

ORDAINED SERVANT



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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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under direction of

Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, Rev. Larry Wilson and Rev. William Shishko

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With the previous issue of *Ordained Servant* a separate page was sent asking for your comments, criticisms and suggestions for this publication. Our thanks to the pastors and sessions that responded. Did your pastor or session respond? If not, perhaps it was an oversight and you still intend to do it. We hope you will. It would be appreciated.



For our final issue for the year we plan something special: namely, an extensive set of indices—by *subject*, by *author*, and by *issue*—covering eight years of publication of *Ordained Servant*. A member of the Christian Education Committee which has oversight of this publication—Mr. John Muether—has kindly undertaken the task of compiling this information for us. It is our hope that when this compilation is finished it can also be used as a means of providing quicker access to this same material as it is posted on the OPC web site.



Do you have an insight which can be helpful to office-bearers in the broader church? Why not submit an article for possible publication in *Ordained Servant*? Of course, we cannot promise in advance to print every article which we receive, but we do wish to be a tool by which OPC office-bearers can help equip one another and so build up the church. So please consider submitting articles. We do ask that you try to write succinctly. That is, aim for brevity and clarity. It has been remarked that some of the Puritans were so *exhaustive* that they are often quite *exhausting*. And we do not see this as a virtue. The writings of John Murray, for example, are a striking contrast. They are—in our opinion—very much like the Puritan writers in *content*, and yet in striking contrast to them in *conciseness*. It is this that we strive for in *Ordained Servant*.



There is probably nothing more important to the well-being of the church than faithful and adequate training of its ministers. It is this conviction which has motivated the Christian Education Committee in recent years in planning the recently launched **Ministerial Training Institute (MTI)**. We therefore urge you to give special attention to the address by Dr. James Gidley which is reproduced in written form in this issue. It was given at the first official meeting of the MTI and is intended to set forth the thinking which has led the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training—and, indeed, the entire Committee on Christian Education—to propose, and now begin this effort. We have already been encouraged by the enthusiastic response on the part of men who plan to take courses that will be offered by the Institute. But we are well aware of our need of the prayers of the whole church as we seek now to faithfully carry out what we have begun. We would “*beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with...[us]...in your prayers to God*” (Romans 15:30).



One of the requests that we received at the recent General Assembly was this: to supply a list of names of men pictured on covers of issues of *Ordained Servant*. So, in this issue we identify those who are pictured on the cover of this issue as members of the Committee On Coordinatio. They are—from left to right—Mark T. Bube, Bruce A. Stahl, Douglas A. Felch, Donald M. Poundstone, Louis C. LaBriola, Garret A. Hoogerhyde, Ivan J. DeMaster, Ross W. Graham, Thomas E. Tyson, David E. Haney, John D. Williams. (Missing from this photo were Stephen L. Phillips and Russell W. Copeland, Jr. We also note that at the recent General Assembly, Mr. LaBriola was replaced on the committee by Paul H. Tavares. Paul is the son of deceased OP minister Henry Paul Tavares and is currently serving as an elder of our Grove City Church).

Pastor to Pastor: The Riches of Spurgeon (pt. 5)

by William Shishko



“He is the best speaker who can turn ears into eyes.” This ancient Arabic proverb offers wise advice to all speakers, and particularly to those who are called to proclaim the Gospel of everlasting life and peace. Our preeminent model is the Master Speaker himself, who used beautiful field lilies and finely plumed birds to illustrate the perfect care of our Father in Heaven. In His perfect mouth a widow’s mites became unforgettable lessons in giving, and the hairs of our head (however many or few!) abide as silent teachers of the sovereignty of God.

While most Reformed preachers prefer to nourish themselves and feed others on the meat of Pauline theological expression, dogmatic formulations, and the language of systematic doctrinal concepts (none of which is to be slighted), we must never forget that the staple diet of biblical preaching also includes the carbohydrates, starches, and fats of metaphors, similes, illustrations, and other forms of imagery that truly “turn ears into eyes.” Unturned cakes (Hos.7:8) and lukewarm water that make one want to vomit (Rev. 3:16) communicate far more than lengthy discourses on the marks and effects of spiritual compromise. The pains of childbearing (Gal. 4:19, Rom. 8:22) say what words cannot as the preacher lays before his people his own agony for their regeneration and the yearning of earth for its own deliverance from the miserable effects of the curse. From the models of the Scriptures, the greatest preacher Jesus Christ, and the best examples of preachers in church history we who preach today must, indeed, learn to “turn ears into eyes.”

Here, too, Charles Spurgeon provides a wealth of help for us. Drawing from history (both sacred and secular), biography, literature, mythology, the developing sciences, and current events, Spurgeon consistently showed himself a master at turning the ears of his massive congregation into eyes that saw the truths their pastor so passionately believed and proclaimed. To read a sermon of Spurgeon is to enter a room full of the finest furniture and decorations. But (unlike so many Reformed sermons that may have similar or even better such “content”), these rooms are well illu-

minated by windows large and small that dot the entire space allowing the full range of spiritual light to enter in. Through this all-important aspect of Spurgeon’s sermons one can truly see the truths of grace, feel the warmth of the Gospel, and experience the healing effects of Christ, the sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2). This, I am convinced, is the “secret” of the success and influence of Spurgeon’s sermons in his own day, and the key to their enduring quality over a century after they were delivered. Like his master, Spurgeon so spoke that “*the common people heard him gladly*” (Mark 6:37). We do well to learn from one who can help us in this area that is hardly known as a strength of our preaching.

To open the treasure box of a Spurgeon sermon or lecture is to find handfuls of perfectly cut jewels of metaphor. A call to mortification of sin and the benefit of life that comes by this discipline, cf. Rom. 8:13 becomes: “When this Achan is stoned and the accursed thing is put away, you will be surprised to find what joy, what comfort will immediately flow into your soul.” The ever-present propensity to lose optimism regarding the Gospel because of personal unbelief and the sins of the age is graciously rebuffed in this manner: “If anybody said to me, ‘The days are darker now than they used to be’, I should remember that the sun is still the same. Perhaps my friend has not lately cleaned his windows; or he has not drawn up his blinds; and that is why he thinks there is less light. It is very possible to be much more in the dark than you need to be. The gloom may be in the eyes rather than in the heavens. May I suggest a little looking at home, that you may see why your former blessedness is gone?” (How much more inviting it is to do self-examination after the wise use of such a figure rather than after the application of a verbal lash!) And the unchangeableness of biblical doctrine before winds of contemporary unbelief is presented this way: “The fair maid of truth does not paint her cheeks and tire her head, like Jezebel, following every new philosophic fashion; she is content with her own native beauty, and in her aspect she is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

Such word pictures abound like pretty wildflowers on a rural countryside. “All worlds are but sparks from the anvil of His omnipotence.” “Grace is the

light, our loving heart is the (film), Jesus is the person who fills the lens of our soul, and soon a heavenly photograph of his character is produced." "Now the sparks of the gospel fall into your soul as if they dropped into an ocean in which they are quenched forever." "There are many books that are excellently bound, but there is nothing within them." They are accompanied by memorable phrases that preach sermons in themselves: "As surely as you rob God of obedience, sin will rob you of comfort." "Grace is the dawn of glory." "Few are the dainties from the King's table which come to the dish of mistrust."

Here one finds masterful similes that make their point by being either down to earth or thoughtfully clever. "Omitted duty is like a little stone in the sole of your shoe." "Some people I know of are like inns, which have an angel hanging outside for a sign, but they have a devil within for a landlord", and (one of my favorites!): "I know some whose wretchedness is chronic – like polar bears they are only at home on the ice." Notice how your ears have become eyes!

Humor, too, is sanctified for the service of the preacher. While never going beyond the bounds of propriety, one can almost imagine the twinkle in his eye as Spurgeon (who loved a good laugh!) lovingly and unforgettably tells fellow preachers what many congregation members would be too respectful to say, "I heard one say, the other day, that a certain preacher had no more gifts for the ministry than an oyster. In my judgment that was a slander on the oyster, for that worthy bivalve shows great discretion in his openings, and he also knows when to close." Like his Master who drew on yeast, seeds, and little children to illustrate his points, Spurgeon drew on oysters, polar bears, and tiny stones. Do you do the same in your preaching?

Nowhere does Spurgeon's skill at "turning ears into eyes" show itself more than in his rhetorical pictures that throw light on the meaning of Christ's work. Here is how the theology of "Christ crucified, dead, and buried" is made vivid by the use of various biblical materials woven with the tools of personification, action, suspense, metaphor, and simile:

"At last the time came when hell had gathered up all its forces, and now was also come the hour when Christ, as our substitute, must carry his obedience to the utmost length; he must be obedient unto death. He has been a substitute up till now; will he now throw down his vicarious character? Will he

now renounce our responsibilities, and declare that we may stand for ourselves? Not he! He undertook, and must go through. Sweating great drops of blood, he nevertheless flinches not from the dread assault. Wounded in hands and in feet he still maintained his ground, and though, for obedience sake, he bowed his head to die, yet in that dying he slew death, put his foot upon the dragons' neck, crushed the head of the old serpent, and beat our adversaries as small as the dust of the threshing floor."

One must wonder aloud if people would be so hungry for non-biblical (and un-biblical) "pictures of Christ" if such eminently biblical "pictures of Christ" drawn from the actual content of the Scriptures were more a mark of our preaching.

All of this, of course, takes work. Even with Spurgeon's remarkable memory, the crafting of such items for the pulpit did not come without much general and particular preparation. Such preparation is, however, part of our work as preachers. We should labor at it with the confidence that God will use it to turn our often dark, stuffy, sermons into bright and airy proclamations of the living Word of God. Pay attention to the innumerable things that can turn your sermon lessons into illustrations. Study how other preachers (like Spurgeon) have done this in an exemplary manner. Discipline yourself to speak on all occasions with the use of similes, metaphors, and images that make even regular conversation sparkle. Review your sermon outline with the thought of "turning ears into eyes." Then go to the pulpit stripped of the idea that fine doctrinal formulations alone make a sermon. Let the people see your doctrine, breathe your teaching, taste the things of the Christ you are privileged to proclaim, feel the truths of sin and holiness, war and peace, hell and heaven, and even smell the fragrance of the Gospel, cf. 2 Cor. 2:14f. Both you and the congregation you are called to serve will sense the difference immediately!

May this series on "The Riches of Spurgeon" entice you to read more of the productions of this pulpit master who "*being dead still speaks*." And may they, in particular, help you to be preachers of the truth who aim at the conversion of the lost as well as the edification of the saints; and who do it with well-dressed sermons that truly adorn the Gospel of grace.

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IS GAMBLING A SIN?

by

G. I. Williamson

When I went to New Zealand in 1963 gambling was already a way of life there. It was quite a shock at the time and I thought: what a contrast with moral America. Would that the same could be said today! But the fact is that the moral decline of our nation is such that this could not be said today. And it is my conviction that the failure of the church to uphold the law of God is one of the primary reasons for this decline. Oh that the Lord would revive his church again so that it would, among other things, speak out against the evil of gambling.

Now it is an interesting fact that the Bible does not say 'Thou shalt not gamble.' This is because the Bible does not attempt to draw up a list of all of the specific sins that people may indulge in. No, what the Bible does is to furnish us with ten immovable principles—the ten commandments—together with a complete Bible that furnishes us with a commentary on these ten principles. And by comparing scripture with scripture we can discern how these ten laws apply to things such as gambling. Thus the Larger Catechism of our church addresses this issue in its exposition of the 8th commandment. This is what it says:

Q. 142. What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?

Ans: The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving any thing that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing landmarks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust inclosures and depopulations; ingrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbour what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting

worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, **wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.**

Now there was a time when strict Presbyterian and Reformed people frowned on the use of dice or cards for the simple reason that they were often used in gambling. In this I believe they were mistaken. I see nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that dice and cards are inherently evil. They may be used—or rather misused—for evil, but that does not make them evil per se. No, it is not what is used for gambling that makes gambling a sin. It is, rather, the moral and spiritual attitude of the people who misuse these things. And it is in this that we find clear Scriptural proof—by good and necessary inference—that gambling is a sin.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines gambling as: 1. *a. To bet on an uncertain outcome, as of a contest. b. Games. To play a game of chance for stakes.* 2. *To take a risk in the hope of gaining an advantage or a benefit.* 3. *To engage in reckless or hazardous behavior.* From this it would appear that there are three essential elements in gambling: (1) The element of *uncertainty*—no one but God knows how things are going to turn out. (2) The second is the element of *risk*—something of value, usually money, is wagered (put in jeopardy). (3) The element of *inequity*—someone (often just *one*, or only *a few*) will gain while someone else (often *many*) will lose.

Now, of course, it isn't hard to think of things other than gambling in which one or another of these elements may be present. To undergo a medical operation usually involves both an element of uncertainty as to the outcome, and an element of risk that the outcome may be negative rather than positive. But there is no personal gain

for the patient at the expense of others. Other patients do not suffer loss because this patient gains. Yet that is the case with gambling. Again, farming certainly involves uncertainty, and probably involves risk. Will this new farming method work? Or will the weather this year nullify my efforts? Yet here, again, there are no other persons who instantly and automatically gain from my loss—or lose from my gain. And the fact that the losers know beforehand that they will probably have to reluctantly relinquish their money does not in any way cancel the fact that the winner profits at the expense of others (who did not desire to give their money to the winner).

The Bible says *“Take heed and beware of covetousness”* or, as the NASB translates it, *“be on your guard against every form of greed”* (Lk. 12:15). But it is this very thing that gambling feeds on. Gambling appeals to “the love of money” which the Bible identifies as the root of all sorts of evil (1 Tim. 6:9,10). The one who gambles desires to enrich self at the expense of others. Yet the Bible says we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and it says the love commanded by our Lord *“does not seek its own”* (1 Cor. 13:5) and *“does no harm to a neighbor”* (Rom. 13:10). Furthermore, gambling is contrary to the work ethic taught by the Apostle! *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need”* (Eph. 4:28). In gambling there is no delight in the principle taught by our Lord—namely, that it is more blessed to give than to receive—but, to the contrary, the delight is in serving self at the expense of others.

Someone has well said that gambling is stealing by mutual consent—and the fact that it is by mutual consent does nothing to redeem it. W. E. Bierderwolf observed that: “Gambling bears the same relationship to robbery that dueling does to murder. One man will meet another in a dark alley and take his life at the end of a pistol, and you call it murder; two men will meet each other in an alley and agree to shoot each other until one or both fall dead, and you call it dueling. But the only difference is that in the first case there is one murder, and in the second there are (possibly) two! One man will meet another in a dark alley and take his money at the end of a pistol and you

call it robbery; two men will meet each other round a table and agree to take each other’s money with dice or cards, and you call it gambling. But the only difference is that in the first case there is only one robber and in the second there are two” (Quoted in Christianity Magazine, Sept. 1990, p. 10).

Gambling also involves many other consequences that are too seldom thought about. How, for instance, could any sincere Christian accept money won by gambling if he is once made aware of the terrible price that others—without their willing consent—have paid in order to enrich him. It is a fact that gambling being what it is—and the sinful nature of fallen humans being what it is—gambling is very addictive. We hear much today about the proceeds from State-authorized gambling going to support all sorts of things in the public arena. But when are we informed of the fact that (as reported in Christianity Today, July 10, 1987): “A Maryland study found that the poorest one-third of the state households bought half of all weekly lottery tickets...(while) Another study concluded that the lotteries in Connecticut and Massachusetts were equivalent to a state sales tax of over 60 percent on lower-income groups.” It doesn’t take much imagination to realize that many children, in such households, are being deprived of many things—including the adequate daily nourishment that they need—because of the gambling addiction of their parents.

In conclusion let me recommend a recent book entitled *The Ten Commandments* by Prof. J. Douma (translated from the Dutch language by Prof. Nelson Kloosterman, of Mid-America Reformed Seminary). In this book there is an excellent discussion of some of the issues touched on in this article (cf. especially pp. 101-106, 347 & 348). I think a careful reading of these sections will underline the importance of remembering that the evil of gambling is not to be located in the materials used, but in a correct understanding of both the intentions of the heart and the effect upon others.

The bottom line is this: the church today needs to clearly testify against the rampant *sin* of gambling.

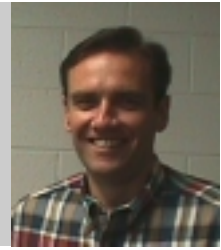


Geerhardus Vos

(1862 - 1949)

by

John R. Muether and D. G. Hart



Nineteen ninety-nine marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Geerhardus Vos, widely acknowledged as the father of Reformed Biblical theology. A descendent of French Huguenots, Vos was born in the Netherlands on March 14, 1862. He immigrated to the United States in 1881, when his father accepted a call to a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church, and he enrolled in what is now Calvin College, in Grand Rapids. From there he continued his studies at Princeton Theological Seminary (1883-1885), and he eventually earned his Ph.D. from the University of Strassburg in 1888.

After teaching at Calvin for a few years, Vos went on to serve at Princeton Theological Seminary nearly forty years, where he taught many of the founding ministers of the OPC, such as Machen, Murray, Stonehouse, and Van Til. Yet Vos is not normally included in the chain of Old Princeton giants that preceded Machen and the OPC (a list generally restricted to Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield). Vos was “largely a forgotten man,” according to one biographer. “Enrollment in his courses at [Princeton] often was sparse compared to those of other professors of a more ‘popular’ type, because of the weightiness of his lectures.”

Another explanation for Vos’s relative obscurity was his low ecclesiastical profile. Rarely did he step outside the classroom and into the courts of the church (though he fought Presbyterian attempts to revise the Westminster Confession). Nearing retirement when Machen founded Westminster in 1929, Vos, an opponent of Princeton’s reorganization, did not leave Princeton for Westminster, nor did he ever join the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Instead, he retired to southern California in 1932, and he then moved to Grand Rapids in 1937, where he lived until his death in 1949. Moreover, Vos never wrote for the Westminster Theological Journal or the Presbyterian Guardian. While Machen and other founders of the OPC may never have fully understood Vos’s reasons for remaining in the

PCUSA, there seemed a greater willingness to forgive him than others who stayed in. (The Guardian provided partial absolution in its obituary for Vos, noting that “when he retired in 1932, he left a valuable part of his library to Westminster Seminary.”) Undoubtedly Catharine Vos, the author of the popular Child’s Story Bible, has been far more widely read by Orthodox Presbyterians than her husband.

Much like Cornelius Van Til, Vos was an acquired taste. Biblical theology and presuppositional apologetics were new subjects in the curriculum of Presbyterian seminaries. Like Van Til, English was not Vos’s native language, and his books quickly went out of print before their rediscovery after his death. His most well known work, *Biblical Theology*, was edited by his son and published by Eerdmans in 1948, just before his death.

Just as Vos was never a member of the OPC, so many of his best contemporary interpreters lie outside the denomination. James T. Dennison edits *Kerux*, a journal dedicated to redemptive-historical preaching in the Vosian tradition. At Gordon-Conwell Seminary, G. K. Beale is applying Vos’s insights in New Testament exegesis (see for example his latest commentary on Revelation).

Still, it can be fairly said that no non-OPCer this century has influenced the denomination as much as Geerhardus Vos. Orthodox Presbyterians often describe themselves as a hybrid between Old Princeton and Dutch Calvinism. More than anyone else, Vos’s long career at Princeton forged links between American Presbyterianism and Dutch Calvinism that were to shape the character of the OPC. Latter day Vosians in the church include Meredith G. Kline and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

For Vos, “biblical theology” was short-hand for the study of the history of special revelation. So the starting point of his theology was acknowledgment of the progressive character of the revelation that accompanies God’s redemptive activity. Vos likened this progress to the growth of a tree: “It is

sometimes contended that the assumption of progress in revelation excludes its perfection at all stages. This would actually be so if the progress were non-organic. The organic progress is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree.”

In historian Mark Noll’s words, Vos was “attempting to roll back the assumption, prevailing since the late seventeenth century, that historical consciousness was the natural ally of naturalistic views of the Bible.” For Vos, this historical progression culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ, whose work is revealed in the New Testament in terms of present inauguration and future consummation. G. K. Beale argues that while this interpretive approach is now standard (cf. Cullmann, Ridderbos, and Ladd), “Vos appears to be the first European or American scholar to espouse an ‘already and not yet eschatology’” to the theology of Paul. Yet the historical sensibilities in Vos’s work has yet to gain full acceptance within the OPC, where suspicions persist that his approach may still concede too much to naturalism. Thus some contemporary exegesis of Scripture (for example, on creation), continues to miss its eschatological dimension.

Though originally a systematician, Vos’s first love was biblical theology. Some of his followers suggest that Vosian biblical theology calls into question the very nature of dogmatics. Does Vos require a fundamental recasting of the categories of systematics? Can we even speak of a “system of doctrine” after Vos?

Those who would pit biblical theology against systematics have difficulty explaining Vos’s long tenure at Princeton and especially his close friendship with Warfield. And Vos himself would hardly identify his insights as Copernican. He was deeply grounded in the Reformed dogmatic tradition. Far from jettisoning systematic theology, Vos was a staunch defender of Reformed confessional orthodoxy, and he used biblical theology to give fresh and creative defense of dogmatics, such as the doctrines of the covenant, soteriology, and the kingdom of God. The two disciplines were complementary, each transforming the biblical data in different ways. “Biblical theology draws a line of

development,” Vos wrote. “Systematic theology draws a circle.” Following in the footsteps of Vos, Meredith G. Kline sees no hard and fast distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology: “biblical theology involves the systematization of the covenantal data under relatively broad historical epochs.”

Vos’s biblical-theological identification of the church as a pilgrim people has made the most indelible imprint on the OPC, even while it has provoked some of the OPC’s strongest critics. American Christians are prone to judge the success of the church in terms of its influence in the world. For this reason, many have dismissed the OPC as “irrelevant” for its want of a social or cultural agenda. Seen from an eschatological perspective, however, it is more accurate to say that the OPC is committed to the “irrelevance” of the world to the church.

The OPC has been molded by Vos’s reminder that, as part of the new eschatological order unveiled in the coming of Christ, the church locates its hope in a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Secured in a life that is hid in Christ in the heavenlies, the church longs for the return of her Lord. This eschatological location of the church as the kingdom inaugurated and awaiting consummation is the legacy of Vos. For that source of solid hope and comfort, the OPC abandoned aspirations for earthly glory. A half-century after Vos’s death, political gospels and this-worldly agendas continue to tempt the church. Reformed orthodoxy needs to give a fresh hearing to Geerhardus Vos, perhaps now more than ever.

D. G. Hart and John Muether are coauthors of *Fighting the Good Fight, A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Both are OPC ruling elders — Mr. Hart at Calvary OPC, Glenside, PA and Mr. Muether in Lake Sherwood OPC, in Orlando, FL.

EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

An Evaluation of Evangelism Explosion

by

Rev. Ralph A. Pontier



I was once a certified trainer in the well-known evangelism program called *Evangelism Explosion* (EE). I took my training in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, from people trained directly by Dr. D. James Kennedy, the creator of EE. Dr. Kennedy led one of the classroom sessions I attended and was available for questions and answers afterward. I did calling in Ft. Lauderdale under the supervision and instruction of members of the Coral Ridge church who had been in the program for many years. I also taught the course two or three times at the church I served in Florida and once at a church I served in Iowa. However I would not recommend its use without severe modifications that I'm sure would not be acceptable to its creators and would, in essence, make it an entirely different program.

I believe that many in evangelical churches, today, have lost a biblical understanding of evangelism. The Bible shows that the primary and appointed means of evangelism is the preached Word. For example: *"You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God... And this is the word that was preached to you"* (1 Peter 1:23ff).

There are also texts that instruct men to preach the word (e.g. Luke 24:45-49; 2 Tim. 2:4), texts that show people being converted through preaching (Acts 2:37; 10:44; 1 Thes. 1:5), texts that summarize sermons (Acts 17:22-34) and so forth. Preaching was the chief activity of the apostles and of those who were chosen and appointed to leadership in the churches. This is summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism, in Q&A 65: **Where does faith come from?** The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel.

This does not mean that no one has ever been

born again through reading a tract or Bible portion—or reading a book—or hearing a neighbor “gossip” the good news—or listening to a Sunday School teacher. Dr. D. James Kennedy tells the story of a doctor who was converted when his patient ‘died’ but was then revived. The patient cried out when he revived, “I was in hell and I don't want to go there again. What do I have to do to be saved?” The doctor remembered the “sinner’s prayer” for accepting Christ that had been drilled into him as a youth, but he had always resisted. He was so shaken by what his patient claimed to have experienced that he not only told the patient what to pray but also prayed it along with him for himself. No doubt God can—and perhaps, sometimes, does—employ such strange ways to bring sinners into the Kingdom. But the fact that such a means can be used of

God, doesn't mean that He wants us to make this our focus. Scripture makes it clear that God wants His church to focus on the official proclamation of the good news by men called, equipped and set apart by the church for that work.

Even when someone is born again through means other than preaching, some-

thing special and wonderful takes place when he or she hears the Word of God preached. Someone has defined ministers of the Word as heralds of the King, proclaiming the message of the King with the authority delegated by the King. If a college student leads a dormitory Bible study and explains the gospel to his peers and those peers scoff they are certainly guilty, but their guilt is not as great as if they had refused to believe a minister of the Word. Jesus said it will be harder on the Day of Judgment for the Scribes and Pharisees than for the men of Sodom and Gomorrah because of what they had seen and heard directly from God.¹

Many in evangelical churches today have, I believe, lost a biblical understanding of evangelism. The Bible shows that the primary and preeminent means of evangelism is the preached Word.

Many ministers do not share this view of preaching. For them, preaching is just one among many tasks of the ministry and certainly not the most important. This leads to low expectations for preaching—expectations, which become self-fulfilling, both with regard to content and results. It also leads to a focus on “programs” and “groups” as the main functions of the church and liturgical readings or music as the main substance of worship. Programs and groups are not bad, but they are not the primary ministries of the church.

Ministers should realize the importance of their work and expect God to do great things through preaching. Knowing that it is the God ordained means of rebirth, (as well as feeding the flock) ministers should labor tirelessly at preparing good sermons. They should preach for conversion, calling people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Preaching should not be viewed as a theological lecture. It should rather be viewed as fishing for men. Preachers have to learn how to cast the net and draw it in (see “*Sermons Which Catch Sinners*” in the January 1999 Banner of Truth magazine). Christians also benefit from the call to conversion because conversion is a life-long process of putting to death the old man and putting on the new man (see HC Q&A 88-90).

Altar calls are not the right way to draw the net in. Altar calls started with Charles Finney in the 1830s. Finney, who was trained as a lawyer, and who became an evangelist shortly after his conversion, relied heavily on emotional manipulation and other psychological tools to get people to come forward to what he called “the sinners bench” where further pressure was applied to get a decision for Christ. Such methods usurp the work of the Holy Spirit and ought to be abhorrent to all Reformed believers. Finney believed that decisions for Christ were guaranteed if you just used the right method. Reformed believers who understand that they should not have altar calls in church, should not (with regard to EE)

1 - Contrary to *Report 44 on Office and Ordination* (CRC Acts of Synod, 1973 pp. 635-716) the difference between ministers and lay people is not just function or special task. It is also a matter of authority.

want to do them in living rooms either. Also, the results of evangelism should not be measured in decisions made, but rather in disciples made, baptized and taught all the things Christ has commanded.

One of the best things that laymen can do to bring people to Christ is live winsome and attractive Christian lives. The Apostle Peter tells us we are a “*royal priesthood*” and fulfill that priesthood, in part, by living “*such good lives among the pagans...that they see your good works*” 1 Peter 2:9-12. Christians should invite their friends and neighbors to church where they will hear the Gospel proclaimed by the King's herald. Scattering pamphlets to people who don't know you may bring in one out of a thousand. There is nothing inherently wrong with such a method, but it is hardly an

effective use of time or pamphlets. It is better to give them to people who are impressed by the character of your Christian life because you visited them when they were sick or in prison or be-

cause you lent a helping hand when they were in need.

Some laymen are especially gifted in explaining the Gospel message. Such should be encouraged by their elders to seek office in the church, especially the office of minister by going to seminary. Of course, not all will be able to go to seminary. Many such have served well as elders, who, through various means are involved in the lives of spiritually needy people.

EE as I know it (I've been out of contact with it for over ten years) **has some strengths.**

1. It requires the memorization of many Bible passages.
2. It teaches a good way to open up a conversation on spiritual matters.
3. The second diagnostic question is very useful in discovering what people are trusting in: If you had to stand before God and he asked you, “Why should I let you into heaven” what would you say to him?

Preaching should not be viewed as a theological lecture. It should rather be viewed as fishing for men.

4. The gospel outline includes an explanation of the sinfulness of man, guilt and substitutionary atonement, subjects missing in many evangelical circles today.
5. The importance of follow up and involving people in church is emphasized.
6. The best part of the program, attested by most participants, is that taking the course has helped them better understand the gospel and has strengthened their faith. Some participants become better able to, or less fearful of, articulating their faith.

EE also has some serious flaws:

1. *The gospel presentation is very weak* in its explanation of God and faith.
2. *The message is Arminian.* Becoming a Christian is presented as the result of something the sinner does. The method is also Arminian. Leading someone in the sinner's prayer in their living room is just as much an altar call as anything done by Billy Graham in a stadium.
3. Giving assurance of salvation to someone who has demonstrated no repentance (actual turning from sin to new obedience, not just a few moments of tears) is wrong and reaps a bitter fruit. *It can inoculate people against further calls to repentance and faith.*
4. The general assumption of EE is that any member of the church who takes the course can become an effective evangelist, ignoring the fact that God has only given "some" to be evangelists, and that the work of evangelism is closely associated with the work of a minister of the Word (see Eph. 4:11 and 2 Tim. 4:2,5). The Bible even warns that "*not many of you should presume to be teachers*" James, 3:1. Many participants in EE end up with a lot of guilt feelings because they are not very good at articulating the required content, but the leader keeps pushing them to do work they have not been given gifts for. Bad feelings can develop between church members when some who have been trained drop out of the program or others refuse to sign up.

5. *An EE program in place in a church may take the focus of evangelism away from where it should be: on the pulpit.*

One of the reasons *Evangelism Explosion* has enabled many churches to bring in new members is because it gets church members involved in loving, caring relationships with those outside the church. When calling teams call on the lonely, hurting, recently displaced, or other needy people, those people often sense, "these people really care about me." Such care and concern may easily lead to further contacts, Bible study, church attendance and eventually enrolling new members into the church.

We really should not need programs to make church members care about their hurting or needy neighbors. We should (and many do) care for them, even if they already are involved in a church. The goal is not to try and steal sheep, but just to show the love of Christ. In small rural communities where everyone has deep roots and a fixed place in the community social order, such genuine love may not change many church memberships but we should love one another regardless, to bring glory to Christ. Where people don't have deep roots and long-standing ties, or among people who have had some kind of unsettling experience like serious illness, moving, bereavement, unemployment, imprisonment, or divorce, such love may result in bringing new people to church where they can hear the gospel proclaimed and where the process of making disciples can take place. The most frequently missed golden opportunity for showing the love of Christ is not warmly greeting church visitors before and after worship services.

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The Presbytery's Role in Shepherding Pastors

by

Peter J. Wallace

A recent incident in the Presbytery of the Midwest has awakened a dormant idea from its slumbers. I am increasingly convinced that presbyteries are not living up to what a presbytery should be. Business and formal discipline receive plenty of attention, but is that all that presbyteries are supposed to do? Someone can easily fall between the cracks because the pastoral side of presbytery is wholly optional. If someone takes the initiative, he can develop a whole network of friendships and mentors, but without such initiative, he could spend his entire ministry in virtual isolation.

Hence, when one member of our presbytery sought spiritual counsel and wisdom, the presbytery offered him a committee which met a couple times, proclaimed him orthodox, and dissolved. A couple of its members tried sporadically to continue talking with him, but the presbytery forgot that he needed help. So he turned to someone who had a more organic understanding of the pastoral relationship—and he now is seeking to leave the OPC and join the Antiochene Orthodox Church.

How can we create a more pastoral understanding of the presbytery? It would certainly involve changing the way we think about presbyteries. It might even involve some structural changes. We currently have a belief, as a relic of the past, that ministers are members of presbytery rather than members of a congregation. I call it a relic of the past because it appears to have virtually no substance as a belief, and no obvious effects in our corporate life. Beyond our yearly visitation (which is not given to all members of presbytery—only to each congregation), where is the presbytery's pastoral oversight being exercised? In the local congregation, we not only worship together, but we have regular opportuni-

ties for fellowship, study, prayer, and spiritual development—not to mention systematic visitation and pastoral counseling. But where is that available (except upon special request) for pastors? We are beginning to develop better means for dealing with crises AFTER they arise, but how can we take our understanding of the organic nature of the body of Christ to PREVENT at least some such crises?

The basic question comes down to this: do we as pastors need one another?

The basic question comes down to this: do we as pastors need one another? Heinrich Bullinger once sent to John Calvin a book he had written with an

apologetic comment, suggesting that Calvin really didn't need to read it since he already knew everything in it. Calvin responded with a passionate rejection of Bullinger's attitude. Calvin insisted that he needed Bullinger to keep his own thinking in line. To paraphrase Calvin's letter: "*by myself I'm a heretic.*" Do we really believe that we need one another? If we did, we might act like it.

The biblical case for this approach may be found in the nature of the apostolic church. The only possible place where one pastor is found ministering by himself is Titus (even Timothy is ministering with Aquilla and Priscilla—2 Tim. 4:19). Even Paul operated within a team of ministers—often surrounding himself with younger ministers and interns. The churches in Jerusalem and Antioch were pastored by a presbytery of sorts (Acts 11:30; 13:1-3; 15:2, 6, 22). The Ephesian presbytery that met with Paul (Acts 20) was commanded as a body to watch out for the flock. If our presbyteries are so large (geographically or numerically) that it interferes with this responsibility, then it is incumbent upon us to do something about it.

Modern presbyteries bear little resemblance to the biblical model. This divergence is of fairly recent origin. Scottish and early American presbyteries felt no compunction about calling ministers to move from one church to another without a call from the congregation, though the congregation was allowed to accept or reject the minister. They even held the Lord's Supper together with all the local churches as a display of the visible unity of the regional church. Into the nineteenth century the Presbyterian churches in New York City were pastored by a team of ministers.

I offer one particular example as a model. The "presbytery" of Geneva met regularly for joint study and discussion of various problems in the churches. Not merely for conducting business, but for pastoral oversight, for mutual correction, and counsel in how to handle difficult situations. Philip Edgecombe Hughes's edition of *the Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva* contains some insights into the way the "presbytery" functioned there. The following quotation refers to "doctrine," but the topics under discussion were broader than mere systematics:

"Firstly, in order that all ministers may maintain purity and agreement of doctrine among themselves, it will be expedient for them to meet together on one particular day of the week for discussion of the Scriptures, and no one shall be exempt from this without legitimate excuse...As for those who preach in the villages under the jurisdiction of the Seignury, our ministers of the city should exhort them to attend whenever they are able. In the event of absence for a whole month, however, this is to be treated as gross negligence, except in the case of illness or some other legitimate hindrance." (p. 37-38) [After discussing the importance of discipline among the clergy...] *"For the effective maintenance of this discipline, every three months the ministers are to give special attention to see whether there is anything open to criticism among themselves, so that, as is right, it may be remedied." (p. 40)*

Naturally this is referring to a single city (although it included the regional church), but it consisted of at least five pastors, plus the several village pastors surrounding Geneva. Within a few decades the number of pastors had increased significantly. Numerical size is not the issue. The regularity of oversight and discipline—one for another—is.

If you study the better monastic literature (the Rule of St. Benedict, Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule* [also translated as *Pastoral Care*], Bernard of Clairvaux, and the like), you will notice some real similarities. The Reformers did not reject the idea of the common life—they rejected the monastic vows and the idea of a "higher calling." If you compare Calvin's treatment of denying oneself with Gregory, you will find that Calvin took the monastic ideal, purged it of various unbiblical accretions, and insisted that it belonged to all Christians. Hence the ministers were expected to submit to one another on a regular basis.

Obviously many presbyteries are geographically too large for the whole body to get together. Many presbyteries are numerically too large for a meeting of the whole to provide the sort of pastoral oversight that I envision. But as helpful as geographical proximity is, it does not guarantee pastoral care, and small numbers mean nothing without a passionate commitment to shepherding one another. If the division of the presbytery is neither desirable nor practicable, I would suggest that the presbytery set up regional meetings. Each region could have regular monthly (at least) meetings for the discussion of issues, pastoral counsel, and godly fellowship. Each region should consist of roughly five to ten ministers, plus ruling elders. For example, in my presbytery—according to my count—there are thirteen ministers in Illinois, five in Iowa (though I think two are in the Presbytery of the Dakotas), twenty-two in Michigan, one in Ontario, and twelve in Wisconsin. Perhaps the regions could be Western Wisconsin/Iowa, Eastern Wisconsin, Illinois, Western Michigan, and Eastern Michigan.

Required meetings could be held every month except those months with business meetings. Perhaps at least half the meetings (if not more often), could be devoted to a specific topic. One member of the group would make a brief presentation, with discussion to follow. The topics would vary with the interests and needs of the group (ranging from “how do I handle this one” sorts of things, to relevant theological questions). Presentations could be exegetical and/or historical perspectives on issues to provoke discussion. Obviously each member of the group would not be expected to prepare one of these talks more than once a year. Other meetings could be devoted to simply talking through issues that have come up in the various congregations, encouraging and admonishing each other. Regions could combine and hold joint sessions involving special speakers, topics of joint interest, etc. In doing this, we would be taking some concrete steps to assert that ministers are TRULY members of presbytery, and can find counsel, wisdom, and fellowship from one another. The Reformation did not reject the authority which bishops exercised, rather they affirmed that the presbytery should exercise that authority over one another. Have we become virtual congregationalists by diminishing the pastoral authority of presbytery to occasional visits and discipline? Or will we let parachurch associations like the Whitefield Fraternals (wonderful as they are) take over the rightful calling of the church?

These meetings should not be optional. We should not say that pastoral oversight is less important than business and discipline. We all need the lamp of the Word to shine on our ministry—and not merely in our own study, but in the fellowship of the presbytery to which we are subject. If we say that members of the congregation must not forsake the assembling of themselves together, by what logic can we say that ministers are excused from such requirements? Many pastors may object that they are too busy for monthly meetings. But what if the meetings

were held on weekday mornings at 9:00 or 10:00? If the regional proposal were followed, few ministers would have to drive more than an hour or two, and since they would not be “business” meetings, the presence of a full complement of ruling elders would not be required (though ruling elders would be welcome). Even for the men from furthest away, they could still be home by early afternoon. Those men who are truly isolated could participate in an electronic meeting.

There are other ways of accomplishing the same ends. Requiring younger ministers to establish a mentoring relationship with an older minister is one; requesting older (perhaps retired) ministers to take on a counseling ministry for other pastors is another.

The reason I prefer the idea of a monthly meeting is because I am a presbyterian. I believe that what the Catholics and Episcopalians expect from the bishop is what the Scriptures expect of the presbytery. Until Presbyterians rediscover the pastoral function of presbytery we will be nothing more than quasi-congregationalists. Until we reassert the God-given authority of the presbytery—as the locus of pastoral care for pastors—we will continue to promote an individualistic conception of ministry and therefore of the Christian life. Our congregations will take what they see in us and imitate it. If we reflect the communion of saints in the presbytery, perhaps it will take better root in our congregations as well.

We should not say that pastoral oversight is less important than business and discipline.

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A MODEST PROPOSAL

by

Larry Wilson

Peter Wallace's good article, *The Presbytery's Role in Shepherding Pastors*, piques anew an idea I've been mulling over for a while. He asks, "How can we create a more pastoral understanding of the presbytery?" He observes that "what the Catholics and Episcopalians expect from the bishop is what the Scriptures expect of the presbytery." He warns that until we "Presbyterians rediscover the pastoral function of presbytery we will be nothing more than quasi-congregationalists." He challenges us to take "some concrete steps to assert that ministers are TRULY members of presbytery, and can find counsel, wisdom, and fellowship from one another."

How can we create a more pastoral understanding of the presbytery? This seems to be a growing desire. Again and again, the General Assembly is overtured to divide presbyteries into smaller bodies. I know that many in my own presbytery have also felt this need for more meaningful presbyterial care and fellowship.

But herein lies a dilemma. Smaller presbyteries can provide the relationships within which meaningful pastoral care can be effected. Larger presbyteries can provide the resources by which ministries like church planting can be carried forth with vigor. It seems that we need to choose between these two ideals. Do we value presbyterial care of its pastors? Choose a small presbytery. Do we value aggressive church planting? Choose a large presbytery.

But must it be either-or? Is there a both-and solution? Peter Wallace suggests that "the presbytery set up regional meetings." Here's where my idea comes in to play. The OPC has three levels of governing bodies — sessions, presbyteries, and General Assembly. But I note that the old PCUSA (even long before it was liberal) had four levels of governing bodies —

sessions, presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly. Could this provide a solution for us?

What if we changed our present larger presbyteries into synods and then subdivided them into smaller presbyteries which are geographically conducive to more frequent, shorter meetings? The synod could handle certain concerns needing greater resources and pooled wisdom — for example, church extension, candidates and credentials, youth ministry. The men in the presbyteries could engage in mutual pastoral care, much like Peter Wallace describes for the regional meetings. Perhaps they could help each other resolve certain conflicts and discipline problems before they become judicial cases which get appealed to presbytery and General Assembly. (I would also suggest that they should try to provide pastoring and fellowship for the pastors' wives.)

My point is that perhaps taking a page from presbyterian history can provide a helpful solution to our dilemma. On a presbytery level, we could have the relationships which make for meaningful pastoral care. On a synod level, we could have the resources which make for effective church extension.

If the OPC wanted to implement structural changes like this, it would have a lot of logistical details to work out. But what do you think of the idea in theory? Is it too outrageous even to consider? Or does it help toward a biblical answer to our dilemma?

Larry Wilson is Pastor of Grace OPC in Columbus, Ohio. He is also a member of the Committee on Christian Education, and of the subcommittee that oversees the publication of *Ordained Servant*.



A New Stage on the Pilgrimage of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

by

Dr. James Gidley

A few months ago, Jim Thomas and I were standing on a platform at the Philadelphia Airport, waiting for a train to take us to Glenside or Willow Grove. We began to talk about J. Gresham Machen and the choices he had made in the 20s and 30s. Something came home to me with peculiar clarity, and I said to Jim: "We're standing on this platform this evening because of the choices that Machen made seventy years ago."

Gentleman, we too are gathered here today because of the choices that J. Gresham Machen made seventy years ago.

The choices that Machen made in the 20s and 30s led to the formation of our beloved Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In that larger sense, none of us would be here for the 66th General Assembly were it not for Machen's choices. It has pleased God to maintain the Church in faithfulness to the Word of God through the intervening years.

But in a narrower sense, we are here today launching the MTIOPC because Machen chose to found a seminary first, and only later, when compelled, to call for the formation of a Church. We have existed now as a Church for 63 years without a denominational seminary. Today for the first time we meet to embark on a new experiment of providing theological instruction to ministerial candidates under the authority and direction of the Church itself.

We have not come to this point easily or overnight. The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training has been deliberating on training

men for the ministry for over six years now. I think the men of the SMT are coming to this enterprise with a sober realization that there is no such thing as an ideal pedagogical organization for the training of ministers. But at least we hope to promote a harmony between the Church

and the organizations that assist in the training of her ministers.

It is my task today to provide some vision for the enterprise on which we are embarking. I am going to plagiarize freely from an article that

appeared in the March issue of *New Horizons*. Unlike George Bush, I have only four points of light:

1. An OPC Identity, Not Isolationism

First, we aim to represent an OPC identity, not isolationism. As we begin to offer instruction to ministerial candidates, there is a danger of becoming ingrown. This would be untrue to the Reformed ecumenical spirit and history of the OPC. The distinguishing commitments of the OPC are not a parochial possession, but are fundamental to the struggles of the whole church of Jesus Christ in the contemporary world. Preserving a knowledge of our history and of its direct relevance to today's ecclesiastical scene will be a service not only to the OPC but also to the whole body of Christ.

2. Scholar-Preachers, not Shallow Preachers

Second, we wish to train scholar-preachers, not shallow preachers. I have exhorted the teachers gathered here today that the Institute's level of instruction must not fall behind the rigor of

any seminary's expectations. If anything, it must exceed them. We wish to train men who are fully equipped to open the treasures of the Word of God to the people of God.

3. Pastors, not Hired Men

Third, we wish to train pastors, not hired men. The Institute should prepare men to love and serve the Church as pastors, shepherding the flock of God. Like Christ, they must be prepared to lay down their lives for the flock. It is my hope that the teachers in the Institute will model that kind of spirit to their students.

4. A Journey, not a Destination

Fourth, we are embarking on a journey, not arriving at a destination. The Institute will be no resting place. It is an experiment in ministerial training. Over the next few years, the SMT will learn much about offering instruction to ministerial candidates. It is my hope that in three to five years, the SMT will be able to give the General Assembly wise counsel on one of the following three directions: (1) It is time to dissolve the MTIOPC because the seminaries have heard what we need and are doing a much better job of providing it; (2) We must continue the MTIOPC, with the following changes, to insure that our ministerial candidates are properly prepared; (3) We must now recommend the establishment of an OPC seminary on the following plan and timetable ...

I hope that you will find this vision to be consonant with your own. As we carry out this vision, what are we? Again, I have four points:

1. An Institute, not a Seminary

First, we are an institute, not a seminary. We will not come close to offering a full seminary curriculum. We will have to work with existing seminaries for the foreseeable future. Our goal is to offer instruction in five key areas:

(1) the Westminster Standards; (2) Presbyterian church polity, particularly as embodied in the OPC; (3) the history, character, and distinguishing characteristics of the OPC; (4) practical theology; and (5) presuppositional apologetics. Granted, some seminaries do an acceptable job at teaching some of these subjects, but we believe that no one seminary covers all of them well and that these are key areas of instruction for preparing men for effective, Biblical ministry in the OPC.

2. An Institute, not a Location

Second, we are an institute, not a location. We are not planning to have a campus. Rather, we intend to serve men preparing for or currently in ministry across the whole USA. We are considering offering instruction by a variety of means, including audio and video tapes, videoconferencing, correspondence, the Internet, traveling seminars, and regional or national conferences. As we draw near to the time for actual delivery of instruction, I want to elaborate on this point.

As the SMT has discussed this aspect of the Institute's work, we have felt the tension between strong enthusiasm for and cautious reserve about the opportunities and technologies of distance education. Despite their promise of effectiveness, do the modern telecommunication technologies carry with them such built-in liabilities that we ought to eliminate them or at least curtail their use severely?

Let me remind you that the challenges and opportunities of telecommunication technologies are not entirely unprecedented. At least two major communication technology revolutions have occurred in the history of civilization that are comparable to our present one: the invention of writing about 5,000 years ago, and the invention of the printing press on the eve of the Reformation.

**...we are embarking on a journey,
not arriving at a destination.**

The invention of writing first made it possible to communicate effectively at a distance. There are drawbacks to writing: Doesn't John tell us in 2 John 12: having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face that our joy may be full.?

Yet we would not, I trust, want to return to a civilization that had no writing. What would we do without it? We only have to look at our Bibles to answer this question, and read there, over nineteen centuries after they were written, the very words of 2 John 12.

And what of the printing press? It greatly magnified the power of writing. Again, you can easily think of drawbacks to this. But our brother G. I. Williamson has aptly pointed out: "What would have happened to the Reformation if the Reformers had said: 'What is this printing press thing? How can this new technology be of any use to the Kingdom of God?'" Printers can print Bibles or pornography, but this does not hinder printing from being a great blessing to the kingdom of God.

Now to return to the present: My friend and colleague at Geneva College, Dr. David Kuhns, has made a study of the difference between live theater performance on the one hand and movies and television on the other. He makes a persuasive case for the idea of "presence" that permeates the live theater. And he draws the appropriate analogy between "presence" in a live theater performance and "presence" at a worship service, as opposed to listening to a television evangelist.

Brothers, we may have to use the technologies of the "virtual" world, but we certainly do not want to produce "virtual" ministers. True, Biblical ministry requires "presence". At the same time, in the providence of God, we have both the opportunity and the need to use telecommunications technology to deliver some of our instruction to our students. We are all entering a learning process in which we will find

out how to use it without letting it use us. I don't have any magic formulas for how we will do this, but I would set a simple principle before you: Any communications technology is a blessing when it draws near those who would otherwise be apart. It becomes pathological when it drives apart those who would otherwise be near.

3. A Church Institute, not a Para-Church Organization

Third, we are a Church Institute, not a para-church organization. The Institute will be an-

The Institute will be answerable to the Church through the General Assembly.

swerable to the Church through the General Assembly. The GA can direct the Institute to take certain actions or to refrain from others. The six members of the SMT, which serves as the board of direction of the Institute, are elected directly by the GA. The SMT is responsible for appointing the Director, Administrator, and teachers of the Institute.

4. Presbyterian, not Hierarchical

Fourth, we are Presbyterian, not hierarchical. The Presbytery is the Church judicatory primarily responsible for the admission of men into the Gospel ministry. The Presbytery takes men under care; examines men for licensure and ordination; oversees a minister's life and doctrine; and is the court of original jurisdiction over him. We by no means intend to weaken these roles of the Presbytery. Rather, we want the Institute to strengthen them. We hope that Presbyteries will interact with the Institute, and will encourage their men under care to take advantage of the Institute. We wish to further those interactions this afternoon. We are here to tell you about the Institute, but even more to listen to your concerns. Yes, we would like you to urge your men under care to take the MTIOPC courses that address their needs. Yes, we would

like you to support us financially, perhaps by direct contribution, perhaps by setting up scholarship funds for men taking the courses. (Though we will offer the instruction free of charge to men under care, licentiates, and ministers, they will also have expenses for computing equipment, course materials, and travel. We will also charge ruling elders \$100 per "credit" for the courses, and you may wish to give needy elders scholarship aid for this.) But we also want you to tell us what your men under care need that they are not getting at seminaries. We want you to tell us how well we are meeting those needs through our courses. We want you to recommend men to us whom you believe can offer excellent instruction through the Institute.

Where do we go from here?

I will leave you with three possible directions for the Institute. They are described by three prepositions: out of, into, or through.

Out of. Just as some Christians regard the Christian life as primarily coming out of the world, so also we might look at the establishment of the Institute as a coming out of the seminaries. While the Bible does indeed tell us to "come out from among them and be separate", we do not subscribe to the escapist view of the Christian life. Neither can we have an escapist MTIOPC. We will have to work with many existing seminaries for the foreseeable future.

Into. The case is also made that the Christian life is primarily one of being sent into the world to minister to the world for Christ's sake. So also we might look at the MTIOPC as the first step for the OPC of moving into the world of the seminaries. But though the Bible does indeed tell us to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations", yet we must beware of settling in to the world and viewing the amelioration of its sins and sufferings and the augmentation of its blessings as the primary aims of Christian ministry. Likewise, we must be-

ware of "settling in" to theological education and congratulating ourselves that "we have arrived."

Through. We face a dilemma. There is Biblical justification for choosing either "out of" or "into" as a significant metaphor for the Christian life. Which shall we choose? There is a way to choose both -- and neither. The preposition through carries within it both into and out of. I commend to you this third way from the words of Psalm 84:6:

"...who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well..."

In this earthly pilgrimage, we cannot escape the valley of Baca, but neither will we make it a well if we seek to settle in. It is not "settling in to the valley of Baca, they make it a well", neither is it "escaping from the valley of Baca, they make it a well", but "passing through". The Church, too, is on a pilgrimage: to the greater, heavenly Zion. So let the MTIOPC be also!

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Hebrews 13:14)

Dr. James Gidley, Associate Professor of Engineering and Chair of the Department of Engineering at Geneva College, also serves as a ruling elder in Grace OPC in Sewickley, PA., as the chairman of the sub-committee on Ministerial Training of our Committee on Christian Education and vice Chairman of the subcommittee responsible for oversight of *Ordained Servant*. This address was given—in substance—at the first meeting of the Ministerial Training Institute at the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids Michigan, just before the recent General Assembly. (Dr. Jim Thomas, mentioned in paragraph one of this article, is also an elder in the Sewickley Church, and Administrator of the MTIOPC).



Foundations in Genesis: Genesis 1-11 Today, © 1998 by Rowland S. Ward, Th.D., New Melbourne Press, 358 Mountain Hwy., Wantirna, Victoria 3152, Australia. 208 pages, paper. Available from the publisher, \$12.00 (+\$3.00 shipping and handling). Reviewed by John W. Mahaffy, pastor, Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Newberg, Oregon.

“Foundations” aptly describes Dr. Rowland Ward’s study in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Too brief to be a full commentary, the book explores the foundation set in Genesis and its relationship to the structure of the rest of Scripture. Foundations in Genesis starts from the position that the Bible is God’s word written. Dr. Ward understands Jesus’ words to the disciples in Luke 24 as he writes: “It is therefore not for us to contrive Christ into the Book of Moses to make it a book suitable for Christians, for Christ is already there” (p. 15).

The author is clearly conversant with recent scholarship, but he writes in non-technical language. The book grew out of preaching to Knox Church in Melbourne, which this pastor-scholar, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, serves. Several tables help to focus on the structure of the book. A few minor typographical errors detract slightly.

Because he does not shirk the hard questions, some of the author’s conclusions are controversial. Likely few readers will agree with all of them (this reviewer does not). But he writes with an irenic spirit. Further, he maintains an (increasingly rare) ability to distinguish between the clear teaching of the text of Genesis and his own, sometimes tentative, conclusions.

Dr. Ward’s approach is balanced. He distances himself from those who “enter the holy place of Genesis 1-11...visiting this cathedral” primarily to seek ammunition for their own view of the date and length of time of creation. But he also decries others who dismiss the early chapters as myths

or legend and “have their own too narrow agenda which prevents Scripture from being heard for what it is, the word of God to sinners” (p. 5).

The three brief introductory chapters are worth the price of the book. After beginning with “Our Approach to Scripture,” he focuses on “Our Approach to Genesis,” and then examines “The Structure of Genesis.” That approach is evident as, near the end of the book, he reminds us, “We must not interpret the narrative by our benchmarks of significance, but by God’s” (p. 178).

The serious student of Scripture will find fresh perspectives in this book. Pastors would do well to read it before preaching on Genesis. Ruling elders will find it a useful tool as they prepare for teaching classes. It is clear enough that the ordinary, discerning believer, as well as the ordained servant, will benefit from Dr. Ward’s pastoral concern.

Unfortunately, the book does not have a U.S. distributor. It is available from the author at the address above. (Due to the high cost of handling foreign checks, cash is the preferred form of payment for single, or a few, copies. In the experience of this reviewer orders are shipped promptly by air mail.)



The Theological Journal Library, Version 2, from Galaxie Software (obtainable directly from www.bible.org/galaxie). It is also obtainable from Westminster Seminary Bookstore (www.wts.edu) for \$49. It can be ordered either by email, or telephone, using a credit card.

This is a resource of considerable value even if you already have many of the issues of the *Westminster Theological Journal* (hereafter WTJ). Why? Because this CD also has on it the writings of Augustine and Calvin, the entire Schaaf’s Church History, and much more. Yet valuable as these ‘extras’ are for many the main value will be found in having most of the material that has

appeared in the WTJ since 1980. I have only worked with a small portion of what is on this CD but I've already found it a very useful resource. I should probably add, at this point, that the CD contains software for either the Macintosh or the IBM type of computer. And in either instance it has an excellent search engine by which one can easily and quickly find every reference to key words and combinations of words. For example I did a search, recently, for material with several terms—and combinations of terms—and was quickly in possession of a complete list of all the articles in which these terms appear. All I had to do at that point was to click on each one, identified by a summary line, to have the complete article before me *and* to view the articles with the requested terms highlighted.

There is much material of permanent value in the WTJ, and that is just as true of all those pre-1980 issues. It is my hope that those earlier issues may—at some future time—be available on a similar CD.



The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, on CD Rom, both IBM and Macintosh compatible. Includes Adobe Acrobat Reader software on the CD. Reviewed by Rev. Bill Shishko of the Franklin Square, NY Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

AGES Software company is providing an invaluable service by making many of the great Christian classics available on CD ROM at a fraction of the cost of purchasing the works in printed editions. One of their latest offerings is *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection* which (amazingly) includes the sermons from all 63 volumes of Spurgeon's *New Park Street Pulpit* and the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (over 3,500 sermons!) together with dozens of other major productions from Spurgeon's prolific hand. Among these are the devotional classic, *Morning and Evening*, the down to earth humor and wisdom of *The Salt-Cellars* and *John Ploughman's Pictures*, and evangelistic works like *All of Grace* and *Around the Wicket Gate*, and *The Soul Winner*,

the volume on evangelism referred to in this month's Pastor to Pastor article.

This CD ROM uses the popular Adobe Acrobat reader, which is included on the compact disk itself. There is no manual included, so those who are not deeply computer literate may need to use the tollfree technical support number for directions for getting the library up and running. The Adobe Acrobat platform is not quite as easy as the one used by Logos Systems (which also makes *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection* available with its fine platform, but at a higher price), but once you become familiar with the various folders and basic command buttons it is quite easy to maneuver through this superb electronic library of Spurgeon. The "cut and paste" function is not quite as easy as with the Logos system, and—at least on my computer—I found a tendency to instability when I was importing material to my word processor; but it is very easy to print out whole sections (or entire books!) for old-fashioned reading and marking on the printed page. One warning: For whatever reason the pagination of the CD ROM version of the sermons does not accord with the pagination as given in the invaluable *Complete Index to C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons* (Pilgrim Publications). (This volume, incidentally, is indispensable for those who are serious about using either the CD ROM edition of the sermons or the printed works themselves.) Nevertheless, one can easily match the sermon title given in the printed index with the convenient indexes given on the CD ROM. Only actual page comparisons become something of a challenge.

The cost of *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection* varies according to distributor, so do some price comparisons before you buy. For information from the publisher you can call 1-800-297-4307, or access their web-site at www.ageslibrary.com. (Another very valuable CD by Ages is the *John Calvin Collection*, putting just about everything that Calvin ever wrote within reach of anyone willing to spend about \$50 for their CD). To conclude: we say many thanks to AGES Digital Library for making so many of these volumes so easily accessible, and at such accessible prices!



Whither the Sabbath?

By

Terry Johnson

Now that “Super Bowl Sunday” (a.k.a. “the Lord’s Day”) is past, and all the understandable excitement about the Falcons is behind us, perhaps we might now raise the awkward question, “Whither the Christian Sabbath?” Time was when American Protestants all agreed: Sunday’s 24 hours were to be “remembered” by services of worship, and “hallowed” by laying aside secular employments and recreations. Respecting Sabbatarian restrictions, the Methodists were as strict as the Presbyterians, who were as strict as the Baptists, who were as strict as the Congregationalists. No work, no play, no entertainment, and no shopping “were allowed on God’s holy Sabbath. Sunday was to be spent in morning and evening worship, and the time between services committed to the holy rest” of devotional reading, naps and works of mercy. When the fundamentalist/modernist debates raged in the 1920s this was the one area in which they all agreed, liberal and conservative alike. The Sabbatarian consensus held until the 1960s, and then suddenly collapsed, and how great was the fall.

Even in the best churches, the best people in those churches camp out in front of the TV all Sunday afternoon to watch the games, and then rush home from evening worship in order to see the last of them. With the man in the pew, the NFL’s rout of the fourth commandment is complete. He no longer even thinks of Sunday as especially the “Lord’s day.” His conscience doesn’t bother him in the slightest.

There is a sense in which I am a realist about this. The American entertainment culture is strong. People mean well but are weak. It all seems harmless. It isn’t. But it is understandable. Much more ominous is the capitulation of the churches. All across the country and all across our own city, churches canceled services, moved services, and adapted

services because of the Super Bowl. The philosophy seems simple enough. “If you can’t beat em, join ‘em.” Churches put up big screen TVs, served chili and soft drinks, called it “fellowship,” and declared victory. A potential program failure was turned into a “success.” Instead of a handful of diehards, a crowd! Fun! Excitement! One prominent church put up two screens and held their evening service during half-time! A Presbyterian pastor in Seattle announced, “It’s a Super Sunday, ‘cause there’s the bowl game and cause we’re in the presence of a God who’s crazy about us.” Of course.

But wait a minute. Sometimes it helps to ask ourselves some basic questions. What is a Super Bowl? It is a game. It is a child’s game played with a ball by grown men. That’s all it is. It is just one form of entertainment in a culture addicted to entertainment. It is noteworthy only in that it has become the most popular spectator sporting event of the year. This means that it brings tremendous pressure on the church to accommodate its presence. After all, everyone will be watching it. But note, it is not external pressure, but the internal pressure generated by a culture of entertainment. It is not the pressure of persecution. The government is not ordering us to cancel or move services. We are not being threatened with imprisonment or death if we resist accommodation. Again, it is only a game. But everyone will be watching it and everyone wants to watch it. The only risk for us personally is that we may lose the pleasurable experience of watching a game, and be thought strange by an uncomprehending culture for doing so. The risk for the church is that merely of staging a service to which nobody comes. In other words, the pressures bearing down on us are those of 1) the lust for pleasure, of not wanting to miss out on the fun; 2) the pressure of democratic fashion, of wanting to fit in, to conform,

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and not be thought different, or strange, or weird; and 3) the pressure of avoiding “failure,” of wanting to “succeed.” Sadly, these pressures have been enough. The church and its members have capitulated.

We don't show much stomach for resisting our culture. That's the real lesson of Super Bowl Sunday. If the whole Protestant church was flipped by the pressure of entertainment in the 1960s, and for that abandoned a 350-year consensus dating to the strict Sabbatarianism of Jamestown's "Dale's Code" (1611), what do you suppose will happen when real persecution begins? Or more subtly, what are we doing in the face of the pleasures and pressures of entertainment culture? Is everyone going to see Titanic or some other trashy teen-age melodrama? Then off go the Christians, kids and all, as well. Is everyone wearing immodest clothing? Is everyone reading sleazy novels? Is everyone dropping off his or her children at day-care? Is everyone ordaining women as ministers in the churches? Is everyone accepting homo-sexuality as normal? Is everyone open and accepting of all religions as equally valid? What will keep us from caving in on these issues as well? Today's church, even the conservative evangelical church, is thoroughly enculturated and compromised. We show no stomach for resisting the hedonistic ("Lets have fun!"), pluralistic (religions and cultures are all the same), egalitarian (men and women are the same), and relativistic (moral choices are all the same; only lifestyles differ) trends in our culture.

When Christians kept the Sabbath they controlled the culture. The reason for this is clear enough. The Sabbath is a culture-shaping ordinance.

It forces work and play into six days. It imposes a one and six cycle of activity. The rest of one day requires careful planning over the remaining six. Consequently it has a sanctifying effect on all of the week, and with it, all of the culture. I don't think that we understand, and probably will not understand for a hundred years or so the loss we sustained when we abandoned the Sabbath. But what I suspect is that we surrendered the culture. When we lost the Sabbath we lost nothing less than the entire culture. The collapse of American sabbatarianism was quickly followed by the collapse of the rest of the Christian cultural platform, the moral chaos of the 1960s, and a crisis of values ever since. The NFL struggled to survive for the decades prior to the mid-1960s in part because of Christian America's resistance to Sunday sports. Sports and the malls wore down that resistance and eventually won. Our sorry counter-attack, chili-bean Super Bowl parties in place of worship services, is an embarrassment to serious Christian people, and only under-scores the severity of the defeat. We're ministering to the culture, they'll say. But at what cost? Shortcuts in ministry which put expedience before principle end up doing more damage than good in the long run. This is not the point at which to minister. It is the point at which to resist. Whither the Sabbath? It's gone, as is a lot more with it.

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