

*An Orientation to Pastoral Ministry in the
Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

*Thirty Reflections on Scripture,
Our Standards,
and
Our History*

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Introduction & Dedication: Why I Wrote This

The idea for this volume (which has been nicknamed “The Purpose-Driven OPC”!) came as a suggestion for my project for OPC Historian John Muether’s MTIOPC (Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) class in OPC History. Having been an ordained minister for nearly 30 years and an OPC minister for 28 of those years, I wanted to fulfill the written requirements for the class with something that would be useful beyond the classroom. John suggested that I consider a project that would build on the material I have taught for several years in both “The Reformed Pastor” class at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and also in the Pastoral Theology class which I teach for MTIOPC. The result is the little book that you have in your hand. It was the suggestion of my wife Margaret (my multi-faceted help-meet) that it be called “An Orientation to Pastoral Ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church”. The subtitle “Thirty Reflections on Scripture, Our Standards, and Our History” prompted John to call it “a thirty day spiritual adventure”! Whether or not that is the case, the chapters ahead are particularly designed to be used as bite-sized aids to form OPC ministers (especially pastors) who think and serve with a self-conscious appreciation of the church in which they have been called to labor.

For better or worse, the OPC does not have its own church seminary. Presently our ministers come from over two dozen institutions which provide various forms of biblical and theological training. While this may bring the benefit of various backgrounds and influences to a church which has steadfastly sought to make its final culture and standard the inerrant Word of God, this diversity of training does not serve to form men who are familiar with the particular ethos of the OPC. The fruit of this is, at best, a lack of appreciation for the things that “make the OPC tick” and, at worst, the development of church ministries and emphases which do not reflect as they should the church standards to which we are committed. There is very much a need for an interface between the seminaries and the OPC, and, further, between the seminaries and pastoral ministries in the OPC. It is my hope that this book will do at least a small part to provide that interface.

My perspective is expressed in the phrase “Christ plays in 10,000 places.” As one who is fascinated and thrilled with Christ’s work in the entire world, I would love to learn more of all 10,000 of those places. However, the OPC is *one* of those 10,000. I am privileged to be a minister in *that* one (in the nature of the case, I cannot serve in more than one at a time) and I want to know as much about Christ’s work in *this* one as I can. Even with all of its eccentricities, foibles, weaknesses, and blind spots (to all of which I have contributed), the OPC is a place in which

Christ *has been* at work and *is* at work today. I want you to appreciate that work, and then to build upon what you have learned as you labor as a minister in the OPC.

I do not believe in defining a church by what it is *against*, but by the very positive things that it is *for* (although it is impossible to be strongly for something without also being against its opposite). I very positively believe that the more consistent we are with our church standards, above all the Bible, the more effective we will be as instruments in the hands of our Savior and King. This has been a driving impulse with me, with my own ministry, and also in the development of the material for my Pastoral Theology class. I hope to convince you that this conviction is both a right and a healthy one, and I hope that this manual will help to form the same drive in you.

I have written this so that you will take time to reflect on the Scriptures and on various facets of OPC history, standards, and practice. As a pastor myself, I am writing this with a view toward men who are, themselves, reflecting on *pastoral* ministry in the OPC and who desire to minister in a manner most consistent with the vows they took upon their installation to service in this church. And, given the brief and suggestive character of each chapter ahead of you, at the end of each one I have included a basic bibliography of especially OPC and American Presbyterian sources which will help you do further studies. As ministers we are bound to “let our progress be evident to all” (I Tim. 4:15). My hope is that each of these chapters will whet your appetite to learn from others who will help you grow in your appreciation of the OPC and will also help you to serve most faithfully in this church.

In writing this volume I have sought to follow base-line Presbyterian principles in learning from and submitting to my brethren. My thanks to OPC Historian John Muether and OPC General Secretary for Christian Education Danny Olinger for their invaluable suggestions and for their encouragement in this project. Thanks, also, to Elder Tom Warnock and to my associate, Pastor Benjamin Miller, for reading the draft of this book and offering suggestions. Tom served on the session of the OPC, Franklin Square for many years before I became its pastor in March 1981. No one knows pastoral ministry in the OPC from a ruling elder’s perspective better than Tom. I count it one of my great privileges to serve with this “loyal yoke-fellow” and with all of my other fellow elders. Of the many fine interns with whom I have worked, Ben is truly my “First Timothy.” I thank the Lord that his bright mind, earnest heart, and love of the church and the ministry have been added to our pastoral staff.

Thanks, too, to the entire congregation of the OPC, Franklin Square. You have allowed your pastor generous amounts of time to teach, mentor, and counsel others who are preparing for or serving in pastoral ministry. I thank

you for that, and I commend you for your heart for the church beyond the local level and for your concern for the formation of men who truly minister like their Master. Martin Luther said “Neither an angel nor a Pope can give you as much as God gives you in your parish church.” That has surely been true of what God has given me in you!

And, finally, thanks to my family. You have been, and are, a wonderful microcosm of the church! I have learned so much from my beautifully submissive wife, Margaret, and from six delightful children who have honored their father’s office as “faithful children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Titus 1:6). Like the household of Stephanas, you have, in various ways, “devoted (yourselves) to the ministry of the saints” (I Cor.16:15). May this little book be a way of extending that service to many others.

I dedicate this little volume to the Rev. John Galbraith who, at the time of this writing, is 96 years of age. He is our oldest living Orthodox Presbyterian minister. He was present at the first General Assembly of the OPC in 1936, and was ordained to the Gospel ministry in the OPC on May 25, 1937. Over the years of his ministerial life he has served OPC pastorates in Gethsemane, PA, Westfield, NJ, and Kirkwood, PA. He has served many terms as both Stated Clerk and Corresponding Clerk of the General Assembly of the OPC. For over thirty years (1948 - 1978) he served as General Secretary of the OPC’s Committee on Foreign Missions, and for many of those years (1948 – 1961) he also served as General Secretary of the OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. In one way or another John has served on most of the Standing Committees of the OPC, and he has also served on countless special committees. No one knows the Orthodox Presbyterian Church like John Galbraith! He is “Mr. OPC”!

He has been and continues to be to me a father in the faith, a mentor, a brother in Christ, a fellow minister, and an ever faithful friend. His longevity and his faithfulness as a man of God are gifts to us; and they are living proof that *Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age. They shall be fresh and flourishing to declare that the Lord is upright. He is (our) rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him* (Psalm 92:13-15).

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Chapter 1

Roots and Branches

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea. (I Cor. 10:1)

“No man is an island, no man stands alone.” That is true by nature. We are all descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Our ethnic backgrounds identify us with particular regions. We cannot be separated from either our extended family or our more immediate biological family. This is also true by grace. God’s elect are chosen in Christ and they are in union in and with Him. God has decreed to do the work of saving His elect through the Church. That Church is built throughout the various periods of time-space history. In this Gospel age it has various branches with different names and in many countries. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is one of those branches, and you are a part of that branch. The history of the development of that branch is not, in any sense, our final authority; but it *is* our heritage.

This heritage has its roots in the *Protestant Reformation* of the sixteenth century. Together with all of the Protestant Reformers, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has a passion for emphasizing the final authority of Holy Scripture in all areas of faith and practice, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, and the priesthood of all believers as joint heirs with Jesus Christ. But our roots go specifically to the *Reformed* (or Calvinistic) branch of the Reformation. With all Calvinists we emphasize the sovereignty of God’s grace in saving His people, and the covenant of grace as the “infrastructure” in which He does that. Ultimately, our roots go to the eternal counsel of God and the covenant promise in which He pledges Himself to be “God to us and to our children”. How amazing that God Himself is our portion! Nothing less satisfies one who has drunk from the wells of historic Reformed theology!

Yet, the branch of which we are a part is even more specific. We are part of the Reformed faith as it worked itself out in the reformation of the Church according to the Word of God, particularly in Scotland. Under the leadership of John Knox and those who followed him, we are a *Presbyterian* church. We believe that the only King and Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, has prescribed a particular order for the way His church is to be governed, and our passion is to conform ourselves to that order and to work out its implications on every level of church life.

That order took on distinctive elements as Presbyterians came to America and established Presbyterian churches in the eighteenth century. The various expressions of American Presbyterianism shared common commitments to the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, to the Westminster Standards as the best expression of the doctrines taught in the Scriptures, and to church government that was neither independent, nor congregational, nor hierarchical. Nevertheless, the branches of *American* Presbyterianism inevitably took on characteristics that made them different from one another (and from their brethren overseas), even while they shared in common the designation “Presbyterian.”

It is good for us to be aware of these differences. It is better that we be familiar with our common roots as Protestants, as Reformed Protestants, and as Presbyterians. It is most important that we remember the Lordship of Jesus Christ (not our heritage) over all. “[God the Father] put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things for the sake of His Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1: 22-23.). When the Church has followed Christ as Lord, as He makes known His will through Holy Scripture, it has been liberated from captivity to all forms of error, man-made tradition, and from culture that has *its* roots, ultimately, in this world.

As a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church you should know the history of “our fathers” as an outworking of God’s covenant of grace in human history. We do not say, with Henry Ford, that “history in bunk”! Church history is truly “His Story”, that is, God’s story worked out in the hearts and lives of His people as they interact with one another and the world around them. As those with an appreciation of the unity of God’s covenantal dealings in both the Old and New Testaments, and of His work through the ages as He builds His church, we, of all Christians, must not think or act as islands, standing alone! Lone Rangers are the stuff of popular media legend, but models of biblical pastors they are not!

In the 1970s, the author Alex Haley became famous for his book (later adapted for a television mini-series) *Roots*. Haley captivated his readers and drew attention to the evils of slavery and racial discrimination as he grippingly traced a family line from Africa to America and through successive generations in our nation. His story made the study of family roots popular, and it stirred the fires of the cause of racial equality. Our story is infinitely more fascinating. It is the story of the wondrous outworking of God’s decree in delivering a people from the bondage of sin and uniting them as family members with the Lord God as their father. Like *Roots* (and like the Bible), the story is graphic, gripping, and uncensored of unpleasant details. It is designed to captivate you and stir

your fire for the cause of the Kingdom of God. The history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is only one part of that amazing history, but it shares in all of its drama, sorrows, and joys. Let us begin our reflections by thanking the Lord for His sovereignty over history, for the way He is building His church throughout the world, for the way He is building the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and for making us a part of that building enterprise in our day and in the place given to us to serve.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Murray, John. "Tradition: Romish and Protestant" in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 4, pp. 264-273.

The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh. 1982.

Chapter 2

Christianity and Liberalism

By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

In 1923, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, then professor of Greek and New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, published what would become in the twentieth century what Luther's Ninety-five Theses became some four centuries before. In seven chapters dealing successively with doctrine, God, man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church, Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* cogently and persuasively argued that the indifference to, or overt rejection of, the historic tenets of Christianity (as espoused by theological Liberalism or Modernism) which threatened to dominate his own church, the Presbyterian Church, USA, and other mainline Protestant denominations, "is not only a different religion from Christianity, but belongs to a totally different class of religions." (p. 7). The book presented the truly evangelical view of the Christian faith as rooted in historical events and told by an inspired and infallible Bible. "Christianity is based...on an account of something that happened, and the Christian worker is primarily a witness. But if so, it is rather important that the Christian worker should tell the truth....The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (p. 53).

For Dr. Machen this truth, to be told particularly by ministers who are bound by solemn vows before God, is always in radical contrast to any form of religion that draws its spirit from man and the world process rather than from the God who has revealed Himself from heaven. Without denying the reality of Christian experience, historic Christianity emphasizes doctrine over such experience or any other religious experience. "Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful man" (p. 79). Historic Christianity is true supernaturalism. It brings God to man in a religion of grace. Liberalism was simply a contemporary form of naturalism. It rose no further than moralism. Historic Christianity focuses on Christ as the glorious, transcendent God who became man. Liberalism was but an extension of mild-mannered humanitarianism. Historic Christianity is a religion of the cross and a bloody atonement to satisfy divine justice. Liberalism made the cross an object of sentiment and moral influence. Historic Christianity emphasizes the absolute need of personal regeneration or the new birth and the sanctification of people

by the Gospel. Liberalism's agenda was personal ethics and the reform of culture by social and political action. Historic Christianity makes its boast in Christ and His heavenly Kingdom. Liberalism, with its severely weakened views of human depravity, lauded man and the development of earthly kingdoms. In short, historic Christianity upholds the truth and glory of God. Liberalism has its source and goal in man. At every point historic Christianity and modern Liberalism were radically contrary to one another; and the issue in it all was either heaven or hell.

While many of Dr. Machen's fellow ministers in the Presbyterian Church, USA bristled at this powerful salvo against the rapidly encroaching doctrinal decline in their Church, others saw in Machen's work a necessarily aggressive and well thought-out defense of what the Christian church has always held as truth. Journalist and social commentator Walter Lippman, no proponent of that faith, nevertheless saw the book's importance in the brewing religious wars of that day. In his *Preface to Morals* (1929), Lippman wrote: "[*Christianity and Liberalism* is] a reasoned case against the modernists...It is an admirable book. For its acumen, for its saliency, and for its wit this cool and stringent defense of orthodox Protestantism is, I think the best popular argument produced by either side of the current controversy. We shall do well to listen to Dr. Machen...The liberals have yet to answer him." And from so unlikely a quarter as the religious periodical *Pacific Unitarian* came these words of praise: "What interests us is that from the point of view of a certain type of theology, Dr. Machen's arguments are irrefutable. His logic, it seems to us, is impeccable...You must be either a believer or an unbeliever, an evangelical or a liberal; you cannot be both at the same time. Our judgment is that Dr. Machen puts the liberal party within the evangelical church where it has not a sound leg to stand on." From what amazing sources does Christ fulfill his promise to honor those who honor Him!

Moody Monthly wrote "Machen's life-long plea for holding forth the Word of God and the Christ of the Bible must be the watchword for every pastor and layman who wants to climb the heights of spiritual power and pass on to succeeding generations a Christian faith that will stand." All Christians would benefit greatly from learning more of the life and labors of the man whom God would later use to lead the way in the formation of what would become the OPC. Orthodox Presbyterian ministers, in particular, will learn much from Dr. Machen's model of incisive, well-researched, and carefully reasoned scholarship – a scholarship that satisfies the intellect while it does not shoot over the heads of the average thinking reader. Indeed, *Christianity and Liberalism* provides the rationale for why the OPC was formed in 1936, and for what made this new Church the true spiritual succession of a body that had abandoned its rich heritage for the pottage of unbelief in religious garb.

If you have not read *Christianity and Liberalism*, it is a “must read” for all pastors in the OPC. Reading it as we approach a century after it was written, I think we will be struck with the fact that the issues raised by Dr. Machen in his day are still with us. The seductive clothing and enticing language may be different, but theological Liberalism in whatever form always threatens the purity of historic Christianity. Until Christ returns there will always be a radical clash between a faith grounded in history, Christ, redemption, and heaven versus religious sentiments grounded in man, human ideals, morality, and the culture of a passing world. Let us be ministers who truly love and proclaim the one religion of pure grace that flows from the God-man sent from heaven and who saves to the uttermost all those who come to God by Him.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI. 1923. Reprinted, 1981.

Trueman, Dr. Carl R. *Christianity, Liberalism and the New Evangelicalism: Lessons from J. Gresham Machen*. Onesimus Books: Bristol, England. 2002.

Chapter 3

The Reformed Faith

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27)

*Dr. Machen's name was gladly identified with the cause of what is called "fundamentalism," that is, adherence to the fundamentals of the faith over against indifference to or denial of these among the theological liberals. While he was willing to speak for these fundamentals and, to that extent, be allied with the fundamentalists, Dr. Machen was uncomfortable with such reduction of the Christian faith to certain admittedly essential points, and to the ambivalence to the doctrine of the Church and its order that marked the individualistic and free-enterprise oriented fundamentalist movement. Machen would not brand himself with descriptions such as "fundamentalist", "evangelical", or "conservative". He was for full and robust orthodoxy that stopped at nothing less than proclaiming the whole counsel of God, and for a church government that would both preserve and propagate that orthodoxy. Writing to fundamentalist New York lawyer James E. Bennett in September 1936 (just a few months before Machen's death), he affirmed, "I for my part am not 'Fundamentalist' at all, but a Presbyterian." By that he meant that he was committed to the Westminster Standards, as adhered to by historic Presbyterianism, and that he was not in sympathy with such divergences from these standards as dispensationalism and "the separated life" with its disregard of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. (See Charles G Dennison's *History for a Pilgrim People*, pp. 105, 106.)*

Following Dr. Machen's sudden death on January 1, 1937, the fledgling body that would later be called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church became embroiled in a struggle for power and for the heart and soul of the new church. One group desired a fundamentalist church that would be tolerant of dispensationalism (as popularized by the Scofield Bible) and its particular brand of premillennialism. The same group wanted to emphasize certain cultural expressions of what was believed to be holiness, particularly abstinence from the beverage use of alcohol. Others, with Dr. Machen, desired a church that was not generally evangelical, but specifically committed to the Westminster Standards as originally adopted by American Presbyterians in 1729 together with their covenant theology and emphasis on heart religion under the sole lordship of Jesus Christ. The latter group clearly carried the mind of the church, and prevailed at both the second General Assembly (November, 1936), and the third General Assembly (May, 1937). Following that Assembly fourteen ministers and three ruling elders left to form what would become the Bible Presbyterian Church. The OPC would be a church that was unashamedly committed to the Reformed

Faith as expressed in the Westminster Standards, and to the Presbyterian church government given in essential form in Chapter XXXI of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Had Dr. Machen lived he would have rejoiced that what would become the OPC was reviving the spirit that had marked Princeton Seminary prior to its take-over by moderate and liberal elements in the Presbyterian Church, USA. Writing in 1927, Machen described that spirit as follows:

As over against...a reduced Christianity, we at Princeton stand for the full, glorious gospel of divine grace that God has given us in his word and that is summarized in the Confession of Faith in our Church. We cannot agree with those who say that although they are members of the Presbyterian Church, they 'have not the slightest zeal to have the Presbyterian Church extended through the length and breadth of the world.' As for us, we hold the faith of the Presbyterian Church, the great Reformed Faith that is set forth in the Westminster Confession, to be true; and holding it to be true, it is intended for the whole world.

(Quoted in Charles G. Dennison's *History for a Pilgrim People*, p. 36).

It is especially incumbent upon ministers in the OPC to cherish and to perpetuate this commitment and this vision. In a day of such doctrinal erosion that even the terms "protestant," "evangelical," and "Bible-believing" have become noses of wax to be twisted and turned into many shapes, those entrusted with the rich doctrinal heritage of the OPC must understand what is meant by "the Reformed Faith" and affirm it relentlessly both within the church and to those around us. A rapidly decaying secular society must be confronted with full-orbed, divinely given doctrine in order to call it to repentance from its multitude of idols, turn its heart from those lifeless idols to the true and living God, and set its affection on Jesus Christ the Son of God who, alone, can deliver us from the coming wrath.(I Thess. 1:9f.) A rapidly decaying Christian society must be confronted with the very same thing.

In his parting words to the elders at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul reminded them that his ministry among them, both publicly and from house to house, was his declaring to them the whole counsel of God, namely, all that God had revealed for their faith and life in Christ.(Acts 20:27). Such a Pauline and apostolic ministry delights to dwell on the sovereignty of God and His grace, the riches of life in covenant with Him through Jesus Christ, and the constant challenge to apply the whole Word of God to all of life such that "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God."(I Cor. 10:31). Whenever such thorough, persistent, and passionate teaching and preaching of these things has marked Reformed ministries there has been the fruit of genuine transformation (not

mere acculturation) of individuals, families, and churches. Let these commitments be our passion and the focus of our exertions, and we should expect, under the blessing of God, to form Orthodox Presbyterian congregations of people who joyfully declare the heartthrob of the Reformed Faith: “For of Him, and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

Some Suggestions for Further Study

MTIOPC (Ministerial Training Institute, Orthodox Presbyterian Church) class: “Westminster Standards,” Dr. George W. Knight, III, instructor.

Warfield, Benjamin. “A Brief and Untechnical Statement of the Reformed Faith” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, pp. 407-410. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Nutley, NJ. 1970.

Williamson, G.I. *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ. 1980.

Chapter 4

Antithesis

He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13-14)

Liberalism in any form gains a foothold in the Church by lessening the terrible and pervasive effects of human sin and, in one or many ways, connecting the Church to a fallen culture. The folly and self-destructive character of such attempts in every age (for such attempts have been made in every age of the Christian church) would seem to be apparent when the Word of God tells us not only that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are Spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14), but also that fallen man both suppresses the truth of God in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18) and is in radical rebellion against God (Rom. 3:9-18). There is, in other words, a clear antithesis between faith and unbelief, between truth and error, between the spirit of this age, and the Spirit who brings the firstfruits of the age to come; between, if you will, Jerusalem and Athens. And there is meant to be a clear antithesis between the Church and the world. One wonders why, having been delivered from the power of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of Christ who is the grand liberator and the light of the world, God’s professed people so often desire to go back to the camp of the enemy!

The OPC is a daughter born in the lineage of churches which have emphasized the various aspects of the antithesis between the two Kingdoms and have resisted the syncretizing tendencies that have distorted and, ultimately, perverted or destroyed other church bodies. Against religious expressions spawned by human imagination, the OPC emphasizes the faith that is revealed in the Bible. Against the perennial attempts to re-define Christ as something other than the God-man, “in two distinct natures and one person, forever”, the OPC affirms the Christ of Holy Scripture, and as precisely defined by the first four Ecumenical Councils. Against all forms of religion that mix God’s grace with human effort, the OPC affirms that salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and received by faith alone. Against the deep-seated individualism of the modern age, the OPC affirms that the Lord Jesus is saving and building a *church* in which “all the members of that one body, being many, are one body...” (I Cor. 12:12). And against a culture of free enterprise in which business savvy and individual initiative are too often courted and enthroned in the church, the OPC steadfastly maintains the “crown rights of King Jesus” to govern and build His church in the manner he has prescribed in Holy Scripture.

Jesus Christ spoke of the antithesis as being the contrast of light and darkness. In the Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of the Kingdom of God and the description of the blessedness and the character of its citizens, Jesus declared: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is [literally] single, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is [literally] evil, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Matt. 6:22,23a). The eye of the heart and its faith must have a single focus on heaven and its riches.(Matt. 6:19-21). A compromised heart and faith is evil because it more or less darkens the light that has come so brightly in that blessed One who is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). Reminding ourselves constantly of that antithesis makes us refuse to put a dimmer switch on that light!

Previously, in the same famous sermon, Jesus had also spoken of the antithesis in terms of its benefit to the world. Far from calling Christians to adapt their faith to the prevailing standards and passing fads of this age, He declares of them: “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). Salt is only effective in preventing decay when it keeps its distinct integrity as salt. “But if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” (Ibid.) Salt loses its character when its strength is diluted by the atmosphere around it. “It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Ibid.) This is the tragic end result of trying to blend Christianity with the culture around it, or, in other words, trying to merge the Kingdom of darkness with the Kingdom of light.

As Orthodox Presbyterian pastors we must be sure that the antithesis we propagate is truly the antithesis between the Christ of the Scriptures and every man-made attempt at deliverance, not between our personal hobby horses and those around us who happen not to share our hobbies with us. At the same time, we must resist every tendency to reduce or eliminate the radical antithesis that does exist between true faith and all forms of unbelief. In so doing, we not only keep the eye of our faith “single,” but we also then best live as salt and light to the world in union and communion with *the* Light of the World. Let your uncompromised light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.(Matt. 5:14-16).

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Philadelphia, PA. 1972.

Warfield, Benjamin. *The Plan of Salvation*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI. 1973 reprint.

Chapter 5

Militancy

...I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matt.10:34)

I have fought the good fight... (II Tim. 4:7)

J. Gresham Machen wrote privately to one fellow minister that the greatest qualification for being a part of the conservative Presbyterian movement was that he ‘be a fighter.’ In fact, Machen thought the cause of the OPC would die of inaction’ unless pastors and elders kept up ‘the ecclesiastical fight.’ (Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 102.)

The OPC was conceived and born in controversy, it quickly entered into controversy, and rarely have its General Assemblies been without controversies that have threatened to divide the church or divert it from its mission of making the Gospel known to the nations. Everything from the concept of God’s incomprehensibility, to the doctrine of creation, to the doctrine of guidance, to the doctrine of justification, to what are acceptable beliefs about the return of Christ have been fair game for militant discussion and debate in the governing assemblies of the OPC. For some, this militancy about believing what is right and doing what is right is regarded as a negative. How is a person to see the Prince of Peace among a body of people that seems to constantly be at war? Must we keep up ‘the ecclesiastical fight’ in order to preserve our character as a church?

To be sure, we must be careful how we engage in “the ecclesiastical fight.” John Newton, former slave trader who became the object of “Amazing Grace” and subsequently became a pastor, warned against the dangers inherent in engaging in church conflict. His letter “On Controversy” (which was wisely reprinted in the October, 2002 issue of *New Horizons*) ought to be read and regularly re-read by ministers, especially Orthodox Presbyterian ones. We cannot and must not blind ourselves to the inroads given to the Evil One if we engage in controversy without being mindful of the corrupting influences of such activity.

At the same time, both Scripture and history demonstrate that Dr. Machen was very right and that we must be the church militant, always “fighting the good fight,” if we would serve faithfully in the army of the Lord of hosts. Scripture is replete with battle language both in the typical battle pictures of the Old Testament, and in the vivid directives of the New Testament. On a personal level, we must do constant battle with the “law in our

members, which wars continually against the law of our minds, bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members” (cf. Rom. 7:23). The Apostle Paul sets a pattern for us as he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection, lest, when he had preached to others he himself should become disqualified (cf. I Cor. 9:27). As an army, the Lord’s people are to “put on the whole armor of God that [they] may stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10). These are never to be the carnal weapons of guns, swords, spears, or hand to hand combat, but rather the weapons of faith and a good conscience, which are “mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when [our] obedience is fulfilled” (II Cor. 10:4-6).

Sometimes this fight is against “savage wolves” that will come in among the sheep, “not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). At other times from right within the church “men will rise up, speaking perverse [misleading] things, to draw away disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). These must be withstood boldly and publicly if they are deserving of blame, even as Paul withstood his fellow-apostle, Peter, when he was blameworthy (Gal. 2:11). In other cases doctrinal divisions and personal factions threaten to rend the Lord’s people. We must let our feelings be governed by the Scriptures themselves, which tell us “there must be factions among you, that those who are approved may be manifest among you.” (I Cor. 11:19).

Because there is an unabating battle of God’s people with the unholy trinity of the world, the flesh, and the devil (ultimately, a battle of the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent, Gen. 3:15), there must always be a militant church. Such militancy, engaged in properly only by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (II Cor. 10:1), keeps the church from lethargy, makes and keeps a doctrinally disciplined people, and brings progress as the church advances through the ages and goes from victory unto victory. One need only think of the battles of an Athanasius, a Martin Luther, a John Knox, or a J. Gresham Machen himself to see how this is true.

Not all of the militancy in the OPC has been God-honoring militancy. All too often personalities have been confused with principles, and sinful human passion has been equated with God’s holy passion. Especially in controversy it is so very important to be reminded that, in Christian militancy, every contender must be “swift to hear, slow to speak, [and] slow to wrath: for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20). We must pick our battles carefully, we must wage them biblically, and we must always look to the Lord of Hosts both to protect us from destroying ourselves in the heat of battle and also to get the victory that will honor His Name and advance His Kingdom. Too often we begin to mingle these latter things with our own names and our

own little kingdoms. Remind yourselves, brethren, that we have a heavenly Commander in Chief who is jealous to guard His glory in the church that He has purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Over against the pacifist spirit of a day that regards all war as evil, we must keep before us the biblical and historical picture of “the church militant”. The OPC at its best has been the church militant at its best. Let your song be, “Sure I must fight if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord; I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by your word.” (From “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” by Isaac Watts.)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 6

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

I will build My Church... (Matt. 16:18)

That now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church...(Eph. 3:10)

The Scriptures present a very high view of the church as both an organism that is a living body (I Peter 2:5), and as an organization, an entity with members who are disciples of Jesus Christ (marked by baptism, Matthew 28:18, Acts 2:41), with officers (Phil. 1:1), with an order for discipline (Matt. 16:15-18), and with specific responsibilities for corporate worship and corporate life as a distinct body (I Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4:1-16, I Tim. 3:14f., Heb. 10:19-25). While there is surely an “invisible church” as described in chapter twenty-five of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which “consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof...” (cf. Eph. 5:23, 27; Col. 1:18), the Scriptures give most attention to specific churches that meet in specific locations, such as the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Thessalonica, and Philippi. It is unto the “visible church” that “Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world; and does, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto” (WCF XXV:3, cf. I Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11ff).

When the church does not take its confession and its ministry seriously, or when a culture is driven by individualism more than by the Word of God, the so-called “para-church” – in whatever form – will have a fertile field for growth. Thus arose the plethora of nineteenth century Christian “societies”, “unions”, and “agencies” which were spawned in an era of Jacksonian democracy and in the spirit of the Industrial Revolution’s capitalism and faith in unbridled progress. In the twentieth century, “church” and its biblical order were too often replaced by various individual “ministries” under the leadership of “dynamic and gifted” men (or women). In the twenty-first century the “para-church” mentality persists, and it is fueled by the depreciation of the meaning of “church” even within those that call themselves by that name. (Perhaps it is honesty more than embarrassment when bodies that have few or none of the contours of what have marked the historic Christian Church now denominate themselves as “worship centers” and “fellowships”).

Even the heritage of the OPC is marked by inconsistency in its attitude toward the visible church as “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of

salvation” (WCF, XXV: 3). Never quite purging itself of the para-church mentality that marked the nineteenth century “New School,” there was more than a little tendency for twentieth century Presbyterians to divert their energies outside of the church, especially when the PCUSA (and, later, the Presbyterian Church, US) became increasingly under the domination of those who perverted both the standards and the mission of the church. One can understand why, in frustration, Dr. Machen and others formed the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933; but one must seriously ask whether this was, in fact, a para-church response to what should have been dealt with by the persistent application of good church order and discipline in the Presbyterian Church, USA. One also must wonder if this prominent part of the reason for the eventual severance from the Presbyterian Church, USA did not also become a de facto reason for the support, if not the development, of other para-church groups throughout the OPC’s history.

Be that as it may, Orthodox Presbyterians, Orthodox Presbyterian sessions and presbyteries, and Orthodox Presbyterian ministers have no reason to divert their resources and their energies into non-church agencies (or “ministries”) which are, in one way or another, doing the work of the church. In God’s good providence we have both an organism and an organization, with a defined membership, officers, and order that is committed to doing what the church is called to do, and in the way Christ calls us to do it. We must resist the carefully marketed appeals to support works that purport to do the work of the church (even when they say that is *not* what they are doing!). Instead, we ought to give our “time, talents, and treasures” to helping the church of which we are a part do its own work and, in so doing, be of even better assistance to other churches and to the body of Christ as a whole.

In his 1933 address “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age”, Dr. Machen masterfully explained the work the church is called to do. As you read the concluding summary of his presentation, read it not so much in terms of the *responsibility* of the church, as the responsibility of *the church* (hence the emphasis, which is mine):

*The responsibility of **the church** in the new age is the same as its responsibility in every age. It is to testify that this world is lost in sin; that the span of human life – nay, all the length of human history – is an infinitesimal island in the awful depths of eternity; that there is a mysterious, holy, living God, Creator of all, Upholder of all, infinitely beyond all; that He has revealed Himself to us in His Word and offered us communion with Himself through Jesus Christ the Lord; that there is no other salvation, for individuals or for nations, save this, but that this salvation is full and free, and that whosoever possesses it has for himself*

and for all others to whom he may be the instrument of bringing it a treasure compared with which all the kingdoms of the earth – nay, all the wonders of the starry heavens – are as the dust of the street.

*An unpopular message it is – and impractical message, we are told. But it is the message of **the Christian church...***

The Psalmist, in Psalm 48, presents the highest imaginable view of the church (albeit in its Old Testament form). After calling its inhabitants to study its component parts with a goal of telling the upcoming generation of its beauty in verse 12 and following, the Psalmist astounds his hearers and us by saying “for this is God, our God forever and ever...” in verse 14. The church, in even the smallest aspect of its life and service, displays the fingerprints of the living God for all to see and admire. May the Lord grant us all this “biblical high churchmanship”, both for our own benefit, and for the benefit of generations to come.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 7

Church and Culture

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.... (Matt. 28:19)

These...have turned the world upside down... (Acts 17:6)

H. Richard Niebuhr, in his oft-cited book *Christ and Culture*, posed the question of how Jesus Christ, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, now is related to culture. Is Christ to be seen *over* culture (as Lord), *under* culture (as the crucified One), or *standing alongside* of culture (as witness)? Because Christ's presence on earth is now manifested by the Spirit through the church (Jn. 14:18) we must translate this into the question of how the church must be related to its culture. What is the proper posture of the OPC to the culture around it?

In Orthodox Presbyterian history we have had opportunities, on various levels, to address this question. Significantly, in 1942 the General Assembly of the OPC discontinued the Committee of Nine, which had been appointed the previous year with the mandate to "study the relationship of the OPC to society in general, and to other ecclesiastical bodies in particular." Its purpose was to suggest "ways and means whereby the message and methods of our church may be better implemented to meet the needs of this generation," and that the church "may have an increasing area of influence and make a greater impact in life today." In discontinuing the Committee, the General Assembly resisted the tendency to create "super committees" that centralized power in a church bureaucracy (as had happened in the Presbyterian Church, USA, and as will happen if there is not vigilance to act on truly Presbyterian rather than hierarchical principles). It also clearly affirmed that the church was to impact its culture by the "vigorous proclamation of our distinctive faith."

Nevertheless, it is important that we be even more specific as to the role of the church in relation to its culture. We need not be held hostage by the options set forth by H. Richard Niebuhr, but we must state positively what our role should be. Part of the answer is that the church, by its confession and its life, is a witness to its culture in a lost and dying world. It is a family of God's children seeking to live "without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life..." (Phil. 2:15f.).

The other part of the answer is that the church must have such biblical high churchmanship that it sees the commission given to it as *the* answer to the question of the relation of Christ, His church, and the culture around it.

By the means of grace, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer, the church is to “make disciples of all the nations....” In the work of evangelism, the church earnestly calls those around it repentance and faith. In the work of prayer the church beseeches the Lord God to do what it cannot do – change human hearts by the divine work of regeneration (Jn. 3:3-8, Ezek. 37:9f). By the work of preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper disciples are made and kept in the way of faithfulness, “keeping all things, whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). In works that demonstrate true Christian fellowship the church displays itself as a colony of heaven in the midst of the earth. In so doing, it does not close its doors to strangers, but opens its heart and its doors widely inviting and urging others to join them as “pilgrims in this barren land.” In doing these things that God has ordained for His church, we must have the highest confidence that we are thus making the most impact on the world around us. Indeed, our impact is for eternal benefits and for the greatest riches, God Himself. It is the impact of living and serving so that individuals, families, and nations are brought under the saving influence of Christ the Lord, delivered from sin and death, and made partakers of the abundance that is involved in the pregnant expression “everlasting life.”

The concept has been called “the spirituality of the church”. Despite its limitations (what genuine Christian really wants a *non-spiritual church?*), the concept, especially as developed in American Southern Presbyterianism and the Christian Reformed Churches in both the Netherlands and America, provides the best response to the issue of “Christ and culture.” In emphasizing the spirituality of the church we are simply (but profoundly) saying that the church most and best influences culture when it is doing what the Lord of the church has called it, and it alone, to do. This way of engaging the culture by calling it to repentance and faith in Christ is “mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds” (II Cor. 10:4). As the church corporately marches to the orders of its Commander in Chief, Christ the King, it may claim the promise that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20)

And when, like Israel before the nations or David before Goliath, the church is faced with what seems to be the overwhelming opposition of a culture that willingly serves “the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), it does not respond by hitching its car to the locomotive of social reform - however well-meant that social reform may be. Instead, the church responds by ever more earnestly doing its work of evangelism, discipleship, and prayer. It does not, in unbelief, abandon its God-given commission and weapons, but renews its commitment to these, and labors afresh under Christ’s own promise: “And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 8

Reformed Piety

Whether, therefore, you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (I Cor. 10:31)

The holiness of Christians is grounded in and motivated by nothing less than the absolute holiness of God: “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy for I am holy’” (I Pet. 1:15-16, cf. Lev. 11:44, 19:2, 20:7). Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the external righteousness of scribes and Pharisees we will by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20). Given that the righteousness we need is nothing less than “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17), Reformed Christians, together with all historic Protestants, revel in the actual imputation of the righteousness of Christ “to all and on all who believe” (Rom. 3:22, Rom. 1:16). In the Gospel and by union with Christ by grace through faith he becomes to us “wisdom from God – and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption– that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’” (I Cor. 1:30-31).

But precisely because Christ becomes “sanctification” to us, we must work out the effects of a righteousness that is as truly *infused* as it is *imparted*. How that dynamic works itself out brings us to the realm of “piety”. How am I, practically speaking, to be holy in an unholy world? The history of the Christian church is strewn with answers that range from the most severe forms of asceticism and legalism to the most bizarre forms of mysticism.

Faced with both the legalism and the mysticism of an early form of Gnosticism and pagan “Mystery Religions”, Paul would seem to have laid the issue to rest as he wrote:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed

have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. [Emphasis mine] (Col. 2:18-23)

At various points in its history, the OPC has rejected false approaches to piety. In its early years it refused (as did Dr. Machen) to be identified as a “dry” church when prohibition of the beverage use of alcohol was the accepted cultural standard of American Protestantism. In later years it stood clearly against the mysticism of the Peniel movement, professed tongues speaking, and views of illumination that at least bordered on a form of prophetic revelation. However, to declare what one is *against* is not equal to declaring what one is *for*. What, then, has the OPC declared as the essence of the piety that grows out of our doctrine?

Above all else, it is a piety that seeks to be guided by the Word of God at every point. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Is. 8:20). “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word” (Ps. 119:9). Indeed, all of Psalm 119 is the inspired guide for such piety. Not only the minister, but all Christians must believe and devote themselves to “the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.” For “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:15-17). Not only are the Scriptures inspired and inerrant (for they are the words of the God who cannot lie), but they are also *sufficient* for us to know the will of God for our lives.

By submitting ourselves to the Word of the Lord we thereby submit ourselves to the Lord of the Word. We do not add to or take away from his word so that we might keep the commandments of the Lord our God (Deut. 4:2). Because we are bought with the matchless price of Christ’s own blood, we refuse to let our consciences become slaves of men (I Cor. 7:23). It is this desire to honor the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ over the human conscience that has driven the OPC to resist every effort to make others lords over us.

But precisely because of this jealousy for the sole Lordship of Christ, Reformed piety lifts up and cherishes all that Christ has given that we might “glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness” (Ps. 24:1). Thus, we enjoy God’s creation and what He gives us; at the same time, we do this *carefully* – knowing that we do all that we do before Him (I Cor. 10:23-28). Reformed piety is piety under the *sole* lordship of

Jesus Christ, but it is piety under the *lordship* of Jesus Christ. For that reason it is both joyous and disciplined at the same time.

Reformed piety grows out of a conscious sense of the covenant God has made with believers and their children. Therefore it is not individualistic, but it grows in an atmosphere of families and churches that delight in their fellowship with the Lord who, in Christ, has become their God (I John 1:7). It cherishes the means of grace as the means by which Christ, by the Spirit, comes to us in power and in deep assurance (I Thess. 1:5). Reformed piety sets its affections on things above, where Christ is, recognizing the believer as both dead in Adam our natural head, and alive in Christ with our lives hidden with Him in God. For that very reason, we “put to death our members on the earth...” (Col. 3:1ff.), and we grow in a holiness that no laws or mystical experiences can ever begin to achieve. Reformed piety is oriented toward the future and its glory, not the present and its shame. It labors in faith and hope here even as, like Abraham, it waits for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb.11:10).

Reformed piety is always most beautiful when it grows out of its God-centered and Christ-saturated theology, and when it is most aligned with it. It is patient and honest, always looking to Christ for forgiveness and for grace, knowing that there is forgiveness with the Lord, that He might be feared (Ps. 130:4). In short, it walks by faith, not by sight. “Calvinistic piety is not flashy or obvious. Rather, the work of the Spirit and the preaching of the Word make their mark in incremental and often hidden ways.” (Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 131). It realizes that no formula, program, or series of steps will ever accomplish what the heart of a true Christian desires as he or she longs after holiness. Only the complete eradication of sin coupled with complete restoration into the image of Christ and entrance into the full enjoyment of God for all eternity will satisfy that longing. Hence, as Orthodox Presbyterians we pray “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20), for only at His coming will there be the fulfillment of the promise, “and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Psalm 130:8).

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 9

Sabbath

There remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God. (Heb. 4:9)

Call the Sabbath a delight. (Is. 58:13)

A strong case could be made that Reformed piety begins with its view and use of the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath. The Sabbath was not made for Israel, but for man as man; and Jesus Christ affirmed that His Lordship extended to the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27-28). In a proper view of conversion, one realizes that, by faith, he has in principle entered into the everlasting Sabbath rest that the Lord has prepared for His people (Heb. 4:3). He ceases from his ultimately fruitless labors to be made acceptable to God on his own, and rests in the completed and perfect work of Christ, his forerunner and the Pioneer who was the first to enter into that eternal Sabbath (Heb. 4:10). He is given the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, a down payment of the inheritance that he shall have in the everlasting Sabbath rest (Eph. 1:13-14). He longs for the day that, having died in the Lord, he may rest forever from his labors and enjoy an eternity of sinless, worshipful service of the eternal God, his inheritance (Rev. 14:13). Each earthly Sabbath is a temporary rest stop on his journey to his final destination.

It is a hallmark of the OPC that it has retained its commitment to this historic view of the Christian Sabbath, that it has resisted every effort to lessen that commitment, that it has contributed much to living out that commitment in its congregations, and that it encourages other Christians and church communions to do the same. The *Directory for Public Worship* of the OPC begins with an entire chapter on "The Sanctification of the Lord's Day," neatly summarizing both the church's confession and catechisms regarding the subject. "The whole day is to be kept holy to the Lord, and is to be employed primarily in the public and private exercises of religion. Therefore it is requisite that there by a holy resting all the day from such labors and an abstaining from such thoughts, conversations, and recreations as are not consonant with this end." (*DPW*. I:2). Though this is regarded as anachronistic in our increasingly secular culture, it is merely a re-statement of the prophet Isaiah's call: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord..." (Is. 58:13-14).

This is not to say that the subject has been without discussion in the OPC. In 1968 the General Assembly was overtured with the request that the church “evaluate the teaching of the Westminster Standards concerning the Sabbath.” A subsequent Assembly appointed a Committee on Sabbath Matters. In 1973, following the presentation of a divided report from that committee, the Assembly determined to accept the report of the committee’s majority, and refused to revise the doctrine of the Sabbath as presented in the Westminster confession and catechisms. The OPC continued to maintain the high view of the Sabbath that had marked Presbyterianism, its old Princeton tradition, and particularly as presented so effectively by Professor (and Orthodox Presbyterian minister) John Murray, professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Yet we must admit that we have a long way to go to make our practice measure up to our church constitutional commitments. Not only has the culture around us almost completely eliminated anything like deference to (if not observance of) a day of rest of any sort, but prevailing evangelical culture has allowed a severe erosion of the Sabbath as a *day holy unto the Lord*. Dispensationalism regards the Sabbath as a Jewish ordinance, and the “seeker-sensitive”, “user-friendly” approach to the church has introduced Saturday evening services (so that people do not need to be bothered with getting up to go to church on Sunday) as well as “Super Bowl” parties that turn a sporting event into a virtual ecclesiastical rite. Sadly, even the evening worship service is becoming less and less common within Reformed churches, including the OPC.

We would do well to let the insights of biblical theology especially inform and help us here: When the Sabbath day is viewed as it is meant to be – as an earthly foretaste of our heavenly Sabbath – true Christians will increasingly develop a love for this weekly “holy day” which is given as a seal of the Lord’s people.

When ministers approach their preparations to lead the church in worship on that day realizing that they are to minister in such a way that the day is an appetizer to whet the appetite for our everlasting feast with the Lamb and with all the church triumphant, the result can only be an increasing hunger for the bread of life and the communion of the saints.

When the means of grace are administered with a felt sense that these are the means by which the One who has entered into His rest brings the blessings of heaven to his weary pilgrims on earth, there cannot but be delight and expectancy in the courts of the Lord.

And when God's people are taught, in practical ways, how to use the entire day to so worship, meditate upon God, and truly *rest* from their regular weekly labors so that they might delight themselves in the Lord, there will be far fewer questions about "what we can't do on the Lord's Day" and far more effort expended to prepare for and use the entire day as holy unto the Lord and heavenly unto ourselves.

May each Sabbath enjoyed here be a foretaste of our everlasting Sabbath, even as it brings us one week closer to that eternal day.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 10

Ministry

...the Gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (Eph. 3:7)

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ. (I Tim. 4:6)

“Ministry” is probably the most overused word in the contemporary evangelical vocabulary. Everyone, it seems, has his or her own personal “ministry.” While it is true that the term *diakonia* may be used of all forms of service, it is also true that the term is frequently (if not primarily) used in the New Testament to mark those who are given distinct responsibilities in the church, and offices to carry out those responsibilities in the name of Jesus Christ the King. Hence, the OPC *Form of Government* uses the term “ministry” in this way:

Our Lord continues to build his church through the ministry of men whom he calls and endues with special gifts for teaching, ruling, and serving. Some of these special gifts can be most profitably exercised only when those who possess them have been publicly recognized as called of Christ to minister with authority. It is proper to speak of such a publicly recognized function as an office, and to designate men by such scriptural titles of office and calling as evangelist, pastor, teacher, bishop, elder, or deacon. (Ch. V, sect 2)

The ordinary and perpetual offices in the church are those given for the ministry of the Word of God, of rule, and of mercy. Those who share in the rule of the church may be called elders (presbyters), bishops, or church governors. Those who minister in mercy and service are called deacons. Those elders who have been endued and called of Christ to labor also in the Word and teaching are called ministers. (Ch. V, sect 3)

There is a difference within the OPC as to whether there are three distinct offices: minister, elder, and deacon or two offices, elder and deacon, with two functions within the office of elder: rule and ministry of the Word (I Tim. 5:17). Early Presbyterian history seems unambiguously to endorse the “three office” view, for instance *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* as agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster. The OPC *Form of Government* clearly allows for the “2 ½ office” view as it uses the expression Ministers or Teaching Elders

in Chapter 6, and Ruling Elders “beside the ministers of the Word” in Chapter 10. Nowhere in our history or our standards is a strict “2 office” view allowed, i.e. granting to all elders the authority to minister the Word by preaching, administering the sacraments, or pronouncing the benedictory blessing upon the Lord’s people when they are gathered as a church.

Practically speaking there should be no substantive difference between those in the church who hold to either the “3 office view” or the “2 ½ office view.” I Tim. 5:17 most certainly speaks of a class of elders whose labor is given to “the word and teaching.” Paul speaks of himself as one who was “put into *the ministry*” (I Tim. 1:12). Not *all Christians*, but specifically called men such as Paul and Apollos, are “*ministers* through whom you believed” (I Cor. 3:5). While the members of the Corinthian church are epistles of Christ, they are epistles as ministered to by Paul and Timothy (II Cor. 3:3, cf. 1:1). They and others with similar commissions are “*ministers of the new covenant*” (II Cor.3:6). They became ministers according to God’s own administration by which He prepares and gives certain men to fulfill the Word of God as they minister it to others (Col. 1:23-25). On whatever view of office you hold, you must maintain this high biblical standard of the role the minister serves and the work that he does.

It ought to continually astound us that the minister is given the particular commission to serve as an ambassador of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:20). While all Christians are pilgrims in a foreign land, i.e. this world, joyfully telling others of their King and their true homeland, only ministers are called by their King to *officially* represent Him in word and deed to the particular areas in which He sends them. (This is the amazing beauty of a biblical view of a call to be a pastor of a local congregation: Christ calls a *particular* man to be a daily ambassador in a *particular* portion of His vineyard and to a *particular* group of people graciously conquered by Him to be His loyal subjects.)

While the ministries of rule and mercy are good and necessary aspects of the ministry of Christ the Servant and the King, there is nothing on earth like the ministry of Christ the Word through the ministry of the word and sacraments. “Now then, *we* are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through *us*: *we* implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (II Cor. 5:20). The “*we*” is not “all believers”, but ministers of the Word sent with His divine commission. The “*you*” are all those who are privileged to hear, through the minister, the earnest entreaties of God Himself as He calls us to throw down the futile weapons of our warfare against the Lord of heaven and earth, and to rest in the perfect reconciliation accomplished by “Him who knew no sin (who was made) sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5: 21).

To make *everything* “ministry” is, ultimately, to make *nothing* distinctive ministry. In a day of egalitarianism and populism the OPC continues to honor the title, the office, and the work of “the minister”. May you who are called to that office realize that there is no higher calling for any man, and may you honor that calling by fulfilling your ministries (II Tim. 4:5). Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as workers who do not need to be ashamed, cutting a straight path, that is, handling accurately, the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 11

The Life of a Minister

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (I Tim. 4:16)

“The life of a minister is the life of his ministry.” This old adage is true in any and every age of the Christian church, and for ministers of any denomination. The OPC *Form of Government* rightly presents the high standards required of the man who would assume the calling of a minister of Jesus Christ:

He who fills this office shall be sound in faith, possess competency in human learning, and be able to teach and rule others. He should exhibit holiness of life becoming to the gospel. He should be a man of wisdom and discretion. He should rule his own house well. He should have a good report of them that are outside the church. (Ch. VI, sect. 3)

While such a description has been part and parcel of what has been expected of Presbyterian ministers, the integrity of “the clergy” began to be eroded in the nineteenth century as men were ordained to the ministerial office with what has been rightly described as “crossed fingers” regarding the doctrinal standards of the church. This led, as it inevitably does, to erosion in the moral integrity of more and more ministers. Taking heed to one’s self and taking heed to one’s doctrine do, indeed, always go hand in hand (I Tim. 4:16). Then, when the discipline of the church toward its ministers with respect to both their doctrine and life was increasingly neglected, the PCUSA quickly declined into a mutual admiration society – a religious fraternity that served, above all else, to perpetuate its bureaucratic machinery and positions for its well-paid employees.

It was from this largely degenerated view of the ministerial life and service that the OPC was separated in 1936 (in the midst of a national depression). Ministers who cast their lot with those who, like Dr. Machen, refused to renounce their servitude to Christ for servitude to a church paid a heavy price. Church buildings and fine parsonages were given up; tents, rented quarters, and often sub-standard housing took their place. Pensions and often higher than average salaries were left; men who could have earned far more in other callings or even in other churches accepted often pitifully small compensation so that they might minister conscientiously in a church that was genuinely committed to historic Christianity and Presbyterianism. (In the OPC, Franklin Square, as late as the

1950s, the church treasurer and others would frequently contribute personal funds to add to the church collection so that they could pay the pastor the already small salary that had been promised to him.)

Yet this purging served the purpose (among others) of giving the OPC a foundational generation of ministers who were blood earnest about their callings and second to none in their labors. The reformation of the church brought a needed reformation in its ministers. OPC ministers *had* to work hard at their calling, establishing Sunday Schools and Vacation Bible Schools, and all of the administration necessary to keep usually tiny churches running somewhat smoothly and with good order. Whether on domestic or foreign fields, OPC ministers were known as *laborers*. Bruce Hunt, legendary OPC missionary to Korea, epitomized that trait as he wrote in a letter to the Committee on Foreign Missions: “I don’t know how much territory I have covered, but it is plenty – walking, cycling, riding on cart, sleigh, truck, bus and train; yes, even boats.”

This does not mean that the OPC has been without fault in the application of its high standards for the life and labors of its ministers. Every church on any level - local, regional, or national - can develop its own “good old boy network,” particularly among ministers. Graduation from a particular seminary may prevail over thorough examination of the faith and life of men desiring to be ministers in the OPC. Seniority or fraternal familiarity may become more influential than the mandates of Holy Scripture in dealing with fellow ministers who have clearly become lax or wayward in their lives. At the same time, the very geographical distance of most OPC ministers from one another coupled with the increasing demands of a busy and fast-paced society work against the necessary work of ministers ministering to one another, sharpening one another as iron sharpens iron (Prov. 27:17). Historically ministers, particularly in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, have made provision for set times to fulfill with one another the mandate to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24) and to “exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). As the OPC has grown and become more established on the American scene, it is easier for men to be content with what they have and not give themselves entirely to their lives and labors “that (their) progress may be evident to all” (I Tim. 4:15). To the extent that this is true of any of us, we must repent and most earnestly pursue the path of new obedience – an obedience befitting our calling to be holy and earnest men in an unholy and uncommitted age.

The OPC will only be as strong as its ministers. What a sobering thought! Contemplate it often. While it is true that “a holy *church* is an awful weapon in the hand of God” (Charles Spurgeon), it is first true that a holy

minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God. While the great Puritan pastor Richard Baxter would never sustain an examination for ordination to the ministry in the OPC, especially because of his view of the atonement and of justification, his message in the classic work *The Reformed Pastor* is still true for us and should ring in our ears:

Oh brethren, watch...over your own hearts; keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal; be much at home with, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God – if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers; or, if you have an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 12

Pastoral Ministry

And He Himself gave some to be...pastors and teachers... (Eph. 4:11)

Beneath the more public studies, debates and General Assembly decisions of the OPC in its warfare as “the church militant,” there are the foundation stones of local churches led by ministers who are called *pastors*. It is a constant source of amazement to me that the Lord does not entrust these ministries to angels, for these unfallen spirits know nothing of what it means to be redeemed by grace and to minister, out of that redeemed life, to specific flocks of Christ’s sheep.

Those who are still alive and were part of the OPC during the time of its first generation of ministers witness to us of the importance of men who were “nobodies” to the world, but were nevertheless official representatives of the meek and lowly One to those who received them and allowed themselves to be ministered to by them. How many Orthodox Presbyterian congregations were built up by the labors of a quiet Robert Vining who persisted in knocking on doors inviting people to church? How many home mission works were started by the energetic Bob Graham, whose love for the OPC and its Lord was infectious? How many young people witnessed the gracious hospitality of Lewis Grotenhuis who, even with his busy schedule and large family, still opened his house regularly to minister just as His Master did, in a familiar home setting?. How many still remember the organizational skills and many projects of Cal Cummings, who modeled so well a pastor who “labored” in his calling? And how many young people were influenced for Christ, especially by the conference ministry of silver-tongued John Hills? There is simply no way to overstate the unique importance of pastoral ministry in Christ’s plan for His Church, and for the discipling of people who learn to follow the Great Shepherd through the rod and the staff of His undershepherds.

Christ’s undershepherd in a local congregation of God’s people...is called a pastor. It is his charge to feed and tend the flock as Christ’s minister and...to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ’s flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the

sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the homes of the people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the Gospel to the lost. (OPC Form of Government, Ch. VIII)

There is a continual need to remind men of these strenuous time- and life-demanding requirements for pastors in the OPC. It is easy for a man to become consumed with standing and special committees on the presbytery or general assembly level. And today the ability to communicate with, quite literally, *the world* by means of a keyboard and a mouse button, brings the ever-present temptation to spend one's time in anything other than the labors of prayer and the ministry of the Word to which he has been called, and for which he must be devoted (Acts 6:4). "It is not thus that souls are won."

As a pastor I have found it helpful to think of the church and the relationship of pastoral ministry in it just as one would think of an automobile and the process by which it is made and runs. The car is sleek and beautiful as a whole entity, but its various parts must function well for it to truly serve its purpose. These various parts are usually made on assembly lines. The work that is done for each part may become tedious and it is hardly glamorous labor, but, without faithfulness in that work, the whole car itself will run poorly, no matter how attractive it might look. Similarly, it is easy to be pleased with the church as a well organized entity and to find satisfaction in being identified with it; but the church will run poorly if the pastor is not diligent about every aspect of the part, i.e. the local congregation, to which he is assigned by Christ as a steward. The work, particularly in a small charge in a remote area, may seem unimportant and unseen, but it is, in fact, no less important than a gear or bushing without which an automobile will run poorly, if at all.

Similarly, a soldier in the trenches may wonder about the importance of his small role in a major war which engages hundreds of thousands. Nevertheless, many lives, including his own, are dependent upon his faithfulness in his duties. Battles are won and lost in the trenches; families and nations are influenced by the responsibility or irresponsibility of each soldier who is given a task. So it is with the church. Pastors are the trench soldiers in the spiritual warfare of the Kingdom of God against the Kingdom of Satan. The battles are won or lost in the trenches of local churches and the ministries that flow from them. For sobering proof, witness the number of churches that

have been dissolved – at least, in some cases, because of the failure of pastors to “wage the good warfare” as they should. On the other hand, witness the number of churches that flourish, ultimately because of the blessing of Christ, but instrumentally because of the faithful, energetic labors of pastors who are “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that (their) labors are not in vain in the Lord” (I Cor. 15:58).

However we choose to picture the work so that we get a real grasp of its importance, may those of us who are given the privilege of being called to serve as pastors be continually stirred to the life and death significance of our labors. A revived church must begin with revived ministers, and particularly revived *pastors*. Knowing the terror of the Lord, may we *persuade* men (II Cor. 5:11); being compelled by the love of Christ, may we *serve* men (II Cor. 5:14); and remembering the solemn charge to all ministers, may we preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, convincing, rebuking, and exhorting with all longsuffering and teaching (II Tim. 4:2). The great Shepherd of the sheep deserves nothing less in those to whom he gives the precious title of *Pastor*.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Murphy, Thomas. *Pastoral Theology*. Old Paths Publications: Audubon, NJ. 1996 reprint.

MTIOPC class: “Pastoral Theology,” Pastor William Shishko, instructor

Chapter 13

Apologetics

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense[an apologetic] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear [reverence].” (I Pet. 3:15)

The OPC was born and grew up in an environment of apologetics, which is the defense of the faith against its opponents. Dr. Machen had been schooled in the classical methods of defending the faith in the tradition of Old Princeton, and he applied that method effectively in his scholarly volumes such as *The Virgin Birth of Christ* and *The Origin of Paul’s Religion*. However, it was Cornelius Van Til whose presuppositional approach to apologetics (building on, but not slavishly following, the methodology of the Dutch theologians Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper) became the standard for most Orthodox Presbyterian ministers and for multitudes of Reformed and Calvinistic ministers beyond the OPC. For example, Francis Schaeffer, who would become well-known for the cultural apologetics by which he challenged the unbelief of young people in “the 60s generation”, used a hybrid of Van Til’s presuppositional approach. Greg Bahnsen, himself an OPC minister, would systematize Van Til’s often rambling treatises and clarify many of the obscurities in Van Til’s sometimes peculiar modes of expression, thus making this eminently biblical approach to defending the faith accessible to those for whom Van Til was but a revered name.

Why address “apologetics” right after we have begun considering pastoral ministry? In part, it is because one of the qualifications for any minister is that he must “be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). With good reason the OPC has put an emphasis on preparing its ministers to respond to the manifold “contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (I Tim. 6:20) in an age in which (as in every age) people are “always learning (but) never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. 3:7).

The other reason is because such training and ability is indispensable to the work of a pastor: the evangelism of the lost and the discipling of converts. In what has been rightly or wrongly called a “post-Christian culture” pastors can no longer assume that there is the “borrowed capital” of Christianity in the thinking of the average man or woman on the street. Not only are categories such as truth and error, sin and righteousness, beauty and ugliness, blurred or non-existent in the thinking of many, but, increasingly, we deal with people who have no familiarity with the Bible at all. As those trained in the language, history, theology, and concepts of the Bible, we

are more comfortable with the “synagogue model” of ministry, that is, opening up and explaining the Scriptures to those who, like Apollos, need to learn the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26), or who simply need to see Christ and the way of salvation in a book for which they need a competent interpreter and teacher (Acts 8:30-35). It is easy for us to stay in this comfort zone; but what is easy is not always what is good.

As ministers we must grow in applying the “Athens model” of ministry (Acts 17:16-34). This entails engaging the popular philosophies of the day and their proponents by showing the emptiness of their thought forms and confronting them with the resurrected, living, and reigning Christ. Rather than accommodating our preaching to the ideas of the world, we must solemnly but earnestly call to repentance those whose supposed wisdom is actually folly (Rom. 1:22), and whose idolatries born of false faith commitments are ignorance rather than true knowledge (Acts 17:30). Surely we must seek to understand what the opponents of the Christian faith are saying, and we must be careful to present their views accurately, as Paul strives to do in Acts 17:20. (Here both Machen and Van Til provide excellent models for us. Even those who personally rejected their Christian faith acknowledged that they understood and fairly represented the views of those with whom they disagreed.). At the same time we must show them that they cannot avoid the God in whom they live and move and have their very being; that God is the Creator of heaven and earth; He is sovereign in all things; we cannot erase the knowledge of Him from our being, for we are His image; and that we are necessarily religious (Acts 17:22-29). Self-contradictory idols are not to be worshipped but God is. And, while we graciously engage His opponents, we always do so as *ministers* – proclaiming Him as His heralds, summoning our hearers to realize that we will be judged by the One whose resurrection is both a declaration of the divine acceptance of His sacrifice for sins (Rom. 4:25) and a preview of the resurrection of the last day and the judgment that will follow (Acts 17:31). The issues are not, ultimately, philosophical, but life and death. To be sure, many will mock, but others will want to hear more. In time some (and we should pray for many!) will believe and follow the Lord (Acts 17:32, 34).

It would be good for us as ministers to do less “preaching to the choir” when it comes to apologetics, and do more preaching to those whose hearts and tongues are in warfare against the true and living God and Jesus Christ His Son. While there is a place, perhaps, for fine-tuning our “apologetic method”, it would be better if we stopped debating about the subject and used it more in active engagement with the nations who “rage and imagine vain things” (Ps. 2:1). Let us use the weapon of good apologetic method and teach our people to do the same so that they do not “answer a fool according to his folly” and thus be like him, but, instead, “answer a fool as his folly deserves lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:4). Then, all the while, let us pray that the Spirit would enable us to open the eyes of those who are blind in order to “turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,

that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ”
(Acts 26:18).

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Always Ready*. Covenant Media Press: Nacogdoches, TX. 1996. *The best practical exposition of presuppositional apologetics. It is more advanced than Pratt’s volume (below).*

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, N.J. 1998. *This volume is probably the best way to get access to the thought and methodology of Cornelius Van Til.*

Frame, John. *Apologetics to the Glory of God*. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, N.J. 1994.

Pratt, Richard L. Jr. *Every Thought Captive*. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, N.J. 1979. *The best popular introduction to presuppositional methodology in apologetics. Suitable for High School students.*

Van Til, Cornelius. *Paul at Athens. The Defense of Christianity. My Credo, Why I Believe in God*. These, and all of Cornelius Van Til’s materials – much of it in audio format – are available on CD Rom, “The Works of Cornelius Van Til.” *This superb resource is available from its producer, Mr. Eric Sigward at ESigward@cs.com*

MTIOPC class: “Apologetics,” Dr. William Dennison, instructor

Chapter 14

Evangelism

Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (II Tim. 4:5)

“The OPC is not concerned with evangelism!” This was an accusation that was heard frequently in the 1970s and 80s, when the so-called “New Life controversy” boiled within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Particularly those who followed then OPC minister Jack Miller and the model of New Life OPC, Jenkintown, PA pointed to church membership statistics which seemed to indicate quite clearly that the “New Life churches” were growing, while other OPC congregations were small, displayed little growth, remained stagnant, or were in the process of death. For a time the conflict between “OPC traditionalists” and the “New Lifers” actually threatened to divide the church or alter its course significantly. Following the OPC’s 1986 rejection of the proposal of the Presbyterian Church in America to “join with them and be received by them as one church,” many of the New Life churches left the OPC for a “voluntary realignment” with the PCA. This brought some necessary heart-searching in the OPC. The fruit of that was a much clearer sense of what is known as “OPC Identity” (hence the number of volumes published since that time which help us to critically *appreciate* our history rather than to critically *depreciate* it.) and the development on various levels, not least on OPC standing committees, of a much more consistent and coherent Reformed and Presbyterian “way of doing things” as a church. Rather than simply *react* to its detractors, the OPC has sought to *act* in a healthy, theologically informed way. This is the OPC at its best!

Nevertheless, has evangelism,— the growth of the church by the winning of those who are lost— been a weakness in the OPC? One can respond in various ways.

Remember that the OPC had to fight for its own existence in its early decades. The first denomination formed as a result of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, the OPC not only was at pains to demonstrate its own *legitimacy* as a church separate from the PCUSA, but also to maintain (let alone build) its infrastructure when most of its physical and financial resources had to remain with the parent body which it left. There was not the attractiveness of beautiful church buildings and well-developed church programs to enhance ministers’ appeals to others to be part of the OPC. Yet, even with that, from the very beginning the OPC seized upon its responsibility as a church to obey the Great Commission, making disciples of the nations under the comprehensive authority of King Jesus. Not only was a Committee on Home Missions established, but Committees on Foreign Missions and

Christian Education were quickly established as well. Despite the national economic depression of the 1930s, and the crippling effects of World War II and the Korean War in the 1940s, the OPC, with very limited resources, taught and preached the Word of God and the way of salvation in Christ to many. In the early 1940s, a General Assembly study committee produced a most useful report entitled “Preserving the Results of Our Evangelism” (see Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, pp. 62f). The report presented a theologically consistent model for evangelism and discipleship to help the church do its evangelistic work in a distinctively “Old School Presbyterian” way rather than in the Arminian and evangelical ways which were becoming both popular and prominent. Against mighty odds the OPC *did* grow!

At the same time, there can be no doubt that the small church’s energies and labors were frequently diverted into matters of controversy which did not, in themselves, further the work of evangelism. The division of 1937 together with the issues that prompted it, haggling over the question of the relation of the church and culture, the “Clark controversy”, the later Peniel controversy, and even the ‘New Life controversy’ itself all no doubt served to at least somewhat divert the church from its mission to make disciples of all the nations. Yet, in the good and overruling providence of God, all of these served to make the OPC, as still a very young church, more self-consciously biblical, Reformed, and Presbyterian in its character. Not only is the church meant to be a beacon to the lost, but it is also meant to be a “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). The OPC’s wrestling with these controversies under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and with the final authority of an unerring Bible have bettered it as a church and given it a much improved infrastructure for fulfilling its part in the Great Commission given by Christ.

Not only evangelists, but all ministers in the OPC are required to “bear the glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing and beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ” (OPC *Form of Government*, VI: 2). Along with all of their other duties, pastors are to “make known the gospel to the lost.” And, while Paul may have been speaking to Timothy regarding his specific duties in what we would call the office of an evangelist, it is nonetheless true that every minister must “do the work of an evangelist” if he would “fulfill his ministry” (II Tim. 4:5). This is done primarily by preaching which must never be devoid of the Gospel and its call to people to repent and believe in Christ. “The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 89). Such preaching must breathe with life and death earnestness. With the great Scottish preacher, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, we must preach so that our hearers sense that “we are dying for them to be saved.” It is a shame to us if our preaching is ever anything less than *earnest*. And such

preaching must be done not only in pulpits on Sunday, but on all occasions and in every place where we make or are given opportunities. Paul's model, given to be followed by all, was proclaiming and teaching "publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).

At the same time, we must teach our people how to be good witnesses of the grace of God in Christ given to them. While the work of official proclamation is given to the minister as God's herald, all Christians have the privilege and the responsibility of telling the good news of deliverance in Christ to others. Such witness-bearing by all of God's people is a powerful engine for the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church (Acts 8:4). Practically speaking, it might help pastors, whose primary focus will be on the various ways of discipling the Lord's people, to make use of local church "Outreach Committees" which can assist a church in giving it more visibility in its community, and also in investigating ways and means by which the ministry of the Word from that church might be better brought into contact with the lost and dying.

In all, let us have optimism that, as we bring the Gospel to the lost, the great Seeker of the lost will draw His elect unto Himself and His Church. We must do this in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit who grants demonstration of power and deep assurance when the Word of God is ministered by a man of God (I Thess. 1:5). In our day, as in Paul's day, the Gospel is still "God's power unto salvation to all those who believe, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Let us not be ashamed of it, but *proclaim* it in faith that God's word so ministered "will not return to him void, but accomplish that which He purposes" (Is. 55:11)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 15

Leading in Worship

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! (Ps. 29:2)

Worship is the highest calling of God's people. It is "not merely a gathering of God's children with each other but before all else a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people" (*Directory for Public Worship*, II: 2). Precisely because it is such an event, it is the highest calling of the minister of God to lead it. Of the *pastor* the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church says: "It is his task to conduct the public worship of God" (*FG*, VIII).

There are differences of opinion in the OPC regarding the role (if any) of non-ministers in leading public worship. Is there a place for the assistance of ruling elders? What of licentiates or interns (who may or may not be licensed to preach) whose gifts of leadership and utterance must be tested by the congregation and developed in preparation for the ministry? What is a church to do on the Lord's Day when, due to unforeseen circumstances, a minister is not present? Above all, how does this circumscribing of those who lead public worship in the OPC fit with the seemingly more "charismatic" approach given in I Corinthians 14?

However we address these questions, the position of historic Presbyterianism has been that a minister of the Word of God leads God's people in worship because the leadership of that worship and its various elements is, itself, a ministry of the Word of God. See *The Directory for the Publick [sic] Worship of God; agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster*, in which every reference to the duty for every element of worship is given to the minister. In approving "the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" (third ordination vow) we grant that other communions may do things differently, but we will submit to these "house rules" for the sake of good order in this particular household of God (I Cor. 14:40, I Tim. 3:15).

Beyond this discussion, however, is the far greater matter of *what* worship is and *how* it is to be conducted by those given that charge. With all of the available helps to assist us in addressing these questions, nothing is more useful to us as Orthodox Presbyterian ministers than the well thought-out and carefully written *Directory for Public Worship* as approved by the General Assembly of the OPC. It presents not only guidance in particular matters (such as the reception of church members, the administration of the sacraments, and the conducting of weddings and

funerals), but it also displays the grand themes that should form our thinking about worship, our organization of weekly worship services, our specific personal preparation to lead the Lord's people in their highest calling, and the actual performance of that duty. Failure to do these things under the guidance of our church standards (above all else, the Bible) will inevitably lead to a declension in our worship and a departure from what, as a church, we have declared to be unto maximum edification for the congregations we serve (I Cor. 14:26b).

What are these grand themes?

First, and foremost, "a service of public worship is in its essence a meeting of God and His people..." (DPW III: 1). In the salutation God Himself, through the minister, greets His people with words of grace and peace. This was clearly the pattern in gatherings of the earliest Christian churches (Rom. 1:7, I Cor. 1:3, II Cor. 1:2). God speaks to His people by His word read and preached by one trained and called to that work. Through His minister He marks His people with the covenant sign and seal of baptism, and through His minister He feeds His people with the Lord's Supper. Through the benediction given by the minister, God pronounces his blessing on his people as they depart. Once again, this is the pattern of the early Christian church (Rom. 16:24, I Cor. 16:23, II Cor. 13:14). No wonder that such things are to be done, above all else, with a spirit of reverence and awe.

Second, public worship is a corporate response of praise, thanksgiving, confession, hearing, and heeding the word of the church's God and King. For that reason, the congregation, with the church of all ages, sings psalms and hymns of praise to the Lord (Ps. 95:1f, 96:1, 98:4-6, 100:2, Js. 5:13) Together the church confesses its faith, (Heb. 10:23-25) and its sins (I Jn. 1:8f). Together the church brings its petitions before the Lord as it is led by the heart and voice of one who serves as both their representative and their mouthpiece before God: "In public prayer the minister is the voice of he congregation. He should pray in such a way that the whole assembly of God's people may pray with him..." (DPW, III:5). Together the church hears and receives God's promises from His word (all of which are "Yes!" and "Amen!" in Christ, II Cor. 1:20) and the precepts from His word by which they are meant to live. Together they give their offerings of thanks (Ps. 96:8), and together they leave as a God-blessed body in order to follow their Lord in faith and hope. With good reason both solemnity and joy should mark God's children as they gather and meet in public worship.

It has been a profound help to me to realize that my leadership in worship as a pastor is leadership in the activity which most powerfully demonstrates the union of the church on earth with heaven itself. Of the church as an

assembly it is true that “(We) have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, i.e. festal gathering, and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24).

Therefore, I must be careful myself not to “refuse Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:25), but I must so minister that divine speech that it is truly an accurate representation of His words and desires for those who hear. I must lead the Lord’s people with a felt sense that Christ adds to our gathering by His blessed self (Matt. 18:20), that He sings His own praise with the church (Heb. 2:12b) even as He joins with the church in confessing its faith in God (Heb. 2:13a). Further, I must preach to the Lord’s people remembering that, through me as a minister and a pastor, He declares His name to His brethren (Heb. 2:12a). What a thrill it is to know that He is not ashamed to call those who compose the body I am privileged to lead as “my brethren,” and that He delights to say of often discouraged, and usually sin- and earth-weary pilgrims: “(Father): Here am I and the children whom (You have) given Me”(Heb. 2:13b).

What minister would want to relinquish a privilege like that to anyone else?

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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MTIOPC class: “Reformed Worship”, Pastor Larry Wilson, instructor.

Chapter 16

Preaching

Preach the word! (II Tim. 4:2)

The Reformed and Presbyterian heritage of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is, in large measure, a heritage of *preaching*. It was the preaching of the Protestant Reformers Luther and Calvin that ignited flames in human hearts and transformed nations. It was the preaching of Knox, Melville, and others of the “Scotch Worthies” that formed a zeal for the crown rights of King Jesus among the Presbyterians in Scotland. And it was the preaching of Francis Makemie, William Tennent, Samuel Eliot, and the men of “Old Princeton” such as Archibald Alexander that birthed, nurtured, and formed the character and disciplines of a Presbyterian Church in North America.

Preaching is the authoritative declaration of the Word of God by the minister as an ambassador of God, with the twin goals of forming a people *of* God and bringing people *to* God. Teaching is primarily to *inform*. Preaching is primarily to *transform*. Preaching has the goal of proclaiming the good news about Christ and “bring(ing) souls into sweet communion with the living and true God” (Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 149). A careful reading and interpretation of Romans 10:14 shows that, in faithful preaching, people hear Christ Himself: “How then shall they call on [the Lord Jesus] in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” For this reason the OPC *Directory for Worship* rightly says: “In the sermon God addresses the congregation by the mouth of his servant. It is a matter of supreme importance that the minister preach only the Word of God, not the wisdom of man, that he declare the whole counsel of God, and that he handle aright the Word of truth” (DPW III:3).

Powerful preaching has not, in my opinion, been one of the great strengths of the OPC. Dr. Machen, for all of his well-known strengths as a teacher and a lecturer, was not known as a preacher (nor was he ever a pastor). Under his matchless influence, the OPC’s first generation of ministers took on more of a lecture model in their preaching. While this served to form congregations of well-instructed Christians; it did not create the stirring impact and appeal to the masses that preaching has so often done in the past. Under the influence of Cornelius Van Til and John Murray, OPC ministers learned to defend the faith as they unraveled philosophical errors; but the milieu of apologetics is different than the milieu of ordinary pastoral preaching; preaching is not a theological lecture. Edmund P. Clowney gave an appreciation for preaching Christ in all of Scripture, but men struggled with how to

take those profound biblical-theological insights and turn them into sermons that did not sound the same each week. Recent discussions in the OPC have unnecessarily tended to polarize men who desire to “Preach Christ!” against those who are concerned to apply the Word of God to the hearts of their hearers. In short, those who preach in the OPC have had precious few models of men from their own ranks who could preach the Word of God clearly and effectively, both showing the glories of Christ in all of the Scriptures and, at the same time, so declaring the biblical passage, text, or topic that it brings specific transformation in the lives of the hearers. This is hardly to say that such preaching has been *absent* in the OPC, but one struggles to think of OPC ministers who are known as “popular preachers.”

The Church is never truly “Reformed”, but is always reforming. We are in need of a revival not just in appreciating preaching for what it is, but in preaching itself! We are in need of a revival that does not turn men to “new measures” for church growth, but that turns men to the “old paths” which effective preachers of the past and the present have taken as they “let their progress be evident to all” (I Tim. 4:15) and, under the power of preaching, have seen multitudes converted and churches built.

We who preach can hardly do better than to learn from the section “Of the Preaching of the Word” in the original *Westminster Directory for Public Worship*. Among other things, our fathers in the faith reminded us:

(The minister) is not to rest in general doctrine...but to bring it home to special use, by application, to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavor to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick [living] and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.

In dehortation, reprehension, and public admonition (which require special wisdom), let him, as there shall be cause, not only discover the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also show the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprised by it, together with the remedies and best ways to avoid it.

...the servant of Christ, whatever his method (of preaching) be, is to perform his whole ministry:

- 1. Painfully [taking pains], not (to do) the work of the Lord negligently.*
- 2. Plainly, that the meanest may understand...*

3. *Faithfully, looking at the honor of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory...*
4. *Wisely, framing all doctrines, exhortations, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail...*
5. *Gravely [seriously], as becomes the word of God...*
6. *With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good. And,*
7. *As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teaches is the truth of Christ...*

I would only add that all preaching must be driven by the conviction that *Christ is at work* in the man who preaches, in the congregation hearing that preaching, and in the event of preaching itself. To try to perpetuate doctrine in a church without “lively preaching” is like trying to fill a bathtub with no water pressure! May the OPC be granted a revival of preaching and a host of men who preach every sermon as “never sure to preach again, as dying men to dying men.”

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MTIOPC class: “Homiletics”, Pastors William Shishko and Peter Vosteen, instructors

Chapter 17

Word and Sacraments

Go...make disciples...baptizing them... (Matt. 28:19)

Do this in remembrance of Me. (1 Cor. 11:24f.)

It is interesting that there have been few official discussions of the sacraments in Orthodox Presbyterian history. Apart from differences of practice regarding the reception of Roman Catholic baptism, a majority and minority report about whether or not it was permissible to receive members who would not submit to the church's practice of infant baptism, and an official rejection of paedocommunion (following the presentation of majority and minority reports to the General Assembly), the OPC has been silent on the issue of the sacraments, preferring to let its confessional and catechetical expressions suffice.

In recent years there appears to be a movement toward increasing the frequency of the administration of the Lord's Supper in the congregations. Few churches, it seems, continue the practice of "communion" on a quarterly basis. Having the Lord's Supper as part of worship on at least a monthly basis, if not a weekly basis, seems to be the trend in the OPC. This is closer to the New Testament pattern in which "the breaking of bread" (most probably the Lord's Supper) was a regular part of the worship of the early Christian church (Acts 2:42). It is certainly closer to what Calvin desired for his pastoral ministry in Geneva.

It also appears that more and more ministers are sensitive to what they regard as a more "Zwinglian" approach to the sacraments in American Presbyterian churches, which is seeing baptism and the Lord's Supper as mere symbols with the emphasis being placed on the human response to them. While the sacraments must be received in faith, they are still visible signs and seals of the work of Christ to worthy receivers, (Rom. 4:11). The sacraments are *means of grace*! They are not unnecessary appendages to the ministry of the Word of God in the church. They are the visible, tangible, sensory Word of God given to bring personal comfort from the Lord of the church to those who receive them in faith. It is encouraging to see a gradual evolution out of at least the implicit Zwinglianism that we have inherited even in the OPC.

The history of the Christian church amply demonstrates that it is very difficult not to either *underestimate* or *overestimate* the sacraments.

On the one hand, both pietism's emphasis on personal response to grace (something that is hardly wrong in itself – the *Larger Catechism*, in particular, addresses how our baptism is to be improved by us, Q. 167, and how the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is to be prepared for, partaken of, and regarded after being received, Q 171, 174, 175), and the individualism which has marked American political and religious experience, have combined to lessen the impact of baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments of *the church*. There is a binding character of baptism and the Lord's Supper – binding worthy receivers both to the Lord and to one another. Those who are baptized are added to the church (Acts 2:40f.) and the Lord's Supper is a table gathering of the church (I Cor. 11:18). Indeed, the one loaf that is a communion of the body of Christ is also a communion with one another in the church (I Cor. 10:16f.). Revivalism, with its emphasis on individual experience, did much to supplant the place of the sacraments (with, it seems, the “altar-call” virtually replacing baptism, and church suppers virtually replacing the Lord's Supper); and the more cerebral character of American Presbyterianism did its own share of depreciating the value of sacraments as the Gospel given to the hands, the mouth, the nose, and the eyes as surely as the word presents the Gospel to the ear.

Yet, in an over-reaction to all of this, we now face those who, in one way or the other, equate baptism with regeneration (or presumed regeneration), and speak of a form of the “real presence” of Christ in the Supper which appears to go beyond the “spiritual presence” spoken of in our standards. “Worthy receivers...not carnally and corporally, but *spiritually*, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as *really, but spiritually*, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements are to their outward senses.” (*WCF*, XXIX: 7). Not to oversimplify the complexity of this issue, but we would do well to see these as references to the Holy Spirit's presence (as He is present with the Word preached), and then put these affirmations in the context of a proper view of the Spirit's ministry as a ministry of Christ Himself in His Church (Jn. 16:14f).

Here again our safe ground is not innovation, but the riches of our own well thought-out confessional heritage as it opens the mysteries of Christ coming to us in these means of grace:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace [not our experience], immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits [not our response], and to confirm our interest in him [they are personal]; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world [they are objective and church-focused]; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his word [they call us to covenant faithfulness as surely as preaching does].
WCF XXVII:1. – Bracketed items mine, WS.

The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it [i.e. we should not put the emphasis on where or by whom a person was baptized], but upon the work of the Spirit and the word of institution [i.e. not the sacrament itself]; which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers [i.e. not automatically and not to all]. WCF XXVI:3. . – Bracketed items mine, WS.

A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit [all language that we should use] unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without.
WLC #162. . – Bracketed items mine, WS.

In a society oriented to the visual, sacraments bring the Gospel to our sight and to all other senses. Unlike preaching, which goes indiscriminately to all, sacraments make personal the love of Christ and the comforts of the Gospel. In baptism the Lord puts His Name on His people; in the Lord's Supper Christ feeds them and gives them drink. In both He shows His matchless grace, and bids us follow Him until He comes again and feasts with us at the marriage supper of the Lamb. As pastors, may we heartily believe and warmly communicate these rich truths to the congregations we are called to serve!

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Chapter 18

Catechizing the Young (And the Old, and Yourself)

Go...make disciples...baptizing them...and teaching them to keep all things that I have commanded you.

(Matt. 28:19)

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me... (II Tim. 1:13)

For some, “catechism” summons images of the Roman Catholic Church and its way of indoctrinating its youth. We should remind ourselves that the Greek term “katecho” (from which we get the term “catechism”) is used in the Scriptures to describe an orderly and systematic teaching of truth, particularly to young disciples. The Gospel of Luke is an extended catechism: “It seemed good to me...having accurately followed all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, in order that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were catechized” (Lk. 1:3,4). “Catechizing”, usually by succinct statements in questions and answers, is the tried and true method of instructing Christians (not only the young, but all disciples) in the history of the Christian church. Martin Luther and John Calvin both composed catechisms for the instruction of their flocks, knowing that Protestants must be given basic constructions of biblical truth so that they might have mental hedges against error.

The Westminster Assembly, building on this tradition, wrote and agreed upon the *Larger Catechism* (“to be a directory for catechizing such as have made some proficiency in the knowledge of the grounds of religion”) as well as the *Shorter Catechism* (“to be a directory for catechizing such as are of weaker capacity”). While the pattern of the Reformed churches in Europe, especially in the Netherlands, was for the minister to catechize the young on a regular basis (usually weekly), the Scottish Presbyterian tradition represented the minister’s work of catechizing simply as an aspect of his preaching. *The Directory for Family Worship* approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647 gave the duty of catechizing to the family, and particularly to the head of the family.

The work of catechizing in the American Presbyterian tradition seems to have been stronger in Southern Presbyterianism than in Northern Presbyterianism. One can surmise that the Industrial Revolution and its effects in increasing the demands on family time, especially in the East and in the cities in which Presbyterianism had its strongholds, took its toll on the discipline of catechizing in the homes (not unlike what our busy modern life has

done for catechizing in our homes). There is little evidence that systematic catechizing was a dominant part of early twentieth century Northern Presbyterianism. Benjamin Warfield had to write defending even the *worth* of the catechism! No doubt this is one of the reasons for the decline in theological discernment among the rank and file of members of the PCUSA.

The OPC wisely and rightly included the duty of catechizing in its list of responsibilities given to the pastor: “It is his task to...(catechize) by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ.” (*FG VIII*). This is not to remove the responsibility from parents, for our primary standard, the Bible, calls fathers to bring their children up “in the child training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). While this text does not specifically mention catechism, it is certainly included in those labors that provide the nurture of the Lord who has given us a “pattern of sound words” to be kept and propagated among His people (II Tim. 1:13).

By means of the work of the Committee on Christian Education and the combined efforts of the OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America through Great Commission Publications (GCP), the OPC has championed the use of catechism by way of outstanding teaching materials and other practical helps. Indeed, recent efforts by GCP have provided a superb revision of a children’s catechism (now called *First Catechism*), a program called “Kid’s Quest” which is easily adaptable to various forms of catechetical instruction in the church or the home, and a *Scripture Memory Work Notebook* which presents a graded program of instruction in both the *First Catechism* and the *Shorter Catechism* for the youth of the church.

We would do well to wed the continental approach to catechetical instruction, that is, catechism classes led by the minister, with the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, which includes catechism as part of preaching, and urges heads of families to catechize all family members – including themselves! Elder visits to homes should encourage catechetical instruction as part of bringing Christ’s rule to families. Sunday school classes, which are really classes for church members as an extended family, should – on every level – reinforce the catechetical instruction of the home. Even without a heritage of or a mandate for “catechetical preaching” in our churches, we nevertheless should consider that there are few things more necessary or vital to church life than an extended series of Adult Sunday School classes on the Confession and the Catechisms we have adopted as a church. With the publication of these documents (together with proof texts – the first such document of Scripture and Confession ever approved by American Presbyterians) there is every reason to provide such classes for those given to our care. And despite the

difficulty of arranging such with congregations whose members often come from great distances from one another, pastors should have some plan for regular catechism classes with church youth.

In short, we should expend every effort to provide a “catechetical environment” for our congregations. Not only Timothies, but all people must “hold fast the pattern of sound words” (II Tim. 1:13) which have been passed down to them, especially in the fine catechisms which are part of *our* tradition and have been valued by those in other church traditions as well. In so doing we may, by the blessing of God, enjoy the sweet fruits that such diligent catechetical labors have brought from one generation to the next. “‘As for Me,’ says the Lord, ‘this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,’ says the Lord, ‘from this time and forevermore’” (Is. 59:21)

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Chapter 19

Ruling Elders

The elders who rule well are worthy of double honor... (1 Tim. 5:17)

There were clearly differences regarding the eldership between Northern Presbyterianism and Southern Presbyterianism. One can study these particularly in the writings of Charles Hodge (representing Northern Presbyterianism) and Robert Lewis Dabney and James Henley Thornwell (representing Southern Presbyterianism). I will not enter into that debate here. The most thorough discussion of the Presbyterian concept of the ruling elder is found in the writings of Samuel Miller, first Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton Seminary (appointed in 1813). Miller clearly laid out the biblical warrant for the office of the ruling elder (called “Church –governors” as well as “elders” in the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* agreed upon by the Westminster assembly of divines) as well as the nature and duties of the office.

In my opinion, the OPC *Form of Government* well represents Miller’s approach. It presents as high a view of the work of rule in the Church as it does of the work of the minister as a preacher and teacher. Rather than engage in fruitless debate over whether we believe in three offices (minister, elder, and deacon) or two distinct functions within the office of elder along with the distinct office of deacon, it is far better that we elevate the work or office of *both* ministers and ruling elders. This is essential as we stand against the egalitarianism of so much of American evangelicalism – a spirit and mindset that tends to *no office* in the Church. It is also essential to the well-being of any church that would be governed by the precepts and pattern given by Christ the King in Holy Scripture. Let ministers and ruling elders in the OPC devote their energies to doing what our “house rules”, i.e. the *Book of Church Order* (and, here, particularly the *Form of Government*) call us to do. Surely there is more than ample work here!

Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors (FG X:3).

Our standards clearly distinguish between ministers and ruling elders: “Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the minister of the Word, with gifts for government...” (FG X: 1). At the same time, our standards just as clearly present a pastoral cast to the manner of rule to be exercised by the elders called to this office. This accords well with Paul’s admonition to the elders of the church at Ephesus to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers[bishops] to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Similarly, the apostle Peter (who spoke to the elders as their “fellow elder” in I Pet. 5:1), calls upon the elders to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers [bishops], not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to [them], but being examples to the flock...” (I Pet. 5:3). Christ’s rule, whether by the minister’s labors in the Word and sacraments, or by the labors of ruling elders individually and jointly in the session, is ever the rule of a shepherd-king (Matt. 2:6, I Pet. 2:25, Rev. 7:17). This is the emphasis we must always make as we show the people we are called to serve how Christ the King graciously leads, governs, and cares for His church.

It is imperative that we take the training, certification, and election of ruling elders with all seriousness. Ruling elders do not represent the people in a kind of ecclesiastical representative democracy; they represent Christ the great Ruling Elder of His church! Every pastor should have a well thought-out program for training ruling elders in the system of doctrine contained in *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC*, and which all officers must “sincerely receive and adopt” as the doctrine taught in Holy Scripture. This program should include a thorough explanation of the government, discipline, and worship of the OPC. Along with this there must be practical instruction in what is involved in the duties of the office, together with counsel which will help ruling elders seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church on every level. This is essential not only because all of that is entailed in the vows a man must take to assume ordained office in the OPC (and remember the solemn warnings about vows in Eccles. 5:1-7), but also because the right functioning of every man who possesses the office of a ruling elder is critical to the best service of the church in which the man is an officer. Presbyterians have rightly held that correct church government is not essential to the *being* of the church, but it is most certainly essential to the *well being* of the church. Any ministers or sessions that have had to work with ruling elders who are sand in a gearbox can attest to how true this is!

Of most importance, let ruling elders be men of the Word of God who not only “believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice” (Ordination vow #1), but whose hearts, minds, and wills are captive to this conviction. Read again our *Form of Government’s* high description of the duties of a ruling elder and you will realize that none of those things can be done correctly or in the right spirit unless the ruling elders – individually and as a session – are pervaded with a conviction to live under the rule of the Book of Books. Ministers with ruling elders and a session like this are blessed indeed! They are not fearful that their ministerial office will be threatened by their “fellow elders,” but they thank God for men who “have particular concern for (their) doctrine and conduct and help (them) in (their) labors” (FG X: 3). And congregations with ruling elders (and a session) like this know that they are similarly blessed. It is no burden, but a delight, for them to “know those who labor among (them) and are over (them) in the Lord and admonish (them), and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” (I Thess. 5:12-13).

May our God grant to us the highest views of both the offices of the *minister* and the *ruling elder*.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 20

“The Hands and Feet of Christ”

It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you...men...whom we may appoint over this business... (Acts 6:2-3.)

If the minister (with or without the assistance of session members) does everything in the church, the ministry will *inevitably* be diminished. It is precisely because this so often happens that we are in need of a renewed appreciation of the office and work of deacons.

While there is some division of opinion over whether or not Acts 6 describes the origin of the diaconal office, the text rather clearly indicates that diaconal work is in view. As the early church in Jerusalem is growing rapidly, vs. 1a., a dispute grows between the visiting Hebrew widows and the indigenous Hebrew widows because, for whatever reason, their daily provisions were being neglected by the apostles who had, along with their other duties, responsibility for what we would call the “ministry of mercy”, vs. 1b (see also Js. 1:27, Gal. 2:10). This ministry was called “the daily *diakonia*”, i.e. *deaconing*, vs. 1c. In a very practical response to this early challenge in the life of the church as a covenant community, the apostles summon the multitude of the disciples and tell them “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God [their ministry of the Word] and *deacon* tables”, vs. 2. It was not *wrong* for them to give attention to the temporal needs of those who were part of the church, but the ministry of the Word must not be neglected in doing so. There is a better way to do things!

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men (males) of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this business”, vs. 3 (compare to Lk. 12:42). Here are *spiritual qualifications* (the seminal form of what are given more fully in I Tim. 3:8-13), *a clearly defined sphere of responsibility* (the business of providing temporal assistance to the church’s needy), and *authority in that sphere* (as indicated by the phrase “whom we put in charge of this business”). That would then free the apostles so that they might give themselves to their primary work of “prayer *and* (literally) ‘*the deaconing*’ of the word”, vs.4. This being satisfactory to the church, seven men are called out by a form of popular suffrage, vs. 5, and they are ordained with prayer and the laying on of hands by the apostles, vs. 6. It should not be missed that, under this new way of administering the official duties of the church, “the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied

greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”, vs. 7. Possibly, this was because they saw in this new Israel of God the true spirit of concern for the needy that was to have marked a now miserably corrupted national Israel (Deut. 10:18f, Ps. 146:9, Is. 1:17).

One cannot escape the fact that this is the inauguration of an office in the early Christian church. The term *deacon* gives the Bible’s own term to designate the office. It is an office designed particularly to demonstrate God’s care for the needy of His church. But, in a more fundamental sense, it is an office designed to free those entrusted with the ministry of the Word so that they might devote themselves most fully to that work. It is not incidental to the text of Acts 6 that the word of God spread and the church grew dramatically once the apostles (the foundation of the church and the predecessors of those who would later be called as ministers of the Word) were freed of other responsibilities in order to do what was more important – to pray and to minister the life-changing, eternity-bringing Word of God.

The OPC has given serious, if not extensive, consideration of the legitimate work and sphere of the diaconate. This came as the OPC, largely through its Committee on Foreign Missions, engaged the issue of whether medical work was a legitimate part of the Church’s work on foreign fields, specifically in Eritrea (see Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, pp. 94-96). Later, through a General Assembly-appointed Committee to Study the Principles of Diaconal Ministry, further study was given to the broader aspects of this issue. Two reports were sent to the churches for study. Both affirmed that diaconal work has a covenantal emphasis, meaning we must do good first to the “household of faith” (Gal. 6:10b), and both refused to limit the ministry of mercy *only* to Christians (but differing on the extent of that assistance) See Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, pp. 187f.

The technicalities of this discussion can easily obscure the fact that the office of the deacon was originally instituted to free those entrusted with the ministry of the Word so that they might fulfill their duties more fully. Perhaps for that reason the OPC *Form of Government* (XI: 4) stipulates: “the board (of deacons),” with authority in their sphere “shall oversee the ministry of mercy in the church and shall collect and disburse funds for the relief of the needy. “*Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons,*” (emphasis mine). In most cases this means that deacons are responsible for preparing for and setting up the Lord’s Supper elements.

Yet, is there not much more that deacons can do without usurping the work of rule in the church?

A strong case can be made that trustees (an unordained office) have, in some of our churches, practically replaced deacons. This was a major concern expressed within late nineteenth century Presbyterianism, but with all of the other issues Presbyterians faced in the twentieth century this one seems to have stayed under the radar screen. Ministers and sessions should seriously ask the question if many of the duties which have been given to Boards of Trustees (all of which fall under the rule of the church by its session, *FG XIII: 7*) should be given to the Board of Deacons. While this concern for “temporalities” such as the church budget, properties, and building maintenance should not displace the work of the deacons in caring for the needy of the church (especially widows), fresh consideration should be given to the facts that *all* such concerns are, ultimately, *spiritual* ones; they all fall under the wise ruling authority of Christ through the *session*; and that deacons are given to free the session (and particularly the minister) from those concerns which can easily displace the primary work of “prayer and the ministry of the Word.” To train deacons with this in view and to increasingly build on this principle that is so clearly given in Acts 6 can only bring great benefits to ministers and sessions which are already overburdened with details. It will also benefit churches which are given the false impression that temporal concerns in the church are somehow not related to the church’s spiritual mission.

John Calvin called the diaconate “the hands and feet of Christ”. What a beautiful picture of a body of men who are given to “show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church,” *FG XI: 1*. May this office, too, be elevated and used so that the love of Christ and His concern for the priority of the ministry of the Word might be better demonstrated in all of the churches of the OPC.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 21

Regional Churches

And the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, had peace and was edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit they were multiplied.

(Acts 9:31)

The term “regional church” is unique to the OPC, but the concept is not. “The Scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church” according to the *Form of Church Government* agreed upon the Westminster Assembly of divines. Such “classical assemblies” were composed of ministers and what we today call ruling elders. Several “particular congregations” were under the government of these officers. This was demonstrated biblically by the inference that the church in Jerusalem was necessarily composed of more than one congregation. Its very size, mentioned in Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, and 6:7, would have prohibited the church in Jerusalem from gathering in one place as one congregation. (There was no “worship center” for such a mega-church in that day!) All the apostles were active in the ministry of the preaching and teaching the Word of God, (Acts 6:2), so it would seem that there were many “preaching posts” in which they did their work within what was called one church in Acts 2:47, 5:11, 8:1, 12:5, and 15:4. And, finally, (and with particular relevance to our own increasingly multi-lingual society) the diversity of language among the believers in Acts 2:5-11 and 6:1 suggests (the gift of “tongues” notwithstanding) that there were various congregations within that one church. It was also noted that, after the first widespread persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), when the Christians were “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,” they nevertheless remained constituted as a church in that region (Acts 9:31). It is from passages such as these that Presbyterians claim the basis for what we call “presbyteries” - describing their government -, or “regional churches” - describing their membership and life as one regional body.

The concept of a presbytery and its “regional church” is primarily a functional and geographical one. Churches in a given region have the privilege (especially if they are small and in need of ministerial or church governmental assistance) of having a number of ministers and ruling elders, “a multitude of counselors,” to guide and oversee them under the Kingship of Christ. The geographical breadth of such a government should not be so large that such ministry, oversight, and fellowship become impractical. Such a situation would only foster an independency that biblical church government is designed to militate against.

The OPC captures the essence of this aspect of Presbyterianism as it thus describes the duties and responsibilities of the presbytery:

The presbytery has the power to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to the individual congregation under the constitution (i.e. The Confession of Faith and The Larger and Shorter Catechisms as adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, together with our Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God – commonly known as The Book of Church Order, FG XXXII: 1). In the exercise of its jurisdiction the presbytery has responsibility for evangelism within the bounds of its region, especially in areas which are not within the sphere of service in any one congregation. Similarly the presbytery shall seek to foster fellowship in worship and nurture in the church as a whole within its region.

The presbytery has the power to organize and receive congregations, to unite and dissolve congregations, at the request of the people, and with the advice of the sessions involved to visit particular churches for the purpose of inquiring into their state and of taking proper measures to insure that the evils which may have arisen in them shall be redressed. Presbytery shall examine and approve or censure the records of church sessions.

Further, the presbytery has power to receive and issue all appeals, and other matters that are brought before it from church sessions in a regular manner, subject to the provisions of the Book of Discipline; to resolve questions of doctrine or discipline seriously and reasonably proposed; to condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the church; to take under its care, examine, and license candidates for the holy ministry; and to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers. (FG XIV: 5)

The OPC will continue to wrestle with the issue of how large a presbytery should be. Presbyteries should not be so large that they cannot carry out well the responsibilities given to them (especially the care for and examination of men who aspire to the ministry). Yet they should not be so small that they cannot provide the resources for growth in their region. As the OPC grows, these issues will face our presbyteries more and more.

Presbyterian church government such as we have in the OPC is not only an expression of our submission to the prescription King Jesus has given for the right administration of His Kingdom on the regional level, but it is also a powerful statement that there is no such thing as independency (on any level) in the Christian church. An

independent Presbyterian (or independent Presbyterian church) is a contradiction in terms! Such a view of the church is far more influenced by the ethos of America than it is by the ethos of Holy Scripture (Prov. 18:1).

Presbyterian church government provides healthy fellowship for church members in a given region, thus showing that even strangers and pilgrims in the earth are not alone in their journey. It provides necessary accountability for ministers, sessions, and congregations which still sin and fall far short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). And, ideally, it provides the human and financial resources necessary for the church in a given region to grow together in its manifold labors of worship, edification, and evangelism.

As the evils of the various aspects of American ecclesiastical independency continue to wreak havoc on ministers, congregation members, whole churches, and the areas they have influenced, biblical Presbyterianism will become more and more attractive to Christians who sense that something is not right when churches have no checks and balances. Without lifting church government to something necessary for salvation, may we nevertheless lift it up as that which is necessary to both honor the King of the Kingdom and to best serve the interests of His churches and their members.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 22

Mutual Submission

Likewise you younger, submit yourselves to (your) elders. Yes, all of (you) be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (I Peter 5:5, cf. Is. 57:15)
...submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21)

What is base-line Presbyterianism? (Note that I have already used the phrase in the Introduction to this volume). I am increasingly convinced that the answer to this question is in the beautiful little phrase “mutual submission”. Where there is a love for and trust in our brethren coupled with a common commitment to the Scriptures and their final authority, the Constitution of the Church and the rule (in the Lord) of our governing assemblies, there is a picture of the beauty and the presence of the blessings of church unity described in Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron; running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord commanded the blessing: Life forevermore!

Conversely: Where there is no such love, trust, common commitment, and the resulting unity, the picture is ugly. There the Lord commands the curse: Death!

We could make a strong argument that one of the reasons the OPC has not seen the growth, the blessing of “life forevermore” (Ps. 133:3) that we would like, is because, in our militancy and many battles as a church that seeks to stand against error and practice the truth, we have not “fought the fight” with the goodness of the spirit of mutual submission. In so doing we have sometimes seemed more like Independents than Presbyterians. Whether this is due to our heritage of separation from unbelief, the mindset of our independent “individual rights” oriented culture, our own remaining carnality, or a combination of these, we have all too often wanted to “take our marbles and go home” when things do not go “our way” in the church. Without going any further we should remind ourselves that the church is, ultimately, not *our* church, but *Christ's*. He bought it, and it is His! And we must also

remind ourselves that part of the very essence of sin is to go “our own way”: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Is. 53:6).

Mutual submission is not only enjoined of every church member, it is especially enjoined of those who rule in the church. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each one look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Phil. 2:3-5a); “Endeavoring, [i.e. working diligently] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3); “Submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21); “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10). I believe that the Scottish Presbyterian commentator John Brown is right when he understands the reference to “elders” in I Peter 5:5 as referring to those with the office of elder as described in verses 1-4 of that chapter. With that in view, the apostle Peter is saying: “Likewise you younger, [i.e. those who do not have the office of elder in the church], submit yourselves to your elders, [i.e. those with that office and function of rule]. Yes, all of you [elders and non-elders alike] be submissive to one another, [i.e. mutual submission], and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’”. Here is Psalm 133 as applied to the church in its New Covenant form and under the government of its covenant Lord.

How does this work out in practice for officers who, on the one hand, must remain militant for truth and the purity of the church, and, on the other hand, must work to preserve the peace and the unity of the church? While there are no simple formulas, there are certain fundamental ingredients which will help us in this all-important area of Christian obedience and (at least for ministers) in honoring their vowed commitment, according to the fourth ministerial ordination vow, “Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?”

First, we must act with holy conscientiousness in all of our dealings with all of our brethren on every level of church life and government. “Watch! Stand fast in the faith! Be brave and act courageously! Be strong!” (I Cor. 16:13). This is the rich material of a militant church. But then Paul adds: “Let all that you do be done with love.” (vs. 14). We must ask ourselves if these exacting standards of truth, boldness, and love are *all* ours in our dealings with *all* of our brethren.

Second, we must learn to *listen* as well as to speak. “Let every man” (including a minister!) “be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (Js. 1:19). What blessed effects this discipline alone would bring to meetings of the church on every level and in all of our dealings with our brethren.

Third, distinguish between principles and preferences. In the heat of controversy it is very easy to begin to see an issue as one of life or death orthodoxy rather than as one of permissible belief or practice within our church constitution. Surely this demands great measures of wisdom, because some issues *are* issues of life and death. Other issues are matters of integrity before our standards. Still others are issues which demand more time, thought, prayer, study, and discussion before the church can or should act on them. Learn to distinguish between these and act accordingly.

Finally, operate out of clear, given principle in all that you do. Spastic responses are usually wrong ones. Ask yourself if you are operating with the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16), or out of your own carnality (I Cor.3:3). It is as serious a matter to divide the church when that is unwarranted as it is to abstain from doing what is necessary for the purity of the church when *that* is warranted. May the Lord of the church grant us wisdom to know the difference.

Mutual submission is base-line Presbyterianism!

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 23

General Assembly

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter... (Acts 15:6)

“Acts 15 is in the Bible!” That is my simple answer when people ask about this annual event called a *General Assembly*. Over against independency of any form (for example *An Independent Fundamental Church*) we must constantly remind people that Acts 15 is in the Bible!

Acts 15 describes a controversy that had arisen in the growing Christian church. The controversy was, literally, over the Gospel itself: must a person be circumcised (and thereby bound to keep the Law of Moses, as a Jew) in order to be saved? The controversy threatened to split the church. It had become such a prominent matter that wherever Paul and Barnabas went they experienced “no small dissension and dispute” (vs. 2) over the issue. Therefore, it was determined that Paul, and Barnabas “and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem,” - the location of what might be called the “Mother Church” - “to the apostles and elders about this question” (*Ibid.*). The matter was to be resolved, not as each local congregation desired, but as one church, functioning through officers representing Christ’s word and Christ’s rule. By wise counsel the church militant would wage war, as prescribed in Prov. 24:6. “In a multitude of counselors there is safety” (see also Prov. 11:14, 24:6).

While the official representatives were sent out, or commissioned, by the church (vs. 3), and while there was clearly a church reception of those who gathered (vs. 4), the deliberations were not carried out congregationally, but by officers, called “the apostles and elders” (vs. 6), vested with both gifts and authority to resolve such a weighty matter. If ever there were a place for Peter to have functioned as the first Pope speaking *ex cathedra*, it would be here. Peter does, indeed, speak – presenting a case from experience that Gentiles who believed the Gospel were clearly saved without being circumcised (vss. 7-12). But it is neither Peter nor the argument from experience that carries this assembly. The apostle James opens the Old Testament (Amos 9:11f.) to demonstrate to the satisfaction of all present that “the words of the prophets agree” with what Peter had presented (vss. 12-18). The Word of God, rightly interpreted, is the final authority in the church!

James gives his judgment as to pastoral counsel to be given to the churches (vss. 19-21). This being satisfactory to those gathered, and also to the “whole church” in Jerusalem, the essence of the deliberations, resolutions, and counsel is then put into an epistolary form and sent, through chosen messengers, to the church at Antioch (and, no doubt, to the other churches which had been formed during the first missionary journey) (vss. 22-29). This brought both encouragement and some measure of peace, it would appear, to the church (vs. 31). It also fostered the ministry of the Word (vss. 32, 35), and the communion of the saints beyond the local or presbyterial levels (vs. 33). This is a description of the first General Assembly of the Christian church together with its fruits. Acts 15 *is* in the Bible!

This chapter provides the primary biblical proof for what the *Confession of Faith* calls “Synods and Councils” (Chapt. XXXI). It is just as applicable to describe the way matters are to be resolved on any level of church government, whether that be the level of the session, the presbytery, or the general assembly.

Critics of such a structure raise objections such as: “how can you have such an assembly without apostles?” The simple answer is that we have sufficient apostolic authority in the New Testament. With our completed Scriptures we have the apostles with us in our assemblies! Others ask on what basis we have our assemblies annually, when the assembly in Acts 15 was clearly held for one specific purpose. Again, the simple answer is that, at least on an annual basis, there is a need for ministers and elders to address matters of the whole church which, in some cases, bring “no small dissension and dispute” among us. Were it practical to do so, given the range of issues facing churches today, assemblies such as these could certainly be held with profit even *more* than once a year. (And, in OPC history, on some occasions they have been.)

The general assembly shall seek to advance the worship, edification, and witness of the whole church. It shall resolve all doctrinal and disciplinary questions regularly brought before it from the lower assemblies. It shall seek to promote the unity of the church of Christ through correspondence with other churches. (FG XV:6)

While other specific duties are granted to the general assembly (FG XV: 7), it is clear that the overarching role of the assembly in the OPC has all of the contours of Acts 15.

When elected as a commissioner (not a “delegate”) by your presbytery, you should see that calling as, indeed, a sacred “commission”. I learned early in my years in the OPC that, as a minister, I should *want* to go to the

annual General Assembly! Over the years (and with not a little trying of my faith!) I have learned the wisdom of that counsel. General Assemblies afford you the opportunity to get to know and appreciate the inner workings of our portion of the Christian church. They challenge you to think *carefully*, speak *helpfully* (hopefully!), and make decisions *wisely*. They also give you a wonderful opportunity to get to know so many of your brothers (and some visiting sisters) with whom you serve in the OPC. Indeed, the camaraderie of the Assemblies contributes, in no small measure, to the mutual submission and unity spoken of in the previous chapter.

When you are called to serve as a commissioner, study the issues before you carefully, giving as much time as possible to read materials before the General Assembly convenes. Participate fully by listening and contributing. Vote conscientiously on all the issues, making up your mind *only* after you have heard all of the debate (and frequently praying for patience *as* you listen!). And, above all, enjoy the fellowship of those who, with you, are part of centuries of General Assemblies (beginning with the first one in Acts 15) which have been instruments of Christ the King to lead His Church in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake (Ps.23:3)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

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Chapter 24

Committees, Not Boards; Servants, Not Lords

Through love, serve one another. (Gal. 5:13)

...nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:3)

It is a common error to speak of the various standing committees of the OPC, especially the Committees on Christian Education, Home Missions and Church Extension, and Foreign Missions, as “boards.” (Not unlike the almost equally egregious error of calling the “administrative offices” the OPC “headquarters”!) “Board-ism” is a strongly pejorative term in the vocabulary of biblical Presbyterianism. *Boards* have authority vested in them by which, in themselves, they make decisions and set the course for a given body. *Committees* serve the body that forms them and that elects their members, carrying out the will of that body under the standards to which it adheres. *Boards* can easily become *lords*. *Committees* are composed of *servants*.

In 1936 those who constituted what would later be named the OPC knew, by the worst possible experiences, what the tyranny of church boards could bring. The PCUSA had, for many years, been driven by its various large and well-funded boards, each with its own well-paid and influential leaders and other personnel. These boards had increasingly come to be dominated by men who had their own agendas for the church. Boards led the way for miscellaneous “plans of union” (which would have granted the ecclesiastical bureaucracy even more power and influence). The Presbyterian Board of Publication (which Dr. Machen challenged in the 1920s) published and promoted materials that were not in accord with the doctrinal standards of the PCUSA. These materials would mislead the thinking of that generation and the generation to come, for Presbyterian education is always designed for “believers and their children.” Later Dr. Machen would boldly address the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for its promotion of modernism, but he was unable to stop the juggernaut of theological liberalism that came to dominate that body. And because the PCUSA had become accustomed to let its course be led by the boards, few joined with Dr. Machen in his protests.

Boards can, and do, take on lives of their own; and their lives are frequently gross mutations in the body that originally created them. Even worse, ecclesiastical boards will seek to increase their own authority (and

resources), dominate the parent body, and, in the process, become expensive bureaucracies removed from the accountability of their brethren and even far more removed from their proper mission.

Those who constituted what would become the OPC had seen enough of this, and they would have none of it in the new church. At its first General Assembly, in June, 1936, the OPC demonstrated both its faith and its commitment to the Great Commission. Despite its limited resources, the OPC erected a Committee on Christian Education, a Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE), and a Committee on Foreign Missions. These “standing committees,” that is, committees with a permanent mandate and having their existence until and unless they are dissolved by the General Assembly, remain today. Other committees have been added that serve the various parts of the OPC’s corporate service, such as the Committee on Coordination (which coordinates the work of the three main standing committees so that our work of what is called “Worldwide Outreach” will be furthered not by competition but by cooperation), the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (which, among other things, assists the presbyteries when their ability to meet diaconal needs within their bounds is exceeded), and the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (which seeks to foster the ties of Christian love with churches of like faith and practice in the United States and around the world).

What is important here is that these are committees of servants *to* the church to carry out mandates given *by* the church. Its members are elected (on a three-year class system) by the General Assembly. Its general secretaries carry out the decisions of the committees. And the decisions of the committees are subject to the review of the General Assembly annually. This aspect of OPC practice may be the one of greatest significance: All those who serve as officers in the church on any level and in any capacity do so as *servants*, representing the One who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). Biblical Presbyterianism has no hierarchies or hierarchical officers. Everyone in a church that is rightly governed is always under authority – ultimately the authority of Christ (Matt 28:18).

This structure allows for the use of a wide scope of the gifts given by Christ to the church through officers with various backgrounds, skills, and experience. Committees not only provide that multitude of counselors in which there is safety, but they can also become microcosms of the whole church, “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The body is not the committee, but the *church* body that is benefited by the committee’s service. People may joke about Presbyterians and their committees, but, when they are rightly

understood and when they function properly, committees are excellent vehicles for utilizing gifts and helping the whole church carry out its mission in ways that local churches and presbyteries alone could usually do only with great difficulty - if they could do them at all.

When nominating and electing men to serve on committees, do not consider men based on their popularity, their name in the church, or whether they support your particular agenda. The church should have higher standards than this, according to I Cor. 3. Rather, consider how a man's gifts and abilities might be useful to the church if he was to serve on a *particular* committee. Confer with him before nominating him. Listen to the nominating speeches which are meant to give honest reasons for electing individuals to the various committees. Never treat this part of presbytery or general assembly life lightly! Our committees provide much of the guidance and direction that we need to faithfully and effectively fulfill the OPC's part in the Lord's service.

If you are elected to a committee, serve faithfully and joyfully knowing that Christ Himself has given you this responsibility through the good order of His church. You will grow through the experience, and you will do *your* part to help the church grow. Just remember that you are on a *committee*, not a *board*; and you do your work as a *servant*, not as a *lord*!

Some Suggestions for Further Study

New Horizons, the official publication of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Produced by the Committee on Christian Education. This is the best source for updated information on the work of the various OPC Committees.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church. General Assembly Minutes and Reports. (Available from the Office of the Stated Clerk, OPC). The General Assembly minutes from 1936 – 2004 are also available on CD Rom. These are available from the Committee for the Historian.

Chapter 25

Home Missions

Then the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly... (Acts 6:7)

One of the most important goals of each local church is growth! If the church is truly a living body as described in I Cor. 12:12-27, it *will* grow. It is meant to grow in *holiness*, which is greater conformity to the image of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16), and it is also meant to grow in *number*. Certainly this is the usual pattern that we see in the book of Acts (2:47, 4:4, 5:14). In our day, as then, our desire must be to see “the word of God grow and multiply” (Acts 12:24, 19:20). Even as, in a family, children grow, leave home, establish homes of their own, and have their own children, so the implanted word of God (James 1:21) is meant to grow and multiply in the church and then reproduce itself in the formation of other churches. This is the work of home missions.

The OPC has grown by a variety of ways for “birthing” home mission works. Most common has been the “strawberry patch” method. A church grows to sufficient size and strength that it is able to send forth a number of its families to form another congregation in a given area. Until such time as its own properly elected elders can govern the church, and until it is fully or nearly self-supporting, it remains under the oversight and guidance of the “mother church.” In most cases this is the best way to do the work of home missions.

Another traditional method has been to find and secure the interest of *at least* ten families who desire to be part of an OPC. These may have Reformed or Presbyterian background or they may not, but their desire must be to have a distinctively Reformed and Presbyterian congregation. A man gifted in church planting is secured by the presbytery, and the exciting work of forming a group of people into a self-consciously Orthodox Presbyterian congregation begins. In some cases a man may actually attempt to begin such a work with *no* families, but this almost always entails the minister having an outside job to provide income while he also carries on the necessary work to, by God’s grace, start a church from nothing. It is far better for a presbytery to have a Regional Home Missionary who can cultivate contacts in a given area, begin worship with a core group committed to form a church, and continue in those labors until a church planter can be found and supported to do the work of the ministry on a full-time basis.

In the early 1990s, after a particularly difficult time in both the OPC as a whole and in the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension in particular, the Rev. Ross Graham, newly appointed General Secretary to that committee, published a series of ten articles in *New Horizons*. These articles marked a turning point in OPC home missions because they clearly articulated a principled Presbyterian way of doing church planting. These articles, entitled “The Bible and Church Planting” subsequently became the foundational principles for the *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership* which was adopted by CHMCE on December 10, 1997. While that manual is important to assist home missions committees of presbyteries in their church-planting endeavors, it is even more important to list the principles from which the manual grows. As originally presented in 1991, they are:

Proposition 1: We should be able to give biblical reasons for why we start new churches.

1. There is a special need for this church in this place at this time.
2. This center of population and influence needs the ministry of this new church we will plant.
3. These fellow believers need our help to carry on what Christ has begun among them.

Proposition 2: We should go first to those who know God and his word when we begin new churches in new areas.

Proposition 3: We should build a connectional Presbyterian structure into the new churches we plant.

1. Let’s give our new churches a group of mature elders.
2. Let’s give our new churches a close sense of connection to other congregations and believers.

Proposition 4: We should provide regular supervision and support for the young churches we have started.

Proposition 5: When we start new churches we must acknowledge that God is in charge of their growth.

1. Remember that this is the age of the harvest.
2. Remember that God uses our efforts.
3. Remember that God causes the growth.

Proposition 6: We should plant churches that are built and run on prayer.

1. Prayer brings the young church together.
2. Prayer unites the young church against the forces of Satan.

3. Prayer encourages hearts in the young church.

Proposition 7: We should plant churches that function as covenant communities.

1. A focus on the family.
2. A God-centered worship.
3. A redeemed fellowship emphasis.

Proposition 8: We should plant “Gentile-reaching” churches.

1. We of the Evangelical and Reformed churches of the twentieth century correspond to the Jewish Christians of the New Testament (Eph. 2:12-19).
2. Those outside of Christ today correspond to the Gentiles of the first century (Eph. 2:12f.)
3. The purpose of God in building his church is to make one new people for himself (Eph. 2:11-14).
4. The task of Christ’s church at the end of the twentieth century in implementing the Great Commission is the same two-pronged task that faced the first century (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 2:9; Rom. 1:16).
5. Now as then that task is accomplished through the declaration and demonstration of covenant faithfulness (Eph. 2:19).

Proposition 9: We should plant churches that are distinctive in their Christian character and commitment.

1. A commitment to definite beliefs.
2. A commitment to godliness.
3. A commitment to changed lives.
4. A commitment to world vision.

Proposition 10: We should plant churches that have generosity and mercy ministries built into their congregational life.

1. Hospitality
2. Compassion
3. Giving

The fruit of doing church-planting out of these principles should be, as with parents of children, the joy of a local church or a presbytery (in fact, both!) seeing the birth of healthy, growing daughter churches. While there are

surely unique elements of the remarkable church growth of the apostolic age, it is no less true today that, through the work of church-planting, "... the Word of God [will] spread, and the number of the disciples [will] multiply..." (Acts 6:7)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. This is the most recent edition of the original *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership*.

Chapter 26

Christian Education

...warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

(Colossians 1:28)

In all generations the Christian church thrives by education. Historic Protestantism fostered the training of the laity in the ability to read, especially so that the “common man” could read the Scriptures. There is, perhaps, no more profound development in Western civilization than this.

It was particularly in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition of Protestantism that the education of all church members took prominence. Strength and vibrancy came to churches and areas influenced by the Reformed faith as men and women, boys and girls became familiar with and conversant in the great books that explained, defended, and illustrated the doctrines of the historic Christian faith. Books like *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Human Nature in its Four-fold State*, *The Mystery of Providence*, and innumerable other Christian classics became household conversation pieces in the homes of Presbyterian and Reformed families. Churches encouraged such reading, referred regularly to the rich content of such volumes in sermons and lectures, and perpetuated such materials in publishing companies and educational agencies.

In our day of fast-paced technological developments, reading and taking pains to become educated have fallen on hard times. Nevertheless, the church – as part of its truly counter-cultural task – must persevere in following the commission of its Lord to “make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Matt. 28:19-20). Not only is it necessary that local churches make every effort to keep helpful literature, audio recordings, and other educational items before their people (and to encourage their use), but presbyteries, too, should encourage the training of officers and lay people in the various areas of Christian doctrine and life.

But, for those who take the unity of the Church and the purity of its doctrine seriously, may we be permitted to affirm that these things mentioned above are simply *not sufficient* if we are to be faithful to the educational task entrusted to us? Indeed, given the surfeit of materials which are available to individuals, families,

and churches, and given the widely varying quality and fidelity of the content of these materials, our churches actually face dangers as our people are exposed to published, duplicated, and electronically transmitted “savage wolves [who] come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29, cf. Jude 4).

For this reason, the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church provides services which are invaluable in the midst of a culture in which free enterprise and egalitarianism rather than ecclesiastical sensitivity and doctrinal fidelity drive the production of educational materials. We most certainly are not bound to use *only* materials produced under the auspices of our Committee on Christian Education; but the Committee does provide us with materials that we know are faithful to our Reformed, Presbyterian, and distinctively Orthodox Presbyterian convictions.

The OPC, through its Committee on Christian Education, works with the Presbyterian Church in America in a joint endeavor known as Great Commission Publications (GCP). GCP provides Sunday School material for all ages, catechetical materials based on what is now known as *First Catechism* (formerly, *The Children’s Catechism*), programs for Vacation Bible Schools, and other educational materials and services to help churches of whatever size. In addition, GCP produces *The Trinity Hymnal*, church bulletins, and other helps for congregational worship. OPC pastors should become familiar with all of the offerings available through what is, in essence, its church publishing house.

The Committee on Christian Education also publishes a number of items itself. Prominent among these items is *New Horizons*, the monthly publication of the OPC. This magazine provides popular articles which develop aspects of the Reformed faith, and it also provides up-to-date information on the various ministries of the OPC as well as news from the presbyteries and book reviews. It is an important means to build “family unity” among the members of the OPC, and also to provide information for the many churches and individuals interested in the life of the OPC.

In addition, the Committee on Christian Education publishes the *OPC Book of Church Order*, *The Confession of Faith*, and *Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts*. The latter volume, in particular, is an invaluable tool that should *be in and regularly used in* the home of each Orthodox Presbyterian family. The Committee also publishes an assortment of tracts, booklets, introductions to the Reformed faith and the OPC, and helps for church officers. OPC pastors can know that *these* items are faithful to our church standards and

are designed for the growth of churches that are of “one mind in the Lord” (Rom. 12:16, Phil. 2:2, 4:2). Pastors will also want to consult the OPC Web site, www.opc.org, and encourage their congregation members to do the same. This medium, too, is carefully overseen by the Committee so that its offerings (unlike most resources available on the internet) are faithful to the Scriptures and our doctrinal standards.

Beyond this (as if the Committee doesn’t do enough already!), its “standing subcommittee” called the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training provides special educational resources for the training of men preparing for the ministry and for the ongoing training of ministers and ministerial intern mentors. Most of this work is done through the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC), something of a “finishing school” for OPC ministers. Because the OPC does not have its own Church seminary, by the means of this Institute (which began in 1999 after several years of preparatory work by the subcommittee) men can receive *church-based* instruction in areas the subcommittee found to be weaknesses in many of the seminaries from which the OPC gets its ministers. All OPC ministers would profit from these courses which currently include the subjects of apologetics, catechetics, the Westminster Standards, ecclesiology, church polity, Reformed worship, OPC history, homiletics, and pastoral theology.

Indispensable to home missions is the multi-faceted work of Christian education. By this means covenant children are nurtured in the faith, younger and older adults are instructed in the various dimensions of Reformed faith and life, visitors and new converts are prepared for the duties and the privileges of church membership, officers are trained, and whole churches are brought, by God’s grace, into “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God” (Eph. 4:13). I urge you make use of *all* of the excellent tools available for you to do that work and to lead it in a manner that is faithful to our standards as Orthodox Presbyterian churches.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

New Horizons. Published monthly, except for a combined issue in August-September by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Great Commission Publications catalogue. Available from: Great Commission Publications, 3640 Windsor Park Drive, Suwanee, GA 30024-3897. Phone (800) 695-3387. Or access their Web site at www.gcp.org

MTIOPC catalogue. Available from the OPC Committee on Christian Education.

The official Web site of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, www.opc.org *Information on all of the above is most conveniently accessed through this popular and rich internet resource.*

Chapter 27

Foreign Missions

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth .Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...

(Matt. 28:18,19a.)

Rightly understood, *everything* about church life is exciting! How can it be otherwise when all the specific parts of the church (both grand and mundane) display the fingerprints of our covenant God (Ps. 48:12-18)? Indeed, the smallest parts of the body known as the “church” (right down to the contribution of its very “joints”, Eph. 4:16) display the power of Christ the King whose work is to build His church through weak instruments like us (II Cor. 12:9). It is important for us to consider with deepest interest each of these “joints” through which Christ works – particularly those “joints” in the Church of which we are a part.

Nowhere is there more excitement and interest in the Christian church than in the work of foreign missions. In Abraham’s seed *all* of the families of the earth are to be blessed (Gen. 12:3). The promised seed through whom that blessing is to come is Christ Himself (Gal. 3:8-16). The Great Commission is nothing less than the bud of the covenant with Abraham now in full flower! The fragrance of Christ (II Cor.2:14) is now meant to be diffused to the nations through the church so that all the areas of the earth might become glad in God (Ps. 97:1).

From its initial General Assembly in 1936 the OPC committed itself to the work of foreign missions as an indispensable part of its role in helping to fulfill our Lord’s Great Commission. This commitment is especially significant because it was made in the very midst of a national economic depression. Even as the ministers and elders who constituted the OPC in 1936 did so in no small measure because the PCUSA had boldly promulgated its modernism through the agency of foreign missions, so the Orthodox Presbyterian Church would labor to promulgate historic Christianity and the Reformed faith through the same agency. “It is not at all an exaggeration to say that the (OPC) came into existence because of a profound desire to see the Word of God proclaimed faithfully in foreign lands” (Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 73).

Since the establishment of a standing committee on foreign missions in 1937, the OPC has sent out missionaries whose goals are to see distinctively indigenous Reformed and Presbyterian churches established around

the world. Our missionaries are not sent out by para-church agencies to work with para-church agencies; they are sent out by the *church* to be instruments in the planting and nurturing of *churches*. Where the OPC can work with indigenous churches which desire to be Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in their government, it will do so; otherwise, our missionaries labor to see such a church formed and nurtured in the nations in which they are called to serve.

The stories of our missionary laborers and their fields of service are without doubt the most striking examples of how the OPC, as a church, shares in both the sufferings and the triumph of Christ (Phil. 3:10, Col. 1:24, II Cor. 2:14). (See the suggestions for further study below.) From missionaries caught in the turmoil of war in Korea, Japan, China, and Eritrea, to (more recently) a missionary family disrupted by death in the hostile voodoo-sanctioning nation of Haiti, the life of the OPC has been powerfully affected by its missionaries – missionaries sent out by the church, supported by the church, and prayed for by the church. Our “missionary force” may be smaller than the numbers sent out under the auspices of bodies less committed to “church” than the OPC, but it would be difficult to find missionaries and fields more loved, appreciated, and supported than those who are part of the whole church life of the OPC.

However, it would be a mistake for OPC pastors to think of foreign missions *first* on the level of a church standing committee. Like politics, all missions begin locally (although they are never meant to be political!). Precisely because OPC foreign missions are church missions, a consciousness of this must begin on the local level. This is the pattern of the New Testament in which Paul, in particular, keeps local churches informed of various aspects of the progress of the Gospel in other areas (Rom. 15:14-21, 25-33, I Cor. 16:8f., II Cor. 8:1-4, 23f., Eph. 6:19f., Phil. 1:12-18, Col. 1:6f., 4:9). This consciousness is buttressed (also as it was in the New Testament, II Cor. 8,9, Phil. 4:14-17) by the financial support local congregations give to foreign missions (both through Worldwide Outreach and by designated gifts for foreign missionaries, fields, or special projects approved by the Committee on Foreign Missions). It is so important to remind the people whom we are called to serve that, despite the multitude of appeals which come from individuals and agencies “called to do the Lord’s work overseas”, it is the expressed plan of the Lord God to do this work *through the church* (Eph. 3:10f). And because Orthodox Presbyterian missionaries are supported primarily by the OPC it is incumbent upon the churches not to fall prey to the temptation to disperse their limited resources elsewhere. It is impossible to understand why any of our local churches would give funds to para-church agencies and missionaries from other churches (which, in many cases, have far broader bases of support), when these resources can be used to expand our own foreign missionary labors.

In addition to financial support, local churches, under the leadership of the pastor and session, can and should communicate with *their* missionaries who delight to hear news from their homeland. Even as we delight to hear news of Christ's work on foreign fields, so our missionaries crave to hear of Christ's work in our midst. Again, this is a pattern followed and exemplified especially by Paul (*the* apostle-missionary to the Gentiles/nations) in the New Testament. (See Rom. 16:21-23, I Cor. 16:19, II Cor. 13:13, Eph. 6:21f., Phil 4:21f.). Such communications (now made easier, but sometimes made riskier, by e-mail) are often fostered through Women's Missionary Societies and Sunday School classes; but families should be urged to do this as well, perhaps as a worthy Sabbath day activity. Short-term teams and the assistance of individual helpers from churches or presbyteries may also be valuable ways to be involved in foreign missions, but such endeavors should always be done in consultation with the Committee on Foreign Missions. *Enthusiasm* for foreign missions must not be wasted or misused by *involvement* in foreign missions in a manner that brings more harm than good. In this area, as in any other area of Presbyterian church-life, we must be careful to do things "decently and in order."

Despite setbacks in foreign mission endeavors, despite the lack of human and financial resources to do all that we would like, and despite the opposition that comes as "kings of the earth set themselves and rulers take counsel against Jehovah and against His Messiah" (Ps. 2:2) it should be a constant source of joy to pastors (a joy communicated to the churches they serve) that the knowledge of the glory of God is destined to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). How encouraging and thrilling it is to know that Daniel's prophecy of "a stone cut out without hands" (Dan. 2:34) is fulfilled in the coming of Christ (I Pet. 2:4). That stone will become a great mountain filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35); it is a kingdom, unlike the kingdoms of this world, that will never be destroyed. It shall, in time, replace all rival kingdoms, and it *alone* shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44). May that triumphant note be sounded regularly in all of the congregations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church!

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Dortzbach, Karl and Debbie. *Kidnapped*. Harper and Row: N.Y. 1975. *Currently available from Great Commission Publications. The gripping account of the martyrdom of OPC missionary Anna Strikwerda and the kidnapping and harrowing days of captivity of OPC missionary Debbie Dorzbach by Communist insurgents in Eritrea in the 1970s.*

Duff, Clarence. *God's Higher Ways*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Nutley, NJ. 1977. *A chronicle of the development and providential protection of the OPC's mission work in Eritrea.*

Hunt, F. Bruce. *For a Testimony*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh. 1966. *Currently available from the Committee for the Historian. A "must read" for all Orthodox Presbyterians. The moving account of this famous Korean missionary's imprisonment during the Japanese occupation of Korea in World War II.*

Johnstone, Patrick and Jason Mandryk. *Operation World*. Paternoster, USA: Waynesboro, GA. 2001. *An invaluable guide to help people pray with understanding for the missionary needs of each nation in the world.*

Chapter 28

Ecumenicity

...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

(Ephesians 4:5-6)

The term “ecumenical” tends to raise all kinds of suspicions. “Ecumenical relations” may be regarded as the proverbial camel’s nose in the tent. What begins with the laudable desire to break down unnecessary barriers between Christian brothers and sisters, and to work to better realize the burden of our Lord’s prayer to His Father “that they all may be one...that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn. 17:21) can soon bring an abandoning of truth in the name of unity. Such “unity” is hardly the unity of being one in the Father and the Son, both of whom are inseparable from the truth they declare as God. And such unity can hardly be said to proceed from the Holy Spirit, whose sanctifying work (including the sanctifying work of bringing unity to the children of God, Eph. 4:3) is done by the very means of the truth of the Word of God (Jn. 17:17). Indeed, it is *commitment* to the whole counsel of God’s truth given in Holy Scripture that provides the impetus to genuine ecumenicity. We must not let reaction to misguided efforts at ecumenicity keep us away from biblical measures to bring increased communion between church bodies and believers in our own nation and around the world.

The OPC was formed by men and women who had been part of a church body, the PCUSA, which was in the vanguard of ecumenical projects which toned down commitment to the Word of God. It may seem strange that, from the start, the OPC would not fear, but both cherish and seek ecumenical ties with others of like faith and practice. Further, it might seem inconsistent that a church so committed to biblical ecumenism would have been part of so many failed efforts to achieve corporate union with other church bodies such as the Christian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Presbyterian Church in America. Nevertheless, the OPC’s commitment to truth *and* to church unity has been and remains part of its legacy. It is these very commitments (called the “ecumenical imperative”) that have given the OPC so many national and international contacts with other churches which seek to be Reformed in doctrine, life, and government. Indeed, Reformed ecumenicity must be seen as one of the OPC’s great strengths, even for a comparatively small denomination.

Through the labors of the OPC and others, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) was formed in 1975. This body of churches which are fully committed to the infallibility of Holy Scripture and the Reformed confessional standards was founded to “advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of the churches that are of like faith and practice.” Following its resignation in 1988 from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (due to that body’s toleration of serious error in one of its leading member churches), the OPC took steps to be received as part of the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC), a smaller and more orthodox body of churches faithfully committed to the Reformed confessions. Commitment to these two bodies, together with ties to dozens of international churches cultivated by the OPC’s Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, have given members of the OPC unparalleled opportunities to become acquainted with brothers and sisters and their churches around the world. It is rightly said of the OPC that “international ecumenicity has spread to the point where the sun does not set on the churches with whom the OPC shares ecclesiastical fellowship” (Hart/Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 145).

Local church pastors and presbyteries can and should build on this fine work that has been done over decades by the OPC’s Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. As international travel for business and pleasure has become more and more common, pastors should make their international travelers aware of the churches with which we have various levels of ecumenical contact. Encourage them to worship in these churches on the Lord’s Days that they may be away. Further, when possible and feasible, it is most beneficial for congregations to hear visiting speakers from one or more of these churches. While language difference may be a barrier in some cases, there are ample opportunities to secure speakers from churches in the United Kingdom, Africa, and parts of Europe or South America in which English is the first or second language spoken by its citizens. Likewise, you may have the opportunity to provide such ministry yourself in one or more of the churches with which we have fraternal ties. It is important for members of the OPC to realize that they are part of Christ’s worldwide church building work; and it is important for our brothers and sisters overseas to learn more about us. This can become one of the most exciting aspects of OPC life, especially when we see it as a genuine “grass roots level” way of our Lord’s prayer being answered.

The loveliness of these ecumenical ties is sometimes demonstrated in very dramatic ways. On September 11, 2001, I learned this in an unforgettable way. As the world watched in horror at the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City (about 45 minutes from the Long Island church that I pastor), I was contacted by

representatives of one of our “Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship” in the Netherlands. Thinking (as we all did at the time) that much medical aid and technical assistance would be necessary to assist the dying and the injured, these brothers and sisters in Christ had made arrangements to provide us with whatever we might need to help those in our midst who had been affected by such a terrible providence. As things turned out, the assistance was not necessary; but I shall never forget (and cannot describe without tears) that day in which the OPC’s ecumenical ties became far more than a mere concept and an ideal.

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.
(Psalm 133)*

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Galbraith, John. “The Ecumenical Vision of the OPC” in *Pressing Toward the Mark*, pp. 411 – 426. Available from the Committee for the Historian. 1986.

Hart, D. G. and John Muether. “The OPC and Ecumenical Relations” in *Fighting the Good Fight*, pp. 135 – 145. Available from the Committee for the Historian. 1995.

Information on the churches with which the OPC has ecumenical ties can be secured from the Rev. Jack Peterson at peterson.1@opc.org

Chapter 29

Commit to Others

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (II Tim. 2:2).

There is a divinely prescribed order for the perpetuation of faithful ministers. Some would see this prescription as fulfilled by seminaries which provide men with tools necessary to do the work of the ministry. While the OPC normally requires such training (or its equivalent), it has never established its own seminary for such training, or even required its ministers to study at one or more “approved” seminaries. It rightly rests upon presbyteries to be conscientious in seeing that the constitutional requirements for men desiring to be ministers in the OPC be fulfilled. Over the decades there has been much “in house” discussion of whether or not an OPC seminary is desirable (or even feasible), but, in the providence of God, the OPC has no such complete training institution for ministers. That is not a problem so long as the church is diligent to honor what the Scriptures say about the training and perpetuation of a faithful ministry.

In two specific ways, however, the OPC has sought to complement and complete the work done by the various seminaries from which its ministers come. One way is through the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (see chapter 26). The other is through the OPC’s Intern Program, which is overseen by the Committee on Christian Education, and, particularly, by the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training, which is a part of the entire standing committee. Once a minister has served as a pastor in the OPC for five years he is then eligible to secure an intern (and financial assistance for the internship) through the intern program. To receive the funding he is required, before having his first intern, to participate in the annual Intern-Mentor Training Program, which is designed to assist men as they formulate their own particular intern program and as they prepare to work with their first intern. When properly planned and carried through, internships under experienced ministers are the very best way to prepare men for the labors, responsibilities, and the challenges of pastoral ministry in today’s world. This is an essential aspect of taking the things *you* have learned and “commit[ing] these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). Precisely because the OPC does *not* have its own seminary to rely on for a flow of ministers, internships are essential to the ongoing well-being of the church.

I urge you to begin thinking *now* of incorporating internships into your own ministerial labors and into the life of the congregation which you serve. Don't, even for a moment, think of an intern as a "gopher" to do miscellaneous things for which you have no time (or desire). That is absolutely *not* the purpose of having an intern. Rather, think of the intern as your *Timothy* to whom you will minister as a *Paul*, remembering that this particular aspect of your service is part of the "thorough furniture of good works" required of the man of God in II Tim. 3:16. You also must teach your congregation members about the importance of this work. Any church which has interns makes a major personal, financial, and spiritual commitment to the formation of a man (and in, many cases, his family) for the rigors of ministerial life. At the same time, churches with this commitment reap the benefit of becoming a part of the life of a man who, under God's blessing, may be of outstanding usefulness in the Kingdom of God.

While the Intern Director for the OPC can be of great help to you as you look for prospective interns, it is most important that you and your session have clearly defined criteria in mind before you even *consider* a man to come as an intern. The "raw material" is critical to the "finished product" at the end of your time with your intern. This is especially true when you are committed to a one year internship. If you make a poor choice, you, your session, and the congregation will be very reluctant to have another intern in the near future.

Above all else you must look for a godly man (and, if he is married, he must have a godly marriage and family life). Seek honest testimonials from those who are in a good position to speak to this most important criterion. If a man is not godly and desirous of being even more godly he most assuredly cannot be a "man of God" (II Tim. 3:17).

Second, he must be a man with a clear commitment to the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of the OPC. You may very well need to work with a man in areas of weakness with respect to our confessional standards, but there should be no doubt of the man's desire to be entirely faithful to the affirmations of those standards. He must be a man who "holds fast the faithful word as he has been taught" (Titus 1:9).

Third, he must be a man with demonstrable gifts for preaching and teaching. Much of your work with your intern will certainly include helping him to hone his preaching and teaching skills, but he must have "the basics" of public speaking ability and an evident burden to effectively proclaim the Word of God if you are to help him *progress* in this gift that is absolutely necessary in any man called of Christ to be a "minister of the Word."

Fourth, he must have a pastor's heart. In a sense, a Christian minister is a "sanctified people person." He cannot be a man who will "very gladly spend and be spent" (II Cor. 12:15) for the souls of men, women, boys and girls if he does not have a love for people. Seek a man who loves both the epistles written with pen and ink and the epistles Christ is writing on human hearts (II Cor. 3:2). Otherwise you may be working with a mere Bible student or scholar rather than with one whom Christ is forming to be a shepherd after His own heart (Jer. 3:15).

Fifth, look for a man who wants to minister in the OPC. In God's providence, your intern may end up serving Christ in another branch of His church, but your desire should be to find a man who will take good Orthodox Presbyterian instruction and use it in an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation to which he will be called. Keep in mind, once again, that the OPC does not have its own seminary to provide a steady stream of ministers. Make it your goal to seek and form a man who will be one of Christ's specially formed provisions for our own needy churches.

Then, after you have found the man and received the proper preparation for your program, pour your heart and your soul into your intern! There is nothing comparable in *any* seminary program to a man "in the trenches" of pastoral life and warfare committing himself to a man who must in turn commit himself to others if he is to truly minister like His Master (I Thess. 2:8). In that way, while we may not have hosts of seminary graduates in which to boast, we, by God's grace, will have not a few real "Timothies" who, like their namesake, seek not their own, but the things which are of Christ Jesus, and sincerely care for the souls of God's people (Phil. 2:19). Christ's church and the OPC will be all the better as a result.

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Trice, Nathan. "Ingredients of a Meaningful and Successful Intern Program". *This and other items connected with the OPC's intern program are available through the Committee on Christian Education. They also may be downloaded from the OPC's Web site: www.opc.org*

Also consult the OPC's Intern Director for information on a future Intern Mentor Training Program.

Chapter 30

Strangers and Pilgrims

These...confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Heb. 11:13).

Much has been made of the “cultural disenfranchisement” of the OPC. You will rarely read about yourself as one of the culture’s “movers and shakers” if you are a part of the OPC! Some regard this as the effect, if not a rationale, for its smallness as a church. Others see such cultural disenfranchisement as a metaphor for what is true of Christ and His church in the world: both are despised and rejected by the world’s culture, before they share in the glory that follows.

Regardless of how one views the position of the OPC in relation to its culture, there can be no doubt that the people of the New Covenant, like the faithful people of the Old Covenant, are “strangers and pilgrims in the earth” (Heb. 11:13). Walking in the steps of our father Abraham (Rom. 4:12, 16, Gal. 3:7) we, too, wait for a city which has eternal foundations whose builder and maker is not any man or group of men, but God Himself (Heb. 11:10). Those who, by sovereign saving grace, now “set their affections above” (Col. 3:1) because they are in union with Christ by true faith “desire a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb. 11:16). Though the world may scorn and belittle us we are not moved because “God is not ashamed to be called [our] God, for He has prepared a city for [us]” (Heb. 11:16). In short, we live out of the lesson that Dr. J. Gresham Machen learned in his own pilgrimage from cultural privilege to cultural disenfranchisement: the work of the Christian church is to prepare people for eternity. This is the sobering and glorious work given to us as ministers of the Gospel.

The reason it is difficult to deal abstractly with the question of the relationship of a church to its culture is because the Christian church serves and lives, simultaneously, in union with Christ in His humility and His sufferings and in union with Christ in the present state of His exaltation and His triumph. The history of the church (and our history) is a history of “the sufferings of Christ abounding in us” (II Cor. 1:5a); it is a communion in “the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...” (Phil. 3:10b). At the same time, and with no contradiction, ours is a history of “our consolations also abound[ing] through Christ” (II Cor. 1:5b); it is a life of “knowing [Christ] and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10a.). It is true of the Christian church, of each particular branch of it, and of each individual composing it that even as we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Christ, losing our lives for His sake, so we also *save* our lives (a joyous thought in our culture of multiple

forms of self-destruction) (Lk. 9:23), and become “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

While the old adage, “No cross, no crown” is true, it is no less true that *with* the cross there is also a crown.

As ministers we must learn to live and serve with *both* of these amazing realities before us. Some of our ministries may become large and influential; others may remain small and obscure. “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as the flower of the field he will pass away” (James 1:9-10). In Christ, both truths share – in different ways – in the victory of the crucified One (II Cor. 2:14). Some ministers and churches will experience more afflictions and more forms of them than others. All will have sufficient afflictions so that they may enjoy the blessed experience of Christ’s presence with them in the fire (Dan. 3:25) and so that they might know experientially something of the meaning of the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10). In all cases we are privileged to be used as vessels through which the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ is diffused in every place (II Cor. 2:14). All of our external circumstances pale into insignificance before this grandest of roles in the world.

What is required of us, and of the OPC, is that we never be conformed to this world (or this age) and to its culture. “Do not be conformed to this world” for “the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (Rom. 12, I Jn. 2:17). Even as we wrestle with the challenging implications of becoming “all things to all men, that [we] might by all means save some” and of being “servants to all that [we] might win the more” (I Cor. 9:22, 19), we recognize that we are still “under law toward Christ” (I Cor. 9:21) and must do all of our work with His “Well done!” as our goal (Matt. 25:21,23).

At the end of the day, perhaps this is the most important legacy of the OPC. In the providence of God it has been made a body that, by the mercies of God, is presented to Him as a living sacrifice, and that seeks not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of its corporate mind (Rom. 12). We do not live this out alone, but, as Israel of old, with other “strangers and pilgrims” headed for Jerusalem – not the Jerusalem of this earth, but the Jerusalem whose foundation, buildings, inhabitants, and atmosphere are of heaven (Heb. 12:22). We are resident aliens; not so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good, but so heavenly minded that we are the most earthly good. Let us continually re-focus our vision on the work of bringing Christ to others and bringing others to Christ that we might be instruments of preparing a people for eternity. “The church of Christ, in all its complex service to the world, can never forget that its primary

concern is to call men into and prepare them for the life eternal". (Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatology of the Psalter" in *Pauline Eschatology*, p. 363)

Some Suggestions for Further Study

Calvin, John. "The Golden Book of the Christian Life". Reprinted in various editions. *This excerpt from Book III of Calvin's Institutes is a simple yet profound description of the historic Reformed view of the Christian life. By all means get it, read it, and promote it to your congregation members.*

Dennison, Charles G. *History for a Pilgrim People*. Available from the Committee for the Historian. 2002. *An application of the Reformed pattern of the Christian life to the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.*

Wallace, Ronald G. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Oliver and Boyd Ltd.: Edinburgh. 1959. Recently reprinted by Wipf and Stock Publishers. *This masterful and unique volume digests and organizes all of Calvin's writings as they pertain to the Christian life. This is an excellent book for study by church reading groups.*

Conclusion

“Well Done!”

Well done, good and faithful servant... (Matt. 25:21, 23)

One of the most haunting statements about the track record of Christian ministers is ascribed to Horatius Bonar: “I have seen many start well, fewer run well, and far fewer still end well.” Our goal as ministers is to not only to start and run well, but to *end* well – to run so as to attain the prize (I Cor. 9:24), to “press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14), to “fight the good fight, to finish the race, and to keep the faith” (II Tim. 4:7). The purpose of this orientation to pastoral ministry in one particular branch of Christ’s church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, has been to help you start and keep running the race well even as you “keep the faith.”

You may regard yourself as a man with few “talents” entrusted to you by Christ your King as in the parable of Matt. 25. We are very poor judges of how richly we are gifted for our Lord’s service. Use what you have fully in His service. I trust that the preceding chapters have provided you with help to do that work *well*. Your reward will be greater than you can imagine.

You are a bondservant of Jesus Christ, according to Romans and Philippians 1. How amazing that a term of derision in the pagan world was, in Christ, exalted to a term of honor. May you count it an honor to be at the beck and call of your reigning King as a *good* servant. I trust that this manual has helped you to render that service in the portion of Christ’s Kingdom known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

I Corinthians 4:1 says that you are a steward of the mysteries of God. Act with integrity at every point. “It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:2). I trust that this orientation – from one pastor to another – has given you some practical instruction to help you build faithfully on the faithful stewardship of those who have preceded you in the Church of which you are a part. Be *faithful* servants, encouraging yourself to “be faithful unto death, and (Christ) will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

At the end of the day you will always be reminded that all that you are, you are by the grace of God (I Cor. 15:10). As men, and as ministers, you will come to appreciate more and more the final recorded words of Dr. J. Gresham Machen: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ! No hope without it!" And when, like him, you receive the greeting "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21-23) you will realize that all the battles and sorrows were worth it, and that the sufferings of this life were not worthy to be compared with the glory that will follow (Rom. 8:18).

"God's Cause"

Sovereign God,

Thy cause, not my own, engages my heart,

and I appeal to thee with greatest freedom

to set up thy kingdom in every place where Satan reigns.

Glorify thyself and I shall rejoice,

for to bring honor to thy name is my sole desire.

I adore thee that thou art God,

and long that others should know it, feel it, and rejoice in it.

O that all men might love and praise thee,

that thou mightest have all glory from the intelligent world!

Let sinners be brought to thee for thy dear name!

To the eye of reason everything respecting the conversion of others

is dark as midnight.

But thou canst accomplish great thing things.

The cause is thine,

and it is to thy glory that men should be saved.

Lord, use me as thou wilt;

but, O, promote thy cause.

Let thy kingdom come.

Let thy blessed interest be advanced in this world!

O do thou bring in great numbers to Jesus!

Let me see that glorious day,

and give me to grasp for multitudes of souls.

*Let me be willing to live and to die to that end;
and while I live let me labor for thee to the utmost of my strength,
spending time profitably in this work,
both in health and in weakness.
It is thy cause and kingdom I long for, not my own.
O, answer thou my request.*

(Adapted from *The Valley of Vision*, ed. Arthur Bennett, Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, pp. 320,321).

**A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR FURTHER READING
ABOUT
THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
ITS LEADING FIGURES
AND ITS HERITAGE**

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