

# ORDAINED SERVANT



The 1949 Reformed Ecumenical Synod

Published by  
The Christian Education Committee  
of

THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# ORDAINED SERVANT

## Statement Of Purpose

*Ordained Servant* exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

## Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## Contents: Vol. 6, No. 1

Editorial Notes.....	1
Lessons from Church History, #1, "J.G. Machen & the Regulative Principle" by <i>Darrell Hart and John Muether</i> .....	2
Biblical Qualifications for Deacons, by <i>Archibald Allison</i> .....	4
Ministering to Homosexuals in San Francisco, by <i>Charles A. McIlhenny</i> .....	10
How to Plant a Regional Church, by <i>Ross Graham</i> .....	13
Pastor to Pastor: The Minister's Treasure, by <i>William Shishko</i> .....	20
Book Notes, by <i>William Shishko</i> .....	22
Book Reviews.....	23

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## Editorial Notes

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As we begin the sixth year of the publication of *Ordained Servant* we would again call your attention to the stated purpose which is always included on the inside of the cover. We would also like to ask you to take note of the box at the bottom of that page: it gives the mail and email addresses relevant to this publication. It has surprised us how often inquiries are directed to the wrong address—a mistake so easily avoided if these directions are followed. We have not been able to use all the material sent to us, but most of it has been used and some of it will yet be used. So we continue to encourage you men who hold office in the church to give us all the benefit of your own study and experience.

On the cover of this issue is a picture of the 1949 Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). We were unable to find any other picture and so the numbers that were used to identify the participants are included. We did not include this list of names because it is not our purpose to draw attention to the individuals who were there, but to this groundbreaking ecumenical effort. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was a part of the RES for nearly forty years. We were a part of it because of our commitment to biblical ecumenicity. And it is the conviction of the editor that the original RES constitution is still worthy of honor. It was all along our desire to see that this organization lived up to that original constitution. It did not. But this does not take anything away from the importance of this ‘beginning.’ May the Lord grant that we of the OPC will never lose our zeal to see a truly Reformed and truly Ecumenical Synod—or something very much like a Synod—which brings together the fragmented but still Reformed Churches of the world in one Synodical structure. Thus we

remember with honor the RES beginning. We hope, in future issues, to show something of the line of faithful Reformed Ecumenicity.

In previous issues of *Ordained Servant* we profited from the careful exegesis of the New Testament passages that set forth the requirements for the office of elder. In this issue we are pleased to present the first part of a similar study—by the same writer, the Rev. A. A. Allison—of the biblical requirements for the office of deacon. The material on the eldership has been republished elsewhere and we anticipate that the value of this further study will be widely recognized.

In this issue we introduce a new column that we expect to have as a regular feature in *Ordained Servant*, namely “Pastoral Notes” by the Rev. William Shishko. Pastor Shishko was recently elected to the Christian Education Committee and is a member of the subcommittee responsible for this publication. We look forward to his contribution out of his extended experience as pastor of the Franklin Square Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we are pleased to have the first in a series of articles by Messers John R. Meuther and D. G. Hart. You will know them from the recent study of Orthodox Presbyterian Church history entitled *Fighting the Good Fight*. The aim of this series of studies is to bring episodes and epochs of past church history before us for the lessons they can teach for the church today. We eagerly anticipate these articles, and are most grateful for the willingness of these men to write.

# LESSONS FROM CHURCH HISTORY

BY

DARREL HART AND JOHN R. MEUTHER

#1 - J. GRESHAM MACHEN AND THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

One of the lesser known episodes in J. Gresham Machen's (1881-1937) stormy career was his nomination in 1926 to be Princeton Seminary's professor of apologetics. Since 1906 he had taught New Testament at Princeton and distinguished himself in works such as *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) as the foremost conservative biblical scholar of his day. Yet, the field of apologetics was not foreign to Machen, as evidenced by his popular books, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) and *What is Faith?* (1925), works that forcefully defended historic Christianity and the importance of theology. Nevertheless, what made Machen's nomination to the chair of apologetics unusual was not his lack of formal experience but rather the opposition his nomination aroused.

The election and promotion of any Princeton professor required confirmation by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.'s General Assembly. This step in the nomination process was usually a mere formality. In the history of Princeton no nominee had ever been vetoed. Yet a different outcome awaited Machen. The 1926 General Assembly received a report that questioned his soundness because of his attitude toward Prohibition. At the spring meeting of the Presbytery of New Jersey Machen had voted against a resolution that endorsed the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act. He did not want his vote recorded because he knew his position differed from most American Protestants. The prohibition of the sale and distribution of alcohol enjoyed widespread

support as an effort to retain the Christian character of the nation at a time of unprecedented non-Protestant immigration to the United States. Machen's opposition to Prohibition was a major reason for the General Assembly's failure to confirm his nomination. As one of his friends later told him, the Assembly was "rabidly Prohibitionist"; commissioners could not understand why a good Christian would not support such an obviously good and biblical cause.

Machen opposed Presbyterian support for Prohibition, however, not because he approved of drunkenness or preferred unpopularity. Rather he did so for important theological—even Reformed—reasons. In a statement defending his position (never published again because of the damage his friends believed it would have done) Machen argued that the church had no legitimate rationale for taking a side in this political question. Aside from the question of the relations between church and state, he believed that the church was bound by the Word of God and so all of its declarations and resolutions had to have clear Scriptural warrant. The Bible did not, however, provide support for Prohibition. It taught the idea of temperance, that is, moderate consumption of alcohol and the other good things of God's creation. This meant that Scripture forbade inebriation. But even here the Bible did not give directions to government officials for abolishing drunkenness. Should this be a matter for the federal government to regulate or should states and local governments? Was legislation the best way to

shape public sentiment or was an educational program more effective? Was regulation of private citizens' behavior even a proper concern of the state? The Bible did not answer these and various other questions. So, Machen concluded, the church had no business meddling in the politics of Prohibition or any other matter where Scripture did not speak.

Machen's reasoning here was an extension of the Regulative Principle. In the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition this principle has typically been applied to public worship. It teaches that we may only worship God as he has commanded us to worship him in his Word. People who hear this doctrine for the first time often understand it as overly negative and restrictive, as if we have no freedom in worship. Though the Regulative Principle does limit what we may do in worship, just as important is what it teaches about liberty of conscience and the Lordship of Christ. As the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches (20.2), "God alone is Lord of the conscience." To bind the consciences of believers on the teaching of Scripture is to recognize and extend Christ's Lordship. But to do so only on the basis of human wisdom or preference is to usurp his rule.

This principle is what separates Presbyterians from other Protestants. Unlike Lutherans and Anglicans who believe that churches may do whatever God's word allows, Presbyterians and Reformed teach that churches may only do what Scripture commands; hence the name Reformed, "reformed according to the Word."

The Regulative Principle applies not only to worship, but to all aspects of the church's life and witness. Unless the church can find a clear warrant from Scripture for a particular teaching or practice it may not speak or act. Otherwise it runs the risk of binding the consciences of believers and usurping the Lordship of Christ. In this broader sense the Regulative Principle is only a variation on the formal principle of the Reformation, namely, "sola scriptura." The Reformers believed that Rome had substituted

the word of man (i.e. the papacy) for the Word of God. John Calvin grappled with just this issue when he responded to the argument that he should submit to the laws of the Roman church even if they were unjust because God commands that Christians submit to the powers that he has ordained. Calvin responded that it was not a question simply of enduring "some grievous oppression in our bodies." The real issue was "whether our consciences shall be deprived of their liberty, that is, of the benefit of the blood of Christ." According to Calvin this was no trifling matter. "No necessity ought to be imposed upon consciences in things in which they have been set at liberty by Christ," he wrote, because without this liberty man could have no peace with God. "If [believers] wish to retain the grace which they have once obtained in Christ; they must submit to no slavery; they must be fettered by no bonds."

The wider implications of the Regulative Principle are important considerations for officers charged with governing the witness and practice of the church. Especially in an age when congregations are taking on more and more responsibilities, from day care to Christian aerobics, the Regulative Principle counters with a wise reminder that the work of the church is prescribed by her head, the Lord Jesus Christ speaking through his Word, and that he has commissioned officers to make disciples of all nations, not on the basis of human wisdom or ingenuity but by the faithful proclamation of his Word.

**D.G. Hart and John Muether are co-authors of *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Dr. Hart was an elder in the Wheaton, Ill. CRC. He is now a member of Calvary OPC, Glenside, PA. Mr. Muether is an elder of the Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, Fl.**

# BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

by

Rev. Archibald Alexander Allison

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3.8 - "reverent"

Translation:

"Deacons likewise must be *reverent*, ...."

Structure:

The qualifications for the office of deacon follow immediately after the qualifications for the office of overseer. Grammatically, verses 8-9 depend upon verse 2. "Reverent" is the first of five qualifications in the first sentence which covers verses 8-9.

Comment:

Several considerations lead us to conclude that in verse 8 the apostle Paul gives the qualifications for the special office of deacon in the church. First, verse 8 follows immediately after Paul gives the qualifications for the special office of overseer in the church. Second, Paul connects verse 8 with verse 2 by using the word "likewise," which means "in the same way" or "similarly." Third, there is no main verb written in the Greek text of verse 8. A reader of the Greek text understands verses 8-9 to share the main verb written in verse 2 (must be). That is why the English translations italicize the words "must be" in verse 8.

The word "likewise" indicates that verses 8-13 are similar in some way to verses 2-7. In Philippians 1:1 Paul addressed the saints in the church at Philippi with the overseers and deacons. The office of overseer and the office of deacon are two special offices in the church. Verses 2-7 are similar to verses 8-13 in that both passages give the qualifications for a special office in the church. Further, the qualifications for both of these special offices are similar, though not identical.

In Acts 6 the apostles found it necessary to choose men to help them with their work. The apostles ordained these men to special office in the church by laying their hands on them. In 1 Timothy 3.8-13 the Lord gives us the qualifications for those who serve the church in this special office of deacon.

The implied main verb in verse 8, "must be," means that these qualifications for the office of deacon are essential. They are not merely helpful guidelines. All of these qualifications are mandatory. They are requirements which God has laid down for the office of deacon in his church. No man may be a deacon in the church of God unless he meets all of these qualifications. We confess that Christ is king of the church. That means that we must follow the rules for the church which Christ sets down in his Word. God has laid upon his church the duty to keep all unworthy men out of the office of deacon. Should a man already in office show himself unqualified for the office he holds, the church must remove him from that office. By removing unqualified men from office, the church maintains discipline, upholds the honor of Christ, and insures that the church is edified unto greater peace, purity, and unity.

The first qualification is that a deacon must be "reverent," which means that he must be worthy of respect or honor. He must be noble or dignified. He must not turn everything into a joke. He must be serious about things that are important. A deacon must be a respectable person. In order to be worthy of respect and honor, he must be above reproach. If a deacon can be justly accused and convicted of sin, he is not worthy of respect and honor and the people in the congregation will not hold him in high esteem. Such a person does not meet this first qualification.

The people of God should have fear mingled with respect and esteem for those who serve in the office of deacon. They should venerate the deacon because he is admirable. They should have love and

## Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

affection for him. To be reverent is to be worthy of this esteem and honor.

### Conclusions:

1. Every deacon must be a man of upright character and integrity before God and men so that he is worthy of the fear, respect, honor, admiration, love, and affection of God's people. This was one of the qualifications for the seven men chosen to help the apostles in Acts 6:3: "men of good reputation."

2. Any man whose manner, conduct, thoughts, or attitude is not honorable, worthy of respect and admiration, and dignified does not meet this qualification and should not be a deacon.

3. A man in the office of deacon whose character and reputation are marred by sinful or improper behavior ought to be removed from office.

4. The congregation should revere and honor the deacons who serve in their midst.

### Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3.8 "not double-tongued"

#### Translation:

Deacons likewise must be reverent, *not double-tongued*, ...

#### Structure:

This is the second of five qualifications for the office of deacon in the first sentence which covers verses 8-9. This is the first of three negative requirements in verse 8.

#### Comment:

The Greek word translated "double-tongued" occurs only once in the New Testament. Literally it means "two-worded." It is essentially the Greek equivalent to the common English expression "He talks out of both sides of his mouth." A deacon must not talk out of both sides of his mouth. He must not say one thing, but mean something else. He must not say one thing to one person, but the opposite to

another person. He must not just say what different people want to hear. He must not be a liar. The deacon must not deceive with his speech. He must speak the truth clearly, faithfully, and consistently. He must be a man of his word. His speech must be sincere.

Jesus commands all Christians not to be double-tongued when he says in Matthew 5:37, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'" For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, singles this out as a necessary quality in a deacon.

John Calvin writes in his commentary on this verse "that by deacons we are to understand those mentioned in Acts 6:3, officers, that is, who are entrusted with the care of the poor." Calvin continues: "The four chief qualities Paul requires them to possess are well enough known, but it should be carefully noted that he admonishes them not to be double-tongued, for this is a fault that is hard to avoid in that kind of work, and yet which more than any other should be completely absent from it."

### Conclusions:

1. Every deacon must consistently speak the truth and be a man who keeps his word. This is no different than God's command that all Christians speak the truth and mean what they say.

2. Duplicity, double-dealing, or deliberate deceptiveness in speech disqualifies a man from the office of deacon in the church.

3. It is especially important that a deacon's speech be trustworthy, true, and free from deception since he handles the church's money and property. A deacon who does not meet this qualification can easily end up stealing from the church.

4. A deacon should not speak kindly to the poor and needy and then turn and speak ill of them to others.

### Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3.8 "not given to much wine"

## Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

Translation:

“Deacons likewise must be reverent, not double-tongued, *not given to much wine, ....*”

Structure:

This is the third of five qualifications for the office of deacon in the first sentence which covers verses 8-9. This is the second of three negative requirements in verse 8.

Comment:

A deacon must not be given to much wine. The Greek verb means “to occupy oneself with” something or “to devote oneself to” something. Paul uses this same verb in 1 Timothy 4:13 when he tells Timothy: “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Paul wants Timothy to occupy himself or devote himself to reading, exhortation, and teaching.

In 1 Timothy 3:8 Paul tells Timothy that a deacon must not occupy himself with or devote himself to drinking a great amount of wine. A man who is given to much wine drinks too much wine; in the words of Proverbs 23:29, he tarries long at the wine. That includes a man who has only occasional bouts of excessive drinking, as well as the man who regularly drinks too much. Wine takes an inordinate place in his life, becoming more important to him than it ought to be. In that sense, he is enslaved to drinking. It occupies too much of his time, his thinking, his desires, and his life.

Such a person is not qualified to be a deacon in the church. The Scripture says that a man who tarries long at the wine, who goes in search of mixed wine, has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, wounds without cause, and redness of eyes. He who longs for wine and is captivated by it will see strange things and will utter perverse things. He will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea or on top of a ship’s mast, having lost his senses and resting only to awake for another drink (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Paul does not say in 1 Timothy 3:8 that a deacon must not drink wine. Those who require deacons to abstain from drinking any wine on the basis of this verse, have twisted this qualification to say something that it does not say. We know from the rest of

Scripture that just as God causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for man to eat, so God gives wine to man. It is the Lord who gives “wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread strengthens man’s heart” (Psalm 104:14-15). Jesus used wine as one of the elements of the Lord’s Supper, and we are to continue using wine in the Lord’s Supper until Jesus returns.

A little later in 1 Timothy, Paul tells Timothy: “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities” (5:23). The Scripture expresses the covenant blessing of God in this way: “Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10). Wine is one of God’s good gifts and is to be used to the glory of God.

In this verse, the Lord of the church disqualifies from the office of deacon anyone who is given to much wine. That includes all who drink excessively, including the drunkard. Scripture condemns drunkenness, saying that no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

In general, a deacon must not let wine govern him, but must be able to use wine wisely and in moderation unto the glory of God. Although wine is specifically mentioned by the text, I think the principle here applies to any food or drink which has mastery over a man, especially those things which impair a man’s judgment and his ability to control his speech and actions.

Because wine can impair a man’s judgment and ability to control his speech and actions, God commanded Aaron and his sons: “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die” (Lev. 10:8-9). Scripture states the reason in these words: in order that you (Aaron and his sons) might “distinguish between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses” (Lev. 10:10-11).

Similarly, civil magistrates, like elders and deacons in the church, are also not to be given to



## Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

wine: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted” (Proverbs 31.4,5). Compare also Isaiah 5.20-25; 28.7; and Ezekiel 44.21.

### Conclusions:

1. Wine is a good thing given by God, but must be used rightly to the glory of God.

2. A deacon must not be given to wine. He must not use wine unwisely in any way, nor be enslaved by it or any other food or drink that impairs his judgment. Addiction to wine disqualifies a man from office. A man who becomes drunk also fails to meet this qualification for the office of deacon in the church.

3. The words of John Calvin regarding pastors apply also to deacons, “Excessive drinking is not only unseemly in a pastor, but usually results in many things still worse, such as quarrels, foolish attitudes, unchastity, and others there is no need to mention” (Commentary on 1 Tim. 3.3). Compare also Paul’s exhortation to all believers in Ephesians 5.18. No believer, but especially no deacon, should be drunk with wine. Rather, God’s people should be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is especially true of deacons. One of the qualifications for the seven men chosen to help the apostles in Acts 6.3 was that they be “full of the Holy Spirit.”

4. From this qualification we can infer that a deacon, just like civil magistrates (especially judges), should neither be “given to,” or under the control of any food or drink or drug which has the same kind of effect as wine on a man’s speech, conduct, and judgment.

5. A deacon must show his ability to rule himself in the way he uses God’s gift of wine. He must be able to use wine wisely and in moderation unto the glory of God; he must never “give himself to much wine.”

Exegesis of I Tim. 3.8: “not greedy for money”

### Translation:

“Deacons likewise must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, *not fond of shameful gain, ....*”

### Structure:

This is the fourth of five qualifications for the office of deacon in the first sentence which covers verses 8-9. This is the last of three negative requirements in verse 8.

### Comment:

In Greek Paul uses a compound adjective composed of the words for “shameful” and “gain.” Its meaning is best conveyed by the translation “fond of shameful gain.” Shameful gain is anything that a man gets by dishonest means, or which is itself shameful or wicked.

Peter speaks of the same thing in 1 Peter 5.2 when he exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly.” Peter is saying that a man’s motivation to serve as an overseer should not be dishonest gain. The same is true of deacons. A deacon should not be seeking dishonest gain. He should not seek to exalt himself among the flock of God by the office of deacon. He should not try to garner to himself power, control, or authority over others.

His desire should not be to puff himself up with pride because of the honor, respect, prestige, or flattery that may come to him. His motivation for being a deacon should not be some advantage that he can get by this office. Rather, a man’s motivation should be an eager desire to serve Jesus Christ and serve the people of God. A deacon should desire to use the gifts and abilities God gives him to advance the kingdom of God.

The task of a deacon is to serve God by helping the pastor and elders in their work and by helping the people in the congregation with their needs. The task of a deacon is to give, not to take. His task is to serve, not seek dishonest gain. Rather than seeking shameful gain, a deacon should have the mind of Christ who though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty

## Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). A deacon should serve in order to make others gain.

God gives us the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). It is certainly not wrong for a deacon to be wealthy, since it is a covenant blessing from the Lord (cf. Proverbs 3:9-10 and Job 42:12). This qualification does not, therefore, forbid a deacon to gain wealth. Rather it forbids a deacon to covet his neighbor's wealth, or desire to gain wealth in a wrong way. Instead of seeking shameful gain, a deacon should remember the words of the apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders: *"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

This qualification should be broadly applied. It applies to money and material goods. A man who just wants riches should not be a deacon. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:9-10: *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

This qualification also applies to the shameful gain of non-material things, such as power, honor, and praise. One's goals in defending oneself or others from criticism or accusations should not be self-serving. A deacon should not use his special office in the church to serve himself, but rather to serve God's people.

### Conclusions:

1. To have or gain money and wealth is a covenant blessing from the Lord. It is not evil. It is not something the godly man must avoid, as Roman Catholic theology and asceticism falsely maintain.

2. This qualification forbids a deacon to acquire money or material possessions with sinful motives or in any dishonest way. A man should not become a deacon in order to get money or any other material advantage.

3. It also disqualifies from office a man whose primary goal is to get power, control, authority,

honor, prestige, respect, or flattery, rather than to glorify God and serve the church for its edification.

4. A man who is unscrupulous in getting his way is also fond of shameful gain and therefore is not qualified to be a deacon.

### Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:9

#### Translation:

8) "Deacons likewise must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not fond of shameful gain, 9) *holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.*"

#### Structure:

This is the last of the five qualifications for the office of deacon in the first sentence which covers verses 8-9. The middle three requirements are stated in the negative, but the first and last are stated positively.

#### Comment:

The apostle Paul uses the word "mystery" several times in his letters to refer to a truth which was previously obscure and relatively unknown, but which God has now made plain to his people through special revelation. For example in Ephesians 3:3-6 Paul writes: *"how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel."*

1 Corinthians 2:7,8,10 is another good example: *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."*

## Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

At the end of 1 Timothy 3 Paul refers to the mystery of godliness when he writes in verse 16: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." In this verse Paul uses the term "mystery of godliness" to refer to the Christian faith.

The "mystery of the faith" in verse 9 refers to the same thing. John Calvin comments that in this verse Paul "gives to the sum of Christian teaching the dignified title of 'the mystery of the faith,' since through the Gospel God reveals to mortal men a wisdom that makes the angels in heaven wonder, so that it is not surprising if it is too great for human capacity."

A deacon must believe the reformed faith which God has revealed to us in his Word, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. A deacon must hold without reservation to the doctrine taught in the Bible. He must have true faith in God. He must know and accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word. He must live in obedience to God's revealed will as the only standard to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God. He must not be a hypocrite who says he believes, but does not bring forth the fruits of repentance and true faith in Jesus Christ.

To have a pure conscience is to be cleansed from the guilt of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ and to be clothed in his spotless righteousness by faith. To have a pure conscience is to be a true Christian. It is to be redeemed by Christ and renewed to live in obedience to God's holy law. Hebrews 10.19-22 speaks of this: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

A deacon must hold firmly to the truth, to the Christian faith. He must believe it and practice it because God the Holy Spirit has regenerated him, given him a new heart, given him repentance and faith, and the blood of Christ has cleansed his conscience from dead works to serve the living God

(Hebrews 9.14). A man who lives in sin or who does not obey God in some area of his life can not have a pure conscience. A pure conscience requires a life of faith, a life of obedience, a life which submits to the Word and rule of Christ the King in all things.

In the words of John Calvin, "It is as if he had said, 'Holding the pure doctrine of our religion from the heart with a sincere fear of God, men who are rightly instructed in the faith, ignorant of nothing that it is needful for a Christian man to know'" (Commentary on 1 Timothy 3.9).

Conclusions:

1. Deacons, like elders, should be well instructed in reformed doctrine and practice. Deacons should know the Scriptures well, live according to the Scriptures, and be able to use the Scriptures correctly in all kinds of situations that occur in daily life.

2. Deacons must be true Christians who are sound in doctrine, and obedient and faithful in life. They must be committed to the reformed faith—to all that God has revealed to us in his Word. They must hold to the faith of our fathers without reservation.

3. Even though deacons do not hold a teaching office in the church, Christ does not want anyone who is unskilled in the Christian faith to hold public office in his church.

4. It is important that a deacon be skilled in the Christian faith (see Hebrews 5.2-14) because he will often have to give advice and seek to comfort other people. That is part of the work of a deacon as he ministers to God's people. The advice and comfort he gives must be biblical. It must be doctrinally sound. It must be correct and wise in practice. That can only come from faithfully studying and using the Scriptures correctly.

**The Rev. Archibald Alexander Allison is pastor of the Emmaus Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Fort Collins, Colorado.**

# Ministering to Homosexuals in San Francisco

by

Dr. Charles A. McIlhenny

A mother tearfully confided in me as pastor that her son poignantly declared himself “gay.” She had always “known” that he was different. He didn’t play sports, he wasn’t vicious or brutal, he liked music and interior decorating, he had a slight swagger to his gait, he spoke with a faint hair-lisp, and always hung around Uncle Harry at family gatherings. His declaration, however, seemed to be the “coup de grace” on their relationship—his relationship to his mother. I momentarily reflected on her sobbing, and then replied that it seemed like she was grieving over the discovery that her son was a from another planet—a Martian! That his supposed “coming out”—his confessing a newly discovered faith-sex-condition—put him beyond the pale of her fundamentalist retrieval and that she’d better get used to him being an alien, i.e., gay!

The homosexual propaganda machine has been cranking out overtime, to an unbelieving secular media, convincing people that “gay” is equivalent to any other already legitimate genetic race-like group. And amazingly many naive Christians have been seduced by such propaganda.

News Flash, Madam! Your son is NOT a Martian. He’s a sinner that needs the grace of God - JUST LIKE EVERY OTHER SINNER.

When people ask me if we have any special counseling for homosexuals I say yes: the counsel of the Word of God, the counsel of the preaching of the Gospel, the counsel of God’s call of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the counsel of God’s corporate covenant community in worship. Contrary to the gimmicks of the world, you’d better believe we have something special.

Is the modern homosexual a special case with

unique and complex psychoses which the primitive Scriptures never knew? Have we imbibed the pseudo-medical conclusion which places the 20th century homophile beyond the reach of the naive, hysterical dictates of the Word of God? Does the Word of God fail to recognize newly discovered genetic and biological factors to which, had they been known, would have made a difference in whether to condemn or accept homosexuals as just different? Does the Bible fail to appropriately distinguish between orientation and praxis? Does the Bible really

condemn homosexuals or does it condemn heterosexuals acting contrary to their natures? Is it inversion or perversion which is forbidden by the Scriptures? The answer to all these questions is a resounding NO! Homosexuals have no place to hide from the scrutiny of God’s Law—no more than any other sinner who tries to invent excuses for his sin. That’s why the homosexual paradigm is so crucial for the church today. If *this* sin can be justified, then ANY sin can be

excused; but the only justification recognized by the Word is that of sinners who repent and believe in the cross of Christ, instead of making excuses..

No, homosexuals are to be receive no special method or message different from other sinners that need Jesus. If that were the case every sinner would have a special excuse for his peculiar type sin. The Bible is clear that sin, of whatever make and model, can only be forgiven by grace and overcome by the power of the gospel.

News flash! The opposite of a homosexual IS NOT a heterosexual. The idea that a homosexual is of another human kind is as foolish as saying the opposite of a paedophile is a heterosexual, or the opposite of an adulterer is a heterosexual. The true opposite of fornication is re-generation; the biblical opposite of paedophilia is justification; the cleansed opposite of homosexuality is sanctification. They ARE all heterosexuals! They haven’t

**“When people ask me if we have any special counseling for homosexuals I say yes: the counsel of the Word of God, the counsel of the preaching of the Gospel, the counsel of God’s call of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the counsel of God’s corporate covenant community in worship. Contrary to the gimmicks of the world, you’d better believe we have something special.”**

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stopped BEING heterosexuals. They have all broken God's moral law. They all need to be converted—"to be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." [1 Cor. 6:11]

In a sense every sinner is different in his sin but there is only ONE common faith-message: repent and believe the gospel. Paul told the Philippian jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household." [Acts 16:31] This was not tailor-made for Philippian government workers or European white/male or Greek mid-life crises jailers with families. Paul would have said this to anyone no matter what his background or circumstance of sin would be.

Many of the homosexuality-plagued seekers think that they must be a special case. It's supposedly too hard to give up this sin; ergo, maybe it's not sin after all! These people must see that it is no more difficult to abandon this sin than any other sin. That this sin has the same cleansing promise as every other sin—no more and no less than the work of Christ.

Paul does say that, compared to other sins, sexual sin denigrates the human body; but he doesn't give them a different message of the gospel, nor promise a separate healing. [1 Cor. 6:18]

One size fits all.

As for the homosexual's recovery the Apostle gives him the one common holy institution for all sinners: the divinely appointed redemptive agency of the Church of Jesus Christ. I say that as a pastor who knows from the Word of God that this is the covenant institution—the family of God—which best cares for sinners and saints. She cares for sinners in warning them to flee from the wrath to come forbidding them entrance into the Kingdom of God while unrepentant; and for saints, in that it provides the comfort of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins and protection against the enemy. This institution sets the overall context for counseling those struggling with homosexuality.

San Francisco culture has a uniqueness when it comes to ministering to homosexuals. In the first place,

there is such a strong support system legally organized to reinforce homosexual way of life that part of the biblical therapy process many times demands fleeing this City altogether. There is such a bombardment of homosexuality—at every level of government, education, medical/health, scientific, media, entertainment and legislation—that in order to forsake wickedness as the Apostle exhorts, one must actually flee the City like Lot of old—not because of an impending brimstone shower but because the seduction is so wickedly powerful.

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Every imaginable agency, institution, and ombudsman provides for the most perplexed and questioning homosexual and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transvestite, and transgenerational person. Even worse, virtually every mainline church—loosely defined—supports gay/lesbian causes along with same-sex marital unions.

Just recently the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, along with the endorsement of the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors, hosted a televised hearing for "Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Summit." Over four hours of testimony was taken from self-proclaimed homosexual teens by these agencies in order to see if added legislation was necessary to support "our gay youth" in the City. New health & medical services were demanded, free condom distribution, free needle for exchanges, gay/lesbian counseling services at the junior high and high school level.

In ministering to the homosexual inquirer, we've found that he must cut off all relations with his old "community"; he must reconstitute by faith into the family of God. He needs a whole new set of spiritual brothers and sisters, moms and dads, found in the Church of Christ. He needs a remodeled family in which to pattern new life and conduct; a place where God's man is a man and God's woman is really woman; husbands acting like husbands and wives acting like wives. It's not simply a matter of a "role model" reversal; it's not replacing one "role" with another "role" as if play acting. A godly structured atmosphere is found only in the church of Jesus Christ that offers real hope and remedy for the enslaved sex addict.

In ministering to the homosexual inquirer not only

must the Law of God be pressed upon the conscience but God's one forgiveness in Christ alone must be also offered. Unless homosexuality be understood fundamentally as sin—transgression of God's one and only moral Law—no further deliverance and recovery ought to be expected.

Here are fundamental givens based exclusively on the Word of God. Do NOT compromise on the biblical message of sin and grace. That is the repentant homosexual's only hope. Do NOT compromise for the sake of winning the sympathetic hearing. His eternal security is in the uncompromised message of the Scriptures which every sinner needs.

He needs:

(1) re-enforcement from the Word on what God says about homosexuality: grace, forgiveness and judgment,

(2) regular monitored accountability meetings with the elders; one of the elders should covenant to pray for him daily, (part of that accountability is in regular weekly prayer and Bible study gatherings with the congregation at large),

(3) reminding that the continual faith-struggle with temptation is part of the sanctification process - it's when he stops struggling that he's got problems,

(4) reassurance that he's not alone in this battle for victory; other members - every member - also struggles like he does,

(5) to be careful about putting himself in temptation's way,

(6) to avoid being introduced to someone else who struggles with the same sexual sin—that's too much temptation. Many of these Christians live alone and temptation in such cases is much more difficult to resist,

(7) to know that in Christ he/she is no longer a homosexual or lesbian just like converted murders and liars are no longer such despite temptations and feelings! "Such WERE some of you. . ." [1 Cor. 6:11]

The Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to "flee youthful lusts. . . with those calling upon the Lord. . ." [2 Tim. 2:22] In other words, the exhortation to flee lust is ALONG WITH others struggling against sin in the context of the covenant community. The agency of the church has no hope for unrepentant homosexual only God's sure

wrath. The church has no authority from her Lord and Head to offer any hope apart from the grace of conversion; but for any repentant sinners, all the resources of the eternal God—" . . . my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." [Phil 4:19]

As pastor I have the sure "medicine" for sin and relief in the preaching of the gospel. The ultimate counseling session must be done in the corporate worship service not merely private sessions; the full extent of the divinely appointed-ordinances of the Lord are necessary to combat and destroy every high thing and thought exalted against the Lord. Families in the church must be made aware of their needed role in ministering to individuals struggling with sin. Yet at the same time a person's sexual past is really nobody else's business. A group gathering of like minded repentant homosexuals must not congregate to talk out their mutual trials. Such sessions subtly foster rather than battle temptations. The mixed—heterogeneous—congregation common ground for all is God's safest sanctuary for biblical "group-therapy".

Thank God there is this: the one size-fits-all gospel which alone guarantees to all sinners deliverance through our one common Savior, Jesus Christ. As I counsel struggling Christians, if the Christian faith does NOT save you from YOUR sin, then I'll renounce the faith and join you. If it won't work equally for you, it won't work for me either. Whatever peculiar providences may have "caused" one's moral adversity, unless he begins where Scripture begins, he will not end where Scripture promises—an end to sin.

November 13, 1996

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# HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

by

by Ross W. Graham

By the time the second General Assembly convened in 1937, statistics indicated that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was composed of six presbyteries (Philadelphia, New Jersey, New York and New England, Ohio, Wisconsin and California). The statistical record of the OPC is impressive. The church has been keeping at least some general statistics throughout its entire history. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension has begun a project of entering all sixty years of them into a data base from which some valuable things can be learned. Some preliminary studies were made available four years ago but there is still much work to do. Today the OPC is divided into twelve regional churches covering the entire geographical area of the United States.

As God expands the OPC it is inevitable that new presbyteries will be formed. But while our general assemblies seem willing to make minor adjustments in regional church boundaries to accommodate new churches that spring up on their perimeters, the 62nd GA signaled that it was reluctant to create new regional churches. Part of the reason for that reluctance stems from the result of the 1986 division of the Presbytery of the Dakotas into the Presbytery of the Dakotas and the Presbytery of the Southwest. Another part probably stems from the fact that approximately 30% of the ministers of the OPC have personally experienced what could be characterized as a less-than-satisfying result of such presbytery divisions since 1964. But rather than focusing attention on the division of the Presbytery of the Dakotas in 1986, a more instructive study is that of the several divisions of the original Presbytery of California.

## 1. The Story of the Division of the Presbytery of California

The Presbytery of California (which was almost immediately renamed the Presbytery of the West Coast) began in 1936 with just a handful of churches spread from Los Angeles to central Oregon. Though it covered an enormous area, it was a working presbytery. Many churches were planted, effective youth work was conducted, and significant dollars were provided locally and denominationally for the work of the OPC.

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But the story of the growth of the Presbytery of California can't be told without mentioning the importance that golf played in the development of the presbytery, and especially in the planting of new churches. It is said that Henry Coray loved the Lord, the OPC, and golf. When he returned from China in the early 1940s due to the outbreak of

the war, he began to play golf and talk about where new OP churches should be planted. Later, during the 1950s and early 1960s when California population growth was booming, Henry Coray and a group of OP pastors played golf and planted churches.

There was Robert Graham in Los Angeles, who later moved to Chula Vista. There was Dwight Poundstone in Whittier (which became our La Mirada congregation), who later moved to Goleta. There was Lawrence Eyres in Long Beach, Bruce Coie in Santee, and Arthur Riffel in South San Francisco. And there was Henry Coray who started out in Long Beach in southern California and later moved to Sunnyvale in northern California.

Though this informal golfing home-missions committee was spread over a distance as great as

## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

from Philadelphia to Portland, Maine, these men would get together at least once a month to play golf and to talk about where the next churches should be planted. It is said that Henry's greatest golfing skill was his ability to find the courses where ministers could play free on Mondays.

But in the mid-1960s, while California growth continued to boom, OP growth in the West came to an abrupt halt. The reason, most probably, was that the Presbytery of the West Coast was divided in 1964 to break off the Presbytery of Southern California, and again in 1968 to form the Presbytery of Northern California and the Presbytery of the Northwest.

### 2. Lessons Learned from Past OP Presbytery Divisions

It would be inaccurate to conclude that presbytery divisions were the sole contributing factor in the plateauing of those regional churches. Many of the golfers moved to other courses in different parts of the country, and a host of socio-economic factors began to come into play as a tremendous influx of immigrants invaded the west coast. But three important lessons can be learned from the several divisions of the Presbytery of the West Coast.

A. We should insure that resources and manpower are wisely and realistically distributed among the resulting new regional churches.

In the Presbytery of the West Coast, much of the money flowed from the north while most of the manpower and the church planting was in the south. No one quite realized when the division occurred, that the south had plenty of opportunities but little money. It is possible that the rich fellowship and the common purpose which these men of the Presbytery of the West Coast enjoyed together may have masked the efficiency with which they did their work. If we are to learn this lesson from our history, here are some things we could consider doing in response to the occurrence of evident growth within our regional churches:

1. Study the present structure of those regional churches before we propose to establish new ones. Probably a minimum of 10 churches, 20 ministers and a \$30,000 budget will be needed to do what we have come to understand to be the work of a modern-day presbytery. If an RHM program, a youth camp or some other ministry of the presbytery is added, that figure should be doubled.

2. Establish separate bank accounts for sub-regions of our regional churches prior to any division. Funds can then begin to be allocated for certain church planting assistance or other regional church ministries from one or the other of those accounts and receipts and expenditures can be tracked in advance of a division.

3. Study the manpower needed to staff the work of a new regional church. Make sure that this is done

both in terms of raw numbers of ministers, elders and people and also in terms of skills, gifts and available time. Some men have more time than others to devote to the work of the regional church. The sessions of the Presbytery of the Northwest have made their pastors and some of their elders available for church planting in ways that many of our local and regional governing bodies would find unimaginable. Their ability to plant churches without the assistance of a regional home missionary is probably attributable, in large measure, to this factor.

4. Learn how to ask the right questions concerning the structure and resources available within a regional church and how to evaluate the answers to those questions. It will not be enough to simply send out survey forms and tabulate and report the results.

B. We should train and equip those who will be responsible to care for the ministries, committees and administration of the new regional churches.

In the Presbytery of the West Coast, much time was spent achieving equality of numbers in the

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## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

resulting presbyteries. But men in the new presbyteries had not trained to do the jobs that needed to be done, and the resulting learning curve took five years.

The work of candidates and credentials, home missions and youth ministries require special skills. They rely on proven practices which are developed over a period of time. For instance, Candidates and Credentials Committees must learn over time which of their members is best suited to examine candidates in church history, or theology, or the Standards. Presbyteries are quite reluctant to change their committee compositions and it is conceivable that whole committees in newly formed presbyteries may have little or no experience doing the work to which they are assigned.

If we are to learn this lesson from our history, one thing we could consider doing in response to the occurrence of evident growth within our regional churches is to identify those ministries of the regional church that will require continuity and experience and then establish apprenticeships and cooperative training for those new committee and administrative people.

Recent developments in the French Creek Bible Conference illustrate how this could be done. A decade ago the French Creek Bible Conference co-sponsored by the Philadelphia, New Jersey and mid-Atlantic Presbyteries noticed that the same people were year after year doing the work and that they were getting older. No new volunteers were coming forward and the ministry was in danger of dying by attrition. The Conference Association established a type of apprenticeship structure whereby men were brought into the work as assistants and were trained over a period of years to take over the work. The result was a whole new leadership pool which enabled French Creek to expand its program from two weeks a year to six. They began to train men in advance so that they could take over at the proper time.

C. We should pre-determine the organizational structure of the new presbyteries of the resulting new regional churches.

In the resulting divisions of the Presbytery of the West Coast, much of the initial time during the first five years was spent just getting organized. Bylaws,

committee structures, meeting times, and budget allocations all had to be worked out after the presbyteries were divided. It was assumed that each new regional church would simply follow the structural pattern of the "mother" presbytery, but that did not happen. Rather, each of the presbyteries took its time to develop its own unique structure.

If we are to learn this lesson from our history, here are some things we could consider doing in response to the occurrence of evident growth within our regional churches:

1. Refine and generalize presbytery bylaws and rules of operation so that they may be applicable to the resulting new presbyteries. Then, adopt content specific versions of those bylaws and rules of operation in advance for each of the resulting new presbyteries by simply changing geographical designations and names.

2. Choose the members of the committees in the resulting new presbyteries and have them work together with present committee members until the separation of the presbyteries is effected.

The men of the OPC have done what their Presbyterian grandfathers and great-grandfathers did decades and centuries ago. In time-honored fashion, when their presbyteries became too unwieldy to get things done, they simply petitioned the next general assembly to redraw the boundaries and new administrative structures were set in motion.

But what is needed if we are to learn from our past is to approach God's expansion of the OPC from a different perspective. We should stop talking about dividing presbyteries and we should start talking about planting new regional churches. For too long the beginning of new presbyteries has been a reluctant separation for us. Rather, let the establishment of new regional bodies of Christ be as joyous as when a local congregation sends some of its own people out to plant a new body of Christ.

3. What is the regional church?

Chapter XIV of the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian church is titled "The Regional Church and Its Presbytery." Sections 1 and 2 read as follows:

## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

"1. The regional church consists of all the members of the local congregations and the ministers within a certain district. The general assembly may organize a regional church when there are at least four congregations, two ministers, and two ruling elders, within a region.

2. The presbytery is the governing body of a regional church. It consists of all the ministers and all the ruling elders of the congregations of the regional church."

This simply-stated construct of a "regional church" is unique to the polity of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The concept does not appear in any other Presbyterian system. But it is the logical extrapolation of the Presbyterian concept of the equality of governing powers. It may be stated in syllogistic form as follows:

If the *local church* has its session, and

If the *whole church* has its general assembly, then

The *regional church* has its presbytery,

The regional church is the first level of the connectional church. It is not a preaching church but it is how we begin to practice the concept of the catholicity of the church. The task of the regional church, as a body of Christ, is to perform those functions that are purely regional in nature or which the local church may be unable to do by itself, such as church extension, the training of ministers of the Word, the mobilization of its covenant youth, extraordinary diaconal ministries, problem solving and ministerial discipline.

It is this concept of the regional church, which enables us to think appropriately and creatively about the providential expansion of the OPC. We may stop talking about dividing presbyteries and start talking about planting new regional churches. This is the missing principle in how we have been approaching the problem of the press of work and distance traveled within the administrative presbytery systems we have inherited.

Just as the goal in local church planting is not simply the beginning of a new session but of a viable body of Christ, so the goal in regional church plantings should be the establishment of a func-

tional regional body of Christ, and not just the beginning of its presbytery. And just as in local church planting, the objective is to narrow the region in which the ministry of the church takes place.

The scenario which is here proposed has never been attempted before. But while the concept of planting new regional churches is not expressly prescribed, it may be observed that:

1. FG XV, which addresses the whole church and its general assembly, provides very little instruction concerning how presbytery divisions are effected. Section 7 simply says: "The duties peculiar to the general assembly include organizing regional churches, reviewing the records of the presbyteries, and calling ministers or licentiates to the missionary or other ministries of the whole church directly or through its standing committees."

2. There is nothing in the Form of Government which would prohibit the general assembly from following this proposed scenario.

What follows is put forward as a method by which the OPC might be able to think and act in a more consistent Presbyterian fashion as it considers the establishment of new regional churches.

### 4. Steps in the Planting of a Regional Church

A. Follow the principles and practices involved in the planting of a daughter church as described in FG XXIX.

FG XXIX deals with organizing and receiving mission works. It has been established that this chapter describes a process which is accomplished over time, and not simply a list of formal actions taken by a presbytery by which a new particular church is created. Organizing a mission work implies all of the things which are involved in working with a group of people from the time they are received as a mission work until the time they are organized as a new and separate congregation. The suggestion here is that the same process be understood in the planting of a regional church.

The same evaluative questions that a session would ask before embarking on the establishment of a daughter congregation with some of its members should be asked by the presbytery:

## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

Is a new regional church needed in that region or can we continue to care for all the people and ministries needed there ourselves?

Are we of sufficient size and income to fund the work and to absorb the loss of members and finances?

Does our session (our presbytery) have the manpower and energy to care for the new church until its own session (presbytery) is ready to govern and minister?

Should we do it now or can it wait until later?

After these questions are answered and the decision to plant a new regional church has been made, then the specific narrowed region for the new regional church should be proposed which will enable both mother regional church and daughter regional church to work in harmony in separate geographies. But to whom is this proposal made? And how?

B. Ask permission of the General Assembly to begin the planting of a new regional church.

In the case of local church planting, the session requests the authorization and assistance of the presbytery. Just as the session of a local church authorizes ministries within its bound which it deems wise and appropriate and as the presbytery authorizes the establishment of new churches and other ministries within its bounds, so the general assembly authorizes the establishment of new regional churches.

But just as the presbytery assumes that the beginning of a mission work and its organization as a new and separate congregation is a process which is accomplished over a period of time, so the GA could understand the establishment of a regional church to be a similar process which is accomplished over time.

Along with the request to the GA to begin the planting of a new regional church must come the proposal of specific arrangements:

A provisional oversight structure should be proposed. How is this new regional church going to be functioning before it becomes a fully organized new regional church?

Lines of authority and responsibility should be carefully spelled out.

A timetable for the development of the regional church into a new and separate regional church should be proposed.

C. Take the time necessary to develop the new regional church into a mature body of Christ so as to insure unity and consensus among the members of its governing body, the presbytery.

As the process of planting the new regional church unfolds, it will be important to focus on the ecclesiastical development of the regional church itself as well as on the organizational structure of its presbytery. The new regional church should consider becoming involved in ministries of church planting, foreign missions and regional youth work from its very inception.

Just as a wise session charged with the development of a local church, the presbytery must make sure within the church of the broader region that:

- (1) The members (as well as the officers) are cared for.
- (2) Flock visitation is ongoing.
- (3) Fellowship and edification is ongoing.
- (4) Outreach is consistent and aggressive.
- (5) Covenant children are especially being nurtured.

The local region and its specific regional problems are being addressed.

D. We should allow the formal functions of the new regional church to remain with the existing regional church until the new church is functioning maturely.

A local mission work needs to be granted the use of the name "church" in its publicity because it is not yet a mature and fully functioning body of Christ and should not bear that name inappropriately. But since it is becoming a fully functioning body and carries out many of the responsibilities of an organized congregation, it may be granted the use of the name, as long as it realizes that it ministers under the auspices of its overseeing session.

## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

Just as the reception, care, and discipline of members, and the setting of parameters for decision-making by the mission work remain with the session of the mother church, so should the authority structure of the new regional church and its presbytery remain with the mother presbytery. There can be no "partial presbyteries" in good Presbyterian polity. How then can a new regional church and its presbytery develop?

A possible answer may be found in the use of commissions. While the concept of commissions is not very palatable to many in the OPC who have feared the use of such structures since they were employed against our fathers by the PCUSA in the early 1930s, there is historic and governmental warrant for their use. FG XII:3 states "Assemblies have the authority to erect committees and commissions and to delegate to them specific interim powers. The membership of such committees and commissions need not be limited to the membership of the appointing assembly when the delegated tasks and powers do not require it."

While no further explanation of the word is made in the Standards, Presbyterian polity normally understands that while a committee has authority to investigate, report and carry out certain specific assigned responsibilities, a commission has authority to act on behalf of the governing body in any and all matters relating to its commission.

This means that if we are willing, certain members of a presbytery's candidates and credentials committee or of its home missions committee who also happen to be members of the fledgling presbytery of a newly forming regional church may be made a commission to act on behalf of the mother presbytery in specific matters of responsibility in the new region. It provides the needed ability to function in many ways like the presbytery of a new and separate regional church before the boundaries are reset. In effect, it allows the new regional church and its presbytery time to grow and develop while it practices its new functions prior to formal reorganization.

The use of commissions could provide the answer to the dilemma in which general assemblies find themselves when a presbytery asks for division. "How can we be sure that the resulting new regional bodies will work unless we let them divide? But if

we let them divide and it proves to be a disaster, how will we ever be able to put the pieces back together?" The presbytery of regional church "X" can authorize some of the members of their home missions committee to be a commission to work on behalf of the newly forming home missions committee of the presbytery of new regional church "Y" before there is a formal and final division.

The new answer to the general assembly's dilemma may be "We want to take the next three to four years to plant a new regional church, the progress of which we will report to the GA each year, but until a new and separate regional church is formed, we will bear full responsibility for the work and oversight within our region." It will be as if there is no new regional church according to the statistics just as there are no session minutes in a mission work because a mission work does yet not have a session. Its minutes are found in the records of an already existing session.

E. We should ask permission of the General Assembly to organize the new regional church as a new and separate body.

Just as the local session declares its belief to the presbytery that its daughter congregation has now matured sufficiently to be ready to be on her own with her officers trained and chosen, so it may be with the organization of a new regional church.

It would then be at the end of the process of the planting of the regional church that the boundaries of the new church are fixed, their name assigned and the statistical report adjusted. The difference from past practice is that this proposed last step has been the only step taken by the GA. Care would need to be taken to insure that all of the details of specific boundaries lines, name of the new body, officers and date of organization are spelled out in a well-worded overture to the GA in the year of the new regional church's separate organization.

### Conclusion

Some have called this above-described process a paradigm shift in Presbyterian polity. However it is viewed, it is offered not simply to be imaginative, but because it may be a more consistently biblical way to approach the expansion that we face as part of God's Church.

## HOW TO PLANT A REGIONAL CHURCH

Consider this. When Paul directed the letter to the Colossians to be read also among the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16), it was apparent that at least something of a new connectionalism was forming. His intent in his second missionary journey had been only to provide pastoral care to the new churches of the Galatian region and to deliver the decisions of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 16:4) to them. Are we observing in this passage a shift to the formation of a new regional church of Asia Minor? Something of that nature had to have been effected if Presbyterian polity is actually the biblical norm for the New Covenant people of God.

By whatever means the creation of new regional churches and their presbyteries is ultimately effected in the OPC, several matters need to be mentioned as concluding comments.

1. These studies and scenarios are preliminary in nature. They are not put forth as *the* way new regional churches should be formed. They are offered as a first step in discussing the matter of regional church divisions in an expanding OPC.

2. In order for the above scenarios to work, presbyteries which contemplate such a process will need to develop some new ways of doing things. For instance, presbytery liaison committees and regional church development committees will probably need to be created. Existing presbytery bylaws will probably have to be altered so as to allow for the functioning of such proposed commissions.

3. At least one additional implication of these scenarios is that just as local church planting is normally done under the auspices of the presbytery's home missions committee, so regional church planting might logically be done under the auspices of the general assembly's home missions committee. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension is not here proposing an additional job assignment. But it may be an appropriate step to take in the OPC's maturing understanding of Presbyterian polity as it touches the concept of the regional church.

November 1995

**W**ith this essay we conclude our presentation of material originally prepared for, and presented to, the 1995 Regional Church Extension Conference held at Lake Sherwood Presbyterian Church, in Orlando, Florida. We wish to take this opportunity to thank General Secretary of Home Missions and Church Extension, the Rev. Ross Graham, for making these available to us.

# PASTOR TO PASTOR: THE MINISTER'S TREASURE

(Part 1)

by Rev. William Shishko

Then He said to them, *"Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."* (Matthew 13:52)

Books are a minister's treasure. While there is no substitute for the Bible—the Book of Books—there are innumerable helps that shine light on the words, history, characters, and themes of that unique volume. Each such help has a place in instructing the modern-day scribe in the limitless glories of every aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven. By them ministers may be preached to, through faithful servants who have long since completed their earthly pilgrimage and departed to be with Christ. Pastors may be shepherded themselves by physicians of the soul who were careful to commit their insights to writing. All those who received intensive instruction in preparation for their work as “householders” in the Church may continue that instruction under the tutelage of the finest Bible scholars, the most eminent of theologians, and the most gifted of preachers, the most mature among the saints. Thus, a treasure that was accumulated years or decades ago is continually replenished, with dividends that accrue to both pastor and people. Pastors ought to be continual learners. “He is always fresh minded, yet knows how to value old spiritual treasures of Holy Writ or Christian tradition” (A.B. Bruce). He is always “hurling forth” (εκβαλλει) things ancient and things fresh, things classic and things contemporary.

Over the next few issues this column will open some of the jewels one pastor has found especially valuable in his continual labors to keep his treasure chest from becoming depleted. But this is not a book review column! At the close

of these articles you will find some “Book Notes” to help keep pastors and others informed of some particularly helpful volumes (some old and some new!). This column, however, has a far more personal “pastor to pastor” purpose. How does one make the time to replenish his treasury with past and present riches? What lodes hold particularly promising veins of gold for the “scribe” who desires to enrich both himself and the people he is called to serve? How does the well-read pastor avoid becoming bookish? These questions, and many others, this writer has grappled with for his nearly eighteen years in the pastoral ministry (sixteen of them in one place), and it is out of that “pastoral” reflection that these upcoming articles will be offered to you.

I write as a lover of books (serving a church that shares that love!) and as a lover of the highest calling any man can receive, the calling to be a pastor of Christ's Church. I solicit and welcome your input (including your suggestions and questions), and trust that the Lord of the Church will use my own musings for your profit and for your help in growing as a “scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven...who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

\* \* \*

I must confess that it is often very difficult for me to begin my morning devotional time of Bible reading. Years ago a pastor friend liberated me by making the same confession himself, and suggesting that a “pump priming time” would not only stoke the fires of my own heart, but also enable me to methodically work my way through some of the finest “devotional” material available. Few suggestions have been more helpful and

rewarding for both my personal life as a Christian and for my work as a pastor.

Depending on how much time is available (usually at least a full hour prior to my sermon work and prayer time) I try to take about fifteen to twenty minutes to methodically work through a volume that “preaches to me,” softening my own heart before I devote the rest of the time to my regular Bible reading. The “heavenly” Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) became the first minister to awaken my soul each morning as section by section I went through his classic exposition of Matthew 12:20, *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax* (WORKS OF RICHARD SIBBES, Vol 1, Banner of Truth Trust). This came at a particularly low point in my relatively early ministry, and became a transforming influence in helping me grasp how the Great Physician deals so gently with His people. It also firmly established wise “pump priming” as I found myself turning to my Bible reading with fresh zeal, and a sense of being in fellowship with the Word made flesh even as I began reading the written Word.

Over the years the authors of “things old and things new” have been my friendly morning companions. John Owen’s entire volume on *THE GLORY OF CHRIST* (THE WORKS OF JOHN OWEN Vol. 1, Banner of Truth Trust) enriched beyond words both my grasp of biblical Christology and my love for the One I am privileged to make known each day as a pastor. I cannot commend too highly Owen’s “Christologia: Or, a Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ”, and urge men to work through it early in their ministries. Later, Gardiner Spring’s perceptive volume *THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE CROSS* (Banner of Truth Trust) would become a spur to my own pastoral evangelistic work. His chapter, “The Cross a Completed Justification” is a rich classic of experimental theology. Imagine turning to your daily portion of Bible reading with these piercing concluding words in your heart:

“The cross is a withering thought to all the

hopes of the purely self-righteous. The vain effort to make your way to heaven by ‘works of righteousness which you have done’ is only to rush on the avengers sword. Your courage will fail. You are welcome to the effort; but you have no alternative but to abide the precept and fulfill the law. And I forewarn you that it will cost you care and pains, watchfulness and agony, utterly beyond the power of man. Already have you a burden of guilt too heavy to be borne. And when you have struggled with it till your strength withers, and every hope is crushed, and your heart sinks within you, I pray God it may not be too late for you to look to the cross of the atoning, justifying Saviour, and remember who it was that came ‘to seek and to save that which was lost.’”

Over the years following this daily procedure the storehouse of your heart will become filled with some of the richest devotional expressions in the history of the Christian Church. Old and new will become your guides: John Calvin and Sinclair Ferguson, Matthew Henry and John Piper, Thomas Boston and J. I. Packer. John Flavel and Arthur Pink. These, and multitudes of others, are God’s gift to enrich your treasury. Pick an author who is gifted in bringing the Word of God to bear on your heart; and pick a topic that ministers to you at this stage of your life and ministry. Then work through a brief section each morning as you “prime your pump” prior to reading the Word of God. Within a few years you will be amazed at how many classics of Christian devotional material have become part of your storehouse, and my guess is that you will have far fewer ‘dry times’ as you read the Scriptures themselves.

In the next issue I want to acquaint you with my favorite early morning companion. Though long dead, he has preached to me many mornings through the reprints of his outstanding works of devotional theology. I’ll let you try to figure out who he is!

Happy reading!  
Bill Shishko, pastor  
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# Book Notes

by Rev. William Shishko

With the recent fracas over the highly controversial statement entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” a number of excellent volumes have become available to help remind us of the errors and dangers of Romanism. *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, John Armstrong, General Editor (Moody) is a comprehensive overview of historical and theological issues, followed by especially helpful units on common ground between the two great Christian traditions and thoughts on prospects for the future. Contributions by W. Robert Godfrey, Robert Strimple, D. Clair Davis, Alister McGrath, Michael Horton, and many others make this an important volume for pastors. *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, William Webster (Banner of Truth Trust) is a more in depth treatment of Rome’s distinctive teachings as contrasted with the Word of God. *Salvation, The Bible, and Roman Catholicism* by the same author and publishing company is an eminently popular and irenic presentation of the same theme, but designed virtually as an evangelistic tool for use with Roman Catholics. I highly recommend it for use in church tract ministries. *Sola Scriptura*, Don Kistler, General Editor (Soli Deo Gloria) is the first volume in many years that deals with this too much neglected Reformation theme. Selections by Robert Godfrey, R.C. Sproul, John Armstrong, John MacArthur, Sinclair Ferguson and others make this another valuable resource for the pastor’s library, and rich with seed thoughts for Reformation Day sermons. Pay attention to the article by James White (“Sola Scriptura and the Early Church”). White is a very accomplished and articulate apologist, and his material is of value to all who want to effectively “give a reason for that hope that lies within them” (I Peter 3:15)

*The Reformation of Worship* is an especially serious concern in our day of liturgical innovation and enthronement of the contemporary in the place of that which God prescribes for His worship. From Generation to Generation, John H. Leith (Westminster) opens up insights into church renewal from the perspective of

one who has a good grasp of the historical tradition of Calvinism. Chapters include “The Church and Ministry”, “Preaching”, Teaching”, and “Pastoral Care”. *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*, Hughes Oliphant Old (Eerdmans) is a complementary volume which gives insight into the elements of worship as understood in the Reformed tradition, and also serves as a practical guide to ministers as they prepare weekly worship services.

Popular helps on the subject of Biblical Churchmanship are always welcome for use in membership preparation classes, and for periodic treatments in Adult Sunday School Classes. *Life in the Father’s House*, Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely. (Presbyterian and Reformed) treats the concept of church membership, then opens up the standard areas of service, preserving unity in the body, mutual congregational responsibilities, etc. *How to Behave in Church: A Guide to Church Life*, Peter Jeffery (Evangelical Press) opens up the themes of 1 Timothy in a simple but very helpful manner. Jeffery’s volumes are of great use especially for young Christians. Both volumes treat the church from a baptistic perspective, however, so they will offer little to no help in the important question of the place of our covenant children in church life.

Two volumes on Biblical History & Geography will be helpful for church libraries and pastor’s reference shelves. *Understanding the Land of the Bible*, by O. Palmer Robertson (Presb. & Ref. Pub), integrates a basic historical geography of the land of Israel with the biblical theological themes connected with them. This is a uniquely valuable resource because of the theological competence of the author. *Gateway to the Old Testament*, by Noel Weeks (Banner of Truth) offers a thematic survey of the whole Old Testament with greatest attention to portions of the Pentateuch. Both of these comparatively inexpensive works will bring rich dividends for Sunday School classes and background work in sermon preparation.

Rev. William Shishko, OPC Franklin Square.



## BOOK REVIEWS

[1] Calvin, John. *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*. (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995) 160 pp. with Publisher's Introduction, Scripture and Subject Indexes. [2] Calvin, John. *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*. Introduction by W. Robert Godfrey. (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1994) 130 pp. with Publisher's Note, Scripture and Name Indexes. Reviewed by Rev. Harry Zekveld, pastor of Cornerstone Orthodox Reformed Church, Sanborn, Iowa. [The quotations in this review are taken from the Presbyterian Heritage Press edition.]

These two new editions of this essay are virtually the same with only slight variations. The Protestant Heritage Press edition is based on the English translation of Henry Beveridge (first published by the Calvin Translation Society), while the Old Paths edition does not acknowledge the translation origin. The latter edition includes a helpful introductory essay by Dr. Robert Godfrey in which he briefly analyzes Calvin's key concerns. It includes also a Scripture index. On the other hand, the former edition is enhanced by headings and margin notes which make for more convenient reading and referencing. Both are prefaced by a note from the publisher.

*The Necessity of Reforming the Church* is unique among Calvin's writings, as Godfrey points out in his Introduction. It is his only "free" defense of the Reformation; it is not a reply to a previous work. Requested of Calvin by Bucer to defend the necessity and chief substance of the Reformation, this statement is addressed to the Emperor Charles V for the Diet of Speyer in 1544. Theodore Beza commented: "I know not if any writing on the subject, more nervous or solid, has been published in our age" (quoted in the Publisher's Introduction of Protestant Heritage Press edition).

In the midst of our worldly wisdom and timidity here is a writing that is refreshingly bold and clear, straight from the heart of the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* rings throughout as Calvin addresses four major areas in the church crying out for reformation: 1) worship, 2) the doctrine of salvation, 3) the sacraments, and 4) church government. His argument for reformation develops along this three-fold division: 1) the prevailing corruption, 2) the reformers' remedies, and 3) the need for immediate reformation.

Calvin reaches the heart of the matter in the third division. As stated in the title, the heart of this treatise is not the description of the Reformation but a defense of its necessity. It is one thing to see corruption in Christ's church and even to agree to the need for reformation. It is quite another to have the courage to act upon what you see, and the wisdom to act judiciously. In this especially Calvin's essay displays and generates nerve.

To the third section is added a fourth section in which Calvin anticipates and answers further objections to the necessity of reformation, especially the objection that the reformation had shattered the church's unity, opening the reformers to the charge of schism. Many agreed that the church's corruption was very great, but the cost of disturbance would be too great a price to pay for reform. Others argued that a more moderate route should have been chosen. Hear him again:

In a corruption of sound doctrine so extreme, in a pollution of the sacraments so nefarious, in a condition of the church so deplorable, those who maintain that we ought not to have felt so strongly, would have been satisfied with nothing less than a perfidious tolerance.... There is something specious in the name of moderation, and tolerance is a quality which has a fair appearance, and seems worthy of praise; but the rule which we must observe at all hazards is, never to endure patiently that the sacred name of God should be assailed with impious blasphemy; that his eternal truth should be suppressed by the devil's lies; that Christ should be insulted, his holy mysteries polluted, unhappy souls cruelly murdered, and the church left to writhe in extremity under the effect of a deadly wound. This would not be meekness, but indifference about things to which all others ought to be postponed (pp. 107-108).

Especially to the objection of schism Calvin delivers a powerful defense of the church's identity and unity, that it is found wherever Christ is present in biblical worship, doctrine, and administration of the sacraments, and where faithful shepherds carry out their office.

This book is very important for the Reformed world today especially in our discussion of the "regulative principle" that is to govern the church. We have much misunderstanding of it. There is a renewed desire it seems to discuss it. We also seem too willing to give up on it because of its difficult application. I urge you to discover refreshing historical and theological perspective in this book.

Reading this defense of the Reformation helped me. It aroused my appreciation of the momentous task that the reformers undertook, together with the giant courage it required. It increased my understanding of the chief place that worship must hold in the hearts of God's people. Calvin's exposition of the biblical principles that drove the Reformation forward was an excellent reminder of what must define the church in all its parts in every age. Finally, it renewed in me a sense of the call that comes to every Christian, and especially to every leader in the church: to us belongs the obedience of faith regardless of the cost, but the result belongs to God.

"But be the issue what it may, we will never repent

## BOOK REVIEWS

of having begun, and of having proceeded thus far. The Holy Spirit is a faithful and unerring witness to our doctrine. We know, I say, that it is the eternal truth of God that we preach. We are, indeed, desirous, as we ought to be, that our ministry may prove salutary to the world; but to give it this effect belongs to God, not to us" (p. 153)

*Divorce and Remarriage* by Cornelis Van Dam, Published by Premier Publishing Company, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, 1996. Reviewed by the Editor.

Is there anything more difficult for pastors and elders than the tangled web of marital discord? I doubt it. And in spite of the fine efforts that have already been made by men such as Murray and Adams to help us deal with these, there is certainly room for more. And we have a worthy contribution from the pen—or should I say the voice—of Dr. Van Dam. I put it this way because this seventy-page book is a revision of material that he gave orally at the 1995 spring meeting of the Officebearers of the Ontario Canadian Reformed Churches. It is my opinion that the original context in which this material was presented gives it added value. The author gets right to the point, and is quite succinct in his treatment.

Most of what the author says is clear and convincing, and his exhortations and warnings are most appropriate. In my opinion his arguments against the view that divorce is never legitimate are quite conclusive. I think he is also right—and helpful—in many observations. Let me give a few examples: "Sexual intercourse between unmarried people did not mean that a marriage was thereby established" (p. 25). "Simply affirming only the wording of Mark 10:11,12 and applying it immediately to today may sound Scriptural, but it is taking Scripture out of context and having no regard for the original audience that heard these words..." (p. 34,35). There is no special New Testament requirement that an office bearer may not marry a divorced woman" (p. 40). "Now to say that these are grounds for divorce does not mean that a divorce has to follow when adultery or desertion takes place. Reconciliation should always be attempted" (p. 42). The timely application of church discipline will also place members of the church, the marriage partners, before clear choices early on, namely the choice whether to serve the true God or the gods of this world. Much misery can be prevented..." (p. 49). And many more succinct and pungent statements could be cited.

There is in my opinion, however, one ambiguity in this otherwise fine effort. I refer to Dr. Van Dam's

treatment of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. On the one hand he speaks of our Lord acting "in the spirit of Deuteronomy 24", while, on the other hand, he says our Lord "went beyond Deuteronomy 24" (pp. 28,29). He further says that "[i]n going beyond Deuteronomy 24 by not allowing divorce for just any reason, Christ did not base his teaching on an exception found in the law due to hardness of human heart, but he went back to the way God had designed marriage and meant it." (p. 30) The clear inference here would seem to be that Dr. Van Dam thinks Deuteronomy 24 did allow divorce for just any reason. It is with this that I disagree.

This very thing was dealt with some years ago, in a study report presented to the 1983 Synod of our sister church, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Among other things this report had this to say about the relationship between Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Matthew 5:31,32. (It came at the end of an extended discussion of the Hebrew and Greek terms used in these passages and in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 24).

[T]he strict school, Shammai allowed divorce not only on grounds of sexual impropriety, but on a breaking of the laws and customs of the land. It seems patently obvious that the Rabbi's had been influenced by the LXX rendering of Deuteronomy 24 and made the more general and vague "improper behavior" the ground for divorce. This list above clearly betrays priority given to cultural mores and customs.

Thus, our Lord, by deliberately avoiding the LXX translation for *ervath-dabhar* and using instead *logos porneias*, translated the Hebrew more accurately, distanced divorce from the vague and general cultural mores of Judaism, and returned it to the proper ground of sexual infidelity and ungodly sexual behavior.

The author himself asks "What then does 'some indecency' refer to?...The only other time the phrase is used is in Deuteronomy 23:14 where it refers to human excrement." "The difficulty is" says Dr. Van Dam, "that this interpretation (i.e. that it refers to a clear violation of the seventh commandment) cannot be proven." It is the opinion of this reviewer that if the 1983 RCNZ report on *Divorce and Remarriage* doesn't conclusively prove it, it at least gives cogent enough evidence that it needs to be either accepted or refuted.

But enough! This fine little book is well worth reading and pondering. I highly recommend it.