

## **Report on the 2025 Office Bearers' Conference**

On March 29, 2025 our annual combined FRC/HRC Office Bearers' Conference was held in Burgessville, ON. This year it was organized by the FRC OBC Committee. This year's theme was: The Word in a Biblically Illiterate World. The speakers were Mr. Ray Pennings and Dr. David Van Brugge. Mr. Pennings led Session I: Beyond Words: How the Culture's "'Woke' and 'Based'" frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness. Dr. VanBrugge led Session II" Finding the Right Words: Promoting Truth, Goodness, and Beauty amid a Narcissistic Culture.

Mr. Pennings spoke about how today's 'woke' world has moved from speaking honest truth about norms and behaviors, which were widely considered to be biblically right, to being affirmative and supportive of whatever a person feels or wants to do, even to the extent that it defies logic, science and common sense. Dr. VanBrugge spoke about how to respond biblically, coming alongside the church, to assist both the leaders and the members, especially the families, to educate, counsel, guide, etc. To answer questions such as How to give constructive criticism. How to affirm at all. How to show sympathy. In short, How to be salt and light in a 'woke' and self-affirming culture.

It was not only a time of much needed instruction but of encouragement and brotherly fellowship as well. Since many Office Bearers were not able to attend, we encourage each consistory to watch the video and obtain the detailed speaker's outlines, and share it with their members. It would be especially beneficial for husbands and fathers, to advise and guide their families in a time such as this. May the Lord bless our congregations and use these efforts for the salvation of the lost and the growth of believers. You can watch the video (and also find the outlines used by the speakers) here: [www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/33025233473471](http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/33025233473471).

## **2025 Office Bearers Conference (OBC) Report**

On March 29, 2025 the FRC organized the OBC in the HRC in Burgessville.

Its theme was **The Word in a Biblically Illiterate World.**

Mr. Ray Pennings (of Cardus Institute [www.cardus.ca](http://www.cardus.ca)) spoke about:

**Beyond Words: How the Culture’s “Woke” and “Based” frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness.** For a detailed outline see **Appendix 1.**

Dr. David VanBrugge (Pastor of the Burgessville HRC) spoke about:

**Finding the Right Words: Promoting Truth, Goodness, and Beauty amid a Narcissistic Culture.** For a detailed outline see **Appendix 2.**

Here’s the OBC video link: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/33025233473471>

For the updated list of former OBC topics and speakers see **Appendix 3.**

## **Appendix 1**

### **OUTLINE - The Word in a Biblically Illiterate World.**

#### **Beyond Words: How the Culture's "'Woke' and 'Based'" frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness**

**Ray Pennings – FRC/HRC Office Bearers Conference – March 29, 2025**

#### **A. Introduction**

##### **a. A Case Study**

- i. *Adam is a member of your congregation. He's 21, a third-year student at your local secular university and in the coffee hour after church, he asks you for some advice relating to a group presentation he has to make at school tomorrow. The topic relates to the relationship between religion and justice in our present society.*
  1. Most of the class is very woke and anti-religious, arguing that it promotes patriarchy, abuse, and keeps people from reaching their potential. Anything that does that cannot be just.
  2. There are several in the class who are Jordan Peterson fans. They are anti-woke and see Peterson's 12 rules for life as a formula for success. They tend to mock the woke folk and in discussions with Adam, the non-Christians could not understand why Adam wasn't a full Jordan Peterson fan because "he's as close to being a Christian as you can get, and in fact a better Christian than most."
  3. There are two girls in Adam's class who are part of the InterVarsity Bible Study group that Adam is part of weekly. They are both devout attendees of their church, probably the most pious girls in the class unashamed about their faith, but are pretty left in their

perspectives, arguing that the church should be leading the way in apologizing for racial and indigenous injustice and are very pro-environment. That said, while this comes through in class, in Bible study together they are the only ones in Adam's class who take the scripture seriously, bringing to every discussion texts and arguments that Adam hadn't really thought through before.

"I'm not sure what to say about all of this?" Adam tells you. I disagree with much or what these girls are saying but they are the only ones in the conversation basing their arguments on the Bible. I tend to agree with the Jordan Peterson crowd on most issues but I did a paper on him and recognize that his philosophy is based on the psychologist Carl Jung<sup>1</sup> and actually, is a form of new age thinking that claims its inspiration of Gnosticism. If I understand correctly, the church fathers called this heresy. What advice do you have for me?"

- b. Disclaimer – multiple books and philosophies beyond capacity to deal with. I find Carl Truman's work most reliable in this area.
  - i. To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse (2025)
  - ii. His Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self (2000) more philosophical and technical;
  - iii. Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution (2002) more accessible.

Not going to summarize these books or deal with the technical arguments – look up these books or one of the many YouTube videos / podcasts with Truman on this subject – he can do a better job than I of systematically explaining the issues involved. Effectively shows how today we are facing a modern form of Marxims, that he traces from German philosophers Hegel and Marx through the Frankfurt School and modern philosophy.

Key ideas:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ezrainstitute.com/jordan-peterson-jung-and-hope-for-the-faint-hearted/>

- From world is shaped through interaction of ideas (Hegel) to material conditions (Marx) to sexual psychology and identity (Freud) into modern critical theory. He notes critical of western civilization, capitalism and Marxism and that we need to honestly listen to the valid questions it raises. Why is it having currency today?
  - Young people not seeing a future for themselves? Do not see a way to get an education, job, family, house? See themselves as worse off than their parents? Raises questions about whether systems work.
- But this is an office-bearers conference and what I hope for a take-away is to equip office-bearers. Going to avoid heavy references to history and philosophy and focus on translation into everyday terms that might be useful for office-bearers who have read the literature as well as many who have not.
  - c. Various contexts in which these issues arise.
    - i. School/ workplace/ neighbours/ within the church/ political public square
  - d. Office Bearer's Calling to make disciples greater than winning arguments.
  - e. Understanding the contexts in which the issues arise.

**B. Establishing Some working definitions of words in title— this is about translation so that we can answer Adam's question How the Culture's "'Woke' and 'Based'" frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness**

- a. Culture –
    - i. the informal rules by which we live e.g. time / space
    - ii. 2 way street
  - b. Woke – “awake to important social facts, especially as it relates to prejudice and social justice” - term borrowed from African American community in south in 1930s.
  - c. Based – “authenticity – being true to yourself, regardless of what others think” -
    - a. Both based on identity and starting with you.
- Relying on Carl Trueman A Strange New Age

- Language differences are not simply differences of vocabulary but worldviews/ frameworks; Inuit have 52 words for snow and ice.

d. Biblical Witness

- i. Creed – QA 22 “What is then necessary for a Christian to believe? All things promised in the gospel which the articles of our Christian faith briefly teach us.”
- ii. Confession – formula of subscription. 3 forms unity/ Westminster.
- iii. Worldview – Creation/Fall/ Redemption/ Restoration - look at issues through this lens.
  1. Starts with creation, God’s purpose and goodness. Often start with problem and sin. End with redemption and Christ’s work. Bible not Genesis 3 – Rev. 20. Is part of the challenge engaging our young people that we do not engage the entire story?
  2. Jonathan Edwards quote. – Story of Christ and His bride

“God created the world to provide a spouse and kingdom for his Son. And the setting up [of] the kingdom of Christ, and the spiritual marriage of the spouse to him, is what the whole creation labours and travails in pain to bring to pass,” Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (Banner of Truth, 2003). Cited in Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol. I* (Crossway, 2019) p 96

Jonathan Edwards, acknowledged by some as “American’s most important and original philosophical theologian,”<sup>2</sup> notes that before the world was created, the three persons of the Trinity decided that God would be most glorified if the Son had a bride. The world was created as a kingdom in which the Son and His bride might live in forever.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/>

<sup>3</sup> “God hath had it much on his heart, from all eternity to glorify his dear and only begotten Son,” Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival in New England and the Way It Ought to Be Acknowledged and Promoted* (Diggory Pr, 2006);

- a. Note how this is future-oriented.
- b. Gives us a working grammar.
- c. Avoids both-sideism and the compromise and idolatry that it inevitably brings.
- d. Promotes humility.

### **C. So Where Do We live?**

- a. History - We have a Judeo-Christian Heritage – 1993 Messenger articles “Are Human Rights Christian?”
  - i. Fruit of a mixed marriage between Reformation and Enlightenment but historically illiterate
  - ii. Danger of Romanticizing past – Calvinists. Every age has its own blessings and challenges. Christians to look forward and not make an idol of any particular age. There is no golden age to which we aspire to recover. The Bible is not painting a utopia on earth, at any time. Each context has its own strengths and weaknesses.
    - 1. Does not mean denigrating past. We can and should be thankful, and acknowledge with thanksgiving God’s work in former days.
    - 2. But neither bearing false witness or pristinising past.
  - iii. Also danger of rewriting past – forgetting the context and definition.
    - 1. Understand evolution of history. State at time of creeds in 16<sup>th</sup> century different understanding than nation state. Significance of Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 – end of wars of religion. Avoidance of sword and coercion.
    - 2. History of Reformed influence includes
      - a. Covenantal – focus on constitution and shared declarations of unity. Same principles that give us

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Cited in Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol. I* (Crossway, 2019) p 967.

priesthood of all believers had pro-democratic impulses and notions of mandate.

- b. Federalism – Calvin and Althusius. Not too much power in any single hands. Opposed authoritarianism.
- c. Solidarity – Concern for the poor and marginalized. Recognition of imago dei. Also tied to notions of common grace and working together with unbelievers.
- d. Cultural Christianity. Increasing debate today.
  - i. Thankful for western civilization and blessings.
  - ii. Thankful for widespread social and moral norms that shaped society.
  - iii. Former and current atheists like Tom Holland (Dominion) have acknowledged what is lost when Christianity is abandoned.
  - iv. Recognize that those cultures have their own challenges.
    - 1. Hypocrisy and Pharisees.
    - 2. Legalism.
    - 3. Not always just.

b. Demographics: See Report from the Canadian Mission Field Messenger Fall 2003

- i. 6% of population claimed to be evangelical; 5% Protestant church attendance (12% overall). Only 22% evangelicals read bible daily; only 65% evangelicals believe “bible is ageless in truth and relevance to modern life”
  - 1. Reference Cardus Research Shifting Landscape of Faith in Canada<sup>4</sup> and Still Christian?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/the-shifting-landscape-of-faith-in-canada/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/still-christian/>



- ii. Note that immigrants more than twice as likely to be personally pious and orthodox than born in Canada. -> We live in Babylon not Israel. Daniel over David.
- iii. Accept providence. Realize that in our lifetime, moving from sending to receiving culture of missionaries. Southern and eastern hemispheres are where majority of world's Christians are.

c. What is Human? Central Question of time

- i. First few centuries – Theology. Doctrine of Trinity. Arius relationship of father and son.
- ii. Middle ages – soteriology and authority. Reformation.
- iii. Our time – anthropology.
  - 1. Biology – survival of fittest and natural selection. Molecules and cells. No creation means there is no God means there is no soul. All we are left with bodies.
  - 2. Recognize that not real so look elsewhere.
    - a. Modern era – Descarte I think therefore I am. Mind is central.
    - b. Post-Modern era. Feelings. You can be whatever you want. Feelings are the most real. Keep in mind not as unreasonable as sometimes seen. 1960s heart transplant. Now talking about brain transplant. But what about technology. Memory? AI and Large Language Learning Models? What is real?
- iv. Need to take care not to simplistically deal with texts as concepts.
  - 1. Body and soul? What about spirit? Strength? Mind? How many parts? How do they relate? Entire section of theology dealing with this. Sometimes we try to proof-text our way through this but scriptures do not always use each term in same manner.

2. Liberal promise of autonomy and individualism fallen short. Isolation/ loneliness/ suicide. Euthanasia. If all about feelings, then why suffer?
  3. Key is for us to remind ourselves of biblical anthropology.
    - a. Imago Dei – made in image of God.
    - b. One of features is social. We are not made as individuals on our own celebrating our autonomy.
- LD 1. My only comfort is that “I belong”

#### **D. Learning the Language of our culture**

- a. Secular
  - i. Charles Taylor – 3 definitions of secular;
  - ii. The challenge of sharing the gospel in our culture is the challenge of asking fish to fly.
- b. Good and Evil
  - i. Flying implies there is something aspirational to fly to. If flying equals faith, faith is substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen. So what is there in that bigger frame?
  - ii. Institutions
    1. Back to Genesis 1. All of creation. Even if sin was not there, would have developed from garden to city. God-glorified in all of life.
      - a. Avoiding Greek and Platonic that there is a spiritual ideal out there and our bodies and physicality hold us in. Part of answer to world that says there is only body. Response of only soul seems to miss the point.
  - iii. Power.
    1. Many of the problems identified start with power and institutions. Injustice. Girls in Adam’s class. Woke people.
      - a. Confess reality. All is broken.
      - b. But go back to purpose. Don’t start with Gen 3 but get back to Gen 1. Why is power?

- c. Creativity. Part of image-bearer of God. Not power so that we have authority but that we can work together for God's glory.
  - d. Structures – marriage, the godhead, family, society, workplace – good.
- 2. Institutions and Power (Marx and his heirs)
  - a. Intersectionality Kimberle Crenshaw 1990s.
    - i. Reduce people to specific features of their identity. Do not deal with whole people but an assembly of identities.
    - ii. Oppressed and oppressor.
  - iv. Good and Evil - Rousseau Rousseau – *Confessions* – Verrat persuade to steal asparagus, resell and use money to help Verrat for food
    - Rationalize 1. Desire to help Verrat 2. Lured by Verrat admiring his talent and capacity -> Good person but society corrupts

➔ Enlightenment good within – structures and society corrupt

## **E. Recovering a Biblical Grammar**

- a. A Christian Anthropology
  - i. Body and Soul
  - ii. Imago Dei
- b. Christ and His Church
  - i. Belonging
  - ii. Purpose and Future
  - iii. Practical Implications for words like marriage.

## **F. Back to Our Case Study**

- a. Can deal with each via various books and deeper study. In academic setting that might be necessary. Lots of good books. But your job as elder isn't to win the argument.
- b. Avoid culturally-defined binaries and both-sideisms. Need a different frame. Keep categories of truth in mind and be contextually sensitive.

- c. Challenge to see everyone dealing with as Image-bearer of God. Dignity and worth.
  - i. Ethic of integrity. Listening to neighbours. Samaritan road responds to need and doesn't come with our own agenda. Tactically wise.
- d. Recommend public theology based on orthodox doctrine (we are people of the word – objective understanding of why we and the world exists).
- e. Never lose the centrality of the gospel. – All things in Christ.
  - i. John 1. In the beginning was the WORD and the word was with God and the Word was God.
    - 1. Word made flesh.
      - a. Authority. In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. Time, matter and space.
        - i. Don't need to engage in debate about how right away but why?
      - b. Purpose. Bible makes clear there is a purpose to life and society. How do you get to those questions? Why does it matter? Otherwise there are good guys and bad guys and we all deal with each other and then we die and if there is nothing more, why does any of it matter. Get to the why questions.
    - 2. Always communicate hope. Gospel is good news. Forgiveness and reconciliation.
      - a. Don't immediately put people into camps. Learn from them Calvin Institutes consider it a sin not to learn from pagan philosophers.
      - b. See present time as great mission opportunity for our church.
      - c. Take comfort from God on the throne – we know how the story ends. Is part of the problem our attitude about difficult times? So much worse than previous?
        - i. We are setting an unbiblical standard.

## Appendix 2

### **Finding the Right Words:**

#### ***Promoting Truth, Goodness, and Beauty amid a Narcissistic Culture***

Dr. David VanBrugge, FRC-HRC OfficeBearers Conference, Spring 2025

Opening Scripture: Luke 6:39-45

Introduction: 2 scenarios

#### **Defining Terms**

**Finding Right Words** = There are two basic theories of communication:<sup>6</sup>

Cultural View of Communication – ritualistic, “we did it,” so the conversation is over. Catholic origin.

Transmission View of Communication – personal, “heart change?,” keep the conversation going and growing. Protestant origin.

**Beauty, Truth, Goodness** = Aiming at big picture truths; universal sign posts that point to God, rather than earthly considerations.

“Saying the right thing is not about being nice or polite; sometimes it means speaking the truth when people don’t want to hear it, or calling out wrong thinking and behaviour. Saying the right thing is about using our words to do good to the people we encounter each day, whether that’s in the home, workplace, church, local community, or on social media. It’s about letting our speech be shaped by God’s word rather than the world. And it’s about looking to bring glory to him in every conversation or interaction.”<sup>7</sup>

**Narcissistic Culture** = When cultures, and sub-cultures [not individuals] become excessively focused on themselves, their image, and their own importance. They don’t see others, and thereby don’t understand or value others, thereby losing connections and relations. They involve a sense of entitlement and superiority based on identity, leading to a lack of empathy or respect for others. Social media platforms merely amplify self-centered, and self-serving narratives. And such a cultural atmosphere contributes to a *climate of conflict and division*.<sup>8</sup>

**So, this can be understood as Finding the Right Words for Healthy Disagreement in Dialogue.** How can we communicate in a culture that forgets God’s Word?

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<sup>6</sup> James Carey, referenced in Schultze, *Communicating*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Lacey, *Right Thing*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 2018. This is nothing new; Lasch traces it back to the anti-establishment of the 1960s. It is only exacerbated in today’s context, and the embrace of technology to communicate.

## **First, Realize Words flow from the Heart.**

The most foundational truth about all communication is that it comes from the heart. Our words flow out of our innermost thoughts and desires.

*Luke 6:45 = A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

Heart communication also raises the importance of motivation.

*Proverbs 15:33 - The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.*

Ask about your personal motivation to engage. Listen for other's motivation to disagree.

Heart Communication also hints that things are not always as they appear. There are layers to people, and sometimes you cannot assume that first appearances reveal all.

*Proverbs 20:5 - Counsel / a plan / purpose in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

Porcupines and Hedgehogs. Sociologists say the population is about 50/50.<sup>9</sup>

So how do you draw out honesty from all people? Just because someone does not throw back at you, does not mean they agree either!

## **Second, Find Words that Love the Person.**

*John 13:34-35 - A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Love means Not Fixing First

*Proverbs 20:6 - Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?*

Consider the possibility that there are other facts behind the disagreement with you. People don't randomly arrive at their views. Other people and events have shaped them. There is often more history, pain, and fear going on in people than we realize. Keeping this in mind may not change the disagreement, but it does provide more compassion along the way. Ask lots of questions to understand before suggesting.

Love means Dialogue that Listens

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Ortland, *Disagreeing*, 12.

1 Peter 4:8 - *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

#### Love means Not Assuming What They Mean

Some office-bearers love to talk.... But James 1:26 - *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

#### Love means Realizing the Reality of "Thin Beliefs"

Proverbs 12:15 - *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

Alan Noble discusses the difference between thick beliefs and thin beliefs. "All of our beliefs are part of a continuum from thick beliefs (which involves a deep understanding of the internal logic, origins, and context; embodied practice; and robust application of the belief, ie coming to church) to thin beliefs (which can be as superficial and unthought of, as signaling your support for a cause simply because you like the hashtag). Thin beliefs are easy to adopt and then toss away, so they are useful for crafting our self-image. But the foundation of them goes unquestioned."<sup>10</sup>

#### Loving the Person means Creating Opportunities to Talk

"It doesn't matter what perfect programs we are broadcasting over our radio channel if they are not tuned in."<sup>11</sup>

### **Third, Find Words that Express a Common Humanity.**

Proverbs 10:19-21 - *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.*

#### Common Humanity Will Not Shy Away from all Disagreement

Disagreement itself is not a problem. We should be able to entertain other opinions. Disagreement gives opportunities for learning, freshness, beginnings.

#### Common Humanity Will Respect the Medium

Finding right words depends on what medium you are using. " Concern here is fittedness. Does your message fit the medium? Do texts or emails engender helpful discussion?

#### Common Humanity Will be Vulnerable

One of the reasons we misunderstand one another is that we tend to hide our true feelings/thoughts.

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Noble, *Disrupted Witness*, 44-46.

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from Crabtree, *Affirmation*, 144.

The difficulty with vulnerability is people are tribal – they only want to surround themselves with people just like them. But the more tribal we become, the less we question our assumptions.

People are less afraid of disagreement, than they are of expressing disagreement and finding out they are alone. Or expressing different viewpoints, and being sidelined from being office-bearers, or ministry opportunities, or becoming the target of opposition.

### Common Humanity Considers Boundaries

Proverbs 20:3 - *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.*

In order to know when, or where, to draw boundaries, ask:

- Does this person's behaviour suggest that engagement has a realistic chance of change?
- Does addressing this disagreement create further harm?
- Are there formal obligations that require me to resolve this, or can it be unresolved without negligence?
- Could a season of waiting or reflection be beneficial for any / all?<sup>12</sup>

### Common Humanity Will Protect Themselves

Proverbs 18:1 - *Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.*

"Most people are not against you; they are simply for themselves. This is usually true in disagreements; the other person probably cares more about them being right than you being wrong. Proving you wrong just serves their larger goal. Thus we tend to experience disagreements personally; when you disagree with someone, they think you are against them."<sup>13</sup>

### Common Humanity Will Appeal for Agreement

Greg Koukl, *TableTalk April 2025*: "As it turns out when critics impose any version of judge not, it is not an appeal that you be virtuous, it is a demand that they be left alone."

Philippians 4:2 - *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

So how navigate situations away from relativism to common agreement: Ask questions.

- a. What do you mean?
- b. I'm confused. Are you saying...?
- c. If he says, who are you to judge, ask, who are you to find fault?
- d. I apologize for giving you the impression I was imposing my standards on you. I only meant to warn about God's standard, the same one I am under.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Questions from Ortlund, *Disagreeing*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ortlund, *Disagreeing*, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Greg Koukl, "Who Are You to Judge?" *TableTalk*, (April 2025): 27.



#### **Fourth, Find Words that Point to Big Picture Truths.**

As Nathan to David... 2 Samuel 12:4 - *And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.* [aiming at sense of justice]

As the Psalmist... Psalm 19: 1, 7-11 - *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. <sup>2</sup> Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.... The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.* [aiming at value of revelation]

As the Wise man... Proverbs 16:23-25 - *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death* [aiming at health]

As Paul to Gentile King... Acts 26:2-3 - *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: <sup>3</sup> Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently* [aiming at respect]

As Paul to Church... Philippians 4:8 - *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things* [aiming at the virtuous].

#### **Big Picture Truths Look Beyond the Immanent**

Some people who argue about details here imagine we live in an entirely natural, material, measureable, comprehensible, and democratic world. Charles Taylor calls this the 'immanent frame.' It is an aspect of secularism that turns everything back the self and how I am fulfilled in it. The goal is always the fulfillment of self. People choose beliefs that are based principally on what will give them self-fulfillment. To make decisions, look inward. To disagree, look inward. What will make sense? Look inward.

So most people live in one of two ways:

- 1) In a closed immanent frame, where there is no higher, transcendent reality.
- 2) In an open immanent frame, where the transcendent being can break into *our* reality once in a while.

The problem is, it is not easy, it is increasingly difficult to live believing in the existence of transcendent God and still live focused on the immanent frame. Noble: "Providence, mystery, contingency, uncertainty, wonder, and randomness have been systematically, bureaucratically,

technologically, economically drained, and systematic theologized out of our world.... We are masters of our health, our safety, our morality, our time, and our success.... The world simply does not feel like a place where the supernatural intervenes. The cognitive barrier facing us (then in people who think this way): How do we speak to people who feel that things are continuing as they have from the beginning? How do we speak to those in church who believe that the divine doesn't interrupt this march of mechanical time?"<sup>15</sup>

See encouragement in church history to consider big-picture truths

Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xx

*How then am I to seek for you Lord? When I seek for you, my God, my quest is for the happy life. ... Is not the happy life that which all desire, which indeed no one fails to desire? But how have they known about it so as to want it? Where did they see it to love it? The kind of happiness they have is inferior to that of those who have the real thing.... My inquiry is whether this knowing is in the memory because, if it is there, we had happiness once.*

*Confessions*, X.xxiii

*Why does your man who preaches what is true become to them an enemy when they love the happy life which is simply joy grounded on truth? The answer must be this: their love for truth takes the form that they love something else and want this object of their love to be the truth; and because they do not wish to be deceived, they do not wish to be persuaded that they are mistaken. ...*

John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.1

*Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings - and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ.... Until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him - they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.*

John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.v.6, I.v.9:

*I have only wanted to touch upon the fact that this way of seeking God is common both to strangers and to those of his household.... This very might [of God] leads us to ponder his eternity; for he from whom all things draw their origin must be eternal and have beginning from himself. Furthermore, if the cause is sought by which he was led once to create all these things, and is now moved to preserve them, we shall find that it is his goodness alone. But this being the sole cause, it ought still to be more than sufficient to draw us to his love.*

*We see that no long or toilsome proof is needed to elicit evidences that serve to illuminate and affirm the divine majesty.... And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a*

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<sup>15</sup> This paragraph and above section adapted from Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 55-58.

*knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.... Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.*

Godefridus Udemans, *Faith, Hope, and Love*, p. 30-35:

*Why are these wonderful virtues so often despised and trampled underfoot today? Is it because people do not understand the value of these costly pearls? The godless say it is vain to serve God, and ask what profit is to be gained in keeping of God's ordinances and walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts while everything is going well with them. But let us look more closely at the benefits of these virtues. In doing so, we will discover that the benefits are twofold. We will receive some benefits in this life and some in the life to come....*

*Since these virtues are exceedingly profitable and necessary, practice them. Develop them and increase them, and so find your highest gain, for these gifts are fruits that are good and profitable for us. Those who lack these gifts can expect only sorrow, anguish, indignation, and wrath, while those who are adorned with them can expect the prizes of honor, peace, immortality, and eternal life.*

Big-picture truths aim at higher realities, with a desire that lives would be wholesome and healthy. Healthy communication promotes that wholeness; unhealthy communication tears down such relational health.

*Proverbs 3:5-8 - Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*

*Ephesians 4:15 - But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:... maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

### **Fifth, Pray for Words that Reflect Jesus as a Courageous Office-Bearer.**

This comes back to personal heart issues.

Jesus Came to do His Father's Will.

*John 12:49 - For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.*

Jesus Prayed for People

John 17:9-10 – *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.*

#### Jesus Did Not Fall to Using Clichéd Jargon

Hosea 12:10 – *I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.*

Mark 4:10 – *Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables... Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?*

#### Jesus Rebuked and Affirmed the Same People

Matthew 16:23 – *Jesus turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me. Thou savourest not the things that be of God.*

Matthew 16:17 – *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

#### Jesus Served Those Who Did Not Understand Everything Immediately

Acts 1:3 – *To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God...*

Titus 2:1, 6-8, 12-14 – *But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.... Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup> Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; <sup>13</sup> Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; <sup>14</sup> Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

#### Jesus Taught Over and Over

Proverbs 25:15 – *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.*

2 Timothy 2:22-26 – *Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. <sup>23</sup> But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. <sup>24</sup> And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, <sup>25</sup> In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; <sup>26</sup> And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*

## Jesus Came to Rule Hearts

Luke 17:20 - *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

Galatians 5:22 - *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, <sup>23</sup> Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. <sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

## Jesus Depended on the Holy Spirit

John 16:12 - *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself...*

Guinness, p. 175: "This challenge means that each of us as apologists must examine our own hearts. Have we loved enough to listen? Or is it that we love to hear the sound of our own answers? Are we really arguing for Christ, or are we expressing our need always to be right? Are we really trying to show people how they can discover the solid joys of lasting treasure, or are we piling up things we have heard others say to still convince ourselves?"

## Conclusion

John 20:19 - *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

Example of Stephen.

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## Appendix 3

### Updated List of Former OBC Topics and Speakers

Number	Date	Place	Office-Bearers Conference	Speaker
<b>OBC1</b>	1982		Personal Obstacles In Office Bearing & Their Solutions: Spiritual Pride versus Godly Humility	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC2</b>	1986		Plodding on in the Strength of Christ: Hints for Improvement in Office bearing Personal & Private	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC3</b>	10-95	Grand Rapids	Reformed Church Order	Mr. B. Elshout
<b>OBC4</b>	03-96	Woodstock	Reformed Church Order	Mr. B. Elshout
<b>OBC5</b>	03-97	Grand Rapids	The Three Offices of Christ	Mr. B. Elshout
<b>OBC6</b>	10-97	Jordan	Office of Deacon	Mr. D. Lipsy
<b>OBC7</b>	03-98	Burgessville	Office of Ruling Elder in The Church of Christ	Mr. F. VanderZwaag
<b>OBC8</b>	10-99	Burgessville	The Ministry	Rev. J. D. Greendyk
<b>OBC9</b>			Family Visitation	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC10</b>	04-00	Grand Rapids	Family Visitation	Rev. M. Kelderman
<b>OBC11</b>	10-00	Jordan	Article 27 and Term Limits	Rev. B. Elshout
<b>OBC12</b>	04-01	Burgessville	Relationship between Teaching Elders & Ruling Elders	Dr. R. D. Johnson
<b>OBC13</b>	03-99		Ten Practical Guidelines for Biblical Counseling	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC14</b>	10-01	Grand Rapids	Pastoring the Dying and the Mourning	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC15</b>	04-02	Jordan	Practical Guidelines for Teaching Catechism	Mr. Mark Fintelman
<b>OBC16</b>	10-02	Burgessville	Office Bearing: A Burden or a Joy	Rev. J. Byl
<b>OBC17</b>	03-03	Grand Rapids	Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth	Dr. G. Bilkes
<b>OBC18</b>	10-03	Jordan	Public Prayer	Rev. F. VanderZwaag
<b>OBC19</b>	03-04	Grand Rapids	The Baptism Form	Rev. B. Elshout
<b>OBC20</b>	10-04	Burgessville	Church Planting & Local Evangelism	Rev. B. Elshout
<b>OBC21</b>	03-05	Grand Rapids	Personal Obstacles in Office Bearing: How to Cope with Criticism	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC22</b>	10-05	Grand Rapids	Personal Evangelism	Rev. B. DeVries
<b>OBC23</b>	03-06	Grand Rapids	Evangelism Strategies for the Local Church	Rev. B. DeVries
<b>OBC24</b>	10-06	London	Discriminatory Preaching	Dr. J. R. Beeke
<b>OBC25</b>	03-07	Jordan	Intercessory Prayer	Rev. G. Procee
<b>OBC26</b>	10-07	Chiliwack	Depression – the Hidden Affliction	Rev. B. Elshout
<b>OBC27</b>	03-08	Burgessville	Engaging our Young People in Study and Service	Rev. M. Kelderman
<b>OBC28</b>	10-08	Jordan	Leading Souls to Christ	Dr. D. Murray
<b>OBC29</b>	03-09	Grand Rapids	Catechizing or Teaching Children and Teens	Mr. James Beeke
<b>OBC30</b>	04-10	Franklin Lakes	God's Character: Reflected in My Talk and Walk	Mr. Del Deur
<b>OBC31</b> *	04-11	Hull	Addressing Office-bearing Challenges in God's Church Today	Dr. Gerald Bilkes
<b>OBC32</b> *	03-12	Burgessville	Cultivating Personal Piety	Dr. Maurice Roberts
<b>OBC33</b>	04-13	Chilliwack	Church Outreach and Planting Work	Rev. Daniel Hyde
<b>OBC34</b>	04-14	Burgessville	Biblical, Confessional, and Historical Perspectives on Church Unity	Pastors Lipsy, VanderMeyden, and Pronk
<b>OBC35</b>	04-15		"The necessity of the Empowering of the Spirit in the work of the Church"	Dr. Michael Barrett

Number	Date	Place	Office-Bearers Conference	Speaker
OBC36	10-16		The Church in Exile	Dr. Michael Barrett Pastor Eric Moerdyk
OBC37	10-17		Sinful Sexual Relationships from Biblical, Legal, and Pastoral Perspective	Mr. Andre Schutten Rev. Mark Kelderman
OBC38	10-18	Grand Rapids Burgessville	Dealing with Disagreements at Church Meetings	Elder Kevin Ash and Pastor John Koopman
OBC39	06-19	Burgessville	“Called to Evaluate: ‘Who am I to evaluate?’ and ‘How am I to do this?’	Various office-bearers
OBC40	10-19	Burgessville	Homosexuality: “Creating a gospel culture in our churches for our members struggling with sexual identity “, and “Homosexuality: How do we shepherd members of the flock?”	Pastor Eric Moerdyk  Brian Schouwstra
OBC41	10-21	Burgessville	The Disappearance of Sin in Culture and in the Church	Pastors Van Brugge and Macleod
OBC42	05-23	Burgessville	Prerequisites of Church Planting	Pastor Terry Klaver
OBC43	06-24	Burgessville	Understanding Our Time & What We Ought to Do - Called to be like “the children of Issachar <i>which were men</i> that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32).	Dr. Bruce Baugus
OBC44	03-25	Burgessville	The Word in a Biblically Illiterate World. 1 Beyond Words: How the Culture’s “‘Woke’ & ‘Based’” frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness Session 2 Finding the Right Words: Promoting Truth, Goodness, and Beauty amid a Narcissistic Culture	Mr. Ray Pennings  Dr. David VanBrugge

We urge each consistory to stress the importance of Office-bearer instruction and brotherly communion. We pray this means may be helpful toward that end. If you are near the location of the Conference, please encourage all office-bearers or past/future office-bearers to attend. If you are unable to attend, please access the recording or material for your benefit. This can be found on [heritagereformed.com](http://heritagereformed.com) under the “Resources” tab. We welcome your input and suggestions on topics that you would find useful and/or need to be addressed. May the Lord bless your congregations and use your efforts for the salvation of the lost and the growth of believers under your care.