Theology Matters

Vol. 31, No. 2 Spring 2025

God Has Spoken

By John A. Mackay

The Book that men most need to study is the book of which they know little and understand less. That book is the Bible. The Bible, it is true, occupies a unique position among the books of the world. It is, we are told, literature's greatest monument, the book that circulates most widely, that speaks its message in a thousand tongues. All this is true. Yet, amid the plaudits that greet the Bible when its name is mentioned, there is a sobering fact that tempers exultation: the Book of books is the great unknown among its kind. To make the Bible known by the people of today is the supreme cultural and religious task of our time.

What is the Bible essentially? It is the record of God's revelation to mankind, the abiding witness to the fact that He has spoken. *God has spoken*. This is the message of the Bible. There is a word from the Lord, an authoritative account of His relations to the world and to man. The eternal silence has been broken. Light has shown upon the mystery of man's life. A divine answer has been given to the problem of his sin. The hidden God has become manifest in a new order of life. The one stupendous fact with which the Bible deals is that God has spoken by saving deeds and enlightening words. The Book is the record of His self-communication at different times and through diverse agents. It is thereby, in a wholly unique sense, the Word of God.

How God Has Spoken

But how has God spoken? In nature, in the heart of man, and in the general religious history of mankind, witness is borne to the godhead of the Creator. But in the history of the Hebrew people God revealed Himself in a unique manner as the living, speaking, and redeeming God. He made Himself known through saving acts and through men who interpreted His ways and purposes.

The Bible is, in particular, a record of encounters which specific individuals had with God, whereby He revealed Himself in their experience and understanding of Him. Time and again God is described as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' The lives of these men He wove into an historical redemptive pattern, making them the representative types of men in whose lives He still works and speaks. To understand what this means is crucial to our understanding of the Bible.

The designation of God in the Bible as the 'God of Israel' bears witness to the fact that in the life-history of a race which bore the name of Jacob, their ancestor, He revealed Himself in a way that became significant for them and, through them, for mankind. God's revelation through Israel was not due to the fact that this people was exceptionally gifted in a religious sense. Indeed, the religious history of the Hebrew people from the days of Jacob and his sons, the founders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, to the time when Israel disappeared as a nation is, in many respects, a sordid tale. But by great redemptive acts, by a long process of hard discipline, and through the leadership of men who did His bidding and interpreted His purposes, God formed a race of people through whom His purposes were both revealed and carried forward in history.

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Most significant as God's interpreters among all the members of the Hebrew people are the prophets from Moses to John the Baptist. It is impossible to understand or to do justice to the Old Testament unless it is recognized that in all its parts it bears witness to the inspiration and insight of the Prophets. The lives and, in some cases, the writings, of these unique figures reveal the meaning of encounter with God. God, we read, 'came' to them; He 'took' them. They 'saw' Him; they 'heard' Him. They received insight into God. They spoke about Israel's God as the God of the whole earth, the one and only God. Under the inspiration of the same Spirit that brooded over the chaos and made an ordered universe, they set God's redemptive purpose for Israel and the world within the majestic framework of creation. They set it also in the living stream of world history. Taking objects and practices which the Hebrews had derived from other nations and the influence of other religions, they infused into these new meaning, and made them an integral part of the religion of Israel. Many objects and practices, for example, which were connected with the symbolism and ritual of the tabernacle and the temple, became, despite their lowly and foreign origin, types of holy mysteries, and patterns of holy living.

In a supreme and absolute sense God revealed Himself as the God of a unique person, Jesus Christ. The most significant name by which He is known in the Bible is 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' In the fulness of time and at the center of history a Man appeared. In Him were fulfilled the longings of Israel for a Messiah. In Him also received fulfilment the predictions of the prophets regarding a Deliverer in whom God's purpose for mankind would find its focal expression and from whom would emanate light and power to make God and His purpose fully manifest. The coming of the Christ is the supreme event to which the Old Testament looks forward.

Of Jesus Christ, the Word of God became flesh, it can be said that He revealed to the world what God is and what man should be. His life was not a casual appearance in history, for God had *sent* Him. His character was not a solitary expression of ideal goodness, for God was *like* Him. His life purpose, which led Him to a cross, was not a vain beating against a meaningless or hostile universe, for God was *in* Him. The Resurrection was the proof that He was truly the Word of God Incarnate. It was also the pledge that no word that He had spoken would fall to the ground. For God, who had spoken through the prophets, had now spoken in a Son.

The men and women who recognized Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and believed in Him as the Christ of God, became a new community. This community was brought into being and indwelt by the same Holy Spirit who had created the world, inspired the prophets, and given Jesus Christ to mankind. It became the new, the spiritual, Israel, the Body of Jesus Christ, the organ of His redemptive will in history. In the course of the years, and under the inspiration of the same Spirit, the Church formed the Canon of Holy Scripture. In and through the Church and its history, God still guides Christians into an ever larger understanding of His redemptive purpose centering in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit awakens in the hearts of Christian believers, members of the Body of Christ, the filial attitude towards God which leads them to say 'Father.' He convinces them also of the essential truth of the Holy Scripture by the witness of His own presence in their hearts.

What God Has Said

What is it that God has said? The Gospel, the Good News, contained in the Old Testament and in the New, regarding God's gracious purpose for mankind, is the content of the Bible message. In thr study of this content the Bible must be understood in its own light. Its categories and terms are native, and not alien, to itself. No part of it can be understood or interpreted in isolation from the other parts, but only in relation to the whole. Only a method of study which starts with Jesus Christ, in whom the fulness of God and His purpose became manifest and which uses Him as the supreme key and clue to an interpretation of Scripture, can make the central meaning of the Bible plain. Only by such a method can the substance of God's self-disclosure be apprehended and its progressive character become clear. Only in this way, too, can the error be avoided of perpetuating practices which were valid at an earlier stage in God's dealing with men, before His full purpose became manifest in Christ. In studying any part of the Bible it is necessary that everything shall be judged with full attention to the significance of Christ's own words, 'Ye have heard that it was said by men of old time … but I say unto you …' Nothing is more unbiblical, nor can anything be more perilous, than to take certain words and commands of God out of their proper context in the Bible and attempt to give them permanent and independent validity.

The deepest note in the Bible is the affirmation of a spiritual unity closely related to the unveiling of God and His gracious purpose in Christ. A unity, like the unity of a musical harmony, underlies the whole. This harmony has an exultant quality. The world of man which came to birth in music, when 'the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy,' will end in a redemptive harmony. Notes of music will celebrate the achievement of redemption by him who redeems men to God from 'every tribe and people and tongue and nation.'

The education of the chosen people was basically a training in the unity of God and His purpose. God, the Lord, being one God, the law of life is one law. True human living consists in obedience to the will of God. Accordingly, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' But before this holy fear is engendered and wisdom obtained, each human heart must be 'united' in its secret places.

Unity is established between God and His people by a covenant, whereby they become God's 'portion' and He becomes their 'portion,' their inheritance. The ultimate goal of this community of life and purpose between God and His covenant-people is, according to the Old Testament, that the nations of mankind should be blessed through Israel and become one in the God of Israel.

But before this redemptive unity can be achieved in history, there must appear in Israel the Suffering Servant, who, on account of the sins of his people and of all people, would be bruised and broken and rejected by men, in order that he might see the travail of his soul and constitute a new and united family of God from among all the nations of mankind. Therefore, the supreme unity is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was perfectly one with the Father. The unity of character and will between Jesus Christ and His Father led Him to the Cross. The Cross of Christ is the supreme revelation of human sin. It is also the supreme manifestation of God's judgment upon sin and of His redeeming love whereby He creates new men in Christ.

The unity achieved in the reconciliation between man and God in the Cross of Jesus Christ led to the establishment of a new unity in the relations between man and man in human society. Elements in society and history between which no true partnership had hitherto existed became one. Jews and Gentiles, masters and servants, men and women, cultured and unlettered, all became one in Christ as members of His Body, the Church. Through the Church as the Body of Christ, God's will would be made known and done among men; His Kingdom would come; His will would be 'done upon earth as it is in heaven.'

Why God Has Spoken

But why should God have spoken? Unless God had revealed Himself and His will, men could never have known Him or His purpose. According to the Bible, it was the deep rift in human nature and the expression of man's rebellious will against his Maker that led to the self-disclosure of God, the record of which is contained in the Bible. The purpose of the divine revelation being, therefore, redemptive in character, the Bible must never be regarded merely as a Book which supplies information. It is not interested in telling about nature as such, or even about God as such, or about the future of the world as such. Much harm has been done in the history of civilization and within the Christian Church by regarding the Bible as a store-house of wisdom on matters which do not concern it. Upon many important matters God has left men to make their own investigation and come to their own conclusions. The truth revealed in the Bible is redemptive truth. It is truth in order to goodness. It opens up to men how they may be redeemed unto goodness of life, unto consecration to the will of God, in the time and place and circumstances in which they find themselves. That being so, they only can understand the Bible and are capable of interpreting it who, feeling their need of redemption, come to its pages in search of God's answer to the problem of their sin and their unsatisfied yearning. To hear the Word of God speak to us through these sacred pages means to recognize that what God desires is man's response in repentance and faith and to take action accordingly. Only when God is obeyed is He truly known.

Recognizing, therefore, that the Bible is a book about redemption which is to be studied in the perspective of redemption and in the light of that central redemptive figure, Jesus Christ, we are brought into a truly Biblical attitude toward the nature of God's self-disclosure. We give up the attempt to understand the Bible by merely dissecting its documents into parts. We do not lose time in the vain, unbiblical effort to make the Bible a textbook in matters in which God did not intend it to be authoritative. But in all matters pertaining to our knowledge of God, the salvation of the soul, the ordering of human society, the upbuilding of the Christian Church, the coming of God's Kingdom, it is in and through the Bible that God speaks His word of command and grace.

There is a sense, indeed, in which the Bible may be described as a very direct and intimate letter to 'whom it may concern.' In its ultimate meaning, beyond all questions about authors and documents, about the origin and development of many ideas and practices contained in the Record, it is a letter from God to mankind. By its diffusion among all nations and the individual challenge of the truth it conveys, this book carries upon it the name and address of every people and person to whom it comes. To each of these it comes not as a book about religion, not even as a book about God. It comes rather as a very intimate and personal communication to all men, corporately and individually, to hear and obey the Word which the living God addresses to them.

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Law and Liturgy

The Place of the Ten Commandments in Reformed Worship

by Christopher Dorn

The Law, by which we understand here the Ten Commandments, is indispensable to Reformed worship. For God's covenant people, it constitutes the beginning and foundation of worship. We worship God because he has commanded us to worship him. The first four of the Ten Commandments contain a perfect and complete rule for all true worship of his majesty: We are to worship God alone; we are not to use images or idols in our worship. We are not to misuse his name. And we are to honor him by keeping the sabbath. These commandments comprise the first table. They are the very soul that animates the six commandments that comprise the second table: We are to honor our father and mother; we are not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet anyone or anything that belongs to another. The two tables of the Law must be observed together and cannot be separated. For apart from the fear of God, we do not maintain justice and love among ourselves.[1] The unity of the two tables of the Law is expressed in the double love commandment proclaimed by Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39; cf. Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27–28).

In the Reformed tradition, however, the Ten Commandments not only serve as the foundation and rule of worship; they also supply some of its content. When we survey the classic orders of worship from the Reformation era, we see that the public recitation of the Ten Commandments played an important part in the ordinary service on the Lord's Day. Their principled use in public worship is a distinguishing feature of Reformed liturgy, evident at its very origins in the publications of Martin Bucer (1491–1551) and John Calvin (1509-1564). But why did these Reformers and their successors see fit to include them in their orders of worship? What considerations guided them? What theological rationale did they provide? And finally, if we are convinced by the choices they made, how might we creatively utilize their insights concerning their place in our own worship, if we are not including them already?

The Ten Commandments in Reformed Liturgy: Historical Antecedents

No doubt an important consideration that guided the decision of the Reformers to incorporate the Ten Commandments into their orders of worship was precedent. The public reading of the Law is attested before they began to draft their own orders of worship. It is evident first in a medieval preaching service in the vernacular called "prone" or "pronaus." The provenance of the term remains shrouded in obscurity. It may have referred either to the screen between the choir and the nave or to the pulpit itself. Some have even speculated that it comes from the Latin word *praeconium* ("public address"). Whatever the case may be, preaching outside the Mass seems to have been a practice in certain regions of continental Europe on the eve of the Reformation.
How widespread the practice was cannot be determined with precision. But it most certainly enjoyed popularity in the territories of southern Germany and the Swiss states in the fifteenth century. In 1502 Johann Ulrich Surgant (1450–1503) parish priest of the Church of Saint Theodore in Basel, published a handbook for preachers which bears the title *Manuale curatorum predicandi prebens modum*. In this work we find a sample order of the preaching service. From the pulpit, the priest recited the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. At the time of the sermon, he offered a general confession of sins, absolution, and the intercessions. To the last of these, he added announcements pertinent to the life of the parish, including notices about feast and fast days, marriage banns and deaths.[2]

These elements in the prone were not fixed; the priest was free to use them at his own discretion. Ideally, he would have been guided in their use by the needs of his people for instruction in the faith. Surgant informs his readers of an ecclesial mandate according to which priests in all parishes of the dioceses must preach sermons that explain the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments.[3] Thus the service was didactic in intent, serving as a vehicle for teaching the people the sum of Christian truth, about which they could hardly learn anything through an official Mass said in a language largely unintelligible to them.

Liturgical historians have shown the dependence of several of the early Reformed orders of worship on the preaching service as we have outlined it here.[4] It is apparent, then, that in this regard the Reformers were no liturgical innovators. Rather, they arranged (and rearranged) the elements they found in existing rites to express their understanding of how God's boundless grace in Christ is communicated and received in worship. For they appreciated the formative role that liturgy plays in the lives of worshippers in establishing and reinforcing theological convictions. If the order in which elements unfolded reflected doctrinal confusion or outright error, then it would undermine the theological truths the Reformers sought to propagate through public worship. On the other hand, if the pattern of the elements aligned with these truths, then it would serve their cause of reforming the churches on the basis of the Word of God.[5]

The position of the Ten Commandments in the liturgy that John Calvin adopted during his sojourn in Bucer's Strasbourg provides a signal case here. They do not appear haphazardly; it cannot be regarded as one element arbitrarily juxtaposed to another. Rather, the position in which it appears is determined by definite theological concerns, to which he wanted to give liturgical expression. We will turn to this liturgy in due course. But for now it is necessary to explain what exactly these concerns were.

The Theology of the Ten Commandments: Calvin on the Threefold Use of the Law

Calvin develops his theology of the Ten Commandments on the basis of their threefold use or function (*triplex usus legis)*. Although first expounded by Philip Melanchthon in his *Loci communes* (1521) and thus not unique to Calvin, the "threefold use of the Law" has been linked with him and subsequently became a distinguishing feature of Reformed theology.

The first use of the Law is designated by the phrase *usus theologicus* (theological use) or *usus paidogogicus* (pedagogical use). The demand of the Law is absolute, claiming the whole person. That is to say, it requires perfect and wholehearted obedience. But both experience and the witness of scripture prove that the observance of the Law in this unconditional sense is impossible for us. For this reason, the Law necessarily shows us at which points we have failed to meet God's standard for holiness of life and righteousness of conduct. In this regard, Calvin compares the Law to a mirror. In the commandments of the Law we have a "mirror of perfect righteousness," in which, "we contemplate our weakness…, just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face."[6]

The Law thus reveals to us our sin. Calvin cites in this connection the Apostle Paul, who declared that he would not have known what sin was if it had not been for the Law (Romans 7:7). For "through the Law comes a knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). In making us aware of our sin, the Law at the same time condemns us. "After the sin comes the curse" (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26; Gal. 3:10).[7] The Law brings wrath (Rom. 4:15) and becomes for us the "dispensation of death" (II Cor. 3:7), insofar as "the letter kills" (2 Cor. 3:6).

This is not to say that the Law in itself is injurious to us. On the contrary, if "our will were completely conformed and composed to obedience to the Law, this knowledge alone would suffice to gain salvation."[8] For, as the Apostle Paul observes, the "Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). Since, however, our nature is corrupted due to sin, we are inclined to violently resist God's Law, refusing to submit to its discipline. It follows that the Law, although intended to bring life, serves as an occasion for sin and death. As the Apostle Paul observed in himself: "I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me" (Rom. 7: 9–10).[9]

The death to which the Law sentences us ought to reduce us to grief and despair. But for the children of God, the knowledge of sin that the Law gives us has a salutary purpose. For it moves us to plead with God to show mercy, which he freely grants to us in Jesus Christ. By the grace that comes to us through Christ, God transforms that which brings condemnation and death into the very way by which he leads us to forgiveness of sins and new life. Precisely in this sense, the Law is our disciplinarian (*pedagogus*), that we might be justified by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:24). In sum, "the function of the Law is to uncover the disease; it gives no hope of its cure." But for this very reason it points out our need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which "brings healing to those who are without hope."[10]

It is evident, however, that the Law does not have this effect on all. Nevertheless, it still serves in the broader public to restrain evil due to the threats that hang over those who violate it. This effect is necessary for the preservation of civil order, on which human society depends. Accordingly, the second use of the Law is its *usus politicus* (political use) or *usus civilis* (civil use). In Calvin's view, those who otherwise would give free reign to their aggressive drives and antisocial impulses submit to the Law due to fear of punishment or shame. The obedience they grudgingly render to the Law is itself a manifestation of God's grace, because apart from the restraining effect that the Law exercises, the civil order would disintegrate.

Calvin also sees this second use to apply to another group. He refers here to those who have not yet come to

know the grace of Christ. In their case, fear of divine retribution for violating the commandments keeps their wanton desires in check. This fear serves them until they are regenerated by the Spirit of God. For to have known the discipline of self-restraint before the time of God's visitation is good training for the rigors of the new life in Christ.[11]

The third use of the Law applies only to those in whom the Spirit of God is already present and active. The Holy Spirit has already inscribed the Law in the hearts of those who believe in Christ, so that they desire to obey God. But in the Law they have the "best instrument to learn more thoroughly each day the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it."[12] By their reading of it, "the Lord instructs [them] in whom he inwardly instills with a readiness to obey."[13] Thus the third—and for Calvin and the Reformed tradition—the principal use of the Law is denoted by the term *usus didacticus* (teaching use) or *usus in renatis* (use for the regenerate). It is important to add here that Calvin does not teach that the regenerate ever fulfill the Law. In this life they always only make a beginning, in dependence on Christ and through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. That is why the Law accompanies them throughout their lives, exhorting and correcting them as they press forward in their pursuit of the perfect righteousness set forth in the Law.

The Ten Commandments in Reformed Liturgy: Calvin's Strasbourg Liturgy

Early in 1538 Calvin was banished from Geneva for his strict views on church discipline. Later that year Bucer, with the consent of the town council, invited him to Strasbourg to pastor a small congregation of French refugees in the city. Calvin evidently had no objections to the order of worship that Bucer himself had been using for the German congregation, for he had it translated into French with very few alterations.[14] For our purposes, the most outstanding one among them is the substitution of the Ten Commandments for the gloria or Psalm that Bucer's German order prescribes as a response to the absolution. It is not entirely clear why Calvin did not find them in the German rite in this place, since Bucer himself recommended its reading in his treatise on the reform of worship, *Grund und Ursach*.[15] Whatever the case might have been, Calvin's French rite opens in the following way:

> Votum
> Confession of sins
> Words of Assurance/Absolution
> Ten Commandments

The votum consists in the words from Psalms 124:8: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." The prayer of confession follows as a corporate act of the assembled people. In his version, Bucer offers three alternatives, the last of which is a long paraphrase of the Ten Commandments. In this prayer the people in the first person elaborate on how they have violated each of them. Calvin adopted the second of the three as his own, in which the people confess generally that they "unceasingly transgress [God's] holy commandments"[16] Over the kneeling congregation, the minister then pronounces the absolution, introduced by an appropriate text in the New Testament. Bucer used 1 Timothy 1:15:

> This is certainly true and a very precious word: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let everyone truly confess with St. Paul in his heart and believe in Christ. Thus, I promise you in his name the forgiveness of all your sins and I declare you to be loosed your sins on earth, and that you are loosed of them also in heaven, forever. Amen.[17]

In Calvin's rite, the people then stand to sing the Ten Commandments, which are set to music in French quatrains, with the *Kyrie* ("Lord, have mercy upon us") as a prayer following each quatrain.[18]

Calvin's division of the Ten Commandments into two tables follows the Jewish and Christian traditions: the first table is concerned with the worship of God, concluding with the fourth commandment to rest on the sabbath. The second is concerned with our duties of love toward our neighbor, as we have already mentioned, above. Between the two tables Calvin inserted a brief collect for grace to keep God's Law.

> The Lord be with you. Let us pray to the Lord.
>
> Heavenly Father, full of goodness and grace, as you are pleased to declare your holy will to your poor servants, and to instruct them in the righteousness of you Law, so write and engrave it on our hearts, that we would seek to serve and obey you alone in our whole life. Do not impute to us the transgressions that we have committed against your Law, so that as we sense your grace being multiplied upon us in such abundance, we would have cause to praise and glorify you, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. So let it be.[19]

The language of the collect reveals how Calvin sees the Law to function in the liturgy. It is the third use (*usus didacticus*) that is reflected here. But the order in which the rite unfolds reveals it as clearly. In worship, God approaches the people as God is—their only comfort. This they acknowledge in the *votum*. In the confession of sins, the people approach God as they are—sinners. In the absolution, the assurance of God's forgiveness is

impressed on them. They respond by singing the Ten Commandments: it is as forgiven sinners that the people express their desire to conform their lives to God's will, which is embodied in the Law.

Thus, in the position in which the Ten Commandments appear in his Strasbourg liturgy, Calvin meant to instantiate the third use of the Law. They come in the context of the grace in which those who have heard and accepted the words of assurance and absolution are standing.

Nevertheless, there is still some ambivalence here. The use of the *Kyrie* after each quatrain perhaps points to the first use—the Law as a catalyst to repentance. In this connection, we may recall that Calvin alludes to God's "holy commandments" in his prayer of confession. The long paraphrase of them that Bucer provides as an alternative prayer of confession gives us good reason to suppose that the Strasbourg Reformer perhaps preferred the first use (*usus paidogogicus*) in worship. But even if we are inclined to find fault with Calvin for lack of consistency in his liturgical decision concerning the Law, we at least can see that there is more than one possibility from which to choose. This will become clear as we move next to consider how Calvin's successors used the Ten Commandments in their liturgies.

Calvin's Liturgical Successors: John á Lasco, Marten Micron, and Vallerand Pollain

Reformers John á Lasco (1499–1560), Marten Micron (1523–1559), and Vallerand Pollain (1520–1557) imported the Ten Commandments into their liturgies, but by no means did they slavishly follow Calvin's Strasbourg rite in this regard. These figures are associated with the "Stranger Churches" in London, to which congregations of continental Protestants fled during the reign of Edward VI (r. 1447–1453) and after 1559 in order to escape Catholic persecution and civil conflict on the European continent.[20] The Polish Reformer á Lasco collaborated with the Dutch Micron to produce a church order for the "Stranger Churches," which the two formally organized in 1550. It was published under the title *Forma ac Ratio* in 1555, and contains an order of worship.[21] In á Lasco's scheme, the Ten Commandments come after the sermon. It is preceded by a prayer in which the minister asks God to "keep Satan from the [people], lest he should in any way snatch from [them] the doctrine of [his] divine Word." In language that is replete with imagery from the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20 and par.), the minister continues by asking God to grant that the word "bring forth seed, fruits, worthy of [God]."[22] A rubric then instructs that the minister read the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20.

This position suggests that the Law functions to give the people a concrete image of the life that produces "seeds, fruits worthy of [God]." In other words, if God answers the prayer, and the divine word takes root in the "good and fertile land" of hearts moistened with "the rain of the Holy Spirit,"[23] the expected harvest will be sincere obedience of God's Law. The third use of the Law is clearly envisaged here. That is why it is remarkable to read after the commandments a rubric directing the minister to remind the people of their sins in the following words: "We see in *this divine Law* the horrible corruption of our nature placed before our eyes, as if a mirror of ourselves has been put before us [emphasis added]."[24] The minister then leads the people in an extended prayer of confession.[25] The Law is doing double duty here!

Similarly, in Pollain's *Liturgia Sacra* we find an elaborate structure in which the first and third uses of the Law come to expression.[26] A cantor opens the service by leading the people in a rhyming version of the Ten Commandments set to a hymn. The people sing the first five verses, which correspond to the first table of the Law. The minister then steps into the pulpit and intones the *votum*. There follows the confession of sins, in which the people acknowledge that they have transgressed God's commandments and depend on his mercy in the face of his judgment. The minister reads a scripture verse that assures the people of God's forgiveness and pronounces absolution over the repentant in the triune name. The people respond by singing the next three verses of the hymn, which correspond to the second table of the Law. This is followed by yet another prayer in which the minister asks the God who gave the commandments through Moses to inscribe the Law on the hearts of his people through the Holy Spirit, so that they may obey God and live holy and just lives. The people then sing the last verse of the hymn, which consists in a petition to God for the strength needed to obey his will. This deft interweaving of the sung Law and prayer ensures that the "pedagogical" and "teaching" uses of the Law are accorded equal weight.

Some Contemporary Uses of the Law in Reformed Worship

Several Contemporary Reformed orders of worship bear the stamp of this early tradition. In the *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church USA, meditation on the Law of God is suggested as a way to prepare for worship. Two texts are offered: the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17) and the summary of the Law in the double love commandment (Matt. 22:37–40). In the course of the ordinary service for the Lord's Day, either of these texts may be read following the confession of sins/assurance of forgiveness sequence as we have already seen.

Otherwise, the two exhortations (Col. 3:12–14 and John 13:34) enclosed in brackets can serve in the same role as the Law and may be said alternatively.[27]

In the liturgies of two Reformed churches that trace their origins from the Netherlands, we find this same pattern. In the *Psalter Hymnal* of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Law predictably comes after the confession of sins, the declaration of pardon, and the gloria. As if to remove any doubt about which use of the Law is envisaged here, the reading of the Law is prefaced by the words: "Let us, God's forgiven people, now listen to his Law for our lives." The following rubric instructs the minister to proclaim "God's covenant Law as guide for our lives, as it is found in the Decalogue or some other scriptural passage."[28]

In *Liturgy and Confessions* of the Reformed Church in America, the tripartite scheme "guilt, grace, gratitude" recapitulates the terms of the life of God's people. The order of worship opens with the *votum*, which expresses the desire of the people to be in the presence of God who has called them to worship. But the people come to the awareness that this God is holy, and thus confess their sins. With the assurance of pardon, they hear the good news of their forgiveness and restoration. Freed from their sins, they are prepared to live in gratitude, which manifests itself in renewed obedience to God through observance of the commandments.[29]

Conclusion

As we have seen, there is precedent in classical Reformed liturgies for some flexibility in the use of the Law in worship. In line with Calvin, the orders we examined privilege the "third use" of the Law. But this by no means exhausts the possibilities, which include the following: (1) The commandments could be read by the minister and people in unison before the confession. In this position, they are functioning in accord with the first use of the Law, according to which it makes us aware of sin. It could also be incorporated into the confession itself. In this case, it will certainly be more practical to draw on Jesus's summary of the Law: "We have not loved you with all our heart, soul, and mind; we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves…" (2) The commandments could be read or recited responsively after the words of assurance. This most clearly reflects the third use of the Law according to which the Law serves as a guide for the lives of the forgiven and renewed children of God. (3) The commandments could be used as one of the scripture readings. (4) The commandments could be recited by the people following the sermon. In this regard, the Law takes on the role of the creed, by which the people give assent to what they have heard in the sermon. This embodies an ancient liturgical principle according to which creed follows kerygma. That is, the people indicate their acceptance of the preached word by giving a summary of what they have heard in the form of a creed.

These options will reflect the conviction that no one liturgical function of the Law we select in advance can prescribe how any one person in our congregations will hear it. The Law on any given Sunday morning will convict one worshipper of sin, invite another to renewed obedience, and inspire in another grateful praise. We will be sensitive to how the Law can impress itself on people in these manifold ways, and plan our worship accordingly.

Nevertheless, the Law has always been very precious to the Reformed tradition, above all because of its third use. God has redeemed us from the curse of the Law through Christ and gives us his Holy Spirit. Because we are no longer under law but grace, we show our gratitude to God in seeking to do what pleases him, conforming our lives to his will, which is embodied in the Ten Commandments and summarized in the double love commandment: to love God and neighbor. We are thus freed both from and for the Law. The Law represents us at full stretch before God, marking out the way in which we may stand before him and serve in his presence in the power of the Holy Spirit—to his glory and to our own good.

Christopher Dorn is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Ionia, Michigan, and author of several books, including *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*.

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[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 377. [*Institutes* II.8.11].

[2] Bruno Bürki, "The Reformed Tradition in Continental Europe: Switzerland, France and Germany" in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, eds. Geoffrey Wainright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 437.

[3] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), 8.

[4] See, e.g., Bryan D. Spinks, *From the Lord and "the Best Reformed Churches": a Study of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the English Puritan and Separatist Traditions 1550–1633* (Rome: C.L.V. Edizioni Liturgiche, 1984), 48–53.

[5] Mark Earngey, "*Soli Deo Gloria*: The Reformation of Worship," in *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, eds. Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 26.

[6] *Institutes* II.7.7.

[7] *Institutes* II.7.7.

[8] *Institutes* II.7.7.

[9] *Institutes* II.7.7.
[10] *Comm. 2 Cor. 3:7* (*Calvini Opera* 50:42). Cited in I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA : Pickwick Publications, 1992), 221.
[11] *Institutes* II.7.10.
[12] *Institutes* II.7.12.
[13] *Institutes* II.7.12.
[14] The German rite of 1539 bears the title *Psalter mit aller Kirchenübung* ("Psalter, with All Church Practices"). For English translation (ET) of the texts, see *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, 282–297. According to William D. Maxwell, Calvin published his French version of Bucer's liturgical texts in 1540. This first edition is lost, but a second edition, which appeared in 1542, is extant. A third edition was published in 1545, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 112–16). For a selection of Calvin's liturgical texts in English translation, see *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present,* 306–336.
[15] *Grund und Ursach ausz gotlicher schrift der newerungen an dem nachtmal des Herren* ("Basis for the renewal of the Lord's Supper from the Holy Scriptures"). Cited in Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, 101.
[16] *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, 284.
[17] Ibid, 286.
[18] James Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 40.
[19] *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, 309.
[20] Spinks, *From the Lord and "the Best Reformed Churches,"* 97.
[21] For the texts in English translation, see Spinks, *From the Lord and "the Best Reformed Churches,"*157–176 and *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, 458–516. Micron translated and abbreviated an earlier edition of this rite and published it under the title *Christlicke Ordinancien der Nederlantser Ghemeinten te London* in 1554. For English translation, see *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, 517-542.
[22] Ibid., 463.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 465.
[25] Ibid., 465–466.
[26] For the above information, see Casper Honders, "Let us Confess our Sins …" in *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, eds. Herman Schmidt and David Power (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 89.
[27] *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 28–29; 48–59.
[28] *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 972–73.
[29] *Liturgy and Confessions* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 1990), 1–3. Interestingly, in an alternate order of worship, which dates from 1968, the Decalogue or summary of the law comes before the prayer of confession, thus observing the first use.

Provisional Advice on the New Constitutional Amendments

by Jerry Andrews

Provisional Advice on Examining Officers

The Constitution of the PCUSA changed again this year. Most changes each year hardly register with most Presbyterians; this is true of the majority of changes again this year. Some changes, some years, have been quite controversial and even eventually reversed; that may happen with a change or two this year. Eventually. More to the point and to the moment, two changes this year baffle many on just what now is newly required. Wanting to act faithfully, both wisely and innocently, all in accordance with the revised constitution, this essay hopes to offer some provisional advice that may help.

Newly added are two categories which name two bases on which there is to be no discrimination against baptized persons—their "gender identity" and/or "sexual orientation." The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) recognizes that lists in the constitution are exclusionary, that is, if it is not listed it is not included. Thus, the continual need for additions. Who else is still excluded, one may be forgiven for asking. The need is endless. We have not seen the end of this effort. This calls into question the wisdom of making a list of categories at all, especially while trying to eliminate considering people in categorical terms. This may all be self-defeating. Sufficient for clarity and following Christ is to say there is to be in the church no discrimination—that vice of prejudicially considering anyone based on a category to which they may belong. Instead, the reach of Christ to the brutal and corrupt tax collector and to the violent zealot is, to the best of our ability, is to be our reach as well. God help us. Adding categories is no help.

Good advice is to think less in terms of categories and more of the image of God in all humanity and the commission to proclaim the gospel to all that all may come. All. Thinking in those terms will help us all.

Newly added also is the requirement to examine all candidates for office on matters of the Historic Principles of Church Order, which famously affirm that Christ alone is Lord of the conscience and thus it is to be free of any coercion, and also to examine on the matters of participation and representation, which has lately added two new categories.

The repeated advice and counsel of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution has noted the redundancy created by this change. Already all candidates are to be examined on the Constitution. The new mandate calls attention to two parts of the Constitution. While highlighting any particular part of the Constitution in the examination may serve to reflect a desire to emphasize some part, no part can be lifted above another and this new mandate adds nothing new. It is redundant. Asking the constitutional questions for ordination and hearing an informed and sincere answer covers the whole constitution. As noted by both the advocates and opposition to the change, and by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, no new questions are named as required; no new answers mandated.

Good advice is any examining body may determine that a sincere answer to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation, as traditionally asked, has covered the whole constitution, including any recent changes to it.

In Christ's name reach out to all humanity, and especially discriminating against none of the baptized, and ask and answer the constitutional questions with thoughtfulness and sincerity. These two pieces of advice may suffice for guiding the examining processes in your presbytery and session.

Politics is local. And there is much potential mischief in the changes. Some presbyteries—it appears that Olympia which first proposed this change is among them—deny candidates for articulating the conviction that traditional marriages alone are instituted and blessed by God. With these changes they may very well continue what they are doing, though there is no new permission to do this in these changes. These presbyteries are very few. May their number dwindle.

Some presbyteries may now, and quite erroneously, think that if they are required to examine on these matters, they are required to exclude because of these matters. They are not. Though this is where new trouble is most likely to begin, may their number be zero.

Some presbyteries will know better than to exclude, and will continue to examine on the whole of the Constitution not on selected parts, and will in doing so maintain the unity of the church. May all their number be blessed.

Good advice is speaking with the leadership of your presbytery—the chairs of COM and CPM, the Stated Clerk and Executive Presbyter—and offering your hopes and concerns with these changes, and offering to help lead. Most places, most times, that is welcome.

Good advice is documenting for the whole church what is the practice of your presbytery and especially what, if any, changes begin because of these changes to the Constitution. Openness tends toward truth. Help the whole by sharing what has been wrought by these changes.

Good advice is that if these changes intending to include have the opposite effect of newly excluding, then removing them from the Constitution will be in order. Until then, examine with grace, confer with presbytery leaders, note any changes.

Other advice is offered. The Constitution of the PCUSA requires every ordaining/installing body—presbytery and session—to examine those soon to serve in one of the offices of the church—teaching elder, ruling elder, deacon. Presbyteries do this regularly whenever a candidate is to be ordained as a teaching elder and whenever a teaching elder transfers into the presbytery to be installed to a new call. Sessions do this less regularly, though the requirement is that it be done in every church after officers are elected, and before they are ordained and installed.

My own practice was ten hours of instruction of every officer elect—ruling elder and deacon—between the time of their election by the congregation and their installation by the Session. Four hours in the *Book of Confessions* tracing the Christological teachings of each creed, confession, and catechism; one hour of testimony of relationship with Christ; four hours in the *Book of Order* learning the matters of historic principles, mission and membership, officers and ordination; one hour assigning and reviewing the new duties to begin upon installation. I would report to the Session that their examination was complete; the Session would record the fulfillment of the mandate to examine.

This investment by the pastor in them then, and the continued investment in them—no less than a half hour at each Session meeting—in matters of faith and practice, was valued highly by the officers. (In the interests of full disclosure: when it was first announced that ten hours in November—two, five-hour Saturday mornings—were given to start this project, some were not sure they liked their pastor anymore). The deacons were equipped to serve and the elders apt to teach because of this investment, begun by their examination, which was taking them, and the faith and practice of the church, seriously. They were, they say, deeply grateful for the investment.

The PCUSA is wise to mandate such an examination. The whole church is blessed by officers well examined and trained for their callings.

Good advice is for every Session to prepare and invest in their officers elect for the sake of the faith and faithfulness of the church. If you do this now, recommit and continue with the confidence that your efforts are bearing fruit. Perhaps this is good time to review your practice and strengthen it. If you do not yet examine this now (I think less than half of our Sessions are currently examining officers elect) begin now with the courage that this is not a rigor in excess of the rewards gained. You, your officers, your congregation, and the whole PCUSA will be blessed by your efforts.

Let us all take this ill moment in the church and pray and work that it become a good. That's always good advice.

Provisional Advice on Being Examined

Changes to the *Book of Orde*r this year include both a revised mandate for examining bodies when they examine candidates for office (see Advice on Examining Officers on this), and revisions in the Constitution on which candidates are to be examined. Each time the *Book of Order* or *Book of Confessions* is amended, the basis on which the examination is made changes. The General Assembly's Advisory Committee on the Constitution has repeated its determination that the current ordination questions asked of all candidates include the whole constitution including any recent changes. Thus, no new questions or answers are required because of these changes. This is, perhaps, the best advice offered to examining bodies.

Additions have been made to the list of categories on which there is to be no discrimination—"gender identity" and "sexual orientation." This is troublesome for three reasons.

One, the ACC has said that it has "expressed its aversion to unnecessarily creating lists of requirements …" These recent additions do not add to the clearly stated and repeated constitutional conviction that all believers in Christ are unified in Christ and none are to be discriminated against. It is redundant says the ACC.

Two, and perhaps more importantly, there is a lack of consensus in both church and society as to what these

undefined referents refer. Indeed, the referents are in a near constant state of change and are not settled yet to anyone's satisfaction. Asking any candidate to determine what they mean while being examined by a body that has not, and probably cannot, itself made such a determination is troublesome.

Three, and perhaps most importantly, most delicately, and most troublesome, because so indetermined, matters of conscience in the candidate may be triggered—a candidate that wants to answer knowingly and truthfully.

The Constitution has been long been interpreted (Maxwell v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh, 1975) to require the candidate, not the church, to make a judgment, whether in good conscience and with an understanding of Scripture and the Constitution, if the candidate can accept or abide by a constitutional provision.

Matters of conscience are sometimes very difficult. They can be difficult because knowing the good, the right, and the true may itself be difficult. On these matters on gender and sexuality, it is fair to say that the PCUSA has been divided for a long generation and does not offer a single voice to help the individual candidate. Matters of conscience may be difficult because other matters vie with the conscience for supremacy. These can include desires and fears, some of which may very well be present during examination.

Good advice for any candidate is to know, in both heart and mind, as best as one is able, what does the Scripture teach and what does the Constitution require. Being prepared to articulate to an examining body that conviction and the commitment to act in accordance with it, with both courage and humility, is good work.

Good advice for any candidate that concludes that Scripture and the Constitution are not aligned in these matters, or on others, is to be prepared to name the scruple and to suggest how one's ministry may yet be sufficiently ordered by our common governance, and to promise as much. Honesty is required and is rewarded by the Lord of the Conscience.

In either case, while only the candidate can determine if one can accept and abide by constitutional provisions, it is the examining bodies who alone have the responsibility to approve or deny ordination and/or installation to one who has so promised. While not only the candidate but the examining body may err in its determination, both are to offer to each other the best chance to be at their best and to accept the determinations.

Good advice in preparing for the examination on matters of the Constitution regarding identity and orientation is to quiet all the conflicting noises of culture and society. They are not authoritative in our deliberations whether individual or corporate. Their definitions are not a substitute for the work and conclusions of the candidate. Further, no candidate or examining body for that matter, is obligated to any opinion or definition or interpretation offered by the advocates of the new amendments, whether in the rationales of sponsoring presbyteries or arguments of organizations. Neither are they authoritative. Simply put, they have no say; do not give them one. The candidate is well advised, with prayer and with the help of others, to seek to know what the Constitution requires, if one can accept and abide by it, and to be prepared, if asked specifically, to give answer.

Good advice is to remember that in these amendments the Church, in its wisdom, did not choose to define the additions, choose to prescribe questions, or choose to propose correct answers. These were intentionally left to the candidate who forms the conscience and the council which make determination. No other may usurp their opinion—definition, interpretation, conviction.

Good advice on the formation of the conscience may include the following. In matters of discrimination generally, the best starting point for reflection is: "*God created humanity in his own image, in the image of God created he them*" (Gen. 1:27), which continues through Jesus declaring "*for God so loved the world*" (John 3:16). In matters of "gender identity," the best starting point is: *"in the image of God created he them; male and female created he them* (Gen. 1:27) and continues through Paul writing: "*neither male nor female*" (Gal. 3:28). In matters of "sexual orientation," the best starting point is: "*a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*,"(Gen. 2:24) and continues through our Savior reaffirming this saying: "*Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said 'For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh'"* (Mark 10:6–8). Many other passages will help explore them with others.

Good advice is to remember that the constitutional provision is that no candidate can be outright discounted or ineligible unless the Constitution states otherwise. *This includes you. May your presbytery remember this also.*

Good advice is to remember that the constitution has in its troublesome list of protected categories, "theological convictions." *This includes you and yours. Know your convictions and be prepared to articulate them for the sake of the church.*

Jerry Andrews, Ph.D., is Senior Pastor Emeritus of the First Presbyterian Church, San Diego, California, and serves as a Director on the Board of Theology Matters.

Keeping Our Vows
A Pledge of Presbyterian Officers

For thirty-one years, *Theology Matters* has sought to provide theological insight and reflection on the faith and life of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches around the world. Today, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) faces what might be its greatest challenge yet.

An overture to this year's PC(USA) General Assembly intends to force those of us who are ministers, elders, or deacons in the church to affirm what we do not believe, thus violating our constitutionally protected freedom of conscience as well as the historic doctrines of creation and redemption well-articulated in our confessions.

In response to that, the Board of *Theology Matters* voted unanimously to affirm the following four-point pledge and commend it to all ordained officers of the PC(USA):

1. I pledge to keep my ordination vows and to exercise my office as a minister, elder, or deacon under the authority of Holy Scripture and guided by the confessions adopted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

2. I pledge to resist all efforts to hinder the exercise of my office as a minister, elder, or deacon under the authority of Holy Scripture and guided by the confessions adopted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

3. I pledge to stand with those who suffer as a consequence of exercising their office as a minister, elder, or deacon under the authority of Holy Scripture and guided by the confessions adopted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

4. Under the authority of Holy Scripture and guided by the confessions adopted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I regard the requirement to endorse gender identity and all sexual orientations to be a denial of Christian liberty, a contradiction of the doctrines of creation and redemption, and, therefore, a violation of my ordination vows.

If you are a minister, elder, or deacon and also a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we hope and pray that many of you will join us in a public affirmation of, and commitment to, this pledge so that we may all stand together against what the overture seeks to do and for the historic faith and teachings of the Christian church.

To learn more about our pledge to keep our ordination vows and to make that pledge yourself, please go to: https://www.theologymatters.com/articles/church-and-culture/2024/keeping-our-vows-a-pledge-of-presbyterian-officers/ or send your name, city, state, and the office you hold to: Theology Matters P.O. Box 50026 Greenwood, SC 29649 or email us at: admin@theologymatters.com. If you are not a member of the PC(USA), please pray for those who are seeking to bear faithful witness in it.

Raising Up a New Generation of Pastors

Today, Presbyterians across America are facing a crisis unlike any our congregations have faced in more than two hundred years. Finding theologically sound, spiritually mature, well-trained pastors has become exceedingly difficult. They are scarce as hen's teeth.

As editor of *Theology Matters*, I routinely receive requests from congregations looking for pastors. Most *can* afford a full-time pastor. They just cannot find one they want. What they want is a competent, half-way well-adjusted human being with decent communication skills. But what most also want is a loving pastor who can say the Apostles' Creed without crossing his or her fingers.

Yet it is not merely theologically sound, spiritually mature, well-trained candidates for ordained ministry who are hard to find. Competent candidates of any sort are in short supply. Seminaries across America have had great difficulty in recent years attracting students. Regardless of denomination, few young people want to be pastors. Fewer still want to be trained as pastors. There are many reasons for this. But there is no doubt we are facing a crisis.

Theology Matters is addressing this crisis. We prayed: "*Send us ministers for the house of our God*" (Ezra 8:17). We believe the Lord heard our prayers and opened a wide door for us through our Institute for Theological Education and partnership with the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary to offer a fully accredited Master of Arts in Reformed Theology, which offers students key courses and a first important step toward ordination.

Because of you, we were able to recruit and teach two cohorts of wonderful students. They are students who have a sincere faith in Jesus Christ and who seek to understand the Bible; who exhibit intellectual and moral courage; who are spiritually curious and eager to learn; who came with a solid bachelor's degree, a strong academic record, a serious work ethic, and good references. **We have now recruited a third cohort, and we need your help!**

We need your help *to provide scholarships*. We need your help *to reach* more young people, *to identify*, to *recruit*, and to *support* those considering a call to pastoral ministry. "How are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:4). For more information, see www.theologymatters.com/institute/

We need your help *to raise up* a new generation of pastors. We also need your help to fulfill our primary mission which is "*to equip* the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12), *to build up* congregational leaders, and *to provide* training for them so that they can meet the various challenges, temptations, and opportunities facing the church today.

We need your help *to meet* the increasing production, printing, and postage costs of our journal which is being distributed freely to growing numbers of congregational leaders in America and around the world where, increasingly, they need sound teaching resources.

We need your help *to increase* our online capabilities and *to improve* accessibility to, and searchability of, our archive which has hundreds of articles addressing the most pressing issues facing congregations over thirty years. We need to be up to speed in this digital age.

We need your help *to sponsor* another national conference. Our conference theme is "The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life for the Sheep." We plan to meet March 3–5, 2026, at Providence Presbyterian Church, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. We hope you will join us. To register, please go to our website: www.theologymatters.com.

We need your help to *gather* a growing community of congregational leaders who seek to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (I John 4:1). We have begun to find each other. It is very encouraging! **Yet we could not do any of this without your help!**

Friends, we need your help *to continue* to provide encouragement, insight, wisdom, and vision for congregational leaders throughout the United States and the world. We need your help *to raise up* a new generation of theologically sound, spiritually mature, well-trained pastors, especially for Reformed-Presbyterian congregations like yours.

You make this ministry possible. Will you please help us to teach the faith, encourage the faithful, and support congregational leaders in thinking about God in a disciplined and faithful way? Will you help us to provide teaching resources and theological leadership?

Today, we have a great opportunity to provide theological insight, wisdom, and guidance to thousands of Christians in the United States and abroad. **Please make your gift today. Please know how grateful we are for you and for your faithful support of this ministry**.

Richard E. Burnett, Managing Editor

The Institute for Theological Education

Theology Matters has established The Institute for Theological Education. Our goal is to equip the next generation of pastors and congregational leaders for Presbyterian and other Christian congregations. We seek to provide theological instruction that is biblical and from the mainstream of the Reformed tradition, and we begin by offering three programs:

1. A Master of Arts in Reformed Theology in partnership with the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (for more details, see below);
2. A continuing education program that offers seminars and retreats for pastors, elders, teachers, and other congregational leaders; and
3. An adult education program that offers courses, lectures, and seminars to all interested in the subject matter, whether for academic credit, a certificate in theological studies, or as auditors.

Master of Arts in Reformed Theology

In August 2023, Theology Matters and the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary launched a Master of Arts in Reformed Theology. We have had two strong cohorts, and we are beginning to recruit a third. Focusing on classic texts and practices valued by the Reformed tradition, this program offers instruction from pastor-scholars whose knowledge has been tested in the academy and significant pastoral ministry. The M.A. in Reformed Theology is a fully accredited, 36-credit degree offered in a hybrid format that includes both face-to-face and online learning. In-person instruction will be held at Providence Presbyterian Church, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

Required Courses

Introduction to the Reformed Tradition
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Interpretation of the New Testament in the Reformed Tradition
Reformed Theology I
Reformed Theology II
Capstone Project in Reformed Theology

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Dr. Jeffrey Bullock, President
University of Dubuque & Theological Seminary

Dr. Randal Working is President of *Theology Matters*. Dr. Richard Burnett is Executive Director and Managing Editor. The Board of Directors consists of ruling and teaching elders in various Presbyterian denominations. *Theology Matters* exists to equip, encourage, and inspire, members of the Presbyterian family and the wider Christian community through the clear and coherent articulation of theology that is reformed according to God's Word. It is sent free to anyone who requests it. You can reach us at 864-378-5416, at this email address, admin@theologymatters.com or at our website: www.theologymatters.com

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