

ORDAINED SERVANT



Rev. Bruce Coie - 1907-1998

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Statement Of Purpose

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

Editorial Policy

1. Ordained Servant publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of Ordained Servant or of the Church.

2. Ordained Servant occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Ordained Servant does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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A Postscript

to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
(and others who may benefit)

On Perfecting Fellowship

by
John P. Galbraith

As should be obvious from “Perfecting Fellowship”¹ the need for the members of the body of Christ to share God's blessings of grace and understanding with one another has become a burden of the heart. The need for it was felt by our whole church through the 1960s and into the early '70s when the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) were exploring the possibility of organic union. When discussions on that matter began, the differences in the polity of the two churches was far and away the prime concern, but that decade turned out to be a crucial time when significant doctrinal questions arose in the CRC. As these replaced polity in the forefront of discussions and began to appear as barriers, recognition—at one point—was given to the need to discuss potential differences before they would become reality. But they were never effected and the rest is history: differences became established, a chasm widened, and ultimately those who once considered union have severed their official relationship. The need for better fellowship

was there then; more than ever, therefore, for both construction and prevention, should we now see the need for not only mutual concern for brothers and sisters, but also for help to each other.

Intrachurch Relations

That concern and help, however, may not be limited to interchurch relations but should apply even more so to intrachurch relationships. Woeful it is that two separate churches have been parted even further; how much more if a church that is one be divided into two because its members were content to go their own ways without the graces and wisdom that others could have

shared. We should all know this; we are children of the Reformation. We are also Orthodox Presbyterians, who came through a much more recent, and similar, division, caused by people going off in their own directions. And we should know the cost to the honor and cause of Christ.

The principle that the parts of the body of Christ should go to each other to ask for or give help ought not to be limited to interdenomina-

The principle that the parts of the body of Christ should go to each other to ask for or give help ought not to be limited to interdenominational matters—general assemblies or synods helping one another. It is a biblical principle designed for the whole body.

¹ The reference here is to the ICRC address by Rev. Galbraith as it appeared in *Ordained Servant* Vol. 7, No. 1.

tional matters—general assemblies or synods helping one another. It is a biblical principle designed for the whole body. It is for the church. It is just as true, just as valid, for individuals, for sessions, and for presbyteries, actively to seek help from, or to offer help to, our counterparts and those over us: persons from persons and the session, sessions from each other and from presbytery, presbyteries from one another and from sessions, and from the general assembly. Phil. 2:4, "*Let each of you look out for...the needs of others*", and 1 Cor. 12:26, "*If one member suffers all...suffer; if one member is honored, all...rejoice*", and Rom. 12:15, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*" all direct us to a better fellowship, a oneness, so that your concerns are my concerns, and yours are mine. Orderliness is not primarily a matter of discipline but of fellowship. It can come to discipline, but first it is the parts of the body being knit together in Christ and his Word by the Spirit.

Steps

Though this subject needs a much longer treatment, we have been asked to be brief. Let it suffice, then, for now, to suggest that:

- (1) Jesus prayed in John 17 not primarily for organizational unity, but for spiritual unity measured by his Word,
- (2) no one person, session, presbytery, or general assembly, has a corner on graces and wisdom,
- (3) if pride stands in the way we should swallow it and be willing to go to school, as it were, to be taught by others.
- (4) we need the benefit of the graces and wisdom that others have,

- (5) being a presbyterian church, help from those of like faith is at hand,
- (6) □our duty is to seek to preserve and enrich the unity in the faith that God has given us, and
- (7) we must not let past history repeat itself.

Does your session or presbytery have a problem? Study it, but also find out who else has had that problem. Ask how they dealt with it; tell them how you have seen it. Discuss a solution together. Is your session planning some changes in your church program? Bounce it off another session or individuals who might be helpful. Basically, get out of the mindset that sets you, your session, your presbytery off as independent from your counterparts. Don't be Presbyterians at presbytery meetings only. Being a Presbyterian, what you do may help or hurt all the others of us. Be active to ask help, be ready to give help. We need to perfect the fellowship within our church. And the church of Jesus Christ will be stronger for it.

...get out of the mindset that sets you, your session, your presbytery off as independent from your counterparts. Don't be Presbyterians at presbytery meetings only.



John P. Galbraith gave the opening message for the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) as it met for the fourth time in Seoul, Korea. This

article, which is a Postscript to that message, is addressed addressed to the OPC.

Some Thoughts On The Practice of Ecumenicity

by Bill DeJong,

Pastor of Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA)

Grande Prairie, AB



I'd like to make a few comments about some of the critical things being said about Reformed churches in general and the Canadian Reformed churches in particular. I've spent time in a number of different Reformed denominations: I was raised Canadian Reformed. While living in Holland I attended the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (which split off from the Liberated in late 1960s). I served as a pastoral intern at the Trinity OPC in Chicago, IL and the First CRC of Taber, AB and am now a minister in the URC. At seminary, some of my fellow students called me 'Mr. Ecumenical.' Needless to say, having spent some time in a number of different communions, I have come to know—in some measure—the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Today I enjoy a lot of interaction with what you would call mainstream evangelical Christians. I serve as adjunct faculty at the Peace River Bible Institute, where the makeup of both students and faculty is generally Baptist (most of whom are 'progressive' dispensationalists). I also host a fellowship group in my house for area ministers who are interested in

the Reformed faith. Ministers from the Christian Missionary Alliance church, Baptist churches, Church of Christ and Evangelical Free churches attend frequently and eagerly.

My message, therefore, to those in confessional Reformed churches is this: keep doing what you are doing, but do it better than it has ever been done before. The greatest revival Christendom has ever known—the Protestant Reformation—was not innovation, but restoration and recovery of the truths and practices of historic Christianity.

Here's what I want to say: Many mainstream evangelicals are looking at Reformed churches with 'beady eyes' and 'drooling mouths.' What they like about Reformed churches is exactly what some people within Reformed churches don't like, such as: time-tested, historical, orderly liturgies, catechism preaching, expository

preaching (in series), God-centered worship services (as opposed to man-centered entertainment), psalm singing, the importance of the covenant, etc.

Half of the membership of the church I serve comes from non-Reformed backgrounds (a number of families from the Roman church, as well as Pentecostal, Baptist, Mennonite, Lutheran—you name it) and non-Christian backgrounds. For all of these people, coming to the Reformed faith has brought a deep sigh of relief—finally they can worship God in spirit and in truth, without being put on

edge by distasteful worship services and questionable teaching.

The message I have, therefore, for those in confessional Reformed churches is this: keep doing what you are doing, but do it better than it has ever been done before. The greatest revival Christendom has ever known—the Protestant Reformation—was not innovation, but restoration and recovery of the truths and practices of historic Christianity. Keep up the good exegesis, keep the respect for tradition, keep the worship services focused on the glory of God, keep catechism preaching, keep expository preaching, especially textual-thematic, covenant-historical preaching.

That's precisely what the church today needs to do: put away efforts to modernize (against tradition) and try to mobilize (with tradition). And by 'with tradition,' I don't mean an archaeological reconstruction of the past, like meticulously following Calvin's liturgy or even the Westminster Directory. Simply 'going back' never constitutes genuine reform. What we need to do is preserve the 'heart' of what has been passed down to us by our ecclesiastical forefathers and make that 'heart' the source of our church life today. This, in my little experience and little knowledge, is much more than simply pastoral (a good enough reason). It is faithful and it is fruitful.

And this is precisely what is being done, in greater or less degrees, in the

Canadian Reformed churches, Free Reformed churches, Free Churches of Scotland, Orthodox Presbyterian churches, United Reformed churches and others. Much improvement is needed, but the foundation for a divinely blessed role in the wider church and world has been laid.

So be careful when you criticize. Not only are you criticizing the very churches evangelical Christians are

looking to for leadership and direction because they LOVE what they see and hear; you are also criticizing the body of Christ, which He purchased with His own blood. In a day in which the church is hated (by the world) and criticized (from within the church), the love of Christ for His body will be sure and steadfast. And that's the source of my hope for the future.

What we need to do is preserve the 'heart' of what has been passed down to us by our ecclesiastical forefathers and make that 'heart' the source of our church life today. This, in my little experience and little knowledge, is much more than simply pastoral (a good enough reason). It is faithful and it is fruitful.

William ('Bill') De Jong is a 1996 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary which is now located in Dyer, Indiana. He is now serving as Pastor of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada—a member of the new Federation known as the United Reformed Churches of North America.



A SAMPLE □ □ SESSIONAL CALLING RECORD □

by □

Ruling Elder David Winslow □ □

On the following page you will find the Sessional Calling Record sheet used by our ruling elders when they are doing home visits. You are free to copy it for your own session's use if you think that it will prove helpful. Perhaps your session could discuss it, comparing it to the one you use now and make improvements.

Why use a written sheet with questions and spaces for answers? Couldn't this questionnaire lead to a rather wooden approach to home visits? My answer is that it can serve as a very helpful guide, but that it shouldn't be used slavishly. At the same time it can serve to bring a conversation back on course when it has gotten far afield from the purpose of the visit. It also forces the elders to ask questions that they might prefer just to slide by and avoid. I do not recommend reading the questions and writing the answers during the visit.

My approach is to have the Calling Record on my lap so that I can occasionally glance at it. I will only write down something that seems extremely important to note immediately. After the visit is over and I am in the car or at home I fill in the answers to the questions that were covered and add extra comments. After all, this is supposed to be a conversation not an examination.

Since our goal in doing Home Visits is

to help the lambs of the flock see their lives hidden in Christ, our Good Shepherd; to encourage them to follow Him in the obedience of faith, we don't want visits to turn into a time to criticize the pastor. The question is not "Do you like the pastor's preaching?", but "Are you understanding it" and "Do you see that you are growing spiritually through it?". Of course these do allow for negative remarks but also for clarification as to where the problem lies, and follow-up questions can help members learn how to get more from the sermons. My pastor reminds us that we are his "eyes and ears" in the congregation so even negative reviews about his preaching need to be carefully evaluated in session meetings.

Do you involve your deacons in Home Visits? If so you'll find that there are a number of questions that could be delegated to them. In any event decide with your calling partner, elder or deacon, who is going to handle what portion of the visit responsibilities. In a future article we hope to deal with one of the number one problems that you find in your home visits: the disrepair of family devotions.

Until then may Godly richly bless you in your care of the flock.

David Winslow, Ruling Elder
Garden Grove OPC

SESSIONAL CALLING RECORD

Family Name: _____ Date: _____

Elders: _____

Adult Members of family present: _____

Names and ages of children: _____

Bible passage read: _____

QUESTIONS

A) WORSHIP

1) Do they attend regularly AM _____ PM _____

If not, why? _____

2) How do they view the service? Any special problems? Any changes desired? _____

3) Are they understanding the preaching? Are they growing spiritually through it?

4) Are there special needs that could be met by sermons on particular topics? _____

5) Do they prepare for worship? Do they know how to get the most out of a sermon? _____

6) Are they endeavoring to keep the Lord's Day holy? _____ If so: how? _____

7) Do they practice biblical giving? _____

B) EDIFICATION:

1) Do they attend Sunday School? _____ If not why not? _____

Is there a topic they would like to see covered? _____

2) Family and private devotions, what is their practice? _____

Do they need help or materials? _____

3) Are the children being catechized? _____

4) Do they attend Prayer Meeting or other mid week Bibles studies? _____

5) Any special health concerns? _____

6) Finances in order? _____

7) Family relations? _____ Marital relations? _____

8) Do the children attend Christian school? Is not is there a desire for this? _____

9) What spiritual needs do they see in their lives? _____

How could the church assist them with these needs? _____

C) OUTREACH:

1) Would they help with survey calling or other outreach efforts? _____

2) Have they invited neighbors or friends to church? _____

3) Do they practice hospitality as a means of reaching people? _____

4) Do they bear witness for Christ at their place of work? _____

D) GIFTS:

1) What gifts do they have that can be used in the life of the church? _____

2) Would they like opportunities and training? _____

E) PROBLEMS UNCOVERED/ADVICE GIVEN:

1) _____

2) _____

On Doing Home Visitation

by

C. Eric Fennema



In a reformed church order book we read the following:

“The elders, with the minister(s), shall have supervision over the congregation...They shall, with the ministers), exercise pastoral care over the congregation.”

“Pastoral Care shall be exercised over all the members of the congregation. The minister of the Word and the elders shall conduct annual home visitation.”¹

These two articles of a reformed church order, are a succinct description of the biblical calling of the elders and ministers of the Word in their task as overseers of the church of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this article is to examine this time honored reformed practice of “family visitation.” What is it? Why is it important? How should it be conducted?

What is family visitation?

It is one of the official means by which the ruling elders, the ‘overseers’ exercise oversight, pastoral care, shepherding - in the church of Jesus Christ. Family or house visitation is when teams of two elders (or an elder and a minister) personally visit the home of a church member or family to discuss the spiritual vitality of their Christian life and the life of the church as a congregation, the body of Christ.

What is the purpose of family visitation?

Family visitation receives its Biblical focus from the words of the apostle Paul, when he addressed the Ephesian elders, in Acts 20:18-21, 28-31. “You know that I have not hesitated to preach

anything that would be helpful to you, but have taught you publicly and from house to house...I never stopped warning each of you, night and day with tears.”

When we read the above passage, and the other passages concerning the work and calling of the undershepherd, we could summarize the purpose of family visitation as pastoral care. Family visitation has a threefold purpose:

- (1) It is intended to strengthen the spiritual lives of faith of the members of the congregation of Christ.
- (2) It is intended to challenge the worship and witness or service of the members of the body of Christ, that it may be found acceptable to the Lord.
- (3) It is intended to promote and encourage the fellowship or communion of the saints of the household of God.

The purpose of family visiting, in other words, is to see that God's Word is alive and functioning in the hearts and lives of the members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this means, the officebearers called to and entrusted with the souls of God's people, are enabled to check the spiritual pulse or welfare, the condition of the body of Christ.

The Importance of Family Visitation

Family visitation is important, therefore, because the elders come as representatives of Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, in his kingly office. The elders have been given by Christ the calling to “watch over your souls, as men who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

As Berghoef and De Koster rightly emphasize in their guide for church leaders, “A regular program of family visitation promises the following benefits:

¹ The Revised Church Order Commentary, by I. Van Dellen and M. Monsma, 1967, Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FAMILY VISITATION

- 1 - It extends the care and supportive concern of the Church into the homes of the membership.
2 Thessalonians 5:11-13)
- 2 - □Family-visiting provides ways to determine the precise needs of the congregation...
- 3 - It allows the elders to assess the people's reaction to the preaching and teaching and all the other functions of the Church.
- 4 - Visiting establishes a meaningful relationship between eldership and congregation apart from emergency situations...
- 5 - It provides a way to detect problems...²

Their whole seventh chapter on "Visiting the Membership" is worth the reading and study by the eldership.

How should family visitation be conducted?

First, we ought to be reminded of the negative. It should not be conducted as a Bible Study or a private preaching session or worship service. Certainly, the Word of God must be the starting point and guide for the visit. Certainly, the Word of God ought to be explained and applied from house to house. Surely, in one respect, we are worshipping the Lord. But family visitation is to be viewed as Christ, through His ordained representatives, coming to our house, so that elders and church members might together "examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test." (2 Cor. 13:5-6)

Self-examination, as the body, and as members of the body is not a matter of condemnation according to the apostle. It is the fruit of faith. Self-examination is not meant to cause us doubt, to question our salvation, our adoption as God's children, whether we are dead or alive. Just as a doctor's

examination, a physical examination does not check whether you are alive, whether you have a heart...but whether you are well, whether your heart is operating properly. So family visitation is to be conducted as a spiritual checkup as the body of Christ and as members of the body.

Of course, we need a standard, and that must be in the church, the Word of God. This standard, the Bible, the Church as a body, as a whole has been called to be the pillar of the truth. The church holds up the truth by her confessions of faith, her creeds. Therefore, the Scriptures as explained by the confessions of the Church, the common faith are certainly a necessary ingredient in family visitation.

Family visitation is found beneficial when it begins with a "family visitation sermon" at the beginning of the year. A family visitation guide for the church members is made available so that the family prepares for this important visit. These are distributed to the families generally a week before the visit is scheduled. An example of such a guide is appended to this article. Families are encouraged to discuss this guide before the visit by the elders. These visits can be made once a month by the whole eldership (in teams), and covering the congregation in about a year's time. This way the eldership keeps a regular contact with the whole congregation throughout the year.

The elders, in their first meeting of the year are given a more detailed guide for understanding and applying the passage in discussion with the family. A basic theme and a main question are the common focus for the visit, and generally has to do with the issue of spiritual growth. Areas of concern to which the passage is applied range from worship, public-family-personal, stewardship, participation in church life...to our witness or conduct in society with our neighbors.

This kind of preparation for family visitation by both elders and church members has been blessed by the Lord, and strengthens, builds up the body of Christ. As the apostle has said, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58b). Have you considered family visitation?

2 The Elders' Handbook, A Practical Guide For Church Leaders. by G. Berghoef and L. De Koster, 1979, Christian's Library Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The following is a sample of material for church members which supplements the material for elders presented on the previous two pages. Guides such as the following are provided for members of the congregation each year in preparation for the annual family visitation.

A FAMILY VISITING GUIDE

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

This month we hope to have "family visitation" at your home. Hopefully this letter will help this visit become a blessing to all.

The purpose of family visitation is threefold:

- (1) to strengthen our spiritual lives of faith,
- (2) to challenge our worship and service, and
- (3) to promote the fellowship of the saints in summary, to see if God's Word is alive and functioning in all of our life.

The elders come as representatives of Christ and his Kingly office, who have been given responsibility to "watch over your souls as men who must give account. Let them do so with joy, and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." When the elders come, the Lord is proclaiming his love for you! (Hebrews 13)

Before the elders arrive, it would be well for you to gather as a family, to discuss the passage in the light of the following questions. Our aim in family visitation is not the church as an organization remember, but to help each family live closer to the Triune God and His Word.

Ephesians 6:10-20

The basic message is: The Christian life is the life of a soldier

This life needs to be strong in the Lord...it needs the armor of God and prayer.

Main question:

1 - Do you believe you are living as a good soldier of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

2 - What do you believe it means to be a good soldier of God? What makes a good soldier?

Do you find this to be true in your life? Why or why not?

What does a good soldier need?

How do you face defeats? victories? enemies?

3 - What do you believe we as soldiers...personally, as a church, face as enemies (evils, dangers) in the world today?

How can we fight them?

4 - How would you describe your prayer life? Why do we need prayer? How can it be improved?

5 - Where do we need the armor of God? Cf. 5:21-31,6:1-9,20ff

We pray for the Lord's blessing on our meeting, and on your home.

Yours in Christ's service, THE ELDERS

C. Eric Fennema is presently serving as pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa. This article resulted from a paper he presented recently at a meeting of the Barnabas Fellowship of Reformed Pastors in Northwest Iowa. We thank Rev. Fennema for his response to our request for this article.



Charles Hodge on Presbyterian Union & Ecumenicity

by

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether

It is difficult to read early issues of the *New Horizons* magazine without getting the impression that its editorial vision was to see that the magazine and the denomination it served go out of existence. Picking up where the recently defunct *Presbyterian Guardian* left off, the *New Horizons* from its first issue in 1980 enthusiastically outlined the new opportunities that lay before the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as it contemplated union with the Presbyterian Church in America and (at the same time) with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. Liberalism was dying, and a union with these allies would launch conservative American Presbyterians into a strategic new era, resulting in a denomination over ten times the size of the OPC and providing an organizational structure better tailored for nationwide witness. Already partnered in the joint-ownership of Great Commission Publications, a merger would align the OPC with a fast-growing missions program. As one writer enthusiastically put it, “we aren’t here to reach the Presbyterian Church USA, but all of America — one at a time!” To many observers, this ecumenical moment was unique and had to be seized. In the words of a letter writer, “now is the time to effect a united church that will be a clear testimony to the Reformed faith.”

“...the hopes of union were dashed, first by the refusal of the PCA to receive the OPC in 1982, and then in 1986 when the General Assembly declined to join the PCA”

As the decade unfolded, the hopes of union were dashed, first by the refusal of the PCA to receive the OPC in 1982, and then in 1986 when the General Assembly declined to join the PCA (the plan of union received a majority, but fell short of the required three-quarters majority). Disappointed commissioners filed a protest against the Assembly that they claimed had “neglected to strengthen its impact for ministry in the world.” The protest went on to describe the vote as “a serious setback to our hopes for a united, vital, biblical and nationwide Presbyterian church.” Even worse for such disappointed commissioners was the impression the vote cast upon the OPC: “we communicate to the PCA and to the world an attitude of superiority...The crossroad has been reached and the Assembly has chosen a course. In our judgment this course looks backward instead of forward, inward instead of outward, and is exclusive rather than inclusive. Our deepest concern is that this course may not be altered in the future.”

Along with its disappointment, the protesters suggested that they would consider denominational alternatives: “given this direction, some may be confronted with new choices.” The result for many was “voluntary realignment” of ministers and congregations into the PCA.

When the 1991 General Assembly wondered whether it ought to pursue “Joining and Receiving” any longer as the instrument for merger with the PCA, it seemed that the decade-long ‘window for union’ had closed. As the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations turned from the PCA and began active conversations with the Reformed Church in the United States and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, it also appeared that the church was divided. A protest at the 1991 Assembly voiced concern that “the OPC as a whole [was] not united as to our future ecumenical direction.”

What is striking about the rhetoric surrounding the union that didn't happen was its similarity to arguments that accompanied a union that did happen, a century earlier in American Presbyterian history.

What is striking about the rhetoric surrounding the union that didn't happen was its similarity to arguments that accompanied a union that did happen, a century earlier in American Presbyterian history. More precisely, it was the 1869 reunion between the Old School Presbyterian Church and the New School Presbyterian Church that healed the breach that took place in 1837. That reunion was also accompanied by a pervasive sense that Presbyterians were confronting a unique ecumenical moment. The Civil War had just ended, and the Northern states were becoming a Union not only in name but also in reality. As steamships were bringing immigrants to American shores and railroads pushing the population westward, the cultural landscape was changing dramatically, and Presbyterians were persuaded that only an organizationally united witness could position the church to capitalize on nationwide evangelistic opportunities. And with the emergence of America as a world power, the church was now poised to engage in world-wide witness and cultural transformation.

Both camps generally expressed optimism over this moment. New School theologian Henry Boynton Smith cheerfully proclaimed that Presbyterian sectarianism was “losing its tenacity,” and he saw in a united church the prospects of “the most effective Christian organization on the continent.” For their part, Old Schoolers such as Lyman Atwater and A. A. Hodge returned the enthusiasm in kind, and pronounced the New School “theologically sound.”

In the midst of this northern ecumenical spirit Charles Hodge provided a voice of dissent. Anticipating the concerns which were to arise later in OPC union debates, Hodge argued that the union was based on the “latitudinarian principle of subscription” which reduced creedal subscription to “essential doctrines.” This was the “broadest of broad church principles,” and indicated that the confessional issues that caused the division of 1837 were not resolved. “The Old School had surrendered everything,” he lamented, and the New School was “willing to receive us as repentant sinners.” Such terms would cost Old School Presbyterians their theological identity for the sake of “sentiment and expedience.” Finally, he warned that “if truth be lost, all is lost. Our numbers, wealth and influence will avail nothing.”

Hodge's fears proved valid. In Leffert Loetscher's words, the reunion of 1869 produced the largely unintentional consequence of a “broadening church,” where organizational efficiency eclipsed theological precision. Within twenty-five years of the reunion northern Presbyterians began serious efforts at creedal revision. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, America's gilded age became Presbyterian's gilded age as well, as

it experienced both spectacular growth and advancing secularization.

The point is not to suggest that a similarly catastrophic future would have confronted OPCers had they merged with the PCA. Rather, what is noteworthy in this comparison is that Hodge refused to concede that opposition to union relegated him to a position of sectarian isolationism. As his son described it, Charles Hodge believed that “under the present condition of the universal church, each denomination has its special gifts and intrusted function, and that the gift and function of the Old School Presbyterian Church was one of the most precious and indispensable, and one which no other could fulfill.” Hodge’s plea was not a call for an inward, backward, and exclusive church. On the contrary, he believed that Presbyterians could best serve their brothers in other denominations only by being good Presbyterians.

Sixty years later, another ecumenical moment confronted a conservative Presbyterian, when the Trustees of Bryan Memorial University invited J. Gresham Machen to assume the Presidency in 1927. In declining their offer, Machen’s reasoning followed Charles Hodge. He acknowledged his “warmest sympathy” with “interdenominational efforts of various kinds” especially “with other evangelical churches.” And it was precisely because of that tie, not in spite of it, that he remained a confessional Presbyterian. “I think that I can best serve my fellow-Christians — even those who belong to ecclesiastical bodies different from my own — by continuing to be identified, very specifically, with the Presby-

terian Church.”

For Machen, like Hodge before, confessional identity enhanced his ecumenical vision. Together, they testify against the assumption that the choice for the OPC lies in either organizational union with other bodies or denominational chauvinism. Certainly no one could accuse either of them of being less than a Presbyterian churchman or isolated from the larger battles in Christendom.

Is the OPC, a century later, fulfilling the vision that Hodge laid before the Old School Presbyterian Church? Has the church found an alternative to the paths of assimilation and isolation? Or have the predictions of those who left the OPC come true? Surely it is too early to tell, but as the OPC continues to serve as a leader in shaping Reformed faith and witness for many small and emerging Reformed churches throughout the world, it is worth remembering that Charles Hodge could conceive of a vital ecumenical role for a confessionally precise church.

The point is not to suggest that a similarly catastrophic future would have confronted OPCers had they merged with the PCA. Rather, what is noteworthy in this comparison is that Hodge refused to concede that opposition to union relegated him to a position of sectarian isolationism.

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

Pastor to Pastor: The Riches of Spurgeon (pt. 1)

by William Shishko



While the true greatness of a preacher will only be revealed at Christ's tribunal, I would join my opinion with those of many others who make the earthly judgment that Charles Spurgeon was the most effective and useful of preachers since the days of the Apostles. Yes, as highly as I regard Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Whitefield, Edwards, and many other pulpit giants of the past, I become more convinced with every reading of a Spurgeon sermon that this English Baptist preacher of the 18th century is the preeminent model for one who would be a herald of the Word of God and the Christ of that Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex in 1834. His father and grandfather were both Independent pastors, with roots in both the Dutch and English Dissenting traditions. Like Timothy, from infancy Charles Spurgeon had known the Holy Scriptures: "It would not be easy for some of us to recall the hour when we first heard the name of Jesus" wrote Spurgeon, obviously including himself in this beautiful description of a covenant home. "In very infancy that

sweet sound was as familiar to our ear as the hush of a lullaby. Our earliest recollections are associated with the house of God, the family altar, the Holy Bible, the sacred song, and the fervent prayer." Spurgeon, who was destined to

**FROM C.H.SPURGEON'S FIRST SERMON
IN THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE
(Preached on Monday afternoon, March
25, 1861, from the text, "And daily in the
temple, and in every house, they ceased
not to teach and preach Jesus Christ",
Acts 5:42)**

"I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist—I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist—but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, 'It is Jesus Christ.'" My venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill has left a Body of Divinity, admirable and excellent in its way; but the Body of Divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is not his system, or any other treatise, but Christ Jesus who is the sum and substance of the Gospel, who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

become Britain's most illustrious preacher of the century, was converted on a snowy Sunday morning in early 1850 as a result of the less than illustrious "preaching" of a layman in a Primitive Methodist Chapel in Colchester, Essex. Under a brief and very personally applied development of the text "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth", Spurgeon's heart was changed by sovereign grace. "Look! What a charming word it seemed to me! Oh, I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant and sung with the most en-

thusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ and the simple faith which looks alone to Him." That joy in almighty saving grace, and that experimental conviction of full, free justification by faith alone in Christ alone would leave an indelible mark on every part of the ministry that was soon to be his.

Spurgeon's eminent speaking abilities wedded to his vast knowledge of the Scriptures were almost immediately put to use. Less than two years after his conversion, when Spurgeon was but 17 years of age, he was called to serve as pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Chapel. In 1854 he was called to serve as pastor of New Park Street Baptist Chapel, Southwark, London. Soon that building was filled to overflowing, necessitating the building of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1859. Apart from periodic bouts with illness which kept him from his pulpit ministry, Spurgeon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle until June 7, 1891, when he preached his last sermon. He died the following January at Mentone, S. France. During his 38 years of ministry in London, 14,692 mem-

bers were added to the church (Spurgeon interviewed most of them personally!). In addition to his pulpit labors, he began a "Pastor's College" to train men "evidently called to preach the Gospel", helped to found the London Baptist Association, established an orphanage (known as "Spurgeon's Homes"), and gave his assistance for the establishment of various other charitable and religious organizations. The Metropolitan Tabernacle, under Spurgeon's remarkable leadership, became a veritable beehive of evangelistic and philanthropic activity in London and its environs.

Spurgeon was unashamedly committed to evangelical Calvinism. He fought battles against hyper-Calvinism (considered in detail in Iain Murray's volume SPURGEON VS. HYPER-CAL-

VINISM, published by the Banner of Truth Trust) and Arminianism. He also stood firmly against the depreciation of the authority of Holy Scripture in what came to be called "The Downgrade Controversy". (The amazingly contemporary nature of these controversies is de-

veloped in Iain Murray's work THE FORGOTTEN SPURGEON, also published by The Banner of Truth Trust. Both of these volumes by Murray are highly recommended.)

Yet Spurgeon is known best as "The Prince of Preachers". Not only did Spurgeon preach to thousands each week, attracting the largest congregations of any minister in the British Isles, but his printed sermons (known as "the penny pulpit"), issued each week and then

appearing in annual volumes for over 40 years, have had the greatest circulation of any printed sermons in history. These sermons, totaling 3,561, fill 63 volumes, some of which extend to 700 pages! They are rightly said to comprise a "Body of Divinity" within themselves. F.B. Meyer reflects the assessment of many a minister whose preaching tutelage has come by reading these sermons: "I can never tell my indebtedness to them. As I read them week by week in my young manhood, they gave me a grip of the Gospel that I can never lose, and gave me an ideal of its presentation in nervous, transparent, and forcible language which has coloured (sic) my entire ministry."

Self-evidently, the 19th century Spurgeon

**FROM C.H.SPURGEON'S LAST SERMON IN THE METROPOLITAN TABERNALE
(Preached on Sunday, June 7, 1891)**

"If you wear the livery of Christ you will find Him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was His like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold He always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on His shoulders. If He bids us carry a burden He carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea, lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in Him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus Christ!"

did not possess the many fine insights of philological, hermeneutical, and biblical-theological studies that have been done in the 20th century. Geerhardus Vos was but 29 years of age at the time of Spurgeon's death! Spurgeon is not a model of consecutive expository preaching such as that done by Calvin, and revived in our own day by the late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. (Indeed, Charles Spurgeon rarely preached sermon series of any sort. He is the exemplar par excellence of topical preaching.) Nor is Spurgeon always the best model of grammatical-historical exegesis that is scrupulous about dealing with a text in its context. (One cringes at what Spurgeon does with a text like Genesis 15:11, "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away" under the sermon title: "Abram and the Ravenous Birds"!). And, as a Baptist, Spurgeon's views of God's covenant and His covenantal dealings with families as the basic unit of the church differ from our own (although there are many blessed inconsistencies that are obvious in volumes such as *COME YE CHILDREN: A BOOK FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS ON THE CHRISTIAN TRAINING OF CHILDREN*, published by Pilgrim Publications). Nevertheless, as models of thoroughly doctrinal, Bible-enriched, pastoral preaching that exalts Jesus Christ and freely offers Him to listener and reader alike, Spurgeon is unmatched. With good reason many a minister has urged fellow ministers and men preparing for the ministry to read at least one sermon by Spurgeon a week.

"There is a story told of me and some person who desired to see me on a Saturday night, when I had shut myself up to make ready for the Sabbath. He was very great and important, and so the maid came to say that someone desired to see me. I directed her to say that it was my rule to see no one at that time. Then he was more important still, and said, "Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see him immediately." The frightened servant brought the message but gained little by it, for my answer was. 'Tell him I am busy with his Master, and cannot see servants now.'"

— from "Spurgeon at His Best" by Tom Carter, Baker Book House, 1988.

Over the course of the next few articles we will delve into some of the aspects of Spurgeon's preaching that have made it so powerful and useful, both as it was originally delivered and as Spurgeon, "though dead still speaks" by his printed sermons. There is no single discipline that has helped me keep my preaching fresh and Christ-centered from week to week (except perhaps listening to tapes of fine sermons preached in our own day) than the discipline of letting the great Mr. Spurgeon preach to me as I read selections from the volumes of his sermons. I trust that these articles will whet your appetite for the feast that awaits you in the works of this unique man of God who "had an intuitive knowledge of the ways of God and of the needs of the human heart, and in all his preaching his one object

was to commend God to men." (William Robertson Nicoll, editor of the *Expositor's Bible*).

For the past sixteen years William Shishko has served as pastor of the Franklin Square, NY congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He is also serving, at present, as a member of the Christian Education Committee and of the Subcommittee on Equipping Ordained Officers which is responsible for oversight of this publication.

Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1-2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms., by Douglas F. Kelly (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications - Mentor imprint) 1997. 252 pp. + Select Bibliography, Scripture / Persons / Subject Indexes. Reviewed by Rev. Harry Zekveld.

“There is only one way for massive intellectual, moral, and cultural healing to occur, and it entails a revolutionary ‘paradigm shift’ from mythological evolution to a Scripturally revealed and scientifically realistic paradigm of special, divine creation” (p. 245). That’s Kelly’s concluding challenge. Kelly steps out to do what few conservative Reformed theologians have dared to do. He calls the church back to a straightforward, literal reading of the first two chapters of Genesis!

Douglas Kelly is presently serving on the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary at Charlotte, NC, as Professor of Systematic Theology. This book grew out of an adult Sunday School Class he taught at the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, MS. While its mixture of careful biblical exegesis and intricate scientific analysis may make it a little tough going at times (I wonder if it is as accessible to the general public as he hopes), this will provide college students with a good textbook on the role of faith in science. Each of the chapters conclude with “Questions for Study.” These questions, together with the teacher’s Study Guide that is being—or has already been—produced, could make this book useful for Bible Study classes.

Finally! - a Reformed theologian who is willing (and able) to make a sustained defense of Creation ex nihilo in the space of six ordinary days! Until recently only the Creation Scientists have been willing to do so. Also, lately, Philip Johnson and Michael Behe have taken the evolutionary scientists to task. But we need Bible scholars who will also take evolutionary exegetes to task. Kelly does this. According to him, a ‘progressive creationist’ is more correctly named an ‘evangelical evolutionist.’

This book is no cheap shot at evolutionism. The author has thoroughly researched his subject both in the area of theology and science, even though he claims to be no expert in the latter. He frequently acquaints us with the thinking of church fathers, leads us into several Latin and French works, and serves us with an impressive bibliography. In addition to the Select Bibliography, each chapter has appended a section of “Technical and Bibliographical Notes.”

Ever since the advocates of old earth and evolutionary dogma have come on board, theologians - even the greatest and most conservative - have retreated into a corner when it comes to the interpretation of Gen. 1-11.

The author’s concern is “the pervasive influence of the interpretive principle held by so many evangelical scholars that one must take a fundamentally different hermeneutical approach to the first eleven chapters of Genesis from the rest of Scripture (in order to accommodate significant aspects of the naturalist world view)” (p. 52). Liberal scholars don’t have this problem - they admit that the text of Genesis must be taken in the

literal, historical sense. They just don’t believe what it says. Evangelical scholars, however, clearly recognize that they have a problem if they want to concede to science on the one hand and hold to inerrancy on the other. So “a large percentage of conservative evangelical scholars refuse to interpret the Genesis text in its plain historical or literal sense!” (p. 51).

Douglas Kelly calls for hermeneutical consistency and intellectual honesty among evangelicals. We must listen to Scripture speak as it addresses real space/time issues. If we do not listen, then we will find ourselves slipping into a deadly deism in which we no longer hear what the Bible says in the real world. He quotes Scottish theologian James Denney: “The separation between the religious and the scientific means in the end the separation of the religious and the true; and this means that religion

Finally! – a Reformed theologian who is willing (and able) to make a sustained defense of Creation ex nihilo in the space of six ordinary days! Until recently only the Creation Scientists have been willing to do so. Also, lately, Philip Johnson and Michael Behe have taken the evolutionary scientists to task. But we need Bible scholars who will also take evolutionary exegetes to task. Kelly does this.

dies among true men" (p. 17). Genesis 1 & 2 open up to us fundamental space/time issues which may not be explained away. "[I]n order to grasp the true situation, one must let [God] relate how He did it, as regards space, matter and time" (p. 78).

In twelve chapters, the author takes us through the creation week. The opening chapter, "Creation: Why it Matters and How it is Scientifically Viable" discusses the inescapably religious starting point of the scientist. "Either one begins with faith in an eternal God or with faith in eternal matter. There is nothing in between (p. 26). Lately, evolutionary scientists are frustrated by the limits of a closed universe and are submitting to the reality of design. Kelly argues that only the Bible provides a logical and intelligent starting point for investigating the creation.

In Chapter 2, "Interpretation and Outline of the First Three Chapters of Genesis," the author argues that we must read this part of Scripture as chronological history, not as poetry or allegory. The following two chapters, "An Absolute Beginning" and "Day One of Creation" are a defense of creatio ex nihilo from Gen. 1:1-3. He confirms this teaching using the two laws of Thermodynamics to argue that matter simply cannot explain origins. In addition, "the irreducibly complex structure of functioning biological systems such as cells cry out for an absolute beginning by an 'intelligent Designer'" (p. 63).

Chapter 5, "Creation of Angels and 'The Gap Theory,'" shows how the Gap theory seriously conflicts with the teaching that the creation was all very good (Gen. 1:31). Chapter 6, "'Days' of Creation - Their Biblical Meaning," is a significant chapter not only because of his careful exegesis of the Hebrew word "yom" but also because the author does a fine job of critiquing the 'Framework Hypothesis.' This hypothesis places an "axiomatic disjunction between literary form and literal meaning, that does not come from the Bible itself" (p. 115). An outside philosophical position is at work in this dichotomy which threatens to empty the actual words of historical truth and fill them with the interpreter's own meaning. Kelly also shows how the New Testament writers assumed a plain, chronological understanding of the early chapters of Genesis.

It's time that we let the text speak for itself again.

Chapters 7 and 8 require a more scientific mind. In these chapters the author uses arguments from the decreasing speed of light and physical chronometers to support a young earth position. He begins by admitting that these two chapters are "much more tenuous than the rest of the book" (p. 137) because thus far the scientific evidence is inconclusive. Nevertheless, the Scriptural evidence "clearly favors" a young earth. Looking at the genealogies, it appears that they contain far fewer gaps (if any) than we have been led to believe. "It is better to be honest and face the facts of the case: a straightforward reading of Holy Scripture teaches an earth only a few thousand years old. This is irreconcilable with the vast ages posited by the evolutionary hypothesis" (p. 142).

The three chapters that follow give a somewhat brief explanation of Days 2-6 of Creation. There is good material in these chapters for sermon preparation on

the days of Genesis 1. The author includes refutations of abiogenesis (development of life from inanimate materials) and mutations between kinds.

Finally, the book closes with a chapter entitled, "The Sabbath Day and the Orientation of the Whole Created Order Towards the Worship of God." The author argues that the Sabbath is embedded in the very structure of created life for the purpose of remembering our Creator. It orients us toward the future, directing our gaze and activities toward a higher world "where we shall by and by enjoy endless fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer!" (p. 243).

In my view, the author's exegesis is persuasive. However, at times the reader would have been better served if the author had given a more lucid explanation of key grammatical points from the Hebrew, such as: why Gen. 1:1 is an absolute clause, why Gen. 2:4 is a superscription, and how Gen. 2:5 anticipates a post-fall environment.

One item that was lacking was a definitive statement on the relation of biblical exegesis to empirical investigation. The author moves back and forth from exegesis to scientific data between chapters and within chapters without clearly stating their connection. He should have led us in thinking through this connection more self-consciously.

This is an important book. In the past I learned that one should snicker at the mention of the Creation Scientists, and break into a laugh when Bishop Ussher was named. Kelly puts a stop to that. He shows that their conclusions about the formation and age of the earth deserves a long, hard look. Above all he demonstrates courage that is much-lacking in our churches and seminaries - the courage to be honest with the text of Scripture in regards to origins. Too long we have been grasping at two contradictory worldviews, hoping for a handful of both. We've wanted to hang on to the event-character of certain dear truths of creation and the fall, but we refused to root these truths in proper exegesis for fear that we would have to say too much about creation. We went after historical-redemptive necessity rather than exegetical necessity. It's time that we let the text speak for itself again.

Douglas Kelly is conversant with a broad range of authors in biblical scholarship, science, and philosophy. It makes his book a rich read.



Harry Zekveld is currently pastor of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa. He was nurtured in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada, and completed studies for the ministry at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in 1995.



Challenges in Preaching

by
James Visscher

There are habits, and then, there are habits. Some are good and some are bad. Some are beneficial and recommended; some are detrimental and to be avoided. Among the former category there is one that has generally stood me in good stead, and that is to find and read at least one book on preaching during my summer holidays. Of course, there have been years when this habit has paid only meager dividends; however, this past summer I once again struck pay dirt.

It came in the form of a book entitled *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker, 1994). It is written by Bryan Chapell who is professor of homiletics (preaching) and president of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Here is a book that I can wholeheartedly recommend to every one of our readers, and to you pastors in particular. If there is one book about preaching that should be on your reading list this year, this is the one. I say that for a variety of reasons. For one, here is a book that is clearly written, well illustrated, complete with

questions and exercises. In other words, an excellent text for those preparing for the ministry and a great refresher for those already in ministry. For another, here is a book that gives wise counsel and necessary instruction on the principles and preparation of expository sermons. Then too, here is a book that seeks to help preachers preach Christ-centered messages.

The standard approach when reviewing a book such as this would be to elaborate on each of the above reasons; however, it may be more insightful for you to see how Chapell deals with a number of challenges that are closely associated with preaching. What kind of challenges am I referring to?

DEFINING A SERMON

What is a sermon? What sets a sermon apart from a series of statements? Chapell says that for a sermon to be a sermon it needs to possess unity, purpose and application.

With “unity,” he means that a sermon can only be about one thing, have one theme, possess one unifying concept. The preacher should be able to state that theme in one sentence.

With “purpose,” Chapell introduces us to what he calls “The Fallen Condition Focus” or the FCF. He defines the FCF as “the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.” Hence preachers need to ask not only “what does the text say?” and “what concerns does the text address?” but also “what do my listeners share in common with those to whom the message was first written?”

With “application,” the author says that every preacher has to have one question at the top of the list. And the question? It is “So What?” Chapell states that “the message remains uncooked without thoughtful, true-to-the text application...a grammar lesson is not a sermon. A sermon is not a textual summary, a systematics discourse, or a history lesson...Preachers who cannot answer a ‘So What?’ will preach to a ‘Who cares?’...We are not ministers of information, we are ministers of Christ’s transformation.”

RIGHTLY VIEWING THE TEXT

Chapell entitles his third chapter “The Priority of the Text” and insists that this is the place where every preacher must start. “The text itself is the source of the truths we ultimately present.” But what constitutes a text? It needs to be “an expository unit” which he defines as “a large or small portion of Scripture from which the preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising within the scope of the text.”

In elaborating on a proper viewing of the text, Chapell deals with sermon length (no hard and fast rule can be laid down), series sermons (recommended, but there are pitfalls), contexts (what to preach is influenced by the calendar, situation, events, catechisms, and above all the Holy Spirit), cautions (do not avoid familiar text, or search for obscure ones, or use spurious ones), tools of the trade (Study Bibles, lexicons, concordances, dictionaries, commentaries), principles of interpretation (consider the context, use the grammatical-historical method, observe the historical, cultural, and literary context, determine the redemptive context).

In his next chapter the author continues to explain how the preacher should regard the Word. In the process he makes a strong plea for expository preaching as the only approach that does justice to the Scriptures. As he says, “expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the Bible says, it obligates them

to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people today.” He quotes with approval the words of John A. Broadus, “the application of the sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.”

To support his view Chapell cites biblical passages such as Luke 24:27-32; Neh. 8:5-8; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2 to explain that true exposition involves three elements: presentation of the Word, explanation of the Word and exhortation based on the Word. Or, using the more traditional terminology, expository preaching consists of the three components of explanation, illustration and application. As for how much attention is to be given to each component, that will vary depending on any number of factors ranging from text to preacher to audience.

Still, true preaching is not just a matter of method and approach, it also involves attitude. In that connection, Chapell has some wise words to say about the preacher’s need to see himself as someone under divine authority, as someone who should preach in a biblical manner, as someone who reflects humble boldness, and as someone who strives for Christ-likeness.

GETTING A HANDLE ON THE TEXT

After dealing with the underlying principles of expository preaching, Chapell goes on to address the preparation. Here he gives some much needed direction in what I would call “the mechanics of preaching.” For example, as preachers handle the text, they need to ask six basic questions:

1. What does the text mean?
2. How do I know what the text means?
3. What concerns caused the text to be written?
4. What do we share in common with: a) Those to (or about) whom the text was written and / or— b) The one by whom the text was written?
5. How should people now respond to the truths of the text?
6. What is the most effective way I can communicate the meaning of the text?

In addition, they need to take four necessary steps. First, they need to “observe...listen to the text, absorb it, wrestle with it, digest it, immerse in it, breath it in as God’s breath, pray over it.” Second, they need to “interrogate” and this involves exegeting the passage (what does it say?), outlining the passage (how does it fit together?), backgrounding the text (where does it fit?). Third, they need to “relate” which means to “consider the impact the information should have on the congregation.” Fourth, they need to “organize” their research in such a way that they have some idea of sequence and order, that they have exhausted and

covered it all, that they have highlighted certain ideas and subordinated others.

MOVING FROM TEXT TO SERMON

Yet if Chapell helps us to interact in a proper way with the text, he also helps us to move beyond the text to the sermon. How does he do so? By stressing that “a well-planned sermon begins with a good outline—a logical path for the mind.”

What are some of the principles that lead to a good outline? Chapell mentions the following: unity, brevity, harmony, symmetry, progression, distinction and culmination. Becoming more specific, he also spends some time on “the proposition” or the theme of a sermon, and concurs with the words of Henry Jowett who once wrote, “I am of the conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, nor ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal.”

From the theme or proposition, Chapell moves on to describe how to develop the main points and emphasizes that “each main point is a division of the thought presented in the proposition.” Next, he deals with sub-points: their types and position. Finally, he comes to “the basic F-O-R-M” meaning that each outline should be

Faithful to the text,
Obvious from the text,
Related to the Fallen Condition Focus, and
Moving towards a climax.”

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

If one of the great challenges of preaching has to do with moving from the text to the sermon, then surely another has to do with making the sermon effective. Chapell cites Reuel Howe who interviewed a host of people and came away with the following complaints about sermons:

- 1) sermons often contain too many complex ideas;
- 2) sermons have too much analysis and too little answer;
- 3) sermons are too formal and too impersonal;
- 4) sermons use too much theological jargon;
- 5) sermons are too propositional, not enough illustrations;
- 6) too many sermons simply reach a dead end and give no guidance to commitment and action.

So what is the solution? Chapell believes that it lies in the use of illustrations. At one time he was not so convinced but now he takes the view that “they are essential to effective exposition not merely because they stimulate interest, but also because they expand and deepen our understanding of the text.” To prove his case Chapell cites a long list of famous preachers who all used

illustrations. More important yet, he cites the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself of whom it is said that “He did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Mark 4:34).

Still, there is always a difference between knowing what should be done and actually doing it. Chapell realizes this and so goes out of his way to teach his readers the art of illustrating. In addition, he realizes that illustrations can be abused and gives some needed pointers about using them prudently and pastorally.

APPLYING THE SERMON

Chapell is convinced, however, that expository preaching is more than a matter of proper illustrations, it also has to do with powerful applications. Early on in his book he touches on the need for application in the preaching. When he deals with sermon preparation, he comes back to it again.

What does he say about the practice of application? For openers, he notes that “preachers make a fundamental mistake when they assume that by providing parishioners with biblical information the people will automatically make the connection between scriptural truth and their everyday lives.” He quotes David Veerman who says “simply stated, application is answering two questions: So what? and Now what? The first question asks, ‘Why is this passage important to me?’ The second asks, ‘What should I do about it today?’” He also cites C. Trimp who said, “God caused the Word spoken in those days to be put in writing with a view to us and our salvation...A respect for the true nature of the Bible opens the way for applied explanation in preaching.”

Yet once again agreeing that something must be done and actually doing it can be two different things. To help us bridge the gap between principle and practice Chapell dwells on the components of application. They can be captured in four key questions:

WHAT? (What does God now require of me?),
WHERE? (Where does he require it of me?),
WHY? (Why must I do what he requires?),
HOW? (How can I do what God requires?).

Following a brief explanation of each of these questions, the author goes into the structure of application, as well as its difficulty. As he does so he continually comes up with pithy and insightful comments. Here is a lengthy one:

Sound application ventures out of hypothetical abstraction and elbows its way into business practices, family life, social relationships, societal attitudes, personal habits, and spiritual priorities. Application disrupts lives and as a result is the point at which listeners

are most likely to tune out a sermon. Whether we like it or not, the breaking point of most sermons is application.

MAKING THE SERMON CHRISTOLOGICAL

In the third main part of his book Chapell develops what is called "A Theology of Christ-Centered Messages." How does he do this? For starters he takes up again the matter of FCF - Fallen Condition Focus and works it out in greater detail. Referring to 1 Cor. 9:8-12, he highlights the phrase "this was written for us" to show that what Moses said long ago was applied in Paul's day and, by extension, should be applied in our day too. Repeatedly, in one way or another, Scripture reveals our fallen condition. Why? To highlight the need and way of redemption.

And yet not every text is directly or obviously redemptive, so what is a preacher to do with those that are silent? He is to realize that every text has a context. Every text is part of a whole. Indeed, every text has to do in some sense with God and with His redeeming work through Jesus Christ. "The Bible" states Chapell, "is not a self-help book. The Scriptures present one, consistent, organic message. They tell us how we must seek Christ who alone is our Saviour and source of strength to be and do what God requires."

At the same time the author warns us that messages that are not Christ-centered or redemptively focused become man-centered. More often than not they promote the "deadly Be's." Under this category we have "'Be Like' Messages" which stress that listeners must strive to be like a particular biblical personality. We also have "'Be Good' Messages" which assume that believers can secure their relationship with God by adopting right behaviour. We have "'Be Disciplined' Messages" that urge believers to improve their relationship with God by trying harder. All such messages, says Chapell, are deadly

because they assume that we are able to do something ourselves about our fallen condition. They bypass the saving work of Christ.

Biblical preaching is Christocentric preaching. It becomes that not just by citing the name of Jesus or some event in His life. It becomes that by demonstrating "the reality of the human predicament that requires divine solution."

Moving from such general statements Chapell becomes specific and suggests a procedure for redemptive exposition. He also presents us with models, messages and marks of redemptive exposition. Again, there is much to learn from his perceptive comments on Christ-centered preaching.

As well there is much to learn from what he says about sermon introductions, conclusions and transitions. The same can be said for the appendices where Chapell deals with delivery, dress, style, divisions, proportions, methods of preparation, methods of presentation, reading Scripture, wedding messages, funeral messages, evangelistic messages, study resources and sample sermon evaluation form.

In conclusion, here is a book that should be read and reread by every preacher of the Word. It will help you greatly as you seek, with God's help, to meet the challenges of preaching.

Dr. James Visscher is pastor of the Langley, B.C. Canadian Reformed Church. He also edits an excellent periodical for elders and deacons called DIACONIA from which this review has been taken by permission.