

SPECIAL EDITION

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REAFFIRMATIONS OF 1973

The Church Today

The Church Reborn

CONCERNING HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was first constituted of presbyters who affirmed their belief in, and obedience to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God written. These assembled themselves into presbyteries for the purpose of maintaining and enlarging their witness through a church so committed.

To this day, the Constitution of the PCUS declares and defines the Bible to be the Word of God written.

However, some present presbyteries have not disciplined themselves under the Word of God by requiring their members to accept the Scriptures as defined in the Confession of Faith.

Indeed, the 1972 General Assembly did reject the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture as defined in the Church's Constitution and declined to place its employees under obedience to God's Word.

We reaffirm our ordination vows and our commitment to the Scriptures as the Word of God, accepting the teaching of the Constitution of our Church that Chapter I of the Confession of Faith on the Holy Scripture, along with the parallel sections of the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, do indeed affirm the plenary and verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture, calling us to obedience to the Old and New Testaments as "The Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself." Scriptures, being self-attesting, are not subject to the criticism or preconceptions of man, nor may they be interpreted to suit the situations and fancies of man.

Not only were the acts of God revelatory, but the very words that recorded and interpreted His acts in Holy Scripture were inspired of God. The Bible is the Word of God written. We therefore reject as inadequate the so-called "witness and instrument" theory of Scripture.

God is absolute truth and in his Word He means to reveal and not to confuse us. Therefore the words of Scripture are to be received as truth in their accepted and ordinary meaning.

CONCERNING REFORMED DOCTRINE

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was constituted as a church in the affirmation of belief in, and adherence to the system of Reformed doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

To this day, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms are still the official doctrinal standards of the PCUS.

Nevertheless, some Presbyteries and Sessions have not disciplined themselves to require adherence to these standards.

We reaffirm our ordination obligation to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. We are committed to the principle that the following cardinal tenets, in which we reaffirm our belief, are a part of this system of doctrine:

God is the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

God created Adam, the first individual man of history.

Adam was the progenitor of all human beings

Moreover, the General Assembly has seated members not ordained under these requirements, and it has appointed and continued Committees that have not always adhered to these standards. Most recently it has moved to alter these standards in a fundamental fashion by authorizing a Confessional Committee to write a new confession and suggest a "book of confessions."

who followed him by ordinary generation.

God entered into a covenant of works with Adam, which covenant Adam broke by disobeying God.

Adam was also the representative of the human race, and all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

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CONCERNING THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) when constituted determined to form no entangling alliances with outside councils or organizations, maintaining that Christ alone was Head of the Church and that He should be guide and ruler at every level of Church authority.

The Constitution of the Church still declares that Christ is the sole Lawgiver in Zion and the Head of the Church.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly continues to maintain membership in the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches with staff members and employees of the PCUS taking directions from and being led by alien authorities through or by such Councils of Churches, thus sometimes placing alien leadership over the Constitution of the Church.

We reaffirm our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the Church and the sole Lawgiver in Zion. We would seek fellowship with those Christian bodies in America which believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God written and faithfully adhere to the Reformed tradition and join with us in humble obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. We deny that the National Council of Churches or World Council of Churches are spokesmen to or for us.

CONCERNING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), when first established, declared its mission to be the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.

Further defining this mission, the Constitution of the PCUS declares that "Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints . . .," "the functions of the Church are to proclaim, to administer and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in Scripture."

Today the Assembly, through its boards, agencies and committees has replaced the Church's mandate to be first-of-all missionary and evangelistic, with a primary emphasis on social, economic and political mission.

We reaffirm the doctrine of our founding fathers that the primary mission of His Church is given us in the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. We rededicate ourselves to the task of proclaiming the Gospel throughout all the world and nurturing His chosen ones in the faith.

CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was established on a Reformed and Presbyterian Constitution, a salient principle of which is that those who voluntarily place themselves under this Constitution are pledged to defend and support it.

Today professors in PCUS institutions and recent General Assemblies have sought to promote new confessions of faith. To this end they have used funds and personnel of the denomination in a manner which would destroy rather than protect and defend our Constitution.

We reaffirm our allegiance to the historic Constitution of our Church and lament any effort to destroy it by means of alien confessions or polity.

CONCERNING EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) when constituted established the Bible and Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as its basic educational documents.

The present Constitution of the Church still declares these documents to be "the basic textbook . . . the primary teaching material for the educational program."

Nevertheless, teachers in some of the institutions of the Church, along with certain boards and agencies, produce, circulate and promote Sunday School curricula, prayer books and other materials many of which are out of accord with the Scriptures and incompatible with basic teachings of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

CONCERNING THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was organized as a distinctively spiritual communion and our founding fathers emphasized that it was to be kept separate from the State.

The Constitution of the PCUS calls upon us as citizens to be obedient to the laws of civil government for Christ's sake, refraining from meddling with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth unless by humble petition in cases extraordinary.

Nevertheless, agencies of the General Assembly have deviated from this basic doctrine of the Church, and the Assembly itself has supported civil disobedience. Moreover, said agencies and the Assembly have supported the violation of civil law, have unfairly criticized the foreign policies of the United States, and have endorsed programs designed to incite rebellion against constituted authority.

CONCERNING CHURCH UNION

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was organized with a distinctly Reformed Confession of Faith and Presbyterian form of government.

The present Constitution allows union only with other Reformed bodies, "of like faith and order."

Nevertheless, the General Assembly continues to promote union with organizations that are not truly Reformed bodies and/or do not have the Presbyterian form of government. In so doing, it expends benevolent funds for the purpose of liquidating the PCUS and establishing another church organization.

CONCERNING ETHICS

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) in its first Assembly adopted the ethics of the Bible as set down in the Decalogue and teachings of Jesus.

These ethics are still a part of the Constitution of the PCUS.

Nevertheless, recent General Assemblies have departed from God-revealed ethics and approved the system known as "situation ethics" in such decisions as the support of abortion for social or economic reasons.

We reaffirm our belief in the Bible, the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms as the basic teaching materials for the educational curricula of the Church. We commend the teaching in educational institutions that the entire world is under an all-sovereign God and that His Word should rule over man and his culture.

We reaffirm our devotion to the Church as a spiritual institution knowing that the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is not of this world. We acknowledge our obligation as citizens to obey duly constituted civil authorities, limiting our relationship as a Church to the area of "humble petition" according to the Scriptures. We rejoice in the religious freedom guaranteed us under the Constitution of the United States of America, and we would support those in lawful authority by our prayers and sympathy.

We reaffirm our allegiance to the historic Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and we seek to be found in the historic tradition of this Church. We will contemplate organic union only with those who conform to this historic doctrine and order.

We reaffirm our acceptance of the ethical standards of the Scriptures as given in the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus. We commend the commentary upon this system of ethics in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. We lament the support of "situation ethics" in the literature and practice of the Church. For example, we abhor the Assembly's condoning abortion for economic or social reasons, remembering that God alone is the giver of life and that He said, "Thou shalt not kill."

CONCERNING DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was formed by congregations and judicatories that accepted a system of discipline.

To this day rules of discipline are provided for maintaining a church of pure doctrine and Presbyterian order.

Nevertheless, many judicatories have ceased to exercise discipline over their members and have received members who do not subscribe to cardinal doctrines of the Reformed Faith. In some instances judicatories have refused to censure presbyters who openly support atheistic political systems. Other judicatories have refused to censure teachers who teach and publish their anti-biblical beliefs.

Moreover, the General Assembly has at times constituted itself with participating members of other denominations, and in 1972 refused to require its employees to be in obedience to the Scriptures as defined in the Constitution.

We reaffirm the conviction that the proper exercise of discipline both locally and regionally is necessary in the courts of the Church. By the firm, yet humble administration of discipline, the Church is sustained and maintained in purity of doctrine and morals.

CONCERNING UNION PRESBYTERIES

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was established with a system of presbyteries each of which was a separate unhindered unit aligned only with the PCUS.

The permanent Judicial Commission of the PCUS did as late as 1969 advise that union presbyteries would be unconstitutional should enabling legislation be approved by only a majority of the presbyteries instead of the required three-fourths.

Nevertheless, the Assembly has approved such an amendment to the Book of Church Order without the approval of three-fourths of the presbyteries and has seated Commissioners from such union presbyteries even though these Commissioners have not taken the mandatory vows required of church officers in the PCUS.

We reaffirm our allegiance to the form of government upon which the PCUS was founded and acknowledge ourselves in obedience to our brethren in the Lord when these brethren are truly in the Lord through obedience to Him as He speaks in His Word and by ordination under the same vows historically taken by ministers, elders and deacons in the PCUS. Ordination vows taken under "Books of Confessions" alien to our own or non-Reformed creeds are not acceptable credentials for such ministers, elders and deacons.

CONCERNING THE CENTRALIZATION OF POWER

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was founded with a polity which recognized, as a keystone, the parity of the eldership and the right of believers to elect their officers under Christ.

It is still a basic principle of the Constitution of the PCUS that power to govern in the visible church is derived from Christ through His people.

Nevertheless, recent General Assemblies have abridged this privilege through reorganization and restructuring. The Assembly centralized power in the General Executive Board and violated this principle when it limited the nominating and administrative privileges of those in the elective offices of our Assembly.

We reaffirm our confidence in the decentralized committee method of administering the Assembly's business as best expressive of our original constitutional polity. We object to the centralization of power expressed in the General Executive Board.

CONCERNING RESTRUCTURE OF SYNODS AND PRESBYTERIES

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was constituted as a system of presbyteries which freely and by their own vote associated themselves together.

We reaffirm the principles of parity, association and service upon which synods and presbyteries were established prior to the restructuring of 1972.

The present Constitution recognizes the right of all judicatories to proper respective representation and voice in self-determination.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly has presumed to restructure synods and presbyteries against the express desire of some of these judicatories, and has laid plans for the complete restructuring of the denomination without consideration of, or receiving the advice of, congregations and presbyteries.

CONCERNING PROPERTY

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) when first constituted recognized the right of local churches to own and control their property.

Local ownership of property is still a constitutional privilege for the local church.

Nevertheless, the Assembly has recognized union presbyteries, some of which have sought to introduce alien concepts of property ownership. It has thus illegally placed PCUS churches under different rules of property ownership such as those of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

We reaffirm the right of local churches, without interference of higher judicatories, to own and control their property as stewards of God who entrusted it to them.

COMMITMENT

We pledge our love and fellowship as brothers in Christ with all those who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but may, in this present time and situation, follow a different course of action, thus committing ourselves to continued fellowship in love with all men of good will and like conviction of the truth — all for the glory of God and the unity of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Believing that unless two be agreed they cannot walk together, the Steering Committee, with profound sorrow and many tears, has concluded that there is a separation of those holding different ideologies within the PCUS. We commit ourselves to the rebirth and continuation of a Presbyterian Church in the United States in accord with these reaffirmations, praying our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit to be our leader and helper. We believe that acknowledgement of the separation and the inevitable rebirth cannot and should not be delayed, and therefore call for the establishment during 1973 of a Continuing Presbyterian Church, loyal to Scripture, the Reformed Faith, and committed to the spiritual mission of the Church as Christ commanded in the Great Commission.

To God be the glory. Amen.

A REPORT ON THE COMMITTEE ON PRESBYTERIAN UNION

At its meeting in Dallas February 8-10, the Committee on Presbyterian Union postponed indefinitely the vote on any plan of union between the PCUS and the UPCUSA. It decided to abandon the present draft of such a plan and begin to work on an entirely new plan. This will take time; so the Committee voted to report to the 1973 General Assemblies of the respective churches as follows:

1. The Committee is proceeding with the rewriting of a revised plan which takes into account the present moods and changes which have taken place

within the Church since our original mandate which reflects the serious study and responses made to the original draft of the Plan for Union, and which reflect the need for new statements on the mission, form, and structure of a new church.

2. The Committee proposes to present such a revised plan for union to the General Assemblies at their joint meeting in Louisville in 1974 for study by the church.

3. The Committee requests that it be continued for such a new and additional study.

Why? Now that's a good question. At least part of the answer is found in the reason given at the Committee's meeting in Charlotte last June by Wallace Alston, Jr., Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Time Table. In discussing the reason for delay (to at least 1975), he frankly said that such a delay was dictated by "the ecclesiastical reality in the southern church." Men, like him, who sincerely desire the union, think that the plan cannot be passed at this time by 3/4ths of the Presbyteries in the PCUS. They point out that many of the strong proponents of union throughout the years now seem to oppose this plan. (This is confirmed by a January 23, 1973 letter to the committee by Dr. Ben L. Rose which letter states: "I am coming more and more to feel that I cannot vote for any plan of union which allows churches to withdraw before the union is consummated.") Then there is the announced opposition to union by the broad middle-of-the-road group represented by CFOP. This opposition is seen as strong enough to get more than the required 1/4th of the Presbyteries to defeat union now. Thus those who favor union seek a more desirable time and climate. They fully realize that such a delay will cause some withdrawals. They propose to watch such withdrawals, and then reevaluate their political possibilities. *In the meantime there will be increased efforts toward more union Presbyteries, toward restructuring of some Presbytery lines where advantageous, and toward an intensification of functional unity and organizational cooperation at the various administrative levels.*

Another reason for delay is the sincere belief by many of the committee members that they have been given the responsibility of drafting a plan for a "NEW" church. (One member stated that the present draft just put together "two old wineskins," was a "patching together of two old constitutions," and was not really "anything NEW.") Their argument was that the present draft should be abandoned; and an attempt made to draft a plan for a truly "NEW CHURCH." This is what the committee is asking the General Assemblies to give it time to do. You will note that the committee does not propose to have a draft of this new plan ready until 1974. Then it will be presented "*for study only.*" An effort was made to delete this phrase so that such a plan, if ready, could be presented in 1974 for vote; but this amendment to delete was defeated. *Thus the committee has a completely indefinite time table as to when it will present the final draft to the Assemblies.*

Another complicating factor is the time table of the Confessional Committee. Dr. James Wharton, a member of the Confessional Committee, reported to our committee in Dallas. He said that the Confessional Committee had so much work to do on responses and revision that another draft of the new confession would not be presented until the 1974 General Assembly. Thus, assuming a one year study period, the earliest vote on the new confession would come in 1975. This would be about the same year that the earliest vote could come on the revised plan for union. There is general consensus that the confessional revision and the union plan

should not be before the church at the same time. Thus if the union vote is postponed until after the confessional issue is decided, the earliest time for a vote on the union plan would be in the years 1977-1978.

Hence, it appears to me that there will be no early vote on a plan of union. It has been indefinitely postponed.

Prior to the vote on this motion to postpone indefinitely any vote on a plan of union, I made it clear to the committee that, in my opinion, the people who hold to the position that I represent on the committee would consider such a postponement as an act of refusal to hear and to heed their concerns. Yet the committee voted to postpone with only two dissenting votes.

Thereupon United Presbyterian Stated Clerk William P. Thompson moved that the Committee ask its General Assemblies to dissolve and dismiss it until a more propitious time. He stated that in his judgment the committee was not being fair to its assemblies by spending all the time and money in a "fruitless and futile" effort. This motion was defeated.

Mr. Thompson and other members of the committee from the UPCUSA privately contacted me to apologize for the way the committee had dealt with the position and concerns I represented. They expressed their opinion that the committee had not negotiated in good faith with us.

Later Mr. Thompson made a *public statement* to the committee. He reviewed in great detail the history of the inclusion of an "escape" clause in the plan. He said that he did not favor such an "escape" clause because it conflicted with the present polity of the UPCUSA. He said that he initially agreed to its inclusion because of the insistence of the PCUS members that an "escape clause" was absolutely necessary to get the plan passed in the PCUS. It was *policy*, not *polity* that prompted his decision to agree to the "escape" clause. He recalled the committee meeting in Alexandria, Va., in 1970 when conservative PCUS leaders were heard. This plan with such an "escape" clause was approved by the committee, printed and delivered to the churches for study. Now at this meeting in Dallas, the Committee decided to abandon the present plan and write a new plan! Mr. Thompson stated that he felt that in dealing with the conservatives the committee had been "dishonest." He further stated that he felt that the committee had "betrayed the brethren who trusted your integrity."

He said that because the reason for his agreeing to an "escape" clause had been removed, he would hereafter oppose any form of "escape" clause in any subsequent draft of a plan for union.

It was the refusal of the committee to give a frank and candid answer to us on the "escape" clause that disappointed me. It seemed to me that after 3½ years during which the hope and promise of such a clause was held out to us, we were entitled to a definitive commitment. It appeared to me that

we were being "toyed with" like children. And instead of continuing the prior course of the committee and coming up with a final draft of such an "escape" clause, the committee ignored all the work done in the refining and redrafting process and decided to work on a new plan. This, in my judgment, was a failure to face and decide an issue on which we were entitled to an answer. (Let me add that some individual members of the committee assured me later that they still favored an "escape" clause; and the committee did not decide in Dallas to keep or leave out the "escape" clause. It just took no action and delayed the entire process indefinitely.)

What conclusions do I draw as to the status of the union process?

(1) A vote on union has been postponed indefinitely. It is not likely to come within the next five years.

(2) The time of the vote on the union will be determined largely by the ecclesiastical political climate in the PCUS. The movement of conservative churches will be watched carefully. Restructuring of Presbyteries will continue to be used by some to change voting balances. A major effort will be made to form as many union Presbyteries as possible. Organizational and functional unity of the two churches will be pushed at the administrative levels. In other words we will see much more "de facto" union before we see "de jure" union.

(3) If a vote on union comes in this decade, I believe the plan will contain some form of "escape" clause. It will most likely be a unilateral clause applicable only to the PCUS, and probably will require approval at the Presbytery level.

As you can see, the union process is now in a state of major flux. It could be abandoned by the UPCUSA. It could now embark upon a long process of developing plans for an entirely "New Church." It will require strong leadership to give the process stability and direction.

— W. Jack Williamson

(Continued from page 2)

In Adam's fall, all mankind lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. Hell is a reality and all the unrepentant, dying without Christ, go there for eternity. Heaven is an everlasting abode for the redeemed.

In His Covenant of Grace God elected some unto everlasting life. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ who, being the eternal Son of God, became man and so was and continues to be both God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever. The Gospel of Christ is to be proclaimed throughout the world, but redemption is not universally bestowed upon all men. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation.

Jesus was born into the world of the Virgin Mary, having been conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit apart from any human instrumentality whatever.

Jesus was truly man, even as He was also truly God. He was tempted in all points as we are but did not sin. He fulfilled His mission in perfect obedience to the Father.

Jesus died on the Cross to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God. He died for our sins and He was raised for our justification. The body which was resurrected and glorified was the same body that died on the Cross. After forty days, during which time he was seen by many witnesses, He ascended to Heaven.

Visibly and physically, the Lord Jesus Christ shall return in glory to judge the quick and the dead in the final establishment of His kingdom.

God the Father and God the Son sent forth God the Holy Spirit to abide with His people forever. He brings new life in Christ. He applies the work of Christ, wooing and leading God's chosen ones out of the world to Christ and sending them back into the world as His witnesses. He is their Teacher, Helper and Guide. His work is effective through the written Word which He inspired.