a call to a minister outside the OPC?
14. Within what time period should a person accept or decline a call?
15. What is implied in the acceptance of a call?
16. What is meant by "find the call in order" and "approve its terms"?

XXIII. □ ORDAINING AND INSTALLING MINISTERS

1. What does presbytery's receipt of a call and acceptance imply?
2. What is necessary for a licentiate to be ordained?
3. What are the academic requirements for ordination, and how may exception be allowed?
4. What must presbytery do when a licentiate accepts a call?
5. When may a licentiate be ordained?
6. Of what do the trials for ordination consist?
7. What must presbytery do to arrange for an ordination?

IN QUESTIONS 8-12 DESCRIBE THE FOLLOWING:

8. ...ordination service and the candidate's vows.
9. ...vows of the congregation.
10. ...ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands.
11. ...installation of an OPC minister as pastor of a congregation.
12. ...installation of a non-OPC minister as pastor of a congregation.
13. When may a licentiate be ordained to the office of evangelist?

IN QUESTIONS 14-17 DESCRIBE THE FOLLOWING:

14. ...ordination service of a licentiate to the office of evangelist.
15. ...ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands.
16. ...installation of a minister of this church as an evangelist.
17. ...installation of a minister outside the OPC as an evangelist.
18. What is to be done when a minister outside the OPC, though not having a call to service in the OPC, desires to serve in the OPC?
19. What must be done when a minister is to be installed in a position that is a change of function from his previous service?
20. What must be done when a minister has been ordained or installed?

XXIV. DISSOLVING MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. What must be done when a minister desires to resign a ministerial charge so he may accept another call?
2. What must be done if a congregation desires to be relieved of its pastor?
3. What must be done if a presbytery, the general assembly, or one of their agencies decides to dissolve its relationship with a minister serving under their call?
4. What must be done when a minister desires to resign to take up a different kind of labor?
5. What must be done when a minister desires to resign without other ministerial work in view?

XXV. ELECTING, ORDAINING, AND INSTALLING RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS

1. Who may be elected to offices of ruling elder and deacon?
2. What provisions must be made for either limited terms of office or lifetime service?
3. For what must a congregation look in their officers?
4. How are candidates to be proposed for the congregation's consideration?
5. What must be done upon a candidate's election to office?
6. Describe the service of ordination and installation and the vows.
7. Describe the service of installation to a limited term of service.

XXVI. DIVESTING FROM OFFICE

1. For what may an officer be deposed?
2. May an officer be divested of his office for other reasons?
3. What must a presbytery do in considering a divestiture?
4. What procedures are to be followed when a ruling elder or deacon may be divested?
5. How must a divested man be viewed if he is called again to office?
6. To whom should divestiture not apply? (XXVI,6,7)

XXVII. MISSIONS

1. Who is responsible for the work of missions?
2. How may the general assembly's initiation of a work relate to the presbytery in which the work is begun?
3. Under whose jurisdiction is a missionary?

XXVIII. MINISTERS LABORING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

1. What kind of labor is in view in this chapter?
2. What seven general principles pertain to such labor?
3. To whom shall these principles also apply?
4. How often must such ministers report to presbytery, and what must be included in their report?

XXIX. ORGANIZING AND RECEIVING CONGREGATIONS

A. ORGANIZING CONGREGATIONS

1. Who may be recognized as a mission work, and where must its members be enrolled?
2. What roll does the presbytery have in organizing a congregation?
3. What four steps must be taken in organizing a mission work of an existing congregation as a new and separate congregation?
4. What five steps must be taken in organizing a mission work of a presbytery as a new and separate congregation?
5. What four steps must be taken in organizing a group of non-OPC believers, not part of an existing congregation as a new and separate congregation?

B. RECEIVING CONGREGATIONS

1. What roll does the Presbytery have in receiving a congregation not belonging to the OPC?
2. What five procedures must be followed in receiving an existing local church not belonging to the OPC as a new and separate congregation?

XXX. ORGANIZATIONS OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

1. What may every Christian do as they exercise the general office of believer?
2. What should church members do when a church fails to perform its divinely given task?
3. What must an organization do when it purports to represent the OPC?

XXXI. INCORPORATION AND CORPORATIONS

1. What place do corporations have in the government of the OPC?
2. What rules pertain to voting at corporation meetings?
3. What rules pertain to the board of trustees?
4. What rules pertain to meetings of corporations?
5. What property rights do particular churches have?

XXXII. THE CONSTITUTION AND ITS AMENDMENT

1. Of what does the Constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church consist, and to what is it subordinate?
2. How may the Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship be amended?
3. How may the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the forms of subscription be amended?
4. What procedures must be followed for organic union of the OPC with another denomination?
5. Describe the "gist" of chapter XXXII, section 5.

THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF DISCIPLINE

1. What is ecclesiastical discipline?
2. What is administrative discipline?
3. What is judicial discipline?
4. Who is subject to ecclesiastical discipline?

II. JURISDICTION

A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Who has original jurisdiction over individuals? Over judicatories?
2. What rules pertain to certificates of dismissal?
3. What rules pertain to those charged with an offense who ask to be dismissed to another body?

B. THE SESSION'S JURISDICTION

1. Over whom does a session have jurisdiction?
2. What rules pertain to receiving members?
 - a. By letter of transfer from another OPC?
 - b. By letter of transfer from another church of like faith?
 - c. By reaffirmation of faith?
 - d. By confession of faith?
 - e. Non-communicant unbaptized children?
 - f. Non-communicant baptized members?
3. What rules pertain to removing members?
 - a. By letter of transfer to a congregation approved by session?
 - b. To a church of which the session cannot approve?
 - c. Upon the ordination of a teaching elder?
 - d. By erasure?
 - 1). Dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve?
 - 2). If member does not desire to remain in the OPC?
 - 3). If member unites or persists attending another church?
 - 4). If a member cannot be found?
 - 5). If a member is persistently absent from stated services?
 - 6). If non-communicant neglects to profess faith in Christ?
 - e. When parents names are removed?
 - f. Upon death?
 - g. By excommunication?

C. THE PRESBYTERY'S JURISDICTION

1. Over whom does the presbytery have original jurisdiction?
2. What is presbytery's original jurisdiction over teaching elders?

D. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

1. What must be done if a session ceases to exist or become too small?
2. What must be done if a church ceases to exist?
3. What must be done if a presbytery ceases to exist?
4. What must be done with incompleated cases of discipline?

III. STEPS IN THE INSTITUTION OF JUDICIAL PROCESS

1. Who may bring a charge?
2. Until what time may a charge be admitted?
3. What 6 rules pertain to charges? What 3 rules...specifications?
4. What is a public offense? What is a private offense?
5. How does Matthew 18:15-17 pertain to the receiving of charges?
6. What warning is given to a person presenting a charge?
7. What rules pertain to THE PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION of a charge brought by an individual or individuals?
8. What rules pertain to THE PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION of a charge brought by a judicatory?

IV. THE TRIAL OF JUDICIAL CASES

A. RULES FOR THOSE INVOLVED

1. What rules pertain to the judicatory?

2. What rules pertain to the clerk?
3. What rules pertain to the accused?
4. What rules pertain to witnesses?

B. RULES FOR EVIDENCE

1. How must the judicatory view factual and circumstantial evidence?
2. In what areas may objections be raised by the accused?
3. What is necessary to establish the truth of a specification?
4. When may a witness be barred from hearing the testimony of another witness?
5. What rules pertain to a trial judicatory's examination of witnesses?
6. When may records of another judicatory be used as evidence?
7. What rules pertain to testimony or evidence taken by a commission?
8. What rules pertain when new evidence is discovered during a trial?
9. What rules pertain when new evidence is produced after the accused has been found guilty?

C. RULES OF TRIAL PROCEEDINGS

1. What rules pertain to THE FIRST MEETING OF THE TRIAL?
 - a. Concerning the presenting of charges and specifications?
 - b. Concerning the time, date, and place for the second meeting?
 - c. Concerning granting citations to summon witnesses?
2. What rules pertain to THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TRIAL?
 - a. Concerning objections which may be raised by the accused?
 - b. Concerning voting privileges and quorums of the judicatory?
 - c. Concerning the accused moving for dismissal of the charge?
3. What rules pertain to THE CONCLUSION OF THE TRIAL?
 - a. Concerning the final argument of the accused, voting on each charge and specification, and proceeding to determine censure?
 - b. Concerning announcing decision on charges and specifications, statement of the proposed censure, and pronouncing of censure in relationship to a possible appeal?
4. What rules pertain to TRIAL IN ABSENTIA?

V. CASES WITHOUT FULL PROCESS

1. How must a judicatory proceed if a person comes as his own accuser?
2. What rules pertain to erasing the following without full process?
 - a. A member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice?
 - b. A member declares he does not desire to remain in the OPC?
 - c. A member unites with or persists in attending another church?
 - d. A member cannot be found?
 - e. A member persistently absents himself from stated services?
 - f. A non-communicant neglects to profess faith in Christ?
 - g. A minister desires to renounce the jurisdiction of the OPC?
 - h. A minister cannot be found?

VI. CENSURE AND RESTORATION

A. CENSURE

1. What are the 5 degrees of censure and how are they to be pronounced?
2. What must be done if a person fails to appear for censure?

B. DEGREES OF CENSURE

1. What is admonition?
2. What is rebuke?
3. What is suspension? How is this censure carried out?
4. What is deposition? How is this censure carried out?
5. What is excommunication?

C. PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Which censures must be announced to the church?
2. What must be done if someone suspended indefinitely does not repent?

D. RESTORATION

1. When may a deposed officer be restored?
2. Under what condition may a deposed officer resume his former office?
3. What must always accompany restoration?

VII. APPEALS

1. What is an appeal, and who may make an appeal?
2. What may not be appealed?
3. What rules pertain to filing an intention to appeal?
4. What steps and timetable must be observed to bring an appeal to a hearing?
5. What is required of the clerk of the judicatory from whose judgment the appeal is taken?
6. What possible decisions may the appellate judicatory make?
7. Who may vote on an appeal brought to an appellate judicatory?

VIII. DISSENTS AND PROTESTS

1. Who may request that his vote be recorded in the minutes?
2. What rules pertain to the submission and processing of a written protest?
3. When should a judicatory answer a protest?

IX. COMPLAINTS

1. What is a complaint, and who may bring a complaint?
2. To whom must a complaint be presented and within what time frame?
3. What rules pertain to a complainant appealing to the next higher judicatory?
4. What rules pertain to the clerks of the judicatories involved in the complaint and the appeal?
5. What rules pertain to a session or complainant appealing a presbytery's decision to the general assembly?
6. Who shall determine what amends are to be made?

THE DIRECTORY FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD

I. THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE LORD'S DAY

1. How may we prepare for the Lord's Day?
2. Why do we keep the first day of the week holy as the Lord's Day?
3. How is the Lord's Day to be kept holy?
4. How do we enable others to keep the day holy?
5. How can each family prepare for the Lord's Day?
6. What is "the sacred duty and high privilege of God's people"?

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

1. From what source must we derive our principles of public worship?
2. Describe God's relationship to public worship.
3. What are the end and the aim of public worship?
4. How is public worship said to be "divine"?
5. How is public worship "Christian"?
6. How must public worship be performed "in spirit and in truth"?
7. What liberty do we have in public worship?
8. How does public worship differ from private worship?
9. How must we come into God's presence in public worship?

III. THE USUAL PARTS OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

1. What are the two kinds of parts of the public worship of God?
2. How is the reading of the Scriptures to be a part of public worship?
3. How is the sermon to be a part of public worship?
4. What is proper at the beginning and conclusion of public worship?
5. How is prayer to be a part of public worship?
6. How is singing to be a part of public worship?
7. How are the offerings to be a part of public worship?
8. What place may ruling elders take in public worship?

IV. THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. How can we prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacraments?
2. With what urgency and/or frequency should the sacraments be kept?
3. How are the sacraments to be administered?
4. Who may administer the sacraments?
5. How strictly must the forms for the sacraments be followed?

B. OF HOLY BAPTISM

1. What instruction is given at the service on the nature of baptism?
2. What instruction is given as to the ground of infant baptism?
3. What instruction is given as the basis of the baptism of an adult?
4. What questions are asked prior to the baptism of an infant?
5. What questions are asked of an adult prior to his or her baptism?
6. How is the sacrament of baptism performed?

C. OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. What instruction is given at the service of the Lord's Supper?
2. What warning is given before the sacrament is served?
3. How is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper served?

V. PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST

1. What may be done for those who contemplate making public profession of faith in Christ?
2. What should a session examination seek out?
3. Why must a one-week public notice be given prior to a public profession of faith?
4. How is a profession of faith related to taking the Lord's Supper?

TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation

by

Peter Y. DeJong, Ph. D.

Chapter V

THE NECESSITY OF FAMILY VISITATION

“To be a dutiful undershepherd is, in another view, to be a faithful sheep, following the Chief Shepherd whithersoever He goes. Pastors are not lords over God’s heritage, but mere servants of Christ, the great Head of the Church, bound to regard His will as their law, and His life as their model . . .

“It is well that our Lord made this plain by the words addressed to the representative man among the apostles, for Christians of active, energetic, and earnest natures are very apt to have very exaggerated ideas of their responsibilities, and to take on themselves the care of the whole world, and impose on themselves the duty of remedying every evil that is done under the sun.”

— A. B. BRUCE: THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE

Perhaps many of us can hardly imagine that a Reformed Christian would ever doubt the value of a practice like family visitation which enjoys such a venerable history and is inspired by such a worthy spiritual aim.

And yet we have such individuals among us, no doubt many more than we are willing to acknowledge.

They contend, and their contention is not devoid of some merit, that the aims of this spiritual work can better be attained in other ways. It is therefore not without reason that we briefly look into the matter of the necessity of family visitation.

Preaching and the Christian Life

In arguing that this practice has long ago outlived its usefulness, these individuals put forth the claim that the triple purpose of encouraging faith, pointing out the believer’s Christian obligations and promoting the proper relation between the individual and the church can be attained and should be attained through the preaching of the gospel.

None of us will dispute that the preaching and teaching of God’s Word is paramount in the development of spiritual life. It is the chief means of grace, to which is appended the administration of the sacraments. The New Testament emphasizes the relation of the believer’s life to the means of grace upon many occasions. Already of the church at the time of Pentecost we read that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”¹ By doing this, so we read further on in the same chapter, they received the benefits of eating their meat in gladness and singleness of heart and of enjoying favor with all the people. Likewise the writer to the Hebrews warns his readers against forsaking the public gatherings of God’s people which contributed greatly to the building up of their faith.

That the strengthening of spiritual life is most intimately bound up with a faithful use of the means of grace has always been believed and strongly urged by our

¹ Acts 2:42

Reformed fathers. In the *Canons of Dort* they propounded their view of the matter in this language:

“As the almighty operation of God whereby He brings forth and supports this our natural life does not exclude but rather require the use of means by which God, of His infinite mercy and goodness, has chosen to exert His influence, so also the afore mentioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. Wherefore as the apostles and teachers who succeeded them piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory and to the abasement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the influence of the Word, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline; so even now should it be far from those who give or receive instruction in the Church to presume to tempt God by separating what He of His good pleasure has most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more clearly this favor of God, working in us, usually manifests itself, and the more directly His work is advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due. Amen.”²

Those therefore who reject the means of grace, specifically the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, do despite to their own souls and despise the gracious gifts of God.

Supervision as the Outreach of Preaching

Such an emphasis on the official preaching of the Word and all that which is connected therewith, however, should in no way be understood to exclude official work of a more restricted and personal nature.

We have already pointed out that from the very beginning of the history of the Christian churches many leaders insisted that for the sake of the well-being of spiritual life something additional was necessary. That the work of the elders even in the apostolic age was not restricted to the public gatherings is plainly taught by James in the epistle which he wrote to the churches. “Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.”³

²Chapter III-IV, 17

That the members of the congregation might receive this personal supervision by the elders, the early leaders of the Reformed churches enjoined a system of family visitation at their first synodical (broader) gathering. Monsma and Van Dellen in their valuable *The Church Order Commentary* offer the following translation of the article which governed that work:

“They (the Elders) shall faithfully investigate whether they (the Church members) manifest themselves uprightly in walk and conduct, in the duties of godliness, in the faithful instruction of their households in the matter of family prayers, (morning and evening prayers) and such like matters; they shall admonish them to these duties with consideration, but also in all seriousness and according to conditions and circumstances; they shall admonish them to steadfastness, or strengthen them to patience, or spur them on to a serious minded fear of God; such as need comfort and admonition they shall comfort and admonish, and if need be they shall report a matter to their fellow Elders, who together with them are appointed to exercise discipline; and besides these matters they shall correct that which can be corrected according to the gravity of the sin committed; nor shall they neglect, each one in his own district, to encourage them to send their children to catechism.”⁴

Although the Synod of The Hague (1586) deemed this article too long for incorporation into the Church Order and greatly abridged it, the chief contents were retained together with specific mention of official family visitation. In harmony with this our present Order in Article 23 insists that one of the duties of the elders is “for the edification of the Churches to visit the families of the Congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian Religion.” The last could be done both at the time of family visitation, if such occasions arose, or whenever any opportunity presented itself to them.

It is almost superfluous to add that all this work was regarded as an extension of the proclamation of the gospel. The officers of the church were called to bring to the attention of all those under their jurisdiction the holy demands of their Covenant God and to enjoin them to take seriously the demands of the gospel of salvation.

Arguments for the Necessity of Family Visitation

³James 5:14,15

⁴Monsma and Van Dellen; *Church Order Commentary*, p. 110

Is this work, then, necessary for the spiritual well-being of the church of Christ? We are deeply convinced that it is and, chiefly, for the following reasons.

First of all, by means of this custom the elders in the churches are able to carry out the mandate of God's Word which insists upon the duty of watching for the souls of the believers and their children.

This part of their calling should weigh heavily upon all who are called to the sacred office. Christ has bought His church with His precious blood and guaranteed to her all the benefits of His atoning work. However, He has been pleased to leave her here for a while in a wicked and perverse world, in order that she might give a living witness to the power of divine grace. In this world there are countless enemies, appearing in many guises and forms, all of whom would, if possible, seek to lead her astray on the road of ruin. Although Christ is clothed with all authority and thus guards and defends His Church with His almighty power, He is pleased to make use of human agents as His representatives. They are to point out the enemies and present the antidote of the gospel. They must with perseverance and patience exhort all to a life of faith and obedience. They should, above all, constantly remind the people, who are bought with the price, of their heavenly inheritance and the rich grace of the Savior which alone is able to keep them standing in the evil day.

If this work is to be carried out effectively, the elders must know the spiritual conditions and needs of the flock over which they have been placed. How can this ever be done, unless there is some form of intimate contact between the officers and members of the congregation? One day each elder must give account of the stewardship entrusted to him, and in that certain knowledge none can fail to be deeply impressed with the seriousness and solemnity of his charge. Until it is proved that there exists some better form of supervision than that of family visitation, we do well not only to safeguard this institution for future generations by faithfully discharging it but also to improve it constantly by studying and discussing its nature and methods.

Moreover, if we understand the high spiritual purpose of Reformed preaching, we will appreciate the necessity of this practice at once.

We believe that the principles of the gospel never change. They are valid everywhere and under all circumstances. However, because spiritual conditions and needs vary greatly with individuals and times, the particular emphasis of the preaching will change occasionally.

All true gospel preaching consists of exposition and

application, that is, of the explanation of the meaning of God's Word and indicating the use to which it must be put in our lives. These are not two separate items in the sermon but closely related and interwoven as the objective and subjective aspects of the same gracious word of life. In order that the second element may rightly come to its own, it is essential that the elders who supervise the preaching of the minister also understand the condition of the congregation. Effective preaching must be specific and pointed. Glittering generalities cannot edify the people of God. The gospel must make a deep and permanent impression upon the lives of those who hear. Only then may we hope for the much-needed fruit.

But how shall the elders know whether or not the preaching is edifying and fruitful, unless they visit the members from time to time in their homes? Throughout the history of the churches it has been demonstrated that there is no better means to a rather adequate knowledge of the spiritual condition of God's people than that presented by family visitation.

Let those who are called to carry on this work be guided by the spirit of love and helpfulness, indeed, having an eye for the reflection of God's glory through the lives of the believers. Let the members of the church be ready and even eager to discuss the power of the gospel in the lives of themselves and the members of their families.

Then the spiritual level of the congregation may be discerned with a fair measure of accuracy, and the minister of the Word will be able to preach the gospel in such a way that with God's blessing it will meet the needs of saints and sinners alike.

But if any now reply that this work of supervision can be better discharged by calling upon the members individually, we would answer that such a method cannot do justice to a very important aspect of spiritual life.

All life is *organic*, that is, it exists in relationship to other, similar lives. Thus spiritual life, too, cannot be treated in isolation. It is not to be considered a hot-house plant, some exotic bloom that flourishes only in the secret recesses of the heart. It must come to expression in daily contact with family, friends and associates. Too often has this been forgotten, with the tragic result that the individual believer makes little progress in effective Christian living. Although we may not agree with many of the emphases in Horace Bushnell's presentation of the gospel, he certainly sounded the trumpet clearly in his day, when he wrote on this matter in *Christian Nurture* in these words, "It becomes a question of great moment, as connected with the doctrine established, whether it is the

design of the Christian scheme to take possession of the organic laws of the family, and wield them as instruments, in any sense, of a regenerative purpose? And here we are met by the broad principle, that Christianity endeavors to make every object, favor, and relation, an instrument of righteousness, according to its original design."⁵

Much easier is it to speak of spiritual matters with only one or two than in the presence of a whole family. But why should this be so? Are we to conclude that the profession of many of our Reformed people is so often contradicted by their daily conduct, that they are compelled to silence about such important matters, when in the presence of those with whom they live daily?

Many times Reformed family visitation has been caricatured. The picture too often drawn is that of a large family, all properly scrubbed and dressed, patiently waiting for the visit which has been previously announced to the whole congregation. The children have been instructed to say as little as possible, preferably limiting their answers to "yes" and "no." As footsteps are heard without, the tension mounts and almost reaches the breaking-point when the elders enter the room. Thereupon a few pleasantries are exchanged about work and weather, but all know that the dread questioning about spiritual matters will soon begin. First the father is interrogated at length, then the mother, and finally the children from the oldest to the youngest. What a sigh of relief, when prayer has been offered and the brethren depart! For another year life in the family, having successfully weathered another crisis in its routine, can resume its usual course. And if the dread ordeal has been survived without the betrayal of too much on the part of any member of the family, all are happy.

Without endeavoring to argue that family visitation never answers to the above picture, we dare affirm that this is by no means the general situation. If it were, we would do well to lament the fearful plight of a church which had sunk to such low spiritual depths.

If both elders and members would remember the real purpose of these official calls, family visitation would seldom if ever seem like an unpleasant ordeal. Since Christ through His officers supervises the lives of the members of His church, we may confidently expect from the elders the manifestation of the sympathetic spirit of our heavenly Highpriest who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." They come not to find fault but rather to comfort and encourage, in order that

the Lord's people may be strengthened in their faith and deepened in their love for the Savior and the saints. If believers are thus to be benefited, they should manifest the same sincerity and frankness which ought to characterize their prayers to God for help and strength.

Dare we, then, discuss the conditions and needs of spiritual life in the presence of other members of the family? Surely if there is a striving to manifest the spirit of Christ, this will present no difficulties. Here the words of Paul to the Corinthian church are much to the point. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunted not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."⁶

It is true that there will be matters demanding utmost privacy. These may never be discussed at family visitation but definitely require consideration at another time. However, if we bear in mind that basically all Christians have the same spiritual struggles, it is both proper and helpful to discuss them with each other. From the experiences of the parents the children may learn much. There will result a far better understanding of each other's failings and an earnest desire to help each other in love which will draw all the members of the family together. The responsibilities of children towards parents and of parents towards children will be seen and appreciated more clearly. And in this way the Christian family will become one of the most influential factors in the spiritual development of believers, old and young alike.

What hampers this work most is false modesty on the part of all. It is often engendered by a wrong conception that family visitation attains its goal, when all the members can successfully persuade the elders that they are very good Christians. Even as Christ came not to save the righteous but to call sinners to repentance, so the elders who come in the name of Christ can be of no help to those who feel no need. Only those who know the power of indwelling sin, are sincerely repentant of their sins, turn daily to Christ, and earnestly resolve to live for Him will experience a rich blessing through the exhortation, admonition and encouragement of the servants of Christ. Then this practice which has stood the test of history will prove spiritually fruitful for years to come.

⁵Bushnell: *Christian Nurture*, p. 110, 111.

⁶1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

THE FUTURE OF CALVINISM

by

Dr. James S. Gidley

Note: This lecture was originally given on July 10, 1992 at a celebration of Calvin's birthday at Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, PA. I have edited the lecture somewhat and have added a few footnotes. Nevertheless, I have tried to preserve the spirit of an oral address, and I hope that the reader will forgive me if he finds a rhetorical device where a more careful argument might be expected in a written paper.

As we consider the future of Calvinism, we might pause to ask what right we have to meddle with this topic at all. Does not the future belong to God? Shall not His counsels come to pass, whatever we might think or do? Can we speak of the future without special revelation from the Lord of the future?

But having paused to ask these questions, we must also ask whether we are to approach the future passively, as if it were about to be let down from heaven before our eyes and we were only spectators of it. Does not the future depend on our choices and actions also?

The answer to all these questions is yes. This is the paradox of Calvinism and of the Bible: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:12,13, NIV). Thus we are warranted to proceed: looking to the future is part of working out our salvation.

Now, how shall we look to the future? Robert Pirsig has formulated the ancient Greek view as follows: "They saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes."¹ This view has much to commend it. Others have spoken of the future of Calvinism before, and the only reasonable way to attempt it is to describe the tendencies of the past and present and to ponder where they may be heading.²

Yet we must not approach the exercise as spectators but rather as participants. A Biblical perspective on the future must not be an intellectual diversion, but a call to action—and a call to repentance if need be. Thus a proper discourse on the future of Calvinism will have to include brotherly advice and exhortation.

Now what is this Calvinism whose future we are to ponder? Many in our tradition have preferred to speak of "the Reformed faith", lest we should attribute to any man—

even so great a man as John Calvin—the credit for what we regard to be the way of God revealed in the Scriptures, and lest it should be thought that we are disciples of a mere mortal. As Paul said of his apostleship, and by implication of his gospel: "not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1: 1, NIV). In the main I agree with this sentiment in our tradition, but I do not shrink from the historical connection with Calvin, and it is fitting as we meet in honor of Calvin's birth that we should keep this connection before us and remember a man who was blessed of God and in whose blessing we share. So I shall speak of Calvinism.

But whether we call it the Reformed faith or Calvinism, does it have a future? Perhaps the vast majority of people today, if they even knew what Calvinism is, would regard it as a thing of the past—a dead thing of the past.³ And we must not be too elated by the modern scholarly interest in Calvin and Calvinism. The dispassionate approach of the scholarly historian, even when it issues in measured scholarly appreciation and praise, too often is a sign that the scholar regards the object of his study as a lifeless carcass on his dissecting table. When men speak passionately, prejudicially, even bigotedly about Calvinism, then you may know that they see it living still.

Is there then a future for Calvinism? You know its liabilities all too well. Its view of human depravity seems too morbid and pessimistic for our age. Its conundrums surrounding Divine sovereignty and human responsibility seem futile to impatient modern minds. Its moral code seems hopelessly repressive to our modern licentiousness.

But we might ask in return: Is there a future for a world without Calvinism? Where is the confidence of this world? For what do men hope when they lay aside their Madison Avenue promotions and consider the naked future? If Calvinism is dead, then perhaps we would do better to pray for its resurrection than to inter the corpse.

When we turn to the church, the future of Calvinism does not seem so bleak. There seems to be a resurgence of interest in it. Reformed seminaries seem to sprout up like mushrooms, and Reformed world-and-life views seem to be in vogue. One evidence of resurgent interest is a book of essays entitled *Reformed Theology in America*⁴. The concluding piece in the volume is “The Future of Reformed Theology”, by James Montgomery Boice. Boice holds out the hope of bright days ahead—if four important flaws are corrected and nine positive elements are stressed. While I shall not review Boice’s points with you, his essay is another example of speaking of the future of Calvinism and of offering advice for action.

In the introductory essay⁵ in the same volume, George Marsden classifies the Reformed into three groups: doctrinalists, culturalists, and pietists. The doctrinalists, of whom he uses the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as an example, see being Reformed as a matter of doctrinal faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Confession(s). The culturalists, with whom he associates the “progressive wing of the conservative Christian Reformed Church”⁶, see being Reformed as a matter of applying Christian principles to all areas of life. The pietists, whom he exemplifies by evangelicals who incline towards Reformed theology, see being Reformed as “find[ing] in Reformed theology the most biblical and healthiest expression of evangelical piety.”⁷ Marsden hastens to point out that these categories are not mutually exclusive; for example, a culturalist may have a high appreciation for sound doctrine and fervent piety. But they do represent important tendencies or emphases.

Marsden’s classification provides a helpful starting point for coming to grips with Calvinism as a living force today. Doctrinalists stress right belief. Culturalists and pietists stress right action. Culturalists stress collective action, and pietists, individual action. Belief and behavior constitute a way of life, and so we here have different emphases within a way of life.

I hope that there will be no disagreement that Calvinism ought to embrace all three emphases. We ought to have correct belief, and we ought to live correctly, both individually and collectively. But it does not follow that we may simply blend these three emphases together to create an appropriate composite Calvinism, like spiritual bakers trying to produce the perfect cake. There is a more profound assessment of Calvinism which is capable of unifying all three emphases and of judging and correcting the deficiencies and aberrations of their devotees.

Fundamentally, Calvinism is that way of life, or that

religion, that seek’s God’s glory in all things, and in so doing seeks the enjoyment of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as its preeminent joy⁸. The true Calvinist seeks to live before God and for the glory of God in thought, word, and deed. Remember Calvin’s own motto: “My heart I give to Thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.” Out of the heart are the issues of life—in giving God our hearts, we have given him our all⁹.

Let us then consider how the doctrinalist, the culturalist, and the pietist measure up to this exacting standard. My comments will necessarily be brief, and my criticisms may seem harsh. But if we are to hold to a high standard, we must not flinch at stating hard things.

I shall begin with pietism. Among the pietists we see a laudable concern for evangelism and discipleship. We see strenuous efforts to turn men’s hearts to Christ and to live for Him. Thus far we see genuine effort to live out the fundamental principle of Calvinism.

Continuing to examine this wing of the Calvinistic mansion, I see those evangelicals who prefer Calvinism in one form or another as the best expression of evangelical theology and yet who do not unite with a conservative Calvinistic church¹⁰. Thus far I follow Marsden. I go one step further and infer that this group would tend to see Calvinism principally, if not exclusively, as a theology, rather than as a way of life. Evangelical piety is seen as primary, but when intellectual support is needed, Reformed theology is preferred to some other theology.

The evangelical pietist thus fails to be a Calvinist ecclesiastically, and thus fails to exercise or obscures the exercise of that true church discipline which historically has been a hallmark of the Reformed churches. The evangelical pietist can be content to be a member of a liberal church. Therefore while his theology, teaching, and preaching call for repentance from liberalism as a necessity for salvation, his ecclesiastical action—or inaction—says that no such repentance is necessary. To be content to sit down in ecclesiastical fellowship with those whom one regards to be enemies of the cross of Christ contradicts in deed what one preaches in word.

Thus the church loses its character as the community of those who are being saved. And however much the pietist may take refuge in the concept of the invisible church, his ecclesiastical compromise with liberalism contradicts his gospel.

Or the evangelical pietist becomes an independent, severing organic ties with any congregation except his own

local one.¹¹ Here there is simply a failure to live out the oneness of the body of Christ ecclesiastically, with the consequent disruption of sound discipline. And I marvel at anyone who might criticize denominationalism, only to take refuge in independency, in which each local congregation is a denomination unto itself.

Now let us turn to the culturalists. First notice that there is a pietist-culturalist connection. At least since Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, published in 1947, there have been voices for social concern from within evangelicalism or fundamentalism. Perhaps the most visible recent manifestation of this has been the emergence of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and the alliance of the religious right with the political right.

Just as Calvinism proves to be a theological treasure-trove for the pietist, it becomes a worldview warehouse for the pietist turned culturalist. If one is to make an impact on society, eventually one needs some intellectual weight. This, Calvinism can provide.¹²

But culturalism has much deeper roots in Calvinism and an honorable history. In the modern era, the work of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and others have provided a sweeping Calvinistic view of culture. Even more recently, the theologians or Christian Reconstructionists have developed comprehensive plans for the detailed application of God's law to civil society.

We must praise the culturalists for their all-embracing vision, their desire to bring all of life into obedience to Christ. They have endeavored to rouse the church out of its insularity and absorption in individual piety. Their watchword "All of life redeemed" is a great and fundamental Biblical insight.

In a short lecture, it is impossible to go into any detail in analyzing the various movements in the culturalist camp. In keeping with my purpose, I shall simply raise what I believe to be an important warning sign. For all varieties of culturalists there is the danger of making the preservation or transformation of society into the primary aim of the church and the Christian. This obscures the eschatological hope of the church or even supplants it.

The hope of eternal glory, being perceived as something remote and intangible, can slip from our attention to make way for more tangible results in this life. Insensibly our agenda for this world becomes our hope. Pragmatism is not far behind, and the longing for visible results infects everything. Spiritually this means the eclipse of the glory of God

as our aim and the loss of the enjoyment of God as our preeminent joy.¹³

Now let us turn to the doctrinalist camp. At the outset we must be on guard against the temptation to think that the doctrinalist camp must be the true heir of historic Calvinism. I say this not only because I have rather strongly criticized the pietists and culturalists, thus possibly leaving the impression that I would now sing the praises of the doctrinalists, but also because I think that we gathered here on this occasion would most likely identify ourselves with the doctrinalist camp. And if we are blind to any faults, it is most likely that we are blind to our own.

Having said this, I must also say that I am deeply indebted to the doctrinalists. Those whose concern has been to remain faithful to God's truth have both taught the church of the glories of her Redeemer and have set a godly example in many a dark day. "Defender of the faith", when deserved, is an honorable title in the church.

We have already seen that doctrine can be valued for its effect on piety or culture. But the doctrinalist sees doctrine as valuable in its own right. With this attitude comes the temptation to intellectualism and dead orthodoxy. I am reminded of the old joke about a departed saint coming to a crossroads at which there are two signs: "This way to heaven" and "This way to discussions about heaven". The doctrinalist may pause a good while at such a crossroads.

A related danger into which we may fall is that we may fail to act for God's glory when that is required, particularly in the ecclesiastical arena. A prime example of this is afforded us in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the Presbyterian Church in the USA in the 1920's. In 1924 a large group of Presbyterian ministers published the Auburn Affirmation—which really should have been called the Auburn Denial. The Auburn Affirmation essentially denied that it was necessary to believe in the infallibility of the Bible, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, and the continuing life and supernatural power of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Eventually nearly 1300 Presbyterian ministers signed this statement. Not one was ever brought to trial for violation of his ordination vows.¹⁵

Where were the doctrinalists? Not even J. Gresham Machen, who certainly had the resolution to act on other occasions, appears favorably in this dark episode. In the year before the Auburn Affirmation was composed, Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* had been published. Machen argued clearly and forcefully that Christianity and liberalism were not only different religions, but different types of

religions. Yet his clarion call was for the liberals to withdraw voluntarily from the churches whose confessions they no longer conscientiously upheld¹⁶. If Machen's analysis was correct, this amounted to calling wolves to a voluntary cessation of biting and devouring the sheep.

Even for Machen, there is a sense in which his failure to bring judicial charges against the Auburn Affirmationists contradicted his teaching and preaching.¹⁷ There is a time when sermons and declarations are not enough. Action is called for. If we are not alert, the time when action can be effective may pass us by unawares. Too late we realize that the moment is gone. Machen realized this in later years.¹⁸

Thus we come full circle back to pietism. The doctrinalist can be tempted to passivism in ecclesiastical or civil affairs, thus acting like a pietist.

Who then is the true Calvinist? Whose future is the future of Calvinism? To answer this, I venture to call your attention to a familiar document, the Shorter Catechism, and in particular to one question. No, not the fundamental first question nor the enlightening second question, but the third: "What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man."

There are two main parts to the answer, and the rest of the Catechism is structured into two corresponding parts. From what I have said so far, I think you will agree that the danger for the pietist and the culturalist is to place undue emphasis on the second part—our duty to God; while for the doctrinalist, the danger is to place undue emphasis on the first part—what we are to believe.

Now the corrective to these tendencies is not simply that the Catechism puts these two things together. If this were all there was to it, then we would have a sort of unstable equilibrium. Picture two children balanced at opposite ends of a seesaw. They cannot remain forever at the same level. Likewise with the attempt to "balance" doctrine and duty. Now and again doctrine will fall too low, now and again, duty.

Neither is it sufficient to say "Right doctrine leads to right living", though this is true as far as it goes. This watchword still leaves us in an unstable equilibrium. Is the intent to say "All we need to do is to pay attention to doctrine, and right living will follow automatically"? Or do we mean "Right living is preeminent, and right doctrine is a means to that end"?

No, we must turn again to the words of the Catechism.

I ask you, why does it say "what man is to believe concerning God"? Why not simply "the truth about God"? I believe that the writers of the Catechism have grasped a profound Biblical insight at this point. The Bible never encourages us to take an abstract or purely intellectual view of doctrine. The truth about God never comes to us merely as a set of ideas for contemplation. Rather it comes to us as that which demands assent. The truth about God ought to be believed.

Therefore the study of theology is always a moral and spiritual matter. It is not merely an error but a sin to embrace a false doctrine. True Calvinists have always seen this, as did Calvin himself. If you want to know the reason why Calvin dealt so rigorously with his theological opponents, this is it. A man's theology reveals not only his mind, but also his heart.

To put it in a nutshell, in matters of religion, doctrine and duty are one. Moral midgets do not make theological giants.

The same coalescence of doctrine and duty appears in the second part of Shorter Catechism answer 3. The duty God requires of man is taught by the Scriptures. In contrast to modern agnosticism about ethics, the Bible teaches that our duty to God is something that can be transmitted from one mind to another. Not only is doctrine duty, but duty is doctrine. And so it is not quite the whole story to say that questions 4 to 38 of the Catechism¹⁹ focus on doctrine, while questions 39 to 107²⁰ focus on duty. It is all doctrine, and it is all duty. Which brings us back again to the true character of the Calvinist as one who seeks to live before God and to the glory of God in every thought, word, and deed.

The contest with liberalism in the 1920's and 30's may have left us with the impression that the defense of the faith is primarily or even purely an intellectual matter. After all, the hallmark of liberalism was its belief in morality. But the battle was not purely intellectual then, and by no stretch of the imagination is it so now. Few people are captivated by subtle heresies and philosophies. Multitudes are enslaved by the idols Eros and Mammon. Many, if they knew themselves truly, would have to list their "religious preference" as "Mammonist"—worshiper of money; or "Eroticist"—worshiper of sensual pleasure. One need only turn to daytime television talk shows or late-night television "get rich" advertisements to see how respectable it has become to be a worshiper of Eros or Mammon.

If the church is to survive the onslaughts of these cruel and destructive idolatries, she must recover a high view of the law of God. It is not only the gospel that is under attack,

but also the law. In such a time, that middle portion of the Catechism that expounds the ten commandments shall be a strong tower to those who will take refuge therein.

A church that is scintillating in theological orthodoxy but lax in obedience is of little worth in the kingdom; as our Lord said, “Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19, NIV).

Let it not be thought that preaching and teaching our duty to God must obscure the gospel. Whoever considers the purity of God’s law in comparison to the corruption of his own heart and life will be driven all the more completely to trust in Jesus alone for salvation. Moreover, salvation is unto obedience (Ephesians 2:10), and though obedience cannot be perfect in this life, the true believer will be marked by that striving after “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrew 12:14, KJV). The preaching and defense of the gospel includes the preaching and defense of the law of God.

Finally, let us return to the future. The culture around us offers little hope for a resurgence of Calvinism, particularly that true Calvinism that I have attempted to describe. What appeal can we make to the world, and what shall preserve us from the pitfalls of pietism, culturalism, and doctrinalism?

Calvinism’s future would indeed be bleak if we have only to appeal to unregenerate human nature for approval. And if we have only our own resources to rest upon, we too shall all fall away. But thus it has always been. Calvinism not only preaches the sovereign grace of God as the source of all blessing, but it also depends for its very survival upon that same sovereign grace. “When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” (Psalm 104:28-30, NIV).

Calvinism has a future as long as the Spirit of God renews the hearts of men and women, of children and infants, and leads them to live to His glory and to find their joy in Him.

But we have been looking at the future as merely that which follows upon and grows out of present conditions. The Scripture invites us to turn our gaze from the swiftly

receding present to the eternal future. For as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Jesus “must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet ... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:25,28, NIV).

The great consummation of all things is that which the true Calvinist lives for and longs for—that God may be all in all. The future that really matters belongs to Calvinism.

¹ Pirsig, R., Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Morrow, NY, 1984 edition, p. 1.

²The astute reader will notice that I have already transformed the subject given in the title. You may now expect that I shall say little about the future and shall concentrate on the past and present.

³ I am here thinking primarily of conditions in the USA. Those familiar with conditions elsewhere must decide for themselves how well this statement describes those conditions.

⁴ David Wells, ed., Eerdmans, 1985.

⁵ “Reformed and American”, *ibid.*, p. 1-12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2. Marsden identifies himself with this wing of the CRC. I wonder if J. Gresham Machen would have described himself as a leader of the regressive wing of the liberal Presbyterian Church in the USA?

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁸ See Shorter Catechism, Q. 1. 9

⁹ I am indebted to the Rev. Lawrence Semel for the last expression.

¹⁰ I use the word “church” here for what is often called a “denomination”. Evangelical pietists may be members of local churches that are more or less Calvinistic, but by (Marsden’s) definition, do not belong to a conservative Calvinistic denomination.

¹¹ Some Calvinistic pietists no doubt are united to conservative evangelical denominations, to whom these criticisms would not apply, at least not in the same way or with the same force. The question would remain, however, how far Calvinism as a way of life is brought to expression in such churches.

¹² I do not mean to say that Calvinism is the only place where pietist/culturalists are turning for intellectual support, but only that it seems to be one of the current options.

¹³ The pietists and the doctrinalists are by no means exempt

from similar temptations. As culturalism can degenerate into social activism, so also can pietism degenerate into self-improvement programs, and doctrinalism into scholarly prestige.

¹⁴ See article IV of the Auburn Affirmation, the text of which is reprinted in Rian, Edwin H., *The Presbyterian Conflict*, Eerdmans, 1940, reprinted by the Committee for the Historian, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992, pp. 205-208.

¹⁵ For the history of the controversy, see Rian, op. cit. See also Ned B. Stonehouse, J. Gresham Machen: *A Biographical Memoir*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, p. 364 (first edition, Eerdmans, 1954).

¹⁶ Machen writes: “A separation between the two parties [liberal and conservative] in the church is the crying need of the hour.” (*Christianity and Liberalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1956; original copyright, 1923; p. 160). “Whether it be desirable or not, the ordination declaration is part of the constitution of the Church. If a man can stand on that platform he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church; if he cannot stand on it he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church ... Finding the existing ‘evangelical’ churches to be bound up to a creed which he does not accept, he may either unite himself with some other existing body or else found a new body to suit himself. . . By withdrawing from the confessional churches those churches that are founded upon a creed derived from scripture the liberal preacher would indeed sacrifice the opportunity, almost within his grasp, of so obtaining control of those confessional churches as to change their fundamental character ... But liberalism would certainly not suffer in the end...The liberal preacher would obtain the full personal respect even of his opponents, and the whole discussion would be placed on higher ground.~ (pp. 164,165).

“If there ought to be a separation between the liberals and the conservatives in the Church, why should not the conservatives be the ones to withdraw?... But in remaining in the existing churches the conservatives are in a fundamentally different position from the liberals; for the conservatives are in agreement with the plain constitutions of the churches, while the liberal party can maintain itself only by an equivocal subscription to declarations which it does not really believe.

“But how shall so anomalous a situation be brought to an end? The best way would undoubtedly be the voluntary withdrawal of

the liberal ministers from those churches whose confessions they do not, in the plain historical sense, accept. And we have not altogether abandoned hope of such a solution.” (pp.166,167).

“But is not the advocacy of such separation a flagrant instance of intolerance?” (p. 167). Machen then argues for about two pages that this is not intolerant because the church is a voluntary society.

“What is the duty of Christian men at such a time? What is the duty in particular, of Christian officers in the Church?” (p. 173). Machen enumerates four things: (1) The intellectual defense of the faith should be prosecuted vigorously. (Here he argues against those who would forgo all intellectual defense in favor of evangelism.); (2) Christian officers in the Church should oppose the ordination of those who are not true believers; (3) Church members should not call liberals as pastors of their churches; (4) Christian education should be pursued vigorously. (pp. 173-177). He then calls for true Christians to gather together for consultation and encouragement (reminiscent of Luther’s idea of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* the (little) church within the church).

Seeing that Machen had to contend with conservatives who opposed making even an intellectual defense of the gospel and with those who thought that even the suggestion of voluntary withdrawal was intolerant, I sympathize with his predicament. Yet the way of the Cross is never easy.

¹⁷ I do not mean to imply that it was his responsibility alone. Nor do I wish to detract from that just admiration and gratitude to God that we ought to have for such a faithful defender of the truth.

¹⁸ Machen, writing in *The Presbyterian Guardian* (in 1936) immediately after the formation of what was later to become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in an article entitled “True Presbyterian Church at Last”, said: “What a fearful sin of omission it was, for example, that an effort was not made in 1924, in every single presbytery in which any of us stood, to bring the Auburn Affirmationists to trial!” Quoted in Stonehouse, op. cit., p. 501.

¹⁹ Concerning the nature of God, God’s decrees, sin, Christ, Christ’s work, and salvation

²⁰ Concerning the law of God, faith, repentance, and the means of grace (the Word, sacraments, and prayer)

“To put it in a nutshell, in matters of religion, doctrine and duty are one. Moral midgets do not make theological giants.”

— Dr. James Gidley

THE ELDER'S HANDBOOK, and THE DEACON'S HANDBOOK by Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster. (Grand Rapids, MI, Christian's Library Press, 1979 & 1980), 303 & 270 pages. \$18.95 Reviewed by the Editor.

These books are of a similar size and format. They are bound in good quality hardback, and—best of all—are solid in content. An added virtue of these books comes from the fact that they are written, not by teaching elders, but by two men who are experienced ruling elders. They clearly value the rich heritage from the past history of the Christian Reformed Church in which these offices were cultivated to a very high level of effectiveness in the life of the church.

Following the outline of Acts 20:28-31 the Elder's Handbook is divided into six sections—Keep Watch Over Yourself—Keep Watch Over the Flock—Chosen by The Spirit—Feeding the Church—The Elder and the Church—and An Eye on Tomorrow. The Deacon's Handbook is also divided into six sections, though it does not try to follow a bible text in doing so. Its divisions are—Stewardship—The Deacon: Background—The Deacon: Foreground—Perspectives on Stewardship—Circles of Service—and Blueprints and Projections. In every one of these sections will be found much that is helpful, practical *and* biblical. And there is a full index of scripture references used, as well as an excellent topical or subject index. An elder or deacon who makes use of either of these fine handbooks will have little difficulty in relocating something important.

Any elder or deacon wanting a useful and reliable guide to the work of their respective office will do well to get one of these handbooks. We highly recommend them.

THE PSALMS IN WORSHIP, edited by John McNaugher. (Edmonton, AB Canada, Still Waters Revival Books, Reprinted 1992), 590 pages, \$15.98 US). Reviewed by the Editor.

I first came across this book some forty years ago while I was serving a small country church as a student pastor. A member of the church had inherited this book but did not value it, and was glad to get rid of it. I have always been grateful for it, and welcome this reprint.

Written by ministers of the old United Presbyterian Church of North America, around the turn of the century, it is a worthy defense of the singing of the biblical psalms in worship to the exclusion of the

unininspired hymns. The majority view in most of the Reformed churches of today—including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—is that there are other songs than the psalms that have a legitimate place in worship. But even so, can anyone deny that the singing of the psalms ought to have a place of honor—perhaps even a place of primacy—among us? Does not our Westminster Confession of Faith specify “the singing of psalms with grace in the heart” as a divinely prescribed element of worship? And does not our book of worship frequently mention the importance of the use of the psalms?

This book is good value, quite apart from the exclusive psalmody espoused by the writers, because of the wealth of information provided in it. But be warned: I wonder how anyone can read it without at least seeing the need for a much more frequent use of the biblical psalms in worship.

WORLD-VIEWS IN CONFLICT, by Ronald H. Nash. (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 176 pages. The subtitle of this book is “Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas.” Reviewed by the Editor.

As I read this little book I found myself giving thanks to God for Cornelius Van Til. It was Van Til who showed me, as no one else, the incompetence and inability of fallen men to do what Nash seems to think they can do. For Nash choosing a Christian world-view is the end result of a process whereby sovereign man applies certain ‘reasonable’ tests by which, supposedly, the best world-view can be identified. The task of the Christian is therefore to present the evidence to him convincingly. For Van Til, on the other hand, if I've understood him rightly, the task is to confront the natural man with the totally unwelcome truth about his fallen condition, and about the majesty and greatness of the God who is going to judge him. It is, in a word, to confront him boldly with the demand for repentance (because he is a hell-deserving sinner) and faith (because he has no resources of any account within himself, and must therefore seek them in Christ alone).

What I missed in this book was this God-honoring, man-humbling confrontation. It lacks power precisely because it lacks the offense of the gospel. Is the legacy of Cornelius Van Til prized as it ought to be among us? Sometimes I wonder. But I also wonder how anyone acquainted with his writings could read this little book without finding himself saying, as I did, “thank God for the work of Van Til.”