

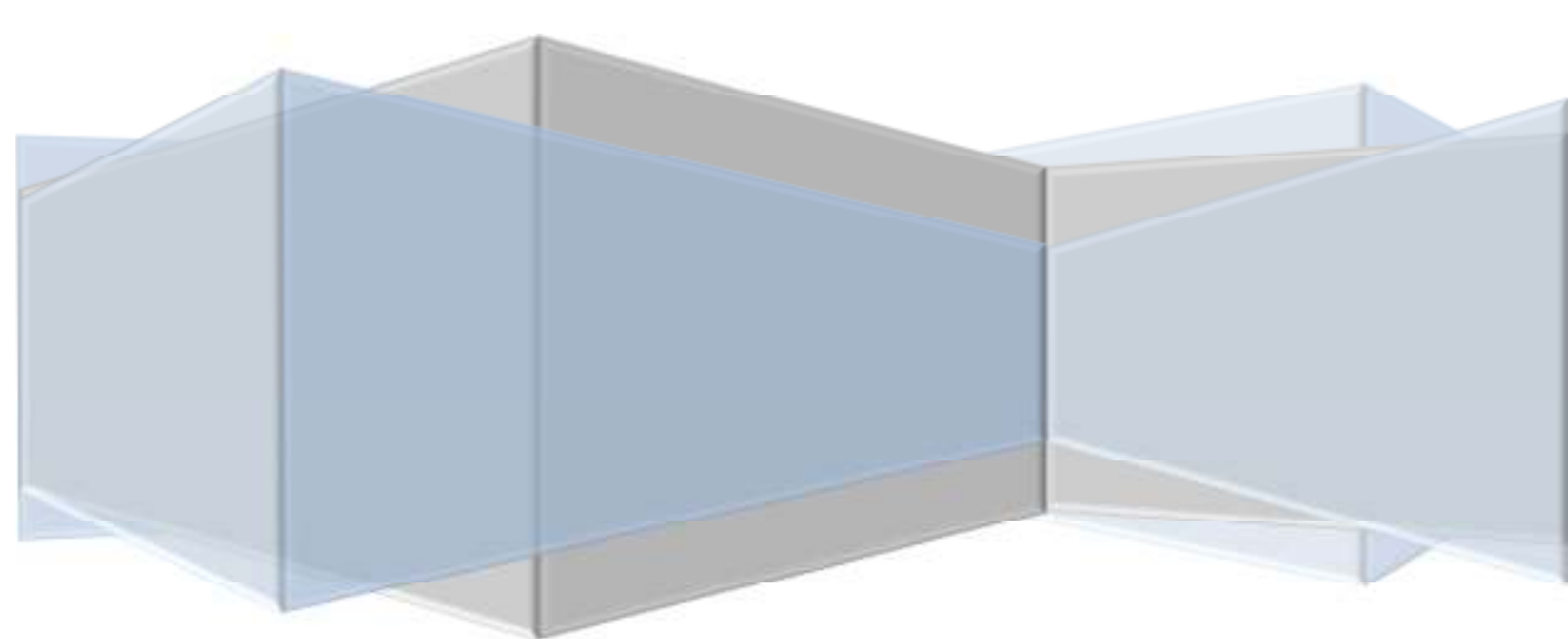
“Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery”

1 Timothy 4:14

Application for Ordination

Résumé, Philosophy of Ministry, & Theology of Ministry

Pastor Ronald H. Gann



RONALD H. GANN

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OBJECTIVE

I seek to serve in ordained ministry, in accordance with my calling, where my spiritual gifts of pastoring, teaching, and leadership can be used for the edification of the local church.

EDUCATION

Barnabas Ministries, Inc. (Londonderry, NH / Hopkinton, MA), 2014	Ordination
Christian Bible College; (Rocky Mt., NC), 2006-07	B.Th Theology
Puget Sound Christian College; (Everett, WA) 1998-99; 2004-05	Bible Certificate
Cascade Bible College; (Everett, WA) 1997	General Bible

PUBLISHED WORKS by Ronald H. Gann

A Hebrew of Hebrews: Walking in the Footsteps of the Apostle Paul (Aventine Press; 2008)
Fa\$T-Food Churchianity: A Critical Assessment of Church Ministry in America (Aventine Press; 2009)
The Scandal of Sovereignty: Defending God's Crown in the Drama of Election (Aventine Press; 2012)

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

BridgeWay Christian Church
(Londonderry, NH)

Senior Pastor/Teacher
2008 to Present

- **Senior Pastor:** duties include weekly expositional teaching and topical preaching, governing with servitude and discernment, promoting proper ecclesiology, biblical theology, and a God-centered approach in all matters pertaining to the life of the church.
- **Vision Caster:** duties include authoring the bylaws and constitution of the church, to include developing the mission and vision statements, and promoting each within the congregation.
- **Leader:** duties include recruiting, mentoring, teaching, training, discipling, and overseeing gifted interns, volunteers, and lay-leaders (deacons), managing leadership and team meetings, and modeling by personal example the primacy of God's Word, the necessity of God-centered worship, and the importance of an active prayer life.
- **Shepherd:** duties include counseling and/or visitations with congregants as needed, conducting one-on-one discipleship meetings, and protecting the church from man-centered and/or theologically bogus doctrines.
- **Servant:** duties include designing the church website and managing its day-to-day updates and functionality.

Open Doors Christian Fellowship
(Litchfield, NH)

Associate Pastoral Teacher/Intern
2006 to 2008

- **Associate Pastor (Intern):** duties included, but were not limited to, teaching and preaching (in rotation with the Senior Pastor) and performing the weekly invocation.

My Philosophy of Ministry

Ronald H. Gann

Perhaps there is no greater barrier to *ecclesiastical* unity, particularly among the clergy, than the longstanding debate over pastoral ministry. How a pastor *instructs* his sheep, *inspires* his co-leaders, *illuminates* Scripture, *imposes* his vision, *invokes* disciplinary action, and *implements* church programs and ministries continues to sow seeds of discord between otherwise likeminded leaders. Notwithstanding our mystical union in Christ, the pastorate is rife with divergent philosophies.

Some ministers, for example, subscribe to a **seeker-sensitive philosophy** (which showcases the performance arts and “felt-needs homilies”¹ as a means of achieving *evangelistic growth*). Others adhere to a **marketing philosophy** (which emphasizes community outreach and “Madison Avenue” advertising as a means of attaining *numerical growth*). And still others adhere to an **expositional philosophy** (which focuses on explaining the meaning of Scripture in its historical and grammatical context in effort to enhance *spiritual growth*). In a nutshell, one philosophy caters to the un-churched (seeker-sensitive), another to the community at large (marketing), and the other still to believers (expositional). And these are just a few of the myriad of models at play in today’s evangelical church. Often referred to as a *philosophy of ministry*, there is no shortage of alternatives from which a pastor can choose. And what he chooses will determine not only *what* he preaches from the pulpit but *how* he governs behind his desk.

¹ “Felt-needs” are largely seen as the issues and questions that face the common person—such as career, family, relationships, etc.—and are therefore front and center in every seeker-pastor’s message; designed to help a person navigate through life more effectively. Douglas Webster correctly writes, “Topics are carefully selected to stress the personal over the doctrinal, and the relational over the [theologically] abstract” (John H. Armstrong; Reformation & Revival Ministries, Inc.; Vol. 3, No. 3, May-June 1994; as cited at www.brfwitness.org).

In defining my pastoral philosophy of ministry, I believe that it is vital that we first define our terms. A philosophy of ministry, in my own words, is an organized statement of unalterable principles for *why* the local church exists and *how* it is to serve the Lord. Specific to the pastorate, it is a blueprint that governs how a pastor should conduct his ministry in his combined office as leader, servant, teacher, shepherd, vision-caster, and principle gatekeeper of the congregation.

Ecclesiastically, my philosophy of ministry consists of three core values (upon which a church should stand), along with seven vision points (for which a church should strive), and seven mission points (by which a church should operate). Pastorally, it also includes four practical points (to which a pastor should aspire). Although far from exhaustive, this ordination paper endeavors to expound briefly upon each criterion as they relate to my personal philosophy of ministry.

Three Core Values

The three core values that comprise my personal philosophy of ministry, and upon which I stake my ground, are: (1) **Scripture-Focused**; (2) **God-Centered**; (3) and **Believer-Oriented**. While seemingly conventional, they are anything but standard fare in contemporary evangelicalism.² I submit that when these three core values are adopted in a church and enforced by the pastoral leadership, the church will better honor God (in its polity and power) and the sheep (in its service and stewardship).

² For more on this topic, see my book *Fa\$T-Food Churchianity: A Critical Assessment of Church Ministry in America*; Ronald H. Gann (Aventine Press, 2009).

- **Scripture-Focused:** The standard bearer for a church must be the Bible. As the inspired Word of God, we are to study its history, teach its theology, uphold its eternal truths, and apply its instructions, exhortations, and precepts. To that end, I believe that it is through a steady diet of expository preaching on Sunday morning that a church maintains its allegiance to, and focus on, the revealed will of God.
- **God-Centered:** The primary focus of a church must be the adoration of God. Through song, supplication, and study, the church is to honor God, first and foremost, for who He is and what He has done. The Sunday service should be about God (rather than us); His glory (rather than our feelings); His Word (rather than our opinions); His agenda (rather than our preferences); and His people (rather than unbelievers)—to the praise of His glory.
- **Believer-Oriented:** The intended target audience for a church must be those who confess faith in Jesus Christ. While evangelizing non-Christians is commanded in Scripture, and is therefore to be obeyed, I believe that the local fellowship on Sunday morning is to be geared principally to, and consist primarily of, believers in Jesus Christ.

These three core values—**Scripture-Focused**, **God-Centered**, and **Believer-Oriented**—are the grid by which my philosophy of ministry is mapped.³ Not unlike the *Five Solas*⁴ of the Protestant Reformation (to which I eagerly subscribe), they are different sides of the same coin—which is to say, each core value is systematically intertwined and inter-dependent. A church cannot focus on Scripture if it is not also centered on God. Likewise, a church cannot effectively minister to believers if it is not first devoted to Scripture. To be God-centric is to therefore be Scripture-centric, and to be Scripture-centric is to thus be believer-centric.

³ These three core values have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

⁴ The “Five Solas” is a term used to designate five great foundational rallying cries of the Protestant Reformers. They are as follows: “Sola Scriptura” (Scripture Alone); “Sola Gratia” (Grace Alone); “Sola Fide” (Faith Alone); “Solus Christus” (Christ Alone); and “Soli Deo Gloria” (To God Alone Be Glory).

Seven Vision Points

The seven vision points that constitute my vision for a church, and thereby inform my pastoral philosophy of ministry, are: (1) **Prayer**; (2) **Faith**; (3) **Family**; (4) **Fellowship**; (5) **Service**; (6) **Study**; and (7) **Outreach**. I submit that when these seven vision points are adopted in a church and modeled by the pastoral leadership, the church will invite divine blessing and incur spiritual victory.

These seven vision points, while mutually exclusive, find common ground in Jesus Christ. For example, by **Prayer**, I mean that a church should be committed to growing in communion *with* Christ, both corporately and individually. By **Faith**, I mean that a church should seek to stand unwavering *on* Christ, particularly in terms of budget planning, church discipline, and ministry development. By **Family**, I mean that a church should exceed in loving one another *for* Christ, especially “the least of these” among us (Matthew 25:45). By **Fellowship**, I mean that a church should enjoy each other *like* Christ, in that we are to be “devoted to ... the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:15). By **Service**, I mean that a church should give to one another as *unto* Christ, to include our time, talents, and tender. By **Study**, I mean that a church should learn and apply the wisdom that comes *from* Christ. And, lastly, by **Outreach**, I mean that a church should proclaim “so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3) that is found only *in* Christ.

These seven vision points are not my own; rather I have extrapolated them from the inspired words of Luke in Acts 2:42. In that particular text Luke sounds the very battle-cry from which the Church Militant receives her universal mandate. It reads as follows:

And they devoted themselves to the *apostles' teaching* and the *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and the *prayers* (Acts 2:42, emphasis added).

In other words, if we are to mimic the apostolic church in our philosophy of ministry, we must advocate the exposition and study of Scripture (“the apostles’ teaching”), as well as corporate fellowship and sacramental worship (“fellowship,” “breaking of bread,” and “the prayers”) as the key ingredients for a Bible-driven, Spirit-filled church. On this point there can be no compromise.

While no church is immaculate in its practice and polity, and no pastor is infallible in his guidance and governance, any pastoral philosophy of ministry that is devoid of these seven vision points—**Prayer, Faith, Family, Fellowship, Service, Study, and Outreach**—does a disservice to the community (in which a pastor labors) and the congregation (whom he serves). My philosophy of ministry therefore champions these seven vision points as essential components to effective pastoral ministry.⁵

Seven Mission Points

Whereas a vision statement is a brief statement that promotes the *purpose* of an organization, the mission statement, in contrast, details the *means* by which that vision is accomplished. A pastor’s personal vision is just as integral to his philosophy of ministry as are the steps he takes to accomplish it. Having noted already the core values and vision points that comprise my pastoral

⁵ These seven vision points have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

philosophy of ministry, it is imperative to also enumerate the seven mission points necessary to bring the vision to fruition.

The seven mission points that underpin my philosophy of ministry are as follows: (1) **Exalt**; (2) **Exposit**; (3) **Examine**; (4) **Esteem**; (5) **Edify**; (6) **Excel**; and (7) **Evangelize**. It is only when these seven mission points are faithfully exercised that the seven vision points can be fully realized.

Similar to the aforesaid vision points, the seven mission points in my philosophy of ministry form a chain of command. By **Exalt**, I mean that it should be a pastor's mission to uplift the name of Jesus Christ at all times and in all settings. By **Exposit**, I mean that a pastor should make it his mission to teach the historical, grammatical, and theological meaning of the New Testament, preferably verse by verse and chapter by chapter. By **Examine**, I mean that a pastor should routinely give his attention to the sacraments of baptism and communion. By **Esteem**, I mean that a pastor should revere, as well as draw upon, the annals of church history in homage to those who have gone on before us (and upon whose shoulders we stand). By **Edify**, I mean that while a pastor's first priority is to glorify God in all that he does, the education of the saints under him must come second. By **Excel**, I mean that a pastor's mission is to stand for truth and advance (excel) a biblical worldview amid an increasingly secularized church. Finally, by **Evangelize**, I mean that a pastor is to make every effort within his sphere of influence to reach the unsaved in his community.⁶

With these seven mission points duly noted—**Exalt**, **Exposit**, **Examine**, **Esteem**, **Edify**, **Excel**, and **Evangelize**—it begs the question: *How exactly are these mission points a means to an end?* Or, more specifically, how do these seven mission points bring about the

⁶ These seven mission points have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

aforementioned seven vision points (whereby a church will shine in **Prayer, Faith, Family, Fellowship, Service, Study, and Outreach**)?

The answer is as self-evident, I suppose, as it is open to interpretation. I am of the opinion that when a pastor focuses on the exposition of Scripture, and peppers his expository teaching with antecedents from church history, the sheep under him will cultivate a ravenous appetite for deeper Bible study (i.e. EXPOSIT + ESTEEM = STUDY). In the same way, when a pastor routinely examines the sacraments and exalts God from the pulpit, the church will inevitably mature into a body of faith that is both worshipful and prayerful (i.e. EXALT + EXAMINE = PRAYER and FAITH). Likewise, when a pastor successfully edifies his congregation through sound teaching, loving relationships, and rich fellowship, a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction will blossom among the laity (i.e. EDIFY = FAMILY and FELLOWSHIP). Lastly, when a pastor excels a Christian worldview and biblical mindset, coupled with an earnest desire to promote each in the church, those in attendance (whether redeemed or not) will be inclined to revisit their religious beliefs and personal politics (i.e. EXCEL + EVANGELIZE = OUTREACH).

In summary, these seven mission points—**Exalt, Exposit, Examine, Esteem, Edify, Excel, and Evangelize** (all of which culminate in the seven vision points—**Prayer, Faith, Family, Fellowship, Service, Study, and Outreach**) results in a philosophy of ministry that is both biblical and effective. Moreover, when the three core values—**Scripture-Focused, God-Centered, and Believer-Oriented**—are added to the paradigm, the foundation for my philosophy of ministry is fully formed. And it is upon this foundation that a church—and the pastors who lead it—must earnestly and steadfastly stand.

Four Practical Points

Beyond textbooks and mere academics, my philosophy of ministry, particularly as it relates to pastoring, has been polished by the aerosol of experience. It has been forged and fashioned, tested and tried, and edited and experimented upon in the laboratory of life.

To varying degrees of success, my philosophy of ministry has informed the manner in which I govern (as pastor and elder), proclaim the Bible (as teacher and preacher), and write and study (as author and essayist). It has, in a manner of speaking, been “put to the proof” through trial and error in the ministry of hard knocks. And in so doing, I am convinced more than ever that a pastor must be a man who expresses and exercises uncommon skills rare among common churchmen.

There are four practical points expected of a pastor, at least insofar as I am concerned, that must be brought to bear in a biblical philosophy of ministry. They are non-negotiable essentials. These points of application include, but are not limited to (1) **Teaching/Preaching**; (2) **Leadership**; (3) **Shepherding**; and (4) **Counseling**. I submit that when these four practical points are standardized in a church—and exhibited among the pastors who lead it—the church will reap a spiritual windfall.

1. Teaching/Preaching

God requires that His overseers in the church be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). By definition, a teacher/preacher is one who demonstrates the ability to persuasively and winsomely communicate the Word of God in such a way that he instructs others in a proper understanding

of Scripture and sound doctrine. He must be suitably gifted in the art of oratory and capable of expositing the biblical text, “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people [can] understand what [is] being read” (Nehemiah 8:8). To that end, a teacher/preacher ought to promote a high view of Scripture⁷—both in the pulpit and in polity—and uphold the exposition of “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42) as the paramount reason that the church congregates together (second only to the worship and adoration of God).

Moreover, in terms of educating and enlightening, my philosophy of ministry envisions a teacher/preacher who delights in instructing the uninformed and correcting those who stray from biblical truth. He does not introduce new revelations or doctrines contrary to what Scripture teaches nor does he go beyond what the universal church has historically confessed in its catechisms. It is because he is a mature man of God that he will not compromise Scripture but dissects the Word of God with thoughtfulness, studiousness, eloquence, and diligence.

2. Leadership

The clear implication of Scripture is that overseers in the church are men who exhibit proven leadership ability (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). By definition, a leader is one who assumes responsibility for the overall ministry of the church, particularly in the office of the pastorate, and takes ownership of its vision and mission, to include the exercise of church discipline. Moreover, a leader influences God’s people to such a degree that it brings them into a deeper relationship with Christ and with each other.

⁷ By “high view of Scripture” I mean a pastor is to regard the Bible as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God and the primary source for evangelical faith and life. He should consider the Bible as the final court of arbitration in all doctrinal matters and codes of conduct.

Leaders, according to my philosophy of ministry, must not only demonstrate wisdom and discernment in their decision-making but also an attitude of servitude toward others, especially to those directly under them (Matthew 20:26-28 cf. 25:31-46). In other words, ministry leaders are those who *love* with authority (those whom they serve) rather than *lord* their authority (over those whom they lead); they *do* unto others rather than *dictate* to all. A pastor, therefore, should be a leader who sets an example—theologically, morally, and practically—for others to eagerly follow.

3. Shepherding

Synonymous with pastoral oversight is the art of shepherding (1 Peter 5:2). By definition, a shepherd is one who provides *spiritual* counsel, *scriptural* support, *sensitive* care, and *selfless* attention to the flock of God. More specifically, it, involves three principle disciplines:

- **Knowing the Sheep.** Jesus said of his Father, “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3). When God gathers His sheep, Christ leads on ahead, “and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (v. 4). A dutiful shepherd, therefore, knows his sheep and leads them lovingly and safeguards them ferociously. Moreover, a shepherd identifies the “stragglers” in his herd and makes every effort to lead them back into the safe confines and fellowship of the sheepfold.
- **Feeding the Sheep.** Scripture places a premium on an overseer’s ability to teach and preach. So much so, in fact, that Jesus required it of Peter as a condition for his reinstatement (John 21:15-20). Shepherds, consequently, must be equipped to teach the Bible, conducive to their individual gifting and personality strengths. A

shepherd's greatest strong suit is his ability to biblically nourish, in the pasture of God's Word, those suffering from spiritual malnutrition.

- **Overseeing the Sheep.** Oversight is a biblical prerequisite for a pastoral shepherd. It requires the *vigilance* of a watchman standing guard at night and the *discipline* of a soldier in the trenches of war. An overseer must protect his flock from the ravenous wolves (false teachers) that abound and “the irreverent babble and contradictions” that they spew (1 Timothy 6:20).

In brief, my philosophy of ministry maintains that a shepherd is a man who is uniquely called and appointed by God to especially care for God's people. He actively seeks to *engage* the flock (shepherd over), *empathize* with the flock (care for), *educate* the flock (teach/preach to), *enjoy* the flock (fellowship with), *escort* the flock (lead them), and *enforce* the flock (protect them).

4. Counseling

Perhaps no other principle in my philosophy of ministry is as scandalous as my view concerning Nouthetic counseling.⁸ Simply stated, I maintain that Jesus Christ, through the Word of God, is wholly sufficient to combat the common ailments that emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically beset sinful men. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the Word of God “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). These two words, “thoughts” and “attitudes,” cover the motivations of man and his deepest values. God's Word, we are told, is fully capable of passing judgment on the most hinder parts of human psychosis. It therefore goes

⁸ Rooted in the sufficiency of Scripture, Nouthetic counseling is form of Christian counseling developed by Jay E. Adams, and published in his 1970 book, *Competent to Counsel*.

without saying that when counseling from the office of the pastorate, a pastor must allow the Bible to speak for itself as the final court of arbitration.

Modern psychology, both secular and so-called Christian, is culpable at times of devaluing the power of Christ as the healing balm for spiritual neurosis while simultaneously over-valuing the wisdom of carnal men. In certain contexts, the Bible has been replaced with the journals of pop-psychiatry—even in the church! However, notwithstanding dissociative disorders and clinically-diagnosed mental illnesses, any philosophy of ministry that suggests that the wisdom of God’s Word is insufficient to administer to depressed or anxious people is rank blasphemy.⁹

My philosophy of ministry maintains that a pastor who teaches, leads, and shepherds must also be equipped to counsel from the Bible and apply its truths to the significant problems and daily challenges that afflict his congregation. We offer an all-sufficient Christ who is the source of all wisdom and spiritual healing; so it is to him and primarily to his Word that we must point a person in the midst their emotional despair.

Conclusion

My philosophy of ministry, although somewhat formulaic in outline, is neither radical in principle nor revolutionary in application. It is a point of view that maintains and sustains a high view of evangelical principles as well as an entrenched commitment to Scripture and the God it proclaims. What is more, it is a philosophy of ministry that stands on the shoulders of Protestant titans of the past who have graced the corridors of church history and shed their blood in

⁹ To be clear, while there is certainly value in some psychotic medicines (as they pertain to legitimate mental disorders), replacing the Bible with the world’s wisdom—that is, “pop psychology” or “felt-needs counseling”—is an assault on the power of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of God’s Word.

remonstrance to Rome so that we might freely conduct ministry in the manner that the Bible prescribes.

We owe it to our Protestant forefathers, including the countless saints who have gone on before and since, to carry the baton of evangelicalism; to be a **God-Centered, Scripture-Focused, and Believer-Oriented** church, equipped with visionaries skilled at **teaching/preaching, leading, shepherding, and counseling** and who pursue with a fever pitch **Prayer** (growing in communion *with* Christ), **Faith** (standing unwavering *on* Christ), **Family** (loving each other *for* Christ), **Fellowship** (enjoying each other *like* Christ), **Service** (giving to one another as *unto* Christ), **Study** (applying the wisdom that comes *from* Christ), and **Outreach** (proclaiming salvation only *in* Christ). When we achieve that end, I stand convinced that the local church will complete its mission in becoming a congregation that **Exalts** (Jesus Christ), **Exposits** (the Scriptures), **Examines** (the sacraments), **Esteems** (Church history), **Edifies** (the saints), **Excels** (a Christian worldview), and **Evangelizes** (the unsaved).

My challenge to the Church of Jesus Christ, both local and universal, is to do just that—to *be* the Body of Christ from the shoulders down, with Christ as our head; a living organism that unreservedly puts into practice a *biblical* philosophy of ministry. If we are faithful to do so, then we as a church will hold in our possession a surefire compass that will guide our steps during the blackest nights of ministry, and lead us home safely at the dawn of a new day.

—Ronald H. Gann

My Theology of Ministry

Ronald H. Gann

A pastor's personal belief system, along with his preaching and teaching, carries with it eternal and temporal consequences. Bound by Scripture, his chief responsibility is to safeguard the church's doctrinal borders, and over which neither he nor his congregants must step. As Paul admonished Timothy and Titus in his respective pastoral letters, a pastor must "teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9) and "encourage others by sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), while not equivocating to "whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10).

Like most evangelical Christians and professional clergymen, my personal theology has matured over the years on account of studious research, prayerful contemplation, laborious reading, and due diligence. To date, seven Reformed principles, together with five core doctrines and four secular articles, comprise my theology of ministry. Cemented in historical orthodoxy and chained together by tradition, they are the anchor by which my pastoral ministry is biblically grounded.

In a word, I am *Reformed*, particularly as it relates to soteriology and Theology Proper (although not necessarily eschatologically or Covenantally¹⁰). Reformed Theology is generally considered synonymous with Calvinism and most often, in the Western church, is associated with the theology of the magisterial Reformers and the historic confessions of the medieval church, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith. The purpose of this ordination paper, therefore, is to flesh out in greater detail the various beliefs to which I subscribe and my reasons

¹⁰ Covenant Theology (or Federal theology) is a prominent feature in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, which views redemptive history under the framework of three overarching theological covenants: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace.

for holding them. Each principle or doctrine informs *what* I teach from the pulpit, and the manner in which I preach it.

Seven Reformed Principles

1. To be Reformed is to be Protestant, whereby the *Five Solas* of the Reformation are affirmed.

The *Five Solas* are five Latin phrases, borne out of the Protestant Reformation, which emphasize the major distinctives between Protestantism and Catholicism. Each *Sola*—meaning “alone” or “only”—stands in distinction to its Catholic counterpart. More specifically, the *Five Solas* clarify and crystalize the Reformed doctrines of justification, authority, sufficiency, and salvation. They are as follows:

- *Sola Scriptura* (“Scripture Alone”): Scripture alone is our highest authority.
- *Solus Christus* (“Christ Alone”): We are saved through the work of Christ alone.
- *Sola Fide* (“Faith Alone”): We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone.
- *Sola Gratia* (“Grace Alone”): We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone.
- *Soli Deo Gloria* (“Glory to God Alone”): We are saved for God’s glory alone.

The *Five Solas* of the Reformation were, and continue to be, a strong corrective to the faulty practices and beliefs pontificated by man-centered and works-based religions. As evangelicals, we are called to combat such error by a strict adherence to Scripture *alone*, upholding salvation by grace *alone* through faith *alone* in Jesus Christ *alone* whereby God *alone* is glorified.

2. To Be Reformed is to be biblical, whereby a high view of the sovereignty of God is affirmed.

The Lord is utterly self-ruling and in control of all things (Proverbs 16:4 cf. Romans 8:28). Everything that operates in the universe does so because God sovereignly made it so, according to His good pleasure. Far more than simply a King who exercises supremacy, God’s sovereignty is *creative* (He generates), *decretive* (He ordains), *active* (He brings to fruition), and *legislative* (He is all-controlling). Nothing exists outside of that which God sovereignly ordains—to include the existence of evil, for which He permits but does not create. His sovereignty, in other words, is *all-encompassing*. That God is in complete control over history and ordains the affairs of His creative order in accord with His predetermined purposes is the collective voice of both the Old and New Testament.¹¹

3. To be Reformed is to be Calvinistic, whereby God is seen as the author of salvation from beginning to end.

First, Reformed Theology teaches that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among Adam’s ruined race to be the objects of His underserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save. His eternal choice to elect some individuals for glory (while leaving others in their sin) was not based on any foreseen act or response on the part of those chosen, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will (Ephesians 1:5 cf. 2 Timothy 1:9). Thus, election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do in their lifetime but was the result of God’s self-determined purpose in eternity past. In a word, it was *unconditional*.

Second, the New Testament reveals that the names of those in eternity past whom “God ... destined ... to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9)—that is, the Elect—were “written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8 cf. 17:8). That is to say, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus

¹¹ See Genesis 4:25; Exodus 4:11; 21:12; Deuteronomy 10:22; 32:39; Ruth 4:13; 1 Samuel 2:6-7; Proverbs 16:33; Ecclesiastes 7:13-17; Isaiah 45:5-7; Lamentations 3:37-38; Amos 3:6-7; Matthew. 5:45; 6:26, 30; 10:29-30; James 4:13-15)

Christ to Himself ... being predestined ... according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:4, 11). The salvation of the Elect, in other words, was decided upon and catalogued in a divine ledger long before creation ever came to be. This truth is spotlighted in the clearest terms in 2 Timothy 1:9 where Paul writes that God “saved us and called us ... before the beginning of time” (see also Titus 1:2).

Lastly, according to Reformed tradition, God draws to Himself in time and space those whom He decreed to save in eternity past. In the words of the Canons of Dort, elect sinners come to Him at the appointed time “sweetly and powerfully,”¹² acting on their own accord and from renewed affections. The Holy Spirit creates within them a new heart or a new nature whereby they *can* understand spiritual truth and *will* most surely believe it. Stated differently, what a sinner *could not* and *would not* do in his state of reprobation, God enables him to do through the miracle of spiritual regeneration. The intended effect is always successful and unavoidably certain. Those whom God elected and predestined in eternity past, He regenerates and effectually draws to Christ in time and space. And those whom He regenerates and draws to Christ in time and space, He most certainly will save and glorify in eternity future.

4. To be Reformed is to be creedal, whereby the great creeds of the historic, orthodox church are affirmed.

While no creed or confession is spiritually binding, *per se*, Reformed Christians nevertheless uphold many traditional documents as beneficial for having guided and illuminated the universal church for centuries. These formal declarations—such as the Apostles’ Creed (c. 180), the Nicene Creed (c. 325), and the Athanasian Creed (c. 415)—preserve the advancements made in the knowledge of Christian truth; they discriminate the truth from false teaching; they serve as the basis of fellowship for likeminded believers; and they exist for our instruction by summarizing in succinct terms the totality of the Bible’s teachings.

¹² The Canons of Dort, Article 16

5. To be Reformed is to be confessional whereby the great confessions of the historic, orthodox church are affirmed.

It is true that the ancient confessions of the church are exempt from inspiration and do not vie for our allegiance in the same manner as Scripture. But it is equally true that we embrace our confessions because they define for us the rich history from which we have come, theologically-speaking, and maintain our course, doctrinally-speaking, in where we are going.

While a confession is a “rule” in one sense of the word, it is more accurately a metaphorical boundary-line or fence, dividing the safe (or correct) areas from the unsafe (or incorrect). For this reason, many confessions summarize the basic points of belief, because as boundary-markers their purpose is to define the lines of demarcation. The church has gone to great lengths historically to formally flesh out these truths and to safeguard these lines in Reformed confessions and catechisms, such as in the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1576), the Canons of Dort (1619), and, most famously, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).

6. To be Reformed is to be evangelistic, whereby the Great Commission of the church is preached and practiced.

The *ordinary means* by which God gathers the Elect into the sheepfold is through sent messengers who herald an *extraordinary message* (cf. Romans 10:15). In short, God, by virtue of His sovereignty and as the Author of our salvation, not only ordains the end (salvation) but also the *means* to the end (the proclamation of the gospel). When properly understood and sincerely believed, Reformed Theology emboldens God’s people to

greater action as witnesses for Jesus Christ. (In point of fact, the Reformed tradition is responsible for spawning some of the greatest evangelistic revivals in history).¹³

Because God has graciously granted our involvement in His redemptive purposes, Reformed Theology fuels the fires of evangelism. It sees “the gathering of the Elect” (through the work of evangelism) as a privilege to be practiced and a duty to be discharged.

7. To be Reformed is to be evangelical, whereby a distinctly Christian worldview permeates all of life.

The term “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “the good news” or “gospel.” By definition, therefore, a Reformed evangelical places a heavy emphasis on the “good news” of salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Four distinctives define evangelicalism, as published by the *National Association of Evangelicals*.¹⁴

- **Conversionism:** The belief that [human] lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus.
- **Activism:** The expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts [and in personal sanctification and holiness].
- **Biblicism:** A high regard for, and obedience to, the Bible as the ultimate authority [in all matters pertaining to Christian life and theology].
- **Crucicentrism:** A stress on the [atoning] sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross [in penal-substitution for the sins of the saints].

The Reformed tradition insists upon a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—one that transcends intellectual assent and religious liturgy—and upholds as paramount the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Moreover, these distinctives impact the core

¹³ The Great Awakening (1731–1755) and the Protestant Reformation (1517) were spawned by Calvinists who had a high view of evangelism.

¹⁴ <http://www.nae.net/church-and-faith-partners/what-is-an-evangelical>

convictions of an evangelical in such a way that it informs their personal politics, religion, and worldview.

Five Core Doctrines

1. **BIBLIOLOGY**: I believe that the Holy Bible is the *inspired* (Spirit-breathed), *inerrant* (without error), and *infallible* (incapable of error) Word of God.

Because it is the revealed Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments and was transmitted without error through men who were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21), the Holy Bible is therefore the supreme authority concerning all matters of life, faith, conduct, teaching, doctrine, and training. Furthermore, the Word of God is neither open to private interpretation (beyond that which the evangelical church has historically taught)¹⁵ nor open in perpetuity (beyond that which the evangelical church has previously canonized). In short, because the canon of Scripture is closed (cf. Jude 3), so then are the recorded words, revealed will, and revelatory prophecies of God.¹⁶

2. **THEOLOGY**: I believe that there is only one true God who exists as three eternal and co-equal Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Trinitarianism: Within the unity of God there exists a *tri-unity* of co-eternal and co-equal Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although one in nature, substance, and purpose they are distinct in their respective roles as Creator (the Father), Redeemer (the Son), and Intercessor (the Spirit).

¹⁵ While I readily admit that churchmen throughout all ages have taught and believed various things, often in contradiction to one another, it is universally accepted that the church stands in united agreement over the essential doctrines of the historic faith—to include the inspiration of Scripture, the Holy Trinity the Deity of Christ, the divine nature of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith alone, the resurrection of Christ, the return of Christ, and eternal hell and heaven.

¹⁶ See Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35; John 17:17; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:19.

Theology Proper: As the first Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Father is the Creator of all things. He is perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, justice, and love, and in whom no flaw or imperfection subsists. He concerns Himself with the affairs of His created order, hears and answers the prayers of His creatures, and graciously and mercifully saves sinners from sin and death when they come to Him in repentance and through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Christology: As the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ is both the Son of God *and* God the Son in whom resides the *hypostatic union* of complete humanity and full deity (i.e. dual-natured). In a word, He is the *theanthropos* (God-Man). In His sinless humanity, Christ is the only begotten Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, “born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:8), without spot or blemish, and who lived a life of abject perfection (in thought, word, and deed). In His sinless divinity, Christ’s death on the cross was as a vicarious sacrifice (in penal-substitution) for the Elect thereby atoning for their sins—after which He physically resurrected from the grave in the very body in which He was crucified and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven (having effectually and effectively redeemed those whom the Father gave Him in eternity past).¹⁸

Pneumatology: As the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit is currently present in the church, sent by the Father and the Son, to convict the world of sin and to testify in the hearts and consciences of men to the redemptive work of Christ. He also holds the role of regeneration, sanctification, and empowerment for all who believe in Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Holy Spirit

¹⁷ See Genesis. 1:1, 26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 18:30; Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1, 14; 3:16–17; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4–5; Hebrews 12:9

¹⁸ See Isaiah 7:14; John 1:14, 18; 6:37–40; Philippians 2:5–11; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:23; 1 John 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Acts 1:10–11.

indwells every believer in Christ, acting as a spiritual helper, teacher, and guide and is, by very nature and in every essence, equal with the Father and the Son.¹⁹

3. SOTERIOLOGY: I believe that salvation is by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in the finished work of Jesus Christ *alone*.

All human beings are sinners by nature and by choice (Genesis 3; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10–12). For this reason, all human beings are born in a condemned state of being and spiritually separated from God. However, God, in His grace, has provided the means by which guilty sinners can be legally justified (in Him), genuinely forgiven (by Him), endlessly reconciled (to Him), and eternally saved (for Him). In brief, justification, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation are attained solely by God’s grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, irrespective of human effort, deeds of service, meritorious conduct, or good works (Ephesians 2:8-9 cf. Romans 6:23). While not denying the value of good works (since good works testify to a redeemed life in Christ), the combined blessings of justification, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation (whereby hell is avoided and heaven gained) are attained “through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

4. ESCHATOLOGY / LAST THINGS: I believe in the personal, visible, and imminent return of Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of his Kingdom, as well as the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal joy of the righteous in heaven, and the eternal suffering of the wicked in hell.

The hope of the ages is the return of Jesus Christ—no longer as the sin bearer and object of contempt and rejection by sinful men, but as the sovereign Judge of the cosmos, whose

¹⁹ See John 14:26; 16:7–15; Acts 5:3–4; Romans 8:14–17; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30.

glorious appearance will trigger the events known in Christian theology as “The Day of the Lord.”²⁰ Also referred to as “the blessed hope” of the church (Titus 2:13), the Lord’s return “with the clouds” of heaven (Revelation 1:7) will appear “as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west” (Matthew 24:27); will ransom his church to eternal glory and immortality (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17); and will break the power of death over the bodies of Christians (cf. 1 Corinthians 15), after which Christ “will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30-31).

The various views concerning the *eschaton* (the climax of history) or *parousia* (the second coming of Christ) are vast and nuanced and go beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that I am ambivalent when it comes to the three end-time views promulgated today—namely, *Premillennialism*, *Amillennialism*, and *Postmillennialism*. Moreover, I remain equally undecided about rapture theology—*Pre-tribulation*, *Mid-tribulation*, or *Post-tribulation*—and question whether the concept of a rapture and a future tribulation period are even viable to begin with. Each viewpoint has its theological and philosophical strongpoints, to be sure, but each also have equally significant weak points that cannot be dismissed insofar as I understand them. Be that as it may, putting their particulars aside, I stand in universal agreement with all of them in that Christ’s return is historical, biblical, literal, and imminent.

5. ECCLESIOLOGY: I believe that the church is the spiritual body and bride of Jesus Christ made up of all born-again persons from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

In Protestant theology, the “Body of Christ” describes the universal federation of believers (past, present, and future) who, through the monergistic work of spiritual regeneration, confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In this sense, all true Christians (from every tongue, tribe, and nation and irrespective of culture, country, and creed) are collective members of Christ’s body (spiritual church)—not because of their

²⁰ See Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10 cf. Revelation 6:17; 16:14.

identification with the physical institution of the church, but through their identification with Christ directly through faith (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 3:6; 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 24). As such, Jesus Christ is the “head” of the body, as Lord and Savior, and Christians make up his individual body parts, as servants and disciples.

Likewise, the New Testament also uses the imagery of a “bride” to describe the spiritual church. Jesus Christ, as the Bridegroom, has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church as his wife-to-be (Ephesians 5:25-27). Just as there was a betrothal period in biblical times during which the bride and groom were separated until the wedding, so the bride of Christ is physically separated from her Bridegroom during the church age. Her responsibility during this betrothal period is to remain faithful to him in love, purity, and fidelity (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:24). At the Second Coming of Christ, the bride will be united with her Bridegroom, and the official “wedding ceremony” will take place whereby the eternal union of Christ and His followers will be consummated (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-2).

Four Secular Articles

1. HUMAN SEXUALITY: I believe that God created human sexuality as a gift and has reserved sexual activity and/or intercourse for the union of marriage.

The Bible restricts all sexual activity to the marriage bed—between one man (husband) and one woman (wife). Any and all forms of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, orgies, fornication (premarital sex), adultery, polygamy, and pornography are sinful perversions of God’s gift of sex, monogamy, and marriage (Genesis 2:24; 19:5, 13; 26:8-9; Leviticus 18:1-30; Romans 1:26-29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4).

2. ABORTION: I believe that human life begins at the moment of conception and that an unborn child is a living human being.

Notwithstanding rare situations where a baby in utero endangers the life of its mother, abortion constitutes the *unjustified* taking of an unborn human life and is therefore equal to, and in every sense, murder. Any teaching or political philosophy that suggests otherwise (for instance, rape, incest, birth defects, gender selection, birth or population control, or the *mental* well-being of the mother) is a clear contradiction of Scripture (Job 3:16; Psalm 51:5; 139:14-16; Isaiah 44:24; 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:5; 2015-18; Luke 1:44).

3. LAWSUITS: I believe that Christians are prohibited from bringing civil lawsuits against other Christians or the local church to resolve personal disputes.

The church—both local and universal—possesses all the resources necessary to resolve personal disputes between fellow believers. It is biblically unconstitutional for a Christian to bring litigation against another, particularly in cases where repentance is made and/or when reparations are offered to the offended party or persons. However, in cases where the offender refuses to seek repentance, rebels against church authorities, or absconds his responsibility to make appropriate reparations to the persons or party offended, civil litigation is permissible. Pertaining to *criminal* matters, a Christian (or local church) reserves the right to invoke secular authorities in the event a crime is committed against them, the church, or the state (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Ephesians 4:31-32).

4. GOVERNMENT: I believe that God has ordained the governing institutions of 1) the home; 2) the church; and 3) the state, to which all Christians must submit.

Every person is subject to an authority, be it in the home, in the church, or in the government. However, each of these institutions (and the authorities who lead them) is

answerable to God and is to be administered according to His Word. The home, the church, and the state are equally sovereign in their respective spheres of responsibility to which all Christians must oblige when governed in accordance with Scripture (Romans 13:1-7; Ephesians 5:22-24; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

—*Ronald H. Gann*