

THE NATURE AND SCOPE
OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

SAMUEL VOLBEDA

This the third and final installment of Professor Dr. Samuel Volbeda's four-hour lecture given in 1939 to the alumni of Westminster Theological Seminary

Confusing church and kingdom work

I have outlined the actual situation accepted today, only to impress you with the work the church as an institution is called upon to do, namely, to convert the heavenly energies of covenant life into kingdom service to the praise of God in the midst of a world growing more wicked every day. Now I return to the church and shall speak about its specific ecclesiastical labors.

In doing this it is incumbent to say at the outset, that the work of the church is performed by one part of the church upon the other. One of the most prevalent ecclesiological errors of our country is, that ecclesiastical work is the duty of all members of the church equally and alike. Of course, it is no mistake to believe that all members of the church owe definite duties to the church. But, contrary to widely current notions, ecclesiastical work is not the business of all members indiscriminately. Exclusion from active discharge of ecclesiastical function does not appertain merely to members who are still in their minority. In fact *most* of those who have attained legal majority and spiritual maturity are not charged by God in his Word with ecclesiastical labors. As a matter of principle, female members of the church are not engaged in church-work; they are even *ineligible* to office. They are barred from performing ecclesiastical action as a matter of category. Their sex automatically precludes them from functioning ecclesiastically. In respect of eligibility not even all male members qualify although they be communicants in good and regular standing. Not all

have fitness for ecclesiastical office and its pertinent duties. The matter in hand resolves itself into the double dictum: first, that the work of the church, ecclesiastically speaking, is performed legitimately only by those who are lawfully called to sacred office; and second, that only those who possess the qualifications specified by the biblical charter of the church are eligible to office.

The cause for prolific confusion on this score is the mistake of confounding the church and the kingdom of God. Ecclesiology is in a bad pass on every hand. On the one hand there are those who, having forgotten all about God's covenant as the divine matrix of spiritual life, erroneously imagine that the church is a spiritual maternity ward, and either believe or, in consistency, should believe in baptismal regeneration. On the other hand there are such as have lapsed into the Roman Catholic error of mistaking the ecclesiastical organization for the kingdom of God as such. Accordingly they deem it the duty of the church as an institution to engage in the building of social structures and in operating social machinery. The so-called social gospel would not have found so ready an entrance into more or less orthodox churches in the past, if the latter had not opened the door to it antecedently by identifying the ecclesiastical organization virtually, if not theoretically and expressly, with the kingdom of God.

One of the most pernicious and lamentable consequences following in the wake of this unbiblical ecclesiology and of the practice congruent with it, is the neglect of what is the divinely-ordained work of the church. Such a church forsook its last as a bad shoemaker to do distinctive kingdom work. The so-called "institutional church" heralded with acclaim some twenty years ago--not to be confounded with the church as an institution--is a dangerous foreign growth in the body ecclesiastical; the more so because the crystallization of error by institutionalization makes it the more tenacious of life and the harder to combat effectually. It was partly with this ecclesiastical aberration in mind that I enlarged upon the distinction of covenant, church and kingdom in the course of this paper. The observance, clearly and

consistently, of this differentiation will prove an effective antidote to the bad ecclesiology complained of.

Offices in the church

In order to determine concretely what the work of the church is, we need only ask which offices Christ, the divine founder of the church, has instituted through his apostles, and what respective tasks devolve upon those invested with these offices.

The offices concerned are the triple ministry of the Word, of government, and of relief. It would carry us too far afield to explore the vast tract of practical theology opening up before us here. It would be worthwhile indeed to spend some time on the biblical conception of ecclesiastical office and its Christological background, but available time does not permit our doing this. Ecclesiastical office was brought in only to explain the restriction of ecclesiastical to a part of the membership of the church. In order to determine who are to do the work of the church, one need but ask: who are in office! Only those believers who are elected to office are assigned to specially ecclesiastical tasks. And in order to make out what constitutes the work of the church, one need but pass on from the formal notion of office to its material definition. We have already seen that, according to Scripture as interpreted by the great Reformed creeds, there are fundamentally but three ecclesiastical offices: the ministry of the Word, the ministry of government and the ministry of relief. That is a syllabus of the work of the church. Members of the church not invested with one of these three offices are not warranted to perform ecclesiastical work. They would be guilty of the serious offense of intrusion in office should they presume to exercise these functions ecclesiastically. Ecclesiastically, I said, for it is a covenant and a kingdom function to profess the truth of God revealed in his Word prophetically, to maintain God's law and enforce Christ's precepts in royal style, and to administer physical and other relief wherever it may be necessary after a priestly fashion.

One of the objectives of the triple ministry of the church is to train God's people for the discharge of precisely these holy duties devolving upon all who have the unction of the Holy One and accordingly bear the name Christian. One could wish that all believers would be keenly aware of their covenant and kingdom obligation to be prophets, priests and kings. But the fact remains that in the church as an institution only those are called to the ministries of preaching, ruling and alms, respectively, who are constitutionally elected thereto.

Nearly the whole Christian church is agreed that the work of the church, institutionally speaking, is the task of only a fraction of its membership, despite the rather wide variety of ecclesiastical polity prevailing. From the angle of the subject under discussion, particularly as regards the work of ecclesiastical government, there are three systems, namely, the monarchic, the obligarchic and the pantarchic.

The monarchic system of ecclesiastical polity is represented consistently by the Roman Catholic Church. Its pope is a monarch indeed. The dogmatical ground advanced in support of the papal system is, that the pope is *vicarius Christi in terra*. He reflects the indisputable monarchy of Christ, we are told. All ecclesiastical power in the Roman Catholic Church derives from the pope as the pope's power derives from Christ. It is exercised in his name formally. In theory no member of the church, whoever he be, has any authority, whether to preach or to exercise rulership or whatever ecclesiastical activity may be contemplated, save the pope and he to whom he is pleased to delegate such power under specified conditions. The Greek Orthodox Church and Episcopal churches are relatively monarchic. The monarchic trend is present but it stops short of papalism, more or less inconsistently.

The Reformed or Presbyterian churches exemplify oligarchic church government. A few brethren are clothed with the office of government. They constitute a Bench of Elders and govern the church collegiately in sessions, presbyteries and synods. The oligarchic principle is carried through consistently in the ascending scale of their

ecclesiastical judicatories. Presbyterianism resolutely disavows monarchism and is careful to close the door tight against it.

The pantarchic (the rule of all the people) is represented by the Independent or Congregationalistic churches. They join hands with the Presbyterians in banning and barring monarchism. But, contrary to Presbyterianism, they vest the government of the church, theoretically at least, in the joint membership of the church. The same individualism that asserts itself in their vigorous rejection of denominational consolidation, appears in their insistence upon the congregational *kratos* of the ecclesiastical *demos*. Not one member, nor even a few members best qualified, but all members, if they be of age, must have a voice in the life and work of the church.

There is no time to weigh these several positions carefully in the scales of Scripture. A few general observations must suffice. Be it said, in the last analysis the church of God is certainly ruled monarchically. One alone is King of the church by God's sovereign decree. That one and only King is our Lord Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastical monarchy, then, is not inherently absurd. But it is far from plausible that Christ, who promised to be with his church to the end of time through his Spirit, should appoint a replacement on earth. Scripture does not teach an early vicariate of Christ such as the Roman Catholic church claims for its pope.

The pantarchic system finds support neither in revelation nor in reason. It is as illogical as it is impractical. Little wonder that it has been toned down considerably since Robert Browne first broached it and later personally abandoned it by returning to the Episcopal Church of England.

The oligarchic system of church government is scriptural indeed. It wisely avoids the extremes of monarchic depotism and pantarchic individualism. It is eminently suited to the exigencies of the present dispensation. It commends itself to reason and has the support of the wisdom that is born of long range experience.

The church as the school of Christ

The church is the divine agency instituted for the purpose of training God's covenant people for kingdom service through the cultivation of their spiritual life by means, preeminently, of the administration of the Word of God.

It is a pedagogical institute; it is a school of Christ. It cannot properly be contended that the church as here defined includes the office-bearers only, because they alone are engaged in the work of the church. For as in a family parents alone govern and children are governed, and in a state the magistrate alone rules and the citizens are ruled, and in a school the teacher alone teaches and the pupils are taught, yet the children indeed belong to the family, the citizens are truly included in the state, and the school embraces the pupils. So also the corporation of the church includes both those who are actively engaged in the work of the church and those who sustain a passive relation to the work being done in the church. Of course, this possibility is moral and not physical. And moral passivity, as we know, is a transmutation of action. The ministers administer the Word to those who are members of the church by baptism and/or confession. The elders rule those sustaining the relation of membership to the church. The deacons care for those enrolled members of the church who are unable to provide for themselves in *naturalibus*. For this reason, membership in the covenant through birth from believing parents, however much it entitles those so born to membership in the church, does not render formal admission to the church by means of baptism superfluous. Covenant rights cannot be asserted, unless and until the covenant seal has been duly affixed to the forehead by means of the sacrament of baptism. The fact that one is a citizen of the kingdom of God by membership in the covenant does not relieve him of the obligation to be a member of the church and to be subject to those who are over him in the Lord. Members of the covenant and citizens of the kingdom are in duty bound to attend the ecclesiastical training school which Christ has founded, in pursuance of their covenant membership and kingdom citizenship.

The church may rightly be called the light and powerhouse of the kingdom of God; not in the sense that the church creates the light and generates the power in the absolute sense. Insofar the figure is not wholly apt. The Word of God is the light as it reveals Christ in whom God reveals himself. And the pentecostal Spirit is the power of God as Jesus told his disciples on the eve of his ascension. Nor is it implied that the light of the Word and the power of the Spirit are mediated exclusively by the ordinances of the church. But it may properly be maintained that God has designed the church to be far more than a mere mechanical reflection of light and power. That description hardly applies even to individual believers. It certainly does not apply to the church of God in its corporate capacity. The church is heavily charged with enlightening power and with pedagogical dynamics through the Holy Spirit who informs it, in order to utilize it in the application of the salvation wrought by Christ. Far from being a *societas humana* after a collegialistic fashion, it is the instrument designed by God himself to serve his cause in the earth intensively. It is impossible to calculate the loss those believers sustain who minimize the significance of the church and of attendance upon its ordinances. History proves conclusively that a high appreciation of the church, when it is true to God's Word, and a correspondingly faithful attendance upon its ministration registers in the solid upbuilding of the kingdom and its rapid extension and growing prestige. Where the church fails, the covenant declines and the kingdom decays. History also proves that when the church becomes untrue to its legitimate mission, and consequently declines and decays, the kingdom of God as delineated in Scripture makes no progress but deteriorates and breaks down, at least in fact, if not at once in name.

It is particularly the ministry of the Word exercised with liturgics and catechism that makes the church the immeasurably potent factor in building and extending the kingdom of God in this world. In a true sense the government of the church and the care of its poor are accessory functions. The church is the custodian of the Word of God, or as Paul put it, "the pillar and ground of the truth." The oracles of God

have been entrusted to it as a sacred deposit, a *paratheke*. It stands guard over these holy oracles. It must preserve them and has done this in past ages both before Christ and after his departure. The history of the Canon is interesting literature in this respect. The church must interpret the Word of God and formulate its interpretation of Scripture in its creed for the official information of the world and the guidance of God's people. Again, it must defend the truth of God against heresy and error after the fashion of the famous *Canons of Dordt*. It must also inculcate the truth that saves, in God's people and their seed, and communicate it to those outside the pale of God's covenant at home and abroad as well as to those who have apostatized from it through unbelief. God's Word, rightly understood, is fundamental to the furtherance of God's work in the world, the promotion of the glory of his wondrous Name and the increase of his people's salvation and happiness.

The government of God's church by the elders and the care of Jesus' needy ones by the deacons are intended to buttress the preaching of the Word. The elders must see to it that all God's people walk consistently according to the truth of the gospel. The deacons must relieve the need of believing indigents, in order that poverty and its indubitably demoralizing influence may not stand in the way of the supremacy of the truth and will of God in their lives. Elders and deacons are "the Aarons and the Hurs who uphold the hands of Moses" as the New Testament Israel fights against the Amalekites of the Christian era. The office of the ministry of the Word is therefore the paramount ecclesiastical office and its incumbents are the leaders of the church preeminently. Of course, they are neither the only officers of the church nor are they above the need of the services of their fellow-officers.

The importance of the Lord's Day

The Day of the Lord, when preaching is conducted in the framework of liturgical worship, is the *Dies Magnus Ecclesiasticus*. On other days God's people are at work in the kingdom of God, the one here, the other there; one doing this, the other that. On Sunday they cease from their

kingdom labors and assemble in their accustomed places of joint worship. In their concourse, there and then, they bring to visible expression their unity as a separate people, an elect race, a royal priesthood. Upon that occasion they render God corporate worship, as contradistinguished from their personal and family devotions. God then bestows upon them in their corporate capacity the blessing of his divine fellowship and inestimable boon of the official proclamation, in his home, of his glorious truth. Provided the minister is true to God's Word, God speaks through him to his people who truly worship God. He is in their midst in a real and special sense. Under these conditions the Scriptures and their homiletical-liturgical opening become in a glorious sense the Word of God such as it is only then and there. Whoever hears God's faithful ministers at such a time in sincere faith hears the voice of the great shepherd as he leads his sheep in green pastures and beside still waters, far from the maddening crowd.

It need cause no surprise when we learn that tremendous kingdom-building energies are released upon these Sabbath occasions to pass into God's people through the subjective medium of their faith in Christ. These they use upon their return to their Father's world and their task therein. The Word of God, reinforced by the sacraments, notably by the Lord's Supper celebrated frequently, is a veritable spiritual *factotum* from the builders of God's kingdom in a hostile world. It is manna to renew their strength, sparkling water to refresh their spirit, balm of Gilead to heal their wounds, the sword of the Spirit wherewith to put their enemies to flight, light to dispel their darkness, music to cheer them on their way, a chart to indicate a path through the wilderness, a program to execute in their life, a beacon to warn them of impending dangers.

It is quite impossible to analyze completely the practical significance of the Word of God as administered to God's people on God's Day by those ordained to perform this momentous and sublime task. The Word of God serves a double purpose when properly administered. Its negative service is that it arms God's people against the foes of God

and their own souls, whether within or without. Its positive usefulness lies in building up their strength for kingdom service through the increase of their faith, the kindling of their love, the confirmation of their hope and the firing of their zeal. It performs all these functions in spite of the preacher's weaknesses and the people's unsusceptibilities, because according to the promise of God, the Spirit of God invests the word of Scripture, when preached aright, with vitalizing energies. It makes true preachers mighty men in spite of themselves as well as it makes God's dull and obtuse people peculiarly receptive of the light and power with which the Word of God bristles under these auspicious circumstances. It need hardly be added that if God's people and their ministers were always mindful of the enormous kingdom-serving power in what may be called liturgical, i.e., worship-formed and worship-filled, preaching on the day when heaven bows down to earth and earth rises to meet heaven's embraces, there would be more consecrating prayer for the Day that the Lord hath made, more intense application to public worship while it is in progress, more trailing clouds of devotion after the gates of the temple have been closed, more heavenly-mindedness during the six-day period of earthly labors, more thought of eternity as the clock ticks off the wearisome hours of time.

But public worship, inclusive of preaching, is not the only task the church performs as a specific religious agency, though it doubtless is the paramount *pensum* of the institution. It may be well if at this point we return to the formal discussions which were discontinued some time ago. For the purpose of reorientation we turn back to the concept of Practical Theology. The question occupying us particularly is, what is the practice referred to in the name of this department of Theology? The answer we found was that it is the *practice*, the *work* of the institution we call church, and that the distinctive purpose of this ecclesiastical practice is to stimulate and cultivate the spiritual life of God's covenant people and their training through instruction and guidance for the life-long and world-wide service of the kingdom of God in its early and temporal phase.

A revision suggested

At this juncture I may be permitted to propound a change in the encyclopedic structure of theology, with reference incidentally to the entire set-up and particularly to the department of theology in which I labor professionally at Calvin Seminary. I would suggest that theology be divided, like Gaul in Caesar's times, in three parts.

The first part deals with special revelation as it crystalized in *hai graphai*, i.e., in a Book that contains a truly supernatural message but presents it in a casket that is truly natural. The book is absolutely unique in respect of its ideological soul, but it is perfectly ordinary as regards the literary body in which this soul has taken up its residence. The book has through an accident of history overruled by divine providence, been called Bible or *ta Biblia*, i.e., a collection of booklets or as it has been styled a library. The literal meaning of the term (booklets) suggests its natural character. Its technical name, used univocally for this book alone among the millions of the world's books, expresses its divine character.

Dr. Kuyper rightly contended that the first department of theology embraces far more than the exegesis of the Old and New Testament writings, respectively. Accordingly he discarded the name Exegetical Theology as being too limited in scope and substituted for it, very felicitously indeed, Bibliological Theology.

The second department of theology is commonly called historical. But this designation is quite unsatisfactory, if only because it gives not as much as an inkling as to what particular history it contemplates. For the Bible as a human book or library has a history of its own. The Bible contains a vast amount of historical material bearing upon Israel and the nations surrounding it. And the church of the New Testament has remained on the scene of the world's theater for well-nigh two millennia after special revelation was terminated. The name Historical Theology leaves us wholly in the dark to which of the three histories mentioned is meant, if all are not included in its purview. Here again, Dr.

Kuyper's proposal was a happy one. He called this department Ecclesiological Theology.

He was not equally successful, however, in following up the clue he had given to its legitimate extent. For he divided the theological matter that followed under two headings, although the material under the second of these two headings logically belongs under the caption of Ecclesiological Theology. The two headings concerned are Dogmatological Theology and the material of Scripture dealing with ecclesiastical office.

A reconstruction, both of the traditional scheme and of that of Kuyper seems advisable. Kuyper's fine suggestion that theology is in part ecclesiological must be retained by all means for reasons that time does not permit us to canvass today. This, however, may be remarked; the *principium divisionis* of theology should not be derived from an abstract analysis of Scripture as if it were an entity unrelated to the realities of earth and time, floating in splendid isolation in the air, but should be governed by the historic and pragmatic considerations that the Word of God and church of God are correlatives in history, even according to Scripture itself. On the basis of this idea we get the theology which deals with the Bible as the natural vehicle of supernatural revelation, second, the *aletheian* (truth) and ethical (duty) ideology embodied in the special revelation of Scripture. Kuyper called the department Dogmatological Theology. This term is not as immune to criticism as Kuyper believed it to be. For if dogma has the connotation of ecclesiastically determined and formulated doctrine, dogmatological theology should be subordinated to ecclesiological theology as presenting the *pistis* and *ethos* of the church. Dogmatics may be continued as what the church officially professes, but no one has to my knowledge ever conceived of ethics as the science of what the church should practice (ecclesiastical agenda analogous to ecclesiastical credenda). Besides, reformed symbolics is supposed to present in scientific form what the church as an institution officially professes as its faith in its creed. Dogmatics may rightly be construed as the scientific exposition and technical

formulation of the entire composite of Scripture ideology, whether creedally formulated or not. In this way dogmatics may explore such traits of truth as have not yet been ecclesiastically surveyed and charted, and may help to bring about the breaking of new light from God's Word, of which John Robinson of Puritan fame spoke to the prospective pilgrims on the eve of their departure for America.

The third department of theology properly deals with the church as it stands revealed in Holy Writ, particularly on the score of its institutional life and practice. As observed above, Kuyper substituted Diaconological for practical and as the nomenclature for this department. Both terms are open to strictures. Even as understood by Kuyper himself Diaconological Theology is much more than the theory of office *diakonia*. He really intended it to deal with what in plain language is the work of the church, as Ecclesiological Theology is to deal with the framework and history of the church. On the other hand, the term *Practical* obviously included far more than the work of the church as an institution, unless it be qualified. But this is not done. The traditional name reads: Practical Theology, and nothing is added by way of qualification.

We shall not err, if we lay hold of Kuyper's idea of Ecclesiological Theology and give it its logical latitude. It would then include the following subsidiary departments.

1. The Polity of the Church
2. The Creedal Faith of the Church (symbolics)
3. The History of the Church
4. The Expansion of the Church (Missiology)
5. The Work of the Church.

It will be noted that all these heads are subdivisions of the notion church, conceived of institutionally. This church is not in all instances constructed properly. Presbyterianism is, according to the Reformed faith, the *jure divino* polity of Christ's church on earth. Or to put it otherwise, Presbyterianism is the framework (Killen's term) of the church which God prescribes in his Word. This ecclesiastical institution, whether set up presbyterially or otherwise, has marched

down the corridor of time and has entered practically every land and has been recruited from well-nigh every people. It is a venerable institution and its historical significance as a spiritual factor and as a molding influence in natural life is immense. Its impact upon society today may not be as great as once it was, but even now it wields a greater influence, be it somewhat more indirectly, than its enemies will allow and its faint-hearted sponsors dare believe.

The faith of the church

In the course of its history the church has studied the Scriptures and has progressively built up what may be called its faith in the creedal sense of the term. This faith, in the case of Protestants truly so called, is merely the reconstruction of the thought-material of Scripture, and is called *faith* because its substance which is derived from the Word of God which we accept by faith as God's Word is correspondingly embraced by faith. By styling our interpretation of Scripture *faith*, we do not mean to imply, that its subject-matter is not dealt with according to the laws of thought, or is not capable of scientific construction, or that the acceptance of that faith and its study, profession and defense are exercised without the use of those reasoning powers which we have in common with unbelieving men and which we employ in the ordinary affairs of daily life. Indeed not! Our whole religion is a *latreia logikee*. What we mean to indicate by calling our version of Scripture faith is that our assurance of the truth of Scripture, and therefore of our creedal recast of a part of Scripture, is based upon the *autopistic* character of Scripture, and not upon the strength of argument wielded dialectically. Argument extends only to the determination of what Scripture actually declares. But once this is settled to our reasonable satisfaction, the declarations of Scripture, as understood, automatically commend themselves as deserving of credence and therefore of submission noetically as well as ethically. The imperative of Scripture, whether it concerns *credenda* or *agenda*, is categorical.

If the question be raised why Christians grant the autopistic character, unlike many who deny it, the answer is that the conviction concerned is intuitive. With believers it is

axiomatic that the Scriptures are superior to the need of validating proof after a logical fashion and according to the laws of evidence that apply in natural affairs. If an unbeliever should find fault with the believer for having this intuition, if he be fair and polite he would hardly proceed upon the assumption that the Bible-believing Christian is a congenital prevaricator, that Christian could warrantably turn the tables on him and demand that he discount those intuitions which he asserts without any attempt at demonstrating their epistemological validity. The church's faith is so called because it is embraced by that self-same act of the soul whereby we trust for salvation in Jesus' blood and righteousness and God's precious promises.

The church's creedal faith is supremely important. It is closely related to its polity; it is a factor of no mean significance historically. And the work of the church is affected by it very directly and very vitally, unless there be no living faith in the heart answering to the faith recorded in the church's standards--a situation which is not at all impossible as history plainly teaches.

It is not necessary to speak of the history of the church, seeing it concerns itself only with what the church *has* done (and undergone), not with what it is *to do*. Its past practice, however, is also its future program insofar as it was executed in harmony with God's Word. If we study the work which the church is called upon to do, we shall have some realization of what the church has done in the ages that have come and gone.

The expansion of the church through missionary effort should receive a generous measure of attention, the more so since we have as yet no scientific Reformed science of missions. It may be hoped that Dr. J. H. Bavinck, professor-election of Missions at Kampen and Amsterdam, will supply this need at his earliest convenience. Before dismissing the subject it may be said that missions among apostate Christians and a technique of missions suited to modern conditions will necessarily occupy a large place in the desired Reformed science of Missions. In a word, what has been styled the expansion of the church must, for a part at least,

be the reclamation of the church.

We now arrive at what I have denominated the work of the church. It is not my purpose to discuss the several labors going into this. A mere enumeration must suffice. It is as follows:

1) The Conduct of Public Worship, which includes preaching as its central and pivotal part and must therefore be conceived of liturgically no less than homiletically.

2) Catechesis, which is the administration of the Word of God to the covenant youth of the church for the purpose of cultivating their nascent spiritual life and thereby bringing them to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness.

3) Family care, as exercised in stated and occasional visits paid God's people at their home and designed to strengthen the covenant life of the family in every direction.

4) Personal care, bestowed upon individuals as circumstances require. Reference may be made to such circumstances as bodily illness, social difficulties and spiritual troubles.

5) Care of the poor, as exercised by the diaconate under the supervision of the consistory (session).

6) The spiritual government of the church, inclusive of discipline as exercised locally, regionally and nationally in collegiate style and not individually.

7) The administration of the temporalities of the church.

Church work is always pastoral

These labors are allocated to the triple officers of the church: the ministers of the Word, elders and deacons, respectively. Instead of remarking upon these various exercises severally, I shall in conclusion devote a measure of attention to their general character.

The general character of all church work without a single exception is *pastoral*. Pastoral work is not a special, particular type of church activity. You will have noticed that I did not include it in the syllabus of church work given a moment ago. What I called "Family" and even more particularly what I styled "Personal Care" is generally held to be pastoral work in distinction from liturgesis, homileisis, catechesis, kybernesis, and the rest of ecclesiastical labors. But pastoral, instead of denoting any particular kind of church work, has reference to the character, spirit, tone, purpose of all church work whatsoever. All the officers of the church are shepherds. It is a mistake to think of the minister as being the pastor of a congregation, in the generally accepted sense of: the *only* pastor. The definite article may be used in his case, if it be meant to indicate that he is the chief pastor.

It should be observed that pastoral is a thoroughly Scriptural term. It is current in both Testaments. God, Christ and those serving them in official capacity, whether theocratically in the Old Testament or ecclesiastically in the New Testament, are repeatedly represented as the shepherds of God's people. Their pastoral work includes all the species of church work enumerated above. Those under the spiritual care of these shepherds are accordingly called sheep, lambs, flock.

The fundamental notion indexed by the term pastoral is "care," devoted to *living* objects of a specified type and calculated to preserve, nourish, protect their life and to comfort them in their distress.

In the New Testament the pastoral function devolves preeminently upon him who gave his life for the sheep and was brought back from the dead by the God of peace, as chief Shepherd of the sheep. True, ecclesiastical officers are once called shepherds expressly and somewhat technically (Eph. 4:11). In this passage Paul no doubt meant to say that those so designated shepherd the flock by teaching the sheep and the lambs. But apart from such epithets as great and chief, bestowed upon Christ as the Messianic Shepherd and promised in the Old Testament particularly when the pastoral agents of Jehovah went wrong (cf. Jeremiah and Ezekiel), Christ stands out as the Shepherd preeminently of his

believing people.

Christ is usually said to be invested with three offices: those of Prophet, Priest and King. Often it is added that these three offices are really one grand office whose execution involves three distinct functions. It may be suggested that his one comprehensive office is pastoral, and that he exercises this one and only office prophetically, in priestly fashion and after a royal style. Whether he teaches his people or dies for them or rules them in God's name, he is always pastorally engaged. This pastoral office Christ exercises directly and immediately through his Spirit, but also mediately, instrumentally through the several officers of the church. It has sometimes been averred that the ministers represent Christ as prophets, that Christ rules his people through the elders, and that the deacons are the agents of his mercy. Fact is, as the one Christ exercises the triple pastoral function, so too each ecclesiastical officer exercises all pastoral functions more or less; that is, not in the same measure although measurably. The minister represents Christ more largely than the elders and the deacons by reason of the cumulative character and authority of his office. But his function is predominantly prophetic (he is a minister specifically of the *Word*) yet the spirit of his prophetic ministrations is priestly and royal, as he opens the Scriptures and preaches repentance and faith authoritatively and entreats men to be reconciled to God and lovingly exhorts and comforts and guides God's sheep and lambs.

The elder's office is largely regimental, and by that token, kingly. But he bears rule only through the Word of God, the law of the King. This he administers occasionally and informally rather than upon the set occasion of public worship. The deacon's office is peculiarly priestly and sacrificial, but he must parallel physical relief with spiritual comfort derived from the Word of God prophetically, and he needs royal authority to demand that those possessed of means contribute to the relief of the poor and to direct the souls of the needy into the paths of thankfulness to God and further to trust in him and to make frugal use of the means supplied.

A glorious task it is, the task of those called to ecclesiastical office. And this glory is aptly indexed in the term "pastoral," beautifully significant as it is. This will appear as we study the pastoral *spirit*, the pastoral *task*, and the pastoral *felicity* of the shepherds of God's ecclesiastical flock.

A union of love and authority

As to the pastoral spirit in which the work of the church is to be performed, this is fundamentally a spirit in which a pervasive sense of tender love and an impressive sense of divine authority are exquisitely blended. The pastoral spirit is neither that of love to the exclusion of authority as modernism fatuously opines, nor that of authority to the exclusion of love, as Roman Catholic practice seems to suggest. Love divorced from authority is not pastoral love, whatever else it may be. And authority without love is not pastoral authority, howsoever one might qualify it. Pastoral is a combination of both after a very definite fashion. It is not love added to authority; neither is it authority added to love. It is, as said above, a blend of the two, resulting in what may, for want of a better term, be called an amalgam. Pastoral love and authority, respectively, may be obviously described. But every analytical denotation is bound to be inadequate. According to its nature authority is distinctively formal; hence it may be said to be the basic and structural element in the compound pastoral. Love is comparatively more material than formal, in the sense of substantial. It rests upon authority. It gathers about authority as an actual building hugs the steel-structure that sustains it and gives it shape and style. Authority is the forensic ground of love and love is the moral and spiritual breath of life with which authority is suffused. Love without authority is invertebrate and amorphous. Authority without love is a naked framework, stark and cold. Authority gives direction and purpose to love. Love imparts vibrant vitality to authority. Authority without love tends to domination, deepening invariably into sordid despotism. Love without authority is subject to dissipation. It volatilizes, it evaporates, it disappears, without leaving behind a trace of its presence or a mark of its effect.

Of course, I am speaking all along of pastoral love and of pastoral authority. I am not forgetting that civil authority, as revealing its typical character in military discipline, is in a wholly different category. Nor am I unmindful of the fact that love may dwell in the heart of an inferior as well as in the breast of a superior. But the superior's love is first: we love God because he first loved us! A parent is anterior to his child. As far as the world is concerned we are here not concerned with the love of God for himself according to the trinitarian economy of his infinite being--the first love ever exercised within cosmic categories was the love of the world's absolute sovereign toward it. And logically his absolute sovereignty was anterior to his love for the world. God's absolute sovereignty determines his love, not vice versa. We see the same situation in intra-human relations. Adam was the first man to exercise love. And the first object of his love for man was Eve, his wife, and, by that token, his social inferior. His love for her was the love of a husband for his wife, that is, of a superior for one inferior (God's Word being arbiter, should the statement be doubted). Parents love their children before their children love them and parents, again, are the superiors of their children. The love of inferiors is love for superiors *qua tales*. Man's love for God, the Mediator's love for God who sent him, a woman's love for her matrimonial master, children's love for their parents, the love of servants for their masters, the pupils' love for their teachers, a congregation's love for those over them in the Lord are clear illustrations of the principle enunciated. The social structure of life is not built on equalitarian lines. It is, of course, not implied that equals cannot sustain relations of mutual love. But the genius of love comes to truer expression and fuller expansion in life in the mutual affection of superiors and subordinates. It is not to be assumed that the social framework of humanity in heaven will be characterized by dead-level horizontalism. There would be less antagonism to the authoritarian construction of society than there is today, if the interrelation of love and authority, as specified above, were in evidence everywhere in a practical way. And those called to exercise authority would be less prone to let power run riot, if the current anti-authoritarian theory of love were not so widely prevalent and not so stupidly persistent.

The glory of being church

We are now ready to draw the conclusion that the pastoral spirit in which all church work whatsoever is to be carried out is truly ideal. We need not be surprised to find the pastoral spirit dwelling specifically in the church. The ecclesiastical corporation while not coterminous with the full-orbed life of God's people, is nevertheless the highest level to which their life rises. As the dynamo of the kingdom of heaven it partakes of the nature of heaven. Nowhere, indeed, and never are God's people closer to the celestial regions of God's mighty universe than when they meet in their ecclesiastical capacity for worship on the Lord's Day before the face of God. All the rest of ecclesiastical life, as it is built around the hub of Sabbath worship, is made of the same fabric. The ecclesiastical institution operates indeed in the natural sphere and employs natural means after the manner of men of flesh and blood. But itself is of supernatural origin. It is supernatural as regards its specific purpose, unlike the family in which the covenant is institutionalized and the social structures of life in which the kingdom of God comes to organized expression. Ecclesiastical life in its quintessence normally presents a cross-section of heaven. For as in heaven the joint worship of God before his throne of gracious glory is the comprehensive program of life, so the corporate worship of God in the sanctuaries of earth is the central and dominant engagement of the institutional church. In view of this fact it is precisely in this department of God's glorious commonwealth that we should expect to find and actually come upon the entrancingly beautiful pastoral relation between God and his people, which is both aboriginal and eschatological.

One cannot but bemoan the sad fact that the church has been almost chronically untrue, in larger or smaller measure, to its God-given pastoral character. We are wont to speak of the deformation of the church in terms of unsound doctrine, unbiblical polity and faulty worship. And rightly so. But a fourth category of corruption may properly be added. It is the defection of the church on the score of its divinely

ordained pastoral character. There are two periods in the history of the church in which the church was pastorally-minded indeed, namely, the ancient era and the age of the Reformation. The medieval church was magisterial like the Roman Empire which the Roman church copied and hierarchical like the Judaistic priesthood which it emulated. Its institutionalism was as cold and austere as the mighty Gothic cathedrals which rose to the skies after the turn of the first Christian millennium. Life was lost when the Bible, the record of the love of God in Christ, was closed and sealed and shelved and forgotten and superseded. When God's love to man became as unknown as the Antarctic continent and the love of the Savior was eclipsed by the Christology that frightened young Luther out of his wits, the shepherds of God's medieval flock neither themselves practiced love in the dealings with Jesus' sheep and lambs, nor did they teach them the lesson which the apostle reiterated in Ephesus in his old age: "Little children love one another."

The Reformation brought back the Gospel of the glorious grace of God. It did not make the reactionary mistake of spurning authority just because it glorified the abounding mercy of God. Enlightened by God's Spirit and taught by his Word, it related authority and love as represented above. The Reformation was a return, in obedience to God's Word, to a pastoral conception of the church and to an ecclesiastical practice congruent therewith. Sound doctrine was inculcated pastorally. Church government was exercised pastorally. Scriptural worship was conducted pastorally. The church was once more the institutional shepherd of God's people.

When decline sets in

But not for long. Scarcely had a century rolled around, when certain reactionary forces, inspired by pagan antiquity, succeeded in impregnating the mind of the church with anti-authoritarianism grounded fundamentally in utter subjectivism. The authority of the church was flouted. The authority of the Bible was first doubted, then disputed, thereafter denied unapologetically. The authority of the state was too strongly buttressed by physical might to be set aside summarily. But it was slowly yet surely undermined, until at

last authority as such was disowned on principle and abandoned indiscriminately. One of the most efficacious means of discrediting authority *uberhaupt* and bringing about its calamitous collapse was the specious argument that where authority prevails love cannot abide and that where love dwells authority is utterly superfluous. This non-sensical line of reasoning derived a semblance of warrant from the fact that the medieval authoritarianism had proved itself indeed to be the deadly foe of love as a principle of life and action. And the state absolutism of the 16th and 17th centuries seemed to second the conclusion drawn from medieval ecclesiastical tyranny. But it remained a typical illustration of the wrong practice of dumping the baby out with the water in which it was bathed. At any rate, the cry: "Away with authority," was raised everywhere. Respect for authority, or as the Dutch say "Ontzag voor gezag," disappeared as rapidly as unseasonable snow in May. Insubordination in the home, in the school, in society, in the state, in the church, everywhere in fact rose like the tide and pressed on irresistibly like a tidal wave. And the motif assigned was the ardent desire that the beneficent reign of the love of God and man might be inaugurated and the kingdom of love might be erected on the ruins of the reign of power.

It was a sad day when also the Reformed churches came under the ruinous spell of this false philosophy. At first believers did not mean to abandon authority in deference to love. But committed to a type of Christianity that exalted the love of God for man and of man for God and his fellow-man, they were naturally charmed by the glorification of love that filled the air. But they forgot to discriminate between the love propounded by reason that had revolted against the Word of God and the love which, as Scripture teaches, is the fulfillment of the law. Before long the period of incubation was over and the church succumbed to the spiritual disease of anarchy. It is not necessary to go into details. But the lamentable fact is that a very large contingent of historic Protestantism has cordially repudiated the philosophy of authority and mawkishly magnified a love that is as spineless as a jelly-fish. The doctrine of love widely and enthusiastically held today leaves no room for judicial

authority, i.e., authority independent of the will of subordinates and having its basis of operation outside ourselves. Even those sections of Protestantism that have not gone over bag-and-baggage to the camp of the modernists are by no means immune to the virus that has destroyed vital Christianity in liberal circles. There is, sorry to say, great impatience with authority that is authority indeed. Those over God's people as their sovereign Lord must avoid the term, if at all possible, and exercise the thing it stands for cautiously, adroitly, diplomatically, if they would not engender antagonism and incur the odium of being secret enemies of love and clandestine foes of liberty. Yet the pastoral spirit of God and of Christ and of his true subalterns is the spirit of love, but of love exercised unhesitatingly, unfeignedly with authority. In the measure in which those teaching, governing and caring for the poor of the church exercise their respective offices pastorally can they warrantably hope to succeed in their Lord's estimation.

The church, then, is a pastoral institution. This imports that all its work is pastoral in character, contrary to the prevailing notion that pastoral work is only one of the several tasks of the church. In examining the pastoral task of the church one may conceivably proceed in one of two ways, if not in both. The one mode of procedure is to inquire how the one pastoral task of the church may be variously exercised. The answer to that question has already been supplied. Seven specifications were enumerated. These need not be repeated.

Unity in the pastoral task

The other method of study is to investigate what particular element it is that gives every specification of church work its distinctively pastoral character. This is at once a matter of unity and a principle of diversity. In respect of the first, namely unity, it should be observed that pastoral care has a distinct reference to life, as Psalm 23 clearly demonstrates. For this reason, missionary work is not pastoral, strictly speaking. To be sure, it is the work of the church. But it is not ecclesiastical in the sense of being expended upon the church. Where God's covenant has not been

established, spiritual life as its chief benefit is not present. And where life is lacking, pastoral work rightly so called is out of the question. Where there are no sheep, it is quite impossible to exercise shepherdhood. It may be remarked, that when the church sets out to do missionary work, it goes out in search of lost sheep and seeks to bring them back to the fold which once they left. Support of this view may seem to derive from John 20:16 where our Lord is reported as having said: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; these also I must bring and they shall hear my voice. And they shall become one flock, one shepherd." But it should not escape us, that the term sheep is here plainly used prophetically. They were originally sheep, but turned into goats, wolves, dogs and vipers (all the biblical designations) through sin. They are predestined to become sheep once more, and in consequence, will not fail to hear his voice and come to him and follow him to the fold. In John 11:52 we read: that he might "gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad." The term children is used similarly. There can be no doubt that in John 10:16 the elect of pagan extraction are meant by the "other sheep" (i.e., other than the elect sheep of Jewish origin). For, to begin with, he expressly declares that he must (*dei*) bring them, which way of speaking implies the successful reclamation of these sheep still wandering in the world's wilderness in their lost and undone condition. Furthermore, Christ makes it plain that it is *his own work*, in a direct sense, to return them to the fold. The labors whereby he brings them back and into the fold are clearly signalized in the preceding verse where he avows that he will lay down his life (atoningly is meant) for the sheep, that is, for those in the covenant stalls not only, but those still roaming on the mountains, bleak and wild, as well. Lastly, the Lord categorically predicts that these "other" sheep will hear his voice as the blessed result of his redeeming death for them. *Summa summarum*: John 10:16 is no *locus probans* for the proposition that missionary work is pastoral in its nature. The most that can be said of missionary work on this score is that it has a pastoral objective. Needless to say, as soon as one convert has been won a sheep has been born and accordingly pastoral care is needed.

It should be noted by all means, that it is not the province of the pastoral institute called church to create the sheep. To make sheep out of goats is God's prerogative. Spiritual life is a covenant boon. Hence the fold of the church should not be opened to such as cannot produce covenant credentials. The church as an institution is not comparable to a railway coach converted into a hospital to which the dead and living victims of a railroad wreck are carried and where they are cared for. It is comparable rather to a hospital in which only the living are received for treatment such as they may need, and from which those dying are removed without a moment's delay. Of course, there are spiritual infants in the church. It need not be argued that there is an absolute difference between a living infant and a dead adult. An infant will ordinarily grow and grow up; a dead adult will putrefy and render the atmosphere pestilential unless he be summarily removed.

Pastoral work, then, is the care of the spiritual living, both young and old who in virtue of membership in God's covenant of grace have been admitted to the ecclesiastical training-school of the kingdom of heaven.

Diversity in pastoral care

We now come to the diversities inherent in the conception of care of life. No creatural life is self-sustaining. Only God is self-sufficient and he is such absolutely because the ground of his divine being is not extraneous to himself. Even insofar as spiritual life is eternal life, it is not *autarkos*, as Deism would have us believe. Just as a stream would certainly run dry, if it were not fed perennially by melting snows on mountain sides or by springs opening up subterranean supplies, so spiritual life as the life of God's sheep and lambs of God's flock must be nourished ever and anon, in order that it may be sustained and not languish. But here again a caveat must be introduced. Let no one mistakenly believe that the church can keep alive those whom God has brought to life. The self-same power that is needed to produce life is needed to sustain it, to preserve it from extinction. Nothing less will suffice. And that almighty power only God possesses. Hence the church must ever look to God

to maintain the life of its members. Nothing the church does or possibly can do is even the remotest beginning of either the production or the sustenance of spiritual life. Theoretically the dictum just promulgated commends itself to every Christian's mind. But in a practical way church leaders are prone to assume, gratuitously of course, that they are indispensable to the preservation and prolongation of the life of their wards. Thank God, they are not! When Paul tells his readers at Corinth that he had begotten them by the gospel and that he was their father, he did not wish to be understood as putting himself in the place of God, as Rachel to Jacob's mind seemed to do with respect to himself on the score of natural life. God sustains the spiritual life he has graciously wrought by his omnipotent power. He does this in a two-fold way, partly directly and immediately and partly indirectly and mediately. Even when God sustains the life of his people mediately, he parallels such a mediate sustenance with direct and immediate action; mediate sustenance alone would be wholly inadequate. This fact should be emphasized and borne in mind at all times by those who are Christ's undershepherds, in order that the sinful pride of ecclesiastics having overweening ambition may first be duly humbled and then completely uprooted. Those in ecclesiastical office do well to remember Jesus' words: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls."

I may now observe that we are standing face to face with a most profound mystery when we contemplate the origin of such life and even when we consider its divine sustenance. God's direct action in sustaining spiritual life cannot be comprehended. But neither can his mediate and indirect maintenance of spiritual life be understood. The means that God has ordained and that we employ may be seen and can be known to a degree. But just how they are effective unto the realization of their purpose quite escapes us. And why they should be ineffectual at times or, if effectual, why they should be more or less effectual at different times under different circumstances, it is impossible for us to explain.

The means at the command of the church are the Word of God and the holy sacraments. Contrary to the vagaries of sacramentarians, the Word of God is the primary and principal means of grace. It would carry us too far afield to investigate why the Word of God that addresses itself to our intellect should be the basic vehicle of the life-sustaining grace of God rather than the sacraments, whose primary appeal is to the senses agreeable to their symbolic character. The institution of the sacraments, particularly that of infant baptism, goes to show that the soul is open to influences from the spiritual world that are not wholly dependent upon the recipients' consciousness to enter the heart and register effect. However, the circumstance that the *via intellectualis gratiae Dei* is paramount in connection with the fact, just noted, that the operation of the sacraments is predominantly, let us say mystical for want of a better term, in the case of infant baptism, suggests that for adults the noetic channel of grace is ideal, that the so-called mystical channel is an accommodation to infancy and immaturity, and that in the perfect world of heaven in eternity the rapport of men with God will be exercised on the score of life as well as of thought through the intermediary of consciousness. The eternal state of affairs leaves no room for such present facts as are indexed in the term sub-consciousness. Somehow the light of post-lapsarian revelation will illumine the now cryptic depths of the spirit of man. And the full potentialities of self-penetration, resident in the human spirit, will be fully actualized. Or to put it in Paul's inspired and inspiring language: "We shall then fully know even as we are fully known," that is, now by God.

The ministry of the Word, reinforced by the administration of the sacraments, is the ecclesiastical agency ordained by God and made effective by him for the *pro parte* sustenance of the spiritual life of God's people. It is therefore, eminently pastoral. Preaching God's Word is feeding the church of God as Paul stated in his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, or of the flock of God as Peter phrased it. This feeding of the flock of God has a double purpose. First, the sustenance of its life. This looks to the prevention of its extinction. Second, the cultivation of its

life with a view to the attainment of maturity and fruitfulness. This maturity is achieved relatively when children of the covenant believe in Christ unto justification and profess Christ unto salvation. Here fruitfulness begins and becomes evident in prophetic testimony, priestly sacrifice in holy devotion to God and his cause, and in royal deeds of diligent service joyfully rendered to God. Full maturity is not achieved before the day of translation to glory and the resurrection of the just at Christ's return. Spiritual maturation is, therefore, a life-long process, calling for pastoral care as long as life lasts.

Subsidiary pastoral functions

Pastoral care includes certain subsidiary functions, namely guidance, protection and comfort. God's people must not merely subsist and grow in spiritual life and strength. They must let their light shine before men and apply their strength of faith in good works in God's kingdom. Theirs is a life of constructive service but also of militant action. Hereunto they need guiding counsel and constant leadership. This guidance and direction the church is called to supply pastorally in one measure. The ecclesiastical shepherds must derive the counsel God's people need from God's Word and impart it to them notably from the pulpit, but also privately as occasion presents and need requires.

Another task of the churchly shepherd is the exercise of protective care over his flock. Indwelling sin is a source of insidious danger. The wicked world, in the midst of which the flock of God dwells, is a constant menace, if not by reason of actual persecution at least by dint of the temptation, whether subtle or open-faced, with which it confronts Jesus' sheep and lambs. The very air is peopled with the demons of hell, while Satan himself goes about either as a roaring lion or as a wolf in sheep's clothing, as an angel of light although he be the prince of darkness. There is more than small reason to believe that those in charge of Christ's church today are not as faithful as one could wish in the discharge of this highly needful protective function. It may be true, as those guilty of remissness will plead, that the average church member of today hardly consents to be pastorally directed in

any real sense, and that he is positively resentful of such warning and admonition as his ecclesiastical shepherds, whether ministers or elders, feel constrained to administer. But this is no valid excuse for failure to deal seriously with recusants. It is to utter a commonplace to say that, owing to the disciplinary unfaithfulness of the church-courts, the church is badly if not hopelessly demoralized. It is strange that the fear of man should break the shepherd's staff. Or is it the love of ease that leads ecclesiastical shepherds to leave their staffs at home when they pretend to tend the flock of God?

The third subsidiary task of the churchly pastor is remedial in its nature. Sheep often come to grief by their own faults and folly, or through the perfidy of their fellow-sheep, or because of the deliberate wickedness of their numerous and powerful and ubiquitous foes. It goes without saying that in a world full of sin-born sorrow there is a crying need for comfort on the part of God's people, not to say of all men indiscriminately. The pardon and peace that God bestows upon his children in the way of faith is not attended with immunity from the ills and ailments which continue to follow in sin's wake long after sin's guilt has been cancelled. Even if believers were personally exempt, which they are not, they would still be involved in the tide of woes which sweeps over the world and leaves no life untouched. But God has seen fit to visit upon his imperfect children a variety of troubles, which while they are not judicial and punitive, are nevertheless painfully corrective, making life a season of sorrow and distress, and creating the life-long need of comfort and encouragement. The Scriptures are, as all its believing readers know, replete with comfort suited to every species of affliction. Paul speaks (Rom. 15:4) of the comfort of the Scriptures as one of the purposes for which they were written and as calculated to inspire hope in adverse circumstances. It is the privilege and duty of the ministers of that divine Word of consolation to fill their vials with the balm of Gilead growing there and to pour it copiously into the wounds that life in a sin-stricken and curse-burdened world inflicts upon weary travelers eternity bound. A rather close acquaintance with ecclesiastical practice leaves the

impression that those in charge of the chores of the church are seldom fully alive to the universal and perennial need of comfort on the part of God's sheep. Most ministers are in need of being reminded that the ministry of the Word embraces not only the impartation of doctrinal information unto the enlightenment and the inculcation of God's precepts unto the guidance but also the instilling of God's blessed comfort unto the encouragement of God's people. The first is basic indeed to Christian life. And the second is imperatively necessary to be sure. But the third too, is indispensable as the prevailingly consolatory tenor of God's Word suggests and the daily deep need of comfort on the part of God's people demonstrates. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." It is my candid opinion that the three-fold ministry of the church has not done justice to this department of pastoral care, notably during the dire depression that filled the third decade of the present century with deep gloom and a plethora of mental anguish and even physical distress. It is as good as certain that one of the reasons why the church has lost its hold on the masses appreciably and its prestige among the people of higher social rank is the deplorable fact that it oftentimes failed to weep with the weeping in tender sympathy. Orthodoxy should be maintained to the fullest extent. Only sound doctrine is the basis of genuine comfort. And discipline should be administered faithfully. But this side of heaven and eternity God's children need solace. Only on yonder side of Jordan will God wipe away all tears from their eyes.

God's people have a God-given right to the opening of Scripture's vessels of comfort. Christ spent a large share of his time in the days of his flesh in ministering to the needs of such as suffered and were disconsolate. By so doing, he left the ecclesiastical shepherds of God's people an example that they should follow in his steps. He will one day call them to account. Blessed is that minister or elder or deacon who in that great day can prove by God's own records that he truly was a channel of scriptural comfort to those in distress no less than a source of light to those needing instruction and a monitor to those requiring guidance.

The joy of faithful shepherding

Finally, a brief passage must be devoted to the delightful subject of pastoral felicity. Pastoral fidelity is the fruitful mother of pastoral happiness. Much might be said regarding the premises from which the conclusion of pastoral joy derives. A full treatment of the subject would require that I paint the beautiful picture of the peace and plenty of the flock blest with capable and faithful shepherds. There is hardly a more idyllic scene than a flock feeding in pastures fair, beside an abundance of clear living water. There is perhaps no earthly reward so sweet as that awarded God's ecclesiastical servants who emulate Jehovah as Shepherd and copy Christ as the keeper of his Father's flock and study Pastoral Theology under Paul of Tarsus. Imperceptibly I have shifted from the happiness of the flock well-shepherded to the satisfaction of those who make the flock contented and happy. But on his felicity I shall not expatiate. I fear I should do but scant justice to it. Not indeed because I underestimate it, but because the deep joys and sweet delights that he reaps from the conscientious care bestowed upon the sheep of Jesus and upon his lambs cannot be adequately transposed into the key of either logic or literature. I can only advise to study the lives of exemplary shepherds of the flock, whether they be biblical or ecclesiastical figures. Apply yourselves to your pastoral duties after their fashion. Then you will discover treasures of pastoral felicity such as my poor words can but adumbrate at best.

Practical theology, or better still Pastoral theology or even better Ecclesiological theology, particularly that part which deals with the work of the church insofar as it is organized as the training school where God's covenant people are equipped for service in the world-encompassing and life-embracing kingdom of God, has occupied the four hours allotted to me at this conference. I have been deeply interested in the pastoral practice of the church. For fully seven years I was engaged in the ministerial part of this pastoral work. In recent years it has been my privilege to engage in the professional study and teaching of this part of the King's business. As those doing pastoral work from day

to day you will concur with my judgment, that even at this late hour the half has not yet been told, either concerning all that the pastoral task involves or the bliss and glory which the Great Shepherd bestows upon his pastoral representatives in the life that now is and afterward in the life that is to come.

Return then to your flocks. Do the work of God-appointed shepherds. Remember and believe that as the writer to the Hebrews says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his Name in that ye ministered unto the saints and still do minister" (Hebr. 6:10).