

Preparation and Discussion Guide for  
**DIVISION AND REUNION**  
*A Reflection on American Presbyterianism*

Presented by Union Presbyterian Seminary  
Richmond, Virginia and Charlotte, North Carolina

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### **Introduction**

Thank you for your willingness to view and/or lead a discussion on Union Presbyterian Seminary's film, *Division and Reunion: A Reflection on American Presbyterianism*. *Division and Reunion* is rich with details. However, we hope you will look for the broad themes in Presbyterian history that unite and divide us.

*Division and Reunion* is about 42 minutes long and is divided into eight sections:

- *Introduction by Brian Blount*
- *Division and Reunion*
- *The Family Tree*
- *The Frontier*
- *Slavery*
- *Interpretation*
- *Path to Reunion*
- *Afterword by Condoleezza Rice and Brian Blount*

It is possible to view the film in one viewing but it is probably better to divide the viewing of the film into two parts, making for two classes of one hour each. If you decide that a single viewing suits your needs better, then ninety minutes would probably be needed. Whether you decide on two classes or one, a good break for discussion is after "The Frontier" before dealing with the issues of slavery and interpretation of scripture. There is a scene selection in the DVD menu and marker in the film at this point.

### **Possible Uses of *Division and Reunion***

This film could be used in a variety of ways. It could be used as part of a series on Presbyterian history, in officer training, new member classes, introduction to Presbyterian theology, as the first session of classes about current issues in the Presbyterian Church (USA) or as a stand-alone class.

## Discussion Leader Preparation

- View the film before it is presented to any group. Write down notes as you view the film.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 (printed at the end of this document), the definitions and discussion questions below. Choose the definitions and the questions that you will use and/or write alternative questions. There is an excellent free downloadable guide, *The Art of Asking Good Questions: The Role of Questions in Discussion* by Joyce MacKichan Walker on “The Thoughtful Christian” website: <http://bit.ly/joycewalker>. The footnotes in a study Bible are often helpful in understanding a passage of scripture, as is reading different translations. There is a good short commentary on this passage by Dr. Holly Hearon at <http://bit.ly/hollyhearon>. You may find additional help at <http://textweek.com> by going to the scripture guide and selecting the scripture. You may also find *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* by Tom Wright helpful (<http://amzn.com/0664227929>).
- Look up any terms that you do not know. For Biblical terms and concepts and background on books of the Bible, the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* is an excellent resource (<http://amzn.com/0061469068>).
- Think about your audience. What do they need in order to be comfortable with one another? How do you want to guide the discussion?
- Consider dividing into small groups of threes and fours to answer the first question about people’s initial response to the film in order to break the ice and enable more participation later in the class.
- Remember that groups of people respond to questions better if they can read the questions and are given a few moments to answer the questions silently and individually.
- Remember that you do not have to know all the answers to participants’ questions and it is perfectly fine to say, “I don’t know.”
- Use 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 at the end of both class one and two, if you are dividing the class into two parts. If you are doing one class, include 2 Corinthians at the end.

## Room, Equipment and Supplies

- Set up the room so all can see the screen easily and discuss the film together. An open rectangle or a semi-circle is the best for viewing and discussion.
- Before the class, make sure the television, DVD, or laptop remotes have fresh batteries. Test the equipment to make sure the equipment functions properly together and that you know how to use the equipment.
- Have nametags for each person and a marker with which to print his/her name.
- Ensure that there are Bibles or copies of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 for each participant.
- Provide copies for each participant of the definitions and discussion questions that you want to use.
- Have enough Bibles available for participants or copy the scripture onto the handout that you provide the class.

## A Lesson Plan

1. Welcome and open with prayer.
2. To create comfort and ease in discussion, ask people to share their name and one recent blessing in their lives if it is a smaller group. If it is a larger group, ask them to share their name and a blessing with those nearest them.
3. Introduce the film *Division and Reunion: A Reflection on American Presbyterianism*. Note that the film's goal is to overview the broad themes in Presbyterian history that unite and divide us.
4. After viewing portions of the film, invite people to silently answer the selected questions for the portion of the film that has been viewed. (See questions below.)
5. Read aloud the questions in order and invite participation. Don't feel like you immediately have to fill up the silence. If a question is a complete dud, move on.
6. Read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 aloud. Ask participants to silently answer questions on 2 Corinthians below. Discuss the questions.
7. Share joys and concerns and close with prayer.

## Definitions

**Polity:** a form of governance

**Elder:** elected by the congregation to govern the church. Elders are to be people of mature faith who oversee the spiritual health and well being of a congregation.

**Calvinistic, Calvinism:** These terms refer to John Calvin (born July 10, 1509, died May 27, 1564) was a French theologian in the Protestant movement. He wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible and *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536). The *Institutes* were very influential on Protestant beliefs about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the nature of the church. Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches were historically rooted in Calvin's theology. Some important themes within the Calvinism tradition are the beliefs in:

- The sovereignty of God
- God's election or choosing people to believe in Jesus Christ and to spread the Gospel
- The depravity of humanity (that even are best actions are tainted with self-interest and sin) and our inability to save ourselves from our own or societal sin
- God's grace that through the Holy Spirit precedes our faith and trust in Jesus Christ
- The centrality of scripture
- Personal righteousness and social justice

**Westminster Standards:** The Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms

**Inerrancy:** In reference to the reading and interpretation of scripture, “inerrancy” views scripture as without error because the Bible is a direct word from God.

**Interpretation of scripture:** A literalistic approach to scripture tends towards viewing scripture as “God-breathed” and is the word of God for every age as it is written.

A more moderate view of interpreting scripture is that the Bible is the word of God given to human beings who reflect a particular time and culture. The Holy Spirit is at work to help us hear what God is saying now in our particular time.

For both approaches, understanding the meaning of the original languages and the historical context is important.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General questions that could be used for reflection and discussion regardless of which portion of the film the class views.**

1. What is your first reaction to the information presented in *Division and Reunion*?
2. What patterns do you see arising from our Presbyterian church history as represented in *Division and Reunion*?
3. What’s the most important thing to you about being a Presbyterian?
  - a. How do you think that characteristic is reflected and/or challenged by what you’ve seen in the film?

**Questions related to the sections “Division and Reunion” through “The Frontier.”**

1. As the territory in the United States and the church in America grew, there were tensions between adherence to doctrine and flexibility to meet the needs of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the frontier. Stricter Calvinists wanted to maintain the high educational standards and beliefs of the Presbyterian Church. An emphasis in Calvinism is that since God is sovereign, God chooses particular people to have faith in Jesus Christ, thereby lessening the emphasis on evangelism and making a personal commitment to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is identified with the Old School in earlier Presbyterian history.

The New School tended towards looser standards on doctrine and more towards humanity's ability to choose to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (free will) and to choose what is good.

What do you think the Holy Spirit's role is in bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ? What role do you think human free will has?

2. In American Presbyterianism there are important standards and themes that run through our history. Read the themes below and answer the following questions. Do any of these standards surprise you? What strikes you as necessary in promoting a healthy church that is faithful to following Jesus Christ?

- a. Presbyterians have a distinct polity of representative church governance that tends to bring people together instead of staying in our own corner of the world. This polity is not a democracy. Instead, elders are elected by congregations not to represent the congregation's views but instead to prayerfully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern God's will for that time and situation.
- b. Since the Reformation, the reading, study and guidance of God's word in scripture has been central. It is primarily in reading and studying scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we come to know God's will.
- c. Presbyterian polity has emphasized that the voice of the minority must be heard and protected, and the will of the majority to guide the church. The minority viewpoint is important because through the minority the Holy Spirit may be speaking to the church.
- d. Argument, or the hearing of different and divergent views, is part of the process of hearing God's will. When an assembly of elders is open to the Holy Spirit and willing to listen to one another, a fresh understanding of scripture and God's will arise.
- e. American Presbyterians have lived in tension between order and freedom. Our form of government promotes an order that, at its best, promotes cooperation and unity in doing God's work in the world.
- f. Presbyterians believe that Christ is the head of the church and that through Christ's love and forgiveness, we are made one in Christ. Unity can be found both in holding the same doctrines and/or loving one another as Christ has loved us. Presbyterians tend towards either loving community or doctrine. Except in early American Presbyterianism when people knew each other personally, loving community and unity of doctrine has been difficult to sustain.

**Questions relating to "Slavery," "Interpretation," and "Path to Reunion"**

1. With the enormous division in the United States over slavery, there were different approaches to the interpretation of scripture that were used for and against slavery.

One approach looked at the Biblical passages in which the ownership of slaves and the treatment of slaves was addressed. Since people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament owned slaves and God did not forbid it, then slavery was part of a God-given social order. This approach tended towards literalism and promoted a spirituality that separated one's faith from economics and politics.

The other approach to the interpretation of scripture extrapolated from what Jesus taught and applied Jesus' teaching to the issue of slavery. Since Jesus taught that we should love others as we love ourselves, then that teaching undermines owning another human being and regarding them as only partly human. Other New Testament passages such as Galatians 3:28 were applied to the issue of slavery: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

- a. What do you view as appropriate ways to interpret scripture?
- b. In your experience, how has scripture been used to apply to moral, ethical, economic and political issues?
- c. How can listening to various interpretations of scripture and open disagreement be a means of hearing God's will in a fresh way?

### **Questions relating to 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 (NRSV)**

*<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.*

*<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The Corinthian congregation was full of turmoil and conflict. Leadership, sexuality morality, lawsuits, spiritual gifts, worship, Paul's leadership and core beliefs were among the many topics of controversy. There were letters back and forth between Paul and the

Corinthian congregation. In 2 Corinthians, scholars believe that we have parts of several letters, among which was an angry, harsh letter from Paul.

Therefore, when Paul wrote about new creation and reconciliation, he was not detached emotionally or spiritually. He had passion about the issues but, above all, Paul had passion for Christ and the way that Christ had transformed him and, indeed, the world.

Reconciliation is not sweeping the issues under the carpet nor avoiding conflict nor simply agreeing to disagree. Reconciliation involves the extremely hard work of remaining in conversation and relationship with others, refusing to retaliate or hold onto grudges. As Jesus teaches, it is seeking out those with whom we disagree and seeking forgiveness. (See Matthew 5:21-26; 38-48; 7:1-5, 12) Reconciliation requires soul searching, sacrifice and much prayer. Ultimately, it is the incredible gift of the love of Jesus Christ active in our lives that empowers us to seek reconciliation.

1. Is there a time in your life when you experienced forgiveness and reconciliation? If so, what was it? How did it change your perception of the person or situation?
2. What helps human beings remain in loving community even when they disagree?
3. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, what might be different ways to understand our being ambassadors of reconciliation as individuals, as a community of faith and in relationship to social issues?

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For further reading:

- Presbyterian Historical Society: <http://www.history.pcusa.org>
- *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* by James Smylie: <http://amzn.com/0664500013>
- *Presbyterians in the South* by E.T. Thompson: <http://bit.ly/etthompson>
- *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* by Bradley J. Longfield: <http://amzn.com/066423156X>
- *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* by film participant Sean Michael Lucas: <http://amzn.com/0875526632>
- *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* by film participant Amy Plantinga Pauw: <http://amzn.com/0802849849>
- *Southern Crossroads: Perspectives on Religion and Culture* by film participant Walter Conser: <http://amzn.com/0813124948>
- *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South* by film participant Erskine Clarke: <http://amzn.com/0804210896>

- *Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine* by film participant Cynthia Rigby: <http://amzn.com/1426758146>
- *Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs* by film participant John Kuykendall: <http://amzn.com/0804209855>
- *Can I Get a Witness?: Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women* by film participant Marcia Riggs: <http://amzn.com/1570751137>
- *Romans: Interpretation* by film participant Paul J. Achtemeier: <http://amzn.com/0664234380>
- *African American Christian Worship* by film participant Melva Costen: <http://amzn.com/0687646227>
- *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* by film participant Mark Valeri: <http://amzn.com/0691162174>