

Transcript of the speech given by the Rev. Jim Baird, former Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, on the floor of General Assembly, Thursday evening, June 11, 2015, in support of the personal resolution on Civil Rights [transcript provided by TE Tim LeCroy]:—

Baird: Mr. Moderator, Jim Baird, Mississippi Valley Presbytery.

In 1971 twelve men were elected to form a new denomination. Take two years and form that denomination. Of those twelve men six were ministers and six were ruling elders. All have died or left the PCA except two: Kennedy Smartt and Me.

[Pause]

And I confess, that in 1973, the only thing I understood was that we were starting a new denomination, which we did. And I confess that I did not raise a finger for civil rights. I was taught (sic) with one thing, and that was to start a new denomination, for the sake of the scripture, for the sake of the preservation of historic Presbyterianism, and for the furtherance of the gospel proclamation. And so I confess my sin.

I'm not confessing the sin of my fathers, I'm confessing my sin, and of those twelve men. Were we racists? No. But we did not do anything to help our black brethren. That's the first thing here.

The second thing, fifty years later I'm a different man, but that's beside the point. It was my understanding that this resolution would have been passed here and would have been passed with the understanding that we confess, you men, but I confess personally that I did nothing.

But the idea was that it would be sent down to the local churches. What you do here is not going to affect anything at the local church, unless they have a chance to represent themselves. And it seems to me that we oughta say that we made a mistake. We confess our sins. I don't believe there's anybody here who hasn't said I got problems one way or another with the racial problems in the United States. We got a problem. OK. But we oughta do something. We're looking for a resolution. And I just assumed that we would have the resolution, and by the way it comes from Mississippi. Two men from Mississippi. And it is also my conviction that we're never going to solve the problem among us, not in Baltimore, or in Chesapeake or in any other place, or in Chattanooga – it's gotta be done in Mississippi. And there are some of us who are trying.

But if we go back and go to every single congregation in the PCA and ask the Session of that church and the Deacons of that church to bring it before their own and decide themselves what have we done in forty years, and what should we be doing today – and take it to every single congregation, and then take it to the presbyteries, and then bring it to the next General Assembly. And that's what I thought this was all about.

And where all the arguments have gone, I don't understand. But I thought I was going to go back to the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson Mississippi and speak to the issue. And say, "Let's do something." Have I been wrong, Mr. Moderator?

Mr. Wert: I hope not.

Baird: I don't understand. Why don't we take this thing and just say, the resolution – and that's how I think the resolution ends, I don't have it in front of me. But I think the last thing the resolution says is to take it back to your local church, and have your local church deal with it. Every single denomination [sic – congregation]. And can you imagine what it would mean to have a whole denomination to work on that one issue – that's what I thought it was all about. And that's what I would propose. Thank you Mr. Moderator.

Mr. Wert: Thank you sir. I think that is a speech for the recommendation.

[Applause]

Mr. Wert: Thank you, brother Baird.