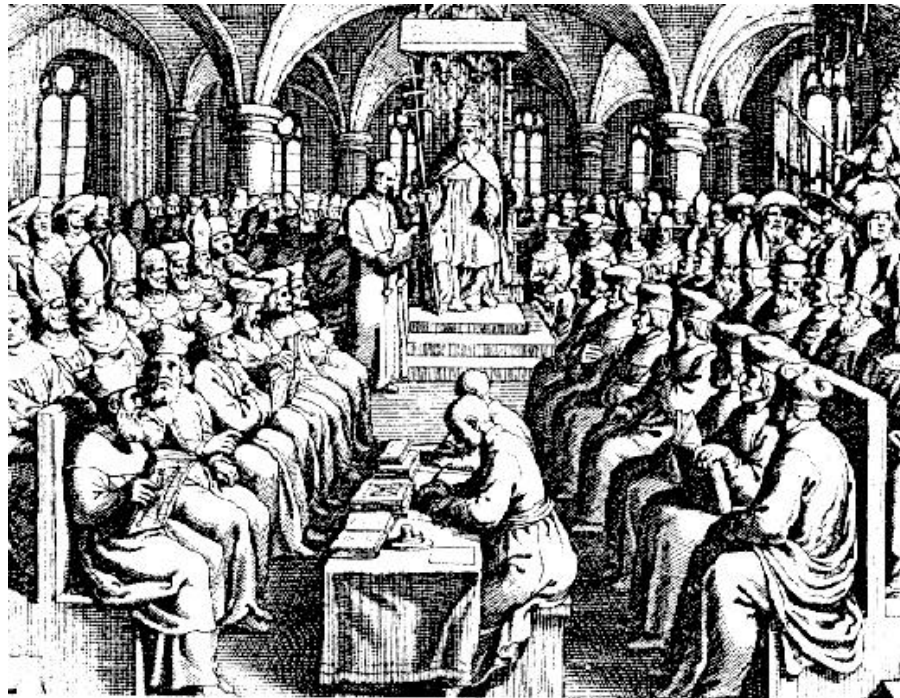


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The Council of Chalcedon

Published by

The Christian Education Committee

of

THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# ORDAINED SERVANT

## Statement Of Purpose

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

## Editorial Policy

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

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

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**Please send all materials intended for possible publication in *Ordained Servant* to the Editor, G. I. Williamson, 119 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA 51201. (Email address is: [williamson.1@opc.org](mailto:williamson.1@opc.org)). Please send all requests for additional copies, or back issues, to the Publisher, Stephen Sturlaugson, PLEROMA PRESS, Box 242, Carson N.D. 58529. Telephone: 701-622-3862**

Editorial Notes

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we give special attention to the subject of preparation for the ministry of the Word of God. The Recommended Handbook for Men Under Care of Presbytery is that of the Presbytery of the Southwest (PSW). It is built upon the earlier work done in the Presbytery of the Dakotas of which the PSW was once a part. This document is still in the process of refinement, but we believe it is in sufficiently finished form that it can serve our Sessions well as they seek out gifted and qualified young men and counsel and encourage them when they manifest a sense of a divine call to the ministry.



Enclosed with this issue of *Ordained Servant* are inserts for a second notebook. You can get a notebook identical to the one containing the first four volumes from Wal-Mart (and probably from similar discount stores). Look for the K&M Company Logo on the lower right, of the inside of the back cover. It had been our intention to send these out with Vol. 5, No. 1, but extreme weather conditions in North Dakota made it impossible for the publisher to get these out with that issue.



The editor still receives too many requests for a change in the number of copies of *Ordained Servant* to send out to the churches. We do try to take care of these requests but urge our readers once again to take notice of the page on the left. A telephone call—or written note—to the publisher will get far more reliable and quicker action in this matter. Please notice, also, the change in the editor's e-mail address. It was GIWOPC@aol.com but from now on it will be williamson.1@opc.org. Other members of the Christian Education committee can also be reached with the same format (tyson.1@opc.org, or wilson.1@opc.org). It is our hope that all members of our Committee will soon be E-mail users and available for your input in the same way. We should perhaps explain that the number 1 is automatically given to anyone who is the first person having a given last name who wants to be listed. If another person with the name williamson came along, for example, it would be williamson.2@opc.org. It should also be mentioned that any minister of the church can be part of the opc.org list.

We remind you, again, that the Christian Education Committee is making plans to have space set apart at Geneva College for a live demonstration of the use of our OPC WEB site, and e-mail, for commissioners at the next General Assembly.



We are pleased announce that one of our younger ministers, the Rev. Archibald Alexander Allison—who wrote the excellent series on the eldership—has agreed to write a similar study of the office of deacon. Look for this in future issues of *Ordained Servant*. Have you written something that would be of benefit to other ordained servants in the OPC? We welcome your contributions, and while we cannot promise in advance to publish any and every article sent to us, we do promise to give such our prompt and careful attention. So why not send it to the editor—today?



.....  
" We are fighting a battle for the Church, a true conception of the Christian Church...we are not prepared to recognize all who 'call' themselves [Christians] as 'being' Christians. This is what...people are doing. They assume that if a man says 'I am a Christian' and he belongs to a church, it does not matter what he believes, it does not matter what he denies, if he regards himself as a Christian then they regard him as a Christian. They say that it is wrong to say that any man is not a Christian if he says he is a Christian, irrespective of his belief."  
- D. M. Lloyd-Jones

# What (Most) Pastors Need

by

G. I. Williamson

If you want to live a long life—it's often said today—you need to pick the right ancestors. The trouble is, of course, that we have no choice in this matter. It's not this way, however, with something else of the greatest importance. I speak of the wife of a pastor. And it is my hope that what I write here will be seriously considered by younger men who are considering the ministry of the word of God as their calling.

No man should even think of entering the ministry if he can do something else. I mean, if he can enter into some other line of work with a clear conscience then I urge him to do so. I say this because I'm convinced that every pastor called of God should feel strongly what the Apostle Paul felt when he said "*necessity is laid upon me, yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*" (I Cor. 9:16). It's easy enough to start out in the ministry without this sense of divine compulsion—plenty of men have done so—but it's not so easy to persevere in the ministry when difficulties arise. A man who is faithful in declaring the whole counsel of God, today, will surely face opposition. And when it happens it is of the utmost importance to know that God is the one who requires you to stick with it.

It is also right here, in my humble opinion, that this vital concern comes into the picture. I speak of the choice of a wife. There's hardly any decision a man called to the ministry will ever make that rivals this in importance. And here let me say that I fully agree with the wise words of Professor Jay Adams concerning a pastor's wife. "Watch out for questions like" these, he says, "'Does your wife play the organ?' or 'Can your wife teach?'" For, as Dr. Adams rightly says, "her

first task is to be his wife; secondly, to be the mother of his children; thirdly, to be a good member of the congregation. Beyond that, she should neither be expected to occupy nor should she expect any special place in the congregation" (Shepherding God's Flock, p. 64). In a footnote he laments the fact that many wives "relish the unbiblical role of P.W." as if it was some sort of ecclesiastical office, whereas Paul speaks of a minister's wife as "a sister (*a believing member of the congregation*) who is a wife" (I Cor. 9:5).

In most cases a minister will need a wife, and—if such be the case—a wife who sees it as *her* calling to help *him*. A wife seeking status for herself will weaken his ministry. The very fact that a minister's wife is well educated, talented and ambitious to "use her gifts" can turn out to be counterproductive. This is not said with any intent to belittle gifts that the Lord has given, or even to suggest that they should never be used. The concern here is for a proper attitude. A wife who has a quiet and submissive demeanor—willing to remain in the background—will be the source of strength and encouragement that her husband needs when things become difficult.

In looking for this "good thing" (Prov. 18:22) then, let me offer a few suggestions. Look first of all for her *commitment to the authority of Christ and the Bible*. Her commitment to *you* will never be enough without, first of all, commitment to *him*. The Scripture says those who are faithful in little things can also be trusted in big ones. It's important, then, to evaluate little things in terms of this principle: submission to God's authority. Closely related is her life-dominating motive. Is it to glorify God and enjoy him forever or

something less than this? No one is perfect, of course, but if this is *the* dominating concern of *your* life—and it surely ought to be if you seek ministry—then you will need a wife who has the same life dominating concern.

Examples come readily to mind to illustrate what I am saying. Think of a minister who is very impressive in the pulpit and also quite orthodox. He begins his ministry in one of the small denominations that still holds to the Reformed faith as a corporate body. His wife is attractive, talented and cultured. She soon finds life in a small denomination too socially unfulfilling. Is it surprising then that, in the end, her husband ends his ministry in one of the large Modernistic churches?

But think also of another scenario. Here is a young minister in a denomination losing its hold on the truth. He comes to see this, more and more clearly, and his wife comes to see it too. But because of her commitment to the Bible—and her foundational desire to seek God's glory—she encourages him to stand for the truth and do the right thing. So they end up in a small denomination still holds to the Reformed faith.

In both of these generalizations—based on many similar cases we've seen over the past 40 years—the influence of the wife is crucial. For this reason I would urge the elders of our churches to be alert to this concern. Elders—the guardians of the church's well-being—should be much more involved, than has been customary in the past, in the preparation of young men for the ministry. They should always be on watch for promising young who appear to have the gifts needed in the ministry. When they *do* discern such young men they can hardly do them (*and the church*) a greater service than to help them tread wisely the path to marriage.

Sessions need to understand what a weighty responsibility it is to recommend young men for the ministry. Too often, I'm afraid, Sessions have recommended men for Seminary training in the hope that the Semi-

nary might be able to help them become what they are not. Sometimes this hoping against hope concerns the young man's wife even though, for the present, it is clear that she would be more of a hindrance than a help. What Sessions need to face quite honestly, in such cases, is the need for direct confrontation. If both the young man—and his wife—were brought to face up to the fact that *in their present state the ministry would be disastrous for them and for the church*, then one of two things would happen. Either they would show that they *do* have the foundational things (by making some radical changes), or they would be forced to see that this must not be their calling. And either way it would be far better for them—and for the church—than what has too often happened.

The inimitable Charles Spurgeon had this to say about marriage. "Let me admonish you young people not to be unequally yoked together. Marriage without the fear of God is a fearful mistake. Those ill-assorted unions between believers and unbelievers rob our churches of more members than any other popular delinquency I know of... You had far better remain in the cold of your bachelor or spinster life than warm your hands at the fire of unhallowed marriage." These words were spoken a hundred year ago, and of course they were *not* spoken with special reference to those seeking the ministry. Every experienced pastor knows how much the church today has been weakened by marital problems. But the damage is multiplied many times over when it encumbers the ministerial office. After all, there is such a thing as teaching by example. And it is right here that the pastor's wife has a unique opportunity. If she willingly fulfills her God-ordained role before the congregation, she will help to provide a role model that will impact the lives of many.

"*He who finds a wife—(and here I take the word wife to mean a wife indeed)—finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord*" (Prov. 18:22). May the Lord grant this wisdom to the future ministers of the OPC.

# SPECIFIC HELP for ELDER VISITING

by John R. Sittema

*In his introductory remarks for this article Rev. Sittema—referring to earlier articles—says “I hope the sheer number of words didn’t cloud the simplest point of all: being an elder demands that you visit the homes of your people.” In the light of this basic principle he continues:*

I remember my first “family visit.” I had all kinds of confidence, being a third year seminarian and all. That, of course, rapidly changed into a case of cotton mouth within five minutes of the start of the visit. I ran out of questions, then ran out of ideas, and finally, ran out of words. I looked at the wise elder who had accompanied me, terror in my eyes, and saw him smile knowingly. He took over, and taught me more in the next half hour than I’d learned about visiting from years of study. (His name is John Hettinga; he’s from Modesto, and I have here finally thanked him!) Perhaps you know the feeling, and maybe have already suffered Cotton mouth yourself. Maybe you’re a newly elected elder, dreading your first visit. These ideas might help you!

## THE FIRST VISIT TO A HOME

1. Before the visit, make sure you know the names of all in the home, especially children. Pray with your visiting partner, if you have one. (Check notes with him about any known concerns you may have (financial, family, habits, spiritual patterns, etc.). Have 2 or 3 Bible passages ready.

2. During the visit, aim at opening up. Let them get to know you: who you are as a person, what you believe the Bible says an elder is to be, what your plans are for pastoral care in your district, and how they might fit in. Also, listen carefully to get to know them. Ask each to relate

his/her spiritual history. Learn about their job(s), hobbies, school, favorite toys, family history, how they came to your church. Remember, you are to pastor real people, and to do it well, you must know them, and they you, as real people! Always end with prayer. Use Scripture throughout as appropriate.

3. After the visit, make notes on what you said and heard, and try to identify what subjects you think need further probing, what areas reveal sensitivity or hurt, what strengths they show that ought to be utilized in the ministry

of the Lord.

## REGULAR (ROUTINE) VISITS TO EACH HOME

At Least yearly (and in this impersonal and fast-paced world, I believe much more often is needed), you must return to that home. Again, before the visit, check notes about previous visits and observations you made then. Check Bible passages read (yes, keep records of all such information!), and prepare to read and discuss a few key passages.

Unless you know of a specific issue that needs attention (a wayward child just moved out of the house, marital problems, a death in the family (etc.)), your aim should be simple: to understand whether God’s Word is alive and functioning in their home, and to encourage them to live in it.

### Specifics:

1. Have the visit at the kitchen table or in the family room—a place where conversation is normal.

*“... being an elder demands that you visit the homes of your people!”*

2. Generally, use open-ended questions, that is, questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” answer. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

A. Not: “Do you have personal/family devotions?”

But: “Describe your pattern for personal/family devotions.” (Try to discover these sorts of things: Daily? Through a book of the Bible? Family discussions about what you read? Early AM? Mealtime? Use devotional guides? Parents as a couple? Children start at what age?)

B. Not: “Do you pray?”

But: “What do you parents pray for regarding your children’s lives? How do you children pray for your parents? What do you ask for?”

C. Not: “Does God’s Word shape your lifestyle?”

But: “How do your children believe your home is different than a non-Christian home?” (Be prepared to listen and to talk!)

“What do you as parents believe is the greatest spiritual danger facing your children, and why?” (Be prepared to talk about television!)

“Why is it difficult to share your faith in your neighborhood?”

“What is the hardest thing about living your faith at work?” and “What are the greatest opportunities for testifying to Christ at your job?”

D. Not (never!): “Do you have any problems with our church?”

But: “In what ways has the ministry of our church been a blessing to you and your

family? How are you involved as part of our ministry? In what areas do you think we can improve our faithfulness, and how so?”

E. Not: “What is your view of Christian marriage?”

But: “Tell me what you think of the view of marriage that TV portrays in programs like *Cosby*, *Rosanne*, *Thirty Something*.” (Hope and pray that their answer is “I never watch it!” Unfortunately, it probably won’t be.)

F. Not: “Do you consider yourself a Christian?” (I never ask that question, since so many counterfeit definitions are floating around!)

But: “The Bible teaches that we know a tree by its fruit. What does your life produce that bears evidence that you are rooted in Christ?”

I trust you get the point. You are seeking to discover how God’s Word functions in their lives. You are also seeking to encourage them to exalt it in growing areas of their lives. Get specific.

#### WHAT ABOUT MANDATED VISITS?

How about those visits where you appear with one specific subject in mind? For example, a disciplinary call to rebuke or admonish, or a call to discuss their children’s lack of attendance at the catechism classes offered for their nurture. Any guidelines here? Here are a few:

1. Get to the point. Don’t beat around the bush discussing the weather. Tell them within the first minute or two of sitting down that you are here to talk with them about...
2. Be positive. Always approach the purpose of the visit as your desire and commission to minister grace and reconciliation. Your

Unless you know of a specific issue that needs attention...your aim should be simple: to understand whether God’s Word is alive and functioning in their home, and to encourage them to live in it.

visit isn't to criticize; it is to promote repentance and restoration. Do have your Bible open, with specific passages in mind. Do ask questions that encourage them to side with the saints in decision making: "How can I help you do what God's Word tells you here?"

3. Remember your office. You may not appear cocky, arrogant, or abrasive. Such behavior is not fitting a servant of Christ. At the same time, you must not be lacking in courage or boldness.

You are Christ's representative: you must speak a Word from Him addressed to the situation you find. Don't fail to read from the Bible; always try to have them read along in theirs.

4. Always pray before and after the visit. Your humble prayer demonstrates your dependence upon the One Who sent you, and shows to them that you, too, are "under authority." It is not just they who must submit to Christ's yoke!

5. Always summarize each meeting verbally. This may sound strange, but I mean it. Each visit will have accomplished something, even if only revealing their stubborn unbelief. Make sure they understand what you understand. At the end, draw together the strings: "Now, we have agreed that Scripture requires that you must begin showing love differently to your wife than you've been doing. You promised to do so and beginning today, right?" Or, "Let me understand clearly. You know the Bible calls your behavior adultery, and says that God calls you to honor your marriage because that pleases Him. Yet, you say you won't give up seeing your boyfriend no matter what?"

**IN SUMMARY**

Though all visits you make are pastoral in

purpose, aimed at caring for God's flock, defending it from the wolves of the world, and leading it according to the Good Shepherd's voice, we've seen that not all visits can be made with the same approach. Generally, the first visit you make to a home in your district has an introductory aim. The routine and regular visits you make may target specific issues or subjects, but all aim to discover whether or not God's Word is functioning as the fountain of faith and life in that home. Only open-ended questions will reveal that information. The mandated visit is more formal, more narrow in scope, more pointed. Treat it accordingly.

Remember your office. You may not appear cocky, arrogant, or abrasive. Such behavior is not fitting a servant of Christ. At the same time, you must not be lacking in courage or boldness. You are Christ's representative: you must speak a Word from Him addressed to the situation you find.

Obviously, your congregation's situation is different from ours here in Dallas. All are. Yet, the pastoral needs aren't all that dissimilar, and, if nothing else I say here strikes you, let this hit you between the eyes: unless you visit your people, showing and telling them you truly care about their obedient faith and service and want to help them

develop it further, you are sending them another message. That is simply this: we talk about faith around here, but it really doesn't matter much.

**We are grateful to Rev. Sittema for allowing us to use this article which first appeared in the *OUTLOOK* magazine. We have—with the author's permission—omitted the first two paragraphs in which he made reference to earlier articles in the series of which this was a part. Rev. Sittema is pastor of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Dallas, Texas.**



**A RECOMMENDED HANDBOOK**  
**FOR MEN UNDER CARE OF PRESBYTERY**  
*in*  
**THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

This handbook is designed to aid you in your work toward licensure and ordination, and to help you to find your way more easily through the procedures that lead to ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This booklet is to be used in conjunction with pastoral counsel. Normally, this counsel will be that of your own pastor and session. In some situations, it may be necessary to put you in contact with another pastor for regular counsel (i.e. ministers from churches other than the OPC who desire to come into the OPC and are working in non-OPC churches, or men in churches currently without a pastor). If for some reason it is inexpedient for your pastor to exercise the requisite oversight, the committee, after due consideration, may elect to put you in contact with a pastor or a member of the committee for counsel. The committee will work closely with you and your pastor/counselling pastor in overseeing your progress.

You are also urged to regularly attend presbytery meetings to find fellowship beneficial to your calling, to see presbyterian government at work, and to become aware of the types of examinations given for licensure and ordination.

For your further information you are also given a BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER, the latest denominational directory, and the most recent list of officers and committees of presbytery. You will be placed on the presbytery mailing list so that you may receive notices and minutes of the meetings of presbytery.

May God richly bless you as you pursue the great calling of ministering the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## A MANUAL FOR MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES

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### COMING UNDER CARE

Form of Government XXI, 1,2

1. The first step toward the gospel ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is to come under care of the presbytery. If you believe you have been called to the gospel ministry, consult with your pastor. To be taken under care of presbytery, have your minister contact the stated clerk of presbytery and the chairman of the Candidates and Credentials Committee concerning your desires.
2. According to FG XXI:1-3, those desiring to come under care of presbytery should take note of the following.
  - A. Coming under care is to be considered the beginning of a period of trial, "in order that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men and that the churches may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed" (FG XXI:1).
  - B. To come under care a candidate must be a communicant member of a local congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (FG XXI:2).
  - C. Ordinarily it should be of the same presbytery in which he is applying to be taken under care (FG XXI:2, p.77). If the candidate desires to place himself under the care of a presbytery other than his own, he shall request his presbytery to forward the written recommendation of his session to the presbytery under whose care he desires to place himself (FG XXI:2, p.78).
  - D. After consultation with your pastor and session, your session will make written recommendation to presbytery "certifying that in its judgment (your) christian faith and potential gifts qualify (you) to be taken under care of the presbytery with a view to ordination to the gospel ministry" (FG XXI:2).
  - E. The presbytery will then examine you respecting your christian faith, life, service, and the motives influencing your to desire the sacred office (FG XXI:2, p.78).
  - F. The presbytery, through its candidates and credentials committee, shall continually guide, counsel, and help you to further prepare yourself for the work of the ministry (FG XXI:2, p.78). This guidance, counsel and help will take various forms.
    1. If you are seminary bound a fund for "aid to ministerial students" has been set up by presbytery in case our men under care may have financial need while in seminary. See the guidelines for the fund on p. 18.
    2. If you are not going to seminary, the presbytery, through its candidates and credentials committee, shall assure itself that you are being theologically trained through a variety of home study requirements. Be advised that the non-seminary route is not an easier path. You will be required to do the work!
  - G. You may proceed toward trials for licensure when you have completed one and a half years of seminary training, or when presbytery, through its committee, has satisfied itself that your non-seminary training has proceeded to the equivalent of one and a half years of seminary.

### BECOMING LICENSED

Form of Government XXI, 3-11

1. When a candidate is licensed, he begins a probationary period not ordinarily to exceed two years (FG

XXI:11) during which he has opportunity to exercise his gifts for the ministry. It is a period in which both the candidate and presbytery are able to test the candidate's qualifications for the ministry. No one entering the ministry is to be a novice. Licensure entitles the candidate to preach the gospel as a probationer within the bounds of presbytery. It is presbytery's approval that the candidate is qualified to receive a call to the ministry from a congregation or to work as an evangelist.

#### EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Before you can be licensed, you must have received a B.A. or equivalent and have completed at least one and one-half years of seminary, or have satisfied the presbytery, through its committee, that your non-seminary training has proceeded to the equivalent of one and one-half years of seminary.

#### EXAMINATIONS

1. To be licensed, you must prove your abilities for the ministry by undergoing examination by the presbytery. The exams include:

English Bible

Theology

Church History

Original Languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek)

Written sermon to be delivered before presbytery

An assigned essay on a theological theme

Exegetical paper[s] on the Hebrew or Greek text of [a] passage[s] of Scripture

Testimonials from those familiar with your work.

2. Upon successfully completing your exams the moderator of presbytery will ask you the following questions for licensure:

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- 2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- 3) Do you promise to study the purity, peace and the unity of the church?
- 4) Do you promise to submit yourself, in the Lord, to the government of the presbytery, or any other presbytery under the jurisdiction of which you may come?

3. Upon affirmative answers to the four questions, the moderator, having prayed, will address you in the following or similar words,

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the authority that he has given to the Church for its edification, we license you to preach the gospel, wherever God in his providence may call you; and for this purpose, may the blessing of God rest upon you, and the Spirit of Christ fill your heart. Amen." (FG XXI:8)

4. Then the presbytery shall record the licensure in its minutes and provide you with a certificate of licensure pursuant to and in conformity with FG XXI:8.

## A MANUAL FOR MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES

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5. Presbytery continues to exercise oversight of your work while under probation as a licentiate. If you are working in a particular church, the session of that church may be asked to report on your work to the presbytery.
6. If during your licensure you determine that you are not called to the ministry, please discuss the matter with several ministers in the presbytery. If you and the ministers agree that it is best for you not to go into the ministry, presbytery will release you from your licensure.
7. The OPC Committee on Pensions wishes to inform new licentiates and ministers that you may enroll in the denomination's hospitalization and major medical insurance plan without medical examination if you apply for enrollment within 30 days from the date of your licensure or ordination.

### RECEIVING A CALL

#### Form of Government XXII

1. You must be licensed in order to be eligible to receive a call from a congregation or to work as an evangelist.
2. When called to candidate, it is wise to take your family along and spend a week to take part in the life of the congregation and visit its members.
3. Your call begins when a congregation votes by a great majority to call you as its pastor. The terms of the call will ordinarily be established at that same meeting of the congregation.
4. The call will then be sent to the stated clerk of the presbytery of the calling church. That presbytery will then meet to consider the call, and, if all is in order, they will approve it.
5. If you are licensed in the same presbytery as the calling church, the presbytery will pass the call on to you. If you have already decided to accept the call, it would speed matters up if you would either come to the meeting or send a letter stating your intentions to the meeting in which presbytery considers the call.
6. If you are licensed in a presbytery different than that of the calling church, the presbytery of the calling church will first consider the call whether to find it in order, approve its terms and determine to place it in your hands. Before approval you may be asked by that presbytery for an interview. Upon approval the stated clerk will forward the call to you and a copy to the stated clerk of the presbytery where you are licensed. If you are inclined to accept the call notify the stated clerk of your presbytery in which you are licensed. The presbytery in which you are licensed will then meet to determine whether you have satisfactorily completed your probation for the gospel ministry and consider approving the call. Upon approval the stated clerk will transfer your papers of licensure to the presbytery of the calling church. The presbytery to which you are transferred will then proceed to enroll you and take oversight of your work.
7. When you notify the stated clerk of the presbytery of the congregation which has called you that you accept the call, this will be sufficient evidence of your intent to proceed with examinations toward ordination. The Candidates and Credentials Committee will then proceed to assign examinations.

### BECOMING ORDAINED

#### Form of Government XXIII

1. Ordination is the solemn act of the church admitting a man to the office of the ministry and giving him the authority to discharge its functions. As a minister it is his duty to feed the flock of God, to be an example to them, to have oversight of them, to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the lost, beseeching

them to be reconciled to god, to preach the word by faithful exposition, exhortation, admonition, and the teaching of sound doctrine, and, to dispense the sacraments.

2. Ordination should take place only after the period of licensure is of sufficient duration (normally not to exceed two years) to give evidence that you possess the gifts for the ministry. This probationary period may take different forms depending on the circumstances. Seminary and post-seminary internships are available. One may also serve as an associate pastor. Whatever course one chooses to take, the whole matter should be considered seriously. Times of probation are beneficial not only to the church, but to the probationer as well. Both seminarians and non-seminarians should involve themselves with the leadership of the church of which they are members. They should make it their practice to attend as many meetings of session and presbytery as is possible. If possible, they should serve as deacons or ruling elders.
3. You may begin steps toward becoming ordained only after you have received a call to serve as a pastor or to work as an evangelist.
4. The presbytery will plan ordination exams at the earliest possible time after the candidate has accepted the call. Time will be given for preparation for the exams. The exams may be given in their entirety before presbytery, or some of the exams may be given in committee. In no case will the exams in Christian faith and life or theology be waived. The following exams are ordinarily given for ordination (see example exams): *[Testimonials will be secured by the Committee from those who are familiar with your work as licentiate]*

- (1) Christian Faith and Life
- (2) English Bible
- (3) Theology
- (4) Apologetics
- (5) Ecclesiastical History
- (6) Hebrew
- (7) Greek
- (8) Such other branches of learning as to the presbytery may appear requisite
- (9) The Standards of the OPC: "confessional, government, discipline, and worship of the church."
- (10) Written discourses (usually a theological and exegetical paper and a written sermon to be preached before presbytery).

Presbytery may waive exams for ordination for several reasons. Some may be waived because of seminary training. Some may be waived because the licentiate has been licensed under the same presbytery from which he seeks ordination. Having examined him as a licentiate, the presbytery may see no need in examining him further in those same areas. However, the exam in theology before the presbytery may not be waived (FG XXIII:6)

5. If presbytery is fully satisfied with the exams, a time for the ordination at an adjourned or special meeting of presbytery will be set. It is preferred that the ordination take place in the church to which the candidate is called.
6. At the service of ordination the candidate is also installed as pastor of the calling congregation. The following order of service has been used at a number of ordinations:

Invocation  
Hymn  
Scripture  
Sermon  
Hymn  
The moderator informs the congregation of the proceedings of presbytery preparatory to this occasion (FG XXIII:8)  
Constitutional Questions  
To the candidate  
To the congregation  
Ordination by the presbytery by prayer and the laying on of hands  
Charge to the congregation

Charge to the pastor  
Prayer of installation  
Hymn  
Benediction

7. The candidate will be asked the following constitutional questions for ordination:
- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
  - 2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
  - 3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?
  - 4) Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
  - 5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son?
  - 6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel, and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
  - 7) Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your life, and walking with exemplary piety before which God shall make you overseer?
  - 8) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation in agreement with your declaration when you accepted their call? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them as God shall give you strength? (For those called to engage in the work of an evangelist the following should be substituted for this last question: Are you now willing to undertake the work of an evangelist--or a teacher of the Word of God--, and do you promise to be faithful in the discharge of all the duties of the ministry as God may give you strength?)
8. If the candidate has answered these questions in the affirmative, the calling congregation will be asked to reply in the affirmative by raising their right hands to the following questions:
- 1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive \_\_\_\_\_, whom you called to be your minister?
  - 2) Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?
  - 3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?
  - 4) Do you promise to continue to him, while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion and his comfort among you?
9. The presbytery will then proceed to ordain the candidate by prayer and laying on of hands, and will then extend to the candidate the right hand of fellowship to partake of the office of minister with them.

10. The OPC Committee on pensions wishes to inform all newly ordained ministers that they may enroll in the pension plan without medical examination if application for enrollment is made within 61 days after ordination.

### PREPARING FOR EXAMS

*Christian Faith and Life* - This is a fairly standard examination. We are seeking to determine your profession of faith, your earthly pilgrimage thus far, your call to the gospel ministry, and elements of your personal and family piety. No particular preparation is necessary.

*English Bible* - This exam is exactly what it looks like, an exam to measure your knowledge of the Bible written in English. Do not take this exam for granted, as overfamiliarity with the Bible in the original languages can breed underfamiliarity with the Bible in English, to the detriment of your effectiveness as a man of God. The exam will consist of identifying particular texts (quoting both text, and chapter and verse), identifying Bible characters and stories, selection of texts applicable to particular occasions and ability to outline the content of Biblical books. A healthy devotional life is the best preparation for this exam. You might also find it helpful to study the sample questions used by our presbytery of Philadelphia, which is obtainable from the committee.

*Apologetics* - This exam is designed to test your knowledge of secular philosophy and your ability to defend the Christian Faith from its claims. The exam measures your familiarity with philosophy, and a good general treatment on the history of philosophy, such as Thales to Dewey or Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Thought*, would help in preparation. The exam also measures your convictions about and ability to use the defense of the faith. Anything by or about Cornelius Van Til should be studied in preparation. You should also have a working knowledge of contemporary Christian philosophy. Seminary notes should provide sufficient background in this.

*Theology* - This exam is taken before the presbytery in public. You need not be unduly frightened by this. It should be a positive opportunity to testify to what the Spirit has taught you. We do intend to be thorough, and to cover the whole counsel of God. The single best way to prepare is to study G. I. Williamson on the Confession of Faith. Exams are usually structured around the confession and it helps to be able to quote, or paraphrase the confession, explain it, and defend it from Scripture. You should also expect questions on contemporary theological issues, which your personal reading and seminary courses should adequately prepare you. It is also helpful to record the questions asked in theological exams you witness.

*Church History* - This exam is also self-explanatory. It is designed to measure your knowledge of and ability to profit from the history of Christ's Church. Your class notes from seminary church history courses will be the best preparation aids, along with a review of B. K. Kuiper's *The Church in History*.

*Original Languages* (including Aramaic) - You will be notified as to the portions of Scripture you will be translating. Included in the exams may be parsing of verbs, identifying grammatical constructions, vocabulary quiz, conjugations, declensions. The Aramaic exam will be less demanding in regard to memorization; it is chiefly a test of your ability to work with the language with the use of aids.

*Standards of the OPC* - This is an examination in "*the Confession, Government, Discipline, & Worship of the church.*" You must know the content of the OPC Book of Church Order to pass. Helpful background reading is Witherow's *The Apostolic Church* and R. B. Kuiper's *Glorious Body of Christ*.

*Sermon* - The topic for your sermon will be assigned. A specific text may be assigned.

*Papers* - You must submit a paper on a theological theme (which will probably be assigned) and another on a text you must exegete (also probably an assigned text). It may also be necessary to submit other papers, though this is the exception and not the rule. If a candidate is in need of work in a certain area, or if his views appear to be out of accord with the Confession, presbytery may require a special paper to cause more study, sharpen views, or produce an extensive defense of a position. The committee will be eager to help with those assignments.

**GUIDELINES FOR AID TO MINISTERIAL STUDENTS**

In order to administer financial aid to needy students who are preparing for the Christian ministry by undertaking appropriate studies in a suitable theological seminary, the following guidelines are proposed for use in the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

1. That offerings taken for this purpose from time to time in our churches be sent to the Chairman of the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the Presbytery, and that the same Committee is authorized to make allocations of funds to needy students attending seminary who are preparing for the Christian ministry by studying for the B.D. degree or its equivalent as the Committee may think wise. The Committee shall report its activities to Presbytery at each stated meeting.
2. Recipients of financial aid shall meet the following qualifications unless an exception is granted by Presbytery:
  - a. The student shall be a member in good standing of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and shall be enrolled in a course of studies leading to the M. Div. degree (or equivalent) in an accredited theological seminary in the United States, and shall be carrying a course load of at least two-thirds of the course load usually required of students at the seminary he is attending.
  - b. The student shall indicate his desire, upon graduation, to enter into the pastoral ministry.
3. Preference should be given by the Committee to students who hold their membership in one of the churches of the Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_, and are under the care of the Presbytery. Preference should also be given by the Committee to students attending a Seminary approved by the Presbytery.
4. The Candidates and Credentials Committee need not disburse funds every year if suitable recipients are lacking, in its judgment, in a particular year, and may invest funds in the meantime in a bank savings account; normally, however, disbursements are expected at least every other year. The following statement is to be signed by those who receive money from the Ministerial Student Aid Fund:

*"I, the undersigned, having been granted aid from the Ministerial Student Aid Fund of the Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_, to prepare myself for the Gospel Ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church hereby declare that though I do not bind myself, yet I recognize by duty to repay the total sum from the Ministerial Student Aid Fund,*

1. if I should be barred from school.
2. if I should discontinue my studies for the ministry,
3. if I should leave for another school unacceptable to the Presbytery,
4. if during the course of my studies or after graduation I should join another denomination without the approval of Presbytery,
5. if, having the opportunity, I should serve in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church ministry less than five years after graduation.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_.

**Our thanks to the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the Presbytery of the Southwest for allowing us to use this material. We hope it will be a useful as a cross-reference for Committees of other Presbyteries, and to men seeking the ministerial office.**



# THE USE AND ABUSE OF CHURCH HISTORY

by J. G. Vos

The history of the Christian Church, if rightly regarded and used, can be a great source of strength, wisdom and stability to the serious Christian. On the other hand, Church history wrongly regarded and misused can be a stumbling block, an occasion of weakness and stagnation. There are three attitudes toward the past history of the Church which are wrong and which can only hinder true strength and progress in bearing witness to the Truth. These three attitudes are: [1] Romanticizing the past; [2] Absolutizing the past; and [3] Disdaining the past. We may consider each of these.

## 1. ROMANTICIZING THE PAST

Romanticizing the past means giving it, in our thinking, an ideal or perfect quality which in fact it did not have. Often it may involve the anachronism of reading the present back into the past instead of seeing the past and interpreting it for what it really was.

Two examples of this tendency come to mind. The first consists in romanticizing the ancient British or Celtic Church—the first centuries of Christianity in Britain and Ireland—before the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain and before the dominance of Romanism. That the Old British or Celtic Church was in those times as pure as any part of Christendom, or even the purest of all, we do not question. But the attempt of some authors to portray the Old British Church as essentially Calvinistic in doctrine and Presbyterian in form of government, and on top of this to hold that it preserved in some places an unbroken continuity

of corporate life until the Protestant Reformation, through a thousand years of the Middle Ages, can only be regarded as an unwarranted romanticizing of history.

Similarly the Waldensian movement of northern Italy has been romanticized, not so much by the Waldensians themselves as by writers in English-speaking countries. The allegation that the Waldenses had a distinct corporate life going back almost, if not actually, to the apostolic period, and continuing clear through the Middle Ages to the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, and that through this long period of nearly a millennium and half they were always distinct from Roman Catholicism, is impossible to substantiate by valid historical evidence. The real evidence indicates, rather, that the Waldensian movement originated in the twelfth century, about 400 years before Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

Moreover, the Waldenses were not Evangelicals or Protestants in the proper sense of these terms. It is possible - or perhaps even probable - that they held the universal priesthood of believers. It is true that they opposed some of the most serious

abuses and pretensions of the Church of Rome. But they did not hold the real heart and core of Protestantism - the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone - in any consistent or pointed manner until they learned it from the Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century. It is even more unhistorical to try to maintain that the mediaeval Waldenses were Calvinists and Presbyterians before the Reformation. That they were noble and faithful witnesses for the truth of God cannot be denied, and we should honor

**"Romanticizing the past means giving it, in our thinking, an ideal or perfect quality which in fact it did not have."**

their memory for it. But it is an improper romanticizing of history to regard these saints as virtually Calvinistic and Presbyterians in mediaeval Italy and France.

## 2. ABSOLUTIZING THE PAST

By absolutizing the past is meant regarding some one epoch or period in the past as ideal and normative for all time to come. The time just after the passing of the apostles, or the time of the great early Church Councils, or the time of Luther, Knox and Calvin, or the time of the Second Reformation and the Westminster Assembly, is nostalgically regarded as 'the good old days' and the idea is held that what the Church of our own day really needs is to get back in spirit to those times and there take its stand. This tendency arises from a lack of historical perspective, often combined with a considerable degree of historical ignorance, and a failure to recognize the imperfection and relativism of all human attainments even the best and highest human attainments under God.

One example of this tendency is the not uncommon notion that the official creeds or standards of a church are sacrosanct and that it is wrong and impious to seek to amend them in any detail, or even to bring them to reexamination in the light of Scripture. This absolutizing of the past inevitably disparages the authority of Scripture as the absolute standard of faith and life. If there are some elements or phases of the past history of the Church which must be regarded as exempt from the judgment of Scripture, then the Bible is no longer our only infallible rule of faith and life. If Scripture is really the only infallible rule of faith and life, then everything in the history of the Church since

the New Testament was completed, is subject to the judgment of God speaking in the Scripture. We do scant honor to the Westminster Confession, for example, if we attribute to it an authority which inheres in the Bible alone, and thus regard and treat it as if it were infallible. But the person who considers it impious or profane to say that such a creed can be amended on the basis of further study of the Bible, is treating it as infallible and giving it a rating which of right belongs only to the Word of God. The present writer considers the Westminster Confession the best credal statement of Christian truth that has ever been formulated. But after all it is not the Word of God and it is not infallible. It was composed by men who were indeed learned and godly, but still fallible and in themselves capable of error.

And, again, when people regard the Reformation as a fixed quantity and a once-for-all attainment, they are absolutizing history. The Protestant Reformation was part of a historical process. "*Ecclesia reformata reformanda est*" — (The Church having been reformed is to be further reformed.) Like sanctification, reformation of the Church is a process without any terminal point in history.

## 3. DISDAINING THE PAST

Disdaining or despising the past is a reaction against the romanticizing and absolutizing tendencies. The person who disdains the past fails to appreciate its real attainments and values. He fails, that is, to realize what God has really done in the past history of His Church.

Someone has said that 'Nobody ever learns anything from history except that nobody ever learns anything from history.' By and large, we

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live in an age which overrates the present and scorns the past. Some can hardly mention the Scottish Covenanters of the 17th century and their struggles without a sneer. The witnesses and martyrs are brushed off with faint praise by an attitude which says, in effect, 'The Covenanters were important of course, but . . .'.

All true progress is building on foundations laid in the past. Only by a grasp and appreciation of the past can we have a truly valid attitude toward the present, and only so can we build soundly for the future. The person who says 'History is bunk' is dishonoring God who by His work of creation and providence made history what it was.

In our own day that great historic monument of the Reformed Faith — the Westminster Confession — has been laid aside as a museum piece by the largest Presbyterian body in America, and a 'new confession' substituted for it as the denomination's real working standard. And this 'new confession' is really a rejection of much of the truth attained and witnessed to in the historic Westminster Confession. This is truly a disdain of history.

It is not uncommon to find people with an attitude of disdain for the historic Scottish Covenanters and the old Scottish covenants. We are not saved by Covenanter history, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But we do the Lord scant honor if we despise what He has done in and through His people in past times.

The disdainful attitude has its roots in pride—the pride of ignorance. Someone has

said that there are three kinds of pride: pride of race, pride of face and pride of grace, and that pride of grace is the worst of the three. But surely we may rank with it pride of ignorance as one of the worst forms of pride. There are people who actually glory in their shame, who actually boast that they are ignorant of theology and church history.

We of the nineteen sixties are not the first intelligent or faithful Christians that ever lived.

Christ through His Spirit has always been at work throughout the past history of His Church. Let us heed the Biblical injunction to 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' Let us not romanticize the past, let us not absolutize the past and let us not despise the past. Rather may we appraise it justly and value it wisely, to the honor and glory of God.

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[This article originally appeared in the journal titled *BLUE BANNER FAITH AND LIFE*, and was written by the editor, Dr. J. G. Vos. After Rev. Vos was forced to leave the mission field during the second World War he began to publish this periodical as part of his pastoral work in his Clay Center, Kansas, parish, and continued it as a professor of Bible at Geneva College. The quality of the material that appeared in this publication soon earned it recognition throughout the world. The publication of this fine periodical came to an end when Dr. Vos was no longer able to carry on the task. It is now long out of print but we understand that the entire content of this periodical, covering a period of some 33 years, is still available from the American Theological Library Association Board of Microtext, P. O. Box 111, Princeton, N.J. 08540.]

# The Biblical Origins Of The Presbytery

by

Ross Graham

## Introduction

God is continuing to expand the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and those of us who work in church planting must be aware that the cumulative results of our efforts and successes will force some unpleasant changes on our presbyteries. It is inevitable that new regional churches and their overseeing presbyteries will need to be established. The subject we want to explore in depth in these lectures is that of the regional church and its presbytery. One of my goals for this gathering is that you will be able to leave these meetings knowing where we have come from biblically and historically as Orthodox Presbyterians and that we will be able to tell it to others.

These are days in which God is forcing us to be larger than we have been in the past. In order to figure out where we are going, it is important to know where we have been. It is altogether appropriate to begin these studies by seizing the high ground with a study of the biblical foundation of Presbyterian government and polity as it touches the work of the presbytery.

### 1. Principles of Biblical Church Government

The nineteenth century produced a number of fine Presbyterian politists, among them Charles Hodge, Samuel Miller and James Thornwell. But it was Thomas Witherow (1824-1890) of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland who mastered the art of simplifying Presbyterian polity into its basic parts. From his biblical study of the apostolic church he derived six basic principles of biblical church government. These six also describe many of the most salient elements of our Presbyterian form of government. They may be summarized briefly as follows:

### A. The office bearers were chosen by the people. (Acts 1:21-26; Acts 6:1-6)

Acts 1:21-26 is the study of the choosing of Matthias. Someone was to replace the traitor Judas who had gone in and out with Jesus the whole time; and the larger group of one hundred and twenty did the choosing. Acts 6:1-6 records the story of the choosing of the first deacons. In each case, standards of experience and character were listed for who the candidates should be, then men were put forward and the choice was made, not by the leaders but by the people themselves.

By deduction, the conclusion may also be drawn that the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 were given near the completion of the canon with the intention that the people would continue to choose their officers in perpetuity.

### B. The office of bishop and the office of elder were identical. (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-7)

In Acts 20:17 Paul calls the elders of the church in Ephesus to the seacoast at Miletus, and then in the same context and to those same men he says in verse 28, "*Be shepherds...serving as overseers.*" The term elder, , refers to the Jewish "*grayhead,*" probably a euphemism for "*older man.*" It was this system of elders which Moses had set in place in consultation with Jethro in Exodus 18. The term bishop or overseer, , was the word used to describe the man in charge of the servants. He was the overseer of the slaves.

Parallel to this but much later in the first century in Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Titus to set in order the things lacking and appoint elders. But in verse 7 Paul describes those same men as bishops or overseers. It appears that with the Gentilization of the church a new terminology

was appropriated to describe men of a younger age than grayheads but who assured a corresponding responsibility as overseers of God's servants. Thus the two words are used interchangeably in the Scriptures.

**C. There was a plurality of elders in each church.** (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5)

In Acts 14:23 Paul had gone back through the churches which he and Barnabas had helped to establish in the Galatian region and it is recorded that they appointed elders in every church. Note the plural, implying more than one. In Titus, Paul speaks of appointing elders in every city. It could be argued that these were house churches and that the elders were actually pastors. But Philippians 1:1 is addressed to the \_\_\_\_\_, the elders and the deacons of that church. So comparing Scripture with Scripture, the evidence seems to indicate that a plurality existed in each ecclesiastical unit.

While some argue that the plurality implied here is that of an elder or pastor in every house church of a city, it is difficult to see how the infant works of a church planter like Titus could be large enough to have "pastors" in local congregations scattered throughout a single city. The evidence seems rather to indicate that the plurality existed within the same local church.

**D. Ordination was the act of the presbytery - of the plurality of elders.** (Acts 6:6; I Timothy 4:14)

In the narrative concerning the ordination of the first deacons in Acts 6:6, the apostles laid their hands on them. The I Timothy 4:14 ordination of Timothy was by the laying on of hands of the group of men comprising the presbytery. In 2 Timothy 1, Paul speaks to Timothy about "the laying on of my hands." It is appropriate to understand that he was saying that he participated with the other elders in the laying on of hands. I have personally used such language when speaking hard words to men who were close to me. "I was one of those who laid hands on you - now shape up." Witherow's point here was not necessarily to demonstrate the exist-

ence of a presbytery as we know of it with a moderator and a clerk. It was rather to dispel any notion of apostolic succession, or of a developing ecclesiastical hierarchy. What is here demonstrated is that ordination is an act of a group of elders, and that a fraternity or a college of elders was being created which collectively had and conferred that authority, as contrasted with any notion of an apostolic conference of authority.

**E. There was the privilege of appeal to the assembly of elders and the right of the church to speak.** (Acts 15:1-29)

Acts 15 is a benchmark in the development of ecclesiastical polity and provides an enormous amount of principle information. What is being taught here may be summarized in two words - appeal and connection. As the problem with the Judaizers unfolded, these two concepts ran as themes throughout. The church in Antioch knew instinctively that it had recourse to other elders and that disputes could be resolved. They knew also that they were not alone. They shared intimate connection with people of widely differing cultural background but like precious faith. What follows below will be a further development of this concept.

**F. The only head of the Church was the Lord Jesus Christ.** (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18)

It's never unwise to state the obvious. The Church is a mystical body which only manifests part of its true nature here on earth. The Church is ruled by Christ himself, and those who have positions of authority always take second place to him. It may be important to note that Calvin and the original form of our standards express unnecessary harshness concerning the church at Rome, calling the Pope the Antichrist. Two centuries later Witherow restated this principle by removing the caustic rhetoric but reaffirming that the Church cannot have another head but the Lord Jesus Christ. But it must also be acknowledged that if this concept was distorted and abused once in the history of the church, it could be so again. The Lord Jesus Christ and he alone rules his Church for his own glory.

## 2. Axioms Derived from the Presbyterian Principle of Connectionalism

Presbyterian polity is not a subject widely discussed by the ancient church. It took the Protestant Reformers to look afresh at the issues of government and structure. But the Presbyterian form of government has developed, like the rest of Reformed theology, by applying logical reasoning to compared and contrasted biblical information (e.g. the doctrines of the trinity, the person of Christ, the covenant, etc.) It would be naive for us to believe that our present form of Presbyterian polity flows directly from the pages of the Bible. It does, however, flow from the above stated biblical principles. Having reviewed those principles, two axioms may now be derived from Witherow's fifth principle which are applicable to the biblical study of the development of the presbytery.

### A. The decisions of some bodies of elders extended beyond the local flock to the surrounding region. (Acts 11:19-26, Acts 15:1-29, 16:1-5)

Within the story of the founding of the church at Antioch in Acts 11 it is important to observe the reaction of the church in Jerusalem in verse 22. The news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. Here the elders in Jerusalem may be observed exercising good oversight in response to what was happening in their newly enlarged district as a result of the diaspora. They sent their man to investigate, and he indicated his approval.

In Acts 15, in addressing the problem with the Judaizers, the regional church made decisions that applied beyond Jerusalem, all the way to Antioch. But in Acts 16:4 it is recorded that Paul and Silas went through the cities of the Galatian region and delivered to them the decrees to keep which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. How did they have the right to do that? They knew instinctively that the decisions of some bodies of elders extended beyond the local flock to the surrounding region.

### B. Office bearers were subject to the body of elders of the region in which bounds they ministered. (Acts 21:17-27; Galatians 1:18-2:14)

If it is postulated that Paul's letter to the Galatians was written before the Jerusalem council occurred and that the letter served as Paul's brief to the council itself, then the story of Peter's visit to Antioch takes on an interesting significance. Chronologically, Acts 11 and 13 provide the information that there is a fully functioning session in Antioch. In Galatians 2:11-14 Paul is therefore speaking with the authority of the teachers when he rebukes Peter. "I withstood him to his face" he says, "because he was to be blamed." Peter was under the authority of another jurisdiction when he visited Antioch.

Acts 21 is a passage which needs to be studied more carefully for its insights into church polity. Here Paul finally arrived back to Jerusalem despite repeated warnings that he would be arrested. In verse 18, he met with the elders of the regional church there and gave them details of all that God was doing among the Gentiles. But since they had been informed that Paul was teaching concepts which were contrary to Judaism, they gave him instructions in verse 23 concerning how he should conduct himself in their region. Paul had come into their district, was subject to their authority and he did what they told him. Though Paul could say in Colossians 2:16, "Let no one be your judge in food or drink or in regard to festival or new moon or Sabbath," and in Galatians 2:3, that "not even Titus, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised," Paul took a vow, because he was subject to the elders of the region in which bounds he was ministering.

### 3. Implications Which Flow From the Biblical Origin of the Presbytery

#### A. There is a body understood as a regional church.

The book of Galatians was written to a regional church. There is no town of Galatia.

The book was addressed to a group of churches which shared in common a single geographic region. Colossians 4:16 may indicate the development of yet another regional church. When Paul said, "You likewise read the epistle of the Laodicians," we are given the impression that they were passing this vital information around among the local congregations of a distinct regional body. Peter may be providing still further information in I Peter 1:1. Could he be addressing the regional churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia?, A map of the geography listed would seem to indicate that something of this nature was being communicated. In Galatians 1:22 Paul spoke of "the churches of Judea which are in Christ" as a distinct grouping.

There is enough biblical evidence to indicate the existence of distinct regional churches in the New Testament, each with its separate geography, a set of local issues and a group of elders to serve as the nurturing agent for a whole collection of local churches.

#### **B. The presbytery is the overseeing body of the regional church.**

If there was such a regional church of Judea, then the body of elders gathered in Jerusalem was charged with overseeing that region. But when something unique happened in Antioch, two concerns arose. First, is it biblical? Second, is this in our district? According to Luke's outline for the Book of Acts, which follows Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 - Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, end of the earth - they were now in end-of-the-earth region. They understood that the gospel had now moved into the furthest region and they assumed responsibility for the new converts in Antioch. But the presbytery's representative, Barnabas, immediately set about the task of building a new plurality of elders.

An appropriate Presbyterian principle which may be developed here takes the form of a logical syllogism as follows:

- If the local church has its session, and
- If the whole church has its general assembly, then

- The regional church has its presbytery.

By analogy, therefore, we can understand that the presbytery is the session of the church regional and must perform all the functions on a regional level that the local session performs on the local level. Perhaps consideration should even be given for the possible conduct of worship on a regional level from time to time.

#### **C. The presbytery is responsible to care for the spiritual health and protection of its local congregations.**

Having discussed the care of the church in Antioch by the presbytery of the regional church of Judea in Acts 11, attention may be directed to the other passages which provide similar evidence for a regional care for spiritual oversight. Both Acts 15 and Acts 21 provide instances in which the regional church functioned to care for the health and protection of local congregations. The presbytery was reactive, responsive, and trusted its representatives. This guarding aspect with respect to the health and care of local congregations is probably the most important lesson learned from these passages.

#### **D. The presbytery provides a place of appeal for the resolution of grievances and theological disputes.**

Acts 15:1-29; 21:17-27 and Galatians 1:18-2:14 substantiate the responsibility of the handling of grievances by a regional body. A companion issue in each of these cases is the principle of connectionalism. If there is no connection, there is no ability to appeal, and there is no right to speak. The principle of connectionalism must be understood to undergird the whole character of Presbyterianism. The churches in the New Testament were clearly connected together. A biblical presbytery must therefore be prepared to act responsively and effectively in matters of church discipline or it is not discharging its responsibilities according to the Scriptures. As goes the health of the presbytery, so go the health and the strength of each of its local congregations.

**E. The presbytery is responsible for the care and training of those called to preach the gospel.**

In Acts 11:1-18, when Peter himself was called to give account to the presbytery in Jerusalem for his controversial ministry and preaching among the Gentiles, he was examined skeptically, with expressions of concern about the report that he had eaten with uncircumcised men. But after his full and complete explanation, the presbytery concluded, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life" (v.18). This was credentialing work.

Again in Acts 21:17-27, Paul and the church in Jerusalem demonstrated their mutual responsibility to each other. Paul gave a clear indication of his subjection to his brothers in the matter of preaching in their district. They say in effect, "If you minister in our district, we must know what you are teaching and you must submit to what we believe is best for the shepherding of God's flock in this region with its unique circumstances and problems."

The ordination of Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6) is another possible indication of the regional responsibility of elders in the training and preparation of ministers for the gospel. Could Paul's appeal to "faithful men" in II Timothy 2:2 be of a regional nature? The seminary structure which is now ingrained into Presbyterian polity must never be allowed to replace the responsibility of the presbytery of the regional church as having the prime obligation for the training of ministers of the gospel.

**F. The presbytery is responsible to establish new local congregations and to spread and defend the gospel in its region.**

The elders of the regional body in Judea demonstrated concern for and approval of the spread of the gospel to Antioch in Acts 11:19-26. Similarly the elders of the new regional body in Antioch appear to have been chosen to be responsible for the spread of the gospel in the Galatian region in Acts 13:1-3. The history of missions in the ancient church could appropri-

ately be described as one generation's foreign missions becoming the next generation's home missions. The gospel was spread extensively by the regional church and intensively by the local church.

### Conclusion

Research for this study on the biblical origin of the regional church and the modern-day Presbyterian presbytery was made more difficult because not much has been written on the subject. In fact, much of what has been presented here was adapted or developed directly from the Scriptures for this occasion. It is offered for study and further reflective research. It is disheartening to observe that these principles appear not to have been followed by the ancient and medieval church. But the Protestant Reformation infused new life into them and gave rise to a host of systems of polity based on this most biblical of ecclesiastical structures.

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## QUESTION BOX

“...I am not questioning the need for an ordained minister to administer the sacraments, that is foregone, as it ought to be for anyone ordained in the OPC. The question I have has to do with the propriety of visiting or guest ministers administering baptism. Neither am I speaking of extraordinary circumstances, e.g., a church without a pastor, which must rely upon a visiting minister for access to the sacraments, but of the norm, of what ought to be the normal approach within the local church to the observance of the sacraments and especially baptism. In as much as the administration of baptism is a profoundly local church matter, admitting the recipient, infant or adult, to the roll of the local church and under the oversight of the local session, is it appropriate for someone, not a member of that session to officiate in that administration?”

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The question here is not ‘what is lawful’ but ‘what is wise?’ In substance we understand it like this: even though it may be quite *legal*, is it really *appropriate* for a visiting minister—who is not preaching the word that day to the congregation he is visiting—to administer the sacrament of baptism? It is my opinion that it is not for the following reasons.

(1) As a minister of the word and sacraments I do not believe it is appropriate to administer the one without administering the other. When I first preach the word and then, immediately after, administer the sacrament there is a greater sense of unity between the two.

(2) In the Reformed tradition weddings and funerals have been regarded as family affairs. For this reason it has been my practice to ‘go along’—wherever possible—with the wishes of families in the church. But the sacraments are *not* family affairs (unless we want to use that term to denote the family of God). This being the case it is unwise, to say the least, to permit sentimental desires of nuclear family to intrude into this ordinance. The ultimate baptizer is the Lord. He administers his

sacraments through the officers of the local church. To bring in someone to baptize an infant because he is a close relative of the one being baptized is to shift the attention away from what is central to what is, ultimately, irrelevant.

(3) The long range consequences should also be considered. I met a man some years ago who was quite proud of the fact that he had been baptized by Abraham Kuyper. No doubt without any intention to do so, he conveyed to others the idea that there was something quite special about *his* baptism because of the one who administered it. Yet we know from the Scriptures that our Lord himself wisely refrained from baptizing anyone himself to avoid this evil (John 4:2). The apostle Paul’s comment about his own practice seems to me to echo this same concern (I Cor. 1:14-17). The last thing that we should do in our work as pastors is to give people the idea that there is something special about the one who does the baptizing!

(4) To some it may seem a bit far fetched to mention it, but I also think we should always consider the regulative principle of worship in cases such as this. The word and sacraments—together—are surely central to biblical worship and they are divinely appointed. But it is my opinion that we need today, perhaps more than at any time since the Protestant Reformation, the warning contained in Article XXIX of the Belgic Confession. There we read that it is a mark of the false church to add things on to the sacraments which God has not commanded. Article XXXII then adds this assertion: “those who are rulers of the church...ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master has instituted”...and “therefore we reject all human inventions...which man would introduce into the worship of God...”

For these reasons I do not think it appropriate to yield to such requests. I might add that standing by this conviction has also given me opportunity to explain important truths to my relatives.

*Selected Writings of John Knox, Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1550*, Kevin Reed editor, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, P.O. Box 180922, Dallas, Texas 75218, 1995. Hard cover, \$34.95. Reviewed by the Editor.

In this day in which an increasing number of voices can be heard calling for a new reformation, it is a distinct pleasure to welcome this reprint—in improved format—of some of Knox's most important statements. Though not a stranger to Knox's writings I was impressed all over again with his utter fearlessness and integrity. Here was a man who, like the Apostle Paul, “did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable” (Acts 20:20 NASB) even when it was dangerous to do so and when it was by no means certain that the truth would be accepted even by his friends. What a difference there is between the militant spirit of this great Reformer, and the temporizing spirit we so often see today.

It would be a great mistake, however, to think of John Knox only in terms of his fearless denunciation of error. He was, at the same time, a devoted and caring pastor. Among the items selected for this book are letters of warning and admonition to the faint of heart, answers to questions submitted to him concerning baptism, the Jerusalem Synod's decree concerning food and the collection of tithes. Knox was faithful in his ministerial office to the high and mighty but he was just as faithful to the weak and lowly.

The material is organized according to the time sequence in Knox's career in which each was written. And then, to further facilitate the reader's understanding, each chapter is introduced with a historical note prepared by the editor. There is also, inside the front and back covers, a handy dated time-line guide to the life of John Knox. The book also has full list of the scripture texts that Knox deals with and a good subject index. It should also be mentioned that the quality of this publication is excellent in every way.

Heartily recommended

*Savior or Servant? Putting Government in Its Place*, by David W. Hall. The Covenant Foundation, 190 Manhattan Ave. Oak Ridge, TN 37830, 1996. Hard cover \$23.95, paperback \$18.95. Orders should be made via the Covenant Foundation, as above.

This is an excellent book. It is, in fact, the best thing I've ever seen in showing how the Church of Jesus Christ is to derive valid principles of divine authority for present-day civil government from the Word of God. David Hall is not on the Theonomic bandwagon. But neither does he have a knee-jerk reaction to it. In fact, I—as one who has very much appreciated Greg Bahnsen's efforts to apply the whole counsel of God to the area of civil government—I make bold to call this “theonomy the way it ought to be.”

What does the book contain? It contains a wonderful survey of (1) what the Bible teaches about civil government, (2) what the Church has learned from the Bible down through the ages to this present time, and (3) what the “certain principles” are that cannot be ignored or denied in civil government without the most serious consequences. It offers no simplistic solutions to the myriad of problems and issues we face today. But time after time, as I read this formidable survey of the whole history of Christian thinking on these matters, I could see how much these principles could benefit our nation today if they were only heeded.

Let me also say that book is in no way either tedious or boring—not if you have any interest in or concern about things going on in the political realm. There was much in the founding of this nation that came—directly or indirectly—as a fruit of the historic Christian religion. The other major world religions simply do not have the life-giving power. Read this book and you will understand as never before why this is so.

George Grant calls this “the single best volume of Christian thinking on the issue of the increasingly intrusive state...Theology at its very best: orthodox, comprehensive, relevant and provocative.” With this I fully agree.