



This month we are departing from our usual article e-newsletter layout to bring you an interview with Joel Beeke, President of Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Beeke will be one of the featured speakers at the Greenville Seminary Spring Theology Conference in March. For details about the conference please visit our website (www.gpts.edu.) Following the interview with Dr. Beeke is the typical report on Greenville Seminary's current finances and the faculty speaking schedule. The financial situation of the Seminary remains critical and we ask for your prayers for both wisdom and resources.

1. From your vantage point, how would you assess the health and vigor of the Reformed churches in North America at this time? What is the basis of your opinion?

Let me begin with your second question. Are these bodies true churches? First, do these churches exhibit the marks of a true church: namely, faithful preaching of the Word, right administration of the sacraments, and the due exercise of church discipline. Second, we must also assess them in terms of their well-being or degree of purity. What I mean by this is how truly the doctrine of the gospel is taught by the ministers and embraced by the members, and how faithful the public worship is according to the Word of God. Every church falls short of perfection, but how pure are these churches? How far do they go toward being what a local church ought to be?

We must never forget that it is possible to be a good, faithful member of a solid, Reformed, confessional church without personally and experientially knowing biblical, sovereign-grace truth. Healthy churches have many members who can explain how they have personally come to know the Lord Jesus and how they continue to live out of Him in daily, practical Christian living. By the blessing of the Holy Spirit, healthy churches foster large dosages of head-heart-hand theology.

I fear that in the larger Reformed and Presbyterian churches of North America, what some would call the mainline churches that come from a Reformed background, the "unchurching" of these bodies by modernism and liberalism begun in the twentieth century is continuing today. Pastors who do not believe what is taught in Scripture and who have not experienced its truths personally and savingly cannot preach the Word faithfully. In the absence of faithful preaching, the sacraments have no definite content or purpose, and church discipline seems to be used only against those who rebuke the leaders of these bodies and call them to repentance. However, even in these larger, older bodies some individuals and local

churches still hold fast to the essentials of the faith, fighting against the running tide of unbelief.

The situation is much better in some of the smaller, older bodies such as the Associate Reformed, Reformed Presbyterian, and Free Reformed Churches, and newer ones such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, the United Reformed Churches, the Presbyterian Reformed Churches, the Heritage Reformed Congregations, and some Reformed Baptist groups. Despite debates over such things as paedocommunion and Federal Vision theology in some of these denominations, many churches continue to affirm the basic doctrines of the Reformed faith. They are growing in size as new congregations are planted and older ones are revitalized. It appears that in a number of these churches God is blessing book ministries and conferences to foster more Reformed and Puritan-minded, experiential theology. Some very encouraging things are happening. As I travel around North America doing conferences and preaching in a variety of Reformed, Presbyterian, and Reformed Baptist churches, I often think that the godly are becoming more godly and the ungodly are becoming more ungodly. Conferences are growing in numbers and in quality. God's people are showing hunger for experiential truth, so that they might know Christ better and be more conformed to Him in daily living.

To determine the relative purity of these smaller bodies as a whole would require careful research and detailed assessment of each one, and we don't have the space to do that here. I am aware that there are some disturbing trends with regard to the centrality of preaching, the importance of doctrinal knowledge and confessional fidelity, and the conduct of public worship in some congregations of even several of these smaller denominations. Reformed worship developed as a vehicle to serve the Reformed faith, and it is hard to see how doctrinal orthodoxy can long endure where there is ignorance, indifference, or antagonism regarding the historic principles and usages of Reformed worship.

Church discipline continues to be highly problematic under the present circumstances in North America. Its purposes are not understood, and its methods are not well known or widely respected; unhappy members easily flee church discipline and find refuge in churches of other denominations. Some of the most conservative Reformed Christians seem to have forgotten that schism is a grievous sin, and the number of Reformed microdenominations continues to grow.

2. What do you see as some of the more important challenges for the church to address in our world today?

The single most important challenge is to continue preaching the authentic, Reformed, experiential gospel of Jesus Christ, and turn a deaf ear to voices that proclaim that some seismic shift in modern culture demands a new or different gospel. We must dare to believe that in spite of 2,000 years of such shifts and changes the gospel of Christ has ever been "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

Second, we need to recover a sense of the wholeness of the Reformed faith as a system of doctrine, manner of worship, and a way of life, and also as a position from which to evangelize the whole world and challenge "every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). We need to practice the Lordship of Christ as preachers and teachers, as believers and followers of Christ, and as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Third, we need to refire and refuel the passion for evangelism, church planting, and missions that burned so brightly in the churches of the Reformation and afterwards in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Investment of energy and resources in other lines of Christian work or activity can be a distraction from these central and urgent tasks. The huge investment of millions of dollars by churches and individual donors in recent political campaigns is astonishing, if one knows how difficult it can be to raise funds to plant new churches or send missionaries abroad. Are political or social issues more important than the

preaching of the gospel and the growth of the church?

Fourth, we must strive to overcome the negativism associated with conservative Christianity in our country today. It may not be possible in this world for us to rise above being “a sect that everywhere is spoken against” (Acts 28:22), but we can see to it that those who visit our churches are surprised by the fervent preaching of the beauty and riches of Christ, the free offer of grace, the sureness of God’s promises, and the practicality of truth and godliness. “Let the beauty of the LORD be upon us” (Ps. 90:17). We may find, by the Spirit’s blessing, more people in the world beating a path to our doors.

3. How can Reformed seminaries best equip their ministerial students to address these challenges today?

Reformed seminaries have always done their best work when they have given their students a good grounding in Bible knowledge, historic Christian doctrine and experience, and the basic skills of good exegetes and preachers. It is more important to furnish our students with the knowledge and skills to find their own answers to contemporary problems or questions in Scripture and Reformed theology than to give them canned answers to repeat mindlessly and endlessly.

That said, we need to have teachers who are not only well grounded in Reformed faith, order, and living, but who are also mentoring biblical piety and alive to both the universal needs of human life and the particular needs of our time and place. The Bible places little value on mere knowledge without understanding. Church history and Christian biography stand alongside experimental and practical theology as rich resources for such understanding and wisdom. In fact, every part of the seminary curriculum should be taught with an eye to the abiding or current relevance and practicality of the subject in hand.

In sum, our seminaries need to give thorough instruction, maintain high standards, and foster a concern for practical usefulness. Part of the task is to make students aware that they must prepare themselves not simply to pass exams but to meet the challenges, foreseeable and unforeseen, of the many years of ministry ahead of them.

4. What are the similarities and differences, as you see them, between Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary?

I view no seminary in North America as similar to our school as Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. We are so grateful for the cooperation between our schools. I count it an honor and privilege to teach periodically at Greenville and have recommended it to many potential students over the years. I am also grateful for how Greenville assisted us in the early years by providing degrees for students who completed our courses.

Both schools are unswerving in their allegiance to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Both schools cherish the heritage of Calvin and the Reformers, the Puritans of England, and the fathers of Scottish Presbyterianism.

Both schools emphasize the centrality of preaching, and preaching with application. Both schools are committed to high standards of academic excellence and ministerial preparedness. Faculty members of both institutions know, love, and appreciate each other. I have a long established friendship with Dr. Pipa, in particular. He and other faculty members from Greenville are loved and valued in many of the churches that support our seminary.

These two schools differ, certainly, with regard to the confessional and cultural milieu in which they have flourished. Puritan Reformed Seminary is the product of a Dutch Reformed and Puritan-minded community

in North America determined to preserve its theological and spiritual heritage brought to these shores from the Netherlands and through the reading of considerable Puritan literature. Greenville Seminary is located in the heart of the historic and distinctive Presbyterianism of the American South, with roots running back before the American Revolution.

It would be foolish to discount these factors of spiritual and cultural heritage in the life and work of these schools. It remains to be seen in the long run if the distinctive heritage of each school serves as a strength or a weakness. It will prove to be a weakness if it serves only to feed a narrow and inward-looking sectarianism that unchurches all Christians who may stand outside or apart from it. It will be a strength if it affords us a stable and well-identified position from which to reach out and contribute something valuable to the wider Christian community, and to meet the spiritual challenges of the day.

I am happy that it appears thus far that both schools are reaching out. Our vision at PRTS is to take Reformed, Puritan, experiential truth around the globe to penetrate as many denominations as possible. Presently we serve close to 100 students who hail from about 15 countries and from nearly 30 denominations. Greenville's paradigm and statistics would be nearly identical to this, I should think.

5. What advice would you give to young men who discern a call to the ministry?

First, seriously examine your call. Elsewhere I have written that a ministerial calling is a holy calling that involves a holy life, a holy desire for the work of the ministry, a holy compulsion to proclaim the gospel, a holy fitness for the work, holy struggles with the weightiness of the work, holy confirmation by the approbation of believers and providential events, and a holy love and burden for the spiritual welfare of people.

Second, do not be hasty. An inward call from God will only grow stronger as time passes, and as more time passes, the greater the clarity of the call becomes. Wait on the Lord continually, by prayer and the searching of the Scriptures. Seek wise counsel in making plans, choosing a ministry path, or deciding where to train. If you are married, your partner should affirm and share your sense of call, something only the Holy Spirit can impart, in His own good time.

Third, remember that Christian service is not merely a profession or career. What you are as both a Christian and a human being is even more important than where you train or what degrees you obtain. By the Spirit's grace, seek to learn and grow in being a true follower of Jesus Christ. Search the Scriptures. Learn koine Greek or, if that is not possible, classical Greek. Take courses that can assist you for seminary studies (Western history, philosophy, logic, speech, Latin, etc.). Fellowship with the wisest and maturest of believers. Read the best books—the great classics of the past. Learn how to think, meditate, and write well. Volunteer for ministry opportunities, such as speaking at youth conferences, teaching Sunday School, or ministering to the homeless. Be an active member of the local church, making diligent use of the means of grace. Grow and ripen as a human being. Profit from every life experience, good or bad, as a way to grow in grace.

Fourth, be practical. Learn to be organized and to manage your time well. Get into the workplace and master the skill of earning a living. Learn to manage your personal finances, to live within your means and avoid debt. Learn how to listen and how to work hard and well. Submit to the discipline of accepting any assigned task, no matter how unpleasant or demanding it may be. Learn how to learn—that is, where to find the knowledge, and how to master the skills needed to get the job done.

Finally, develop your people skills along the way. Study human nature and behavior. Visit the sick. Acquire the common graces of good grooming, good manners, and Christian courtesy. Cultivate a healthy lifestyle

with regard to diet, sleep, and exercise. The ministry involves diligent work, hardships of many kinds, heavy demands on skill and resources, and constant encounters with human and personal complicating factors. Give your all to the Lord and His cause, and pray continually for wisdom.

6. What books have you recently written for lay Christians?

A few months ago, Ligonier's Reformation Trust published Living for the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism, which seeks to show the biblicalness, doctrinal soundness, experiential warmth, and practical applications of Calvinism in twenty-eight different aspects. I've drawn on friends like Sinclair Ferguson, Derek Thomas, and Michael Haykin to assist me in producing this popular book on comprehensive Calvinism.

Last month, Day One and Reformation Heritage Books co-published 365 Days with Calvin, in which I edited Calvin for contemporary readability and added a closing section of applications to each day's selection.

I have also recently written enlarged editions of Family Worship and The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings.

Of particular interest to conference attendees, will be The Soul of Life: The Piety of John Calvin, a 240-page popular paperback due out at the end of this month. These books will be available at the conference, the GPTS online bookstore (www.presbyterianbookshop.org) and Reformation Heritage Books (www.heritagebooks.org.)



February 12-23 – Dr. Pipa – South Korea – Korean Institute Reformed Preachers

Feb. 15 – Dr. Dyer – Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Cookeville, TN

Feb. 22 – Dr. Dyer – Sovereign Grace Reformed OPC, Hickory, NC

Feb. 22 – Dr. Shaw – Covenant PCA, Oak Ridge, TN

March 3-4 – Dr. Curto – Meeting for the OPC Committee on Ecuminicity

March 10-12 – Dr. Pipa, Dr. McGoldrick, Dr. Knight – Greenville Seminary Spring Theology Conference, Woodruff Road PCA, Simpsonville, SC

March 15 – Dr. Dyer – Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Cookeville, TN

March 22 – Dr. Carrick – Christ Church of the Carolinas, Anderson, SC

March 20-22 – Dr. McGoldrick – Bible Conference, Crosspoint Community Church, MO

March 27 – Dr. McGoldrick- Kuyper College, Grand Rapids, MI

March 29 – Dr. Pipa – Covenant PCA, Houston, TX

April 3-5 – Dr. Pipa – Bible Conference, New Bern, NC

April 3-5 – Dr. Curto – Conference, Immanuel PCA, Norfolk, VA

April 17-18 – Dr. Dyer – Church Revival Conference, Providence OPC, Denver, CO

April 17-19 – Dr. Curto – Conference, Westminster PCA, Kingsport, TN

April 23-25 – Dr. Pipa – Fraser Valley Bible Conference, Fraser Valley, British Columbia

Ongoing:

Dr. Smith is teaching an Adult Sunday School class at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Bernard, NC

Dr. Willborn is the stated supply at Covenant PCA in Oak Ridge, TN

Dr. Shaw is leading a Men's Bible Study at 2nd PCA in Greenville, SC



In the month of January we received donations totaling \$43,218. The contributions were \$14,136 under budget (\$55,571). Donations for the first seven months of the fiscal year are \$407,937. Contributions for the year are \$3,293 less than this time last year. Donations so far this fiscal year are currently over budget by approximately \$6,450 and our general expenses are \$42,400 over budget. Capital Campaign income has reached \$2,181,768 and we anticipate another \$916,969 from incoming pledges.

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