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The Council of Nicea

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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Editorial Notes

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we give special attention to the subject of creedal subscription. There is, first, the chapter from the book entitled *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (the chapter written by J. R. Muether) giving an interesting summary of the history of subscription in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We wish to express our appreciation here, for the permission given by both Mr. Muether and the editor of the book, Dr. Hall, to use this material in this issue. Then, in addition to this, there is an article and a book review on the same subject by the editor.

Rev. Ross Graham, being well known throughout the OPC, probably needs little if any introduction here. But he was kind enough to send us a copy of a series of studies he prepared for conferences of Home Missionaries of our denomination. As soon as we began reading this material it occurred to us that it is exactly the sort of thing that would be of benefit to all of our office bearers. We therefore sought, and received, permission to make them available to you. We hope that all of our pastors, elders and deacons will read and ponder this material.

A third thing that we wish to mention is the article about Corporate Responsibility, written by the editor. It should be pointed out that this study was originally prepared a few years ago at the request of the Presbytery of the Dakotas, and was recommended to the Churches of the Dakotas for consideration. If our experience in the Presbytery of the Dakotas is any indication of what is faced elsewhere, then there is more need than ever today to consider the issues of apostasy and separation. It is our view that the reasons for our separation from the PCUSA nearly 60 years ago were valid. The only thing that has changed with the passing of those 60 years is that Liberal Churches have become even worse than they were then, if not in principle, at least in practice. Sixty years ago there was still much "moral momentum" (to use a phrase from J. G. Machen) accruing from past, more godly generations. But now the inherent wickedness of it all becomes more and more apparent in the vile ethical fruit of the apostasy. We therefore print a revised

version of this study in the hope that it may be of some use to others.

In the final issue of Vol. 4 (1995) we published news of the WEB site which has now been set up for the OPC. In this issue we continue to provide what we hope will prove to be useful information for those who are just getting started. We are now working to get all the members of our Committee on line so that we can exchange information by this amazing modern means, and it is our hope that more and more Sessions will see to it that they have access too. May we suggest, also, that it is not necessary that your pastor—or even any member of your Session—be a computer guru. It is probably the case that already there is some younger man in your congregation who is on-line, and who would be willing to give your Session a demonstration of what this resource can mean to our Church. It should be mentioned, also, that the Christian Education Committee is making plans to have space set apart at Geneva College for a live demonstration of the use of our OPC WEB site, and E-mail, for commissioners at the next General Assembly.

Due to the fact that the editor uses the Macintosh Computer we have received some software programs for the Mac to review. We realize, however, that many of our readers do not use this system. If any of our readers wish to submit reviews of good software for Bible study, or church management, we would be most happy to receive them. You can send your review on disk with whatever format you use on your own computer. Since the Macintosh comes with the ability to read (or translate) material written with your system, you only need to send it to us.

Have you written something that would be of benefit to other ordained servants in the OPC? We welcome your contributions, and while we cannot promise in advance to publish any and every article sent to us, we do promise to give such our prompt and careful attention. So why not send it to the editor—today?

Confidence in Our Brethren: Creedal Subscription in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by John R. Muether

John O’Sullivan, the Editor of *National Review*, is fond of citing what he calls “O’Sullivan’s Law,” which states that any group that is not explicitly right-wing will become left-wing over time. O’Sullivan applies his law generally to political organizations: parties, action groups, think tanks, etc. Students of American church history may be tempted to apply O’Sullivan’s Law to ecclesiastical contexts as well, to assert that any church that is not explicitly conservative will become liberal over time. After all, American culture, with its religious pluralism, anti-intellectual populism, and advancing secularization is hardly friendly terrain for Christian orthodoxy. More specifically, conservative Presbyterians may want to frame the principle in this way a Presbyterian church that is not explicitly Old School will become New School over time, or, alternatively, those who are not explicitly strict subscriptionist will eventually become loose subscriptionist. The burden of this essay is to survey the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Hereafter OPC) with respect to its view of creedal subscription. Along the way we wish to test the reliability of an ecclesiastical version of O’Sullivan’s Law.

The OPC, throughout its nearly sixty-year history, has established a reputation for rigorous doctrinal orthodoxy. George Marsden, for example, located the OPC within what he calls the “doctrinalist” strand of American Reformed tradition: “Orthodox Presbyterians... meant by ‘Reformed’ strict adherence to Christian doctrine as contained in the infallible Scriptures and defined by the standards of the Westminster Assembly. Only Christians whose creeds were fully compatible with Westminster’s and who viewed subscription to them as paramount were fully within the pale.¹ Similarly, Mark Noll noted, not very sympathetically, that OPC “has prided itself more on confessional precisionism than on ecclesiastical diplomacy.”²

As Marsden and Noll indicate, the popular impres-

sion is that the OPC has a high level of confessional integrity that results in little diversity of theological expression. What is curious about that image, however, is that for all its reputation for creedal integrity, the OPC is without a history of debate on the nature of creedal subscription. When compared to the public debates in the Presbyterian Church in America over subscription,³ what is most remarkable about the OPC is its remarkable silence on the topic. The language of “strict” or “full” subscription on the one hand, and “loose” or “system” subscription on the other hand, is virtually absent in the OPC. The question

begs itself: Why is this so? We will suggest the answer lies in unique elements in the story of the OPC. Events surrounding the origin of the OPC, and events that took place in its early history established a definite creedal sensibility within the church. Yet, however strong that sensibility is, it is not the product of careful reflection on the part of the denomination, but rather the result of an unarticulated corporate culture.

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Subscription and the founding of the OPC

A deep respect for the Westminster Confession pervades the writings of J. Gresham Machen, the New Testament scholar from Princeton who would found both Westminster Seminary and the OPC. He was reluctant to refer to the Confession as a “man-made creed” and referred to it instead as “the creed that God has taught in his Word.”⁴ As he became involved in the fundamentalist-modernist debates in the Presbyterian church in the 1920s and 1930s, his concern was in defending the Reformed faith as expressed in the Westminster Standards.⁵ When over 1300 Presbyterian ministers signed the Auburn Affirmation in 1923, asserting that biblical infallibility, the virgin birth of Christ, his miracles, substitutionary atonement, and resurrection were merely theories that Presbyterians may or may not believe, Machen responded that the Affirmation’s skepticism challenged not only the authority of the Bible,

but also the confessional character of the church.

In several works Machen lashed out against the brazen dishonesty of the modernists within the church, who were deceptively using traditional language to take control of the church, all the while denying the Confession and the infallibility of the Bible. Revival in the church will come only with the renewal of “just plain old fashioned honesty of speech.”⁶ In his most popular work, *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen reflected on the ordination vows in the Presbyterian Church: “if these ‘constitutional questions’ do not fix clearly the creedal basis of the Presbyterian Church, it is difficult to see how any human language could possibly do so....[T]he ordination vow declaration is part of the constitution of the Church. If a man can stand on that platform he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church; if he cannot stand on it he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church.”⁷

In another essay, “The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance,” Machen lamented the anti-doctrinal spirit of his age. Modern Church-unionism” sought unity through a watering down of confessional commitments.

The goal of ecumenical movements was to “make doctrine as meager and vague as possible,” in the name of religious progress. Machen countered that creeds are an expression of the truth, not an expression of the historically-conditioned experience of faith. Creeds of the past were premised on the idea of truth, and ignoring them led not to doctrinal progress but to “doctrinal regression or decadence.” While he did countenance the possibility of doctrinal advance within the Presbyterian Church, he also believed that his was not a “creed-making age.”⁸

Machen’s confessionalism—coupled with his high ecclesiology—led him to champion the “corporate witness” of the church. The church as a *whole* was a witness to the truth through its constitutional documents. Ministers occupy pulpits in the church only with the endorsement of the church. “The preacher therefore speaks not only for himself but for the church.”⁹ If he were to preach heresy it would be heresy for which the whole church would be responsible. The church must therefore be a doctrinally strict company through the instruments of its doctrinal standards. Machen saw the corporate witness compromised not only by liberal preachers and the underhanded tactics of the modernist church bureaucracies, but also the indifference of the “moderates,” who sought to stand aloof from the doctrinal controversies. The

principle of corporate witness was to be held above institutional loyalty or prestige.

Thus, when the Old School identity of Princeton Seminary was compromised by its 1929 reorganization (the new Board included signers of the *Auburn Affirmation*), Machen founded Westminster Seminary, announcing at its opening convocation that “Princeton Seminary is not dead, the noble tradition of Princeton Seminary is alive.” Westminster would maintain that tradition, “not on the foundation of equivocation and compromise, but on an honest foundation of devotion to God’s Word, to maintain the same principles that old Princeton maintained...that the Christian religion, as set forth in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, is true.”¹⁰

Seven years later, when Machen was defrocked by the PCUSA for opposing modernism in the Foreign Missions Board, he and his sympathizers began what became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in order “to perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church...regardless of cost.”¹¹ Its charter proclaimed that the new church would maintain and defend

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the Bible “as the Word of God” and the Westminster Confession “as the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scriptures.” Thus the OPC was the “spiritual successor” to the PCUSA in a way similar to the founding vision of Westminster Seminary. Spiritual succession was understood in terms of fidelity to the theology of the Westminster Confession that had formerly characterized the Presbyterian Church and Princeton Seminary.

Doctrinal Divisions in the OPC

Though Machen died six months after its founding, the OPC was beset with doctrinal controversies.¹³ In 1937, Carl McIntire and other fundamentalists left the young church to form the Bible Presbyterian Church. This split was the result of several issues, including the relation between the Church and its Confession. Among the early issues to resolve was the form of the Westminster Confession that the Church would adopt. McIntire argued that unless the Church adopted the 1903 revisions to the Confession, it could not legitimately claim to be the Presbyterian Church’s “spiritual successor.” The second General Assembly, however, voted to eliminate the 1903 revisions because they were Arminian in character. Another issue was whether or not to amend the Confession

to allow for a premillennial interpretation of the return of Christ. Although the Confession seemed to rule out premillennialism, Machen argued against revisions. A premillennial could still receive and adopt the Confession in good faith: “for the reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the ordination vow, so far as the return of Christ is concerned, we must have confidence in our brethren.”¹⁴

A decade later the church found itself embroiled in the “Clark controversy.” In part the debate was procedural: Did the Presbytery of Philadelphia license and ordain Gordon H. Clark properly? It also involved a theological dispute: Did his view of the incomprehensibility of God do justice to the majesty and mystery of God? There were other significant issues lurking in the background as well, having to do with the mission and character of the OPC: Would it be evangelical or conservative as defined by the emerging evangelical movement, or would it be distinctively Reformed as defined by the Westminster Standards? Clark’s supporters saw the OPC as an evangelical church opposed to modernism, while his opponents envisioned the church opposing modernism by defending and propagated the Westminster Standards. In the end Clark and his followers left the church, leaving the issues to be framed by the terms of his opponents.

The Clark case was almost immediately followed by the Peniel dispute. Some ministerial members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church became involved in the Peniel Bible Conference in upstate New York. The Conference began to take on peculiar teachings on new revelations of the Spirit that, according to critics, challenged the sufficiency of Scripture.

Peniel’s critics in the OPC were frustrated by the selective way in which the movement seemed to embrace the Reformed faith, and found a “serious lack of clarity and precision” in Peniel’s formulations. Like Clark’s supporters, Peniel’s defenders critiqued the direction the OPC was heading. Clark called it a small circumscribed, obscure group. Peniel described it as cold, withdrawn, and inflexible. In both cases debate often focused on the tension between a strong Reformed identity and greater size and influence.

Thus, by its 30th anniversary, with the collective effects of the McIntire exodus, along with the Clark and Peniel controversies, the confessional identity of the church was fairly well established, though not explicit. The boundaries of Machen’s movement, vaguely defined

at first in the battles against modernism were clarified by these divisions in the direction of traditional Presbyterianism. While none of the debates saw the nature of creedal subscription spelled out, each resulted in the exodus of those yearning for a broader vision of the church: McIntire left for the fundamentalist cause; the evangelicals departed in the Clark and Peniel disputes. The growth of the church was stymied, and the OPC remained relatively small and, to use Noll’s term, firmly established in “confessional precisionism.”

Subsequent Reflection of Subscription

Later events provided opportunity for the Church to reflect on its Confession. The OPC followed closely events leading to the adoption of the *Confession of 1967* in the UPCUSA.¹⁵ In adopting the *Confession of 1967*, mainline Presbyterians included the Westminster Confession within a book of ancient and contemporary confessions, and altered the ordination vows for church officers. No longer was there the require-

...“for the reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the ordination vow...we must have confidence in our brethren.” (Machen)

ment to “sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” Instead ministers were to “perform the duties of a minister of the gospel in obedience to Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance of the confessions of this church.” OPC commentators saw some positive benefit to the new confession: the new vow to submit to confessional “guidance,” along with doctrinal changes rendered by the *Confession of 1967* introduced long-overdue honesty in the Presbyterian Church. The new confessions “grants creedal tolerance to the unbelief of the *Auburn Affirmation*,” wrote Edmund Clowney.¹⁶

At the same time, it thrust the remaining conservatives in the mainline church into a confessional crisis. These changes placed the Westminster Confession in a “creedal museum,”¹⁷ keeping it only because it was historic, not because it was true. Indeed, the doctrine of confessional progress required the new *Confession* to prevail over the Westminster Confession. As the new *Confession* contradicted Westminster at several points, the new subscription formula required that officers in effect *deny* the Westminster Confession. Norman Shepherd summed up the OPC evaluation well when he wrote: “The tragedy of the confessional crisis in the United Presbyterian Church is surpassed only by the glory of the opportunity now at hand to confess anew and

unequivocally the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the fellowship of a church where the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are sincerely received and adopted.”¹⁸

During roughly the same time, the church studied subscription from another perspective. In the late 1960s the church began to discuss merger with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod.¹⁹ During these discussions, as well as later discussions with the Presbyterian Church in America in the 1980s, much of the debate focused on alleged differences in subscription between the uniting parties. Did these potential partners engage in credible subscriptions of the Westminster Standards? Many who opposed the merger questioned the creedal integrity of the RPCES and the PCA, often recounting anecdotal horror stories during the Assembly debate. Others responded with confidence in the integrity of these bodies. What emerged from the OPC reflection was ambiguity over its own understanding of subscription, with considerable confusion over what an officer of the church affirms when he accepts the doctrinal standards of the church.

On a practical level, the OPC engaged in a subscription discussion in the one area of the Confession that proves most vexing to contemporary Presbyterians, i.e., its teaching on the Sabbath.

On a practical level, the OPC engaged in a subscription discussion in the one area of the Confession that proves most vexing to contemporary Presbyterians, i.e., its teaching on the Sabbath.²⁰ In 1968, the Presbytery of Wisconsin, in the midst of a discipline case over a minister’s views of the Sabbath, overtured the General Assembly, requesting that the church “evaluate the teachings of the Westminster Standards concerning the Sabbath with the purpose of defining the nature of subscription to the Standards on this matter.”²¹ The Assembly’s Committee on Overtures and Communications recommended that the Assembly take a strong Sabbatarian position: “the second ordination vows for office bearers...entails belief that, as to Sabbath observance, the prescriptions and prohibitions of the Fourth Commandment under the new covenant apply to the first day of the week, in distinction from the other six days.” The Assembly itself determined, however, that it did “not deem it advisable, apart from appeal from a decision by the Presbytery, to render a decision.”²²

That appeal would come in the very next year, in the form of a complaint entered against the Presbytery of Wisconsin for failing to discipline the minister. Among the reasons in the complaint was “a failure to uphold the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy

Scriptures”...and “in effect to declare that those secondary standards are themselves in error.”²³ In response, the Assembly appointed a “Committee on Sabbath Matters.”

Four years later, that committee presented a divided report, in 1973. The majority report essentially upheld the complaint against the Presbytery. It concluded “So far as the teaching of our secondary standards regarding the Christian Sabbath or Lord’s Day is the teaching of Scripture, its *acceptance is required by the second ordination vow*” [emphasis added].²⁴ A Minority Report took strong exception to this conclusion. The offenses alleged in the trial before the Presbytery of Wisconsin were “not contrary, on any construction, to the Reformed system of doctrine.” The report went on to argue that the “core of the church’s faith” should not be a Reformed faith that requires what is “confessionally unique with the Westminster standards.”²⁵ In other words, a “continental” view of the Sabbath should not be beyond the bounds in the OPC. The majority report was adopted, but not without significant

dissent. What is important in this debate for our purposes is that it represents the first case in the OPC when the Assembly focused specifically on the nature and extent of subscription. Both the strict-leaning majority report and the system-leaning minority report claimed that their understanding was in the spirit of the founding of the OPC.

On at least one occasion, there was movement to resolve the apparent ambiguity in favor of more exact and binding forms of subscription. In 1993, for example, the Presbytery of Northern California delivered an Overture to the General Assembly requesting that the church’s Form of Government be amended to establish a full subscription view of the confession. The proposed changes included the definition of “system of doctrine”:

The “system of doctrine” referred to in the subscription vows for licentiates and officers in the Church is the whole body of truth which the Holy Scriptures teach. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms are to be received by the licentiate and officer as a most satisfactory exposition of this truth in an integral and indivisible whole. By receiving and adopting the standards, he thereby affirms and agrees with nothing less than the complete set of assertions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.²⁶

Rather than adopt the overture, the Assembly returned it to the Presbytery for proper grounds and it has not yet reappeared.

The OPC as a Community of Interpretation

From its origins under Machen’s leadership, the church affirmed the centrality of the Confession in its worship and life, yet fell short of assuming a rigidly strict position. The church seemed able to profess forthrightly its confessional identity in general terms, yet hesitant to specify the nature of creedal subscription in internal debates. To be sure, the church understood that vague assent to the “system of doctrine” had opened the door to heresy in church history. Yet the OPC has resisted “overstrictness,” not employing exacting subscription formulas to guard against decline.

This brings us back to O’Sullivan’s Law. The OPC experience suggests that an ecclesiastical version of this principle needs some qualification. The OPC is a church that was never explicitly strict subscriptionist, and it has not, over the course of 58 years, become loose subscriptionist. The church does not easily fit on either side of the strict or loose subscription debate in contemporary Presbyterianism.²⁷

How has the church avoided the tensions of strict and loose subscription? The history suggests that the church has established a community of interpretation that has enabled it to maintain both peace and orthodoxy without the polarizing effect of a rigorously enforced subscription. Providentially, the OPC has been, relative to other communions, clear about its theological identity. Both the doctrinal divisions that it has experienced, as painful as those were, and its failures at merger, as disappointing as they seemed, were helpful at least in this sense: they kept narrow the focus and identity of the OPC. If these episodes have kept the church numerically small, they have also kept it theologically cohesive.

Moreover, this corporate culture has developed in a way that has avoided the modern temptations of advanced bureaucratization and high levels of organizational efficiency. As a result, the OPC engages in very deliberate (and often painfully slow) debate on theological issues. The OPC has demonstrated the principle that theologian Richard Lints expresses in his book, *The Fabric of Theology*: “the construction of a theological framework and the appropriation of a theological vision are properly tasks of the Christian community and not of

isolated individuals... The communal character of interpretation serves to suppress the tendency of an ecclesiastical aristocracy or an academic elite to reign supreme in matters pertaining to the Bible.”²⁸

The OPC believes that, “in the final analysis there simply is no *constitutional* device that will guarantee continued orthodoxy.”²⁹ Just as important is the necessity of a vibrant community of interpretation. As Machen put it in the premillennial debate, the OPC endeavors to interpret the Confession with “confidence in our brethren.” “Unless we have that mutual confidence,” Machen wrote in 1936 to a five-month old church, “it would have been better that we should not have attempted to form a church at all.”³⁰

...“in the final analysis there simply is no *constitutional* device that will guarantee continued orthodoxy.”

The OPC has forged one model of being a confessional church in the modern world: seeing the Church as an *ethnos*, a community that operates within an interpretative consensus. That the Church could remain orthodox without an articulated position on subscription is a testimony to the power of that consensus. But the OPC model may not be easily appropriated.

The OPC consensus is undoubtedly aided by its small size. This ought never to be a cause for boasting, but it may be a cause for reflection. Perhaps in an individualistic, narcissistic, and anti-creedal age, size is the necessary sacrifice of confessional integrity.

This sharpened identity by no means implies theological unanimity, doctrinal tensions continue to challenge the church. Recently, the “New Life” movement within the OPC could have threatened its consensus to the point of raising the issue of subscription, but the voluntary realignment of these churches into the PCA averted that debate. There are important doctrinal issues that still divide the OPC, such as theonomy and exclusive psalmody, with some arguing that these are confessional matters. Yet the OPC has achieved a certain peaceful coexistence on these issues, and no party has prosecuted its opponents for violations of subscription vows.

Finally, this analysis offers no opportunity for the OPC to be presumptuous about its confessional identity. The OPC’s confessional precision and its shared consensus has been challenged in every decade of its existence. It must be constantly vigilant in maintaining Machen’s vision of a “hermeneutical circle,” preserving both its heritage, the glorious Standards, and the community that accords “confidence in our brethren.”

CONFIDENCE IN OUR BRETHREN

Notes:

1. George M. Marsden, "Reformed and American" in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 2. The other two strands in Marsden's taxonomy of American Calvinism are the "pietist" and the "culturalist."
2. Mark Noll, "The Spirit of Old Princeton and the Spirit of the OPC" in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986), p. 243.
3. For example, the Knight-Barker dialogue in *Presbyterian X* (1984) and the Barker-Smith debate at the 1992 General Assembly.
4. J. Gresham Machen, *What is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 229.
5. For a comprehensive study of Machen's involvement in this struggle and his role in the formation of the OPC, see Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) and D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Presbyterianism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
6. J. Gresham Machen, "The Issue Before the Church" in *God Transcendent*, ed. by Ned B. Stonehouse (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 44.
7. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [1923]), pp. 163-164.
8. J. Gresham Machen, "The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance," *Scripture and Confession*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), pp. 149-157.
9. J. Gresham Machen, "The Parting of The Ways," *Presbyterian* 94 (Jan. 24, 1924), p. 8.
10. Machen, *What is Christianity?*, pp. 232-233.
11. Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, p. 496.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
13. It is not possible to describe the details of these struggles here. For a fuller explanation of them, see *Fighting the Good Fight of Faith: A Popular History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, by D. G. Hart and John Muether, forthcoming.
14. "The Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America" *Presbyterian Guardian* 3:3 (November 14, 1936), p. 43.
15. The *Presbyterian Guardian* devoted a series of articles to the new confession, and the faculty of Westminster Seminary produced an anthology, *Scripture and Confession* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).
16. Edmund P. Clowney, *Another Foundation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), p. 6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
18. Norman Shepherd, "Subscription Crisis for Presbyterian Officers," *Presbyterian Guardian* 34 (Nov. 1965) p. 145.
19. The discussion would climax with the vote at concurrent General Assemblies in 1975, where the OPC approved the union plan but the RPCES assembly rejected it.
20. Another area is in the teaching on creation. Does the Confession require a six 24-hour day creation that eliminates an animal ancestry for Adam? Or does such a requirement direct the church toward an extra-confessional fundamentalism? It is likely that OPC will debate these issues in the near future.
21. *Minutes to the 35th GA*, 1968, p. 9.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
23. *Minutes to the 36th GA.*, 1969, p. 12.
24. *Minutes to the 40th GA*, 1973, p. 106.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 111-12.
26. *Minutes of the Sixtieth General Assembly...of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Horsham, PA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1993).
27. This point should not be lost on those in the PCA, on both sides of the debate, who have suggested that the PCA's "strict subscriptionists" might seek re-affiliation with the OPC. Many of the strict subscriptionists in the PCA may be surprised at the lack of heightened sensitivity in the OPC toward subscription.
28. Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 286.
29. Clair Davis, "Creedal Changes and Subscription to the System of Doctrine" *Presbyterian Guardian* 36 (March 1967), p. 46.
30. "The Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America" *Presbyterian Guardian* 3:3 (November 14, 1936), p.43-44.

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On Being a Confessional Church

by

G. I. Williamson

It is generally recognized that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church [OPC] is a Confessional Church and that the Westminster Standards are the official testimony of its faith. But the question is, what does this really mean?

THE MEMBERSHIP VOWS

It does *not* mean that every confessing member of the church is required to subscribe to these formularies from day one. This should be self-evident from the fact that the children of believers are received as members of the church through their baptism. They begin, in other words, as babes in Christ as well as babes in arms.

But the OPC also welcomes babes in Christ of another sort. It welcomes those who, like the Philippian jailer mentioned in Acts 16, are only beginning to grasp the whole counsel of God, but who give sufficient evidence of a hearty submission to the authority of the Word of God and—subordinate to that—to the officers whom Christ has set in the Church to teach them. To require such people to wait until they have had sufficient instruction to be able to subscribe to the entire Westminster Standards would be a serious departure from the Apostolic model. After all, what is the task of the ministry? Is it not to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ *until* we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God (Eph. 4:13) so that—at last—we are no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (v. 14). Is it not clear from this that requiring subscription to a rather elaborate statement of Christian doctrine such as we have in the Westminster Standards, goes well beyond the capacity of many new converts to Christ? And is it not equally clear that the inspired apostles did not let this fact exclude those who gave credible evidence of faith in the Savior? It is my conviction that, in this, the OPC stands in the

line of the most faithful Reformed Churches and I hope it always will. May the Lord continue to bring many out of this lost generation through the faithful testimony of the OPC, and may he then continue to do a great work of building them up in faith and obedience through the teaching ministry of our churches.

It is for this reason that our church makes a clear distinction between the relatively simple vows that adult converts take when they are received as church members, and the more elaborate vows required of those men in our midst who are ordained. This does *not* mean that the two are out of harmony with each other. Not at all, for if those who have taken membership vows are faithful in keeping them they will—as they grow in the grace *and* knowledge of the Lord—come to that mature faith so fully and beautifully expressed in our Standards. The reason is obvious: it is the faith summarized in the Westminster Standards which is taught in the Bible. So anyone who sincerely submits to the authority of the Bible will be able, in the end, to say of these standards what we as office-bearers say; namely, here *is* the system of doctrine which is taught in the Scriptures.

THE VOWS OF ORDINATION

It is important to note, however, that even then—even when we as office-bearers subscribe to the Westminster Standards—we do *not* for one moment put them on the same level as the Bible. It is one of the most important articles of our faith that the Bible *alone* is infallible. Even the very best writings of men (and that is, after all, what the Westminster Standards are) are fallible. And it is for this reason that the OPC has never bound the consciences of its pastors, elders and deacons to any *absolute* adherence to the wording of these documents. Is there any pastor, elder or deacon in the OPC who does not at some point or other disagree with certain wording, at least, of these documents? It is also a fact that the OPC throughout its history has been willing to give

men room for conscientious dissent from particular aspects of formulations contained in these Standards. And it is my conviction that our church has been wise to do this.

But it is right here that great care must be exercised by all of us who have taken ordination vows, lest we abuse this privilege of conscientious dissent.

Let us take, as an example, the teaching of the Westminster Standards concerning the Sabbath day. Can a man serve as an office-bearer in the OPC if he is not persuaded that the Bible itself teaches such a strict view of the present-day application of the fourth commandment as we find in these Standards? The answer is that he can, and this is not just my personal opinion. It is a well known fact. Sessions and Presbyteries of the OPC *have* ordained and installed men who have honestly expressed reservations concerning the Westminster formulation concerning the Sabbath. And the purpose of this article is not to take issue with this concession. But I *do* take issue with a further step that some have taken. I refer, here, to the public preaching, teaching or writing—and *personal practice*—by office-bearers of the church which contradicts our official Standards. It is my conviction that this is, in effect if not in intention, to undermine the confessional integrity of our denomination.

PERSONAL INTEGRITY IS ESSENTIAL

To some this may sound like a severe restriction. But it is my conviction that it is only as each of us is willing to bear the burden of self-imposed respect for our creedal documents that we can remain a Confessional Church. What I am saying, in other words, is that it is my conviction that in all of my official teaching *and* personal practice I ought to sincerely seek to be in harmony with the Westminster Standards. In this way I contribute to the unity and peace of the church.

And let me add that there is no reason to consider this an intolerable burden. Not at all, because there is an avenue open to me to effect change in the official standards of the church *if this self-imposed restriction becomes a burden too great to bear*. It is not easy, of course, to come to Session, Presbytery or General Assembly with Scriptural arguments weighty enough to persuade others that *I* am right and that *the*

Westminster Standards are wrong. This requires a great deal of hard work. And it is obviously much easier—and *therein lies the temptation*—to just ignore the official Standards of the church by unilateral teaching and practice. But the difficult way is the right way. Indeed, it is my conviction that it is the only way that is consonant with the terms of our subscription.² Just imagine what the OPC would soon be like if every man only did that which seemed right in his *own* eyes! Yet that is, in effect, what *begins* to happen when we choose to ignore—or even contradict—the official creeds of our church in our public preaching, teaching or actions.

In all of this we are reminded, again, that there is nothing will keep the OPC from falling if we who are office bearers lack personal integrity. Even the greatest creed ever written will not guarantee the continued faithfulness of a church. Isn't this one of the patent lessons of the twentieth century? Great Reformed Churches *have* gone down to spiritual destruction in spite of the fact that they have had elaborate creeds *and* strict membership and ordination vows.

The OPC has been wise, in my opinion, in *not* seeking to preserve its orthodoxy by an overly strict form of subscription. But there is no room for complacency. *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (I Cor. 10:12). And *“if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load”* (Gal. 6:3-5).

¹ I highly esteem the Westminster Shorter Catechism. But I wish the authors had never characterized the Word of God as *“contained”* in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments! The Westminster Assembly did not anticipate the way in which that term could—because of the rise of the neo-orthodox error—become so ambiguous. I do not disagree with what the authors of this catechism *meant*, but I regret *the way* they said it.

² The sixth ordination vow for ministers of the OPC reads as follows: *“Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel, and the purity, the peace and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account.”*

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

What it is
and
Why it is important

by

G. I. Williamson

By “corporate responsibility” we mean the biblical teaching that there is no such thing as a merely private, personal or individual faith. According to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 12:12-16), the people of God are like a body. The members of the body are related one to another. They are affected by the condition of the body (the church). And we do not think in a biblical way about ourselves, or others, if we do not take our corporate unity seriously. But, sad to say, this is a very common error. There is in American evangelical thought, for example, the idea that one can belong to the invisible church regardless of what one’s visible affiliation may be. I want to demonstrate, from the bible, that this really is not true.

To begin with, then, please read 1 Kings 11:9-13. It tells of a very important period in the history of ancient Israel. This nation came to its greatest outward glory in the days of Solomon. But it was also in the days of Solomon that the outward glory was undermined from within. We know, for instance, that Solomon installed pagan temples for his wives right there in Jerusalem. So there was—before the death of Solomon—already a marked decline in zeal for the things of God. Solomon just did not have it to the same degree that David did. I point this out because we need to recognize that a period of decline always precedes great spiritual catastrophes. So the underlying cause

of what came later was this decline in faithfulness. It characterized the entire body of the nation of Israel, but was especially seen in the acts of its leaders.

If you will now turn to 1 Kings 12:1-19, you will see what happened after Solomon died. The old united kingdom was now divided. It is also clear that both sides contributed to this tragic division. Certainly Solomon himself laid the groundwork for it, and Rehoboam’s folly greatly advanced it. But we also need to see that there was a complete disregard for the Messianic promise, pronounced by God upon the House of David, on the part of the ten tribes that rebelled to form the Northern Kingdom. So the division became a fact, and God said through His servant that—in the ultimate sense—even this was of Him. We must realize, in other words, that divisions of this kind are ultimately a manifestation of the sovereign will and control of God.

Had it stopped there it would not have been such a serious matter. But now the realities of the situation began to come out, 1 Kings 12:25-33 tells us what happened. Then a man of God—a prophet—was sent from Judah to denounce the altar set up for worship in this new kingdom. What you had then—in the Northern Kingdom at this time—was a very serious act of apostasy. It was a deliberate and willful rejection of the divinely

instituted house of worship—and plan of worship—revealed by the one true God. It was an official act of rejection of the divinely instituted sacrifices, Levitical priesthood and temple (concerning which the Lord had said that He would cause His name to dwell there).

As a consequence of this, there were some who—having before perhaps rashly followed Jeroboam—now thought better of it. If you consult 2 Chronicles 11:13-17, you will see what happened. It became clear that the Northern Kingdom—by the official acts of its leaders—had become apostate! They had, in other words, rejected God’s way in order to institute their own. And so godly people saw this as an inescapable time of decision. They had to make the decision not to remain involved in the apostasy, but to cleave and adhere to Rehoboam, the king of Judah. Even though I’m sure some of them objected to his high-handed ways, yet they did see a vital difference between the kingdom that only had a man-made religion and the one that had a God-ordained religion. That was the difference between these two realms at this time in history. The religion of the Northern Kingdom in many ways aped and imitated the religion of Judah, but it was not the same because God had only ordained one place at which men could bring acceptable sacrifices, and it was in Jerusalem.

By the way, we should not imagine that Jeroboam—when he set up calf worship—said, ‘Folks, I want you to worship a different god.’ That is not what the Hebrew tells us. What he said was, ‘Here, folks, here is Elohim. Here is your God.’ In other words, he employed the same religious terms—the same God words—but he filled it with an entirely different meaning. You need to see that. He didn’t use a different word for God, but he did completely change the definition, or content of the word. So, if you worshiped Elohim up there in the Northern Kingdom, you were worshiping with a different concept of God

than you would if you went down to the Southern Kingdom and worshipped the true God under that name of Jehovah the covenant keeping one.

As a consequence of this, God declared His judgment and it came about in this manner (read 1 Kings 14:1-17a). In the sixteenth verse we find one of the momentous statements of the bible on the subject of corporate responsibility: “And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and made Israel to sin.” Look again at 1 Kings 15:30, which gives the reason why this marked the beginning of the end for the house of Jeroboam. What it says is this: everyone who continued to adhere to Jeroboam was unavoidably involved in the guilt, sin, and punishment of Jeroboam. Now that is what we have in mind when we talk of corporate responsibility. Everyone who remains in a church after it became apostate shares in its guilt and judgment.

Please turn now to 2 Chron. 13. Here we read that the King of Judah, Abijah, came up and that there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. The king of Israel—and the people who still followed him—vainly imagined that they could defeat God’s people. Abijah, on the other hand, was conscious of the difference between a true and a false kingdom. He knew the difference between those who really are God’s people and those who are not God’s people. And he was vindicated that day in a most remarkable way when, in spite of this clever entrapment scheme of Jeroboam, the Lord delivered His people. So the calamities that came over the Northern Kingdom did indeed involve all of those who adhered to Jeroboam. And if you know your bible, and the rest of the Old Testament story, you will know that the Northern Kingdom was carried into captivity at a much earlier time than the Southern Kingdom. It was carried away into Assyria, never to return again. But the Southern Kingdom of Judah, though it

was carried into Babylonian captivity, yet had a remnant which was spared according to God's unbreakable covenant promise.

The principle is this: the bible says Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, sinned and made the people of Israel sin. And the only way any Israelite could escape involvement was to do what certain Levites and other godly people of the Northern Kingdom did! When they realized what had happened they left the Northern Kingdom and went down and became part of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. And—in principle—the very same thing happened again in the first century when the Jewish church rejected Jesus as the Messiah. There is no need to go into great detail. But, in the first century, you had the people who claimed to be the people of the Messiah. If you went anywhere in the Roman Empire and asked, 'Do you know anything about a people who believe in a Messiah?' they would have said, 'Oh, sure, there's a synagogue of the Jews up the street and they are always talking about a Messiah who's supposed to come.' So there were two religious organizations at that time, both claiming to be people of the Messiah. But only one of them really was the people of the true Messiah. The other one had rejected Him.

In Matthew 23 we read of the judgment of God on the people of Israel in the first century. It was even more severe than the one that came in the time of Jeroboam (note, especially, Mt. 23:37-38). So, in the first century, because the Jews redefined the meaning of the word "Messiah" so as to eliminate a humiliated, suffering, dying Christ, in favor of one who would only be victorious, powerful, and king-like, they became an apostate people. The words of the apostles about them are really quite strong. In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 we see that Jesus himself called them Synagogues of Satan. Now just imagine that! Some of the members of the early Christian churches were related to people in those

Synagogues. But Jesus says, "Those people are not members of a Synagogue of God, but of a synagogue of Satan." So you can see, again, it was no use to imagine that all was well with these people who stayed in the old church of the Scribes and Pharisees, instead of joining the Christians. It was no use pretending that they would still be acknowledged as God's people.

Can you imagine the people of the churches at Smyrna or Philadelphia gathering together for ecumenical bible study or worship with members of the synagogue of Satan? 'But,' you might say, 'couldn't there have been some real believers there in the old Jewish organization?' Yes, of course. But they were in mortal danger. That is why God said "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4). And, if you look at John 12:42,43, you can see the proof that there were such people. In their heart of hearts they knew they were in the wrong assembly, but they had too much to lose in terms of this world so they decided to stay there. But you can't do that without consequences, because God says in His Word, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." And He also says we had better leave or share in the plagues that are coming. One of the difficult things the Reformers had to deal with was precisely this problem: members of Reformed churches, at the time of the Reformation, would still foolishly gather for fellowship and worship with Roman Catholics. Well, it wasn't right, and Calvin wrote a very powerful tract against it. So did John Knox in Scotland.

The situation for us was much the same because the thing that led to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was a terrible denial of the truth about Jesus. Did you ever hear of the Auburn Affirmation? It was signed in 1924 by almost 1,400 ministers of the Presbyterian Church. Do you know what

the doctrines were that were called into question in that document? Well, here they are: (1) the inerrancy of the bible, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his miracles and (5) his physical, bodily resurrection. The modernists said, in effect, 'You don't have to believe these things to be a Christian.' And the people who led in the formation of the OPC said, 'Oh yes you do. You don't have the real Christ unless you have the One who was born of the virgin Mary, worked mighty miracles, died to pay the terrible price of sin for his people, and rose on the third day in the selfsame body in which he was crucified.' Dr. Machen rightly said that the Modernists redefined Christian words and that this had resulted in a different religion. The result was that the Presbyterian Church, at that time, was experiencing a clash between two religions that could not coexist in peace. So our church came into existence.

It would be nice to be able to say the Presbyterian Church in the USA has improved in the fifty years since the OPC came out of it, but it has not. As a matter of fact it has become even worse. It has reached the place where a young man, who wants to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church, will not be ordained if he is not willing to ordain women to the ministry (even if he is convinced that the Bible forbids it). Yet a man who denies the deity of Christ can obtain ordination. That is the kind of thing that separates us, and what I am troubled about is the fact that some of our people do not see that people who are involved in this apostasy are not 'good Christians' according to the bible. It is wrong to call them 'good Christians' for the same reason that it was wrong to call those people who stayed in the Northern Kingdom 'good Israelites.' You wouldn't call those Jews who stayed under the Scribes and Pharisees—instead of joining the Apostolic Church—good Israelites, would you? We do not deny that such could be people who have

conviction in their heart of hearts about Jesus. But the Bible says we have to *act* in a manner consistent with what we *believe* to have the biblical right to be acknowledged as Christians. It follows, therefore, that we should not recognize those who remain yoked with unbelievers as 'good Christians.' Should we witness to them? Yes. Call them out? Yes. Say to them, 'Don't go on supporting unbelief. Don't go on paying for it. Come out from among them?' By all means. But recognize them as they are in their complacency as good Christians? No. That just is not biblical.

We should be glad, at any time, to meet with other people in the community in a forum in which these issues are brought up, so that they can be challenged, and so that we can talk about the unbelief in which they are involved. But to act as if all is well dishonors our God, and it doesn't help these people. How would you like it if you were paying money to support enemies of the Gospel, putting yourself under God's judgment, and nobody warned you? Yet that is exactly what people are doing. People who live right up the street from us are putting money in the plate that goes to false churches and dangerous ecumenical organizations. Perhaps in ignorance, but nevertheless in fact, they have financed enemies of the Gospel. And the fact that members of Liberal churches don't know, and don't *want* to know, doesn't get them off the hook. And *we* are not at liberty to pretend that all is well just because we live in a nice peaceful neighborhood and want to get along. No, the issue is too big, too serious.

Think about it. **Jeroboam the son of Nebat** not only sinned himself, but also **made Israel sin**. No one who remained under his authority could escape involvement in that sin. So, in this account, we see the reality of 'corporate responsibility.' May the Lord use this to inform our consciences so that we might learn to act with greater consistency with this important biblical doctrine.

POLITICS
and
The Separation of STATE from RELIGION
by
C. H. Spurgeon

“The writer firmly believes that the State, as such, ought neither to patronize nor persecute religion; but he hears on all sides this principle roughly and popularly stated in these terms—‘the State has nothing to do with religion,’ and as from this last statement he dissents very strongly, he is anxious that the differences should be as clear to the minds of others as it is to his own; or, that reason should be shown to convince him of his error. As a preliminary exercise upon this subject, the following queries are proposed:

1. Are not all mankind under law to God, and where and when did the King of all the earth announce that nations were to be free from his control, and from all recognition of his existence and authority?

2. Ought not a nation in all questions which necessarily involve religion, to decide for God, and according to his word, rather than for infidelity; and when a question is decided by numbers, is not every citizen burdened with a share of responsibility, and should he not give his vote on the Lord's side?

3. If the case of a government appointed for secular rule be exactly parallel with that of a company for the management of a railway, so that neither may go beyond their special business, are not both the government and the company still bound by the laws of God; as for instance, but that which allots one day in seven for rest? And can either of them break such laws without sin? If it be true, that both are free from all allegiance to the law of God, where is this affirmed or implied in Scripture?

4. If a government has nothing to do with religion, by what right are public houses closed on Sundays at certain hours? Why are theaters closed on the Lord's day? Why are chaplains provided for the Army and Navy?... Why does not Parliament sit on Sundays? We venture to challenge the believers in the non-religious principle to endeavor to carry out the logical inferences of their own assertion; most devoutly hoping that they will never succeed.

5. If a government should cease to acknowledge God at all, or in any sense, would it not at once become religious in the very lowest and worst sense, and be to all intents and purposes atheistic, and would it not necessarily by disregarding the Sabbath and in other ways, become a persecuting government towards the Christian faith, at least in the case of its servants and employees? And would it not thereby involve all its Christian subjects in a share of its sin?

6. As the non-respect of God's word is as much a religion as the respect of it, and as the avowed believers in this religion are a small minority of the nation, is it consistent with justice that the governing power should be controlled by the negative faith or non-faith of the minority, in a word, by their *ir*-religion? If not, then in questions which necessarily involve religion, must not the government decide for respect to God and his Word?

7. How can religion be eliminated from education, unless it be eliminated from the teacher himself? If books of history and science, and reading lessons be expurgated of every religious idea, and the Bible be excluded, will not the work

still be incomplete till we raise teachers of a colorless character, or so utterly destitute of any zeal that they will never intrude their faith in God, his providence, his Word, or his Son?

8. Supposing this last fact to be accomplished, what results beneficial and desirable are likely to follow from the teaching? What results which Nonconformist Christians could look upon with pleasure when on their knees before God in intercession for their country?

9. If it be said that Sabbath Schools will make up the deficiency, is it remembered that in large towns the government schools will mainly gather those who never have gone to such schools and never will? Is it also remembered that many of the lowest class of parents who now send their children to Sunday Schools as their only chance of learning to read, will probably withdraw them when they are forced to acquire that accomplishment, or at

least can do so for nothing elsewhere?

10. Is this the freedom which our fathers fought and bled for, and this the liberty for which Nonconformists have suffered and labored—the liberty to deny to those who ask for it, permission for their children to read the Bible in the government schools? If it be so, was the object worthy of the effort?

11. As we have now with considerable clearness taught the world that the state has no power within the sphere of the church, would it not be as well to teach the further lesson, which is needed to balance the first, namely that God is King over all the earth, and that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of Lords? Is it not true that parliaments, and kings, and nations, are under the law of Christ, and that whoever may say, *‘Let us break his bands asunder, and cast his cords from us,’* such language ill becomes Christian men.”

“THE magistracy, of what sort soever it be, is ordained of God himself, for the peace and quietness of mankind; and so, that he ought to have the chiefest place in the world. If he be an adversary to the Church, he may hinder and disturb it very much: but if he be a friend and so a member of the Church, he is a most useful and excellent member thereof, which may profit it very much, and finally may help and further it very excellently. His chiefest duty is, to procure and maintain peace and public tranquillity: which doubtless he shall never do more happily, than when he shall be truly seasoned with the fear of God and true religion; namely, when he shall, after the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, advance the preaching of the truth, and the pure and sincere faith, and shall root out lies, and all superstition, with all impiety and idolatry, and shall defend the church of God. For indeed we teach that the care of religion doth chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate. Let him therefore hold the word of God in his hands, and look that nothing be taught contrary thereunto. In like manner let him govern the people committed to him of God, with good laws, made according to the word of God. Let him hold them in discipline and in duty, and in obedience: let him exercise judgment by judging uprightly: let him not accept any man's person, or receive bribes: let him deliver widows, fatherless children, and those that be afflicted, from wrong: let him repress, yea, and cut off such as are unjust, whether in deceit or by violence. ‘For he hath not received the sword of God in vain.’ Rom. xiii. 4.” — from the Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 30

The Historic Origins Of The PRESBYTERY

by Ross Graham

Introduction

In Os Guinness' book, *No God But God*, one of the charges he levels against American evangelicals is that they suffer from historical amnesia. "Like Rip Van Winkle's return from sleep, they act as if there were no jump from the last chapter of the book of Revelation to the first pages of the story of modern times."

It is my fear that we could easily be swept along with the similar sentiment. If elders, sessions, presbyteries and general assemblies may be observed in the Scriptures and proved as the biblical model, then what we did last week in our session meeting or last month in our presbytery meeting is what they did or had in mind in the New Testament church.

But Presbyterian polity has developed like the rest of Reformed theology by applying logical reasoning to compare and contrast biblical information. As students of church history we cannot escape the observation that Presbyterianism was not the preferred form of government employed in the church by the beginning of the second century.

While not much historical information is available concerning the practice of ancient church polity, it is clear that godly and gifted men rose to positions of leadership in a system of sees and bishops. Even before the church became a ward of the state with the rise to power of Emperor Constantine in 318 A.D., an Episcopal form of government seems to be well entrenched. For the next twelve centuries this hierarchical episcopacy developed unimpeded and unchallenged.

It was the Protestant Reformation that called the system into question and took a fresh look at the structure of the church - who were to be the

leaders and what were to be the responsibilities and the privileges of the members. But how the modern systems of Presbyterian government developed may come as a surprise.

1. The Development of Early Reformed Polities

In the days of John Knox the word "Presbytery" was almost unknown in Scotland. The church was guided by ministers, elders and deacons working through kirk sessions, synods and general assemblies and helped by readers, exhorters and superintendents. Visitation was such an important matter to the ministers and elders in Scotland that they vested inordinate responsibility in these superintendents who would go from church to church inquiring about the spiritual health and condition of the people and the congregation.

There was great concern for determining the correct biblical structure and government in those days. Some argued that the office of superintendent could meet the continuing need for administration and jurisdiction. But others argued strongly against such an episcopacy with its separations between clergy and laity. They had for too long been familiar with those abuses and wanted no more of it. The solution that began to appeal to many by the middle of the sixteenth century was the presbytery.

It had not been necessary in Geneva, Switzerland, to create such a regional jurisdiction. The consistory and the Venerable Company dominated by John Calvin and Theodore Beza were quite sufficient for the limited population of the area. But in 1559 the Reformed in France invented what it called the colloquy as a body between the particular consistory and the provisional synod. Holland followed France in this structure and it

The Historic Origins Of The PRESBYTERY

was the classis which was placed between the local congregational consistory and the synod.

But the developments which gave rise to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian structure took a different course. In 1579 the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland made a rather strange sounding declaration: "the Exercise may be judged a presbytery." What was this Exercise to which they referred and how had it become a presbytery? It had come, as most things Reformed, from Calvin's Geneva.

2. The Exercise

In his Ecclesiastical Ordinances published in 1541, John Calvin prescribed meetings which should take place every Friday morning. An eyewitness described how one minister expounded, another followed and then all members were allowed to make observations. Calvin actually makes a veiled reference to this practice in the Institutes 4.1.12 with a comment concerning I Corinthians 14:30. It is interesting to note that at one of these Friday morning gatherings held on October 16, 1551, minutes were taken, indication was given that the preaching text was John 8 and after another added, Bolsec, the heretic, argued his point which brought forth a long response from Calvin and led to the man's arrest at the close of the meeting.

It was this practice which John Knox and the other exiled Protestant dissidents had observed while in Geneva. Upon their return they brought with them the concept and the practice in various forms and refinements. In 1550, John Lasco, pastoring a Reformed church for Protestant refugees in London, made provision for members of the congregation to bring in questions through their leaders. Records indicate that Knox's English congregation in Geneva was required to assemble once every week to hear the Scriptures orderly expounded, "at which time it is lawful for every man to speak or inquire as God shall move his heart."

In 1559 the book of order of the Reformed Church in France indicated that "at the meetings of the colloquies the ministers each in turn shall expound the word of God so that each may show how

he practices the study of the Scriptures and the method and manner of treating the same." Records of the English Puritans in London indicate that the Exercise was practiced at least from 1571 to 1574 and in typical Puritan penchant for order it was specified that the entire meeting last no longer than two hours.

But it was John Knox, upon his return to Scotland, who is to be credited with the development and refinement of this practice. An entire chapter of the first Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, written largely by John Knox, is devoted to the Exercise. The first paragraph states its purpose:

To the end that the church of God may have a trail of men's knowledge, judgments, graces and utterances...it is most important that in every town where schools and the repair of learned men are, that there be one certain day every week appointed to that exercise which St. Paul calleth prophesying.

The agenda for the Exercise was specific. Each group might choose their own day of the week and book of Scripture to be studied but beyond that they must follow the outline as Knox and the other Reformers interpreted it from I Corinthians 14:26-36. The Scripture for the day was read. One man was to concentrate on that one text, not to preach upon it but to be short in his exhortations and admonitions, that the time may be spent in opening the mind of the Holy Spirit in that place. Then a second man "added," confirming, correcting or further explaining. A third man spoke briefly "in case some things were hid from one or the other of the previous speakers." All the speakers were then "censured" or "admonished" by their peers, by which it must be assumed Knox meant there was theological and exegetical review. Lastly came the discussion of questions by all present. Strict warnings were directed against "debate and strife, curious...and unprofitable questions, all interpretations leading to heresy...or plain contradiction to any other Scripture."

It was this practice, known among the English-speaking Reformed churches as the Exercise, which

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was going on weekly throughout the Reformed world at the time of their greatest growth. Knox and the other Reformers rested their case for these meetings on a study of I Corinthians 14.

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

These verses were, for Calvin and Knox, an important outworking of their development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. They had seen in them a type of meeting ordained by God whereby men could learn to respond to his invitation to come to reason together with him and that in understanding, they might become mature men of the Word.

3. The Purpose of the Exercise

In a series of articles in the *Covenanter Witness*, Roy Blackwood summarizes what he believes to be the Reformers' intentions for these meetings.

A. To develop leadership. The Reformers believed the Exercise would provide a setting which would help to identify and develop the gifts and graces which God had built into the lives of men whom he was adding daily to his Church. It would also call those gifts and graces to the attention of the church as a whole so that men with obvious qualifications would be promoted to the positions of leadership and responsibility which God had intended them to have.

B. To help young Christians grow into spiritual maturity. Not only could young people and new converts learn actual doctrine and content by listening and asking questions, they could also learn how to learn more by observing the study methods and growth patterns of the older Christians.

C. To recruit new leadership. By giving everyone a sense of personal responsibility for the continuing development of the church as a whole and by keeping the church mindful of practical needs and developing maturity in the lives of their leaders, the Exercise served to encourage men to desire church office.

D. To continue upgrading the competency of the teaching ministry. Blackwood muses, "what fully ordained and perhaps aging pastor today would welcome 'censure' even by his peers for his methods of study, preparation, delivery and doctrinal content? "

4. The Exercise Becomes the Presbytery

But the Exercise continued to develop and took on a life of its own. This unique type of meeting, which honed the skills of ministers and identified the most competent of them in the process, began to take on authority and business aspects. It was noted in the minutes of the 1573 general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland that a copy of the "Acts of Assembly" was to be given to every Exercise. In 1579 at the same assembly at which it was declared that "the Exercise may be judged a presbytery," a matter of discipline was referred to a commissioner in one district "with the assistance of the brethren of the Exercise."

Whether this was one of those slippery slopes in the history of Presbyterianism we may never know. But it may be observed from the records that the presbyteries which absorbed the Exercises began to take on significant ecclesiastical and administrative functions. Matters of discipline and questions from sessions were discussed on a regular basis, and visitations to local churches were assigned.

Two trends emerged as a more modern form of Presbyterian polity developed from the Exercise. The first was that the people did not continue to participate. The Exercises became colleges of ministers and elders. The second was that the meetings began to be held less frequently. Records of the assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland in

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1647, the same year the Westminster Confession was completed, indicate that the presbytery was now meeting only once every two weeks or once a month.

5. The Development of the Presbytery in the New World

When the Scotch and Irish Presbyterians began to emigrate to the mid-Atlantic and southern colonies in significant numbers in the early part of the eighteenth century they did what their Presbyterian counterparts in Scotland had done a century and a half before. In 1706 they organized a General Presbytery of the ministers and elders of the local churches throughout the colonies. This first presbytery in the New World, organized under the leadership of Francis Makemie, was entirely independent of any Old World synod.

In 1707 their minutes describe the purpose of the Presbyterian Church in terms of supplying "desolate places when a minister is wanting, and the opportunity of doing good." They also followed their Scotch-Irish brethren rather than the Reformed Churches in France and Holland in standing firmly for the separation of church and state.

One thing which did not cross the ocean with the Presbyterians was any notion of the historic roots of the presbytery in the practice of the Exercise. The General Presbytery had big plans. It would need to be divided, and new ones created, and a synod formed.

Ten years later in 1716 the first general synod was organized with three member presbyteries scattered from Long Island to Maryland known as the Synod of Philadelphia. This synod, collecting all the Presbyterians in the colonies to date, represented 19 ministers, 40 churches and 3000 communicants.

In another ten years the young church found itself in a vicious dispute concerning the standards of its beliefs. The English Puritan element in the church, which settled mostly in the New England colonies, favored less control and no particular creedal adherence. But the Scotch-Irish

Presbyterians who settled the middle and southern colonies and who comprised most of the new church's constituency favored adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith, completed just 80 years before. Because of their numbers they prevailed and in 1729 the Presbyterian Church passed the Adopting Act which formally adopted the Westminster Standards as its official confession of faith.

But the new church had left the Exercise behind as it structured its government. In its place, the presbyteries of the New World involved themselves in the rigorous preparation of a competent ministry, the extension of the church, and the exercise of discipline. It is interesting to note that while the colonies were fiercely independent of each other, the Presbyterians saw themselves as one church bridging all geo-political boundaries. It was their organized and structured operations within the boundaries of regional presbyteries that shaped the American Presbyterian movement and gave it a unique and non-European flavor.

6. A Reflective Analysis

This chapter in the history of Reformed polity, which spans its first two centuries, helps us to understand some important lessons.

A. Changes in polity occur as the church continues to reform.

If we applaud the radical changes in church government which occurred at the time of the Protestant Reformation, we should be willing to applaud later changes as more is understood about the structure of Christ's Church. It took 14 centuries to become so profoundly corrupted both doctrinally and governmentally that a reformation was required. We have only been working on this new paradigm for church government for the last four-and-a-half centuries and we can expect to continue to see appropriate biblical adjustments as time passes.

B. The polity of the 16th century Reformers should not be considered normative.

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It is fashionable to appeal to the views of John Calvin and John Knox with respect to polity issues such as the role of the minister, the place of church discipline and structure of the local church. But the times in which those men lived affected the way in which they developed their governmental structures. Geneva was a city-state ruled by the church. The Presbyterians in Scotland during the time of Knox never had a day of peace from severe persecution and oppression.

Who among us today would interpret I Corinthians 14 in such a way as to develop the Exercise? In fact, Calvin's Friday morning meetings were so fraught with potential abuse that they never lasted beyond his lifetime. The theology of the Anabaptists and their concept of the clergy constantly dogged the heels of the practice of the Exercise. So we should be careful to guard against abuses of appeal to the views of the reformers with respect to issues of church government.

C. Spiritual oversight and administration are two elements of church government which must constantly be kept in balance.

Distortions in the outworking of church polity will follow wherever these two are not carefully monitored. It was easy in Calvin's Geneva to keep a church in control. It was less easy in Scotland and England where the territory was larger and the climate of tolerance was more hostile. It was less easy still in the colonies where distances militated against the churches' leaders meeting frequently on a regional and national level.

An axiom which could be derived from the study of this period of church history is that the greater the distance between the churches, the more focus there is on administrative matters. Administration is not an evil. It is part of what the church must do. But neither may it be allowed to become the only thing that the church does. Who among us during the description of the practice of the Exercise did not say, "That's what our presbytery should be doing today"? Who among us has not lamented, "Why is there no time set

aside within our presbytery meetings when we can really study and debate issues in depth?"

Roy Blackwood laments, "We hear on the one hand of a desperate need to recruit young people and newcomers who will early and quickly demonstrate a practical sense of responsibility for the development and expansion of the church. And we hear on the other hand of elders who will not allow young people to have such responsibilities because they are suspicious of their level of maturity....The Reformers believed that God had provided an age-designated one room school type of Exercise meeting so that the spiritually young could grow and that the elders could become more keenly aware of the spiritual maturity that God keeps bringing into their midst."

Conclusion

That inclination you've had to lose patience when your presbytery gets bogged down in details...that sense of frustration at having a great collection of theological minds gathered and then watching them debate the finer points of the treasurer's audit...the countless other incongruities that puzzle you about the meeting of your own presbytery...you now have an explanation. It wasn't always that way. But it is the price we pay for the maturity of a great heritage of Presbyterian government.

November 1995

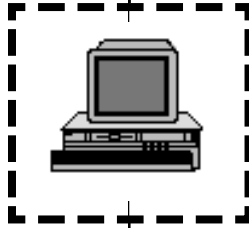
Ross Graham is the General Secretary of the Committee of Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The above material was prepared for a conference of Home Missionaries and is the first in a series. We hope to print the others in future issues of *Ordained Servant*.

Computer Information

The purpose of this page is to provide useful information for computer users. The information provided in this issue of *Ordained Servant* is for those who use the Macintosh Computer, are using America Online and wish to learn the Web Surfing Procedure for access to the OPC World Wide Web Page. The Steps for accessing follow.

Please read these steps through once or twice *before* actually trying them.

1. Be sure that you are running America Online v2.6. Without this version the AOL web browser software will not work properly. For details on doing this see Step 8.
2. Log in to your account on AOL.
3. When "In The Spotlight" comes up point and click on "Go To Main Menu" at the bottom of the screen.
4. Point and click on the menu item "Internet Connect."
5. From the pull-down menu "Go To" select "Keyword" and enter in the space provided the word "Upgrade" and press your "Enter" key.
6. A picture of a city appears along with a number of highway signs offering options for upgrading your services. Point and click on "Download Now."
7. You will be prompted with the question box "Are you certain you wish to exit this free area?...You will be charged from this point on." Click on "Exit."
8. From the menu "MAC Upgrade Software Library" select "AOL Browser Only" and click "Download Now." This process will take anywhere from 8 to 15 minutes depending on what speed modem you have. We believe that, if you don't have version 2.6 of America Online, you can download it from this menu as "AOL Application Only." You should also be able to select "AOL v2.6 with Browser" and get both at once but it will take more than forty minutes of connect time and *it's easier and cheaper to*



just get a new disk in the mail.

9. When the download is complete return to the Internet Connection screen, point, and click on the hemisphere in the upper left corner labeled "World Wide Web - Browse the Web."
10. The America Online browser will start up and retrieve the Web page for America Online. You have now begun "surfing" the Internet.
11. From the "Services" pull-down menu select "Open URL." (1) In the space provided enter: *http://www.opc.org* and press enter. This should initiate the retrieval of the OPC Web page. (2) Once complete you can scroll up and down to see all of the main page if your screen isn't capable of displaying it all at once. (3) Text that is displayed in blue and underlined (for those with monochrome displays) are hypertext links. Being hypertext means they can be pointed to and clicked to take you to those items. (4) To back up a selection you use the "Back" (left arrow) button. To go forward to the item you backed up from press the "Forward" button.
12. When you are done "surfing" select "Quit" from the pull-down menu labeled "File." You will be returned to your normal America Online session from which you can "Go To" "Sign-off."

Caveats: It appears that the AOL Web browser does not support some common features of other Web browsers. Some reformatting of the OPC Web pages will have to be done to compensate for this thus losing some aesthetic qualities we had hoped to use. Perhaps AOL will catch up soon and permit us to restore those features.

In another article we will describe what a URL is and suggest some Christian sites to browse.

The Subcommittee on the use of Technology
Larry Wilson
Clifford Collins
G. I. Williamson

For: The Christian Education Committee of the
Orthodox Presbyterian Church

“Online Bible”

A Review of Software for the Macintosh Computer

by
The Editor

Online Bible, from By The Numbers Software, RR 1, Box 75, Sutton, NH 03221. The Classic CD is \$40, the Deluxe CD is \$90. Either can be ordered with the use of your credit card by calling 1- 800-554-9116.

This software has a great potential. But I have to say ‘potential’ because it is still in the process of completion. I received the Classic CD ROM for review and was pleased to note the reasonable price (\$40 for the Classic CD), and the availability of more recent Bible version add ons (NKJV and NRSV at \$15 each, and NIV and NASB at \$30 each). All of these versions are included in the Deluxe version CD. And along with it are such resources as Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David*, John Gill’s *Expositor*, Matthew Henry’s *Concise Commentary*, the *Geneva Bible Notes*, Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*, the 1934 Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible’s *Topical References*, *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, *Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* and a number of other resources.

The 1769 King James Version of the Bible is the basic text for the Online Bible. It is this version that is also coded numerically so that the definitions of Strong’s Concordance can be called up automatically. The use of this feature is optional so that one need not have a page full of numbers, when they are not needed, but only the text of the KJV itself.

All of the material mentioned above—and more—can easily be brought up on the computer screen in a series of windows by the Sync feature. This brings the English text, the Greek or Hebrew text, the Lexicon definitions, cross references and commentaries selected, to the screen automatically. These windows can be arrayed in

a row, one behind another. Or they can be seen side by side within the limits allowed by the size of your screen. And all of this means that when the material is there it’s very easy to use and often quite helpful.

But the trouble is that a number of these resources are still incomplete (Matthew Henry’s *Concise Commentary*, and Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David* are two examples that come readily to mind after using this program). And it is quite frustrating to call up two or three of these—as I have recently in preparing some lessons on the Psalms—only to find that there is nothing there (except a blank window!) because the work of producing computerized versions of these classic works has not been completed. I spoke to the author about this, after contacting him through E-mail, and he assured me that the work of completing these is being done as rapidly as possible. He also said that this work is being done in such a way as to keep the cost down. This is indeed commendable as there is too much software that is over-priced. But it is disconcerting to note that, in advertisements I’ve seen for this software, it is not clearly stated—as it ought to be—that this is an unfinished product.

I hope the proprietors of *Online Bible* will move as quickly as possible to supply what is lacking in the generally good material they have selected for this program. Even if nothing new is added to the advertised resources it would then, indeed, be a bargain. However, I would also like to suggest that in the future use might well be made of some of the public domain material from Hengstenberg, Kiel and Delitzsch, Hodge and other great conservative commentators of their calibre. If any—and much more if all—of these improvements are made Online Bible will begin to live up to its claim of being the Bible resource program by which all the others are judged.

The Practice of Confessional Subscription, David W. Hall, Editor. Published in 1995 by University Press of America, Inc. 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706. 233 pages. \$42.50 (but available for \$34.00 + \$3.00 postage to readers of *Ordained Servant* from: Dr. David W. Hall, The Kuyper Institute, 190 Manhattan Ave., Oak Ridge, TN 37830). Reviewed by the editor

How tight should the binding of ministers, elders and deacons be to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, in Presbyterian Churches? That is the question. And the eighteen Reformed writers—past and present—who speak in this symposium do not quite see eye to eye in giving their answers to this question. There is, however, a basic unity here. None of these contributors want that binding to be too loose while, at the same time, they all admit that there has to be at least some room for conscientious exception to the exact wording of the Westminster Standards. So, in the end, the entire book is devoted to wrestling with the difficult problem of how to allow some room for conscience while retaining a real commitment as a church to these superb documents.

As I interact with these writers it seems to me that they all more or less agree with B. B. Warfield's warning that "too strict subscription overreaches itself and becomes little better than no subscription" at all (p. 135). It encourages mental reservation, the very thing that the church should seek to avoid. It is for this reason that several contributors stress the need for men to be encouraged—and expected—to fully and frankly express any reservations they may have so that Presbyteries can judge whether or not they are tolerable. It is right there, of course, that "the rubber meets the road" and, in the opinion of this reviewer, there is no way to avoid this.

So the ultimate question becomes: how much may the church tolerate without undermining its own confessional unity and witness? Should a minister, for example, be allowed to publicly preach

and/or teach any views that are contrary to this or that teaching of the Westminster Standards? If he does differ from these Standards at some point should he be required to keep this to himself, or should he be permitted to preach and teach it so long as he is honest enough to identify it as a private or personal opinion as over against the Confessional stand of the Church? It is in this area that there are some interesting and provocative contributions in this symposium. T. David Gordon's use of a distinction between joint and several powers in the church is one such effort (though I am not entirely satisfied with it).

To this reviewer at least, one thing emerges from this symposium as the primary lesson (and the chapter contributed by John R. Muether—printed by kind permission in this issue of *Ordained Servant*—illustrates the point quite clearly). No one has yet come up with a formula that will guarantee Confessional faithfulness, and I do not expect that any one will. The reason is quite simple. The primary safeguard of a church's orthodoxy is not found in any formula, important as this is, but in the integrity of the men who use the formula. Great churches, with excellent forms, have fallen away from the faith. And there are churches with imperfect forms that have kept the faith. I am not in any way suggesting that we do not need good forms of sound words, and even less am I suggesting that what we have is necessarily the best that we could have. It is for this reason that discussions of this matter along the lines presented in this book are valuable. But the bottom line, in my opinion is this: no form of subscription will ever be devised that will work for any length of time unless our Presbyteries continue to be diligent in upholding the Church's Confessional Standards.

This is a timely and fascinating book. I heartily recommend it. I would add that we should indeed be thankful to God for the generally high level of integrity in this matter, so far, in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The following News Item appeared in the November issue of the Reformed Herald (the News Item was a reprint taken from the *Christian Observer*. It is followed by comments of the editor, Rev. David Dawn. We reproduce it here as a good example of 'practical ecumenicity.'

+ + +

In a tragic setback for free speech, Biblical morality, and the general free exercise of religion, a New Jersey federal district court has ruled in *Presbytery of Orthodox Presbyterian Church v. Florio* that the New Jersey homosexuals' rights amendment overrides one's constitutional right of free expression. The history of the Florio case falls into the following five phases:

1. The legislature of the state of New Jersey passed its "Law Discrimination" (LAD) prohibits anyone in New Jersey including transients, communicating anything, either verbal or written, which might promote discrimination against homosexuals. Specifically, the statute forbids anyone "to aid, abet, incite, compel, or coerce" discrimination against homosexuals (see N.J. Stat. @ 10:5- 12, Title 10, "Civil Rights"; Chapter 5, "Law Against Discrimination"). Further, the statute includes no exception for religious speech (see *New Jersey Law Journal*, Dec. 5, 1994).

2. Rutherford Institute attorney Tom Neuberger filed suit on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as represented by the Rev. David Cummings. The suit charges that the statute violates the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment.

3. The attorney general's office of the state of New Jersey agreed not to enforce the statute against churches, claiming that such a religious exemption, though not written, is implied. The promise did not include, however, protecting a minister if he stepped off church property to disapprove of homosexuality (see *The Legal Intelligencer*, Nov. 17, 1994).

4. Partially on the basis of the state attorney general's promise, the trial court dismissed the Rutherford Institute's case, but Institute attorney Tom Neuberger appealed. The appellate court, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, ordered the original trial court to reconsider the statute's "effect on our fundamental right to freedom of speech."

5. Tragically, in late September the trial court ruled that the state of New Jersey has a "compelling state interest" to prohibit discrimination and this "compelling state interest" overrides free speech liberties (see David B. Cruz, "Piety and Prejudice: Free Exercise Exemption from Law Prohibiting Sexual Orientation Discrimination," *New York University Law Review*, vol. 69, pp. 1176, 1178 [Dec. 1994]).

The ramifications of the latest ruling are significant. If enforced to its fullest extent, the statute would forbid any public disapproval of homosexuality, effectively making various passages of the Bible technically illegal if communicated in public (for example, Rom. 1:27; I Cor. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:8-10).

(This was followed by Editor Dawn's Note)

Generally speaking, I do not think articles on current events or politics are appropriate to this magazine. We do our best to emphasize theological and devotional material, as well as the news from the Churches.

Occasionally, however, an issue comes along of which all our members need to be made aware. Certainly, I was ignorant of the situation in New Jersey until I read this article in the *Christian Observer*.

One might argue that preaching against homosexuality comprises a very small part of a Church's ministry. However, this issue sets a precedent. Once it is established in Law that our freedom of speech is restricted in one area, be sure others will follow. Much of the teaching of Orthodox Christianity - to say nothing of the Reformed Faith - is manifestly politically incorrect.

Our brothers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are to be commended in the highest possible terms for their stand on this issue. They have our unreserved admiration and - I hope - our prayers as well.

Perhaps some of our readers will want to write New Jersey Governor Whitman. Barring an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, only the state government can change this legislation. More importantly, let us pray that God in his mercy will continue to grant us freedom of speech and religion in this country.