Theology Matters

A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry Vol 14 No 4 • Sep/Oct 2008

The Board members responsible for publishing *Theology Matters* were greatly distressed by several of the actions taken by the 218th General Assembly and we will be speaking out clearly against the false doctrines and blatant mistakes being promoted in the PC(USA) by some of its leaders. (Articles on p. 12-15 critique Amendment B being sent to the presbyteries for a vote that would replace the clear, biblical ordination standards in the *Book of Order* with vague language that includes no specific standards.)

However, we will not leave the denomination, nor will we encourage others to leave because that is the wrong response. After much prayer and consideration, we are firmly convinced that leaving the PC(USA) sends the wrong message and leaves far too many of God's precious children without a defense and without proper leadership. Therefore, we are committed to remaining within the PC(USA) and working from within for the much needed reform. We trust God's power to bring new life to his church and we seek to have the same love for the lost that took Christ to the cross. See our new regular feature on p. 16, "The Reformation of the Church."

The Theology in the Liturgy

by Simon Chan

Theologically, there are two ways of understanding the liturgy. One way is to see worship as essentially the expression of a peculiar kind of human experience commonly known as *religious* experience. To the extent that our religious experience changes with the times, to that extent our liturgy needs to be revised to reflect the new circumstances. This view may be called, to use Lindbeck's categories, the experiential-expressive theory. [1] If this is how the liturgy is understood, it is hardly surprising that many Christians today seem to think that when it comes to the liturgy or "order of service" the critical question is how it could be creatively constructed to meet the needs of worshippers. The second way may be called the revelational approach. Worship is essentially the response to the revelation of the triune God; it cannot be constructed arbitrarily, but must be shaped by the *giveness* of revelation. The shape of the liturgy is determined by the shape of that revelation. There are, therefore, theological norms to be observed in the construction of the liturgy. The liturgy is true to the extent that it faithfully embodies the revelation of the triune God.

In this paper I have presupposed the revelational approach as the only appropriate way of dealing with the theology in the liturgy. For one cannot properly speak of a primary theology (*theologia prima*) without

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presupposing the prior action of God, as we shall see below. It is this primary theology that is reflected in the liturgy. The liturgy in turn aids and guides further theological reflection (secondary theology). This dialectical process is summed up in the phrase *lex orandi lex credendi*.

Lex orandi lex credendi

Protestants tend to see the liturgy (if there is a liturgy) as a product of the church's theology. In other words, the rule of faith (*lex credendi*) is the beginning of liturgical production. The *lex credendi* precedes the *lex orandi*. There is a sense in which this is true. Any attempt on the part of the church to construct its common or corporate prayers must ensure that they faithfully reflect the church's basic beliefs; otherwise, the liturgy lacks theological integrity.

The formula *lex orandi lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of faith) however, points to a more primary process at work. Before we could think about God and even before we could worship God, there is a prior action on the part of God who makes worship and theological reflection possible. God takes the initiative to reveal himself, and in that self-revelation God also calls those to whom that revelation is given. Worship is the response of those called. It is this giveness of revelation that constitutes the primary reality which must shape all subsequent liturgical developments.

The Christian tradition recognizes the shape of this revelation to be essentially Trinitarian. It begins with the one true God of Israel, whose faithfulness to the covenant with his people culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit ("in the fullness of time"). The coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the church is to elicit a response from the people of God: "Because we are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal 4:6). This response that recognizes God as "our Father" (the Paternoster) is the foundation of Christian worship. Worship, therefore, may be defined as the Spirit-inspired response of the church to the revelation of the triune God in which praise and adoration is rendered *to* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit. There is, then, in the very act of responding to revelation an implicit acknowledgment of a theology of a most primary kind, that is, the knowledge of who God is. It is this primary theology that finds expression in the liturgical celebration, so that the liturgy could be described as, in Alexander Schmemann's words, the "epiphany of the Church's faith."[2] The works of Schmemann have been especially influential in focusing attention on the primary theology of the liturgy.[3]

If the liturgy schematizes the revelation-response dynamic, then it is not the case that only certain portions of the liturgy (such as the proclamation of the word) are more theological than others; rather, the *whole* liturgy is theology. This is why the whole liturgy could be said to be constitutive of the church. The idea is implied in the Reformation teaching that the church is constituted by word and sacrament which are the basic components of the liturgy. They are what make the church the church. In the faithful observance of word and sacrament, the church is actualizing itself as church. Further, if we look at Luther's seven "marks" of the church, namely, the preached word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys (church discipline), church offices, worship, and cross-bearing, one will not fail to notice that they are directly or indirectly linked to the liturgy. In fact, all the "core practices" of the church grow out of the liturgy.[4] Luther describes these marks as "the great holy possession (*Heilthum*) whereby the Holy Spirit effects in us a daily sanctification and vivification in Christ." In the medieval church, a *Heilthum* is a miracle-working relic. Thus, the marks are the means by which the Holy Spirit transforms the church. The liturgy always involves a "synergy": The church carries out the liturgy, but it is also the Holy Spirit who is at work, just as the "Abba, Father" is as much our prayer as the Spirit's response to the Father.

The liturgy is a life-transforming practice because it is the primary locus where the Holy Spirit is at work to craft the ecclesial community. It is there that we encounter the living God. It is there that theology is experienced as a lived reality. In worship, we are not thinking *about* our experience of God (secondary theology) but encountering an epiphany (primary theology). This article seeks to recover some important aspects of the living theology encountered in the liturgy.

The Trinitarian Persons

As I have already noted, the liturgy is simply an attempt to be faithful to the Trinitarian revelation. The liturgy enacts a Trinitarian theology and draws us into a vital relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is why Christian worship in all the major Christian traditions is thoroughly Trinitarian. Protestant churches are at least familiar with the doxology ("Praise God from whom all blessings flow") and the *Gloria Patri* ("Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost"). In the Eastern liturgy, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are far more frequently named than in the Western liturgy. It begins with "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The *Trisagion* (Thrice Holy) is used repeatedly in different parts of the liturgy:

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.
Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.
Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.
Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.

In the Roman liturgy, a regular hymn of adoration to the Trinity is the *Gloria in Excelsis*. It begins with "Glory to God in the highest." The Father is called "Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father." Next Jesus Christ is praised: "the only Son of the Father," the one "who takes away the sins of the world" and is "seated at the right hand of the Father." The hymn ends by specifying the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

For you alone are the holy one
You alone are the Lord
You alone are the most high, Jesus Christ
With the Holy Spirit
In the glory of God the Father.

The Trinitarian economy is most clearly expressed in the Eucharistic prayers. Although the Western churches, both Catholic and Protestant, have multiplied the number of Eucharistic prayers in recent years, they all follow a basic pattern. It begins with prayer to the Father whose works of creation and sending his Son for the world's salvation are recounted. This is followed by the remembrance of the work of Jesus Christ culminating in the words of institution. The Spirit's coming is invoked over the bread and wine.

At every turn, the liturgy directs our thoughts to the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ whom Jesus calls his Father. The liturgical tradition has followed Jesus' own practice by using Father as the primary term for addressing God in prayer. The central prayer of the church begins with "Our Father." It is most appropriate because we are "sons in the Son" (*filii in Filio*). In modern times, however, some have tried to substitute these with supposedly more inclusive terms, such as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. There are serious implications with these substitutions. They imply that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are descriptions of the roles they play and therefore could be replaced by other functional equivalents. But the term Father is not primarily a function but refers to the person who distinguishes himself from the Son. "Father" is the name of the person who is revealed by and distinguished from the one who identifies himself as the Son. In other words, Father and Son are meant to highlight the fact that the persons of God must be understood first and foremost in their relation to each other and only secondarily in relation to their functions. A person is defined in relation to another person. Father is Father in relation to the Son. God as person can only be explained in relation to God, not in relation to what he does in the world. There are therefore no functional equivalents for the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit since they are "a way of being" of the three persons.[5] According to John Zizioulas, the very being of the Trinity must be explored not in terms of the question *what* is it but *how* is it, that is to say, not according to their "substance" or "nature" but according to their "mode of being" or personhood. The person is an ontological category and cannot be reduced to ethical or psychological categories which may only be aspects of personhood. The ontology of person (and hence of communion) is at the center of Christian theology. God's relation to humans, too, must be understood in ontological terms: humans are "modes of being," a way of relating to God and each other. That is what it meant by calling them persons. An ethical or psychological conception of human beings is inadequate. Yet, according to Zizioulas, this is what has happened in Protestantism. It steers away from Cartesian rationalism but it fails to arrive at a full ontology of persons:

> By dismantling all ontological connection between God and the world, Protestantism marked a departure from the intellectual path to faith [Cartesianism] and its replacement by a psycho-logical or 'existential' approach: faith is to be understood in terms of *trust* [Lutheran] rather than of rational conviction and persuasion, or as response and obedience to the Word of God [Barthian]. In none of these cases does the eucharistic ethos seem to play a decisive role as a way of faith.[6]

By "eucharistic ethos" Zizioulas means an attitude of grateful acknowledgement of the "gift of being," i.e. the acknowledgment of God's very Person—the Other—"and our own existence as a gift of the Other." Eucharist presupposes an *ontological* communion and otherness of persons. The faith generated by the "eucharistic ethos" is not merely psychological certainty or ethical resolve but is linked to "personal causality"; that is to say, it takes the stance that "whatever exists or happens is given to us by *a person*."[7] Thus faith is primarily a "way of being" between persons. Although it may produce rational or psychological conviction it cannot be reduced to either.

This insight which we owe largely to the Cappadocian fathers has far-reaching implications. From the persons of the Trinity (who are what they are in relation to each

other), we understand what it is to be human persons. Humans are who they are not because of certain personal capacities (such as rationality, intentionality, freedom, etc.), but because they are ultimately related to the Trinity as *imago Dei*. That is to say, humans, by being from God and made in God's image, are truly persons by virtue of their relation to the triune persons, regardless of what capacities they might possess or lack. When persons are defined according to certain qualities or to an abstract human nature, a dangerous distinction inevitably emerges: some human beings will be regarded as less than persons if they are deficient in or lose certain "personal" qualities: the fetus is only a potential person, the comatose is no longer a person; the Alzheimer's sufferer or mentally retarded is not a full person, etc. Abortion and euthanasia then become perfectly legitimate options. Christianity rejects these rationalizations because basic to its conception of the human being is not "human nature" but personhood based on the inextricable relation to God as persons.

It is in the liturgy culminating in the Eucharistic celebration that we come to know the truth that God is persons-in-communion and we are persons-in-communion with God and each other.

The Monarchy of the Father

The liturgy not only affirms personhood as the ultimate reality in God, it further specifies the way in which the persons of the Trinity are ontologically *ordered*. Christian theology speaks of the generation of the Son and the procession or spiration of the Holy Spirit *from the Father*. In the Eastern church the Father is the One "without origin" who "causes" the personal otherness of the Son and the Spirit, and it uses the phrase "the monarchy of the Father" to express this idea. The phrase faithfully reflects the New Testament data where only the Father is explicitly referred to as God and is always the initiator, the one who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is a certain "order" in which the three Persons move. Zizioulas describes their movement in the following way:

> It is clearly a movement with *personal initiative*. It is not that the Three, as it were, moved simultaneously as 'persons in communion'; it is the *one*, the Father, that 'moved'…to threeness." [8]

Only a consistent doctrine of the monarchy of the Father helps to preserve the ultimacy of divine personhood. But this has only been partially realized in the Western tradition. Traditional Western conceptions, while accepting the priority of the Father, have not given the doctrine full play, first, because of the insertion of the f*ilioque* into the Creed, suggesting that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* and therefore not from the Father alone. Second, the oneness of God is identified with the one substance that the three persons share, in which case the divine *nature* and not persons becomes the ultimate reality. Many modern Western theologians, such as Colin Gunton, Thomas Torrance, and especially Jürgen Moltmann, have also rejected the concept of the monarchy of the Father, perhaps driven by modern egalitarian interests. They have instead argued for the *simultaneous* "co-emergence" of the Three, conceiving of the communion of the triune persons as one of mutual co-inherence. The one God refers to the *unity* of the persons. Relationality itself thus becomes the ultimate reality.[9] The problem with these conceptions of oneness is that they fail to give a proper account of the nature of Christian worship. When Jews and Christians pray to the one God, they are not praying to a "substance" or a "relationship" but the person who in the Christian liturgy is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is seen in ancient doxologies where praise is rendered *to* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit. It was only later, in order to combat Arianism, that the doxology was changed to a coordinated formula: "to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." Further, all ancient Eucharistic prayers are addressed to God the Father who sent his Son, and in the epiclesis the prayer is again to the Father to send the Holy Spirit.

Despite the explicit rejection of monarchy, modern Eucharistic prayers continue to follow the ancient monarchical pattern. We see this, e.g., in *Common Worship* (2000) of the Church of England. This shows that in prayer we cannot avoid what we know in our heart of hearts to be the case: the One to whom we address our prayer is God the Father. Here is one clear illustration of the ancient principle that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi*. We do well to follow the rule of praying even if we are tempted to *think* otherwise!

The foregoing discussion of the way the liturgy reveals the *persons* of the Trinity and the *order* in which the persons are related (monarchy of the Father) should forewarn us against hasty attempts at liturgical revisions because its language offends our modern sensibilities. Instead of asking how the liturgy could be remade to fit our religious needs, perhaps we need to re-examine our own religious experience. Perhaps it is *we*, not the liturgy that need to undergo a conversion!

The Corporate Nature of the Liturgy

The liturgy not only reveals or conveys a primary theology of the Trinity, it also reveals and reinforces a primary ecclesiology. In the liturgical celebration we are made aware of being the church, the corporate body of Christ. The liturgy hardly uses the singular noun or

pronoun when referring to the worshippers. We enter into communion with the triune God who is persons-in-communion as members of the body of Christ through baptism. We are no longer self-referencing individuals (the Cartesian "I"), but one body in Christ indwelled by the Spirit who prays in us the "Abba, Father." This does not mean that each person is not personally active and involved. As a matter of fact, each person is called, in the words of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, to "active participation." When one is baptized into Christ, one does not become a nameless member of a herd; rather, one is given a new name, signifying a new and unique identity. At the same time, we are, in Paul's language, "members one of another" (Eph 4:25, AV), i.e. persons-in-communion.

The ecclesial body is not a collectivity of individuals seeking to find their personal self-fulfillment at worship. Here is where the ancient liturgy challenges the so-called "contemporary" service which often shifts the center of worship from God to self. The "I" dominates the service. Consider the following: "I worship you, almighty God, there is none like you/I worship you, O prince of peace/That is what I long to do/I give you praise, for you are my righteousness/I worship you, almighty God, there is none like you." What this song conveys about worship is that it is the activity of an individual. Biblical titles for God are used: almighty God, prince of peace. But this God is there *for me*: "you are *my* righteousness." Worship is not only individualistically conceived, it seldom focuses objectively on who God is but how good God is to me or how good I feel about Him. Take this song: "I love you Lord/And I lift my voice/To worship you/O my soul, rejoice/Take joy, my king, in what you hear/ Let me be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear." The message, translated into more prosaic, less sentimental terms is: Lord, I am worshipping you, and you must be very happy with what I'm doing.

The liturgy reminds us that as we are gathered together "in Jesus' name" we are not there as individuals doing our own thing and experiencing God. Rather, we are the *qahal*, the gathering of God's people responding to God's call. The song of adoration to God, so well epitomized in the *Gloria in Excelsis*, objectively declares who God is. It is the song of the whole people of God. To God the Father we sing "*We* worship you, *we* give you thanks, *we* praise you for your glory." To Jesus Christ we pray, "You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on *us*… You are seated at the right hand of the Father, receive *our* prayer…." Similarly, most liturgical prayers are in the plural, seldom in the singular. The rare exceptions are the prayer of confession and the prayer of humble access before communion in the new Roman Missal. The latter has: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed." Before the awesome Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ, each person kneels as a responsible member of his Body, engaged at the highest level of "active participation."

The whole liturgy is one objective declaration. The church not only declares the glory of God, it also declares the word. After each reading of Scripture the reader declares: "This is the word of the Lord," and the congregation responds: "Thanks be to God." At the communion, we declare the "mystery of the faith": Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. In the Creed, we declare the faith of the church. The liturgy confronts us with the sheer fact of who God is and the great work of redemption accomplished in Christ. When confronted with the mystery of the gospel, our only appropriate response is one of thanksgiving and gratitude. In these declarations we are practicing and imbibing a primary theology of grace: God owes us nothing, but we owe him everything. Everything is given. Even in our offerings which include the Eucharistic offerings of bread and wine, we acknowledge: "Everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you and of your own do we give you" (Alternate Service Book).

The Church in the Liturgy

In the liturgy we learn what it means to truly give God the glory. In fact, the word "glorify" is virtually synonymous with worship. In glorifying God we are practicing the highest purpose of human existence. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Worship has no higher end than the acknowledgement of God as God. We are, in short, learning what some liturgical theologians describe as the "aimlessness" of worship.

> In the liturgy man is no longer concerned with himself; his gaze is directed towards God. In it man is not so much intended to edify himself as to contemplate God's majesty. The liturgy means that the soul exists in God's presence, originates in Him, lives in a world of divine realities, truths, mysteries and symbols, and really lives its true, characteristic and fruitful life.[10]

In the language of Paul, the ultimate end of our existence is "to the praise of his [God's] glory" (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). The liturgy teaches us that we worship because God is who he is. We do not worship in order to gain something for ourselves; rather, we worship because God is simply to be acknowledged as God, no more or less. When worship is driven by ideologies or pragmatism, it becomes a tool to serve our own agenda. Then we begin to feel the need to make worship

"relevant" to certain interest groups. But to realize that the church exists for God's glory entails an ecclesiology very different from an instrumentalist view. The instrumentalist view says that the church exists to serve the world, however that service is defined: to promote peace and justice, to feed the hungry, to proclaim the gospel. All these are important works of the church, but they are not the church's *raison d'etre*. The church's ultimate purpose is to praise God. Frank Senn has well brought out the far-reaching implication of this truth for the church:

> If the idea of living "to the praise of God's glory" seems too vaporous to modern ears, that is our fault, not the apostle's. Perhaps we need to heed his warning to "Give up living like the pagans with their good-for-nothing notions" (Eph. 4:17). Perhaps the idea of living "to the praise of God's glory" is opaque to us also because we have reversed the relationship between the church and the world that is spelled out in the Ephesian letter. We think that the church exists for the sake of the world, but that is not true. The world, indeed the whole universe, exists for the church…. The world exists as the arena in which the gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord of all, can be proclaimed, and as a source of fresh recruits for the royal priesthood of the redeemed world. [11]

This is an astounding vision. We are accustomed to thinking of the church as an instrument to serve God's purpose in the world, a purpose vaguely expressed in the phrase "the kingdom of God." We are often told that the church has a mission in the world to promote "kingdom values." But if the world is meant to glorify God, it means that the world does not discover its end within itself. The world is meant to find its fulfillment in the church. The church is the end for which the world was made. The church is bigger than the world! It is bigger in the sense that it is meant to embody the final order of things which embraces the new heavens and the new earth. The church inhabits both heaven and earth. In the liturgical celebration, we are joined by saints in heaven and other heavenly hosts in rendering to God "songs of everlasting praise." In the Roman and Orthodox liturgies, the dead are included in the intercession. The reach of the church is farther than the present creation. In singing praises to the triune God, the church is made aware of faint echoes of her song in the far reaches of the heavens.

The liturgy gives us a vision of the church that could only inspire confidence despite its present weaknesses and dismal failures. There is much cynicism today towards the church both outside and within it. Yet, if we have a true liturgical vision of the church, we could say with Augustine, "The church may be a whore, but she is still our mother."

The Liturgy and the Glory of God

The liturgy that declares the glory of God also specifies something of the *content* of the divine glory. When Moses asked God, "Show me your glory" (Ex 33:18), God's answer to Moses was to proclaim the glory of Yahweh in a highly paradoxical manner:

> Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. *Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation*" (Ex 34:3-7).

The Lord both forgives iniquity and judges wickedness. The fullness of God's glory cannot be properly expressed except in these paradoxical terms. As Rudolf Otto's classic *The Idea of the Holy* has shown, God's revelation always comes to us in the form of a paradox: *fascinans et tremendum*. God's presence both attracts (*fascinans*) and fills us with fear (*tremendum*). He is both loving and holy. "Behold…the *kindness* and *severity* of God" (Rom 11:22, NASB). God is both "God with us" (Immanuel) and "Wholly Other," dwelling in "unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:16).

The liturgy is full of such paradoxes. [12] The adoration of the triune God is juxtaposed to the confession of sin (cf. Isa 6:1-5). At baptism the baptizand is both buried and raised to new life. Sunday straddles the old and new creation. It is the eighth day, the day of the resurrection and the beginning of the new creation, and also the first day, the day of the old creation. The Eucharist anticipates the joyful Marriage Supper of the Lamb, yet it comes with a warning: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats…" (1 Cor 11:28). The liturgy captures this paradox most succinctly at the invitation to the Holy Meal: "Holy things for holy people." Gordon Lathrop observes that the words of welcome also carry an implicit warning: Holy things are meant for holy people.

One danger of modern worship forms, whether "traditional" or "contemporary," is the reduction of this paradox of the divine glory into something more agreeable with our modern sentiments. In the contemporary worship one usually gets the impression

that God is intimate and cuddly, always there to meet my needs when I call. Similar sentiments can be found in the modern liturgies of mainline Protestant churches. Compare the following two prayers of confession from the United Methodist Church liturgy in 1965 and 1989 respectively:

> Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men: We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous to us. Have mercy upon us….[13]

> Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy.[13]

In the 1965 prayer the language of sin and the sense of God's majesty and holiness are quite emphatic. In the 1989 prayer these are conspicuously muted. The word "sin" is not used; rather, the confession is mainly about failure to obey, hurting a loving God and neglecting "our neighbors" and "the needy." The transcendence and immanence of God in the old prayer ("Almighty God, Father) is replaced by a picture of God that is decidedly immanent and friendly ("Merciful God").

Examples like these could be multiplied. But we do not get the full impact of this theological dilution unless we actually attend a modern liturgical service of a mainline church in the West. [15] The overall impression that one gets is that God is a nice guy who would let us get away with almost anything except, perhaps, when we happen to use politically incorrect language.

The real tragedy in modern worship whether charismatic, evangelical or mainline Protestant is that the glory of God has become shrouded by human attempts at constructing new forms and revising old forms without taking serious cognizance of the revelation of the triune God as found in Scripture and embodied in the liturgical traditions of the ancient church. When this happens, there is no more true worship. For how can we *glorify* the God whose glory we have corrupted? Liturgical revision is necessary as the church encounters new situations and as language changes over time. But we can only do it faithfully if we first recover the primary theology of the ancient liturgy.

[1] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984).
[2] *Church, World and Mission* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 135, 142-43.
[3] E.g., *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2000); *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1996).
[4] See Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, "Christian Ethics as Informed Prayer," in *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 3-12.
[5] John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London: T. and T. Clark, 2006).
[6] Ibid., p. 98.
[7] Ibid., pp. 90, 98.
[8] Ibid., p. 131.
[9] Ibid., pp. 134-37.
[10] Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada Lane (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 95-96.
[11] Frank Senn, *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 63.
[12] See Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
[13] *Book of Worship for Church and Home* (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House, 1965), p. 17.
[14] "Word and Table: Service 1" in the *United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 8.
[15] I had had the opportunity of visiting a number of different mainline denominational churches on extended visits to the U. S. and Canada over a number of years. The latest was during my sabbatical in Pittsburgh from January to June 2007.

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The Reformation Marks of the Church

by Jerry Andrews

The Right Preaching and Hearing of the Word 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

The year is 1520. We are parishioners of the Great Cathedral in Zurich, Switzerland. Our language is German, and we've just heard it powerfully spoken from the pulpit again this morning. Ulrich Zwingli, our new pastor, the People's Priest, has been preaching at us in a way that is transforming.

It seems that much is newly liable to change. It was started three years ago, we're told, by an Augustinian monk when he nailed 95 theses on a door in Wittenberg. The news spread by rumor, the ideas by preaching. Now it has come here by way of the proclamations of Pastor Zwingli.

We can see the changes all around us, especially within the cathedral. The stained glass is gone, the icons removed, the organ disassembled. What remains is a space simplified so as not to distract from the preaching. The word read, explained, heard and obeyed is now the measure of our formation. We are being reformed.

It is neither the first nor last time the church will be reformed. The Apostle Paul wrote to a very new church at Corinth in the middle of the first century for the purpose of their reformation. Abuse of the Lord's Supper was the occasion. In their brief history they had perverted the purpose of communion with the persistent divisions within their fellowship. The Apostle, who was himself, it seems, received well by only some of the congregation, wrote a letter to them in the hopes of correcting their error.

Further argumentation by the Apostle in an argumentative environment would not by itself be a help. An appeal to his own authority, considerable though it was, would be insufficient. A higher authority, a final arbiter, would be introduced.

With the simple words, *"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you …"* the Apostle claimed his words of judgment and correction to the Corinthians are *"from the Lord,"* and his work is to transmit that of which he is himself a recipient. What follows is as long a quote of the Savior as the Apostle makes in all his letters. And the letters of the Apostle, including this one to the Corinthians, are a proclamation of the word; the reading of the letter in Corinth (always aloud in the ancient world) would be its hearing. Rightly done, not only would the Corinthian errors be corrected but the assembly would be, for all its continuing faults, a true church of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle presumes and practices that the word, rightly preached and heard, would assist and define the reformation of the Corinthian church and that the word, rightly preached and heard, would mark the recognition of the church.

Zwingli presumed and practiced the same in Zurich.

The abuses of the sacraments were in 1520 again an occasion of controversy and division. Proposed amendment of those current abuses by appreciation of and appeal to the word of the Lord in the preaching of the reformers and in the obedient hearing of the reformed was central to the work of reformation.

Beyond the right preaching and hearing of the word to correct current abuses, was the recognition that the right preaching and hearing of the word was itself a mark of the church. Abuses in many areas of church life were frequent, persistent, and, one is tempted to say, almost normative in the church whether first or sixteenth or any century. But what is important, the reformers argued, is that the word be given full sway in the correction of those abuses always. That is how we may know, however disordered its common life may be, that that church is …well is, a church.

Some churches had progressed far on the path of reformation from centuries of abuse in a brief three years leading up to 1520; some less so; some had not begun in earnest at all or gave any promise of beginning. The question arose among the reformed and reforming concerning the ecclesiastical status of those churches which remained unreformed, especially so concerning those which resisted the reformation. Were they churches at all? The ever widening distance from one congregation to another in practices, worship, and doctrines intensified the anxiety in the hearts of many that what some may

call a church might be no church at all if it remained persistent in its abuses and resistant to amendment.

Zwingli, as the other reformers in due time, would need to answer the question: What marks the true church of Christ?

The first answer given by the reformers was the right preaching and hearing of the word. It is not meant to be an aspirational or constitutional standard as are the Nicene marks—one holy catholic apostolic. It is a minimal standard. If absent, a church does not exist; if present, there is a church. The church present may be an unreformed church, it may be an errant church, it may not be much of a church but, it is not to be doubted, it is a church if in it the word is rightly preached and heard.

This initial preference for discovery of the work of the word when deciding the ecclesiastical status of any entity claiming to be a church was justified by this logic: the word is the word of Christ—the apostles are his apostles, the prophets are his prophets—where the word is rightly preached and heard, Christ's own and Christ's word is present, and where Christ's own and Christ's word is present, Christ is present, and where Christ is present, there is the church.

The reformers announced their commitment to this mark of the church—the right preaching and hearing of the word—in their confessions. Hear this quote from the Second Helvetic (Swiss) Confession written by Heinrich Bullinger, Pastor Zwingli's successor at our church in Zurich.

> …we teach that the true church is that in which the signs or marks of the true church are to be found, especially the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God as it was delivered to us in the books of the prophets and the apostles, which all lead us unto Christ, who said in the Gospel: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life. A stranger they do not follow, but they flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (Second Helvetic 5.134)

May the right preaching and hearing of the word mark our church as true.

The Sacraments Administered According to Christ's Institution I Corinthians 11: 17- 22

The year is 1540. We are parishioners of the refugee church in Strasburg, France. Our language is French and we hear it preached daily by our pastor, Jean Calvin.

The reformation of the church is well underway now. But it has had its troubles. Our pastor, a great leader of this reformation, had served in the Cathedral Church in Geneva, Switzerland. That town had continued internal disagreements on the direction and pace of the reformation and sometimes showed signs of reversing its gains. Pastor Calvin had been dismissed and had come back to his homeland France, and begun as our pastor.

Strasburg, like Geneva, had many refugees. Reformed and unreformed parts of Europe are polarizing with the consequent displacement of many people. Our congregation has refugees from all over France, and Western Europe. Many have come here because of the growing reputation of our pastor. His publications are many; his reforms are seminal for other churches in other towns; his influence increases.

A question is asked often of him. What marks the church as a church of God? Refugees wondered out loud about the places, and the churches in those places, from which they had fled. Pastor Calvin would neither dismiss as false the congregations which were unreformed or were reforming according to principles other than those of his teaching, nor would he unquestioningly grant the status of church to any gathering that claimed the designation, even if it had long been known as such even, indeed, if it had once been such. The church had marks by which, in her visible forms, she could be seen and known. The first of these marks—the right preaching and hearing of the word—was well developed and practiced throughout the reformation. A second mark always accompanied it — the administration of the sacraments according to the institution of Christ.

The Apostle Paul had seen the sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered according to some other institution than that of Christ and had insisted on its immediate amendment. Their unreformed pagan ways had made the celebration of the Lord's Supper a source of death rather than life for themselves.

Corinth was at once both wealthy and full of slaves, sophisticated and bawdy, characterized by life and death, and, by first century standards, cosmopolitan and quite happy with itself. So too was the church of Corinth. Paul wrote more often with more words to this church than any other.

After congratulating them on whatever he could find in whatever area of their common life he could find it, he addressed their abuses of the Lord's Supper. *"I do not commend you in these matters. I can not."*

One might ask, what can go so wrong with the administration of the sacraments—Lord's Supper or

Baptism—to deserve such attention and severe judgment of the Apostle? The church at Corinth came together regularly at the time of the Lord's Supper, it seems, and accentuated their many and deep divisions. Partisanship, fierce and sustained in the congregation, had entered the fellowship even at the time of coming together to celebrate their union with Christ, and with one another. The factions may be prelude to the clarifying of the true and the truth, the Apostle suggests, but divisiveness at the table is altogether without justification.

The most obvious illustration of this is that economic inequities within the congregation, (the result of both the presence of a remarkably wide gap between rich and poor in Corinthian society, as pronounced in this city as anywhere else in the empire, and the absence of any parallel practice to the broad and generous sharing of resources and needs as in the church in Jerusalem) was intentionally highlighted at meal time. Rather than overcome the gap, at least for this most holy of meals, or even attempt to diminish it by hiding the painful knowledge of the inequity, the wealthy members insisted on calling attention to inequity by conspicuous consumption in the presence of their humbler fellow congregants.

The Apostle, with the tone of disbelief makes the description the charge, *"one goes hungry and another becomes drunk."* The rebuke is harsh by means of its ridicule, "*What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?*" And the cross examination is withering, "*Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"* Had they really been proud of this? Had they really expected the Apostle to approve? Were they so far off the mark that they had offered this to the Apostle for his commendation? "*What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!"*

What follows is the simple appeal in soft confident tones to the words of Christ by recalling the manner in which Christ first instituted the sacrament. It is the Apostle's longest quotation of the Savior known to us. In this moment and manner the two marks of the church are so approximate as to be seen at once—the right preaching and hearing of the word (that is, the deference of the Apostle to the word of Christ), and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution (Christ's *"Do this"*).

Pastor Calvin and the other reformers had argued for a Lord's Supper stripped of its many many medieval complexities which had (they believed wittingly) divided those wealthy (mistakenly thought to be so) in the things of God (namely the clergy) from the humbler fellow congregants who hungered for a visible reminder and means of God's grace that they might live. The distant and unapproachable altar of the Mass would be amended and replaced by the proximate table of the fellowship of the people of God who come—sinners one and all, without distinction—to where a simple meal would be truly shared. Shared with each other, but what is more, shared with Christ.

Again the logic can be detected here: where the sacraments—the Lord's Supper or Baptism—were administered according to the institution of Christ, Christ is present, and where Christ is present, there is the church.

Note that the spiritual condition of the pastor/priest is not the issue in any of this. Though our congregation loves and admires Pastor Calvin, against whom the priest back home is compared unfavorably, the quality of the clergy is never cited as a mark of the church; nor is the quality of the faith of the individual congregants. As Luther said, *"Baptism is valid even though faith is wanting; for my faith does not make baptism but receives it."* Whether the sacrament was administered according to Christ's institution would be its measure of validity, and would be second mark of the church.

Pastor Calvin would write in his *Institutes* (I.IV.9),

> From this the face of the church comes forth and becomes visible to our eyes. Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists. For his promise cannot fail: 'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.'
>
> But that we may clearly grasp the sum of this matter, we must proceed by the following steps*:* the church universal is a multitude gathered from all nations; it is divided and dispersed in separate places, but agrees on the one truth of divine doctrine, and is bound by the bond of the same religion. Under it are thus included individual churches, disposed in towns and villages according to human need, so that each rightly has the name and authority of the church.
>
> If it has the ministry of the word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church. For it is certain that such things are not without fruit. In this way we preserve for the universal church its unity, which devilish spirits have always tried to sunder, and we do not defraud of their authority those lawful assemblies which have been set up in accordance with local needs.

May the administration of the sacraments in our church be according to the institution of Christ.

Discipline Rightly Administered
I Corinthians 11:27-34

The year is 1560. We are glad members of the High Kirk in St. Andrew's Scotland. English is spoken here, and perfectly so, this is north Scotland. And no one speaks the language more passionately than our Pastor John Knox.

Pastor Knox had read Zwingli's fiery sermons and modeled his own upon them. He had studied under Calvin after Calvin's successful return to Geneva, and had carefully studied the thorough Genevan reforms. Fleeing to Geneva after escaping his captors, he had become a disciple of the reformation of the church, and had determined to be an apostle of its spread to his homeland. "Give me Scotland" had been his prayer. God had answered it affirmatively.

The English royalty had been defeated by the Scot nobility, giving Pastor Knox and we Scots the freedom to declare our faith and practice, ordering our common life—church and community—according to the reformed ideas and habits of our covenanting.

The successes and failures during a long generation of reforms on the continent had provided us with valuable lessons for the work of reformation here. The difficulty of sustained faithfulness and persistent progress in faith was noted with fear and trembling. Great efforts had sometimes failed. We determined to be bold in our efforts of reformation but have no confidence in these efforts apart from God's help. We determined to keep both our sin and Savior ever before us. We determined to self administer discipline.

The Apostle had commanded the same of the Corinthians.

The necessary companion to the word and sacraments—rightly offered and received—was discipline rightly administered. The final paragraph in this section of the Apostle's reformation of the Corinthian church insists on discipline.

Noting that they had acted *"in an unworthy manner"* he told them to *"examine themselves"* and only then act. For acting without *"discerning"* resulted in *"judgment against themselves"* which in turn had resulted in many being *"weak and ill"* and a few having *"died."* They could and must avoid all this by judging themselves and therefore not need to be judged by another.

This self judging is *"discipline."* It is part of Christ's discipline. Christ's discipline is for us rather than against us. It is always remedial, always restorative, always for our correction, and always *"so that we may not be condemned along with the world."* It is for our salvation. It is for our reformation.

Pastor Knox insists on this.

This discipline will work against error in our common life and the ever present orientation of our lives toward sin. This discipline will encourage godliness within our church and community, and will reorient us, however slowly but nonetheless surely, toward life. This discipline will confirm the work of reformation in us and by us. Thus this discipline will be the appropriate companion to the first two marks of the church.

Zwingli and Calvin had presumed discipline implicit in each of the first two marks but we, to be careful of our own sinfulness, make explicit this third necessary mark of the church as completing and accompanying the first two.

When Pastor Knox writes our Confession we say,

> The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed himself to us, as writings of the prophets and apostles declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, with which must be associated the Word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished. Then whenever these notes are seen and continue for any time, be the number complete or not, there, beyond any doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who, according to his promise, is in its midst. (Scots Confession, 3.18)

May discipline be rightly administered in our Kirk.

May the three marks of the church be present in our church. Let there be no doubt.

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Find resources to defeat Amendment B that would replace G-6.0106b ("Fidelity and Chastity") on the *Theology Matters* website: www.theologymatters.com

A Critique of the 218th GA Proposed Replacement of G-6.0106b

by James R. Tony

Current G-6.0106b
Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.

Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness.

Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Proposed Replacement G-6.0106b
Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions.

In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church.

Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.

Both the current G-6.0106b and the replacement have three sentences and both start similarly with the words "Those who are called to…." Beyond that the content and the consequences diverge.

The First Sentence

First, the current constitution's G-6.0106b accords with the historic understanding of Reformed Christians and is consistent with the Confessions in its call for officers to lead lives in obedience to Scripture.

By contrast, the replacement speaks of a pledge to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ. The rationale explains that the intent of the replacement is to separate Scripture from Jesus Christ and place Scripture in a subordinate position. This is a radical revision of Reformed theology's insistence that we know the Savior by the Holy Spirit's witness to us through the Scriptures (See, for example, BOC 6.001 and 9.27). Thus, instead of an ordination standard that requires officers to be under the authority of Scripture, the replacement suggests that Scripture is merely a witness to be "understood." The replacement also diminishes the role given to the historical witness of the Confessions as authoritative boundaries to the interpretation of Scripture.

The Second Sentence

The second sentence of the current G-6.0106b defines and illustrates one such confessional boundary. It is the biblical requirement "to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001) or chastity in singleness." The specific nature of this requirement is in direct response to the question of whether sexual relations outside marriage and, in particular, homosexual relations, are consistent with the will of God and may be approved by the church. The replacement ignores this question. It establishes no definite constitutional ordination requirement. And it leaves unspoken what is obedience to Jesus Christ on this

matter. This is precisely the place where proponents of the replacement would support the radical idea that obedience to Jesus Christ is at variance with obedience to Scripture.

Both second sentences use the word "fidelity." The context and application of the word, however, are quite different. The current G-6.0106b requires fidelity in marriage. The replacement says that assent to the ordination questions means fidelity to the standards of the church. The replacement does not specify exactly what standard or standards require fidelity.

G-6.0108 specifies that "The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves." The current G-6.0106b gives a standard by which a candidate AND a governing body may examine the readiness and suitability for ordination of that particular candidate. If the replacement is adopted, the responsibility of the governing body appears to be nullified since the candidate's declaration would be considered sufficient attestation of fidelity to the standards.

The Third Sentence

The third sentence illustrates another radical difference between the current G-6.0106b and the replacement. Repentance for sins committed is at the core of historic Reformed and Christian teaching. The standard is announced clearly in sentence two of the current G-6.0106b. However, it does not require success in living up to the standard. Rather it requires the willingness to live up to the standard or ***to repent from the failure to do so***. So sinners can be and are regularly ordained, provided they are willing to amend their sinful deeds, whether or not they have been successful in doing so at the time of ordination. The third sentence of the current G-6.0106b expresses a definite prohibition of ordination for the unrepentant. And it makes the determination of repentance the responsibility of the ordaining governing body, not just the candidate.

By contrast, the third sentence of the replacement recognizes the sincerity of a candidate's efforts to adhere to these now unspecified standards. The grammar does not express a requirement, but a pre-formed and unexamined judgment that automatically "establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards." This sentence could have said that "***it is the responsibility*** of the governing body charged with examination…to establish the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards." But the replacement does not say that. Instead it observes that the process of sentences one and two establishes the candidate's sincerity. No specific standard would exist; thus there would be no means of judging sincerity. It would have to be assumed. Readiness and suitability for ordination also would have to be assumed.

Conclusion

The original G-6.0106b is in accord with historic Christian, Reformed and Confessional teaching and practice. It connects the PC (USA) with the church universal. The replacement puts in place a radical revision of the relationship between Scripture and authority in the PC (USA) and removes specificity and clarity from the examination process for ordinands. Its intention is to provide opportunity for the ordination of those who engage in sin without repentance, particularly in the area of non-marital sexual relations and replaces repentance with sincerity as the examined attitude for ordination.

The effect of the replacement's ordination standards would be to substitute vagueness for the current specific standards. The GA PJC decision in Bush v. Pittsburgh (Remedial Case 218-10, Feb. 2008) rested on the specificity of the current G-6.0106b: "Section G-6.0106b contains a provision where conformity is required by church officers 'to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness.' The church has decided to single out this particular manner of life standard and require churchwide conformity to it for all ordained church officers." If the replacement Amendment B succeeds, we must ask where any specific manner of life ordination standard will be found.

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This article is from the **"Resources for the Debate on Amendment B"** found on the *Theology Matters* website, www.theologymatters.com. For a printed copy of the Resources, contact us at 540-898-4244 or email scyre@swva.net.

Additional resources for the debate may be found on the Presbyterian Coalition web site www.presbycoalition.org.

The Danger of Losing "Fidelity" in G-6.0106b

by Paul Leggett

We've all had the experience of one or more Jehovah's Witnesses coming to our front door. They are invariably polite and very pleasant. When I open the door and hear their initial introduction, I hasten to point out that I'm the pastor of the Presbyterian Church next door (without knowing it they've come to the church manse). Upon identifying myself, they usually greet me
with a broad smile and tell me they believe in Jesus too. Next, I'm offered a (free) copy of one of their publications, *Awake* or *The Watchtower*. If you, like me, have ever opened one of these up and begun to read, even out of curiosity, you note a series of references to familiar terms, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, justification and so on. Yet if you continue to read more, you realize that these same words are being used in a very different sense than one finds them in Scripture or in our Confessions. I admit to having the same experience reading the proposed replacement to *Book of Order* G-6.0106b coming from this June's General Assembly.

An Unexamined Pledge

Like *The Watchtower* the words are familiar but what do they really mean? A careful reading shows that this proposal, which presbyteries will soon be voting on, is not just a rewrite of the previous G-6.0106b. It is an altogether different kind of statement. Without going into the extensive history of G-6.0106b it will be sufficient to compare the present text with the proposed replacement and see how they differ. To begin with, the text of the present "6b" is in the form of a goal, "Those who are called to office in the church *are to lead a life…"* (italics mine). The phrase, "are to lead," invariably suggests a goal or a challenge to be taken up by those "who are called." On the other hand, the proposed change is simply in descriptive language. It is indicative rather than imperative. The opening phrase of the proposed change is, "Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), *pledge themselves to live lives…"* (italics mine). The essence of the proposed replacement is to say that by assenting to the constitutional questions those "who are called" have pledged to lead certain kinds of lives. Rather than setting up a goal, the new language simply describes an assumed fact that, by assenting to the constitutional questions, those "called to ordained service" pledge themselves to lead a certain kind of life (the details of which will be discussed below). Right here though we have to ask, is this enough? Does the mere fact of assenting to constitutional questions in itself constitute a "pledge?" Can this somehow be taken as a given? Can the church be satisfied that by answering certain questions, no matter how significant, that one called to office has thereby made a pledge? The difference may appear to be subtle but it is significant. The phrase, "are to lead" calls the candidate forward to respond to a challenge. Stating that assenting to certain questions is itself a pledge tends to minimize the nature of the commitment. It actually states as fact what it never examined. The candidate alone decides if he/she is in compliance with the ordination requirements. There is no examination by a governing body. It is a merely a ceremonial certification of a subjective personal judgment by the candidate.

Radical Change in Authority

A more serious question has to do with the commitment itself. According to the proposed replacement the "pledge" in question is "to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions." Again to use the *Watchtower* analogy these words all sound right. The terms are familiar. For goodness' sake, who would object to the standard, "to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church?" In reality, though, this new language represents a serious departure from basic Reformed belief. The logic of our Confessions, as well as our entire theological heritage going back to Scripture itself, is clear. The first point of obedience is *to Scripture*. Obedience to Scripture leads to obedience to Jesus Christ. Indeed apart from the authority of the Scriptures we have no revealed knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The original wording of 6b has this point correctly. By reversing the order of Jesus Christ and Scripture the proposed change departs significantly from the entire approach of our *Book of Confessions*.

The confessions of both the Reformation and modern era affirm the importance of obeying Scripture. We obey Scripture because it is the word of God in written form (Book of Confessions 3.18, 5.001-5.002, 6.004, 8.04, 9.27). It is only as we obey Scripture that we have any understanding of who Jesus is. This point is affirmed over and over in Scripture itself. Scripture defines who Jesus is (Matt. 21:42; Luke 4:21; 24:27, 45-47; John 5:39; Romans 1:1-2; I Cor. 15:3-4). Jesus' ministry is repeatedly seen as a fulfillment of Scripture (Matt. 26:54-56; Mark 14:49; Luke 22:37; John 13:18; 17:12;

19:24). Our Confessions follow this essential pattern which goes back to Jesus himself. We begin with Scripture so that we may know who Jesus truly is. Jesus is the subject of many writings, ancient and modern, from *The Gospel of Thomas* to *The DaVinci Code.* How is one to know who Jesus really is? The only way is through the authoritative word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The language of the proposed replacement of 6b distorts all this. It speaks of following Jesus "through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions." But what does this really mean? "The witness of the Scriptures" is an ambiguous term. To show how far off this expression is as it is found in the proposed replacement, one need only look to the Confession of 1967 (*Book of Confessions* 9.27). Here the witness is the Holy Spirit who speaks "through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written." The Scriptures then are a witness from the Holy Spirit. As a result they constitute a "witness without parallel." In Scripture the church "hears the word of God." Through the Scriptures then the church's "faith and obedience are nourished and regulated." Despite some concerns that were raised when the Confession of 1967 first appeared, its view of Scripture combines the joint witness of Word and Spirit which goes back to John Calvin (*Institutes* I.VII.4) and is found in all our Confessions.

The proposed replacement of G-6.0106b is more than a simple change. It presents a radically different way of understanding Jesus Christ than is found in our Confessions and indeed in classic Reformed Theology as a whole. It not only removes the critical theme of obedience to Scripture but inverts the order of Jesus Christ and Scripture. In referring to "the witness of Scripture" it omits the equally important witness of the Holy Spirit. The goal is not understanding the Scriptures but obeying them. Obviously understanding Scripture is essential to obeying it. Yet in the proposed change the means have replaced the goal.

What is lost in the proposed change is any sense of the historic Reformed understanding of the authority of Scripture. An authority is to be obeyed. A witness is cross examined. The difference is vast. The Reformed view of Scripture is the hallmark of our theological heritage going back to the Reformation. We are not fundamentalists, tied to some literal understanding of the text. Nor do we see in Scripture simply a new law. We recognize the importance of understanding the text. We realize that the Scriptures were written in Hebrew and Greek and that in interpreting them appeal must be made to the original languages (*Book of Confessions* 6.008). We also acknowledge that the church has the obligation to approach the Scriptures "with literary and historical understanding" (BC 9.29). Within the basic Reformed approach there is a certain range of viewpoints which is also reflected in our Confessions. Nonetheless, the essence of the Reformed approach can be summarized in the words of Emil Brunner:

> Christian doctrine is legitimate, is truly based upon revelation, and the faith which is based upon it is the true knowledge of faith, in so far as this doctrine and this faith agree with the teaching of the Bible. (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 44)

Undefined Jesus

It is this essence which is lost in the proposed revision. Without beginning with Scripture and then going to an understanding of Jesus Christ one loses all theological balance. This point was made dramatically clear at General Assembly after this proposed replacement had been approved. The Assembly engaged in a serious debate about marriage which would have replaced Jesus' own language of "male and female" with "two persons." The Assembly ultimately voted this proposal down by a large majority. That however is not the point. If one is serious about living lives "obedient to Jesus Christ," how can there be any debate regarding Jesus' explicit teaching? The fact that this could even be debated shows the consequences of abandoning "obedience to Scripture" as the basis for following Christ. The principle of being obedient to Jesus without a clear standard in Scripture leaves one with an undefined Jesus. The General Assembly, therefore, could decide for itself if Scripture in fact gives us the basis for what it means to obey Jesus. In this particular case the Assembly ruled in favor of Scripture's version of Jesus' teaching. The next time however may be different.

The proposed replacement of G-6.0106b is theological confusion at best and outright distortion at worst. The General Assembly for all its wisdom and hard work stands under the criteria established in the Barmen Declaration. This in fact applies to all of us in the church, ministers, elders, deacons, teachers or lay persons:

> If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and we in faith experience what he himself said: 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you' (BOC 8.04).

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The Reformation of the Church

A friend tells the story of growing up in a home filled with tension, heated arguments, door slamming, and tears, as his parents fought to free his sister from her drug addiction. She rejected their help and they refused to abandon her to the drugs, so the struggle continued. It was a weary, unhappy home in which to grow up. One day things changed when his sister ran away from home. He was relieved to finally have the fighting cease and peace fill the house. He was glad that his sister had left, until one night when he woke up and in the dark and silence, he heard his father sobbing for his lost child. In the same way, God the Father weeps for the lost and rejoices when the son returns or the sheep is found.

False teachers disrupt the church today. Yet it is not a new or unique situation. Peter encourages the church in Asia Minor that is assaulted by false teachers by reminding them of the false teachers in the OT.

> There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.… Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. (2 Pet. 2:1)

Calvin elaborates in his commentary on 2 Peter that the church in every age will be assaulted by false teachers,

> He [Peter] encourages and strengthens those to whom he writes with the argument that God has always disciplined His Church with this kind of trial so that their hearts may not be disturbed by its novelty. He says that the condition of the Church under the Gospel will be no different from what it was under the Law; false prophets upset the old Church, and we must expect the same. It was necessary to say this specifically because there were many who thought that the state of the Church under the reign of Christ would be peaceful.… Let us, therefore, remember that the Spirit of God has declared once and for all that the Church will never be free from this internal trouble, and let this image be kept in mind that the trial of faith is common both to us and to our fathers, because it has the same purpose, namely to make clear by this means whether we truly love God, as is written in Deuteronomy 13:3.

Calvin asks the question that is on all of our minds, "…if the Lord wants to keep His people unspotted, why does He not gather them all together into some corner of the earth where they can encourage each other in holiness? Why does He mix them in with the wicked, by whom they are defiled?" Calvin's answer may not please everyone, "When God appropriates to Himself the responsibility for helping and protecting His own, so they do not fail in the struggle, we take heart to fight the harder."

God has a heart for the lost. He sent prophet after prophet for centuries to Israel to call the people to repentance. The church however, rejected, persecuted and killed the ones he sent. Then he sent his only begotten Son and the church killed her Savior. Both the OT and the NT describe a war but not between the world and the church. The battle is within the believing community. The problem was Israel's own faithlessness. Paul's letters too are written to churches torn apart by false teachings. The church at Corinth was so deceived by false teaching that they were proud of their sexual immorality. Paul admonishes them to repent and goes on to say that their relationship with one another within the church should be love. Not a love that ignores or exalts sin, but self-giving agape love that rejoices in the truth and—always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Perhaps as Calvin claims, God has allowed turmoil in the church to make clear whether we truly love God. Do we have the Father's heart for the lost that causes us to sacrifice our hearts, time, energy and money to pick up our cross and follow where Jesus led—to love again and again, to reach out with the truth again and again and again—knowing that we will not fail in the struggle because God has promised his aid?

The Rev. Dr. Kari McClellan is President of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM). Rev. Susan Cyre is Executive Director and Editor of *Theology Matters*. The Board of Directors of PFFM includes clergy and lay, women and men. PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the PC(USA)'s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping people develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view.

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