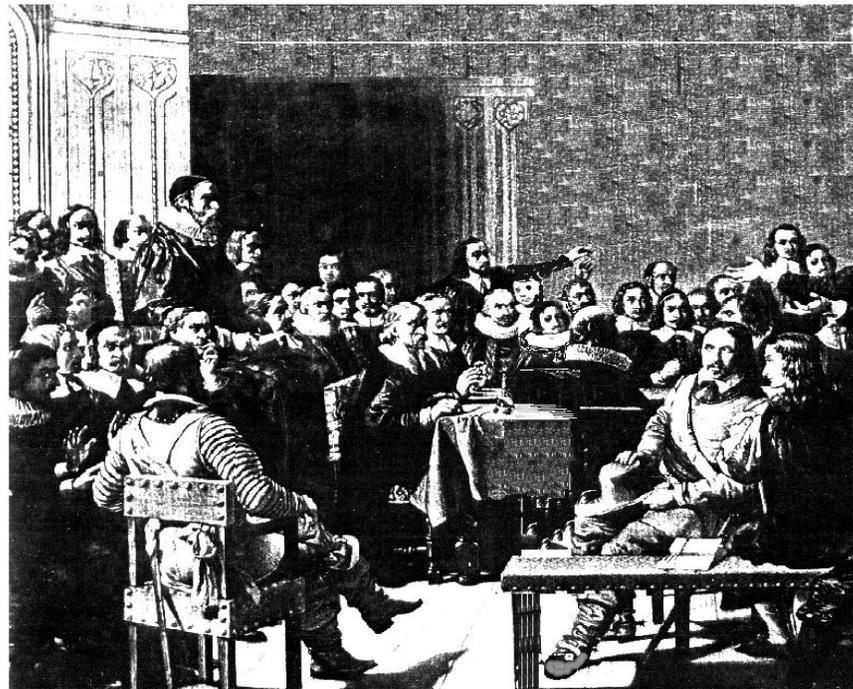


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THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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. 5, No. 4

Editorial Notes.....	73
Remember the Big Picture, by <i>Bruce Coie</i>	74
The Outstanding Need of the OPC (Part 2), by <i>Lawrence Eyres</i>	77
Indians, Farmers, and Church Officers, by <i>Larry Wilson</i>	79
The Story of Old Side Presbyterianism, by <i>Ross Graham</i>	81
The Post-Modern Paradigm Shift, by <i>Larry E. Ball</i>	87
About Letters of Attestation, by <i>G. I. Williamson</i>	91
Book Reviews.....	95
Index to <i>Ordained Servant</i> , Volume 5.....	96

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With this issue of *Ordained Servant* we complete our fifth year of publication. We hope that you—the Lord’s ‘ordained servants’ in the OPC—have been assisted and encouraged in your task by this publication. But we are humbly willing to hear otherwise. If you have constructive criticisms to offer, or recommendations to make, we would very much value your input. We also welcome material that you might offer for publication. We cannot promise that we will use everything sent to us. But we *do* promise to give it serious consideration.



The ranks of those who were involved in the OPC from the beginning are thinning as we enter the 61st year of our denomination’s existence. All the more important then, in our opinion, is the wise counsel offered in this issue by two men—Bruce Coie and Lawrence Eyres—who have served the Lord in our ministerial ranks from the beginning, or very close to it. We hereby express our thanks to both of these faithful servants.



“A Defence of ‘Lesser Lights’”

by Charles H. Spurgeon

“...it would be well for us to imitate God in this: in not forgetting the lesser lights. I do not know that great men are often good examples. I am sorry when, because men have been clever and successful, they are held up to imitation, though their motives and morals have been questionable. I would sooner men were stupid and honest than clever and tricky; it is better to act rightly and fail altogether than succeed by falsehood and cunning. I would sooner bid my son imitate an honest man who has no talent, and whose life is unsuccessful, than point him to the cleverest and greatest

that ever lived, whose life has become a brilliant success, but whose principles are condemnable. Learn not from the great but from the good: be not dazzled by success, but follow the safer light of truth and right. But so it is that men mainly observe that only which is written in big letters; but you know the choicest part of God’s books are printed in small characters. They who would only know the rudiments may spell out the words in large type which are for babes; but those who want to be fully instructed must sit down and read the small print of God, given us in lives of saints whom most men neglect. Some of the choicest virtues are not so much seen in the great as in the quiet, obscure life. Many a Christian woman manifests a glory of character that is to be found in no public man. I am sure that many a flower that is ‘born to blush unseen,’ and, as we think, to ‘waste its fragrance on the desert air,’ is fairer than the beauties which reign in the conservatory, and are the admiration of all. God has ways of producing very choice things on a small scale. As rare pearls and precious stones are never great masses of rock, but always lie within a narrow compass, so fully as often the fairest and richest virtues are to be found in the humblest individuals. A man may be too great to be good, but he cannot be too little to be gracious. Do not, therefore, always be studying Abraham, the greater character. Does not the text say, ‘Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah that bare you’? You have not learned the full lesson of patriarchal life until you have been in the tent with Sarah as well as among the flocks with her husband.”

REMEMBER THE BIG PICTURE

A Father in the Church Speaks

by

Rev. Bruce Coie

The author, a retired OPC minister, has been asked to address to younger men in the church some things he regards as important to maintain. He would like to encourage his brethren to maintain the full-orbed ecclesiology of the Reformed faith. Do not major only on aspects of it. Remember the big picture.

The Church is Both Visible and Invisible. It is necessary to distinguish between the Church as visible and invisible. The members of the visible church can be clearly known, so far as the count of them is concerned, for they constitute those whose names appear on the rolls of membership of churches. But if a church is not exercising church discipline, or wishes to cover up the fact that its membership is dwindling, it may juggle figures so as to make its membership appear larger than it actually is. Then it may be clearly seen that often the visible church consists of both believers and unbelievers, such as are truly Christians, and such as are merely professing or nominal Christians. The little circle of the twelve apostles, which was the nucleus of the New Testament church, contained the traitor Judas Iscariot. The church at Jerusalem upon which the Holy Spirit had recently been poured out harbored such pious frauds as Ananias and Sapphira. Membership in the visible church does not guarantee eternal life. There is every reason to fear that in these days of exceedingly lax requirements for church membership and almost total neglect of church discipline, the unsaved within the visible church constitute much more than a sprinkling.

On the other hand, the invisible church consists exclusively of those who by the grace of the Holy Spirit have been born again. It is not difficult to understand why this aspect of the church

should be called “invisible.” We cannot tell with certainty who have been regenerated (born again) and who are in an unregenerate state. Only God Omniscient is able to do that. Martin Luther was right when he predicted that he would, on his arrival in heaven, meet with two surprises: he would miss many whom he had confidently expected to see there, and he would meet many concerning whose Christianity he has had serious doubts. Prof. R. B. Kuiper remarked, “It is well to remember, too, that Luther added that the greatest wonder of all would be that unworthy Martin Luther would be there.” This means that Christians do well to beware of impatience or hastiness in judging others.

Every single member of the invisible church has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13). Of all its members it may be said: “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). “As lively stones” they are “built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood” (I Pet. 2:5). “They are washed, they are sanctified, they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 6:11). Together they constitute the body of Christ (Col. 1:18). To be sure, they have not yet attained perfection. They still offend in many things. They have to contend every day with the weakness of their faith and lusts of their flesh. But that does not alter the glorious fact that even now they have the victory over sin and the devil through their Lord Jesus Christ. In Him they are perfect!

This does not make the visible church unimportant. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself established it. He calls believers to join it and to submit to its spiritual oversight (Heb. 13:17). He adds to the church—the visible church—those who are

being saved (Acts 2:47). Membership in the invisible church does not release one from his responsibility to be involved in the visible church.

At the same time, the visible church is to keep itself pure. It can only do so as it seeks constantly to bring itself and its members into the truest relation to the Lord and Head of the Church. And this it does when it exercises faithfully church discipline, even to the point—if needed—of excommunication. Did not the apostle Paul command the believers at Corinth to “put away from among you that wicked person (who had committed incest)” (I Cor. 5:13)? And did he not enjoin his helper Titus: “A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10)? And did not the Lord Himself ordain that, if an offending brother refuses to heed the admonition of the church, he must be regarded “as a heathen man and as a publican” (Matt. 18:17)?

The true identity of the visible church does not consist of such externals as costly offices, artistic stained glass windows, richly appointed furnishings, dignified vestments, and skillful preachers. A church may have all these and not deserve to be called a church of Christ. Only as it resembles the church invisible can the church visible be said to be true. The truthfulness of the visible church is found in its members and consists in their loyalty and faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ. That church is genuine which honors Christ its Head and itself manifests His body. To do this, the church needs faithful officers. Who are they?

Church Office is Both Universal And Special. The Protestant Reformation emphasized the universal office of every believer as over against the Roman Church. That is, every church member is an officer. In fact, every church member has three offices. He is at once a prophet, a priest, and a king. This does not make every member a minis-

ter, deacon, or elder in the technical sense of those terms. Most members do not hold those offices. And because those offices are held by a few only they are properly designated as special offices.

But some—the anabaptists—so reacted against sacerdotalism and so stressed the universal office of every believer that they denied the special offices in the church. And it must be remembered that this anabaptistic influence corrupts the church down to the present day.

The true identity of the visible church does not consist of such externals as costly offices, artistic stained glass windows, richly appointed furnishings, dignified vestments, and skillful preachers. A church may have all these and not deserve to be called a church of Christ. Only as it resembles the church invisible can the church visible be said to be true.

In contrast, the Scripture warrants special officers in the church. Paul tells us (Eph. 4:11,12) that Christ “gave some (to be) apostles; and some, prophets; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Paul and Barnabas, on their missionary journey, “ordained . . . elders in every church.” (Acts 11:23)

The Apostle Paul exhorted, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (I Tim. 5:17). The same apostle enjoined the elders of the Church at Ephesus, “Take heed 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” (Acts 20:28). Moreover, the apostles instructed the believers at Jerusalem to choose deacons for the care of the poor. This was done, and they set them “before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6). How clear then that the apostles designated special offices in the Church—ministers, elders, and deacons.

Special Offices And The Universal Office

But how are the special offices related to the universal office of every believer? That the two are closely related to each other is almost self-evident. The term “Christ” means “anointed.”

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit to the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. Every Christian, too, is anointed with the Holy Spirit to the selfsame threefold office. But, as Prof. R. B. Kuiper has pointed out so well, it is also true that the special offices in the church represent Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. The minister, or teaching elder, represents Him as Prophet, the deacon represents Him as Priest, and the ruling elder represents Him as King. It follows that the universal office and the special offices are inseparable. For the special offices are rooted in the universal office.

This is why, biblically, the members of the church choose their own officers. In a great many churches, the officers are not ordinarily chosen from below but are appointed from above. To all intents and purposes these hierarchical churches deny the universal office of believers. A church which gives real recognition to the universal office of believers will insist that its members choose their own officers.

For the same reason, biblically the membership of the church is governed by its officers with its own consent. No human being or group of human beings has the right to force rule upon the membership of the church against its will. No bishop, no archbishop, no metropolitan, no patriarch, no church council, no college of cardinals, no pope may do that! When it is done, it amounts to a denial of the universal office of every believer (as prophet, priest, and king).

This is also why the members of the church choose their own officers from their own number. A particular church will elect its elders and deacons from its membership. Ordinarily a church will elect its pastor from the pastors of its denomination.

In this sense, a church functions like a democracy. However, it is not a democracy. Although the special officers of the church govern

with the consent of the membership from its own number, yet their ultimate responsibility is not to the membership. It is to Christ, the divine head of the church.

How many Protestant churches fail to get this point! Following the reactionary approach of anabaptism, they regard the people as their final source of authority. This is the underlying error of independent, congregational ecclesiology. Yet, sometimes one even meets with this error in our

Orthodox Presbyterian churches. Suppose a Session lacks the courage to make up its mind on some point. So it calls a congregational meeting and asks the congregation to make up its mind for it. In such a way the Session is in danger of becoming the servant of the congregation rather than the servant of Christ. Remember its special officers

are not to please men but Christ. It is He who gives them authority, through the universal office of believers (who elected them). It is Christ as Prophet, Priest and King whom they represent. Their ultimate responsibility is to Christ.

Brethren, how important it is to maintain and practice this full-orbed Reformed ecclesiology of the Reformed faith. Do not major only on aspects of it. Remember the big picture. Stress both the visible and invisible aspects of the church. Honor both the universal and special offices of the church.

Suppose a Session lacks the courage to make up its mind on some point. So it calls a congregational meeting and asks the congregation to make up its mind for it. In such a way the Session is in danger of becoming the servant of the congregation rather than the servant of Christ.

The Reverend Bruce Coie was born in 1907 and was ordained at the first General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. His ministerial career thus spans the entire history of our denomination. Rev. Coie now lives at the Presbyterian Retirement Community at Quarryville, PA.

The Outstanding Need of the OPC

Part 2

by

Rev. Lawrence Eyres

In the last *Ordained Servant* I gave it as my conviction that the greatest need of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is an abiding consciousness of God at every level of her life. It's not a matter of doctrine but rather the failure to realize, moment by moment, that "...all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13 NKJV). This consciousness should permeate our teaching, preaching and governing as ordained office bearers. All we do as undershepherds of Christ needs to be aflame with the "burden" of the message we proclaim. We are God's men, and we must give account for every word and deed.

This consciousness needs to permeate the whole church "...like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments..like the dew descending upon the mountains of Zion..." (Psalm 133:2,3). This holy awareness ought to come upon the whole body of Christ! It needs to become the atmosphere of every worshiping family of God the world around, including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In Part 1 of this essay I dealt with the ordained officers of the church—particularly ministers and ruling elders. In this article I will extend the application of this principle to the local congregation as the family of God in one location, and then to the individual family units that make up a congregation.

The Local Congregation

As a retired pastor, I've preached in many pulpits over the last three years. I've observed a difference that I never noticed during the decades of my full-time pastoral ministry. And there is no correlation between the largeness or smallness of these congregations. The difference is that I experience more freedom and joy in some pulpits than in others. Now some of that difference may be due to my prepara-

tion, both as to sermon substance and spiritual state, but not all of it is. In some pulpits (and I find this a constant on return visits) I sense an openness that brings joy to my heart. From the very start there is that something which is evident, but lacking in others. In the latter instances there is polite listening and a cordial handshake afterward. In the former there seems to me to be an eagerness to hear the word, which many express afterward.

What's the answer? Perhaps I've experienced the answer as a pew-sitter during these last three years. As a preacher, I can analyze the sermon—be a critic, albeit a kind one. But unless the preacher overwhelms me with the power of his message, I remain unblessed. I struggle to lay aside my critical apparatus and enter into worship with the earnest prayer that my soul will be blessed. And that prayer is invariably answered. Could it be that some congregations are like the spectators at a sports event who pay for their seats and expect to get their money's worth, whereas others come as poor, hungry worshipers, wanting and expecting to be blessed?

This analogy goes far toward explaining the difference between a Berean and a Laodicean church, though one seldom sees as sharp a difference as this today. Our members need to be educated spiritually to realize their poverty as unworthy sinners so that they will come to worship as those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. So, perhaps doctrine does enter into it after all. But God does give the Holy Spirit in increasing measure to those who ask Him. So it all comes back to the need for a consciousness of God on the part of both preacher and members of their congregations. I remember hearing Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones lecturing at Westminster Seminary in September, 1967. His subject was "What Is Preaching?" He spent the better part of an hour trying to answer his own question. And at the end he told of the first time Jonathan Edwards heard George Whitefield—from Edwards' own pulpit in Northampton. At the close of

Whitefield's sermon Edwards was moved to tears by the force of Whitefield's preaching. The Doctor portrayed both preacher and people as held together in the mighty hand of God. It is my conviction that the NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 1:21 leaves something to be desired. Yes the world does count the message of the cross foolishness, but it is a heralded message—one proclaimed abroad on the authority of Jesus Christ. There is an implied method in the message that brings the scorn of the world. Yet the heralding of the Gospel with the unction of the Spirit has power that mere human opinion cannot match. There's mystery here, but it is holy mystery. Let our congregations be taught to come to the preaching of the Word with high expectations. They will not be disappointed! Such speaking and hearing promotes a high sense of the presence of God.

The Family Unit

The students of American history tell us that our Puritan forebears would not permit single adults to live alone. They had to become a part of a family unit until they married themselves, and became another family. Sound strange? Perhaps, but one parent families were unheard of in those days. There is something about a whole family that cannot be duplicated piecemeal. Biblically speaking, the family is the basic unit of the body of Christ. It is the microcosm of the church. In the family is modeled headship and submission, shared authority, and all social graces. It may be that this is what has made home schooling the educational decision of choice for thousands of Christians in our day. There are certain educational requirements that should not be farmed out to the professionals!

But few families—even Christian families—come up to this high biblical standard. I grew up in a Christian home where the family altar was not a matter of choice for children. Every morning after breakfast we got our Bibles out. We each read in turn as early as we could read. It wasn't as good as it might have been, but we all participated and were jealous of our turn to read. The church we belonged to was no OPC, though it held a high view of the Word of God. But it was that daily family altar that had the greatest shaping influence on my young life. In church families today the family worship has become a dinosaur. I know it's harder now than it was during my childhood. There are so many distractions now—jobs, school sports, conflicting work shifts in two-income families, and

so on. There are so many good things we and our children simply “must” have that there is no time for the best. And when the good crowds out the best, the good is bad! How can we practice Deuteronomy 6:1-9 in today's frantic pace? Yes it can be done. As a pastor, I have seen it done in two or three homes in recent years. And the children of those homes have grown up, married and established homes on the model of the families that produced them.

But even family worship—while foundational—is not all there is to a God-conscious family life. We need a revolution in the area of family living. Here are some of the ingredients: firm but loving discipline, parents who love and respect each other, parents who through their obedience to God may require obedience of their children. They must always keep the lines of communication open between them and their offspring. And, most of all, they must, by all the means of God's appointment, lead their children to Christ. And this is not a one-two-three process. They cannot make their children believers. And the children can't cause their own “new birth,” any more than they could cause their being born the first time. Only God can give new hearts to our children who were born sinners. But God is pleased to use our teaching, example, discipline and our prayers to bring our children to himself. I like to say that God does not promise to save all our children, yet he is in the habit of saving the children of his children. He keeps his promises, but we—the best of us—break ours. Therefore we must plead with our children to seek the Lord while he may be found, and plead with God to have mercy on them and save them. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” How many years do we have to bring our children to God? As many years as it takes—sometimes by the time they fly the nest, sometimes longer. But God has ordered us to make his Word the constant context of our homes. That's real child evangelism!

Herein is the greatest need of the OPC and all other churches that bear the Christian name. Grace comes from heaven. It comes through the exercise of preaching, teaching and ruling in the church. It flows down to the lowliest member of the church, from there to the family units (for the church is the assembly of God's people. Yet the church is still the church even in disassembly). And that's where the family comes in. Christ is building his church from the family up. And the common denominator of all that the church is, and does, is her consciousness of who she is and to whom she belongs.

Indians, Farmers, and Church Officers

by

Rev. Larry Wilson

Have you noticed? The Cleveland Indians are back! In all likelihood, they're back to stay for a while. And herein lies an object lesson for pastors and churches who need additional qualified officers.

This line of thought was piqued as I read the book *Endless Summers: the Fall and Rise of the Cleveland Indians*, by Jack Torry (South Bend Communications: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1995). Torry starts with the 1954 World Series. The Indians had been steadily rising for several years. Finally they were on top. They'd won an astonishing league record 111 regular games that season. They were heavily favored to beat the less-talented New York Giants in the Series. The Indians were poised to become a baseball dynasty. They had momentum. But in the first game, Giant Willie Mays made an impossible catch that utterly knocked the wind out of their sails. The Giants went on to humiliate the Indians by sweeping the Series, 4-0. And instead of becoming a dynasty, the Indians became a drone on a treadmill of mediocrity. For four decades after Willie Mays' catch, the Indians didn't win a single pennant and had just 10 winning records.

What went wrong? Many blamed a curse. But the reality is more mundane. With the loss in 1954, the owners panicked and fired the management that had built a highly successful farm (minor league) system. The new management made expensive, high-profile trades and virtually dismantled their farm system in order to pay for it. And they paid for this grave miscalculation with decades of losing teams. In recent years—and only in recent years—the Cleveland Indians rebuilt a quality farm system. And guess what? They went to the World Series in 1995! Don't be surprised if you see them there again in 1996.

It's no accident that baseball teams call their

system of recruiting and fostering players a farm system. Any farmer can tell you that you can't expect to reap a harvest unless you plow and plant and cultivate. For decades, the Indians franchise tried to reap a harvest without putting much into plowing and planting and cultivating new players. And they came up empty-handed! Now they've rebuilt their farm system. And they're producing winning teams again!

This reminds me of a complaint I've heard repeatedly. Again and again, pastors bewail the fact that they don't have enough elders and deacons. When asked what they're doing about it, they say they're praying. Of course, that is the most significant thing we can do. For Christ is the one who gives gifts to His people. And Christ is the one who builds the church. But to say that that's the most significant thing we can do is not to say that it's the only thing we can do! For Christ also uses means. Doesn't it make sense to develop some sort of farm system to plow, plant, cultivate, and ultimately reap qualified officers?

I can tell you about the farm system we use at Grace OPC in Columbus, Ohio. Every other year, we follow this procedure:

For a month, the Session takes nominations for prospective candidates for the offices of elder and deacon. We put an insert in the bulletin explaining this procedure and providing space for members to make their nominations. All communicant members in good standing in Grace Presbyterian Church are eligible to make nominations. Male communicant members who have been part of the congregation for at least a year are eligible to be nominated. We ask members to make their nomination in writing, to sign and date it, and to hand it to the pastor or an elder. We keep these names confidential.

Each man who's been nominated is asked to join

an Officer Training Course. What if a nominee seems clearly unqualified? We don't say, "Well, obviously he's unqualified" and write him off. He's not yet a candidate; he's a prospective candidate; he's an opportunity for training. During the course, each man is asked to prayerfully examine himself to discern whether he believes God is calling him to this particular ministry at this particular time.

We structure the Officer Training classes according to the five ordination vows: Part 1: Prerequisites (A) The Word of God (our primary standard)—vow #1, (B) Reformed theology (our secondary standards)—vow #2, (C) Presbyterian polity (our tertiary standards)—vow #3, Part 2: Practice (A) The Church—vow #4, (B) Office in the Church—vow #5.

After the course has been completed (it takes about 6 months), nominees who have faithfully attended the classes are invited to interview with the Session. According to Scripture and our Form of Government, the Session is responsible to make certain that those who stand for election are qualified in Scriptural and doctrinal understanding and stability, in spiritual maturity, in faithful involvement in the life and services of the church, and in requisite spiritual gifts. The Session approves those candidates whom it deems to be qualified.

Then, for the duration of a month, the names of those who have been certified by the Session are announced to the congregation for its prayerful consideration. Only at this point do we have official candidates for the offices of elder and deacon.

Finally, the congregation elects elders and deacons. Candidates do not run against each other. Nor is this a popularity contest. The question asked concerning each candidate is: "has God called, equipped, and prepared this man to serve in this capacity at this time in this church?" Members vote by ballot—"Yes" or "No" for each candidate. Those who receive a majority vote are ordained and installed.

All this takes much of a year. During that year, we ask the congregation to make the whole process a matter of regular prayer—that God, working through His people, will add the men of His choice

to the roll of officers in the church.

Frankly, there have been years when we've gone through this whole process and haven't added a single officer. Was that a waste of time? Well, was it a waste of time for the Cleveland Indians to rebuild their farm system? Do teams jump automatically to World Series contention? Is it a waste of time when a farmer plows and plants and cultivates? Do farmers jump straight into the harvest? We have an elder who went through this process three times before he was ordained—that's a six year stretch. Were five of those years a waste of time? Dear brothers, since when is it a waste of time to plow, plant, and cultivate for the future? I'll tell you what is a waste of time—to expect immediate gratification and cry about having no qualified elder or deacon candidates when you don't do any plowing, planting, or cultivating to get them.

Take a cue from the Cleveland Indians and from farmers—develop a farm system to train men so that you can reap a future harvest. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy (Psalm 126:5).

.....
• **Larry Wilson is pastor of Grace OPC in Columbus, Ohio. He adds this Postscript:**
• **Do I say that ours is the only legitimate way to prepare church officers? No, brothers, no. For one thing, our system presupposes that officers serve indefinite rather than set terms. And I don't say that that's the only legitimate way either. What I do say is that the principles that we try to apply with our system are biblical and wise. But I'd really like to learn from how others apply them. If other pastors, elders, or deacons are willing to help edify the broader church by sharing their wisdom on this and other practical issues, I'd encourage them to submit articles to the editor of *Ordained Servant*, (the Rev. G.I. Williamson, 119 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201; or email him at Williamson.1@opc.org).**
•

The Story of Old Side Presbyterianism

by

Ross Graham

Introduction

This is a story that needs to be told. We should learn it and tell it over and over again and incorporate it into our history as American Presbyterians. For some reason we have truncated that history and only view the events which follow the trial of Charles Briggs in 1899 as worthy of our real study. It is as though we are saying that until the beginning of the twentieth century all was well in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and everyone believed the same things and was committed to the same understanding of the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Catechisms. But not only was this not the case, the events which occurred in the earlier history of the Presbyterian Church of our roots provide some significant insights into why we react as we do today.

We have all come to know and appreciate some benchmark dates in the formation of the twentieth century conservative Presbyterian denominations which have been formed through struggles in the early 1900s. We can tell of the Auburn Affirmation of 1923; of the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929; of the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933; and of the trials and defrocking of J. Gresham Machen and eight others, and of the subsequent formation of the Presbyterian Church of America in 1936. As Orthodox Presbyterians, we can also recount the separation of the Bible Presbyterian Church from the OPC in 1937; the resolution of matters surrounding the ordination of Gordon H. Clark in 1947; decisions concerning the Peniel controversy in 1969; and the decision of the General Assembly not to accept the invitation to join the Presbyterian Church in America in 1986.

But there are other dates just as significant in Presbyterian history which serve as similar benchmarks in understanding where we came

from and who we are today. In the telling of the Old Side and Old School Presbyterians other dates gain a similar importance; here are some of them: 1706, 1729, 1741, 1758, 1789, 1801, 1837, 1861 and 1870.

This is my history, just as Machen, Murray and McIntire are my history. The story which is about to unfold may surprise you. For some it may be entirely new information. For others it should serve as a succinct review. But I think all of you may face the surprise waiting for us in this chapter of our church history - the surprise that the things that were done then will sound so much like present-day happenings, and the decisions that were made then and the camps that were formed then are things that affect us today.

If the story of Old School Presbyterianism is told well, it just may be that some of you will be provided with additional pegs on which to hang some of your ecclesiastical history. May God grant us the grace to see His hand in it and through it just as we have seen his hand in the formation and the work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

1. The Plan of Union of 1801

It was the dawn of the 19th century. A fledgling country called the United States of America was taking its first wobbly steps as a nation. Thomas Jefferson had just been inaugurated as the nation's third president. The war with Britain for the independence of the colonies had been won. The Constitution had been ratified, and a great westward expansion was underway. The frontier in 1801 stretched from the western border of New York State down the middle of Ohio and Kentucky and through the center of Tennessee.

The Presbyterian Church, like the country itself, was on a great westward march. But while the middle and southern colonies, largely settled by Scotch and Irish Presbyterians, were the seat of

Presbyterian government and Reformed doctrine, New England was staunchly Congregational in its church government and was exporting its government and a corresponding theology to the frontier. In its first grappling with church growth, the Presbyterian Church of the USA seized the day with a move to claim much of the church's westward expansion through an alliance with the New England Congregationalists.

That alliance was called The Plan of Union of 1801. It was designed by well-meaning Presbyterians who believed that their biblical system would win out in the end. But it was offered in the spirit of freedom of choice which embodied the psyche of much of the nation at the time. It said in part:

"It is strictly enjoined on all the missionaries to the new settlements to endeavor by all proper means to promote mutual forbearance and a spirit of accommodation between those inhabitants of the new settlements who hold the Presbyterian and those who hold the Congregational form of church government. If, in the new settlements, any church of the Congregational order shall settle a minister of the Presbyterian order, that church may if they choose still conduct their discipline according to Congregational principles, settling their differences among themselves, or by a council mutually agreed upon for that purpose...."

It did not take long for conflicts to arise. The new presbyteries and synods on the frontier were Plan of Union presbyteries and synods. Not everyone had committed themselves to the same system of doctrine, let alone the same form of church government. Presbyteries with Plan of Union majorities readily ordained New England men who could then transfer to any other presbytery. When questions began to be raised about the Adopting Act of 1729 itself and about the whole meaning of the requirement for subscription to the Westminster Confession, it was not long before the move was on among the more conservative Presbyterian element, later the Old School, to abrogate the Plan of Union that seemed to be causing all the trouble.

2. The Second Great Awakening

At the beginning of the 19th century it was,

however, more than just the attempts to address the expansion of the church which were causing difficulty for Presbyterians. The Second Great Awakening in America was underway with Charles Finney, a Presbyterian minister, as its driving force. It is not the purpose of this presentation to make a study of this or the other revivals in America and Great Britain, but it is safe to say that while there was general consensus among all parties in the Presbyterian Church that the revival of the early 1800's was truly a spiritual movement directed by the hand of God, there was great disagreement as to how the Calvinistic, Reformed and Presbyterian churches should respond.

Finney was a flamboyant and fiery preacher who introduced what were called "new measures" into his revivalist preaching format calling out into the aisles and to "anxious seats" those to be prayed for. Much of this revivalist work was done in central and western New York State where the Plan of Union Cayuga and Onondaga Presbyteries were generally supportive.

But Finney and others began to drift toward perfectionism. Though the Plan of Union presbyteries condemned this drift, they could not bring themselves to condemn Finney's more Arminian approach of response to the gospel as the obligation of the human heart. Must the evangelist risk discouraging the sinner by telling him it is God alone who chooses whom he will save, and that without the gracious regenerating work of the Holy Spirit the sinner can do nothing toward his salvation? The New School men defended a less doctrinal stance in regard to the saving of souls.

In 1834 Charles Finney left the Presbyterian church to become Professor of Theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. That same year, in his parting comment concerning his old church, he was quoted as saying, "No doubt there is a jubilee in hell every year about the time of the meeting of the general assembly."

3. The Debate Over the Theology of the Disciples of Jonathan Edwards

Unless the impression is given that the Old School / New School controversy simply arose over

issues of territory in evangelism, it is important also to note the decidedly theological debate that was going on in the early part of the 19th century. For those who ultimately found themselves in the Old School, it was this debate that shaped all the rest. Both the formulations of the doctrines themselves and the rigidity with which they were adhered to are the defining characteristics of the two schools of Presbyterian thought and practice.

Jonathan Edwards was the first and inarguably among the most significant of the emerging American theological minds. When Edwards began his career in the 1720s, the first Great Awakening was in progress. The needs of the moment were to define the place of religious experience and the effects of conversion from a theological perspective. In comment, George Marsden says:

“Edward's most lasting contribution was the distinction he drew between moral inability and natural inability. Men, he said, were by nature potentially able to do good if they willed to. Their problem was that their wills because of original sin were inclined to self love, making them morally unable to will anything good. Men were naturally free to do what they wanted or willed, said Edwards, but they would want to do good only if the Holy Spirit changed their basic dispositions from self love to true love.

Edward's profound thinking and Presbyterian roots endeared him to the church and made him a bridge between New England and the mid-Atlantic and southern colonies.

But those who followed Edwards tended, like the disciples of most great men, to distort rather than to improve. First, Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), supposedly in the spirit of Edwards, took up the enlightenment views of his age in the attempt to bring God down and man up. While Hopkins admitted that men were depraved by nature to the extent that it was certain that all mankind should sin as Adam had done, he went on to say that the children of Adam are not answerable for Adam's sin and it is not their sin any further than that they approve of it by sinning as he did.

The desires of these new disciples of Edwards seem to have been to give man something to do in reaction against the Calvinistic tenets of grace

plus nothing. Following Hopkins was a raft of New England theologians riding the wave of the Second Great Awakening. They seemed bent on contradicting the Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election while denying that what they were teaching was a form of Arminianism. Since many of them were from the theological border state of Connecticut where New England Congregationalism met head on with Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism, their teaching was known as the New Haven Theology.”

While time does not permit a review of their school, Marsden indicates that their mission seems to have been to provide for the evangelists of the Second Great Awakening a theological justification for exhorting their audiences to turn from sin to a new righteousness even though salvation is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. They did this by applying philosophic reasoning of the day to the theological problem, and they did it within the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

One of their preachers, Albert Barnes, published a sermon, "The Way of Salvation," which cast doubt on the Calvinistic system of doctrine taught in the Confession of Faith. In 1830 Barnes was brought to trial for heresy on the basis of views expressed in his sermon but was eventually acquitted by the General Assembly of 1831 which was under the control of what would become known as the New School men.

4. The Division of 1837

So it was in the early 1830s that succeeding general assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the USA approached a great divide. George Marsden suggests six issues which led to the division of the Old School and New School. They are as follows:

1. The meaning of confessionalism
2. Theology itself
3. Methods of revivalism
4. Presbyterian polity
5. The relation of the church to voluntary societies
6. Slavery

We have already touched on four of these six

issues. The remaining two provide some important insights into the differences between the parties and the causes of the division. Many within the Presbyterian Church saw the church itself as a force for social change and good, bringing to bear the morality of Christianity upon the culture at large. Two issues continued to surface throughout the first half of the 19th century on which there was deep division between parties within the church.

The first issue concerned the beverage use of alcohol. Those who would ultimately be identified with the New School believed that it was incumbent upon the church to do all within its power to eradicate the evils of intoxicating liquor. There were repeated calls for total abstinence and for joining other groups and organizations demanding prohibitionist legislation by the government. But those within the Old School could not bring themselves to compromise biblical principle for practical application. If the Scriptures did not forbid a thing, then the church could not forbid it simply because of its abuse by some.

The second issue concerned the abolition of black slavery. Those of the New School argued passionately for the abolitionist position and urged the church to condemn the sin of slavery. This it never did. Rather, it repeatedly followed the lead of Old School spokesman Charles Hodge who said, "The Scriptures do not explicitly condemn slave-holding as a sin; therefore slave-holding is not necessarily sinful and the church may not pretend to make laws to bind the conscience."

These two issues, though very different from each other, and though championed and opposed by different groups within the Presbyterian Church, are illustrative of the complexity of the situation which faced the Presbyterian Church in the 1830s.

Finally, in 1834 matters came to a head when the famous "Western Memorial" brought the differences between the Old and New Schools to the floor of the general assembly. The memorial was denied by the New School-dominated commissioners. In frustration, a document titled "Act and Testimony" was framed by the Old School men while the assembly was still in session and was eventually signed by 347 ministers, 1789 ruling

elders and 14 licentiates. It said in part:

"...we bear our solemn testimony against the right claimed by many interpreting the doctrines of our standards in a sense different from the sense of the church for years past...we testify against the reprehensible conduct of those in our communion who hold and preach and publish Arminian and Pelagian heresies...we testify against the conduct of those who while they profess to approve and adopt our doctrine and order do nevertheless speak and publish in terms derogatory to both...."

By the assembly of 1837 the Old School was in the majority. It adopted 16 specifications of error largely against the Plan of Union presbyteries and synods. It abrogated the Plan of Union of 1801 and took the unusual step of making its action retroactive so that in effect it declared four synods formed under the Plan out of ecclesiastical connection with the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.

By its action the Old School had excised nearly one-fifth of the membership of the church - 28 presbyteries, 509 ministers and 60,000 communicants. With no room left in their former Presbyterian body, the New School party assembled their leaders in an obscure town west of Syracuse; New York, and formed what became known as the Auburn Convention. It is hard to miss the fact that 90 years later an even more devastating event would take place in Auburn, New York.

5. The Old School

So the Old School and the New School in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America went their separate ways. They remained that way for the next 33 years. In many parts of the northeast, presbytery and synod boundaries of the two churches directly overlapped and used the same names. It was a confusing time for the people in the pews and confusing as well for historians attempting to identify which of the two bodies was the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The continuing church, the Old School, exhibited a definite and distinct personality which may be stylized as follows:

First, the Old School valued full subscription over general subscription to the confessional standards. When the New School convened in Auburn, New York in 1837, it drafted what became known as the Auburn Declaration. The document outlined the New School's theological and confessional position. Church historians point out that it is as important to note what it does not say as what it does say. The document affirms the loyalty of the New School men to the biblical and Presbyterian system of doctrine. But it goes on to allow scruples about matters not essential to the system. The next year the New School assembly reaffirmed their love for the confession, but then proceeded to declare "...but it is not the Bible, nor a substitute for the Bible, nor a stereotyped page to be merely committed to memory by unreflecting, confiding minds without energy or thought, or a prayerful, faithful searching of the Scripture."

Second, the Old School valued doctrine over evangelism if it had to choose between the two. In their Act and Testimony of 1836 the Old School expressed their concerns about New School beliefs and practices. They lamented the disorderly and unreasonable New School meetings of people in which unauthorized and incompetent persons conducted worship in a manner shocking to public decency, females often leading in prayer in promiscuous assemblies, and sometimes in public instruction.

They expressed concern about hasty admission to church privileges and the failure to exercise any wholesome discipline over those who subsequently fell into sin. They were concerned with filling the churches with ignorant and unconverted persons so as to gradually destroy all visible distinction between the church and the world. George Hutchinson asserts that the Old School stood opposed to the New because of the New School's desire for a church less concerned with abstract doctrinal issues and more concerned with its appeal to and effect upon the life of the masses.

Third, the Old School valued scriptural principle over enforcement of societal morality. As was discussed earlier, the Old School repeatedly and consistently refused to condemn as sin what the Scripture did not condemn as sin. Neither in the area of total abstinence nor on the issue of the southern practice of slave-holding would the men

of the Old School capitulate to the outright condemnation of practices which were not specifically condemned as sin in the Scriptures.

It should be pointed out, however, that as early as 1818 the general assembly had unanimously adopted a report which spoke of slavery as a gross violation of the law of human nature and urged all Christians to work toward the eventual abolition of the institution. And while the New School declared in 1840 that "the only true principle of temperance is total abstinence from everything that will intoxicate," three years earlier, at the Old School's first general assembly in 1837, the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages by church members was condemned. But there was a propensity on the part of the New School men to see their church as a moral force for righteousness within society in a way that the Old School could never accept.

Fourth, the Old School valued the work of the church over the work of groups and individual Christians. In the years before the division of 1837 there was much rivalry between independent agencies and the boards of the general assembly concerning how missionary activity and involvement in proactive causes should be carried on. The New School favored nondenominational agencies as more conducive to Christian unity and evangelical success. In the words of New School minister Absolom Peters, "We are constrained to believe that the voluntary association of evangelical Christians, as far as it is practical, is much better suited to the object of the world's conversion than any form of church organization for this purpose ever has been or can be." The Old School was charged with being exclusive and sectarian.

In their Act and Testimony of 1837 the Old School speaks of "the irresponsible power assumed by several associations of men under various names to exercise authority" and Charles Hodge, now the avowed leader of the moderate Princeton Party, raised serious objections about subscription vows to the Westminster Confession among some of the New School men. "Some only subscribe to the essentials of the Christian faith in general rather to those of the Reformed faith in particular," he said. It was not that the New School, on the whole, was basically unorthodox, but that the New School church had always tolerated some views defi-

nately opposed to the Confession. And, after all, Albert Barnes, still in the New School ranks and avowedly questioning some of the doctrines of the Confession, would be part of the united church.

But by the time of the Old School general assembly of 1869, there was overwhelming desire for reunion. The presbyteries of both churches, by an almost unanimous vote, speedily concurred and reunion was effected the next year. The Plan stated that "the reunion shall be affected on the doctrinal and ecclesiastical basis of our common standards...the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments...the Confession of Faith...and the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States..." So as the Old Side and New Side had reunited in 1758, the Old School and New School, apart from their southern constituencies, had come back together in 1870.

Reflections on this Chapter in Our History

Where did you find yourself fitting into this earlier part of our history? Most Orthodox Presbyterians find themselves identifying more with the Old School than with the New. But it is interesting to observe that throughout the history of Presbyterianism the issues have changed very little over time. The names have changed and the particular descriptions and concerns go by different terminologies, but the sides and the schools are still with us. It appears that, in each case, the new gave rise to the desire for a broader church and a more general expression of Christianity. The desire for breadth and generality could explain the radical rise of modernism, neo-orthodoxy, and theological liberalism within the Presbyterian Church in the early part of the 20th century.

But true Presbyterians rarely take things to extremes. George Marsden contends that Evangelicalism was also a child of the New School. He further asserts that both broad Evangelicalism and American Fundamentalism were the 20th century spiritual children of the New School mind. OPC historian Charles Dennison goes even further and suggests that Christian Reconstructionism may also be a child of the New School. But it is important to note that throughout the long history of American Presbyterianism the two sides

and schools all maintained a strong commitment to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, to a set of confessed doctrinal beliefs drawn from those Scriptures and to a Presbyterian connective system of government.

Could it be that God has designed the two sides to work together for his glory in the advancement of his kingdom, each covering the abuses and the blind spots of the other? Perhaps we should learn from this chapter in our history that Presbyterianism itself demands two sides, and that no matter how often we purge the church in an effort to be more pure, some will gravitate to each side and Presbyterianism, the most biblical and most orderly system of church government ever devised, will continue to function.

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THE POST-MODERN PARADIGM SHIFT

and the Biblical, Reformed Presuppositionalism of Van Til

by Pastor Larry E. Ball

Presently in secular America there is a paradigm shift taking place which is originating in intellectual circles, but is quickly capturing the mind of the average American. It is a shift from what has been historically called “modernism” to that which is presently called “postmodernism.” It is a dramatic change in the way people think, and it is the outworking of what Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary described years ago as “man becoming epistemologically self-conscious.” Simply put, man is biased in the way he knows things, and he needs to know that!

As Christians we should look upon this paradigm shift as an opportunity for evangelism. However, it is important to note, that only a presuppositional apologetic will be able to deal with this new way of thinking. Evidentialism as an apologetic method will be useless.

In this article I will attempt to explain the meaning of what I have just said. What is modernism? What is post-modernism? What is a paradigm shift? What is presuppositional apologetics and why is it the only weapon that can be adequately used as a tool to expose the fallacies of post-modernism, so that Christ may be properly presented to those caught in its trap? I will attempt to answer these questions to some degree in the following comments.

Most of us who were raised in the public schools and sent off to state colleges and universities in the sixties were taught under a world and life view called modernism. Even though many of us attended church on Sundays, in the public schools and colleges we were adopting a way of thinking oftentimes very much anti-

thetical to what we were learning in church. We were schizophrenic, and didn't know it.

So it was with me, having been raised in a conservative Presbyterian church, yet studying mathematics and physics on the college level at a state engineering school. In church I learned about God and how important He was. In the classroom I learned that God was irrelevant. In church I learned that God created the world. In the classroom I was taught that the world as we know it is a closed system with natural laws which are neutral in regard to questions about God. In church I learned that God spoke through the Bible. In the classroom I learned that through our minds, without reference to God, we can come to agreement via the scientific method about facts as we discover natural laws. In the church I learned that the ten commandments defined right and wrong. In the classroom I learned that even in the area of ethics there were natural laws defining right and wrong and all men who will only properly reason with their minds will come to the same conclusions about what is right and wrong. Any reference to God was unnecessary. This was modernism and this was me in the sixties!

Toward the end of my college career I began to lose faith in modernism and also I began to doubt the validity of Christianity. I had thought that the study of mathematics would answer the ultimate questions of life. The more I advanced in the study of mathematics, the more I began to see that mathematics was built upon unproved axioms which had to be accepted by faith. At its root, mathematics was just another faith system. This greatly discouraged me. As I sought counsel from Presbyterian ministers, I was un-

able to find one who could give me biblical answers to the tension I had developed between religion and science. Since the leaders of the church seemed to be mimicking the answers that I was hearing in the classroom (baptized of course with some religious language), I became very suspicious of the church. One pastor gave me a book entitled, "I Believe In God And I Believe In Evolution." I was so disappointed that I never even read the book. Finally, by God's providence I enrolled at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where Dr. Cornelius Van Til was Professor of Apologetics.

Westminster Seminary was at its zenith in the sixties. John Murray, Jay Adams, Cornelius Van Til, E. J. Young, and other men of great caliber were all gathered at the same place to teach the Christian Faith. What a blessing for a young searching Christian like me! To say the least, I was overwhelmed. As a little sidetrack to my article, I remember the first lecture—as a first year student—I heard from Professor John Murray. I was asked afterwards what I thought of it. My response was, "I didn't understand a word he said." I was a slow learner and by the time I graduated three years later, I finally began to understand what Professor Murray was saying.

The greatest blessing to me was the teaching of Dr. Cornelius Van Til. I was driven to Westminster partially because I was seeking a way to combine my dwindling faith in Christianity which I had learned in church and my dwindling faith in the scientific method which I had learned in college. Dr. Van Til clearly laid out the answers from what I consider [to be] the only biblical apologetic faithful to the Scriptures, which has come to be called presuppositionalism.

The presuppositional method asserts that the beginning point of all knowledge is the fact that God exists. There is no neutrality in the world, and all systems are at root religious, even the scientific method. The scientific method, if

pushed to be consistent, is based upon faith in the belief that the world came into existence by pure chance, and in reality it has no basis on which to boast of any trustworthy laws or truth. The only reason it has had any success is because it has borrowed capital from the Christian faith, namely, the assumption that order does and ought to exist in the world. Dr. Van Til used to say in principle that all predication is impossible except upon the presupposition of the full Christian position. The Christian Faith gives a basis for laws and truth because a self-contained God created the world and therefore gave it meaning. All systems are based upon certain presuppositions which men assume. In other words, all men are biased in their search for truth. All men know that God exists, but unbelievers suppress that truth in rebellion. There are no neutral brute facts. All facts are "God created facts." Any denial of this is rebellion against the true and living God. We must not let the world claim an area of neutrality where Christians and unbelievers seek together to investigate and reach some conclusion about the existence of God. To allow this area of neutrality, is to deny at the very outset the claims of God and to give the unbeliever stolen ground which he does not deserve. Proclamation of the gospel, and not an intellectual argumentation depending upon the acceptance of a common neutrality, is the biblical method to approach the unbeliever. However, Dr. Van Til did teach that since all men are made in the image of God, a point of contact exists between the Christian and unbeliever, and that intellectual discussion was useful, at least in so far as it would show the inconsistencies of the unbeliever in the hope that the Holy Spirit would change his heart as the claims of Christ were pressed upon him.

Needless to say, I left Westminster Seminary a changed person. I thought presuppositionalism was so clear and evident, that all Christians must surely agree. To my surprise I found great opposition among Christian and Reformed leaders to the apologetic method of

presuppositionalism. Even today, it saddens me that Van Tilian presuppositionalism is seldom adopted by young men coming out of seminary. The place where it really is taking root in men's hearts is in local church congregations among Christians sitting under preachers who are committed presuppositionalists.

Modernism was a system that assumed a neutral world of neutral facts where Christians and unbelievers could come together without reference to God and reason through the scientific method to arrive at truth. Eventually, however, it became increasingly clear that, on this view God became unnecessary and therefore irrelevant. A truce between God and the Devil always ends up in God being pushed out of the arena. Evidentialism is an apologetic method using the assumptions of modernism in seeking to prove the existence of God. According to consistent evidentialism the problem with man is not ethical, but simply intellectual. If we reason together, assuming the neutrality of the facts, we can convince men that there is a God. Unbelievers are simply encouraged to look at the facts, without first assuming that they are "God created facts." In this way evidentialism has been trying to convert modernists for years—by adopting the very presuppositions of modernism. They have not been very successful.

Today, however, there is occurring a "paradigm shift" in intellectual circles, where modernism is being challenged by a new world and life view labeled post-modernism. What is a paradigm shift? It is a change in the way people view the world. The move from Creationism to Darwinism was a paradigm shift. The move in counseling from a foundation based upon theology to the pseudo-science of psychology was a paradigm shift. A change in a person's view of professional baseball from being as American as apple pie, to a view that it is a sport for greedy baseball players to get rich at the expense of the sports fan, is a paradigm shift. A paradigm shift is a change in the way we view things and thus a

rejection of assumptions which beforehand we accepted as fact.

Post-modernism is challenging the modernism of which I was taught in the public schools. Post-modernism is based upon the premise that everyone is biased. For example, post-modernists proclaim that American history as taught by modernists is not true. Traditional American history is the intentional attempt of one ethnic group in power (namely White Anglo Saxon Protestants, "WASPS") to impose their views upon other ethnic groups. The language of history has no meaning (Deconstructionism) unless it is viewed as the instrument of power to bring the control of one group over another. Thus history needs to be re-written. History is not neutral. It depends upon the bias of those in power who write the history books. Courses in college like Western Civilization is Eurocentric in bias and must be substituted (not simply supplemented) by other views such as Afrocentric history. At one point post-modernism has become so ridiculous that some post-modern historians have suggested that native American's (formerly known as Indians) political views had more influence on the United States Constitution than did either Christianity or the so-called European Enlightenment. The problem is that WASPS have been writing history for the purpose of maintaining their dominance over minority groups in America.

Likewise, science is not merely neutral, but it has been the attempt to impose the values of the ruling majority upon the minority. Unless one sees science in this light, then he does not understand the true nature of science.

Thus, to some extent, post-modernism has exposed modernism as a faith system which rests upon certain biases in its search for truth. There is no neutrality, but only a power struggle of ethnic and religious groups in power to impose their mentality upon minority groups.

Post-modernism is capturing the modern

mind, especially at the university level. My daughter is a Dormitory RA (Resident Assistant) at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. During her required training for this position, her curriculum defined “isms” as that which refers to the definition of terms. The curriculum went on to say that an “ism” is “the oppression of an individual or group in the minority (according to race, sex, age, religion, ability, etc.) by the majority.” “Heterosexism” was defined in the university curriculum as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one orientation over another, and thereby the right to dominate.” Sound familiar? It is post-modernism capturing the university, all at the expense of the Tennessee taxpayers.

To the extent that post-modernism is challenging the neutrality of modernism, I rejoice. Post-modernism has exposed the lie that men operate on a neutral playing field and come to the knowledge of truth as they reason together.

However, it must be made clear that post-modernism, although it raises the right questions about modernism, also has the wrong answers. It only seeks to replace one power structure with another. Is Afrocentrism any better than Eurocentrism? Who is to say that one is better than another? Is homosexuality better than heterosexuality? Who is to be the judge? Is not the issue of modernism verses post-modernism ultimately a power struggle and to the victors belong the spoils? Even though post-modernism offers no more hope than modernism, at least it challenges the presuppositions of neutrality held so forcefully by the modernists. The problem is that it seeks to substitute one set of corrupt presuppositions for another.

As a presuppositionalist, I can rejoice that the underpinnings of modernism are being challenged. This is what presuppositionalists have been doing for years, but it seems few were listening. The challenge for us as Christians is to take advantage of this paradigm shift, and show

that both systems, whether modernism or post-modernism, are based upon false and corrupt presuppositions.

At root, all systems of belief, all paradigms, all world and life views, are based upon some religious presuppositions. We must challenge all of them with the presuppositions of the Christian faith, which is the only real truth, because it is based upon the true and living, self-contained God who reveals Himself to man. That is our starting point. We must proclaim to others that all other starting points are false and empty, and will only bring God’s judgment upon them. For those who repent of promoting false presuppositions in rebellion against God, there is forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have tried to simplify a relatively complex topic in a few short paragraphs. I hope this will at least stimulate more interest in this important topic. For further reading on the topic of post-modernism, I would recommend the book *The Death of Truth*, Dennis McCallum, General Editor. This book can be obtained through Gary DeMar and “American Vision” or through Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN. 55438. The Book is introductory and is overall excellent reading. However, it should be noted that the writers are not presuppositionalists, and on several occasions relapse into the mode of modernism in proposing solutions to the battle between modernism and post-modernism.

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About Letters of Attestation

by

G. I. Williamson

A question was addressed to me recently by a pastor of one of the secession churches. The consistory of his church had received a letter of attestation from one of our Orthodox Presbyterian Churches for a family wishing to transfer membership to their church. The question went something like this: “Don’t your churches include information about such things as the date of birth and baptism of covenant children?” Evidently the letter they had received was only a general statement about their membership status, without such precise information. This confirmed an impression that I received years ago during my ministry in New Zealand—namely, the fact that there is much to learn from the better examples of the continental Reformed tradition.

I have in my possession a number of constitutions—from several American Presbyterian bodies—and none of them give much attention to this need. One of the fullest that I have found is in Article 52 of the Book of Government and Worship of the (old) United Presbyterian Church of North America.

52. Records.—Every session shall keep an exact record of its proceedings and a roll of the members of the congregation in full communion, together with a register of all deaths, removals, or other changes in the membership, of all baptisms, and of all contributions of the congregation. The roll of communicants shall be revised at least once a year, and especially before application is made for a call to a minister. The records shall, at least once a year, be submitted to the presbytery for revision, and annually there shall be made to the presbytery a report of the membership and the changes therein, of baptisms and contributions, and whatever else may be necessary for a full record of the work of the congregation.

Yet though there is a recognition that these records are very important, there is no indication that the information contained in these records was supposed to be sent to another congregation in the event of a transfer of membership. There were three forms which were to be used for such transfers.

1. CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP AND DISMISSAL

It is hereby certified thatis a member in full communion of the United Presbyterian Church of, and is, atown request, dismissed to unite with the United Presbyterian Church of, or any other Church of Christ where God in His providence may direct, and when so received all responsibility to this Session shall cease.

By order of Session,

.....Moderator

.....Clerk

Given at this .. day of, 19...

About Letters of Attestation

2. CERTIFICATE FOR A MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN SOME TIME ABSENT

It is hereby certified that.....was a member in full communion of the United Presbyterian Church of up to 19....., when removed from the bounds thereof, and that, as far as known to this Session, may be received into the membership of any Church of Christ.

By order of Session,

.....Moderator

.....Clerk

Given at this .. day of, 19...

3. CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP FOR ONE ABSENT FROM HOME

I hereby certify that..... is a member in full communion in the United Presbyterian Church of, and is entitled to Christian fellowship wherever..... may be duringabsence from us.

Given at..... this day of, 19....

..... Pastor

These forms (above) are much too lax with respect to the question of the faithfulness of receiving churches. Yet it is clear that an attempt was being made—by means of these forms—to deal with the increasingly common problem of the mobility of the American people. In the intervening years this phenomenon has not only increased here in the United States, but has now become more and more common throughout much of the world. Employees who work for the large multi-national companies are often called on to serve in places far from home, and sometimes for a considerable period of time. It is my opinion that people who face this situation have a greater need than ever for fellowship with the body of Christ, and it is therefore part of our duty as ordained servants to do all that we can to help people in this situation to avail themselves of every opportunity to profit by the means of grace.

The consequence of all this, as I see it, is that there is more and more need for some kind of membership certificate that can be carried by a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for use as a means of introduction to faithful Reformed churches.¹ But my main concern here is to urge clerks of session in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to include in all letters of attestation which are intended for a transfer of membership, the kind of information that could be important for the receiving church to have. To this end I here give a few suggested forms.

¹ During the years of my ministry in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand I discovered that this was standard practice among Churches of the continental Reformed tradition.

About Letters of Attestation

THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

The Session of _____ Orthodox Presbyterian Church of _____
 _____, at the request of our member[s] listed below, presents this state-
 ment of membership to you, _____
 Church of _____

We commend them to your Christian fellowship and request you to receive them with Christian love and
 provide them with appropriate pastoral care.

MEMBERSHIP RECORD

Last Name _____ Ph. # (____) _____
 Address _____

Given Name	Date of Birth	Date of Baptism	Date of Profession	Prior Membership (if any)
Single				
Husband				
Wife				
Children				

By order of Session, given at _____, this _____ day of _____ 19____
 _____ Moderator
 _____ Clerk

Membership Receipt - (Please return as soon as possible):

This is to certify that the membership of _____
 of the _____ Orthodox Presbyterian Church was received and accepted
 by the _____ Church of _____.

_____ Clerk
 _____ Date

About Letters of Attestation

A certificate of Church membership intended for use during extended absence from home would appear like this:

<p>THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</p> <p>A CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP</p>
<p>The Session of _____ Orthodox Presbyterian Church of _____ _____ for the benefit of our member[s] listed below, presents this attestation of membership.</p>
<p>We commend him __ her __ them ____ to your Christian fellowship and ask you to provide Christian fellowship and any appropriate pastoral care during a visit among you.</p>
<p>MEMBERSHIP RECORD</p>
<p>Name(s) _____ _____</p>
<p>Home Telephone # (____) _____</p>
<p>Home Address _____</p>
<p>By order of Session, Given at _____, this _____ day of _____ 19__</p>
<p>_____ Moderator _____ Clerk</p>

There is one other matter that deserves attention here. What kind of information should be included when a certificate of membership is sent to another church? Should it, for example, include information about a persistent lack of faithfulness in using the means of grace? It is my opinion that it should. When the elders of the church have had serious difficulty in bringing a brother or a sister to honor their membership vows, I believe we owe it to that brother or sister—*but also to the Session of the Church to which they are moving*—to give some indication of this concern. When this is done wisely and faithfully it may very well prove to be of eternal significance as the elders of the receiving church take up the burden of shepherding these weaker (and sometimes even delinquent) members. (I think it is also just as important to add a brief note of special commendation when those who have been exemplary in their faithfulness are certified to another congregation). I believe this is one of the greatest needs in the church today—consistent cooperation between sending and receiving churches in the oversight of God's people. Some of the Apostle Paul's concluding statements in several of his epistles points the way for us today in this important responsibility.²

² Note particularly the following: Ro. 16; Col. 4:7-17; 2 Tim. 4:10, 14.

Leading in Worship, A Sourcebook for Presbyterian Students and Ministers, Drawing Upon Biblical and Historic Forms of the Reformed Tradition. Terry L. Johnson, Editor. Published by The Covenant Foundation, Oak Ridge, TN. Cloth, 185 pages, \$17.95. Reviewed by the Editor.

This book is another attempt to rediscover—and recover—some of the unity and beauty of the historic worship practices of the Presbyterian and Reformed heritage. This is certainly much needed today because of the present chaos in worship wherein, it seems, almost anything goes. Suffice it to say, then—on the positive side—that there is much of value in this book. I speak here of material in the chapters on ‘Regular Services’, ‘Occasional Services’ and the ‘Appendices.’

I find it my inescapable duty, however, to lament the fact that this book devotes an entire chapter to the kind of ‘Seasonal Services’ (i.e. Christmas, Good Friday, etc.) that the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in their earlier (and, in this respect, better) days abhorred. It is the conviction of this reviewer that the so-called “church year” has no basis whatever in Scripture, and is therefore contrary to the clear teaching of the great Reformed Confessions. The author of this study himself says: “We are convinced that the true need of the hour is precisely what Presbyterians have always had—simple, spiritual, substantial, reverent worship...” With this reminder we are in hearty agreement. But it was precisely because our Fathers *did* have that, that they did not want to add these things that God had never commanded—no, not even when the great multitude desired to have them. It is for this reason that I cannot unreservedly recommend this book.

The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism, by D. A. Carson. Published by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1996. 640 pages. Reviewed by Charles Wingard, Pastor of the OPC in Ipswich, Mass.

Readers of *Ordained Servant* know well the challenges presented by religious pluralism in American life. Not only must the Christian pastor engage adherents of traditional non-Christian religions, he must also present the exclusive truth claims of Christ to men and women who deny the very existence of religious truth. Some are merely carried along by the relativistic currents that flow through American life. Others present an informed and articulate assault against the universal truth claims of the Christian faith.

Therefore, readers of *Ordained Servant* will be encouraged by D.A. Carson’s *The Gaggling of God*. The author shows an extraordinary breadth of reading as he details the profound influence that religious pluralism exerts on American life. Unfortunately, the reality of pluralism in American life has caused many within the church to retreat from the exclusive truth claims of the gospel. Of great concern to the author is the willingness on the part of many evangelicals to soften the biblical witness to the finality of God’s saving revelation in scripture, the particularity of God’s redemptive grace, the necessity of faith in the Christ for eternal life, and the reality of the eternal punishment of the wicked. The “two-covenant” (to Jewish/Gentile) missions, postmortem evangelism, and annihilationism are ably refuted. Throughout *The Gaggling of God* Dr. Carson, by careful exegesis and sensitivity to Biblical theology, demonstrates convincingly that “the Bible’s Plot-line” does not permit a softening of the hard truth that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

But perhaps most helpful are the many pastoral insights which will assist ministers in cultivating a loving sensitivity to a skeptical world, while at the same time providing positive proposals for a thoughtful witness to a pluralistic American culture. The author’s ministry of the word of God in many pagan settings has equipped him to be a helpful guide for ministers of the Reformed faith.

ORDAINED SERVANT

Index to Volume 5 - 1996

Issue #1

Editorial Notes.....	1
Confidence in Our Brethren: Creedal Subscription in the OPC, by <i>John R. Muether</i>	2
On Being a Confessional Church, by <i>the Editor</i>	8
Corporate Responsibility, by <i>the Editor</i>	10
C.H.S. on Politics.....	14
Ross Graham - 1.....	16
ComputerInfo.....	21
Computer Software Review.....	22
Book Review.....	23
Practical Ecumenicity.....	24

Issue #2

Editorial Notes.....	25
What (Most) Pastors Need.....	26
Specific Help for Elder Visiting, by <i>John R. Sittema</i>	28
Presbytery of the Southwest's <i>Recommended Handbook for Men Under Care of Presbytery</i>	31
The Use and Abuse of Church History, by <i>J. G. Vos</i>	39
The Biblical Origins of the Presbytery, by <i>Ross Graham</i> (the second in this series).....	42
Question Box.....	47
Book Reviews.....	48

Issue #3

Editorial Notes.....	49
The Story of Old Side Presbyterianism, by <i>John R. Muether</i>	50
The Outstanding Need of the OPC, by <i>Lawrence Eyres</i>	57
Appraising the Value of the Internet for Ministry, by <i>David W. Hall</i>	59
Terrible Honesty in an Age of Sentimentalism, from " <i>Modern Reformation</i> ".....	64
The Biblical Foundation of the Diaconate, by <i>George W. Knight III</i>	66
Resurrecting the Resurrection, by <i>G. I. Williamson</i>	69
Book Reviews.....	71

Issue #4

Editorial Notes.....	73
Remember the Big Picture, by <i>Bruce Coie</i>	74
The Outstanding Need of the OPC (Part 2), by <i>Lawrence Eyres</i>	77
Indians, Farmers, and Church Officers, by <i>Larry Wilson</i>	79
The Story of Old Side Presbyterianism, by <i>Ross Graham</i>	81
The Post-Modern Paradigm Shift, by <i>Larry E. Ball</i>	87
About Letters of Attestation, by <i>G. I. Williamson</i>	91
Book Reviews.....	95
Index to <i>Ordained Servant</i> , Volume 4.....	96