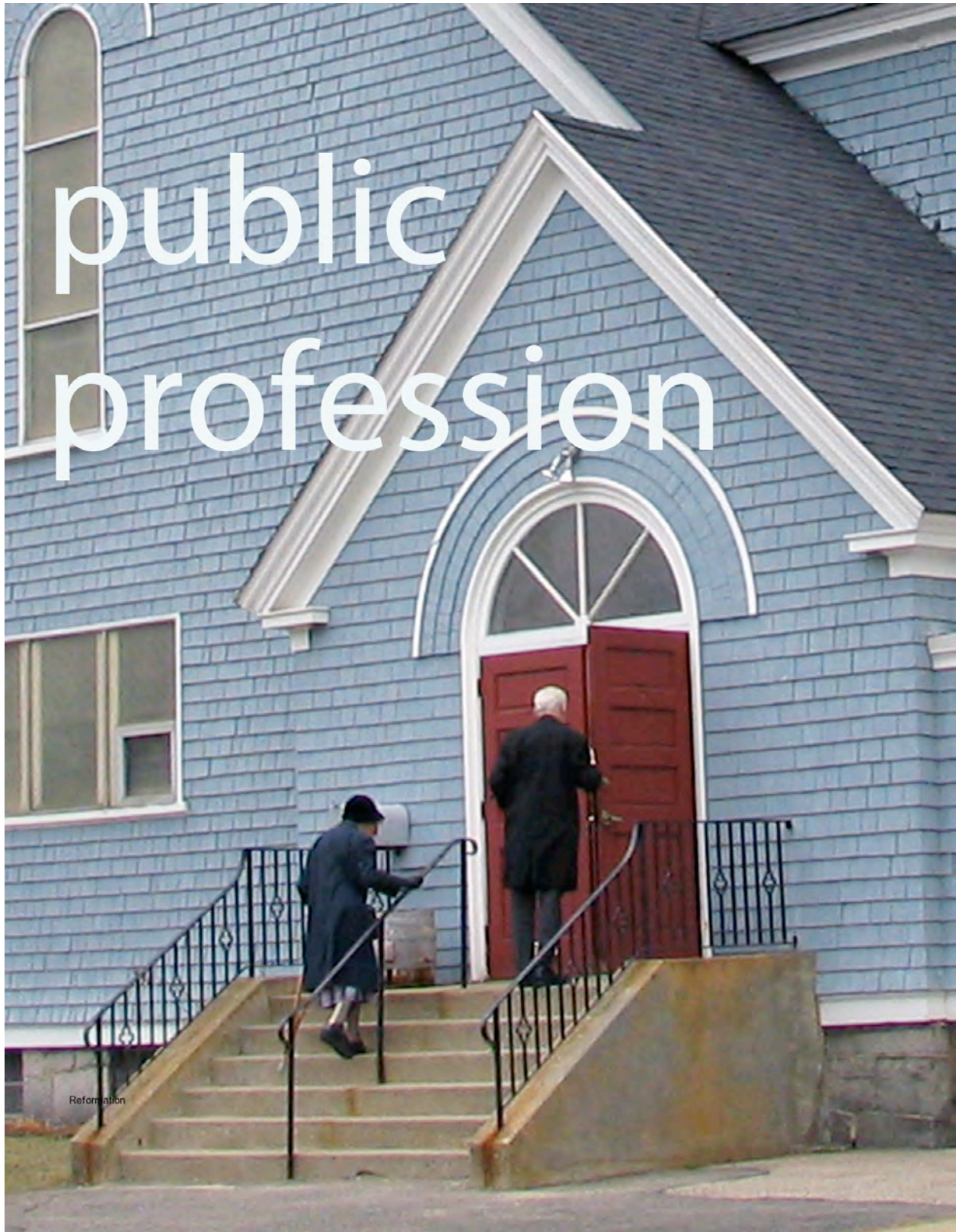


# public profession



Reformation

# *Ordained Servant*

## *A Journal for Church Officers*

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### **From the Editor**

Public profession of faith stands at the center of the church's ministry. The *Ordained Servant* archives yield three articles on this subject published in 2002 and one in 2005 (see below). Over a year ago Pastor Ken Golden sent me his excellent booklet "The OPC Class," used in preparation for membership in his congregation. Because many pastors have developed similar booklets, and due to its length, it is not suitable for publication in these pages. However, Ken has written a fine article to remind us of the importance of thorough preparation for communicant membership in the visible church: "How Much Catechesis? The Case for a Maximalist Approach to Membership Classes." In light of the general ignorance of the Bible that is characteristic of our times, it behooves us to take this subject seriously.

For those who may not have public profession booklets available, I have provided PDF versions of Ken's booklet "The OPC Class," as well as my own, first written in 1982, first published in electronic form in 1998, and revised several times since: "Making A Good Profession: A Course in Basic Christian Faith and Practice in Preparation for Making Public Profession of Faith." I have also included a booklet, perhaps not as common in our churches, written for covenant youth, generally under the age of sixteen: "Jesus Is My Lord and Savior: Public Profession for Covenant Youth."

After becoming a communicant member of Christ's church, then what? Pastor Joel Beeke ably addresses this question in his article "Marks of a Faithful Church Member." This would make an excellent handout at the conclusion of a membership class.

Wayne Sparkman, my old friend and Westminster Theological Seminary classmate, and director of the PCA Historical Center in St. Louis, provides us with a thorough review of *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.

Finally, our poet of the month is a little known eighteenth-century American poet, Phillis Wheatley. Born in Boston, she was a slave child of seven or eight and sold to John and Susanna Wheatley in Boston on July 11, 1761. It was not common for American women to be published in those days; but it was especially uncommon for children of slaves to be educated at all. Her gift of writing poetry was encouraged by her owners, who taught Phillis to read and write, with her first poem being published at the age of twelve, "On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin." Phillis's popularity as a poet both in the United

States and England ultimately brought her freedom from slavery on October 18, 1773. Her sacred verse is a treasure to be enjoyed.

Blessings in the Lamb,

Gregory Edward Reynolds

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

## How Much Catechesis?

### The Case for a Maximalist Approach to Membership Classes

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Ken Golden

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church requires prospective members to make credible profession of faith by taking solemn vows in corporate worship. Often this marks the end of an extensive process of studying the essential Christian teachings that are summarized in the vows. Many of these classes also include summaries of Reformed distinctives such as TULIP and worship. This raises a number of questions. How many class sessions should be required? How many topics should be covered? How much information should be imparted in order that vows can be taken in good conscience? A philosophy of curriculum is helpful in order to answer these questions. The purpose of this essay is to examine our philosophy of membership curriculum (hereafter *catechesis*) in light of biblical, historical, and practical issues. In this essay, I argue that catechesis should take on a *maximalist* or comprehensive character, not only for public profession of faith, but also for long-term assimilation into the OPC. I support this thesis with biblical and historical data, interact with practical concerns, and offer a sample curriculum.

#### **Biblical Support**

The New Testament approach to indoctrination falls under the category of catechesis. This means more than the familiar question and answer format we find in the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Catechesis (κατήχησις) is derived from the verb κατηχέω (*katēcheo*) that means “to report/inform” or “to teach/instruct.”<sup>1</sup> At least one of Luke’s reasons for writing his gospel was for a certain Theophilus to “have certainty” (*katēchēthēs* κατηχήθης) about the doctrines of the faith (Luke 1:4). Additionally, the Alexandrian Jewish convert Apollos was described as being “competent in the Scriptures” and “speaking accurately the things of the Lord,” because he was instructed (*katēchēmenos* κατηχημένος) in “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:24–25). The way of the Lord is the religion of God that finds fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Judg. 2:22; Isa. 40:3; Jer. 5:4–5).<sup>2</sup> Based on its New Testament usage, catechesis can be described as the transmission of Christian doctrine from the mature to the untrained.

Catechesis also has deep roots in the Old Testament. God chose Abraham and his progeny in order to “command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19). The purpose of Abraham’s election was to create a “God-fearing community” through the instruction of covenant children—an obligation that was

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<sup>1</sup> “κατηχέω,” Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature 3rd ed. (BDAG)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 534.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, The International Critical Commentary (ICC)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 2:887. “In Acts, Christianity is described as the Way, ἡ ὁδός, at 9.2; (16.7); 18.25, 26; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22.” Ibid.

reiterated in the Mosaic Law.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the Exodus, God commanded Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell [תִּסְפֹּר *tesafer*] in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know [וַיִּדְעֵתֶם *vidayetem*] that I am the Lord.” (Exod. 10:1–2) The verb סָפַר (*safar*) in the piel frequently describes a transmission of information.<sup>4</sup> The verb יָדַע (*yada*), however, expresses “a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses” including “God’s knowledge of man (Gen. 18:19, Deut. 34:10) and his ways (Isa. 48:8; Pss. 1:6; 37:18), which . . . begins even before birth (Jer Jer. 1:5).”<sup>5</sup> Such knowledge is intimate and enfolding. In Deuteronomy 4:9–11, the command to make known (*vehodayetam* וְהוֹדִיעֵתֶם—hiphal of יָדַע) is accompanied by the exhortation to teach (*yelamedun* יִלְמְדוּן) the entire history of the law to the next generation.<sup>6</sup> Here, the piel form of the verb לָמַד (*lamad*) suggests the idea of training as well as educating.<sup>7</sup>

The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. According to Paul, Abraham received the gospel in advance. The gracious covenant that bears his name was not annulled by the law (Gal. 3:8, 17) but fulfilled when God the Son assumed its responsibility on the cross of Calvary. As spiritual heirs of this everlasting covenant by faith in Jesus Christ, Christian parents must diligently transmit the faith to their children.<sup>8</sup> Paul specifically had this in mind when he wrote, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up (*ektrephete* ἐκτρέφετε) in the discipline (*paideia* παιδεία) and instruction (*nouthesia* νοουθεσία) of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4) The verb ἐκτρέφω (*ektrepho*) occurs only in the book of Ephesians, denoting “to nourish” (5:29) and “to rear, bring up” (6:4).<sup>9</sup> Παιδεία (*paideia*) entails “the act of providing guidance for responsible living” (Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:5, 8, 11) or describes “the state of being brought up properly” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).<sup>10</sup> Finally, νοουθεσία (*nouthesia*) expresses an “avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct” (1 Cor. 10:11, Eph. 6:4; Titus 3:10).<sup>11</sup> In describing that these various forms of instruction are “in the Lord,” Paul connected the Old Testament mandate of catechesis with New Testament families who were the spiritual inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 2:39). With the unfolding of redemptive history, fathers must now pass on their doctrinal heritage in light of its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Word Bible Commentary (WBC)* vol. 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 50.

<sup>4</sup> “סָפַר,” *KB*, 1:766.

<sup>5</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago, Moody, 1980), 1:366; cf. “יָדַע,” *KB*, 1:392.

<sup>6</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Williard, 2nd American ed. (Columbus, OH: 1852; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, n.d.), 12.

<sup>7</sup> “לָמַד,” *KB*, 1:531; cf. Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 1:480: “The training aspect can be seen in the derived term for ‘oxgoad,’ מִלְמֵד. In Hosea 10:11 Ephraim is taught like a heifer by a yoke and goad.”

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 1:481.

<sup>9</sup> “ἐκτρέφω,” *BDAG*, 311.

<sup>10</sup> “παιδεία,” *BDAG*, 748–49.

<sup>11</sup> “νοουθεσία,” *BDAG*, 679.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians, WBC* 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 408.

Timothy was such a covenant child who from his earliest years was “acquainted with the sacred writings” (2 Tim. 3:15).<sup>13</sup>

All this language suggests a comprehensive approach to the transmission of covenantal knowledge from one generation to the next. While the covenantal context involved transmission from parent to child (Deut. 6:7; Ps. 78:2–8; Eph. 6:4), the maximalist principle can be broadened from nuclear to ecclesiastical families. It can inform the catechesis of converts, lapsed persons, and even Christians seeking a deeper understanding of the faith.

## Historical Support

Catechesis was an indispensable tool for the early church. Catechumens, the students of catechesis, included adult converts preparing for baptism and the children of baptized parents. Instead of the question and answer format that typifies later catechesis, teaching often involved the study of creedal or doctrinal statements of faith.<sup>14</sup> Although catechetical philosophies varied, there is evidence for curricula that was lengthier in duration and fuller in scope. The renowned catechetical school of Alexandria usually involved a two to three year curriculum.<sup>15</sup> Some, like Augustine of Hippo, took on a narrative approach. He wrote: “The narrative is complete when the beginner is first instructed from the text, ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth,’ down to the present period of Church history.”<sup>16</sup> Augustine was not implying that catechumens receive the minutiae of biblical information; rather he suggested “a general and comprehensive summary.”<sup>17</sup>

Others were more topical in their approach. Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catecheses* were lectures intended for students approaching baptism. Beginning with repentance and baptism, they moved on to a systematic discussion of faith, the Trinity, Christ in his humiliation and exaltation, and the holy catholic church. In his *Protocatechesis*, Cyril explained the reason for his systematic program:

Let me compare the catechizing to a building. Unless we methodically bind and joint the whole structure together, we shall have leaks and dry rot, and all our previous exertions will be wasted. No: stone must be laid upon stone in regular sequence, and corner follow corner, jutting edges must be planed away: and so the perfect structure rises.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Cyril underscored the importance of systematic study. While the order of topics differed considerably from later dogmatic presentations, his principle of theological connections not only appeals to the academic mind, but strengthens the rank-and-file catechumen in pursuit of discipleship.

As the church became more and more identified with the world and ecclesiastical pomp and ritual developed, evangelical teaching began to decline. Nevertheless,

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<sup>13</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> John Murray, “Catechizing—A Forgotten Practice,” *Banner of Truth* 27 (October 1962): 15.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:257.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De Catechizandis rudibus*, trans. Joseph Patrick Christopher (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1926), 3.5.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Catechizandis*, 3.5. Note: Chapters 17–24 provided an example of his narrative program.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Protocatechesis* 11 in *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, trans. Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1969), 1:79.

remnants of the evangelical church remained faithful to catechesis. As John Murray noted, “It stands out clearly in the history of the dark Middle Ages that where this kind of instruction was adhered to most closely [e.g. Waldenses and Lollards], Christian life remained purest.”<sup>19</sup> During the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, catechesis experienced a renaissance. By this time, the question and answer format became commonplace, with larger confessions and “institutes” providing deeper reflection.

Not everyone has shared this vision. In recent centuries, catechesis has been met with resistance, especially in the modern Sunday school movement that favors Bible memorization. While one would be hard-pressed to criticize this activity, an overemphasis at the expense of systematic teaching warrants some concern. Accordingly, Murray’s insightful critique is worth repeating:

A misguided reverence for the Bible has prevented some from forming a systematic outline for the main doctrines of the Word, and consequently when confronted with a systematic challenge to their faith, which also alleges Scripture for its authority, they are ill equipped to defend their position. As we are so painfully discovering today, such people are the easy prey of Romanism and false cults.<sup>20</sup>

Today, many cults are re-packaged versions of ancient Christian heresies. Their command of proof texts can be overwhelming to Christians who have not gained a systematic understanding. Furthermore, Christians are confronted negatively by skeptics seeking to undermine the Bible and positively by seekers desiring to deepen their understanding of the Scriptures. A maximalist approach to catechesis enables Christians to meet these challenges.

### **Practical Concerns**

So far, we have seen how catechesis has served as an integral component of transmitting biblical truth from the mature to the untrained, whether adults or children. Since this essay concerns training for public profession of faith, both groups are in view. Different people have different needs. Some people come from other Reformed churches and have already been catechized. Others come well versed in Reformed doctrines even though they attended less consistent churches. Still others come with an extensive but fragmented knowledge of the Bible. Finally, there are those who come with no biblical knowledge at all. Does this mean that churches need to design separate curricula to accommodate every situation? Few would find this practical. Instead, one curriculum that could be tailored to various needs would serve the purpose.

Here, it is helpful to compare the maximalist approach to other strategies. Some principally subscribe to the minimalist maxim of “less is more.” While brevity can be a virtue in many things, the transmission of the Christian faith requires more understanding. The seriousness of taking membership vows—including the fifth vow requiring fidelity to the church—requires counting the cost beforehand. Those with insufficient knowledge may find themselves at odds with the church concerning such issues as predestination, paedobaptism, the regulative principle of worship, or fencing the

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<sup>19</sup> Murray, “Catechizing,” 16.

<sup>20</sup> Murray, “Catechizing,” 23.

table. This can prevent assimilation and commitment. Studying these issues ahead of time can help avoid problems down the road.

Others take these issues seriously but feel that a maximalist approach may be impractical for teachers or a stumbling block for inquirers. Lengthier catechesis involves time commitments for pastors who are already juggling busy schedules. Moreover, the busy lifestyles of inquirers may cause some to expedite the process. Wisdom needs to be employed in these matters, but pragmatic concerns should not trump pedagogical needs. While pastors should be seen as the primary catechists, they could be supplemented by session-approved teachers. Catechists can also be flexible with inquirer schedules. Classes do not have to take place at one specific time in a classroom. In fact, conducting classes in the homes of inquirers according to their schedules can lead to ministry opportunities. This can build trust between teacher and student.

### **A Sample Curriculum**

Having evaluated the strategies and their perceived motives, the question still remains, how much catechesis is needed? One specific solution is now being proposed. My own search for a maximalist approach to catechesis led me to write a curriculum titled “The OPC Class.” This rather ordinary title provides the structural divisions of the book: (I) Orthodox—*Christian Essentials*, (II) Presbyterian—*Reformed Distinctives*, and (III) Church—*Means of Grace*. The purpose of this division is to differentiate what one must believe in order to make profession of faith from other important doctrines that will be taught in an OPC congregation. Consequently, inquirers can approach membership with the freedom to disagree about certain teachings and the opportunity to grow in their understanding of the Reformed faith.

The Orthodox section is subdivided into familiar categories with accessible titles. Chapter 1 begins with the Bible as God’s Word to man. This includes discussions on general and special revelation, attributes of Scripture, biblical authority, and the canon. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce inquirers to the Triune God and the image-bearer with whom he entered into covenant. Chapters 4 through 6 alternate between what man has done in sin and what God has done in salvation through Christ and is doing through the Holy Spirit. The latter chapter includes a summary of the law for further reflection.

The Presbyterian section introduces the familiar Reformed distinctives of TULIP, church government, and worship. The Church section focuses on the means of grace: Word, sacrament, and prayer. Rather than being short summaries with proof-texts, these chapters provide full biblical and theological treatments of the subjects covered. Questions for further discussion are found at the end of every chapter.

The book also offers two appendices. The first one concerns the five membership vows, breaking them down into a number of questions about each vow. This gives inquirers a chance to review what they learned and better understand the vows they will be taking. The second appendix is a sample liturgy offered in table format with biblical proof texts for each element and their dialogical progression from beginning to end.

In keeping with the maximalist approach to catechesis, The OPC Class contains some chapters that are longer due to the complexity of the subject matter. While most chapters can be taught in one 60 to 90 minute session, the longer ones would require multiple teaching sessions.



## **Conclusion**

In seeking to prepare inquirers for public profession of faith, OPC sessions need to consider the consequences of their philosophy of curriculum. As argued in this essay, a strong biblical, historical, and practical case can be made for a maximalist approach to catechesis. Such an approach will not only provide adequate preparation for entrance into our congregations but undergird the need for long-term assimilation into the OPC.

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# ServantLiving

## Marks of a Faithful Church Member

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Joel R. Beeke

For an annual fee, you can be a member of your community recreational center, where you have access to its exercise equipment and swimming pool. If you choose never to visit the building, it's no problem. You can sit at home and eat ice cream all day and never get your membership revoked. So long as you pay your dues, you are a member. Similarly, you can be a member of a book club that offers great deals on books. Club mailings say you are under no obligation to buy anything; you can return a book at any time and cancel your membership.

In such a cultural setting, it is not surprising that membership in a local church has also become non-demanding. In many churches only a fraction of their “members” attend worship. The church leadership is partly responsible for this easy membership by not upholding biblical standards and discipline. Responsibility can also be laid at the feet of people's wrong views of the church, such as when people view the church like a museum, or a shopping mall, or a social club, or a community service program.

To correct a faulty view of the church, we must go back to the biblical concept of the church. The Bible tells us the church is the body of Christ. A Christian, then, is a living part of a larger body of people. That is the essence of Ephesians 4:10–16, which says the church is a living organism. It is a spiritual and relational body; each Christian is a member much as a hand or foot is a body part. Christ is the head of this body. He and all his members are bound together by the Holy Spirit and the bond of true faith.

This truth has profound implications for what it means to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:10–16 that membership in the church is all about Christ. We will focus our attention on five marks: Christ's Word, his person, his people, his kingdom, and his image. We will examine what it means to be a faithful member of the body of Christ in each of these areas in the (1) personal, (2) public, and (3) practical dimensions of our lives. Thus, the five marks will unfold into fifteen characteristics of a faithful church member.

### **Mark One: Receiving Christ's Word**

Ephesians 4:11–13 tells us that Christ gives pastors and teachers to the church to the end that “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>21</sup> The primary tool the exalted king uses to build the house of God is his Word as taught by the pastors and teachers of his church. Therefore, the first mark of a faithful church member is *receiving Christ's Word*—not merely as an individual reading his Bible at home but also as a worshiper listening to Bible preaching.

**1. Personal hunger for the Word.** In 1 Peter 2:2, the Apostle Peter urges all Christians to thirst for the sincere milk of the Word, “that ye may grow thereby.” If you are sick and have no appetite, you only feel nauseous and restless when served a delicious meal. Some people experience the preaching of the Word like that; a sermon makes them

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Beeke uses the King James Version throughout.

uncomfortable. They blame a minister for preaching too long, but the problem is that they have no hunger for the Word. Even a simple meal of meat and potatoes is a feast to someone who is hungry. So it is with a person who has a healthy appetite for the preaching of the Word.

**2. Faithful attendance at corporate worship.** Hunger for the Word in church is expressed publicly by faithful attendance at church worship services. Hebrews 10:25 says we must not forsake assembling ourselves in corporate worship. Biblical worship makes “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) wrote, “There is no worship of God that is better than hearing of a sermon . . . it stirs all the coals of fire in your spirit, and makes them burn with a brighter flame.”<sup>22</sup>

**3. Active listening to the Word.** Jesus describes four kinds of listeners to the Word in the Parable of the Soils, only one of which receives the Word, perseveres in faith, and goes on to bear abundant fruit. In Luke 8:18a, Jesus says, “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” Pray on Saturday for tomorrow’s worship. As you come to church, remind yourself that you are going to the throne of God to hear him speak. John Calvin (1509–1564) wrote, “Whenever the gospel is preached, it is as if God himself came into the midst of us.”<sup>23</sup> What an awesome thought! When you sit before a preacher, stir up your mind to listen actively, alertly, and reverently, as one who hears the living voice of God. Don’t expect to be spoon-fed like a baby. Cut your food and chew it for yourself. Think about what the preacher is saying. Take notes on the sermon, giving special attention to the main points, Scripture references, and personal applications. Listen with humble self-examination. Listen with delight at the words of life.

The first mark of a faithful church member is receiving Christ’s Word from his appointed pastors and teachers.

### **Mark Two: Union with Christ’s Person**

Christ gives his Word to call us into union with him (Rom. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:14). In Ephesians 4:15–16a, Paul commands the saints of God to grow into Christ in all things. Christ is the head of his body; all our growth, which lifts us into closer communion with him, comes from him. Therefore, one must be a member of Christ to be a member of the body of Christ. Paul challenges us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” You are not truly in the church until Christ is truly in you. This too has personal, public, and practical characteristics.

**4. Personally trusting in Christ.** Colossians 2:6–7 says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” True church members receive Christ personally as prophet, priest, and king (for that is what “Christ” means). We receive Christ by God-given faith (John 1:12–13). This faith is active trust; it rests upon God in Christ for salvation. William Ames (1576–1633) wrote, “Faith is the resting of the heart on God . . . We believe through Christ in God.”<sup>24</sup> Do not assume you are a believer because of a response you made or something you experienced years ago.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert L. Dickie, *What the Bible Teaches About Worship* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 53.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:129.

<sup>24</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 80–81 (I.iii.1, 8).

Ask yourself, “Am I trusting in Jesus Christ alone to make me right with God, to rule me and to guide me?”

**5. Making diligent use of the sacraments.** I am not suggesting that baptism and the Lord’s Supper have the inherent power to save. Trusting in the sacraments for your salvation is idolatry. In its historic Reformed usage, *sacrament* means a public sign and seal of the covenant between God and man. Sacraments are also called “ordinances,” for Christ ordained their use for the worship of his people. They are a means of grace, the Word made visible. They are not empty rituals. They are Christ’s command (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 22:19). Membership in Christ’s church demands that we publicly receive holy baptism and partake of the Lord’s Supper, trusting that, as Christ’s ordinances, they are means by which he works in our hearts and lives.

**6. Practical obedience to Christ.** In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” He adds, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them . . . loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (v. 21). Obedience is the best expression of love for Christ and the way to experience more of the love of Christ. Thomas Boston (1676–1732) was a champion for the gospel of free grace among the people of Scotland. Yet he reminded us regarding Christ’s church, “They have delivered up themselves unto him, to be ruled by him, as well as to be saved by him; to be governed by his laws, and not by their own lusts, as well as to be saved by his grace, and not by their own works.”<sup>25</sup> Does your obedience show that you are truly one with Christ?

Receiving Christ’s Word is the first mark of a faithful church member. Union with Christ’s person is the second mark.

### **Mark Three: Connected to Christ’s People**

The third mark of a faithful church member, according to Ephesians 4:16, is being “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth.” *Joint* here refers to a ligament or tendon that holds together the bones and parts of the body with great strength. Romans 12:5 says, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” This is more than outward association, like a shoe tied onto a foot; it is the way a foot is tied to the rest of the body, sharing the same life-blood and nervous system. The membership of a church is more than a voluntary association. Its members are interconnected and interdependent, as well as accountable to one another. How does this play out in personal, public, and practical characteristics?

**7. We are personally connected by love.** Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.” Each member of Christ’s body should love his brothers and sisters in the Lord, and each member should grow in love for the church. Perhaps you do many things in church. But do you love the people?

**8. We publicly confess our faith.** It was after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ that the Lord said, “I will build my church.” (Matt. 16:18). Earl Blackburn writes, “The first responsibility of church membership is loyalty to the church. By loyalty to the church, I mean fidelity to the teachings of the church so far as they are loyal to the Word of God . . . It is only right, then, for a church to ask someone who desires to be a member to be

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (Choteau, MT: Old Paths-Gospel Press, n.d.), 197.

loyal to its doctrinal position as defined in its statement or confession of faith.” A personal confession of faith is required for church membership.<sup>26</sup>

**9. We practice hospitality.** Personal love and public confession become practical in hospitality. First Peter 4:9 counsels, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” The church aims to be a family, and nothing characterizes a family as much as maintaining fellowship and eating meals together. Extending hospitality to others in the church, however, is far more than sharing food; it is sharing love and life, especially with those who may otherwise be deprived of it. The church in the United States desperately needs to practice such hospitality, for many times visitors will attend a worship service for months without ever being invited into a member’s home.

The third mark of a faithful church member is connecting with Christ’s people. The stronger the tendons and ligaments which hold together a body are, the stronger the body will be. Likewise, the strength of the church depends upon the strength of our friendships.

#### **Mark Four: Serving Others for Christ’s Kingdom**

Ephesians 4:16 describes the next mark of a healthy church as the “effectual working in the measure of every part.” Every part of the church must do its job. We all have different gifts, and we all need each other. Some people are gifted in helping the hurting; others are good at teaching. One Christian can give much money to help the poor and spread the gospel. Another is anointed with the spirit of prayer. Each member has a role to play in the advancement of God’s kingdom. To be the body of Christ, we must be Christ’s hands and feet on earth and cooperate with each other in the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Father’s will.

**10. We personally serve with zeal.** Serving Christ must arise from the zeal of our hearts. God’s mercies to us propel us to sacrifice ourselves for him (Romans 12:1), and our service to him takes shape according to a believer’s particular gifts (vv. 3–8). Every believer should be fervent in serving the Lord. *Fervent* literally means burning hot, like water heated to boiling or metal heated to the point of glowing. Are you burning for the Lord? If you are zealous, you don’t need a title or personal invitation to serve at a meeting or ministry. Offer yourself humbly to the elders to happily take on the difficult and mundane jobs for the sake of Jesus Christ’s kingdom.

**11. We publicly witness for Christ.** In Ephesians 4:15, Paul says we should speak the truth in love. In this context *truth* is the knowledge of the Son of God (v. 13), or Bible doctrine (v. 14). A faithful church member speaks the truth to his neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family members. Be confident that the gospel *is* the power of God for salvation. Behind its words stand the infinite power of God and the finished work of Christ. When you speak the gospel, you are unleashing a lion! It is God’s instrument on earth to advance his kingdom. So seek first his kingdom by being a public witness for Christ.

**12. We practice good stewardship.** We make our commitment to Christ’s cause practical by giving money. Jesus says in Matthew 6:19–21, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Our money is a temporary gift to us, like Monopoly money

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<sup>26</sup> Earl M. Blackburn, *Jesus Loves the Church and So Should You* (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010), 108, 121.

which is useless when the game is over. Our life is also over quickly. A wise church member gives as much money as he can to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Are you tithing to the church? Are you supporting the kingdom cause?

The fourth mark of a faithful church member is serving others for Christ's kingdom.

### **Mark Five: Growing into Christ's Image**

Christ "maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love," Ephesians 4:16 says. God wants the body of Christ to grow in him. Ephesians 4:13b says the goal of this growth is "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Our growth will not be complete until we, the church of Jesus Christ, reflect our Lord in his splendid holiness and righteousness. What a glorious destiny we have, to be conformed to the glorious image of God's Son! A faithful church member pursues this growth all his life long in personal, public, and practical ways.

**13. We are personally humble.** In Ephesians 4:1–2a, Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation [or calling] wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness." The first quality of a worthy walk with Christ is "all lowliness," that is, humility. We were once spiritually dead in our sins and trespasses, but in his great love, God made us alive with the miraculous power of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1–5). That truly makes us humble. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) said that by gospel humility we are "brought sweetly to yield, and freely and with delight to prostrate ourselves at the feet of God."<sup>27</sup> One test of our humility is how we respond to the leadership and correction of our church's elders. Do we clothe ourselves with humility and receive the Word meekly?

**14. We faithfully attend prayer meetings.** In addition to private intercessory prayer, we reveal our quest for spiritual growth by participating in prayer meetings of the church. Acts 2:42 says of the first Christ-followers, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." The early church gathered often for prayer (Acts 1:14, 24; 3:1; 4:23–31; 12:5, 12). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) realized that though his church only had a few people when he came, "yet I could never forget how earnestly they prayed," as if they could see Christ "present with them, and as if they must have a blessing from him."<sup>28</sup> Christ teaches us to go to the Father seeking his Spirit like hungry children asking their father for bread. A faithful church member seeks spiritual growth for his church by joining in prayer.

**15. We engage in meditation.** In Christian meditation, your mind hovers over a biblical truth like a bee over a flower to draw out its sweetness. Meditation is taking time mentally and emotionally to digest what you learn from listening to and reading God's Word. Without proper digestion, you will not benefit from the nutrition you have received. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) said, "Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises."<sup>29</sup> Meditation is crucial for growing in Christ's image. Psalm 1:1–3 says that the man who meditates daily on the Scriptures flourishes "like a tree planted by the rivers of water."

## **Be Faithful to Christ and His Body**

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<sup>27</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 312 [III.6].

<sup>28</sup> Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 270–71.

<sup>29</sup> *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1874), 17:270.

Ephesians 4:10–16 shows us five marks of a faithful member of Christ’s body. A faithful member receives Christ’s Word, unites with Christ’s person, connects with Christ’s people, serves others for Christ’s kingdom, and grows into Christ’s image. In every respect, church membership depends on the church’s living head, Jesus Christ.

These marks unfold into fifteen ways to exercise faithful church membership. Can you circle each one of the fifteen characteristics as present in your life? If not, how do you need to change? Go to your pastor and tell him you want help growing in those specific areas.

FAITHFUL TO CHRIST	<i>Private Dimension</i>	<i>Public Dimension</i>	<i>Practical Dimension</i>
<i>Receiving his Word</i>	1. Hungry for Word?	2. Attending worship?	3. Actively listening?
<i>Joined to his Person</i>	4. Trusting in Christ?	5. Sacraments?	6. Obeying his laws?
<i>Connected to his People</i>	7. Loving the people?	8. Confession?	9. Hospitality?
<i>Serving his Kingdom</i>	10. Zealous to serve?	11. Witnessing?	12. Stewardship?
<i>Growing in his Image</i>	13. Humble?	14. Prayer meeting?	15. Meditation?

Remember that how we treat the church is how we treat Jesus, for the church is his body. Therefore, the stakes are high. How dreadful were Christ’s words to Saul in Acts 9:4, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” If you abuse Christ’s body, you abuse Christ. If you neglect Christ’s body, you neglect Christ. On the other hand, what unspeakable joy the faithful servant will experience when the king of kings comes with his holy angels, sits upon his throne, calls you by name, recounts your acts of service to his people, and says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). Strive therefore to be faithful members of the body of Christ!

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# ServantReading

## Confident of Better Things

### A Review Article

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Wayne Sparkman

*Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger. Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011, 520 pages, \$12.

A book worth re-reading! As I was saying (*New Horizons*, Oct. 2011), it's not easy to review, in short compass, a book with twenty-six authors. So I was pleased when Dr. Reynolds invited a longer review of *Confident of Better Things*. This is a handsome book, well-made and inexpensive, with substantive content that will reward. At this price, buy copies for your elders as well, plus one for the church library.

To begin with general orientation, the volume is arranged in five categories—history, theology, Christian education, missions and ecumenicity—appropriately chosen divisions, since these are also characteristic concerns of the OPC. Typographical errors were mercifully few in the volume and seemed to appear mostly in the last few chapters. A minor improvement might have been made to the order of articles in the Christian Education section had the more foundational Dennison article been first, followed then by Tyson on Catechesis, Gidley on preparation for ministry, Tracey on the importance of the languages, Pearce on internship and Reynolds on the true character of the Lord's herald, in that order. In that way the articles would have displayed a more logical progression. Finally, Tom Patete's article could have been moved to the History section, following Roger Schmurr's article, where their stories would form an interesting comparative.

#### **Part One: History**

1. “The Significance of Paul Woolley Today,” by John R. Muether (7–23).

In the History section, the editors take point, writing the two opening chapters of the book. John Muether provides an enjoyable look back at the life and ministry of Paul Woolley, one of “lesser lights” of early Westminster, without whom the institution might have floundered. It could be argued that Westminster Seminary would never have come into existence without the involvement of Robert Dick Wilson, and in a similar way, that Westminster simply could not have continued but for the efforts of Paul Woolley. He was the faithful servant God used to keep things moving forward, yet without his taking center stage.



2. “How Evangelical Is Rome? Van Til, Strimple, and Roman Catholicism,” by Danny E. Olinger (25–48).

With this chapter my eyes were opened to the OPC's long tradition of apologetics with reference to Roman Catholicism. Here Danny Olinger provides an overview of that tradition, briefly looking back at Loraine Boettner's work before giving close consideration of the work of Drs. Van Til and Strimple, the strength of whose apologetic rests in maintaining the primacy of “God and his revelation through Christ in the Scriptures, refusing to sacrifice the 'either/or' teaching of the Scripture, as affirmed in the Protestant Reformation, for a 'both/and' theology to justify a common cultural pursuit.” This tradition continues with Olinger's own “Primer on Vatican II” (*Ordained Servant*, Oct. 2010) and most recently with David VanDrunen's article on “Inclusive Salvation in Contemporary Catholicism” (*New Horizons*, Oct. 2011).

3. “First—but Not the Last: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church over the Past Fifty Years,” by Roger W. Schmurr (49–71).

Roger's chapter is told with a refreshing honesty which may strike some readers as at times a bit too honest. But there is value in having such honesty in print, even if others might occasionally tell a slightly different story. All of this forces us to search out the matter more deeply, and that is a positive thing. From his early years under the ministries of Al Edwards and Henry Coray, to his first pastorate on the other side of the country, to his long involvement with *New Horizons* and later with Great Commission Publications, Roger's chapter provides a walking tour and might well have been titled “A History of the OPC as I have lived it.”

4. “The Legacy of Charles Hodge,” by Alan D. Strange (73–84).

With two major biographies of Charles Hodge released in 2011, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*, by Paul Gutjahr (OUP, March 2011) and *Charles Hodge—The Pride of Princeton*, by W. Andrew Hoffercker (P&R, Nov. 2011), Dr. Alan Strange's chapter provides some excellent reflection which should be brought to your reading of either of these recent volumes. Prior to these works, the last was *Charles Hodge Revisited*, edited by John W. Steward and James H. Moorhead (Eerdmans, 2002). Dr. Strange takes opportunity to spar with Moorhead on several points as he explores the question of Hodge's legacy and whether the OPC has remained true to that Princeton heritage of orthodoxy and piety.

5. “Confessing the Reformed Faith: Our Identity in Unity and Diversity,” by Richard A. Muller (85–97).

Dr. Muller's chapter was originally a NAPARC address delivered in 1993 and then published in *New Horizons* (March & April, 1994). Muller's denominational affiliation is with the CRC and as such he is the first of three ecumenical representatives included among the authors of *Confident of Better Things*, the other two being Tom Patete (PCA) and Dr. Robert Godfrey (URCNA). Muller's article is also one of only two chapters in the book which have previously been published.

The crux of his message is that “Reformed unity is a unity of faith represented as a spectrum of opinion—a unity within boundaries.” Muller concludes his message with this exhortation: “I would simply commend to you our great heritage and commend to you as well the work of holding fast to what is most valuable in our tradition for the sake of our present and future work in the service of the gospel. Our unity will appear clearly in the

declaration of our faith through our distinctive confessions and through the reflection of our confessional heritage in our forms of worship. Our Reformed *identity* depends on our willingness to declare our confessions and in so doing to confess the faith.”

## Part Two: Theology

6. “Is Classical Christian Education Truly Christian? Cornelius Van Til and Classical Christian Education,” by William D. Dennison (101–25).

This was one chapter that left me wanting more. I'd like to see Dennison develop these ideas further. Perhaps something along the lines of a Van Tilian alternative to Doug Wilson's *Repairing the Ruins*. That project is suggested when Dennison summarizes Van Til in contrast to Wilson, stating in a footnote (p. 123) that “On the contrary, Van Til understood the demise of the nineteenth century as being rooted in the secular and pagan elements of autonomy carried forward from the classical world.” Our schools need a curriculum such as Dennison hints at in his conclusion, a “method of education . . . grounded in the self-contained and self-sufficient God of Scripture whose ontological triune Being knows the facts, interprets the facts, and creates the facts in accordance with his sovereign plan in revelational-history.” Now, what exactly does that look like, and how does it work itself out in book-to-book curriculum?

7. “Ecclesiastes: Wisdom for a Pilgrim Church,” by Stephen J. Oharek (127–46).

Oharek tackles the Book of Ecclesiastes, with a view to its application to the life of the OPC and her people. He concludes that “this book is *Christ's* story, which is why it is *our* story, the story of redeemed pilgrims making their way through a fallen world.”

8. “‘The Lord and Giver of Life’: Cessationism in Service of Catholicity,” by Mark A. Garcia (147–67).

One of two chapters dealing with the subject of spiritual gifts, this chapter by Mark Garcia might be considered preliminary or general to the subsequent and more specific chapter by Dr. Richard B. Gaffin. We have here an excellent Reformed corrective on the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. Garcia quotes George Smeaton to good effect, “Wherever Christianity has been a living *power*, the *doctrine* of the *Holy Spirit* has uniformly been regarded, equally with the atonement and justification by *faith*, as the article of a standing or falling *church*.” Garcia concludes that “a sound biblical understanding of the ultimacy and the necessity of the Spirit's ministry of producing and cultivating God's glory in the church—the *telos* at the heart of covenantal cessationism—goes hand in hand with that unhesitating affirmation.”

9. “Tongues Today?” by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (169–84).

As Garcia noted in his chapter, the covenant-historical form of cessationism that summarizes Gaffin's views has also come to characterize the OPC in this matter of spiritual gifts. Dr. Gaffin presents us with material originally prepared for publication, but by God's providence withheld until now and no doubt honed by further reflection. Brick upon brick, Gaffin carefully builds his case, yet with no intent to slight or demean those who differ. He concludes, “the New Testament passage that perhaps more than any other speaks of the full and mysterious dimensions of the Spirit's activity that searches out even 'the deep things of God' (1 Cor. 2:10) beyond our comprehension, makes clear at the same time that this profound probing of the Spirit elicits and produces in believers, and does so just as it engages our spirits (v. 11), conformity to 'the *mind* of Christ.' (v. 16).”

10. "The Gospel and Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutics," by Lane G. Tipton (185–213).

Tipton's chapter is one of three that employ the original languages, leaving the book still well within the reach of any serious reader. Even in these articles where the languages are used, the alert reader should be able to follow the author's arguments. Yet I expect lay readers will find Dr. Tipton's article among the deepest waters in the book and so would advise they pick it up at the end before starting the article. Get this well in hand before beginning: "It is time to proclaim clearly and without reservation that Christ enters the Old Testament through its front door, so that biblical symbolism in the Old Testament both communicates the saving truth of Christ's person and work and that truth runs organically through to its fulfillment in Christ's death and resurrection."

11. "Was Adam Historical?" by Robert B. Strimple (215–22).

Truth is by nature timeless. Dr. Strimple's contribution to this volume has been published three times previously but could not be any more appropriate for inclusion, particularly in light of recent debates over this past summer. The inevitable unraveling effect of error is explored to its end. "If the historicity of the first Adam is considered irrelevant to us, why then should the historicity of the second Adam not also be irrelevant to us?"

### **Part Three: Christian Education**

12. "Biblical Languages and the Art of Gospel Preaching," by Stephen J. Tracey (225–44).

For all the time, money, and heartache spent learning Greek and Hebrew, are you amazed at how quickly it slips away? Most pastors maintain their skills at some minimal level, enough to get by, but Stephen Tracey builds his case that first, our faith rests upon the very Word of God, and second, quoting Luther, that "it is inevitable that unless the languages remain, the gospel must finally perish." Or as Samuel Miller exhorted, "be ready, on all occasions, to explain the Scriptures...not merely to state and support the more simple and elementary doctrines of the gospel; but also to elucidate with clearness the various parts of the sacred volume, whether doctrinal, historical, typical, prophetic, or practical...be ready to rectify erroneous translations...to reconcile seeming contradictions; to clear up real obscurities...in general, to explain the word of God, as one who has made it the object of his deep and successful study."

13. "Faith and Learning in the Presbyterian Ministry," by James S. Gidley (245–65).

Presbyterians have always sought an educated ministry, but what constitutes adequate preparation? The MTIOPC program has been one successful approach to augmenting the seminary curriculum, the requirement of an internship is another. Perhaps we might argue the church's burden for the careful preparation of her ministers should begin in grade school! But above all our author would remind us that it is God who calls ministers, and that institutional training is secondary to God's preparation of the man.

14. "Fulfilling the Great Commission through Pastoral Internships," by Ronald E. Pearce (267–76).

Ron Pearce sketches the outlines of a well-designed internship program, and the proof of this discipleship program has been displayed over the years in the number of men

equipped to stay in long-term, fruitful ministry. As we stand on the shoulders of other saints, it should be noted that Pearce himself interned under the Rev. George Scipione.

15. “Catechetical Instruction in the OPC,” by Thomas E. Tyson (277–87).

In this chapter Tom Tyson lays out the goal and duty of catechesis, a brief history of the practice in the early church, the “what” and “how” of teaching it, and then concludes with a review of the practice of catechesis within the OPC. Keep in mind that the practice shouldn't just be limited to our children. Getting parents to catechize their children is also a clever way of educating the adults.

16. “By the Grace of God It Was Done! Reflections on Great Commission Publications,” by Thomas R. Patete (289–309).

Patete is the second ecumenical author for our book, and the PCA author presents a concise, readable history of Great Commission Publications, from the OPC origins of GCP on through the organization's thirty-six year history. The *Trinity Hymnal* has been central to this story and deserves its own fuller account, if someone will write that someday.

17. “A Medium for the Message: The Form of the Message Is Foolish, Too,” by Gregory E. Reynolds (311–34).

Having attended Westminster Seminary with Greg Reynolds as a classmate, and watching his career over the years, it is particularly interesting to read this chapter as something of a capstone to his doctoral dissertation. The foolishness of the herald as messenger forces the message of Christ to the forefront and reminds us that salvation is the Lord's monergistic work. As regards a proper humility before the Lord, there is a great consonance here with the editors' opening note, that “the way to Christ is found through the conviction of sin.” (1).

#### **Part Four: Mission of the Church**

18. “The World Is Not Enough: The Priority of the Church in Christ's Cosmic Headship,” by A. Craig Troxel (337–65).

“The biblical truth of the headship of Christ was key to the Reformers in their systematizing of a coherent ecclesiology, and it continues to receive its due in the Reformed family as the “first principle” and the “keystone” of Reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiology. In a very real sense, the Reformation was an attempt to recover the headship of Christ in the church.” And so it continues today, where to cite but one example, debate over biblical worship and the regulative principle is at heart a debate over Christ's headship.

19. “Called to the Ministry,” by Bryan D. Estelle (367–75).

The Lord watches over each of his dear children, guiding and enabling them, to his greater glory. The calling and responsibility of ministry is too daunting but for the fact that Christ is at work in your life, that you might have fellowship with him and that you might lift up his name, drawing others to the table in sweet communion.

20. “Power in Weakness,” by Mark T. Bube (377–409).

Building from Thornwell and Piper, Mark Bube presents his case “that worship lies at the heart of missions, that a right zeal for the glory of our God is what drives the hearts of his people in missions.”

21. “Church Planting in the Presbytery of the Southwest, 1997–2010,” by Gary W. Davenport (411–23).

“A new congregation earnestly prays for the Lord's provision for the many obvious needs in a young body. One regular prayer is for the Lord to give the people the eyes of faith to see his provisions come to pass. Nothing happens by accident or coincidence. All motions of creation and the actions of men are governed by God's most wise and sovereign hand. As we ask, seek, and knock, the Lord does attend to even the most incidental details.” Would that congregations continue to earnestly pray and seek his face, imploring the Lord to save a dying world.

22. “The Ruling Elder in Church Planting,” by John S. Shaw (425–43).

Where would the church be without its ruling elders, without mature leadership? “The growth of the church depends on ruling elders uniquely equipped with these qualities: a heart for the extension of the church; a recognition that the gospel is the first priority of the church; experience as an elder in other churches; an ability to think conceptually (and flexibly) about the church; the heart of a servant; and a willingness to suffer and die for the sake of Christ and his church.”

### **Part Five: Ecumenicity**

23. “The Glorious New Zealand Experiment,” by Jack W. Sawyer (447–70).

An interesting story and worth telling. Sawyer traces the often parallel paths of the OPC and the Reformed Church of New Zealand. The ties have been so close that an account of the OPC would be incomplete without reference to the RCNZ. I would like to see a comparable account of the work in Uganda. One profitable, humorous aside, on page 461: “Van Dalen, a Dutch speaker himself, also figured out that the key to reading Van Til was to understand that he seem to be 'thinking in Dutch but writing in English.’”

24. “The Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel,” by Robert B. Needham (471–84).

Along with Tom Patete's telling of the history of GCP, I greatly value Bob Needham's account of the Joint Commission. These are important stories that bear witness to the Lord's work in what are often difficult places. The final pages of Needham's article are useful for their scriptural defense of chaplaincy. My archivist's heart has me hoping someone is carefully preserving a set of the monthly Prayer Plea.

25. “Reflections on the OPC and the URCNA,” by W. Robert Godfrey (485–94).

Dr. Godfrey's ecumenical concern for the larger Reformed community is near legendary, by way of his essay “A Reformed Dream.” He quotes Machen and reveals his own heart as well: “Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there be such a place, then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.” It is a dear, sweet picture of the earthly refuge that is the church, and I fear the coming years will only make that refuge all the more precious and rare. May we all, as God's people, be a humble, praying people.

## **Conclusion**

26. “The Audacity to Be Reformed: The OPC and the Next Twenty-five Years,” by J.V. Fesko (497–510).

Dr. Fesko offers an apt word which is at once a reflection on the OPC's past as well as her future challenges: “The church is not built upon adiaphora. Fundamentalism is not the way to promote the gospel or protect the church. On the other hand, we need not dilute the message of the Reformed faith; nor can we make the truths of Scripture less offensive if we simply ignore or hide them... We must not allow internecine discussions over debatable matters [to] distract us from the more fundamental and crucial mission of spreading the gospel to a lost and dying world.” (510).

If God has so equipped a little church with a big mouth (cf. 466, fn. 38), may her voice always be full with the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To God alone be all glory.

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# ServantPoetry

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Phillis Wheatley (1753?-1784)

## On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
"Their colour is a diabolic die."  
Remember, *Christians, Negros*, black as *Cain*,  
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.