

Philosophy of Ministry

We are in the midst of a transitional time for the visible Church, in American culture in general and Presbyterianism in particular. Many mainline churches around us have fallen prey to liberalism of various types, while many evangelical churches look more like the culture than the church.

We don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future. Our job, then, is to remain faithful to him and to his vision for the church. The church must again become distinct from the world if she is to fulfill her mission (John 13:34-35).

Fifteen "Talking Points" for the Future

(Important for reformation, revitalization and church planting)

This vision for the future comes right out of the Bible and right out of the past of Presbyterianism. It is consistent with the best of our historic church life and with our Christ-mandated mission. But a new generation will have to be introduced to and embrace this vision if we are to remain a living witness for Christ and grow in vitality as a body of believers.

We seek (by brotherly persuasion, helpful publication, friendly discussion, and compelling example) to build a church that will be faithful to the following commitments: expository preaching, biblical worship, biblical and confessional theology, a biblical understanding of the Gospel, a biblical understanding of conversion, a biblical understanding of evangelism, a biblical understanding of church membership, a biblical understanding of mutual accountability in the church, a biblical understanding of church government, and a biblical view of Christian discipleship – and thus a church with a shared vision of ministry.

1. Expository Bible Preaching

2 Timothy 4:1-2 "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

Expository Bible Preaching is not a style but a principle. It's controlling concern is to expound what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hear God's Word and recover the centrality of the Word in our worship. The next generation of preachers must be trained to appreciate the difference between preaching that is Bible-based and preaching that merely uses the Bible as a starting point to discuss the matter at hand.

2. Biblical Worship

John 4:23-24 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father **in spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship **in spirit and truth**."

1 Corinthians 14:33-40 (selected) "God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. . . . If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. . . . But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

The Psalmist tells us that worship is giving unto the Lord the glory due his name (Psalm 29:1-2). But where do we find the substance of and our direction for our gathered, corporate worship? The Bible. Much that is amiss in modern worship practice would be corrected if we took for our principle of direction: "Sing the Bible, Pray the Bible, Read the Bible, Preach the Bible." We ought to strive to be sure that all that we sing is scriptural, that our prayers are saturated with scripture, that much of the word of God is read in each public service, and that the preaching here is based on the Bible. We need churches, church plants and church planters committed to a high view of public worship. This will have to be deliberately inculcated and fostered if the generations to come are going to follow in the good way.

3. Inclusive Psalmody

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing

one another with **psalms** and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

We need deliberately to re-include the psalms in our worship. “Exclusive psalmody” is the view that we should only sing psalms in our congregational praise. It is a time-honored position held by many in the reformed and presbyterian tradition, and we esteem those who do so highly. However, we also believe there is ample and important biblical reason to also sing biblically sound hymns and songs of human composition (not the least of which is the biblical imperative that the redeemed praise the Redeemer for the redemption [see Psalm 98 and Revelation 5], and that explicitly and not merely implicitly and typologically). Nevertheless, the big problem in the PCA is not advocacy for exclusive psalmody but rather the practice of exclusive hymnody (or as one chap has wryly put it “exclusive chorusody”!). What is being excluded and ignored in our circles is the psalms – which are at the heart of the worship tradition of every major historical branch of Christianity. Hence, the book of Psalms, as God's divinely inspired hymnbook, should be amply and regularly sung from, along with Scripturally sound hymns in our services.

4. Morning and Evening Worship

Exodus 20:8-10 “Remember the sabbath **day**, to **keep it holy**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God”

If we believe, with the majority of Christians in all ages (and with the Westminster Divines!), that the Old Testament Sabbath command has a weekly new covenant fulfillment in the Christian Lord's Day (and we'll argue for this under our next point), then we will believe that the **whole of that day** (following the explicit one day in seven pattern of the old covenant of grace) is to be spent in worship, deeds of mercy, necessity and witness, and rest. If that is the case, then both prudential factors and the testimony of history indicate that the best way to help the Lord's people keep the Lord's Day (as opposed to the Lord's hour or the Lord's morning, or even the Lord's Saturday night!) is to frame the first day of the week with gathered praise: morning and evening. And such is not without Biblical precedent. Sinclair Ferguson once said to me that those who wished to do away with the Lord's Day evening service “betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of the theology of Lord's Day experience.”

5. A Theology of Lord's Day Experience

Mark 2:27-28 “Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So **the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**””

Revelation 1:10 “I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**”

We need to resuscitate a high view of the Lord's Day in our circles. We understand that there will be differences in our specific practice, but the big picture and the central message needs to be displayed and trumpeted again. As J.C. Ryle bluntly put it: “As a rule there is a general flight of steps down from ‘no sabbath’ to ‘no God.’” Protestantism cannot survive without the Lord's Day, but some of our own brethren are working for its extinction with all good intentions, and our culture is obstructing and tempting our people at every turn. We want to recapture the Spirit of M'Cheyne “A well-spent sabbath we feel to be a day of heaven upon earth . . . we love to rise early on that morning, and to sit up late, that we may have a long day with God” and Baxter “What fitter day to ascend to heaven, than that on which He arose from earth, and fully triumphed over death and hell. Use your Sabbaths as steps to glory, till you have passed them all, and are there arrived.”

6. Family Worship

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

We use the designation “Family Worship” as synecdoche for the whole of family religion, and we recognize that the church today needs a revival of older principles and practice in this area too. We need to encourage

family worship (including singing, Scripture reading and prayer), along with family attendance of the corporate worship of the church. The catechisms, too, are almost lost tools that would supply antidotes to many of our current problems. A sense of the strategic role of parents in the Christian nurture of their children needs to be freshly pressed home. If the prime and main focus of our promotion of spiritual life in covenant children is on Sunday School, Youth Programs, retreats and conferences, VBS, and various other special Christian Educational emphases (as wonderful and helpful as these can be), then we will neglect the plan that God himself established for the discipleship of covenant children: godly parents living, talking and teaching the faith in the home.

7. Biblical Theology (or Westminster Calvinism)

2 Timothy 1:13-14 “Retain the standard of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.”

Have you noticed that the PCA is balkanized into sub-groups that identify themselves theologically as, respectively, “Old School,” or “Broadly Reformed,” or “TR – Truly or Thoroughly or Totally Reformed,” or “reformed with a little ‘r,’” or “Gospel-driven,” or “Sonship,” or “Liturgical Reformed,” or “Reconstructionist,” and the list goes on. Whatever happened to good old vanilla Westminster Calvinism – a warm-hearted and whole-hearted embrace of the theology, ethos and praxis of our *Confession*? One of the grand ironies of many of these sub-groups, left and right, is that they often have some significant arguments with the theology of the Confession that are part of the heart of their agenda (whether it is paedocommunion, baptismal regeneration, “Shepherdism” [justification by the twin instruments of faith and works], theonomy, anti-regulative principle, anti-federal theology, anti-Sabbatarianism, anti-WCF ethics and more). We need men who have a spirit of respect and energy for the *Confession*. As long as we merely acquiesce to the Standards, without personally embracing them as a compelling summary of biblical truth, a strengthening destructive diversity will continue to emerge.

8. Shared Vision for Evangelism/Church Planting/Missions

2 Timothy 4:5 “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, **do the work of an evangelist**, fulfill your ministry.”

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 “. . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

We need a body of men who love God’s word, who embrace sound Reformed theology and who have a zeal for souls. We need men who have heard and are endeavoring to respond faithfully to Paul’s call to Timothy, who have Paul’s twin attributes of heat and light and share his energy for the work of evangelism and church establishment. Men who have as a genuine aim in their ministry the drawing in and building up of the Lord’s people in response to Jesus’ commission and promise. Bonar said “We take for granted that the object of the Christian ministry is to convert sinners and edify the body of Christ.” Durham adds: “This is the great design of all preaching, to bring them within the covenant who are without, and to make those who are within the covenant to walk suitably to it. And as these are never separated on the Lord’s side, so should they never be separated on our side.”

9. Ministerial Piety

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be

strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Piety is “the life of God in the soul of man” (to borrow Scougal’s phrase). I do not mean that true spirituality is merely soulish or disembodied, James 1-2 will correct that misunderstanding quickly, as will Romans 12:1-2. But in the Bible, true religion flows from the heart. Evangelicals used to understand that. But one does not have to be a sleuth to detect a marked deficiency of piety in the ministry of the church in our own time. We can remember giants in the land, and we feel ourselves midgets. Indeed, for some, the very word “piety” is held in great suspicion as the vestigia of a kind of pietistic revivalism that we are better off without. And yet Calvin himself viewed the *Institutes*, the *Institutes* mind you, as a “sum of piety” rather than a *summa theologia*. We need to foster personal piety in the ministry. We need to recognize our own spiritual poverty and challenge one another to strive for devotion in love to God and experience of the love of Christ.

10. A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel and Evangelism

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”

2 Timothy 4:5 “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, **do the work of an evangelist**, fulfill your ministry.”

The Gospel is the heart of Christianity. Yet many today are confused about what it is! Some view the Gospel as something that makes people’s lives better (only partially true), some think the Gospel is “God loves you,” (again, only partially true), but the Biblical Gospel is that God loves sinners at the cost of his Son. Anything less than this rich, full, biblical presentation of the Gospel will produce spurious conversions. The whole truth is that we are dead in sin and in need of spiritual life, and God graciously grants that life by his Son - that is Good News! We must tell the next generation this wonderful truth and pray that they imbibe it.

How someone shares the Gospel is closely related to how he understands the Gospel. We need to be more concerned to know and teach the Gospel itself than to teach people methods and strategies to share it. Indeed, what we want our people to be excited about is the Gospel itself. Biblically, evangelism is presenting the Good News freely and trusting God to convert people. We must cultivate a Gospel-embracing and Gospel-sharing people, if we are to be faithful in the days to come.

11. A Biblical Understanding of the Law and Sanctification

Romans 3:31 “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”

Philippians 2:12-13 “. . . work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.”

It is essential to healthy discipleship that a Christian understand something of the ongoing role of the law in the Christian life (the third use of the law) and the grace dynamic of the Holy Spirit’s uniting of us to Christ by faith. Neither of these things should be set over against one another or de-emphasized in the balance of our instruction on Christian growth. Sanctification is both active and passive, both monergistic and (asymmetrically) synergistic, both by the standard of the law and by the power of the Spirit, both responsive to biblical imperatives and dependent on the grand indicative of union with Christ, both inward and outward, both individual and corporate. Evangelicalism stills tends to present theories of sanctification in one of two equally erroneous camps: legalism and passivism. Neither does justice to the richness of New Testament teaching on the subject. Neither is Confessionally sound. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey” is still a good summarization of the emphases of a life that

flows out of union and communion with Christ.

12. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion and Discipleship

1 Timothy 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion should not be equated with or stereotyped as an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself by its fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion. Our people must have experienced such a real conversion and have started down the road of understanding it biblically if we are to be a healthy church.

A pervasive concern with church growth exists today - not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovered for today, true discipleship would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world. But again, this radical concept must be taught and propagated to another generation if a vital church life is to flourish in PCA churches in the third millennium.

13. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership and Discipline

Hebrews 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Matthew 28:19-20 (selected) "Go therefore and make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . ."

Acts 2:42-45 "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."

Membership must be the reflection of a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service or it is worthless. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home. But we live and minister in a day of unparalleled lack of commitment, so we must restore a high view of what it means to be a church member.

When we are united to Christ by faith, we are united to all who are united to Christ by faith. This mutual accountability is visibly manifested in the way we care for, look after, encourage and challenge one another to the life of godliness in the local church. The whole church has an interest in the spiritual health of every individual member. Especially church officers, and especially elders as shepherds should seek to promote true Christian discipleship and mutual accountability among the flock. We should long to be a godly and close Spiritual family in the PCA, but this will not happen unless we work at it.

14. A Biblical Understanding of Church Government

Ephesians 4:8-13 (selected) " . . ."WHEN HE [Christ] ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." . . . And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

Luke and Paul both thought church government mattered. Luke, three times in the book of Acts, connects biblical church government and discipline with church growth and health. Paul tells us that Jesus gave officers (and therefore church government) to the church as a gift necessary for our edification. Yet many are indifferent to the matter of church government and order. We need unapologetic presbyterians planting churches and training officers, if we are going to see church health and growth the way the New

Testament anticipates. But we live in a place and time that doesn't know or care much about church government. Furthermore, most of our members are totally unfamiliar with historic presbyterian polity. We ignore commitment in this area at our peril.

15. A Reformed Worldview

Acts 17:28 “. . . in Him we live and move and exist . . .”

2 Corinthians 10:5 “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,”

2 Peter 3:15 “. . . sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”

We need ministers and members who think Christianly about all of life. Unfortunately, many who talk about worldview today are fuzzy about what its contents might be. The following sorts of elements are essential components to an authentically Reformed worldview: an unequivocal commitment to the authority of Scripture (including affirmation of the biblical concept of revelation, and of inspiration, inerrancy, authority, perspicuity, and sufficiency); the sovereign, Triune God as creator and providential ruler of the World (including affirmation of the creator/creature distinction, implications of the doctrine of the Trinity all the loci of theology, especially philosophical theology, theology proper, Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology, special creation, God's continuing involvement with His creation, a Theocentric perspective on all life, space and time, non-neutrality, Kingdom of God); the historical reality of the Fall and the sinfulness of man (including affirmation of the noetic effects of sin, the reality of Satan and the forces of evil, and mankind's need for reconciliation and redemption); the sovereign Grace of God in salvation (including affirmation of the priority and supremacy of Grace in redemption, consequent humility and gratitude of the redeemed, and resultant assurance of salvation); and the nature of the Church (including affirmation of its unity and diversity, and visibility and invisibility).