

# ORDAINED SERVANT



Two Students at the Recent MTIOPC Intensive Training Session in San Diego

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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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The primary focus of this issue is the need for faithful visitation of church members by the elders. Following an article by Rev. Archie Allison explaining how he instituted this practice in a church planting setting, a brief defense of the practice by the editor *and* a timely expression of the concerns of one of our new elders is a fine brochure prepared by the Rev. Nathan Trice who has also instituted this practice in his ministry. This can easily be photocopied and reproduced (with your own pasted-in list of elder districts, and members) for use in your own congregation. There is hardly anything that we can commend as passionately as this practice, having seen its benefits over many years of ministry.



In the previous issue of *Ordained Servant* we invited a response from readers. We received one from Rev. Matthew W. Kingsbury and have included it in this issue. He thinks that *we* are the ones who have gone too far—the editor, that is, and Rev. Richard Ganz. Although we are not persuaded of *all* that Rev. Kingsbury has to say, there is value in his rejoinder. Be sure to read it—*and* the quotation from John Calvin that is cited with it.



Stephen Doe continues his series on the ‘Free Offer of the Gospel’, this time looking at some of the history of this doctrine. We are also anticipating a third article from him to complete this interesting series.



We conclude this issue of *Ordained Servant* with some book notes by Rev. Bill Shishko and an article to better inform you about what the recently created Ministerial Training Institute (or MTI) is and what it has been doing. The response to this new effort of the Committee on Christian Education, on the part

of both students and instructors, has been very favorable. And the more *you*—the ordained servants of the OPC—take interest in this work and help us to improve it, the better it will serve our churches.

**Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto. (Westminster Confession XXX,3)**

**The Power of the Office and of the Minister. Then there is another power of an office or of ministry limited by him who has full and absolute power. And this is more like a service than a dominion. THE KEYS. For a lord gives up his power to the steward in his house, and for that cause gives him the keys, that he may admit into or exclude from the house those whom his lord will have admitted or excluded. In virtue of this power the minister, because of his office, does that which the Lord has commanded him to do; and the Lord confirms what he does, and wills that what his servant has done will be so regarded and acknowledged, as if he himself had done it. Undoubtedly, it is to this that these evangelical sentences refer: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Again, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). But if the minister does not carry out everything as the Lord has commanded him, but transgresses the bounds of faith, then the Lord certainly makes void what he has done. Wherefore the ecclesiastical power of the ministers of the Church is that function whereby they indeed govern the Church of God, but yet so do all things in the Church as the Lord has prescribed in his Word. When those things are done, the faithful esteem them as done by the Lord himself...**

**The Power of Ministers Is One and the Same, and Equal. Now the one and an equal power or function is given to all ministers in the Church. Certainly, in the beginning, the bishops or presbyters governed the Church in common; no man lifted up himself above another, none usurped greater power or authority over his fellow-bishops. For remembering the words of the Lord: "Let the leader among you become as one who serves" (Luke 22:26), they kept themselves in humility, and by mutual services they helped one another in the governing and preserving of the Church. (From Chapter 18 of the Second Helvetic Confession)**

# BIBLICAL GODLINESS

A Response to Williamson & Ganz on Qualifications for Office  
by

Matthew W. Kingsbury



The January 2001 edition of *Ordained Servant*<sup>1</sup> carried two articles which argued the Church ought to take more seriously barriers to ordained office: “Have We Gone Too Far?” by G.I. Williamson (p. 17), and “Access Denied” by Richard Ganz (p. 18-19). I applaud these men’s zeal for a rigorous adherence to the Scriptures by the Church, and share with them a concern that we frequently ignore clear commands on qualifications for office. Thus, I would never reject calls to rigor, as such. Unfortunately, I believe Messrs. Williamson and Ganz have failed to take into account the whole counsel of God and consequently argue for unbiblical standards for office.

In “Have We Gone Too Far?” Mr. Williamson examines the effects of divorce on a man’s life, and concludes that these consequences disqualify him for ordained office.<sup>2</sup> In “Access Denied” Mr. Ganz forcefully argues that the sin of adultery creates a lifelong ban on service in office. These are distinct positions, but are arrived at by some shared assumptions, and thus may properly be considered together.

## A One-Woman Man

Mr. Ganz begins his argument (p. 18) by asserting that the requirement of 1 Timothy 3:2, that an elder be a “one-woman man”, means he must have a wife. It is not simply a bar on polygamy, but also disqualifies the unmarried from office. This particular assertion is not necessary to his conclusion, but is nonetheless a serious error which points up his rather selective examination of texts.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 10, #1.

<sup>2</sup> Please note: Mr. Williamson never states that a divorce, by itself, is a disqualification for office.

Of course, our infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself (WCF 1.9). Thus, I am disappointed that Mr. Ganz makes no reference to 1 Timothy 5:9. There, with what is clearly a parallel expression, the Apostle Paul teaches that a widow must be a “one-man woman” to qualify for support by the Church. By definition, a widow is single, without a husband. Hence, we must conclude that Paul describes her godly character, as revealed by her conduct when married. She must have been faithful to her husband, and so be a woman characterized by faithfulness. If “one-man woman” in 1 Timothy 5:9 clearly refers to the Spirit-given characteristic of faithfulness, and not, more narrowly, faithfulness in a current marriage, then “one-woman man” means the same.

Moreover, Paul specifically calls single men to pursue ordained office in 1 Corinthians 7. In 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, he teaches the Lord has called some to celibacy so they might devote themselves wholly to Christian service. Earlier, in verse 8, Paul held himself up as an example to all who are unmarried. He says to these, “Serve the Lord in the same way I do.” While we must agree with Mr. Williamson that this cannot be a call to ordained office for single women (p. 17), certainly we may take it as such to single men. Paul wants them to dedicate themselves to preaching and teaching, to doing the work of evangelism in places where a married man could not. But Mr. Ganz disagrees with the Apostle. His argument necessarily implies that if a task (such as preaching) requires ordination, then a single person cannot perform it. I am more persuaded by Paul than Ganz.

By failing to consider all relevant Scriptures, Mr. Ganz creates an extra-Biblical standard for office:

marriage. Having said this, I do agree with him that the “one-woman man” requirement is a positive one, and not just a hedge against polygamy. As are all the officer qualifications in 1 Timothy 3, this is a positive character requirement. The elder and deacon must live lives characterized by fidelity.

### More than Forgiveness?

In their articles, Messrs. Ganz and Williamson both seem to overlook the transforming power of the Cross of Christ, as applied by the Holy Spirit, in the lives of sinners. Mr. Ganz says a man who commits adultery will always be characterized by that sin. “... he will never again be entirely without reproach, without blame... He is a man whose own wife will never again fully trust him... He may be restored in his marriage, **if his wife chooses to remain with an adulterer.**” (p. 19, last emphasis mine)

Mr. Ganz goes on to argue a man who commits adultery lacks the Biblical requirement of self-control and is thereby excluded from office (p. 19, 1 Timothy 3:2). Since he is arguing for a permanent, irrevocable exclusion, he in effect states that such a man can never become self-controlled.

Mr. Ganz ought to consider 1 Cor. 6:9-11: *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

You were adulterers, but are not anymore because of the work of Jesus Christ for you. This Spirit who has washed you clean is also indwelling you, renewing you in the image of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24). Godliness is within the grasp of sinners like you because of the grace of our God in our Lord Jesus. The Spirit transforms people. We

are obligated by Scripture to see sinners not as they were, but as God has made them and is making them.

This brings us to Mr. Williamson, who says forgiveness is not “the only thing that matters” when considering the past sins and errors of candidates for office (p. 17). He argues that men with a history of divorce cannot be considered blameless or having a good testimony before the world (1 Tim. 3:7). That is, we ought to consider whether a given officer candidate will besmirch the Church’s reputation if ordained. In response to this argument, we must remember what the world thinks of the Church. They think we are a weak and foolish people who believe a weak and foolish message about a weak and foolish God (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). This said, I do agree with Mr. Williamson that we must take the opinions of those outside the Church on officer candidates very seriously. This can be done rather easily: ask them! Without doing so, we have no idea of a man’s true reputation in the world. Mr. Ganz’s session interviews wives of officer candidates (p. 18), and so I’m sure they also interview their unbelieving neighbors and co-workers. Unfortunately, this is a far from regular practice. While candidating for a pastorate, only one session asked me for a reference from a former (secular) employer. Shouldn’t this be the norm?

Mr. Williamson rightly notes that worldlings rejoice to find inconsistencies in the Church, particularly elders who are not Biblically qualified (p. 17). But they also note the inconsistency of not believing the grace which we preach. When unbelievers see the Lord has made a sinner into a godly man, they condemn the Church for hypocrisy when we hold his past sins against him. We ought to show the world that God really does transform sinners into saints, that even adulterers can be made godly leaders in the Church.

Messrs. Ganz and Williamson, in their zeal, commit a very fundamental error. They say once a man has sinned, he can never become blameless (p. 17,19). They seem to forget the Holy Spirit is

renewing us in the image of Christ in this life. He makes us more than what we were and better than what we are. He makes us like Jesus.

**The Very Positive Contribution of Ganz and Williamson**

I hope the above is not taken as an absolute rejection of everything these godly men have tried to tell us. They address a very substantive problem in the Church, and their call for rigor ought be heeded. A session or presbytery must consider very gravely any divorce and/or adultery in the past of an officer candidate. They ought to ask whether such men have indeed been so sanctified by the Spirit that the sins of their past have no lure to them whatsoever. Without being duly assured of such, ordaining bodies ought not put them into office.

Mr. Williamson asks whether we have gone too far. Doubtlessly, some have been too quick to ordain unworthy candidates, just as others have wrongly denied ordination to men made fit by the Holy Spirit. Messrs. Ganz and Williamson err when they make divorce and adultery bars to office.<sup>3</sup> I fear they

<sup>3</sup> Again, Mr. Williamson does not do so explicitly.

run the risk of adding to God’s Word in a matter of faith and practice (cf. WCF 20.2).

The discerning reader will have noted I take far greater exception to “Access Denied” than the more cautious “Have We Gone Too Far?” Mr. Ganz concludes by saying this: “It’s also called godliness” (p.19). As a pastor in the Church of Jesus Christ, I hope I also have a zeal for godliness. I remain convinced, however, that godliness must be defined by Scripture. Godliness never adds to the requirements of God’s Word, no matter how wise those additions may seem to us (Col. 3:11-23). Mr. Ganz argues for what he calls “godliness.” I plead for a Biblical godliness.

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**associate Pastor of the Immanuel**  
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**Thornton, Colorado, is presently**  
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**Presbyterian Church in Denver.**

*"The husband of one wife". The reason why this rule is laid down has been explained by us in the Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy. Polygamy was so common among the Jews, that the wicked custom had nearly passed into a law. If any man had married two wives before he made a profession of Christianity, it would have been cruel to compel him to divorce one of them; and therefore the apostles endured what was in itself faulty, because they could not correct it. Besides, they who had involved themselves by marrying more than one wife at a time, even though they had been prepared to testify their repentance by retaining but one wife, had, nevertheless, given a sign of their incontinence, which might have been a brand on their good name. The meaning is the same as if Paul had enjoined them to elect those who had lived chastely in marriage, had been satisfied with having a single wife, and had forbidden those who had manifested the power of lust by marrying many wives. At the same time, he who, having become an unmarried man by the death of his wife, marries another, ought, nevertheless, to be accounted "the husband of one wife;" for the apostle does not say, that they shall choose him who has been, but him who is, "the husband of one wife".*

- From John Calvin's Commentary on Titus 1:6

## VISITING THE MEMBERS

by

Archibald A. Allison



The Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Chapter VIII includes the following as part of the duties of a pastor:

**“It is his task...to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to the adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the homes of the people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; ....”**

The Form of Government in Chapter X sets forth the following as one of the duties of ruling elders in the church:

**“They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant.”**

There is little disagreement that the pastor and elders should shepherd the members of the congregation and lead them in faithful service to Jesus Christ. Paul commanded the elders from the church in Ephesus: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In I Peter 5:2-4 the Lord commands pastors and elders: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

As a pastor how do you shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the specific needs of

those in the congregation? As a ruling elder how do you watch diligently over the people committed to your charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals? There are several ways in which the pastor and elders should carry out these duties. One important, time-tested, and effective way is to visit the people in their homes. Chapter VIII of the Form of Government says that the pastor should visit in the homes of the people. Chapter X of the Form of Government says that the ruling elders should visit the people.

In many churches the pastor and elders do not faithfully visit the members of the congregation in their homes on a regular schedule as part of shepherding the flock and diligently watching over the families and individual members of the congregation. This neglect harms the church and hinders God’s people in their faith and life. It hinders each child of God from growing to full maturity.

As pastors and elders we learn how to shepherd God’s people from the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Good Shepherd (Ezekiel 34, John 10), the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (I Peter 2:25), the Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4), and the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20). David said in Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” The word “pastor” means “shepherd.” A pastor or shepherd is someone who feeds, nurtures, and leads a flock of sheep. In Psalm 23 David is saying: The Lord is my pastor; therefore I shall not lack anything because the Lord will meet all of my needs.

The Lord uses the figure of a shepherd and sheep in daily life in order to teach us about heavenly things (John 3:12). A shepherd knows his sheep individually. He checks up on them regularly so that he knows their condition at all times as accurately as possible. A shepherd feeds his flock. He takes care of his flock. He reclams and recovers the sheep that strays. He binds up the sheep that is hurt and facilitates healing and restoration. An earthly shepherd protects his sheep from harm and danger. He leads them in safety. He does everything he can to nourish the sheep in order that they might thrive and grow without setback.

Just as skilled and well-trained technicians must

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constantly oversee and monitor machines and industrial operations in today's workplace, so a shepherd must diligently oversee and monitor a flock of sheep. You can not just leave a flock of animals to themselves all day and all night and expect them to thrive. You have to check on them at regular intervals. You have to give them feed and fresh water. You must promptly attend to any needs that arise.

In my youth my father was the shepherd and I was an undershepherd along with my brothers and sisters. My father sent one or more of us out at regular intervals to look after our animals. In extreme weather conditions and at other critical times my father sent us out more often to check on the animals. We had to know how the animals were doing, take care of them, and give them fresh feed and clean water. When we returned from our regular visits, my father would inquire about the condition of the animals. Those daily lessons taught me how to be a good shepherd who takes good care of his animals. In the Bible the Lord uses this analogy of a shepherd to describe how he cares for his people. God has called pastors and elders to be shepherds under Him who, ministering in His name, take good care of His people.

In Zechariah 11:16 the Lord describes a worthless shepherd as one who will not visit those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. In Jeremiah 23:2 the Lord denounces the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture with these words: You have scattered my flock, driven them away, and not visited them. Behold, I will visit you for the evil of your doings.

In these passages, to visit God's flock means to show concern for the sheep by inspecting and overseeing them. Out of that inspection and oversight the shepherd looks after the sheep, cares for them, and attends to their needs. A good way for the pastor and elders to show concern for the members of the congregation is to visit them in their homes where they live. When you go to their home, you see more of who they are and how they live.

In the private and relaxed setting of their own home you can ask about their spiritual well-being. You can find out how well they are growing in their Christian faith and life. You can discuss how fruitful the preaching and teaching of God's Word has been in their lives and how it can bear more fruit in their lives.

You can encourage them in their own private worship, family worship, and instructing their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You can learn their struggles and difficulties and provide the necessary encouragement and help. You can praise, thank, warn, admonish, or exhort. You can discuss any problems they are facing and give them God's wisdom and direction. You can encourage them to develop and use their gifts for the well-being of the congregation. You can learn how the pastor, the elders, the deacons, and the church can be an even greater blessing to them.

In John 10:14 Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by My own." As the pastor and elders regularly visit each family at home, they grow to know the family and the family grows to know their shepherds. In this way the members become more comfortable with the shepherds and are encouraged to respect their wisdom, seek their counsel, and receive their instruction, correction, and admonition. The home visit should not be the end of the session's oversight. Rather, visiting each family at home shows the session's genuine concern for each member of the church and their sincere commitment to oversee, nurture, and help each member all the time. Specific, personal communication in a home visit is an important means of uncovering problems when they are just beginning. It also is an important way of communicating to each family that the pastor and elders care about them and whenever they need help, they should ask the session for help and direction.

The apostle Paul told the elders from Ephesus in Acts 20:20 that he taught them publicly and from house to house. Regular ministerial or sessional visitation in the homes of members provides an excellent opportunity to teach God's people from house to house. Just as the pastor authoritatively proclaims God's Word publicly on the Lord's Day, so the Word of God must be authoritatively taught in the home through regular sessional visitation. In the home God's Word can be explained and applied to the specific needs of that particular family.

In order to minister God's Word to the people in a particular congregation in a fruitful and effective way, the session must know the needs of the people. The only way to know the people's needs is to oversee them, develop relationships with them, and get to know them. Regular ministerial or sessional visitation



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in the members' homes is an excellent, time-tested way of achieving this. Regular home visits are indispensable to shepherding the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Therefore every session should make regular visitation in the homes of members a high priority. It is good for the pastor and an elder to visit every family in the congregation at least once a year. When there are specific needs or problems, many more visits may be necessary.

All of this is why from the beginning of my ministry I began regular ministerial or sessional visitation in the homes of the members of the congregation. I did not have to convince the session to do it. The elders already understood the benefit and importance of it. As the pastor of a new mission work I arranged to visit one or two families each month. It is good to have two men for each visit, either the pastor and an elder, or two elders. When it is impractical to have two men for each visit, it is better to have one man visit than to skip the visit altogether. Those who visit should report to the whole session.

When it was time to visit a particular family, I told them that I wanted to visit them this week and arranged a suitable time. On the first visit with each family, I usually read a passage of Scripture related to the purpose of sessional visitation. I explain to them a few simple reasons for the elders to visit each family and some of the benefits. I have found families to be quite receptive. They are glad that their pastor and elders care about them and come to visit them. At each visit I thank the family for the good things they have done in their own family, in the church, and outside the church. I encourage them to continue doing those things. Through asking questions and discussion I seek to find out how they are doing and help them continue to grow in both faith and life. I ask them whether they understand the public preaching and teaching and how they have benefited from it. I encourage and exhort them in weak areas. I urge them to do things they are neglecting. I suggest things that might help them.

I try to visit each family in the same month every year. Each year we grow together and have opportunity to discuss other areas of doctrine and life, new problems, and new ways to serve in Christ's kingdom and in his church. The members know that their pastor and elders care about them. As a relationship of care, trust, and shepherding grows, the members open up more and seek help and advice. We have been able

to resolve problems before irreparable harm is done. Regular visits are an excellent way for members to communicate with the leaders of the church and the session to communicate with individual families. I have been greatly encouraged in my work through these visits. I also encourage the members and urge them on in the good fight of faith. Regular visits help me preach more effectively. I am better able to apply God's Word to the congregation in a fresh, engaging, and relevant way.

As a pastor I have found that many of God's people crave a good shepherd to care for them in particular, to come to where they live, to interact with their particular situation, to lead them, to encourage them, to help them, to advise them, and to correct them. Regular home visitation builds respect and trust between the shepherds and the sheep. It makes it easier for the shepherds to lead and the sheep to follow. It takes seriously God's command to the pastor and elders to watch out for the souls of the sheep as those who must give an account. There is no better way to watch out for the souls of God's people than to go to where they live and learn who they are. Learn what lives in them. Show them the love and compassion of Christ. Care for them. Lead them in the right way. Warn them of the dangers they face. Then you will be able to give account for them to the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ with joy and not with grief. That is profitable for God's people (Hebrews 13:17). If you do not have regular home visitation, I encourage you to start now. If you do have regular ministerial or sessional visitation, continue and do not grow weary in this important part of shepherding God's people whom he has entrusted to your care.

**Archibald Alexander Allison is currently serving as pastor of the Emmaus Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. This work was started in 1994 under Archie's leadership and was particularized as a congregation of the OPC by the Presbytery of the Dakotas on March 16th of this year.**

# Seven Good Reasons for Home Visitation by the Elders of the Church

by the Editor

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## 1. The Scripture directly asserts it.

Elders are men whom the Holy Spirit has made “overseers” of the church in order to “shepherd” his people (Acts 20:28). The Scriptures make it clear that this can only be done when there is intensive involvement of shepherds (elders) with the sheep (the church members). To be a good shepherd one must know the sheep (John 10:27) and the sheep must know him (10:4,14).

## 2. The Apostolic model demands it.

Paul told the Elders of the Church of Ephesus that they were to follow his example. And he not only taught them publicly, but also “from house to house” (Acts 20:20). His shepherding was not only corporate, in other words, but was also individual (“for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” Acts 20:31). And we know that this was intended as a model for these elders because he also said “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak...etc.” (Acts 20:35).

## 3. The nature of the sheep requires it:

Sheep are not capable of defending themselves from “savage wolves” (Acts 20:29). And these wolves are all the more dangerous when they come in sheep’s clothing. As Professor John Murray put it: “...there is no more ominous feature of members of the church than the lack of discernment; they can listen to what is good and true, and to what is bad and false, without discrimination” (*The Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 1, p 266). There is, therefore, an urgent need for elders to work with the members in order to lead them to greater discernment.

## 4. The plurality of the eldership requires it (i.e. the minister is not the only one called to this task)

When our Lord appointed seventy to do home mission work he sent them two by two (Luke 10:17). And Solomon said “two are better than one, because they have a reward for their labor” (Eccles. 4:9). Where issues of truth and righteousness are involved it is vital that there

be at least two witnesses (Deut. 17:6). And since the elders are first to take heed to themselves, it would seem essential that there be elders to exercise oversight of elders in home visitation.

## 5. The book of Proverbs implies it:

“The beginning of strife is like releasing water: therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts” (Prov. 17:14). And “The words of his [a fool’s] mouth begin with foolishness, and at the end of his talk is raving madness” (Eccles. 10:13). It is obvious, therefore, that the elders of the church can best defuse potentially explosive tendencies by early action. Church discipline is too often thought of in terms of such final censures as suspension or excommunication. But good church discipline is an ongoing process—much like good discipline in a well regulated family—in which every member of the family is constantly subject to loving correction.

## 6. Church history recommends it:

The writer of these paragraphs has had experience in churches that have—and churches that have not—had regular home visitation by the elders. And the difference is enormous. In the one, the tendency is to have much less involvement with direct oversight of the flock, and to being occupied with mundane matters. In the other, large segments of Session meetings are given over to fruitful discussion of the spiritual state, and spiritual needs, of the members of the flock. A minister blessed with Session meetings of this kind will be greatly strengthened in his ability to speak to the needs of his people. And much more could be added.

## 7. Pastoral experience vindicates it!

The faithful members of the flock are the loudest in their praise for it, while those who are most likely to decry it are the ones who may need it most. It has been a wonderful blessing to learn that Widow X has been much encouraged by faithful elder visits. And while visits to brother Y have often been difficult, because of so much in his life that needs to be pruned away, it is by elder visitation that even in this case progress is discernable.

# ELDERSHIP IN THE BALANCE

by

Charlie Meyer



An elder in the Presbyterian church must strive to strike an appropriate equilibrium among a number of actions and attitudes. The proper balance is that which most glorifies the Lord and serves and sustains His Church Body. I have tried to summarize my impression of what will be required of me as I undertake the task of eldership.

## Have I been called to the eldership:

### 1. By the SPIRIT or by MEN?

Certainly I am called by the Spirit, for without the power of the Holy Spirit I could not equip myself to serve, nor would members of Christ's holy Body recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in me. I would not have chosen to do this of my own volition. I am being led. Am I also called by men? Yes, I serve because men have asked me to serve, but their asking and my willingness to accept their invitation is also the work of the Holy Spirit.

### 2. To SERVE or to RULE?

I believe elders are principally servants who lead by example. Jesus showed us how to serve by washing his disciples' feet, showing his obedience to God by serving others. When elders set a clear and visible example of obedience to God, elders can lead and rule in service to God's will.

### 3. To LOVE or to DISCIPLINE?

Christ commanded us to love one another. Not in a lazy way. Not with sinful motives. But we are to love one another as God loved us, with a pure and holy love that honors God and His image which resides in each and every one of us. Sometimes we must be reminded of who we are and what God expects of us. That is discipline, but it is discipline that is born of the love of God and love for one another.

### 4. In CONFIDENCE or in HUMILITY?

Church leaders must be confident in the way they have been equipped to do God's will. They must be strong in the faith to put on the armor of God and serve Him in the face of adversity. The Body is not served well by timid leaders. But on the other hand, Church leaders must always bear in mind that their gifts are not of their own making, nor is God a respecter of persons. Job thought

he could challenge God through force of reason; but in the end Job learned humility. Elders should be confident in leadership, but humble before the Body of Christ, His Church.

### 5. To TEACH or to LEARN?

An elder should teach: because by teaching he

**“If an elder watches over his charge with tender solicitude and love, he will in many cases prevent the necessity of public censure by the eldership as a court of the church, because his private instructions and admonitions will be corrective at the earlier stages of defection and deviation. How much of purity and peace would have been maintained in the church of Christ and will be maintained if elders are sensitive to, the first steps of delinquency on the part of the people and bring the word of tender admonition and reproof to bear upon them before they reach the by-paths of open and censurable sin!”**

— John Murray (Collected Writings, Vol. 1, p. 266)

leads by example, he serves the church body by conveying knowledge by the power of the Holy Spirit, and remains in close contact with church members. On the other hand, an elder will always have a lot to learn (he will never know enough about Holy Scripture); he will continue to grow in sanctification and wisdom through the work of the holy Spirit, and will come to an ever greater understanding of the members for whom he is responsible. In this sense he is always learning, and will hopefully continue to learn throughout his life.

### **6. To INSTILL or to DRAW OUT?**

Should an elder create the answers and solutions to problems faced by the church by means of advocacy and persuasion? Or should an elder discover the hidden needs and preferences of the church body by drawing them out in formal and informal conversations and interactions? Both approaches may be needed from time to time; neither approach is universally appropriate.

### **7. To LEAD or to LIFT UP?**

The one-man band will always make some kind of music, but it is rarely good music. Elders do lead through service to others, but it's not possible for only a few such men to continuously sustain the weight of all the tasks a church must perform. Elders from time to time will look for opportunities for others to serve, and will lift them up in the eyes of the church body as fellow servants.

### **8. To CHANGE or to PRESERVE?**

Christ's ministry evidenced occasional changes in audience and location; different miracles were made known from time to time. The Apostle Paul similarly moved his ministry, and adapted his message to his changing audiences. Change, then, is a natural feature of ministry. What must be preserved, however, are the unchanging doctrinal truths upon which our faith and ministry are based. Elders need to recognize the difference between form and substance in our church ministries.

### **9. To DRAW IN or to WARD OFF?**

Who should worship with us? Should elders work to keep the church body pure? Yes. Harmful or destructive elements should be contained and removed. Should we be free from dissent then? No. There is room for disagreement so long as every member remains focused on glorifying God and doing His will in service and love for one another. If we can agree on this, we can learn from one another through healthy examinations of God's revealed Word.

### **10. To RISK or to CONSERVE?**

If the Lord be for us, who can be against us? That is a call to be active and advance vigorously the cause of Jesus Christ. But Proverbs 2:6-11 also speaks of gifts of discretion and wisdom that come from God to all those who seek after Him in righteousness. Elders are to be neither conservative nor liberal with our scarce fiscal and physical resources. What is important, it seems to me, is that elders are mindful of both our limitations and our opportunities, and should work to overcome the former to obtain advantages from the latter as they are guided, through prayerful deliberation, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**This article was sent to the editor of by Rev. Bob Myers, Pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Burtonsville, MD. Pastor Myers thought it was worthy of publication in *Ordained Servant* and we agree. It would be a great blessing to all our churches if every newly elected elder or deacon would approach their new office in the spirit of this article by elder Charlie Meyer.**

## Family Visitation Is...

## The Parts of a Typical Family Visit:

**Biblical** — The Apostle Paul describes his ministry: “*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*” (Acts 20:20).

Scripture Reading and Prayer  
Discussion of Personal and Family Matters  
Discussion of Church Matters  
Questions for the Elders  
Closing Prayer

**Official** — Your elders are lawfully elected, ordained, and installed “*to keep watch over themselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers,*” and to be “*shepherds of the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). They are accountable to Christ (Heb. 13:17).

### Personal and Family Matters

#### Sample Discussion Topics for a Family Visit:

**Pastoral** — The elders come as shepherds, quite literally representing the Chief Shepherd, who is deeply concerned for all of our needs (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:2,4; Heb. 4:14-16). Family visitation is not primarily “social” but “pastoral”.

**Prayerful** — Your elders are called to pray for you (Acts 6:4; James 5:16), and they do so throughout the year. Be ready to make particular requests for their prayer for you. They also desire your prayers for them (1 Tim. 2: 1,2; Eph. 6:18,19).

**Edifying** — The elders take seriously the mandate of Scripture that we are to be “*speaking the truth in love ... what is helpful for building others up,*” to “*strive after*” and to “*work hard to attain*” peace with all men (Mat. 5:23-24; Eph. 4:15, 25-32; Heb 12:14-15; Jam. 3:1ff). Family visitation gives you opportunity to express your encouragements and concerns to the Session.

**Regular** — The elder who oversees your shepherding group views this visit as an important part of his responsibilities, and is committed to visiting you at least once each year (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:14).

- In what specific areas have you grown in your understanding and practice of Christianity this past year? In what areas have you been disappointed?
- Do you personally and regularly read the Bible and pray? Do you do so also as a family?
- What have you found helpful for devotions?
- What encouragements do you find in the life and ministry of the church for you personally? As a parent? As a family?
- Are there any areas of need in your life or in your family’s life of which you would want the elders or deacons to be aware?
- What has helped you to be a more faithful witness to Jesus Christ? What has prevented you?
- Do you believe you and your family understand what we call the “Reformed Faith”?

### Church Matters

- Are you faithfully participating in the worship services and the sacraments?
- Are you participating in the church’s ministry of education, mercy, and fellowship as one who serves as well as benefits?
- Are there some areas in the church’s life where you have a desire to serve or participate but do not at present?
- Are there areas of need in the church’s life or ministry of which you believe the elders or deacons should be aware?
- Do you have suggestions for subjects or passages of Scripture for sermons or lessons in Sunday School or Bible studies?

## Preparation for Family Visitation

Encouragements and Concerns to Discuss with the Visiting Elders:

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Questions to Ask the Visiting Elders:

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Prayer Requests for the Visiting Elders:

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Prayer for the Pastor and Elders:

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Other Thoughts for the Visit:

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## Shepherding Groups at Matthews OPC:

(Revised: February, 2001)

<u>Elder Allford</u>	<u>Elder Clark</u>	<u>Elder Fyfe</u>	<u>Elder Knight</u>	<u>Elder Mauldin</u>	<u>Elder Peterson</u>
C. Beard	Allford	Brandt	Arseanant	Batten	Ball
R. Beard	Dean	Brubbacher	Cook	Caldwell	Black
Flye	Grigg	Crouch	Doboe	Clark	Boone
Harbin	Herrin	Guido	Dollar	Duffy	Crawley
Jackson	King	Heinzl	Eubank	Epifanio	Dixon
LeGrand	J. LaPlant	Kelly	Gear	Hulbert	Fiol
Long	T. LaPlant	Knight	Hathaway	Langan	Hitch
Mauldin	Mack	R. Posvar	Laurie	Newkirk	Miller
Morgan	Matthews	Snyder	Markwat	M. Posvar	Taylor
Stedl	Willingham	Vance	Peterson	Randazzo	Tunst
Trice	Zappone	Waggoner			

## Family Visitation at Matthews Orthodox Presbyterian Church

“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.” - Acts 20:20

### What is family visitation?

Family visitation is an important ministry of the Session in which the elders visit the members and families of the church in their homes. This brochure is written to help you understand what to expect and how you may prepare for their visit to your home. You will find here an outlined order of their visit, a statement of the purpose of family visitation, and examples of questions they might ask you in the course of their visit.

### What is the purpose of the visit?

- To develop the spiritual life of the members.
- To challenge the lives of believers to service and witness.
- To promote the communion of the saints.
- To encourage the believers in the church's worship and the means of grace.
- To build confidence in the authoritative, prayerful, and instructive care of the elders called by our Lord to shepherd his sheep.

### Who will take part in the visit?

Your shepherding group elder will visit you, occasionally accompanied by another elder or deacon, if appropriate. They are interested in all the members of your covenant home, and ask that every member of your family be present.

### When will we be visited?

A couple of weeks or so in advance, your shepherding elder will call to set a date and time for a visit. It is the elders' goal to visit each family at least once a year.

## Some Thoughts on Term Eldership

by

John R. Sittema



Some time back, a reader wrote to ask me to address a column to the subject of the practice of “term eldership.” (For those unfamiliar with the practice, allow me to explain: in many Reformed churches, elders are selected by “election” by the congregation for a specified term of office. “Ordained” to office only once, these brothers are eligible for reelection, and subsequent “installation” to office, again and again throughout their lifetimes. The practice differs markedly from that in most churches who hold to the Westminster creedal tradition (where the manner of preparation and selection to office for a ruling elder is much more rigorous, and the term is considered to be lifelong).<sup>1</sup> The reader implied some criticism of the term eldership practice, as I recall, opining that nowhere in Scripture was the practice to be found, either explicitly or implicitly. Further, the writer went on, it is a waste of God’s precious gifts to the local church if several of the men to whom He has given the wisdom and spiritual ability to pastor the flock are on “vacation” from their responsibilities for a year or more at a time. And, as another correspondent observed not too long ago, the practice of “term eldership” tends to tilt the emphasis of the office from pastoring to that of a committee position or a board member term of office—hardly appropriate for an office with such weighty Biblical responsibilities.

### PROBLEMS WITH TERM ELDERSHIP

Allow me to make a few observations “up front.” The first is that the practice of “term eldership” today seems to be especially prevalent in those churches whose legacy is that of the Church Order of Dort (the great synod that answered the challenges of Arminius with the Canons and also wrote a comprehensive Church Order whose fundamental principles serve to undergird several such documents, representing

many denominations and/or groups of churches today). Term eldership is not customarily the practice in those Presbyterian and Reformed churches whose confessional legacy is that of Westminster, rather than the Continental standards.<sup>2</sup>

Second, among those churches that practice “term eldership,” several bad habits seem to go along hand in hand. One of these is, as the correspondent above notes, that the view of “election” to office carries with it such non-Biblical political connotations as to corrupt the high and holy practice from the start. In the USA especially, where the image of the political process is so low, it is difficult to imagine “election” to the office of elder not being corrupted by association with popularity, the notion of the elder as the democratic representative of a group within the church, and even the practice of “campaigning” for office. Sadly, I have heard much that would indicate that these practices and attitudes are widespread.

In addition, the practice of “term eldership” does, at least, suggest a temporary, and thus an insufficient view of the work of the elder. I have railed for years in this column against an “administrative” view of the office of elder, insisting on one shaped by the Biblical image of the shepherd. It is difficult to imagine a true shepherd, in Biblical times, working an eight hour shift, and then forgetting about his flock for the remainder of the day. Jesus, in John 10, called such a care-giver a “hireling,” and would not even dignify such a man with the term “shepherd.” But this would seem to be the inevitable consequence of electing elders to a three year term. Service in office as an elder is viewed as no different than service on the Christian school board. It’s a committee position. And once that notion sinks roots, it is almost impossible to cultivate a strong and Biblical view of an elder as a pastor, daily and deeply concerned about the spiritual life and walk

<sup>1</sup> We hope that this is generally true in our churches (Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> Term eldership is an OPC option: Form of Gov’t (xxv,2).

## Some Thoughts on Term Eldership

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of the flock of God throughout their long discipleship.

Further, if the term “term eldership” concept twists the view of elder even a few degrees off Biblical center, the result also affects the preparation process for those entering the office. My contacts within several conservative Presbyterian bodies convince me that their view and practice of the preparation and examination of elders is superior to that in the CRC tradition with which I am most familiar. In the CRC, my experience has been that training often discusses policies, procedures and practices. Newly elected term elders are helped to become acquainted with the routine of the meeting schedule, assigned their “district,” partnered with a visiting teammate, and briefly apprised of “cases” in process. Such a pragmatic approach is necessary with only three (and in some cases two) years in office, one has to “hit the ground running.” In the Presbyterian churches with which I am familiar, elder training involves years of assigned reading and study, thorough grounding in Reformed theology and the creeds, careful examination of the existing pastoral involvement of the potential candidate. (Is he already teaching? How well? What is the level of his discernment? Is he already involved in counseling? Is his work up to Biblical standards? Does he “desire the office of overseer/elder?” Is he willing to do the work necessary to be spiritually prepared?) Only after such careful and lengthy reflection do the existing elders present the candidate to the flock, often examining him in the presence of the congregation, and only then proceeding, should they concur, to his ordination. The result of such a careful process is that a weight of respect and trust is given to the elder by the flock. In my experience, election to a three year term often (usually?) does not bestow such respect and trust. (Should you desire to read a bit more of the theory and practice behind such a view and practice of office, I highly recommend a little book by Lawrence R. Eyres entitled *The Elders of the Church*, published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975).

By this point, you have no doubt noted that I am critical of the “term eldership” concept. Clearly I am, and not only for the reasons listed above. I have challenged several of my friends who hold passion-

ately to the “term eldership” concept to point to any passage that suggests, not to mention insists, that the Bible views an elder in any other way than a man appointed for life. None to date has risen to the challenge. In fact, the “defense” of the practice among theologically competent people is usually apologetic, not passionate. All I hear is appeals to tradition, that “the Church Order prescribes it thus and so.” OK, but Church Order isn’t infallible, remember? At the same time, as a minister of the Word in the CRC, I am bound to that Church Order, and am aware that my options are limited. And so, although I write as I do above, hoping and praying to change attitudes and perspectives, and thus practices within the CRC and other churches that have adopted term eldership, here at Bethel CRC in Dallas, we practice term eldership. And, to be honest, I’ve never met an elder with whom I’ve worked in the CRC who doesn’t like the “term” concept (especially in the last three months of the last year of the term)! So. . .

### **“IF YOU CAN'T SAY SOMETHING NICE. . .”**

To be fair, I must note some benefits in the practice of “term eldership.” For one, gifted men are more likely to serve in Christ’s church as elder if their service has specific term limits. That benefit is worthy of note in light of the many kingdom causes which place demands particularly upon the most gifted of the men of God among us. They simply do not have the time to serve all who ask; a limited term in each ministry enables them to serve several, in sequence.

Again, the practice of “terms” does allow for the practice of “sabbaticals,” periods of rest and refreshment from the weighty burdens of office. Such sabbaticals, between terms of office, are particularly beneficial for those who serve in very large congregations, with many pastoral duties, or those who serve in young, new or smaller congregations, where the amount of work is not able to be spread around as many willing workers. Of course, granting a temporary “sabbatical” is not inappropriate for those churches that practice life-tenure eldership. In fact, it is quite common.

I will report a benefit which Professor William



## Some Thoughts on Term Eldership

Heyns alludes to in his venerable Handbook for Elders and Deacons (even though I find it a spurious argument). He suggests that term eldership profits the church by allowing the work to be spread out more equitably among the congregation, and that it profits the church by avoiding “hurt feelings” in those who would otherwise not be able to take a turn. As I said, I find the argument spurious, because in my view it promotes a non-pastoral understanding of the office of elder. I only mention it because it is one of the most popular explanations I’ve heard for the term eldership view in twenty years of ministry (sad to say).

### “IF I HAD MY DRUTHERS.. .”

I would prefer, for the overall dignity of the office, and to preserve the pastoral character of it, that the office of elder be clearly understood to be for lifetime tenure. I believe it is the testimony of Scripture that God makes men elders (Acts 20:28); the church only receives and recognizes them as such. This, of course, would demand a change in the manner of selecting elders (not electing them, but examining and approving them), and may well include the needed admission that the church cannot, indeed may not, determine in advance how many elders it will have. If God makes men elders, He alone determines how many He will raise up. Those whom He has equipped, whom the church identifies and recognizes as possessing these Spirit-endowed qualifications, should be ordained to office.

However, I am unlikely to sway easily the views and practices of Reformed churches and individuals who have several hundreds of years of tradition behind them, I’ll settle for securing your agreement to a couple of smaller points. ‘If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em, but convince ’em in the process’!

First, even if you practice (and defend) term eldership, please remember that those once ordained remain elders for the rest of their lives, even if they are not in active office all that time. That this point is valid even in churches that hold to term eldership is demonstrated by the difference in “ordination” and “installation.” An elder is ordained once; after that, he is installed. Constant reminders of this fact may assist

those making nominations, and help those in the congregation as well, to grasp the seriousness and weight of the office, and to avoid the “democratic process” corruption discussed above.

Second, if your congregation elects elders for terms of office, and then grants them release from active duty for a time, make clear to all that they are still in service, even though the nature of their service may be changed for a time. For example, sabbatical elders (call them that!) ought to be invited to regular and periodic (quarterly?) elder conferences, to be apprised of the status of the spiritual care of the flock, to be involved in prayer on behalf of the other brothers and the flock itself, and to be consulted on matters in which their wisdom would be beneficial. Further, should the burden of the care of the flock become too great, due to some unusual circumstance or set of circumstances, the sabbatical elders could be called in to relieve the active elders of some of the routine (but nonetheless important) pastoral duties.

Finally, even if your congregation practices term eldership, make clear to the flock—and to any potential candidates—that your local requirements for office are those weighty requirements set forth by Scripture, and not merely a list of “functionary skills” needed for a committee-type position. Far too often local churches get what they deserve—elders unqualified for office because they were neither appropriately trained nor screened. God forbid that should happen to any of you. His church is too precious to him to be placed under the care of unqualified, untrained, ill-equipped hirelings!

**Dr. Sittema is currently serving as the pastor of Bethel CRC in Dallas, Texas. This article (taken from *The Shepherd’s Staff—a Column for Elders & Deacons*) appeared in *The Outlook*, September 1995, Volume 45, No. 8 and is reprinted here with kind permission.**

# THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL:

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE NON-ELECT - Part 2

by Stephen D. Doe



## History of an Idea

In a previous article the question was raised: “Does God have a non-redemptive love for the non-elect, a love which is seen in His sincerely offering salvation in Christ to all who hear the Gospel proclaimed”? That idea was carefully articulated in a report submitted by Professors John Murray and Ned Stonehouse to the 1948 General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. There are current today, however, challenges to the idea that God has anything but hatred for those under His decree of reprobation. These challenges have been around for a long time, so we will turn to some history for perspective.

From the end of the 16th century and into the middle of the 17th century and the writing of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Reformed theology was undergoing refinement and clarification. The great doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity had taken centuries to define with precision. Now Reformed theologians, during this period, devoted time to developing the idea of the covenant and the *ordo salutis* or the way in which God’s saving decree is carried out. Presbyterians see the Westminster standards as the rich flowering of this increasingly mature understanding of Scripture. Were there other tendencies, however, which over-emphasized logical systematization of theological structure? It seems that though most scholars wisely remembered the limits of man’s ability to understand the eternal purposes of God, some men sought increasingly complex readings of God’s decrees.

Arising during this time were two challenges to the Reformed faith, Arminianism and Amyraldism (or hypothetical universalism), which seemed to require responses of more and more careful definitions of God’s working in salvation and in the Gospel. In responding to those challenges and in seeking to clarify God’s working in salvation one of the most significant issues was the debate over the order of God’s decrees.

When, in the course of His own eternal counsel, did God determine to do what? Reformed theologians have designated two approaches to this question of order: *infra-* and *supralapsarianism* (where “lapsarianism” refers to the fall of Adam).<sup>1</sup>

*Infralapsarianism* says that the order of God’s eternal decrees is: to create, to permit the fall, to elect some to salvation out of fallen mankind while passing by the rest. Election then is below or after the decree (*infra*) to permit the fall. It is sometimes also called *sublapsarianism*.

*Supralapsarianism* says that the proper order is: the decree to elect some as of yet uncreated and thus unfallen men to salvation and the rest to reprobation, the decree to create, and finally the decree to permit the fall. The decree to elect is thus *supra*, or above, the decree to permit the fall. The burden of this position is to make the decree to elect the determining decree because it places all the outcome in God’s sovereign hands. Although the denial of the free offer seems to arise from a *supralapsarian* view of God’s decrees, *supralapsarianism* does not necessarily lead to a denial of a sincere offer of the Gospel.

At the end of the 17th century some English Calvinists of *supralapsarian* bent, including Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh, began to develop what they felt was greater and greater consistency in their Calvinism by teaching the idea of eternal justification. They reasoned from the decree to elect that God justified His people in eternity before the Incarnation or before the actual regeneration of any individual. God not only elected the Church to salvation in eternity but

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. John V. Fesko, pastor of Geneva OPC in Marietta, GA, wrote his doctoral dissertation on lapsarianism. “*Diversity Within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster*” will be published in book form in the coming year.

actually justified the elect in eternity so that justification in time was only the final step of what was the elect's eternal possession.<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith explicitly rejected that idea in Chapter XI:4.

The ground that Crisp and Saltmarsh tilled, proved fertile for the thinking of an English Independent minister, Joseph Hussey, in the opening years of the 18th century. Hussey moved fully into a denial of the free offer of the Gospel. He developed a number of points to distinguish a real Calvinist from one who was luke-warm, including these words:

“We must preach the Gospel as it is most fitted to the display of effectual grace. To offer God's grace is to steal: God saith, Thou shalt not steal...But there is no command for offers...We should preach the Gospel, because it is sure as to individual persons, or particular interests, me or thee. But offers are all indeterminate as to anybody and so indeed are fixed on nobody...Offers rob the Gospel of its properties, privileges and glory.”<sup>3</sup>

Hussey's ideas began to create divisions in the Reformed community in England, especially among the Calvinistic or Particular or Strict Baptists. These Baptists, and some independents who were paedobaptists, were the ones who were carrying the burden of maintaining Calvinism against the force of Arminianism in the Church of England. Later in the 18th century the banner of Hussey was picked up by John Gill and John Brine among the Particular Baptists and such was the long-lasting influence of Gill and Brine and others in Baptist circles that when Charles Spurgeon began to preach in 1854 his preaching of the free offer of the Gospel aroused strong opposition from some of the leading Baptist pastors in London like James Wells. Iain Murray chronicles all of this in his book, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*.<sup>4</sup> Names as familiar to Reformed readers as J.C.Philpot, William Gadsby, and *The Gospel Standard* were and are associated with this movement.

The denial of the free offer of the Gospel, however,

<sup>2</sup> Toon, Peter. *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity* 1689-1765. London: The Olive Tree, 1967, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> Toon, *ibid.*, pp.81-2

seemed to recede into the background as the English Baptists drifted from their theological roots toward the end of the 19th century; but the 20th century saw the controversy arise again among the paedobaptists. In the 1920s Herman Hoeksema left the Christian Reformed Church over the issue of common grace and the free offer of the Gospel and founded the Protestant Reformed Church which still today holds the denial of the free offer as one of its distinguishing marks. In the Netherlands Klaas Schilder developed his own form of rejection of the free offer though he differed from Hoeksema in significant ways.<sup>5</sup> In 1947 and 1948 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had to deal with the issue of the sincere offer of the Gospel as it arose out of the question of Gordon Clark's ordination.<sup>6</sup> The report by John Murray and Ned Stonehouse came from those discussions. It was presented to the General Assembly of the OPC in 1948 and received but not adopted, yet it has served as a benchmark for the OPC during the last fifty years whenever the question of God's love for the non-elect resurfaces. Has the OPC been confused for over fifty years about the sincerity of God in calling all men everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel call? In another article we must look at some of the biblical warrant for the free offer in order to decide.

<sup>4</sup> Murray, Iain H., *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See Alexander C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder*. Franeker, Netherlands: T. Wever, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Hart, D.G. and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education and The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995, pp. 106-115.

**In this issue we have another contribution by Stephen D. Doe on the subject of the Free Offer of the Gospel. Stephen is currently serving as Pastor of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Barre VT. We also look forward to a further article from him on the same general subject.**

## BOOK NOTES FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

by

William J. Shishko



Even thirty years ago it was rare to find quality books written from the perspective of a clear and devoted commitment to the Reformed faith. How different the situation is today! A multitude of publishing companies produce hundreds of volumes by authors who, in one way or another, develop aspects of historic Christianity. Officers, in particular, should be aware of what is available for the genuine edification of the church.

Much that is written is either mediocre in quality (one of the many negative effects of desktop publishing making it possible for anyone and everyone to “get in print”), or positively dangerous (beware of glitzy advertisements for books by unknown authors, published by unknown companies, that promise to set the Christian world straight on some particular aspect of doctrine!). Other volumes are of outstanding help in various areas of Christian faith and practice, both individually and on the corporate, i.e. church, level. Among the many recent contributions that should be considered by church officers, I have found the following especially valuable. They are presented according to themes.

Good helps for nurturing our young people and assisting families in that task are always welcome additions. Starr Meade’s *Training Hearts Teaching Minds* (P & R Publishing) is particularly noteworthy. The author offers a daily devotional (one for six days of the week) based on one question of the Shorter Catechism per week. The devotionals are short, to the point, and memorable. They are ideal to foster appreciation for the catechism, and also to help each family memorize the answers to the 107 questions (Although it is regrettable that the author modified the answers to the questions at various points. Have a copy of the standard answers

to the questions handy as you work through Meade’s book). Encourage families to add these to their daily family devotional material. The Banner of Truth Trust has again provided a valuable service by reprinting J. W. Alexander’s *Remember Him*. This delightful 56 page volume is perfect to give to young people after their profession of faith and as they begin their regular partaking of the Lord’s Supper. In meaty paragraphs, Alexander offers fine biblical counsel on everything from various questions about the Lord’s Supper to the professing Christian’s duties in the church and in the world. This is also an inexpensive gem (list price, \$4.99, but look for discounts) to make available to all new Christians. I can’t commend it too highly.

Pastors need regular mental stimulation as they wrestle with issues of pastoral ministry, evangelism, and church growth. G. A. Pritchard’s *Willow Creek Seeker Services* (Baker Books) is far more than a sociological analysis and careful critique of this user-friendly, mega-church phenomenon. It is a thoughtful probing into the mindset, goals, and commitments of Bill Hybels and his Willow Creek staff. One cannot read this volume without being helpfully challenged to reach the “un-churched” even though we do not use many of the Willow Creek methods. On a very different level, *Preaching the Living Word* edited by David Jackman (Christian Focus Publications) contains a series of addresses given at the annual Evangelical Ministry Assembly in the United Kingdom. The contributors are evangelical Anglicans known better in Great Britain (although J. I. Packer and Alec Motyer are also well known on this side of the Atlantic). While some essays are better than others, the two by Mark Ashton (with the exception of his weak views on worship as, “before all else a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people”, cf. OPC DW, II:2), and the three by Peter

## BOOK NOTES

Jensen are worth the price of the whole volume. Here one finds the insights of a responsible biblical theology coupled with pastoral and practical concern for application to the life of the church. I recommend that pastors take some time to work through these essays thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Preachers will derive great help from three recent additions. Sidney Greidanus builds on his previous two contributions (*Sola Scriptura*, and *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text*) with his *Preaching Christ from The Old Testament* (Eerdmans). This is easily the most helpful of the three volumes because it addresses the actual work of preparing to preach on Old Testament passages. One does not need to agree with all of Greidanus' conclusions to appreciate the help he gives in the challenging task of preaching from the Old Testament. *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Eerdmans) by Graeme Goldsworthy is a similar help, and equally valuable. I have come to appreciate Goldsworthy (an Anglican lecturer at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia) as probably the finest exponent of the use of biblical theology in preaching. Arturo G. Azurdia III's *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Mentor) is a magnificent help to put fire on the homiletical sacrifices we offer each week. Azurdia weds the preaching of Christ with a passion for the glory of God. I'm not surprised that many men have had their preaching ministries transformed by this rich book (be sure to read the footnotes and quotations!).

For busy ruling elders who are looking for practical helps in your church labors, be sure to get David Dickson's *The Elder and His Work* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications). There is no finer brief compendium of the ruling elder's duties than this one. The helps for home visitation, ministry to the young, and dealing with church disciplinary matters are full of the sagacity that only a mature, experienced ruling elder can offer. Westminster Discount Service has recently reprinted this most useful volume. When you order it from them, be sure to ask for a list of WDBS reprints. They have many older titles that cannot be found elsewhere, including Pierre Marcel's *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Bap-*

*tism*, Charles Hodge's *Constitutional History of The Presbyterian Church In The United States Of America*, and Samuel Miller's *The Ruling Elder*. You can contact Westminster Discount Book Service by calling (914)-472-2237.

Commentaries on 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism abound. We do well to be aware of the roots and fruits of that many-faceted response to theological modernism. Sadly, the prophetic notes of the late Francis Schaeffer's *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, are being confirmed by the observations of more recent analysts. Iain H. Murray's *Evangelicalism Divided* (The Banner of Truth Trust) is receiving a well warranted wide reading. While Murray focuses more on the evangelicalism of Great Britain in the past half century, his observations and analyses are pertinent for North American evangelicalism as well. This is not a pleasant read. The compromises of Billy Graham, the shifts in evangelical leaders like J.I. Packer, and the unsuccessful attempts to bring para-church unity when church loyalty to increasingly unfaithful churches prevailed are the heart-breaking realities that contributed so heavily to produce the lukewarm evangelicalism of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. May we learn, and also take to heart, lessons that we must apply lest we become part of the problem rather than (hopefully) part of the solution.

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

## The Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC

by

Thomas E. Tyson



What could be more important to the well-being of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church than the training of her future ministers?

This was the question that stood out in the thinking of the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training of the OPC's Christian Education Committee about five years ago. The six members of that subcommittee decided that it was time to do something to improve the training that our ministerial candidates receive prior to their ordination, and perhaps even help men who are already ordained. What seemed clear to them all was that there exist certain "holes" in the preparation that many men receive from seminary. Not that all seminaries fail to provide instruction and training in the same identifiable areas, but that most men seem to have "missed" something or other, no matter which seminary they attended. The troublesome subjects were identified:

- *Presbyterian Polity*, including the OPC Form of Government and Book of Discipline
- *Orthodox Presbyterian History*, Distinctives and Commitments
- *The Westminster Standards* (Confession and Catechisms)
- *Presuppositional Apologetics*
- *Pastoral Theology*
- *Catechetics*
- *Homiletics*
- *Liturgics*

Soon it became apparent that the best way to attack this problem would be to provide training supplementary to that which men receive in the seminaries. And, since recent technology made distance learning possible, it was not necessary to narrow the training to a central campus. Besides, such would not be possible, since the men targeted

were scattered throughout the country. Consequently, it was decided that through the use of the Internet, and particularly e-mail capability, the courses could be offered without the need for facility capital spending.

Late in 1998, The Rev. Thomas E. Tyson was appointed Director, and Dr. James Thomas Administrator, of MTIOPC and the two began their work in earnest in January of 1999. The first courses were offered in the Fall of that year, and registrations were both sought and found, with the result that 18 men took the Polity, History, and Standards courses. In January of 2000, these men gathered for four days at the OPC Administration offices in Willow Grove, Penna., for a time in Intensive Training.

For the Spring of 2000 term, new courses in Catechetics, Liturgics and Homiletics saw a combined student "body" of 20, with another Intensive Training week in June, once more held in Willow Grove. Further, the Homiletics course was repeated during the summer with the men gathering near Chicago in August for their in-person sessions. Then, in the Fall of 2000 term, 22 students registered for the three courses repeated from the previous Fall, plus Homiletics. These men gathered with their instructors in rainy San Diego for intensive training.

In this current Spring 2001 term, 18 men are taking Catechetics and Liturgics, as well as two new courses, Presuppositional Apologetics and Pastoral Theology. The in-person sessions will be held in Willow Grove again, except Pastoral Theology, which will meet at the Franklin Square, N. Y. OPC.

MTIOPC courses are available free of charge to any OPC man under care, licentiate or minister. Only a \$50 per course registration fee is charged, but even that is refundable as soon as the student com-

pletes the course. OPC ruling elders may enroll for a \$50 per-credit hour tuition fee (no additional deposit is required, and ministers and ministerial candidates from other denominations may take courses for a \$100 per-credit hour tuition fee (again, no additional deposit is required). For assistance in paying the cost for travel to the intensive training sessions, tuition scholarships are available for up to \$250 per term. Here are some highlights:

- One student took (and passed) four courses during a single term
- In a recent course, all four students received an A grade
- Students from four different seminaries have received academic credit for our courses
- One student was given 1.5 credits for a 1.0 credit MTIOPC course

MTIOPC courses are targeted as seminary-level instruction. They are not to be considered the equivalent of voluntary conference participation. Students receive reading lists and syllabi, and are expected to fulfill written assignments and take “final exams,” in some cases. This is serious education! The full roster of course offerings at present consists of:

- *Presbyterian Polity*, Rev. Stuart R. Jones, instructor
- *OPC History*, John R. Muether, instructor
- *Westminster Standards*, Rev. G. I. Williamson, instructor
- *Apologetics*, Dr. William D. Dennison, instructor
- *Pastoral Theology*, Rev. William Shishko, instructor
- *Catechetics*, Rev. Thomas E. Tyson, instructor
- *Homiletics*, Rev. William Shishko and Rev. Peter J. Vosteen, instructors
- *Liturgics*, Rev. Larry E. Wilson, instructor

Let me here highlight two of these courses, the newest ones:

### 1. *Pastoral Theology*—two continuing education credits

This class combines personal reading, intensive training instruction, and actual exposure to church life in an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation. The goal of the class is to help students develop a truly biblical approach to the pastoral office and its various responsibilities. Subjects to be covered include:

- The Minister in Relation to Himself
- The Minister in Relation to His Family
- The Minister and His Session
- Shepherding, Ruling, Miscellaneous Duties, and
- The Minister in the Presbytery and General Assembly.

The Intensive Training period will include workshops with the church Session and Board of Deacons. This class will be most beneficial for men who are on the threshold of pastoral ministry or for those who have recently entered the pastorate as ordained ministers. Limited to six students.

### 2. *Presuppositional Apologetics*—two continuing education credits

The purpose of this course is to provide a thorough introduction to presuppositional apologetics, and to highlight its importance in the theological encyclopedia and the life of the church. The first half of the course is an Introduction to Presuppositional Apologetics. Topics include:

- A survey of the History of Apologetics
- What is Presuppositional Apologetics, and
- The Relationship between Presuppositional Apologetics and
  - Scripture
  - The Person of God
  - Pre-redemptive Revelation
  - The Doctrine of the Fall

## The Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC

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- The Covenant of Grace—Jesus Christ, and
- The Doctrine of the Church

The second half of the course is Presuppositional Apologetics and the Marketplace. This deals with:

- Cornelius Van Til and the Theistic Proofs for God's Existence
- The Problem of Evil
- Criticisms of Miracles from a Scientific Worldview,
- Religious-Mystical Experience
- Psychology, and
- Post-Modernism.

The course concludes with a discussion of why Presuppositional Apologetics is so important to the future of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Registrations will be open for the Fall 2001 courses (to be announced) in August and may be submitted to the MTIOPC Administrator, Dr. James H. Thomas Jr., at 112 Evergreen Drive, Aliquippa, Penna. 15001. Telephone: 724/774-7427, E-mail: thomas.2@opc.org. For information about registration and course offerings, please contact the Administrator. However, any questions about the program

in general are welcome and may be forwarded either to the Administrator or to the Director, Rev. Thomas E. Tyson, at 908 Fernhill Drive, Glenside, Penna. 19038. E-mail: tyson.1@opc.org, Phone: 215/886-8315.

All ordained officers of the OPC are requested to be in earnest prayer for the MTIOPC, that God would use this program to improve and enhance the training and preparation that our ministerial candidates, as well as our current officers, receive to enable them better to fulfil the high calling that is theirs to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and to shepherd the Lord's precious sheep.

**Thomas E. Tyson hadly needs any introduction for *Ordained Servant*, readers, having served for over a decade as the General Secretary of the OPC Committee on Christian Education, the immediate source of this publication. Tom recently took up the work of Regional Home Missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia, but continues to serve as the Director of the Ministerial Training Institute.**

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