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Norman Mailer passage from *The Gospel According to the Son*, Random House, 1997.



Price H. Gwynn III, Moderator of the 202nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers, and became a successful businessman as well as an extremely effective elder of the Presbyterian Church. Prior to his election as moderator,

this North Carolina native was vice-president and director of Lance, Inc., having previously served as president of two other major companies. After being elected, Gwynn became the only moderator of our denomination to be featured in *The Saturday Evening Post* for his extensive business experience. Such experience prepared him to serve as chairman of the board of Presbyterian Publishing Corporation during an important time of transition.

His experience and leadership at all levels of the Presbyterian Church are equally impressive. Gwynn has served as deacon, elder, Sunday school teacher, synod representative, and has held extensive presbytery committee assignments, as well as acting as moderator of his presbytery. He was awarded five honorary degrees from Presbyterian colleges, including Davidson, where he also served on the board of trustees. During his distinguished career, he chaired the board of Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, and he is an active member of the board of trustees of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Further national church leadership roles include former membership on the General Assembly Council and the Committee on the Spiritual Welfare of the Church. He is currently a member of the Special Committee for Review of the General Assembly. Gwynn has combined all of these activities with a distinguished military career, outstanding civic service, and, with his wife Katherine, strong family ties with their three sons and grandchildren.



Dear Presbyterian Leader:

I am very pleased to send you the inaugural volume in the Price H. Gwynn III Church Leadership Series from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC).

This series of publications is intended to honor one of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s most distinguished leaders, a committed Presbyterian Christian who has provided extraordinary leadership to his denominational publishing house and to the PC(USA) as a whole. As you can see from the resume of his ecclesiastical service, Price Gwynn has served the PC(USA) at all levels. He is one of our denomination's greatest treasures.

It is the hope of PPC's board of directors and staff that these publications will edify and inspire you in your particular situation of ministry. They are intended to celebrate the life and work of Price Gwynn, but also to foster more effective leadership within the PC(USA).

PPC is sending this publication to you free of charge. If, however, you would like additional copies, please send \$1.00 for each copy to cover shipping and handling to Customer Service, Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 100 Witherspoon Street, Room 2060, Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

On behalf of Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, please accept this publication with our best wishes!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Davis Perkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "P".

Davis Perkins
President & Publisher

To Praise God Boldly

John M. Buchanan



To Praise God Boldly

There is a wonderful incident in Norman Mailer's retelling of the gospel story when Jesus is reflecting on his choice of friends. He has been criticized for associating with the wrong people, sinners and publicans:

Why did I seek out men who would rather eat and drink than pray? . . . These publicans were rarely solemn. Still I trusted the good spirit between us. It was not a time to fast. There was much to prepare for the Lord. To fast would make us gloomy, and we would become like those who praise God with their words but remain so afraid of other men that they can never praise him by bold deeds.

To praise God with bold deeds. I am honored to have been invited to contribute the inaugural essay for this series on leadership in the church, particularly because it recognizes and celebrates the leadership of an extraordinary Presbyterian, Price Gwynn. Price is the kind of Presbyterian who makes me proud of my church: an effective businessman; a generous philanthropist; a good husband, father, and neighbor; a loving friend; a faithful leader who has answered the call of his church time and time again. He led us, spoke to us and for us, with distinction and grace, during his term as moderator of the General Assembly. He brought a lifetime of leadership experience along with his love for our church to his assignment as the first chairperson of the board of the new Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. The immediate and strong performance of that enterprise is due in no small measure to Price Gwynn's leadership. At times of stress and tension within our Presbyterian family, Price has spoken a consistent word of reconciliation, grace, and hope.

He surely would not prefer eating and drinking to praying, but like Mailer's characterization of the preferred company of Jesus, Price has given his life to the work of our Lord. He has done so with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. He has praised God with bold deeds.

I am grateful, as well, for the opportunity to write about our future as a church and to express what I think our church needs by way of leadership in the days ahead, on the basis of what I saw and experienced during my term as Moderator of the 208th General Assembly (1996).

A Church Alive and Faithful

This church of ours is a marvel. You wouldn't know that if all you read about the Presbyterian Church comes from the pages of publications whose purpose is to change the church by convincing readers that there is something wrong at the heart of our denomination and its leadership that requires correction. There is a place for advocacy journalism in the body politic and with every responsible organization. Indeed, the existence of a vital and free society depends on the freedom to criticize and argue vigorously for change. Historian Martin Marty says flatly: "One cannot have a republic without argument" (*The One and the Many*, Harvard, 1997, 154). The problem is that most of what Presbyterians read and think they know about our church comes from the pages of polemic publications that deplore much of what the Presbyterian Church is and does, publications that specialize in the "Presbyterian crisis du jour." And somewhere in the middle of that dynamic, the reality of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gets lost.

Moderators know it. Moderators spend a year traveling throughout our church, visiting presbyteries, synods, mission projects, colleges, seminaries, and congregations. Every Sunday the moderator is privileged to experience the life of a different Presbyterian congregation. What a jarring contrast, between what the advocacy press says about us and what actually is happening where our church lives, moves, and has its being: in the life of its congregations! The moderator discovers a church which is marvelously alive and faithful and vital and hopeful, in congregations of astonishing diversity. It is deeply moving to witness the faithfulness of Presbyterian congregations and people everywhere engaged in the work of our Lord—baptizing babies, nurturing children, teaching the young, standing with young families, caring for the sick, comforting the grieving—and, everywhere, reaching out to their neighborhoods and towns and cities in ministries of compassion and justice. Literally everywhere in this country, Presbyterian people are doing the work of Jesus, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, healing the sick, visiting the prisoners.

In a *New York Times* editorial, Peter Steinfelds reported a recent study of service projects provided by local churches in major metropolitan areas and what it would cost the municipalities to provide these same services. In Philadelphia alone, the figure amounted to \$70 million annually. The moderator of the General Assembly sees it every week, and I will never forget it, never cease being grateful for this marvelous church of ours.

We are an old church. It's part of our glory and it is part of the challenge of our future. Most media attention recently has been devoted to the phenomenon of the megachurches, most of them new, most of them trying desperately, and succeeding, not to look, sound, or feel like a traditional church. But we've been around in North America for something like 325 years. We were here 150 years before there was a United States of America. Our forebears brought to the New World their feisty Calvinism with its distrust of hierarchies and its stubborn insistence on freedom and representation, and the creative interface of theology and life. By the time of the War for Independence, the Presbyterian Church was here in strength, proclaiming the gospel, establishing schools and colleges, evangelizing, teaching, and building hospitals, many of which still bear our name. It is our glory.

We have a Presbyterian Historical Society with a real story to tell. Our history is also our greatest challenge. Many of our congregations give evidence of it, located in old neighborhoods in older cities, living in and struggling to maintain old buildings. Because we are a faithful church of Jesus Christ and not a business enterprise whose evaluative criteria are numbers and profits, we have stayed in those old buildings in old neighborhoods in old cities, hanging on for dear life as the world changed and continues to change around us. We love to wring our hands about membership loss and the decline of Presbyterianism. But it is, at least in part, a story of faithfulness, of congregations staying with their neighbors, of a denomination investing its resources and energy to sustain those congregations.

The challenge of the future is to continue our faithful presence but also to discover new ways to be the church. The leadership challenge of the future is to create and invest energy and resources in a vision of a new church for a new century.

A Tradition of Worldwide Mission

Moderators discover that while our numbers continue to decline we are still a big church. Moderators work and travel at different paces. My burden was to follow Marj Carpenter, who isn't happy unless she's in and out of three airports a day! But even the busiest of us quickly learns that this is one big church: there are still 2.7 million of us. That's more people than live in Costa Rica or Jordan. There are 11,400 Presbyterian congregations in the U.S., 68 colleges and universities still relate to our General Assembly, and we have mission activity and relationships in 87 countries.

It's a magnificent story. The Presbyterian Church has been

engaged in global mission for nearly a century and a half and today, all over the globe, there are autonomous, indigenous Reformed/Presbyterian churches, planted by our missionaries in the last century and the early decades of this century, today our strong partners in mission.

Each moderator has his or her favorite mission stories with which to regale, and in time bore, our friends and congregations. But each of us returns from our year of service so full of the wonderful experience of the global church of Jesus Christ, so deeply proud of and grateful for our Presbyterian tradition of mission, and so very anxious for its future.

As every American moderator, I was amazed at the Presbyterian presence in Korea and grateful for the faithfulness of Allen Underwood, Samuel Moffett, and the other early missionaries who brought the gospel and, as their forebears did in North America a century earlier, established schools and colleges—among them the finest secondary, university, and graduate programs in the nation—along with a wide range of health care services and institutions, clinics, and hospitals. I was grateful to learn about the Presbyterian Medical Mission role in dealing with the great cholera epidemic of 1890 in Korea and how the gospel of Jesus Christ was communicated eloquently and effectively by the ministry of Severence Hospital. I was amazed and grateful to learn that there are 500 Presbyterian churches in North Korea, all but a very few existing—without buildings—as house churches, and that we are in communication with our sisters and brothers in North Korea because of the distinguished and faithful leadership of two Korean Americans on our General Assembly staff with roots in North Korea, Syngman Rhee and Insik Kim.

In Ocijek, Croatia, I was touched by the faithfulness and courage of Steve and Michelle Kurtz, mission workers serving on the faculty of Evangelical Theological Seminary and working with the AGAPE project, an ecumenical refugee resettlement program that we Presbyterians help to fund. AGAPE provides food and shelter to desperate refugees, rebuilds destroyed villages, and resettles people who have been driven out of their homes by the combatants. I stood behind the Communion table in the Reformed Church of Vinkovsci, a small church building that was nearly destroyed by a direct mortar hit but is now repaired, patched, plastered, and freshly painted with funds from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) One Great Hour of Sharing, and witnessed the tears of gratitude in the eyes of the Croatian men, women, and children who crowded into their beloved church to break bread and share the cup with the moderator of the

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

I thanked God for Presbyterian missionaries who established churches in Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, and in each of those places I received, on behalf of our church, love and gratitude for continuing Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) support, presence, and solidarity.

I greeted Pope John Paul II on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and assured him of the prayers and good wishes of the Presbyterian congregations and people of our church. As he greeted my wife Sue and me, he said in perfect English, “God bless your ministry and the ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).”

In Rome we exchanged ideas and hopes with officials in the Pontifical Secretariat for Christian Unity and again experienced profound gratitude for the courage and faithfulness of the Waldensian Church, a brave Reformed Italian denomination.

Every day for one year I witnessed and experienced this amazing church of ours, which continues to express the gospel of Jesus Christ through its Reformed tradition in worship, education, and intentional interface with the world. Every day I thanked God for the faithfulness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

A Sea of Change

What an exercise in “ecclesiastical culture shock” to return to and reimmerge myself in a church that feels, for all the world, like it doesn’t want to be a church any longer. Every day I read an article, essay, or personal letter from a Presbyterian who has concluded that the time has come to sacrifice the unity of our church, that we are already two churches, that we need to “take back the church” or “declare our dissent from the church” or “become a church within a church.” Every day I talk to Presbyterians who are ready to give up on the project of being a denomination with people who have different opinions on this or that. I believe we are at a critical time in the long history of our church. And I know I am not alone in my weariness over this ideological warfare that divides us and my longing for a way to help my church reinvest its energy and passion and resources in its mission. It is a time that desperately needs extraordinary leadership.

It is helpful, I think, to take a step back from the immediacy of our situation, to check in with other disciplines and enterprises, and to put our current dilemma into a larger context. Peter Drucker, management consultant and theorist, introduces

a recent article on leadership with this succinct observation: “As the twentieth century winds down, our disappointment with leaders is escalating rapidly.” Drucker lists the corporate and governmental leaders who have fallen in the past decade and suggests that, “Our disappointment stems from the inexorable sea of change in the conditions of leadership imposed by our new global environment.” He quotes Vaclav Havel, who recently declared, “Something is on the way out, and something else is painfully being born” (*Drucker Management*, spring 1997, vol. 1). Historians say the same thing about the period in American history immediately preceding the Civil War. Havel’s statement also reminds us of Paul’s wonderful image of the whole creation groaning in the travail of labor, as the new creation, the new being in Jesus Christ, is born.

Drucker’s simple, clear observation is that high technology has forever transformed the way leaders must lead. High-tech communication has spawned an incredible new diversity in the body politic—like the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Instant communication spawns diversity, which spawns conflicting agendas and “calls into play separatism, tribalism, nationalism.” Sounds like my church!

Drucker describes the complexion of this new, factious environment:

- splintering nations
- disintegrating and reconstituted alliances
- increasing group pride
- proliferation of narrowly defined, often single-issue political groups.

Is that a description of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Drucker is calling for a “New Paradigm of Connective Leadership.” By that, he means leadership that can “negotiate, persuade, and integrate conflicting groups, inspiring both supporters and opponents to work together for the common good.” That—in case you’ve never tried it—is what moderators do, and it is not easy. Sometimes it feels impossible. The key, Drucker says, is keeping your eye on the connections between conflicting visions: “Connective leaders see connections where traditional leaders see only chasms.”

Unity in Diversity

So, where are the connections in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)? Is there common ground upon which people in conflict can stand? That is the challenge for new leaders.

Some are saying that it is too late, that we are already divided into two, perhaps three groups with irreconcilable differences on fundamental matters. And yet . . . and yet . . . our best tradition as Reformed Christians is an intentional commitment to discourse and dialogue as a way to get at truth. In a sense, we invented the notion of public, civil discourses in the modern world.

Marty says we must keep talking. Leadership fosters conversation, never shuts it off, holds out to the very end for more talk, dialogue, argument, discussion. I don't think we've finished talking with one another yet. I know we haven't.

In *The One and the Many*, Marty suggests that the ideological divide that separates Americans from one another on a variety of issues is not really a chasm in the middle of the society, but rather two platforms with a huge valley between them. Twenty-five percent of the population live on the plateaus, 75 percent in the valley between them; 15 percent are on the right plateau, firing salvos over the valley at the 10 percent of the population on the left. The left 10 percent return the fire, aiming at the 15 percent on the right. The 75 percent in the middle observe the warfare, sometimes lean right or left, occasionally get hit by the fire, and almost never are willing to fight to the death, which means sacrificing the unity, integrity, and life of the society for ideological purity, right or left.

This is not to say that 75 percent of us are neutral on the big issues which are dividing us. Not at all. When asked to respond to the specific issues of ordination of homosexuals or abortion, a clear majority of Presbyterians oppose the first and prefer freedom of choice for the second. The question before us is this: Are these issues the ones that precipitate the sacrifice of our church's unity? It is my suggestion that about 25 percent of us are ready to say yes, while 75 percent of us, who may lean one way or the other on the particular issues, are willing to live with diversity, extend acceptance and grace, and, above all else, keep talking. My strong sense is that 25 percent of us are willing to stop the debate, resolve the issue once and for all, absorb whatever losses result to the unity of the church, and move on, while 75 percent of us are willing to keep talking in the interests of our church's unity in diversity.

The challenge of leadership is to enable the second alternative, in my opinion. The temptation for all of us and, believe me, it is very real, is to resolve it, shut off debate, and move on. Strong leaders must help us resist that temptation and gird ourselves for more talk, argument, and dialogue, and life in a family that is not close to agreement.

Is there no way to declare a cease-fire? Is there no way to declare a moratorium on amendments to the constitution and at the same time a moratorium on name-calling and accusing one another of insincerity, unfaithfulness, duplicity, and deception? Would it not be a good idea if the combatants retired to their separate corners and gave themselves and all of us a much-needed respite?

Moderators know how difficult that proposal is. Some would say it is impossible. Efforts to effect it feel like capitulation and betrayal to one side or the other and often both. The one thing the right and left agree on, it seems, is that the moderate middle is wrong, weak, compromising, and unfaithful. And that is precisely where leaders must be, whatever the cost.

Drucker advises us to find the connections in the meantime. It was my privilege to work on a daily basis with the newly elected stated clerk of our General Assembly. Cliff Kirkpatrick's dream, which I happily share, is to help all of us refocus on our precious Presbyterian/Reformed tradition by studying, celebrating, rallying around, and investing ourselves in the implementation of the Six Great Ends of the church. I hope new leadership will press forward with that timely invitation. I know Cliff Kirkpatrick will.

Ties That Bind

The connections that can hold us together while we continue to talk are, I believe, those things we have done so well and so faithfully in the past. I look forward to the day when, instead of arguing about sexuality, we Presbyterians will focus our energy, intelligence, imagination, and love on:

- Higher Education: exploring new ways to relate to our colleges and universities, aggressively creating new ministries and a strong presence on the campuses of our public universities.
- Public Theology: entering into dialogue, from our Reformed theological perspective, with the major cultural currents that are creating a new world-media, arts, leisure time, free-market economics, globalization, and high-tech communication.
- Public Advocacy: I have missed our strong voice recently. Even when I did not agree with the positions our church took, I was always glad to hear Presbyterian convictions expressed on the important issues of the day. I do think we are trying to say too much about too many

issues and so hardly anyone is listening to us any longer. I wish for a narrowing of our concerns and refocusing on public education, for instance, a Presbyterian agenda if there ever was one.

- **Racial Justice:** Wouldn't it be something if we Presbyterians actually did something about racial inclusiveness instead of passing resolutions?
- **Public Celebration and Evangelism:** After the glorious opening worship at General Assembly in Syracuse someone quipped, "Why, we looked like a megachurch this morning." Presbyterians love to celebrate our history, tradition, and mission. Every time we schedule a large, visible, public event, Presbyterians travel whatever distance is involved and show up to be the church together. It is a great public witness and effective evangelism. Why can't we do it in every presbytery, one Sunday morning, every year, all across the country?
- **Reinventing the Church:** Everybody agrees that change is happening; something is dying and something is being born. We are in the postdenominational, post-modern, post-Christian age. Old structures are falling apart. Mainline, old-line churches lose members; new forms of church emerge in front of our eyes. One megachurch has so many imitators joined together in an association of nondenominational congregations that they are well on the way toward looking like a new denomination.

We Presbyterians are inclined to wring our hands about this perilous new situation or, more typically, to accuse one another of causing the demise of the old structures and realities. I have an alternative strategy based on my conviction that the Holy Spirit is moving with freshness and new energy in the church and the world and that our task is not to fight rearguard actions with one another to preserve our pasts, but to hold on to one another as we try to discern what the Spirit is saying and where the Spirit is leading.

A New Church for a New Day

Church leaders should keep a three-by-five card in their pockets for daily reference:

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:18-19a)

Clearly there is a relocation of attention, followed by intellectual energy and financial resources, going on in the world, nationally and locally. And just as clearly, people involved in national structures are challenged to think and work in new ways.

There is, for instance, tremendous energy for mission today in the Presbyterian Church at the congregational level. Thousands of Presbyterian congregations are building houses with Habitat for Humanity, sending work teams to Africa and Central America, and establishing new relationships with congregations and mission projects all over the world, from our large urban centers to remote parts of Africa and South America. And the task of national leadership is to nurture that new energy, to coordinate and facilitate the growing mission involvement of Presbyterian people. The day of a global mission program in which the only local involvement is writing checks or exchanging friendly letters with missionaries is over.

Our urban areas are crying for new forms of the church. What we did relatively successfully for several centuries does not work in the city of the twenty-first century. We have old buildings that require enormous resources to maintain, oftentimes in places where people no longer live. We need to think anew, to reinvent a new church for a new day.

Can we produce leadership for the fabulous future we are facing? Can we nurture and support people who will lead us to praise God with bold deeds?

Of course we can. But we will have to generate the grace and courage to transcend the ideological divides that fracture our church and paralyze our ability to act at all. We have been hunkered down in a defensive posture for so long, the very ideas of bold Presbyterian initiatives and bold Presbyterian leaders sound curious to our ears. But they are what we need.

The Presbyterian Church needs

- Leaders who are visionaries and who will help us discover where the Spirit is leading.
- Leaders who can articulate the vision with eloquence and integrity.
- Leaders who are risk-takers and who can encourage our embattled church to shake off its defensiveness and act boldly.
- Leaders who simply will not accommodate the status quo.
- Leaders who base their ministries on the biblical notion of servanthood and who teach and express in their own lead-

ership the words of Jesus: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Our church is commonly characterized as sick. That is not my experience.

I believe we’re sick and tired of fighting; sick of expending our financial and spiritual resources contending with one another; sick of the relentless negativism about our Presbyterian Church.

But no, we’re not sick. We’re ready to become a new church for a new day, a church more than capable of producing new leaders who, in the best tradition of our own history, will lead a new generation of Presbyterians to praise God boldly.



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