

# NEW HORIZONS

in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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by Rosaria Butterfield

MARCH 2016

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## New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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Dave Holmlund was installed as the new regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia on January 15 at Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pa. He is shown here giving the benediction at the conclusion of the service of installation.



# SEX AND MARRIAGE IN LIGHT OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE IMAGE OF GOD



DAVID VanDRUNEN // In every area of ethics, God has given principles of conduct that we are obliged to honor. But Scripture makes clear that the moral life is not blind obedience to arbitrary rules. God wants us to grow in moral maturity, which involves developing a deep understanding of who we are as his image-bearers,

of the nature of the world around us, and of our proper place and behavior within such a world. God's law doesn't impose arbitrary rules, but instructs us how to live in ways that fit the kind of creatures we are, and thus are genuinely good for us and others. This does not mean that God's law always matches our feelings and urges at any given moment. Indeed, because of sin, this is often not the case. But following God's law promotes both his glory and human well-being.

This general truth is very important for Christians seeking to think and act rightly in the face of shifting cultural attitudes concerning sex and marriage. Conventional wisdom claims that traditional views inhibit a satisfying human life, while the new sexual mores provide joyful liberation. In response, Christians should not just pound the rules harder, but expose this conventional wisdom as a lie. Whether we are guarding our own conduct individually, communicating Christian views to unbelievers, or training our children, God calls us to promote his law on sexuality as that which fits our God-given human nature and

thus is genuinely good for us.

## God's Law and Human Nature

Some initial comments on the relationship between God's law and human nature are in order. Christian theologians have long struggled to understand this relationship. They have debated, for example, whether the moral law is arbitrary—such that God could have given us a different moral law if he wished (say, one that permitted adultery and theft)—or fitting and appropriate for the kind of creatures we are.

We must avoid undue speculation, but Scripture indicates that the latter position is much sounder. In his sovereign freedom, God surely could have created a world much different from the one we know, in which case the moral law might also look different. Had he created rational beings who lacked sex organs and reproduced in some other way, the seventh commandment would hardly make any sense. But since God in his wisdom made the world and human beings in the way he did, his moral law reflects this objective reality.

Consider two ways in which Scripture communicates this truth. First, God gave not only lists of rules (e.g., the Ten Commandments), but also instructions for growing in wisdom. As evident especially in Proverbs, wisdom requires careful consideration of the world around us and particularly the dynamics of human interaction. It calls us to learn how to act in appropriate ways that reflect the kind of creatures we are.

Second, the Bible speaks of the law known by all people through natural revelation as the same in substance as the moral law revealed in Scripture. For example, the sins Paul identifies with rebellion against the natural law in Romans 1:26–31 could be nicely summarized by the Ten Commandments, and Paul's reasoning in Romans 2:12–15 makes sense only if (dis)obeying the natural law is the moral equivalent of (dis)obeying the biblical law. These two examples indicate that God, in his goodness, does not impose his law as something alien or foreign to us, but as something appropriate to our created nature. Sex and marriage illustrate this.

## The Image of God, Sexual Difference, and Marriage

To understand human nature, the best place to begin is at the creation account. Scripture first says about us that we are the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). Nothing is more basic to our identity. How fascinating it is, then, that Genesis 1:27 proceeds to state: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them.” Of all the many features of image-bearing human nature that God might have identified, he highlights sexual distinction: “man” is “male and female.”

On the one hand, this statement is a great equalizer; males and females alike bear God’s image and enjoy all the dignity that that entails. On the other hand, equality is not identity. Males and females are objectively different. In fact, the language of Genesis 1:27 suggests that being distinguished as male and female is an essential aspect of creation in God’s image. We bear God’s image not only individually but also corporately, as a community of males and females. Thus, when later biblical texts speak as though the distinction between male and female matters, God is not suddenly imposing something arbitrary upon us, but guiding us in ways that correspond to our image-bearing nature.

Genesis 2 provides a more detailed description of how God made us male and female. He first created a male human being (2:7) and then a female human being (2:21–22). After creating Adam, God said it was not good for the man to be alone. He needed a “helper.” And not just any helper would do, but one “fit” for him (2:18, 20). The King James language of a help “meet” for Adam captures the idea well: the woman was to be a helper perfectly suited for the man. No animal could satisfy the need, nor could another male human being. A female was exactly the appropriate counterpart. Furthermore, what these counterparts needed wasn’t a merely casual partnership, but a marriage relationship (2:24).

Genesis 2 thus teaches that being male and female is essential to being human. Why? Apparently so that “man” could undertake the vocation for which God made him in his image: to be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, and rule (1:28). To fulfill these tasks (presumably not just some of them, but all of them), humans had to be males and females, many of whom would unite in marriage relationships. Thus again we see that sexual difference generally, and sexually complementary marriage specifically, are not arbitrary, but in accord with what God made us to be and to do in this world.

### Human Nature and Sexual Conduct

It is worth reflecting more directly on sexual behavior. My basic claim now is this: ordering our sexual conduct according to God’s law is not submission to arbitrary divine rules, but the path directing us toward what is good for ourselves and our neighbors, given the way God has made us.

A pattern can be observed in many areas of life. Those who eat modestly feel well and satisfied afterward; those who eat excessively feel gorged and uncomfortable. Those who drink wine moderately enjoy gladness of heart (Ps. 104:15) and even reap health benefits; those who get drunk lose control of their faculties and suffer a hangover the next day. Those who remain calm under stress tend to make good decisions and promote peace; those who lose their tempers leave wounds and resentment behind. Sinful behavior involves giving in to powerful desires that may bring a temporary sense of satisfaction, but which are inevitably very bad for us and usually also for people around us.

Sex manifests the same pattern. A loving, monogamous, husband-wife relationship does not guarantee a thoroughly satisfying sexual life in a fallen world (any more than eating good food in moderation guarantees robust health), but it does promote contentment and happiness in ways that other sexual practices cannot. Users of Internet pornography develop a shameful

and stubborn addiction. The hookup culture prevalent on college campuses leaves emptiness and regret in its wake. Such examples abound.

The early chapters of Proverbs showcase this pattern. Here a father instructs his son to understand how the world works, what’s fitting in such a world, and what promotes human well-being. The adulterous woman, he explains, is initially attractive and appeals to one’s feelings and urges (5:3), but in the end proves to be bitter and sharp (5:4), leading to ruin (5:11, 14). As it’s fitting to drink from one’s own cistern rather than to let its waters flow through the streets, so it’s fitting for a man to enjoy his own wife rather than other women (5:15–20). Likewise, the adulteress is seductive and smooth (7:14–21), but the one who falls for her is like an ox going to the slaughter or a bird caught in a snare—she leads to death (7:22–23). Perhaps most poignantly: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished” (6:27–29). Sexual sin, far from liberating, leaves no one better in the end.

### Conclusion

In a fallen world, good doesn’t come to the righteous or evil to the wicked automatically. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, sometimes “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,” for “time and chance happen to them all” (9:11). We must strive to walk in godly paths, even when life doesn’t quite make sense. But we should be thankful that God’s law directs our sexual conduct in ways that are not alien to us, but consonant with our image-bearing nature—ways that tend to our good and not to our harm. May our teaching on sex and marriage not focus entirely on proscriptive rules, but also on the joy and profit of walking in God’s path. □

*The author, an OP minister, teaches at Westminster Seminary California.*

# THREE LENSES THROUGH WHICH PEOPLE VIEW SEXUALITY



ROSARIA CHAMPAGNE BUTTERFIELD // **There seem to be three lenses through which to examine today's sexual landscape. The first views gender and sexuality as cultural artifices, not ontological, God-ordained categories. Folks with this lens reject the idea that the Bible is an inerrant (without error) and inspired-by-God text,**

even though some claim a deep love for many parts of the Bible, and a self-identified high view of Scripture. It is not unusual to have a high but also flawed view of something. People can have a high view of something that they don't understand. I may have a view of Shakespeare's sonnets, but if I cannot scan for iambic pentameter, I will only be able to appreciate them in a surface or "vulgar" way. Faithful readers of any text may have differing levels of literacy in discerning the meaning of those texts.

The same is true for Scripture. A high view does not guard against low literacy. To unbelievers and to those who hold to a *revisionist hermeneutic* (a reading practice that questions and re-conceives the Bible's plain meaning and the shared testimony of the church), this is the case. But the Bible unfolds its own hermeneutic, as God himself determines how we should approach him. Of course you can read the Bible through a lens other than that which God asks, but you will never know the God of Scripture through his written

Word if you do.

God's created order includes norms, boundaries, definitions, and limits for sexuality and gender, some of which may be difficult to embrace, especially if your personal experience puts you at odds with people you love and care about. Bible-believing Christians are gender and sexuality *essentialists*, believing that there is an essence to maleness and femaleness, and that God's created order mandates sexual union exclusively between one man and one woman in the covenant of biblical marriage. To the rest of the world, such essentialist understandings of sexuality, gender, and selfhood are reactionary, backward, and dangerous. To the rest of the world, the Bible-believing Christian's rejection of the wisdom of the world in favor of the fear of God and allegiance to the thousands-of-years-old Bible is foolish and hate-mongering. I completely understand how these folks feel and interpret this. And my shift from postmodern intellectual, unbelieving professor, and lesbian activist to repentant Bible-believing Christian has

tagged me a dangerous idiot. I love the folks in the former group. This group holds my former family of choice, and the learning community they cherish and inhabit is the one I helped build. Unbelievers tend to be pragmatists about morality. If consenting adults are hurting no one and cherishing what they have together, they are deemed to have a good relationship. I believed this for many years and I understand where they are coming from.

The second lens through which to read sexuality is with an inerrant, inspired, and dependable Bible. But even when we use the right lens, we also use the eyes of flesh, so we won't get good results. In this group we find Christians who uphold what we call the *inerrancy* (without error and therefore completely true and trustworthy) and *inspiration* (God-breathed, supernatural, holy) of Scripture, but have never struggled with homoerotic desires themselves, looked deeply enough into Scripture, or listened well enough to their friends who do struggle. These folks unbiblically believe that the struggle is the sin. They

do not know how to approach their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) neighbors because deep down they truly believe that if gay people would just come to Jesus, they would all be straight.

Recently someone in my extended church community asked if the lesbian daughter of a mutual friend of ours was going to commit her life to Jesus and “go straight.” I reminded the churchy lady (I live in the South, so indulge me here) that the young woman she mentioned had made a profession of faith, and I had no more knowledge of whether she would develop heterosexual attractions than I did if she was going to buy a puppy at the state fair this year.

Homoerotic desire, these folks believe, is rooted in willful sin, bad choice-making, full-blown lust, and/or lack of knowledge of or real faith in Jesus. Without intending it, they endorse a prosperity gospel about sexuality, one that falsely believes that Christ died on a cross and rose again to make you happy and prosperous on earth. We all make choices along the path of our life journeys, but if sin is only about bad choice-making, we don’t need a savior. Sin is bigger and deeper and longer than bad choice-making. All sin is a vestige of the fall and a transgression against God, but that doesn’t mean that patterns of temptation are themselves proof that we are actively sinning.

While it is true that in conversion we are new creatures in Christ, it is also true that on this side of the resurrection we will struggle with all manner of sin, including, if God permits, homoerotic desire. That is the kicker, and I hear this all of the time: “God would never make someone with a homosexual baseline.” Really? Original sin means that we are born in fallenness—both moral (which requires the sanctifying power of God through saving faith) and natural (which requires medical or supernatural healing, but not necessarily saving or sanctifying faith). Sexuality can straddle this line, as sometimes sexual dysfunction results from natural fallenness (such as intersexuality, being born with reproductive or sexual anatomy of both sexes). So yes, we are all “born this way.” And even after we are born again, we will all struggle with sin until we die and enter Glory or Jesus returns.

Whether the pain you face now is the consequence of your sin or the sin of others, in God’s providence and in saving faith, Romans 8:28 still reigns: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” It is not the absence of sin that makes you a believer. It is the presence of Christ in the midst of your struggle that commends the believer and sets you apart in the world. Real conversion gives you Christ’s company as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Indeed, the fall made everything—including my deepest desires—fall. And this happened under God’s providential eye, not behind his back.

The third lens is used by those who believe they have Christ’s saving

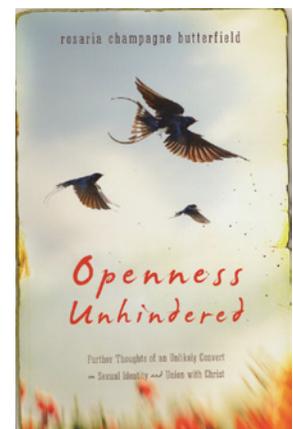
grace, but do not believe that God calls them to repent of all sin, in part because they use the wrong biblical lens. They believe that there are holes in the biblical story, holes that can only be filled by the “moral logic” of personal experience or the culture in which we live. These people believe in Jesus, but extract him from the Word of God by suggesting that we have new and improved ways of understanding the human condition.

While the Bible is not a science book and will not tell me how to fix my computer or build a telescope, it is spot-on when it comes to the moral condition of humanity. When folks in this group claim Christ’s confidence, but uphold a hermeneutic that unwittingly but wholeheartedly erases Jesus’ brutal sacrifice for sin, they often do so on the grounds of new evidence about morality that changes what the Bible means. Every generation seems to arrive at new evidence to explain away a biblical truth. Part of loving your sister or brother involves holding the mirror of Scripture up to the reflection of personal testimony. If personal testimony does not reflect the Bible’s account of a life of faith and repentance, then for the sake of your friend and for the sake of Christ’s witness, bring the Word of life to bear upon the claim of conversion. □

*The author, a well-known author and speaker, is the wife of an RPCNA pastor and a homeschooler. She quotes the NASB. This article is an excerpt from Openness Unhindered (Crown & Covenant Publications, 2015), pages 5–9. Photos: Neil Boyd Photography.*



Rosaria Champagne Butterfield



# CHRISTIAN VALUES IN A HOSTILE SOCIETY



LANCE KINZER // For much of our history, American Christians have enjoyed the luxury of theorizing at leisure about their relationship with institutions of common culture. The pace of current events, driven by societal attitudes regarding marriage, family, and sexuality, means that what was once an abstract debate has

increasingly tangible implications. Many Christians and churches will face decisions that would have been inconceivable just a generation ago. Thinking together about how to live wisely in the world has taken on fresh urgency today.

The pressing issue of whether religious liberty can be preserved in a culture that has idealized sexual self-expression is now fully before us. In the opening lines of the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision invalidating laws confining marriage to persons of the opposite sex, Justice Kennedy wrote, "The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific rights that allow persons, within a lawful realm, to define and express their identity." The "Constitutional right" to same-sex marriage has thus been grounded in the same abstraction that the Court used to reaffirm the abortion license in its 1992 *Casey* opinion, in which we were instructed that "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

The legal landscape for those who dissent from this understanding is

increasingly difficult. Traditional checks against governmental power to coerce conduct inimical to religious belief have been undermined by court opinions and societal attitudes that view free exercise of religion as operative only at the level of individual belief.

This ascendant view of what is meant by religious liberty is not easily squared with the opinion of men like James Madison, who wrote, "It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage only as he believes to be acceptable to Him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society." Under this increasingly disfavored understanding, religious liberty warrants protection precisely because it speaks to an area of life where men and women of good will are compelled by their deepest understanding of their duty before God to refrain from, or engage in, conduct that has unavoidable social consequences.

## Practical Implications

The practical implications of all of this are being played out across the United States. For example, in Illi-

nois, the Evangelical Child and Family Agency was forced to stop providing foster care placement services. In Iowa, a devout Mennonite couple was fined \$5,000 and ultimately forced to close down their business after declining to host same-sex wedding ceremonies. The fire chief of Atlanta was fired for publishing a book expressing traditional views about marriage and sexuality.

Added to this are the more than hypothetical concern about loss of accreditation for Christian educational institutions, loss of tax-exempt status for churches and other religious nonprofits, and threats to the professional licenses of Christian doctors, lawyers, nurses, and others.

More concerning than governmental actions directed against religiously motivated conduct, are the societal attitudes that undergird them. These are perhaps best reflected in the aggressive stance taken by major corporations opposing efforts to safeguard religious liberty against the kind of encroachments discussed above. It is not merely our written Constitution that has been transformed, but our "unwritten constitution"—those shared values and

presuppositions that undergird our life together in the common realm. To a large percentage of Americans, traditional religious teachings on marriage, family, and sexuality appear foreign, irrational, and even dangerous. In a society where the public is disinclined to see religion as a public good, appeals to religious liberty are viewed as little more than archaic special pleading by those who wish to shield their “irrational animus” from the legal and social approbation it deserves.

### Questions to Be Considered

For Christians pondering these realities, two distinct questions must be considered. First, as citizens of the United States, how can we best seek the welfare of the earthly community that God has placed us in? Here complex principles of temporal justice, prudence, and political sagacity all come into play.

Secondly, Christians are obligated to consider the even more complex question of how they, as citizens of the kingdom of God, are to bear witness to the truth, as those wedded together as the body of Christ. While the kingdom of God is eschatological in ultimate form, it is a reality now in the life of the visible church, where religion as abstract idea gives way to the tangible reality of a living community. Here especially, we do not stand strictly on our rights, but practice an ethic of self-denial.

God’s rule of both his temporal and his heavenly kingdom is not in doubt. But the nature and form of that rule is nonetheless distinct in the two realms. The former is grounded in the common grace principles of preservation and restraint, and the latter finds its focal point in Christ’s redemptive office. One implication of this distinction is that the church is freed to live out an ethic that is peculiarly its own. One part of this ethic entails a willing submission to the “suffering then glory” pattern reflected in the life of our Savior.

This does not mean that the church never appeals for redress to the civil magistrate. But it does mean that it avoids all entanglements that distract

from its spiritual mission. A church preoccupied with political activism and litigation strategies will send a message to both its congregants and the world, that word and sacrament observed in community are insufficient to sustain us in our journey as sojourners and exiles.

For Christians, the sexual ethic of Scripture is not optional. From adultery to divorce to same-sex marriage, our understanding is formed in strict submission to the eternal moral will of God. Whatever societal disfavor comes as a result of these views must be endured without compromise. The church must teach and practice what God has commanded. But this is different from organizing itself to facilitate effective political action that obscures its spiritual mission.

Likewise, a healthy society promotes a principled pluralism in which even those who hold to minority religious views are protected as full participants in the civil life of the nation. This inherently requires a degree of line drawing, as no one contends that every type of conduct, no matter how inimical to social order, must be allowed in the name of religious freedom. And it is perhaps especially here, at the point of such line drawing, that Christians, both individually and institutionally, must consider the scope of their involvement in that task. Moreover, the question of how to respond when we believe the line has been drawn improperly must be confronted.

In this regard, speaking hypothetically, it is one thing for an appointed county clerk to quietly seek a religious exemption under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act when confronted with the responsibility to issue same-sex marriage licenses. It is quite another to see it as part of the mission of the church to make common cause with those who would use the clerk’s circumstance in a partisan political battle.

Our hypothetical clerk has every right to use his status as a citizen in the common realm to peaceably pursue lawful redress of his grievance. Providing accommodation to those who,

as a matter of conscience, object even to some aspect of their job, has deep roots in our legal system. This approach has the added benefit of not seeking a winner-take-all outcome, but is instead a practical way to foster the kind of principled pluralism referenced above. In short, seeking lawful accommodations is not only appropriate as a matter of right, but may also serve as a wise means by which to promote the good of society as a whole.

However, when, after reasonable effort, an exemption is not granted, it may be more salutary for the clerk who feels bound by conscience not to issue same-sex marriage licenses to resign and for the church to provide financial support in his transition, than to press that claim in a contentious legal or political battle that will be used by men of ill will to obscure the mission and teaching of the church. Only the application of wisdom to the specific facts of a given case can determine when this is the better path.

In all of this, the church must be both more and less strident than the clerk. The church can never under any circumstance “resign” its spiritual mission in the name of social peace. On the other hand, the church may wisely choose to forgo its civil privileges so as to more clearly bear witness to its unique ethic of self-denial as expressed in Matthew 5:38–42 and elsewhere.

As the Augustinian political philosopher Robert P. Kraynak aptly put it, “We must learn to manage the enduring tensions of the heavenly city while seeking the best possible arrangements of the earthly city and recognize that the two orders will not be reconciled until the end of time. Living with the tensions of dual citizenship is a more difficult task than assuming an inevitable convergence of Christian faith and modern democratic life, but it is the only honest course for the pilgrims of the earthly city.” □

*The author (PCA), after ten years in the Kansas House of Representatives, works for a religious liberties advocacy group.*

# MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND PUBLIC POLICY



JENNIFER A. MARSHALL // On Easter Sunday 2015, *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni proposed “freeing religions and religious people from prejudices,” such as the belief that homosexual relations are sinful. But biblical teaching on sexuality is not so easily dismissed by appealing to “the enlightenments of modernity.”

Beginning in Genesis 1–2, the Bible unequivocally teaches that human beings are created in the image of God, male and female, made for each other in marriage. Each element of these beliefs about life and sexuality is increasingly challenged in culture and in law.

Clarity of conviction on the basis of biblical truth is essential. The challenges we face require us to think clearly about life together in society. It is appropriate that Christians seek public policy that reflects the way that God made the world for its flourishing, and to do so for the love of our neighbors. Yet the rapid pace of news can make it difficult to distill the critical facts needed to carry out our responsibilities as Christians and citizens. What follows is a guide to the most significant developments and responses on policy issues related to marriage and sexual identity.

## Marriage Redefined

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court mandated that all states must issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. This decision went beyond the Court’s constitutional authority. A sense of stewardship for the rule of law is reason enough to denounce the Court’s activism, even before consider-

ing the substance.

Moreover, the decision radically changed government’s posture toward a pre-political, God-ordained institution. Public policy has historically reflected the created order of marriage, bringing together the two halves of the human race for the future of humanity. The expectations of permanence and exclusivity attached to the marital institution in law honored the God-ordained, lifelong covenant. No-fault divorce and the sexual revolution undermined these standards; now redefinition has negated the norm of sexual complementarity. Where government had in its marriage policy implicitly acknowledged the created order that precedes it and, by extension, an authority higher than itself, the redefinition of marriage in law abandons such deference and purports to remake a fundamental reality.

Rebuilding a right understanding of marriage in law and culture demands perseverance. It must begin with deeper appreciation for the significance of marriage in God’s design for the flourishing of society—and careful reasoning about how public policy should reflect that reality.

To do so requires the freedom to make the case for marriage in the days

ahead. The most pressing policy priority, therefore, is to preserve the freedom to live in a manner that is consistent with the truth about marriage. Now that the law teaches that marriage has nothing to do with sexual complementarity, dissenters will face pressure. Advocates of this “new orthodoxy” will seek to use official mechanisms—such as licensing for professional fields—to drive those who believe marriage is the union of a man and a woman to the margins of public life.

The government may have changed its definition of marriage, but it should not attempt to coerce private citizens to change their convictions about it. Policy should protect the freedom of churches, other groups, and individuals to speak and act consistently with the truth that marriage is the union of a man and a woman, and that sexual relations are properly reserved for marriage. The law should prohibit government from discriminating against individuals or groups who hold such views, in areas like tax policy, grants, contracts, accreditation, and licensing. The First Amendment Defense Act introduced in Congress and similar state legislation would provide such protection.

[Continued on page 20]

# THE TESTIMONY OF A NEW MISSIONARY

// DAVID ROBBINS

*Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious;  
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way;  
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious,  
And all thou spendest Jesus will repay.*

These words, a verse from an old hymn, still hang in a frame on my parents' wall. I can remember singing them in the Baptist church where I grew up.

I was not supposed to be born. My parents wanted another child, but the doctors said it was impossible. Seven years they waited and prayed before I came, and they offered me to the Lord for his service, just as they had done with my two older brothers. They could not then have guessed that this would mean sending their youngest son “to bear the message glorious” to the country of Uganda.

Very early, I knew I was a miserable sinner. If there was anything extraordinary about me, it was my defiant attitude and persistent disobedience. Many wooden spoons were broken to help me in my early progress in the Christian faith. I was willful, but I also knew that Jesus Christ, his death in my place, and his resurrection were my only hope. Weakly but sincerely, I put my trust in him. I believed, I was saved, and I truly began to love my Savior and his Word.

Our home breathed the atmosphere of foreign missions. We went to church missions conferences, we prayed for missionaries, and we invited them into our home. We read many missionary biographies together and came to know men whom God had used on the mission field—men like Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton. These saints had a profound influence on me. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to take the good news about Jesus to the ends of the earth and see many people come to know him.

But first God had to work on me. In his love, he destroyed my warped view of the gospel. In my teenage years,



*Missionaries David and Rashel Robbins with their children Joshua, Emmalene, and Hannah (being held)*

my older brother Joel (today an OP pastor in Marina, California) started saying strange new things about God's grace, something people called “Calvinism.” I hated it passionately. I insisted, “Man has free will!” I would not listen. But then, as I was reading my Bible, I stumbled onto Romans 9. Paul so directly countered my objections—“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”—that I was completely defeated. I had nothing to say. I believed the awesome truth that God is sovereign in his gift of grace.

Breathtaking as that was, I was not relieved. The doctrine of election did not comfort me—it seemed to accuse me. If God chooses his own for salvation, and if he makes all his people holy, then how can I be his when there is so much corruption in my heart? I began to doubt that God had chosen me. I went through a period of deep despair.

At last Jesus persuaded me to rely upon his precious promise: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). Trusting in his word, I came; and in an instant, I knew that his blood covers all my sins, even my besetting sins. Blessed assurance!

I did not become an Orthodox Presbyterian all at once. Only after much searching of the Scriptures was I convinced that infants ought to be baptized. Nor did I immediately set out to pursue the ministry; now more aware of my depravity, I was hesitant. I took a job in telecommunications and pursued degrees in business, hoping that these things might somehow, someday, be used by God to bring the light of Christ to those who are in darkness.

In God's wonderful providence, I met Rashel in 2005. I was drawn to her deep love for Christ, and her love of missions thrilled me. Was God now calling me to be a missionary, I wondered? Strengthened by her friendship, it seemed it was time to find out. I left California to attend Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and she went off on an extended missions trip to India, but the Lord had determined to bring our souls together. Our long-distance relationship blossomed,

and we were married at the end of the year. Since then, God has given us the undeserved reward of three children: Joshua, Emmalene, and Hannah.

Throughout seminary and the pastoral internship that followed (at Grace OPC in Columbus, Ohio), God confirmed my call to his service. I was ordained to the gospel ministry in 2010. I can still feel the heavy weight of all those hands. Our risen Christ has indeed sent me. Woe to me, indeed, if I do not go and preach the gospel!

Until 2015, it was my great joy and privilege to serve the Lord in a home mission work in Huntington, West Virginia. We labored hard together, but in time it became clear that God had other purposes than planting that particular church. The mission work in Huntington has closed, but our brothers and sisters there remain very dear to our hearts.

We knew we were being called away; but to where? We still wanted to serve the Lord in foreign missions, but it didn't seem possible at the time, so we again committed our lives to him. And he surprised us! We go rejoicing to be two of your missionaries in Karamoja, Uganda. Not only my parents, but the entire OPC is giving of its sons to God's mission. Please join us in fervent prayer to our Father: that the Light of the World would dawn with saving power in the hearts of the Karimojong people.

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## THE DESIRE OF MY HEART

*Rashel Robbins*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. —1 Peter 1:3*

For God's glory and my good, I was born into an Assyrian family in the country of Iran in 1982. We were Eastern Orthodox Christians, and through the teachings of that church I learned early on about the living God and my duty to serve him. Even when I was a young girl, the Lord kindled a great desire in my heart to seek him and know him. I was taught that it was through sacrifices and good works that I would obtain favor with God. The Lord, however, used a second grade teacher to show me that I was dead in my sins and that I needed Jesus Christ to save me and give me a new life.

I was in great spiritual distress as an eight-year-old. I could not quite understand how the free grace of God would save wretched sinners like me. I shed many tears over the next few years and begged the Lord to save me. Meanwhile, the Lord sent us many trials and afflictions that drew me nearer and nearer to him. I spent most of my childhood in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, an event that created a lot of instability, poverty, and fear. Schools and houses were being bombed. Inflation caused by the war made it difficult for my parents to provide for our basic needs. My father became addicted to

drugs and used most of his time and money for his own pleasure. I felt hopeless and discouraged. Our situation seemed so bleak.

In 1994, the Lord opened the door for my family and me to leave Iran. We went to Greece, where we tried to obtain refugee status from the American Embassy. While in Greece, we were lonely, hungry, and homeless, yet God, my provider, used the generosity of strangers to supply us with shelter, food, and even friendship. Seeing his hand providing for our every need caused my heart to love him more, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life serving him.

I was thirteen years old when we came to California and started a new life. We enjoyed many earthly blessings and were grateful for the ease and comfort that came with them. There was one thing still lacking: the assurance of my salvation. Since I did not quite understand that it was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that anyone is brought into a new life, I remained very uneasy about my eternal status. However, during my junior and senior years in high school, I attended a Bible study where I finally understood and received from the Lord a great gift: the assurance I was seeking. I knew that I was "born again to a living hope" in my Savior.

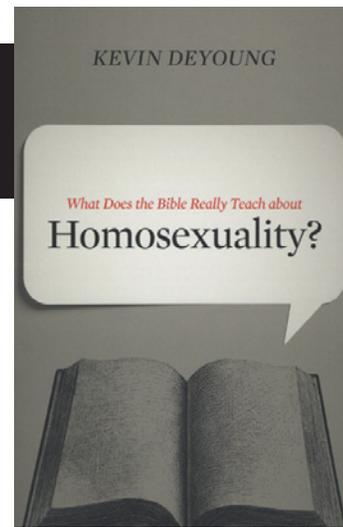
The Lord, in his mercy toward me, started to uproot me from the sins and strongholds of idol worship and doing works of righteousness for my salvation. The changes in my theological views led to changes in practice, and I began to live out my new faith. Through many trials, the Lord brought me out of Eastern Orthodoxy and into a Bible-believing church. It was a very difficult time for my family. I brought shame and disgrace to them by leaving their church and its practices. As I went through this, God became my all in all—my Father, strength, and refuge.

As I studied Scripture with other Christians, I became convinced of the five points of Calvinism and my need to join a church body that held to those doctrines. My desire to reach out to the poor, the outcasts, and the lost grew stronger, and it filled my prayers, my service, and my future goals. I finished my AA degree in psychology and my BA in education. The Lord provided an opportunity to assist a church in Mexico for a week, and this confirmed my desire to become a missionary. I was praying that I might marry a missionary pastor, someone alongside of whom I could serve as he brought the good news of salvation to others.

In 2005, the Lord opened the door for me to serve him in India for six weeks, and during this time I was getting to know David. I found myself falling in love with this humble, godly friend who took every opportunity to point me to Christ. We got married that same year! I have been blessed with the privilege to serve God as a mother of three under David's godly leadership. We have been married for ten years now, and through these years we have grown and flourished in the grace and knowledge of Christ through the ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We are eager to serve the Lord together in Karamoja.

# REVIEW: THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

// ALAN D. STRANGE



One can scarcely imagine a book being published by an evangelical press a few decades ago addressing the question that this book does: what does the Bible really teach about homosexuality? It would simply have been assumed in evangelical circles, certainly Reformed ones, that the Bible condemned homosexuality, clearly and unambiguously. To be sure, certain scholars had come in recent decades to reinterpret key biblical texts that had been long thought to ban any sort of sexual relations between persons of the same sex as addressing only certain sexual abuses (such as pederasty) or the failure to observe ancient cultural conventions (such as hospitality). But, by and large, only scattered liberals had begun to question the historic consensus that the Bible, wherever it touched on the subject, proscribes homosexuality.

It was back in the 1980s when I first came across the liberal argument that the men of Sodom were not condemned for their homosexual desires for Lot's guests, but only for wanting to gang-rape them and for being inhospitable to them as guests. That argument, and many others like it, have come to be made more and more by those who identify themselves, not as liberals, but as evangelical and even Reformed Bible believers.

This is why, in part, Kevin DeYoung wrote this book: to look afresh at what the Bible really teaches about same-sex affection and to demonstrate that the historic consensus (that the Bible prohibits all homosexual behavior) is correct—but to do so in a more pastoral manner than we have typically addressed the issue previously. In this book, DeYoung addresses homosexuality candidly, succinctly, lovingly, and caringly. This is a must-read for anyone who wants to know the biblical teaching on the matter and the correction and healing that it offers to those who struggle with it and want to serve the Lord faithfully.

Part 1 deals with the most relevant biblical passages per-

taining to homosexuality. DeYoung begins, appropriately, with God's design for male and female in marriage and sexuality as that is set forth in Genesis 1–2. That some struggle with sexual identity and same-sex attraction is admitted, given the Fall and the disorder that has affected all of creation as a result.

DeYoung readily admits that someone who considers himself a woman trapped inside a man's body (as the current lingo has it), or who desires sexual congress with those of his own gender, has not blithely chosen to be that way. All the underlying causes of homosexuality are disputed and not easily understood. Nonetheless, it is something that is seriously disordered with respect to God's design in creation and that must be resisted and died to. While one may not have sought to have such desires, any more than one has sought to have a propensity toward alcoholism or a problem with one's temper, this does not mean that homosexual desires alone (without acting upon them) are not sinful.

Sin in all its parts is sinful—not only the words and deeds that come from sinful desires, but the desires themselves. DeYoung deals with this throughout the book because some evangelicals have been teaching that “sexual orientation” itself is not sinful—that is, that an on-going desire for someone of the same gender is not sinful, so long as one remains a “celibate gay.”

DeYoung does not deny that someone may struggle with such desires for a lifetime, and that living a chaste, single life may be his only recourse. (He does not promote the view that genuine Christians will never struggle with homosexual desire, or that all true Christians can definitively overcome it.) However, this does not mean that the desire for same-sex relations is not itself sinful. DeYoung treats the erroneous view that such desire is not sinful clearly throughout his book. This is not to say that the desire is just as sinful as the words and deeds that proceed from it, but such is the case with all sins.

DeYoung deals with Genesis 19 (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah), showing that the context and the rest of Scripture indicate that a primary sin of those cities was homosexual conduct. In his treatment of Leviticus 18 and 20, he demonstrates that same-sex relations violate the moral law of God

(and thus continue to be prohibited in our day), even though other stipulations in the context are merely part of the ceremonial law for Israel.

Then DeYoung treats the most relevant New Testament passages, namely Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1. He addresses the contention that Paul is not addressing homosexuality as such, but rather only some sort of sexual abuse unrelated to one's "orientation." In these passages, Paul includes homosexual behavior in a broader catalog of sins, noting that though believers may once have been under the dominion of, and characterized by, such sins, they have a new identity in Jesus Christ and are no longer under sin's hegemony, however much they may continue to struggle with particular remaining sins. When Paul says, "Such were some of you," he means that the disobedient, liars, homosexuals, etc. are new men and women in Christ, even though they may still struggle with these sins.

Part 2 of this must-have book treats some of the most common objections, and does so candidly and sensitively, with a keen eye to ministry. For example, the assertion that "the Bible hardly ever mentions homosexuality" is met with the reality that the Bible talks quite a bit about sexuality as God made and intended it, and that homosexuality always stands over against it. The objection that what God forbids is "not that kind of sexuality" is met with the response that the Bible says nothing good about any sort of homosexual behavior.

"What about gluttony and divorce?" raises the objection that these much more common sins seem to get a pass in the church. "The Church is supposed to be a place for broken people" reflects what people often say when confronted with the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality. "You're on the wrong side of history" is often heard, as is "The God I worship is a God of love." The objection "It's not fair" (to condemn me for being the way God made me) receives fair treatment, as do the other objections just mentioned. I will leave it to DeYoung to answer them for you.

The work concludes with an honest and compassionate chapter, "Walking with God and Walking with each other in Truth and Grace." It also has three appendixes, including one on same-sex marriage. It has a short, and thus helpful, annotated bibliography. Perhaps the best thing about this book is that DeYoung always contextualizes everything that he writes with the gospel, noting that "We need truth. We need grace.

## 2016 Sabbaticals Announced

MTIOPC is taking a sabbatical for 2016, but should start back up with a full slate of courses in 2017.

After eight years of consecutive sessions, the OPC Timothy Conference is also taking the year off in 2016.

Look for announcements of the 2017 MTIOPC Spring and Summer Term courses and the 2017 OPC Timothy Conference this fall.

## ABCs of PRESBYTERIANISM Authority in the Church (3)

Larry Wilson

Our Lord Jesus himself runs his church. As its King and Head, his authority is magisterial and sovereign.

The authority of his church officers, on the other hand, is only ministerial. They are to act as ministers (servants). "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

As Edmund Clowney explains:

When the disciples thought that the Kingdom would bring them prestige and power Christ warned them about the vast difference between his kingdom and the gentile empires. He who would be first in the Kingdom must be the servant of all (Mt. 20:20–28; Mk. 9:35; Lk. 22:24–30; 1 Pet. 5:3). (*Living in Christ's Church*, p. 154)

Accordingly, our Lord Jesus commands his officers:

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2–3)

This means that leaders in the church are to devote themselves to serving King Jesus and his redeemed flock, not themselves. How many church problems we could avoid if only every minister, every elder, and every deacon earnestly applied himself to this pursuit!

We need Jesus. Only Jesus can save a wretch like me. That's the story line of the Bible and the best news you'll ever hear" (pp. 135–36), whatever sin one may struggle with, including same-sex attraction.

*The author teaches at Mid-America Reformed Seminary and is associate pastor of New Covenant Community Church in Joliet, Ill. What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality? is published by Crossway, 2015 (paperback, 160 pages, \$12.99).*

## ● Out of the Mouth . . .

I was teaching my son Malachi, age 4, the hymn "Now unto Jehovah," so he could join the singing in church. As we drove to church, he began singing: "Now 1, 2, 3 Jehovah . . ."

—Rachelle Bennett  
Fawn Grove, Pa.

*Note: If you have an example of the humorous "wisdom" that can come from children, please send it to the editor.*

# AL TRICARICO JOINS HOME MISSIONS TEAM

// JOHN S. SHAW



*Al Tricarico (center) with missionaries Eric Tuininga (left) and Charles Jackson in Mbale*

The new associate general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension is a familiar face to the congregations of the OPC. Al Tricarico, with his family, left the suburbs of Washington, D.C., for the region of Karamoja in Uganda eleven years ago. The Lord blessed their labors for more than a decade, and only after careful consideration and diligent prayer did Al and Laurie make the difficult decision to leave the foreign mission field.

The Tricaricos made preparations for their return to the United States in the summer and fall of 2015, initially not knowing where they would move. At the same time, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension continued its search for an associate general secretary. Several pastors and elders recommended that the Committee contact Al. After lengthy conversations and interviews, the Committee extended a call to Mr. Tricarico, and he was installed as their next associate general secretary on January 30, 2016. Grace OPC in Vienna, Virginia—the congregation where Al served from 1991 to 2004—hosted the installation service.

In 2005, Al and Laurie moved to Uganda with their five children, who were between the ages of 5 and 15. Alongside fellow laborers, such as the Wright and Okken families, they worked to establish a national church in Uganda.

The Lord has blessed the labors of Orthodox Presbyterian missionary families in Uganda—both in Karamoja and in Mbale. Nakaale Presbyterian Church continues to grow in numbers and in maturity. Weekly Bible studies meet in a dozen or more villages. Three men have been trained to teach. An indigenous mercy committee addresses diaconal needs. Written materials (including the Shorter Catechism translated into the Karimojong language) are published and distributed. By God's grace, much has been accomplished toward the building of an indigenous Presbyterian church in this portion of Uganda.

The Tricaricos enjoyed the privilege of participating and watching as the Lord grew his church in Karamoja. Deciding to leave proved difficult, as they left behind many Christian brothers and sisters in Uganda. Yet they can rejoice, not only in the growing church, but also in the many ways the Lord has changed them through their missionary work.

Pastors regularly move to new communities. They face the challenge of meeting new neighbors and learning about new cultures. Of course, that challenge proves all the more difficult when missionaries move to a new country with a different language and an unfamiliar culture. Al learned many practical ministry lessons during his time in Uganda.

Reflecting on his time there, Al says,

It was good to serve in Uganda. Over time, I learned, to some degree, how to put away pride, rely on Christ, and love the unlovely (as I hope they love the unlovely me!). I know that the sins of impatience and self-reliance, with which I struggle, are just as bad as, if not worse than, polygamy, drunkenness, and deceit—the sins that regularly plague the Karimojong communities.

Also, I discovered the many positive common graces of the Karimojong people. They are hospitable, generous, and amazingly resilient in the face of unspeakable sorrow. They are committed to friends in ways that are unknown to many in the West. I learned much from them, and told them so. I thank God for the gift of living, serving, and learning in Uganda. Whatever I have gained has come entirely by the grace of Christ.

In December 2015, Al and Laurie made the long move from Uganda to Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Their family has grown in the eleven years since moving to the mission field. Kate (26) married Zack Ritchie and lives in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Emily (23) married Josiah Reiner and lives in St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, with their son and a daughter on the way. Maria (21) attends Houghton College and plans,



*Al Tricarico leading a Bible study with a Karimojong translator*

following her upcoming graduation, to marry Michael Bova on June 11. James (19) lives and works in Williamsport. Joshua (16) is currently a junior in high school.

Al began his labors as associate general secretary in February. The Committee on Home Missions thanks the Lord for his generous answer to their prayers during the eighteen-month search. In his good timing, the Lord has provided a man with the gifts and experience to serve the church faithfully in this new capacity. What is that experience, and how has the Lord prepared Al Tricarico for this new place of service?

After seminary, in 1984, Al and Laurie served as assistants to Jon Stevenson, director of the Boardwalk Chapel, an evangelistic ministry of the Presbytery of New Jersey. The Lord brought together husband and wife that summer, and they were brought together around the work of gospel ministry. Church of the Covenant (OPC) in Hackettstown, New Jersey, called Al to serve as pastor of evangelism and discipleship in 1986. He served in that position until the congregation of Grace OPC in Vienna, Virginia, called him to serve as their pastor in 1991. In each place of service, he has displayed gifts in the areas of preaching and personal ministry, with a tender spirit to care for those whom the Lord sends to him.

Al has encountered many opportunities to proclaim the simple but glorious truths of the gospel to the lost and hurting, whether in New Jersey or Washington, D.C., or Uganda. He has much to contribute in training and encouraging church planters in the work of evangelistic ministry. He says, “I want to use the gifts I have to welcome questioning people and encourage others to do the same. I want people with questions, criticisms, and even hostilities to feel respected and loved. I

want us all to work the gospel patiently into interactions with doubters.”

Al has experienced the difficulty of moving to a new and unfamiliar place, meeting new people, and quickly adapting to their culture—all with the aim of bringing the gospel to bear on them and their situation. He has much to contribute in training and encouraging church planters who struggle with learning about and embracing a new community and new neighbors. He can both challenge and encourage church planters and their families during a time of transition and possible loneliness.

Al has experienced the challenge of gathering new people, doing the hard work of discipleship, and helping a new congregation form where previously one did not exist. He has prepared materials, trained teachers and leaders, and assisted new mercy ministries. He has much to contribute in training and encouraging church planters, who are called to “put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5).

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension saw in Al Tricarico a man with varied ministry experience and a generous spirit, one who could be helpful in encouraging and training church planters. We are excited to watch as the Lord continues to build new churches in part through the passions and gifts of our new associate general secretary.

Praise God for:

- Growth among his people in Uganda
- Bringing the Tricaricos back safely to the States
- Providing an associate general secretary who can minister to church planters

Pray for:

- The Charles Jackson and David Robbins families as they take up their labors in Uganda
- The Tricaricos as they adjust to life in the States, and Al as he adjusts to his new responsibilities



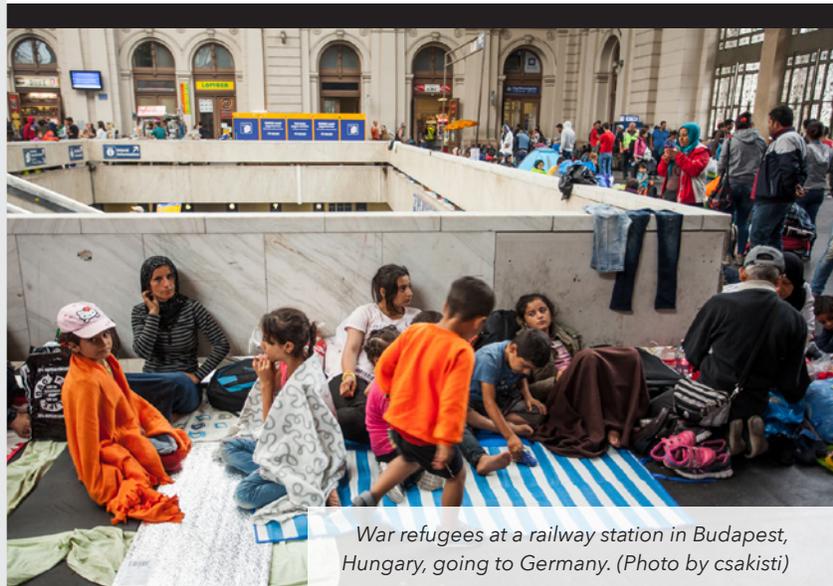
*Al and Laurie Tricarico*

### **Home Missions Today**

For up-to-date Home Missions news and prayer updates, e-mail [HomeMissionsToday@opc.org](mailto:HomeMissionsToday@opc.org).  
New editions: March 9, 23.

# TODAY'S REFUGEE CRISIS

// LENDALL H. SMITH



Through vivid news reports and video clips, we are all witnessing the refugee crisis that is currently facing the world. Multiple reasons, such as political oppression, ideological persecution, and open warfare lie behind this present-day tragedy. How pitiful it is to behold great masses of people, young and old, fleeing their home countries in search of a safe place to live. Dramatic photos of capsized boats that contained too many occupants, or of a young child's body washed up on the shore, tear at our heart strings. Conditions in refugee camps are often deplorable. One reporter confessed that her visit to a refugee camp dramatically changed her life. It has been estimated that the number of displaced persons and/or refugees could be as many as sixty million. Many governments are struggling with the predicament of absorbing large numbers of refugees into their countries.

The crisis is indeed overwhelming. How should we as Christians view it? Matthew, in his gospel, records that our Lord, in carrying out his ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God and healing every disease, when he saw the crowds, "had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). We may not be able to understand the ultimate reasons for the catastrophe that is unfolding before our eyes, but should we not view this, in part, as an opportunity set before us by divine providence to do what we can to minister to these refugees, especially fellow believers who are being persecuted for their faith?

The OPC defines a major disaster as a calamity that arises suddenly and unexpectedly, resulting from an identifiable natural or *man-made* event, such as an earthquake, volcano, flood, hurricane (or typhoon), famine caused by drought, or war, which directly injures the persons and property of *tens of thousands* of people in a defined geographical area. The OPC's Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM) is responsible for

assisting the denomination in coordinating disaster response, as well as addressing diaconal needs in the church or the world that are beyond the province and/or capacity of local diaconates or presbytery diaconal committees. As such, the CDM is currently exploring how best to provide appropriate help in the current situation, believing that the Lord would have us show compassion to these poor and needy people.

One of our principles of diaconal ministry is that material assistance should not be just a humanitarian effort, but rather should be accompanied by an active ministry of the Word of God. One way for us to do this could be to come alongside a sister denomination that is already engaged in such a ministry to refugees and help strengthen their hands so that they are able to do more. The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) and the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), through which our fraternal relations with other denominations are developed, are also able to provide accountability that the relief work in which we seek to become involved is accomplishing our intended purpose. Additional ways to serve could include sending out evangelists who speak the language of some of the refugees, sending out deacons to help with material needs, or assisting congregations that wish to sponsor one or more refugee families.

As we are confronted with the reality of the present refugee crisis, we should see it as an opportunity to minister to those who have been torn from the safety and security of their normal lives and dispersed to various countries around the world. We may not be able to do much, but we ought to do what we can to minister to these exiles, that they may find their true refuge and safety in the mercy of the living God.

*Gifts designated for "Refugee Relief" may be sent to the Committee on Diaconal Ministries at the OPC Administrative Offices, 607 N. Easton Road, Building E, Willow Grove, PA 19090. The author, a retired minister, is the president of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.*

## MARCH

1. **Heero and Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for wisdom to find good ways to reach out to adults in the community. / **Jim and Tricia Stevenson**, Tulsa, Okla. Pray for growth at Providence OPC, both in number and in love for our Savior and the saints. / **Mark Stumpff**, administrative office assistant.
2. **Joshua and Jessica Lyon**, Carson, Calif. Pray that Grace OPC will continue to grow in spiritual maturity. / **Mr. and Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray that more workers will be sent to serve the Lord in Asia. / Pray for the health struggles of Navy chaplain **Bryan (and Shelly) Weaver**.
3. Missionary associates **M. D., D. V.**, and **S. Z.**, Asia. Pray for their witness to the students they teach. / Home Missions general secretary **John Shaw**. / Pray for stated clerk **Ross Graham** as registrations arrive and preparations are made for the 2016 General Assembly that will begin June 8.
4. Pray for **Larry and Kalynn Oldaker**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio, as he visits mission works and churches throughout the presbytery. / Pray for the labors of tentmaker missionary **T. L. L.**, Asia. / **Alan Strange** and **Derrick Vander Meulen**, coeditors of the proposed Psalter-Hymnal.
5. Missionary associates **Mr. and Mrs. C.**, Asia. Pray that the Lord would work in the lives of students they befriend. / **Chris and Megan Hartshorn**, Anaheim Hills, Calif. Pray for boldness for the people of Anaheim Hills Presbyterian Church to share their faith. / **Charlene Tipton**, database administrator.
6. **Kim and Barbara Kuhfuss**, Eau Claire, Wis. Pray for visitors to Providence Reformed Church and the new plan for outreach. / **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for the ministry to a group of Russian-speaking students at the university. / **Wayne (and Suzanne) Veenstra**, yearlong intern at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Mich.
7. **Ben and Heather Hopp**, Haiti. Pray for the Hopps as they prepare to return to the U.S. to begin a yearlong furlough. / **Mika and Christina Edmondson**, Grand Rapids, Mich. Pray that God would use New City Fellowship's outreach efforts to build his church. / *New Horizons* managing editor **Jim Scott**.
8. **Paul and Sarah Mourreale**, St. Louis, Mo. Pray that the Lord would provide a musical accompanist for Gateway OPC. / Associate missionaries **Octavius and Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that those newly confessing Christ as Savior will grow in grace and knowledge of the Word. / **Chris Tobias**, *New Horizons* cover designer.
9. **Mark and Jeni Richline**, Montevideo, Uruguay (on furlough). Pray for Mark as he speaks in OP churches about his ministry. / **Jonathan and Lauryn Shishko**, Queens, N.Y. Pray that the Lord would add several new families to Reformation Presbyterian Church. / Army chaplain **Stephen (and Lindsey) Roberts**.
10. **Jim and Bonnie Hoekstra**, Andover, Minn. Pray that visitors to Immanuel OPC will become regular attenders. / **Ray and Michele Call**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for Michele's health and strength as she enters the final month of her pregnancy. / **Lowell (and Mae) Ivey**, yearlong intern at Covenant Community Church in Taylors, S.C.
11. Missionary associates **Markus and Sharon Ruth Jeromin**, Uruguay. Pray for the ongoing ministry of the Word and sacraments in the new church plant. / **Andrew and Billie Moody**, San Antonio, Tex. Pray for God's blessing on officer training and community outreach efforts at San Antonio Reformed Church. / Pray for Christian Education general secretary **Danny Olinger** as he prepares for the Committee on Christian Education meeting on March 14-16.
12. **John and Wenny Ro**, Chicago, Ill. (downtown). Pray that more people will come to Gospel Life Presbyterian Church through its various outreach efforts. / **Brian and Dorothy Wingard**, South Africa. Pray for students preparing for the gospel ministry. / **Andy (and Anna) Smith**, yearlong intern at Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Ill.
13. Pray for the daily needs of retired missionaries **Betty Andrews, Cal and Edie Cummings, Greet Rietkerk**, and **Young and Mary Lou Son**. / **Phil Strong**, Lander, Wyo. Thank the Lord for his faithfulness to Grace Reformed Fellowship over the last year. / Army chaplain **Earl (and Susan) Vanderhoff**.
14. **Ron and Carol Beabout**, Gaithersburg, Md. Pray that the Lord would add five new families to Trinity Reformed Church. / **Eric and Dianna Tuininga**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for local pastors as they deal with the needs of their congregations. / Pray for **Mark Lowrey**, director of publications at Great Commission Publications.
15. **Charles and Connie Jackson**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for safe travel on the roads of Uganda. / **Jeremy Logan**, Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Pray for spiritual growth and maturity at Knox Presbyterian Church and for a zeal to reach out to the community. / **Darryl and Anita Kretschmer**, yearlong intern at Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine.



Markus and Sharon Ruth  
Jeromin

- 16. Mark and Peggy Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. Pray for Mark as he does church-planting exploratory work. / Missionary associate **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the community health projects she promotes in local villages. / **Linda Foh**, OPC.org website technical assistant.
- 17.** Pray for missionary associate **Sarah Jantzen**, Mbale, Uganda, as she assists the Tuininga family. / **Tom and Martha Albaugh**, Pittsburgh, Pa. Pray for Redeemer OPC Mission, that God would save local families and bring them to worship. / **Tim (and Jeni) Son**, yearlong intern at First Presbyterian Church, North Shore, in Ipswich, Mass.
- 18.** Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / **Bob and Martha Wright**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Bob as he works to ensure that missionary dwellings and vehicles are in good working order. / **David Haney**, director of finance and planned giving for the Committee on Coordination.
- 19. David and Sunshine Okken**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that family members of believers will come to know Christ as Savior and Lord. / **Mike and Katy Myers**, Hartwell, Ga. Praise God for his faithfulness to Heritage Presbyterian Church, and pray for more growth. / **Charles Williams**, yearlong intern at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Ada, Mich.
- 20. Jay and Andrea Bennett**, Neon, Ky. Pray for the Lord to bless Neon Reformed Presbyterian Church's outreach and evangelism efforts. / **David and Rashel Robbins**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for their health and strength as they labor in a tropical climate. / **Daniel Adams**, yearlong intern at Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pa.
- 21.** Missionary associates **Fiona Smith, Rachel Turner**, and **Angela Voskuil**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would work in the hearts of the children they teach. / **Robert and Christy Arendale**, Houston, Tex. Pray that the Word and Spirit will build up and sustain Cornerstone OPC. / **Benjamin (and Emily) Gordon**, yearlong intern at Trinity OPC in Hatboro, Pa.
- 22. Christopher and Ann Malamisuro**, Cincinnati, Ohio. Pray that the Lord would bless Good Shepherd OPC's outreach efforts with new visitors. / Pray for the labors of missionary associates **Jesse and Hannah Van Gorkom**, Nakaale, Uganda. / *New Horizons*: editorial assistant **Pat Clawson** and proofreader **Sarah Pederson**.
- 23.** Missionary associates **Christopher and Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Christopher as he serves as interim administrator of the medical clinic. / Pray for **Jim Bosgraf**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest, as he follows up on contacts and visits Bible studies. / **Janet Birkmann**, Diaconal Ministries administrative assistant.
- 24. Brian and Sara Chang**, Cottonwood, Ariz. Pray for new opportunities to make the name of Christ and Verde Valley Reformed Chapel known in the community. / Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Mark Bube** as he provides counsel to our foreign missionaries. / **Brian Guinto**, yearlong intern at Grace Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio.
- 25.** Pray for Foreign Missions associate general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he advises and encourages missionary associate candidates. / **Jonathan and Kristin Moersch**, Capistrano Beach, Calif. Pray for continued growth and harmony at Trinity Presbyterian Church. / *Ordained Servant*: editor **Greg Reynolds** and proofreader **Diane Olinger**.
- 26. Bill and Sessie Welzien**, Key West, Fla. Pray for Keys Presbyterian Church, that God's elect will be brought in. / Pray for Foreign Missions administrative assistant **Linda Posthuma**, and for secretary Katrina Zartman as she works on scheduling furloughing missionaries. / **Doug Watson**, part-time staff accountant.
- 27.** Affiliated missionaries **Jerry and Marilyn Farnik**, Prague, Czech Republic. Pray for outreach programs with which they work. / Pray for Home Missions staff administrator **Sean Gregg**. / Committee on Coordination: **Jan Gregson**, assistant to the finance director.
- 28.** Pray for **Lacy Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast, as he gives counsel to organizing pastors and overseeing sessions and helps lead them through the process of organization. / **Ben and Melanie Westerveld**, Quebec, Canada. / **Kathy Bube**, Loan Fund administrator.
- 29.** Missionary associate **Jennifer Nelson**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for opportunities in everyday conversations to be a witness to the gospel. / **Jim and Eve Cassidy**, Austin, Tex. Pray for God's blessing on South Austin Presbyterian Church's outreach efforts, and for the raising up of new officers. / **Matthew (and Elin) Prather**, yearlong intern at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, Calif.



Jim and Eve Cassidy

# HOW TO BE RICH TOWARD GOD

// CHARLES K. PERKINS

A man once called to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus responded by stating this truth: “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

As helpful as this truth is in avoiding the particular snare of thinking that life is about possessions, it raises another question: “So what does life consist in?” To answer this question, Jesus continued with a parable:

[A certain rich man] thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:17–21)

So Jesus characterizes “life” (v. 15) as being “rich toward God” (v. 21). To enjoy this life, it will be helpful to work out what the phrase “rich toward God” means. We get some help from Romans 10:12, where we find a similar Greek phrase translated into English as “[the Lord] is rich to all.” Now, when the Lord is rich to all, those “all” are receiving from the Lord. Therefore, somewhat surprisingly, in Luke 12:21 Jesus teaches us that “life” is when we produce for God.

Scripture illustrates this when God’s people are described as a vine that ought to produce the good fruit of righteousness and justice (Isa. 5:7). This kind of fruit can be produced only as we abide as branches in Christ, the true vine (John 15:5).

We produce this fruit for God in all of life, but, as we continue, let’s ask a more focused question: “As those who participate in the church’s mission, what fruit is God looking

for?” In our Form of Government, we find this summary of that mission: “The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness” [II.4].

A couple of things make this an excellent summary of biblical teaching. First, we see that the fruit of divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness arise out of a relationship with Christ (“in fellowship with and obedience to Christ”). Second, as we unpack “mutual edification,” we see the beauty of a community building itself up in love through the giving and receiving of gifts of word and deed.

Now we see that we are rich toward God when, in relationship with Christ, we produce the fruit of worship, edification, and gospel witness *by our actions*. But this isn’t all. As we continue to think about being rich toward God, we recognize that, in addition to our acts of worship, edification, and witness, we can also produce fruit *by our giving*—but only if our giving is used by those who intend to produce the fruit of worship, edification, and witness.

One of the encouraging things about giving in the OPC is that each congregation, each regional church, and indeed our whole denomination (through Worldwide Outreach) is unified in its mission under Form of Government II.4. Each entity exists to promote divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. Therefore, our monetary gifts are producing the kinds of fruit that God desires from the church, as the church, with the result that we are living as we have purposed, to be rich toward God.

*The author is the pastor of Prescott Presbyterian Church in Prescott, Ariz.*

## Worldwide Outreach and Thank Offering Results

Contributions to Worldwide Outreach totaled \$3,935,417 in 2015, up \$267,373 from 2014, but \$64,582 short of our goal of \$4,000,000.

The missions and education committees were able to attain 100% of their budgeted revenue due to savings realized by *New Horizons* and the Committee on Coordination.

The 2015 Thank Offering was a success. Contributions by year’s end (included in 2015 Worldwide Outreach giving) totalled \$841,500. An additional \$190,630 was received in January (credited to Worldwide Outreach in 2016), and further Thank Offering receipts are still expected. This pushes the total above our goal of \$1,000,000.

# PUBLIC POLICY

[Continued from page 9]

## New Government Policies

Emerging policy regarding sexual identity is another source of pressure against biblical views about marriage and sexuality. Efforts in a number of states and localities and legislation in Congress seek to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected categories under civil rights law. This would privilege someone's subjective choice to identify as a gender other than their biological sex; a cross-dressing male would have to be granted access to the women's restroom, for example. Public schools would have to accept teachers undergoing gender transition treatments, introducing young children to a topic their parents may not consider age-appropriate.

In the past, civil rights law was enacted to prohibit discrimination on the basis of immutable characteristics such as race, in the wake of long-standing, systematic oppression. But unlike the immutable characteristics of race, sexual orientation and gender identity are internal, subjective, fluid, and expressed in conduct.

The perceived momentum of these new policies regarding sexual identification—making their passage “inevitable” by a number of accounts—has led some to support such proposals in exchange for religious liberty protections they believe would otherwise be lost in the future. The state of Utah did just that in 2015, creating a sexual orientation and gender identity policy, with some religious exemptions. Now efforts are under way to replicate it elsewhere.

The Utah policy has been portrayed by some as an admirable balance of competing interests, where both sides win. In reality, the policy concedes the central issue. It elevates sexual orientation and gender identity to the same legal status as race, thereby relegating the biblical view of marriage to the status of racial bigotry. It portrays the truth about marriage and sexual complemen-

tarity as discrimination, merely tolerated for the time being. The outcome puts a mainstream religious belief in a precarious position, and leaves an unstable foundation for religious freedom. Further, from a Christian perspective, it is problematic to call for special solicitude in law for categories that entail rejecting God's design of male and female and that are defined largely by conduct the Bible deems sinful.

Moreover, “inevitable” is not a category in which Christians should think about social trends. Commitment to prayer and action is incompatible with such resignation. Recent events offer encouragement. In November, Houston voters defeated a sexual identity policy by a wide margin. We must be clear that all people deserve respect, but laws like these would create negative consequences for religious freedom.

## Expanding Legal Interpretations

Meanwhile, current law has been manipulated to advance the new policy orthodoxy. Wherever government regulates—an increasingly broad realm—the potential for such pressure exists.

Regulations prohibiting sex discrimination in education are a prime example. The federal Title IX policy was designed to increase educational opportunity for women and girls, and it has particularly been applied in college athletics to advance funding parity for women's sports. Most recently, however, the Obama administration has reinterpreted sex discrimination to include sexual identity. Enforcement actions by the U.S. Department of Education have indicated that schools must not make distinctions based on students' actual or perceived gender identity, even in the context of high school locker rooms.

This new interpretation is problematic for Christian schools that teach conformity with God's design of human beings as male and female and that sexual relations are reserved for marriage. Not surprisingly, many religious universities have sought, and received, from the U.S. Department of Education waivers from these problematic

aspects of its new Title IX interpretation. But now the Human Rights Campaign has prevailed upon the Department of Education to expose schools that have received religious exemption. Such disclosure has been an element of previous pressure campaigns to intimidate those who disagree with new perspectives on marriage and sexuality.

Another challenge is emerging from the new health care law. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has proposed regulations that would effectively require health care professionals to offer, and insurers to pay for, gender transition treatments or sex change operations. Such a directive would disregard medical expertise and moral conviction about how best to treat a person suffering from gender dysphoria. Faith-based groups submitted comments to HHS on their concerns about the proposed rule. Whether they will be heeded remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

The Bible teaches that truth exists, and there is a created reality. Even if a legislature or court says otherwise, the created truth about marriage will not change. Even if public policy asserts that gender is a social construct rather than a biological reality, it will not alter the truth of Genesis 1.

Our confessional task as Christians is clear when it comes to marriage and sexual identity. Preserving the freedom to make that confession publicly and in our callings is one of the most pressing policy challenges we face, while working toward the day when law will better reflect the way that God has made the world for the good of all. □

*The author is vice president for the Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity at the Heritage Foundation, a fellow at Reformed Theological Seminary—Washington, and a member of the PCA.*

*A related resource: “Protecting Your Right to Serve: How Religious Ministries Can Meet New Challenges without Changing Their Witness,” by Eric N. Kniffin, available at [www.Heritage.org](http://www.Heritage.org).*

# NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

## UPDATE

### CHURCHES

• On December 11, **Covenant Presbyterian Church** in Buford, Ga., formerly in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S., was received as a congregation of the OPC by the Presbytery of the Southeast.

### MINISTERS

• **Christopher B. Strelvel, Sr.**, was installed as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Buford, Ga. (having been its pastor in the RPCUS) on December 11.

• On October 20, the Presbytery of New York and New England dissolved the pastoral relationship between **David M. DeRienzo** and Second Parish OPC in Portland, Maine, and called him to be an evangelist, to serve as a military chaplain.

• **David R. Holmlund**, formerly the pastor of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church in Dover, N.H., was installed as an evangelist by the Presbytery of Philadelphia on January 15 to serve as its regional home missionary.

• On November 16, the OPC Japan Mission, acting as a commission of the Presbytery of Ohio, installed **Stewart E. “Woody” Lauer** as a missionary evangelist in Japan.

• On January 30, the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic installed former foreign missionary **Albert J. Tricarico, Jr.**, as associate general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

### MILESTONES

• Former OP minister **Charles D. Abbate**, 48, died from brain cancer on January 19, leaving behind his wife, Cheryl, and their five children.

• **Lois Cook Stanton**, 89, the widow of OP minister Donald F. Stanton, died on January 9.

## LETTERS

### COVENANT PREACHING

Editor:

I read with interest Robert Drake’s three-part series, “Covenant Preaching.” It left me with many questions about “gospel preaching” and “anti-Christian sermons.” For instance, would Calvin’s sermons be “anti-Christian”? Well, given their theocentric nature (as described by Walter Kaiser), it would seem so. Or would Christ’s ministry be a “gospel preaching” ministry? Given an analysis of the book of Mark (courtesy of Rick Phillips of Reformation 21), it would seem not to be. Every single sermon does not have to be a gospel sermon for the tenor of a ministry to be gospel centered.

Shawn C. Mathis  
Morrison, Colo.

### FILTHY RAGS?

Editor:

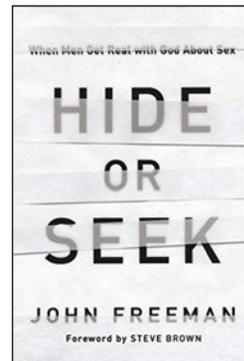
Thank you for including Jonathan Cruse’s article, “Worship Words: Selecting Great Hymn Texts,” in the December issue. I found it to be well written and edifying. The one quibble I had with it was some of the imagery in “Our Advocate.” I always thought that the elect of God appear righteous and holy to God from the moment of their justification. This is quite different than appearing before the judgment throne in filthy rags.

Brian Wortman  
Sheridan, Ind.

## REVIEWS

*Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex*, by John Freeman. New Growth Press, 2014. Paperback, 144 pages, list price \$17.99. Reviewed by OP pastor A. Craig Troxel.

There is nothing simplistic about this book. Complicated problems are not



trivialized. Sins are not stereotyped or understated, and superficial solutions are not offered. John Freeman gives us realism, stemming from thirty years of dealing

with men who have grappled with various forms of sexual brokenness. Descriptions are sketched out in edgy clarity (e.g., pornography statistics).

Any man who deals with sexual temptation (and what man doesn’t?) will find himself in this book. Christian men know that preserving sexual purity is like trying to stay healthy during an epidemic. And when they fail in their efforts, the one thing they would never, ever dream of doing is talking about it, especially at church. This is not just a problem. This is our problem.

John Freeman has been working with men who know the struggle of sexual temptation and sin, and the pain of sexual brokenness, especially the overwhelming feeling of fighting a losing battle. Whether their conflict is with lustful thoughts, pornography, or same-sex attraction, many Christian men feel helpless under the siege of seemingly irresistible temptations. Such men often lose hope in the power of the gospel for real change, and they become increasingly skeptical that God’s forgiveness will last much longer.

If such patterns of failure continue, Freeman observes, these men become “God-haters”—taking out their anger on others, themselves, and God. Secondly, they become “idol-makers”—giving their hearts to the false promises of a counterfeit love. Thirdly, they become “game-players”—trying to manage a hidden life at odds with their outward Christian mask. Meanwhile their corroded heart whittles away at their confidence, crippling their spiritual effectiveness.

Freeman connects the dots between what a man thinks is unseen and what inevitably seeps into the rest of his life. King David once thought similarly.

This is where the light of gospel enters, exposing the lies of sexual failure and illuminating the truth that God has not left us powerless. His grace is sufficient for forgiveness and transformation. It nurtures repentance and emboldens our faith that would claim the greatness of God's love in Christ, so that we stop hiding our sin and start seeking God's help, with genuine integrity and transparency.

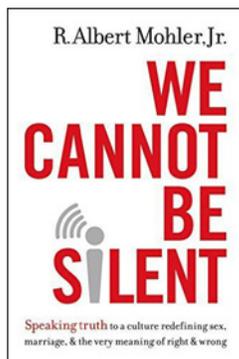
There are a few weaknesses in this book. I expected a discussion of hypocrisy in the section on "game-players." More could have been said on the infusions of sanctifying grace that the Spirit applies through the means of grace.

As for strengths, Freeman refuses to serve up sugarcoated sentimentalism. Rather, he candidly (but not too graphically) discusses sexual sin and diagnoses lust. Freeman wisely emphasizes Christian community. This book is a good word—an accessible, healthy, and encouraging word—especially on Christ's power in us. It is always heartwarming to hear that Christ "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."

Highly recommended.

***We Cannot Be Silent*, by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Nelson Books, 2015. Hardback, 213 pages, list price \$24.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Shane Lems.**

In the past few years, there have been a number of helpful books on homosexuality written from a conservative Christian perspective. In *We Cannot Be Silent*, Baptist leader Albert Mohler talks about homosexuality, but he also does more: he explains the cultural and historical background of the sexual revolution, which gave birth to the homosexual agenda. In a compelling manner, Mohler says that the seeds of the current homosexual agenda were planted in the nineteenth century, when Euro-



pean intellectuals began to redefine love and sex. The seeds were fertilized in the American sexual revolution of the 1960s, which went hand in hand with a moral revolution. In other words, the current American homosexual agenda has grown so quickly because the American cultural soil has been and is ripe for such growth.

In one interesting section of this book, Mohler highlights the gay agenda from around thirty years ago. An organized effort was made to remove stereotypes about gays, make them look good, portray them as victims, and argue that gays are born that way. Mohler argues that this agenda, combined with a general lack of morality, has resulted in the sexual mess we find ourselves in today. He even explains how the American judicial system has been involved in this sexual revolution. Readers who are interested in the legal side of this topic will find much to think about in this book.

Mohler notes the huge ramifications of the sexual revolution: it includes the home, children, businesses, schools, sports, the military, voluntary associations, churches, day care centers, government workers, public facilities, and so forth. One of the many reasons Christians should be concerned about the sexual revolution is that it affects every area of our lives. Some may accuse Mohler of using scare tactics in this book, or exaggerating his case, but these are real things about which we need to think!

Mohler doesn't just explain, examine, and criticize America's sexual conundrum. He also provides a brief overview of the Bible's teaching on sex and admits

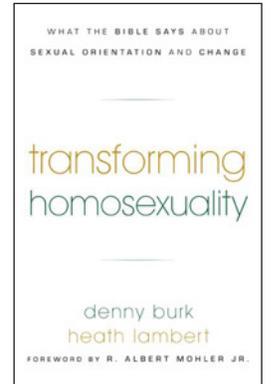
that the church hasn't always done a great job discussing and defending biblical teaching in this area. Mohler gives the church wise advice on how to navigate in our sexually charged culture. There is even a chapter that answers some common questions about homosexuality.

Mohler gives us a lot of information in this book, which is difficult to summarize. It certainly is a great resource to help Christians think biblically and reasonably about this

pressing topic. Most Christians who are looking for a sane voice on sexual morality will appreciate this detailed book.

***Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change*, by Denny Burk and Heath Lambert. P&R, 2015. Paperback, 135 pages, list price \$9.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Daniel F. Patterson.**

Since the great majority of Christian books on homosexuality tackle the topic of homosexual behavior, this book fills an important gap by treating the ethics of



same-sex attraction and how the church can minister to Christians who struggle with it. The authors accomplish these two goals admirably as they divide the book into two parts, consisting of two chapters in Part I and three chapters in Part II.

In Part I, the authors carefully argue that homosexual desire, not simply homosexual behavior, is sinful. This is a needed contribution to the current discussion in the church because there is a growing number of orthodox Christians who believe that the Bible does not reject homosexual attraction *per se*, but only homosexual behavior. The authors offer clear biblical evidence that *desire* can, in and of itself, be sinful, particularly if the object of one's desire is forbidden.

Another interesting topic is the difference between Jesus' temptations and ours. Although the authors recognize that it is not necessarily sinful to be tempted (since that would implicate Jesus in sin), they do brilliantly argue, on the basis of James 1:13–15, that temptation to sin that arises from our own sinful nature is itself sinful. This intersects with the topic of same-sex desire, in that such desire originates from within, not without.

Part II boldly, yet compassionately, sets forth biblical strategies to help those who

## Mid-America Seminary Interns

Churches are encouraged to apply for a seminary intern through the OPC's Committee on Christian Education. Please also contact Mid-America Reformed Seminary if you are interested in having a seminary student serve in your congregation. Contact Rev. Mark Vander Hart, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 229 Seminary Drive, Dyer, IN 46311-1069; mvanderhart@midamerica.edu; tel. 219-864-2400, ext. 408; fax 219-864-2410.

struggle with same-sex attraction change. In chapter 3, the authors address five popular myths. Perhaps the most harmful and persistent myth perpetuated by Christians is that the goal of change is heterosexual desire. This, the authors argue, is the goal of a dangerous, secular therapy that is embraced by many Christians, called "reparative therapy." The authors are quick to point out that the Bible never portrays homosexuality in general to be good, but rather homosexuality within the confines of marriage. In the authors' own words: "What the Bible commands, therefore, is not homosexuality, but holiness" (p. 75).

Chapters 4 and 5 address repentance as the biblical path to change and the church as the place where such change can take place. It is also at this point in the book that one realizes that much more work needs to be done by thoughtful Christian therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists to help us better understand the person struggling with same-sex attraction. With little help being offered by secular psychology on this front, Christian professionals need to think carefully about how best to aid Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction. Burk and Lambert give us a good start, but it is not enough. Work needs to be done on biological, psychological, and sociological contributions to same-sex attraction, all the while holding to the sinfulness of not just homosexual behavior, but homosexual desire as well. Repentance and ministry are greatly aided by understanding.

*Gamechangers: Key Figures of the Christian Church*, by Robert Letham. Christian Focus, 2015. Paperback, 208 pages, list price \$14.99. Reviewed by Prof. Alan D. Strange. (Abridged from review in *MJT*, 2015, vol. 26.)

Bob Letham brings a wealth of academic and pastoral experience to bear in this gem of a book. Stem-

ming from a series of occasional lectures that he gave when serving as an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor in Wilmington, Delaware, Letham traverses in a brief span (twelve fairly short but meaty chapters) the whole of church history through a select number of figures that the publishers call "Gamechangers."

What particularly marked the ancient church—development of the doctrines of God, Christ, and man—is evident in the seminal figures Letham treats. Athanasius (ca. 295–373) defended the doctrine of the full deity of Christ against Arius and all comers, and properly stood "against the world." Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–391), as one of the three Cappadocian fathers (together with the brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa), also defended the full deity of the Spirit and pioneered a way of thinking about God so as to preserve both the unity and the plurality of the Godhead. Augustine (354–430), as the capstone of the patristic period, recaptured the Pauline definition of predestination and grace so as to set the plate for the rest of church history.

Charles the Great (741–814), or Charlemagne, is the only one treated herein who is not a theologian, though he headed a kingdom that would later develop into the Holy Roman Empire. The stagnancy of this period began giving way by the time of Anselm (1033–1109) and Aquinas (1225–1274). The former developed the doctrine of atonement in a way that it had not been previously (the

ancient church having focused more on the person of Christ than his work). The latter developed systematic theology as a whole, with an unfortunate sacramentalism in place of a developed pneumatology.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) discovered that the righteousness that God requires is given freely by him as a gift, received by faith alone. This understanding of definitive forgiveness now (not in the future, after being thoroughly sanctified by purgative fires) led to a Reformation that embraced Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), John Calvin (1509–1564), and many others. Bullinger showed that, even among the Reformed, the approach was not monolithic, as seen in his doctrine

of predestination; Calvin, influenced particularly by Bucer of Strasbourg, developed the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in a way that the church had earlier not done.

John Wesley (1703–1791) focused on the Christian life, though embracing perfectionism. J. W. Nevin (1803–1886) sought to recover the balance of a more churchly approach, although one might argue that while he recovered certain needed elements of the Reformation (e.g., Calvin's Eucharistic emphasis), he did so in an imbalanced way. Similarly, Karl Barth (1886–1968) sought to oppose the immanentism of liberalism with the transcendence of God that he found in several places, including Calvin (though some would argue that he "gave away the store" in the process).

Letham helpfully provides after his treatment of each thinker a short list of both primary and secondary sources for further reading. Each chapter is relatively brief, addressing the life and times of the "gamechanger," as well as the substance of his work and the impact of his thought. This would be a fine book for a young adult or an adult Christian education class. Exposure to, and understanding of, church history needs to figure more prominently in the church's program of Christian education. Letham's book is an excellent entrée into it.





# Short-Term Missions & Disaster Response

The Committee on Diaconal Ministries | The Committee on Foreign Missions | The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension  
of THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”*

**I Peter 4:10 (ESV)**

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- Help churches and mission fields find individuals and teams to assist them with short-term ministry projects
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