

# SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT THE “NEW” PCUSA

## Some Definitions and Preliminary Principles

### DEGREES OF ERROR, DEFINITIONS:

- **Disagreement** – Difference in Opinion
- **Differing Interpretation of Scripture** – Difference in understanding of honest biblical study and scholarship
- **Error** - **1.** a deviation from accuracy or correctness; a mistake, as in action or speech: *His speech contained several factual errors.* **2.** belief in something untrue; the holding of mistaken opinions. **3.** deviations of faith or conduct from what is right.
- **Heresy** – Denial of revealed truth coupled with the acceptance of error.
- **Apostasy** – “Renunciation of or falling away from a religious faith. Rebellion against or defiance of Scripture / the clearly stated will of God. It implies that the offending party will not, and perhaps CANNOT, return to true Christianity.

### GENERAL ISSUES:

- **SYNCRETISM** – “Attempts to fuse different forms of beliefs or practice.” It is often presented to others as a new level of enlightenment that allows everyone to feel like their views are acceptable. It is opposed vehemently throughout the Bible (Elijah against the priests of Baal, the prophets against the various Old Testament kings’ willingness to add the worship of other gods alongside the worship of the One True God). The New Testament, echoed by the Church Reformers, stresses Grace alone through Faith alone in Christ alone.

Today, it has crept into the PCUSA in the form of “Jesus and...”, “Scripture and...”, as well as “Christianity and...”

**PAGAN PCUSA GENERAL ASSEMBLY WORSHIP PRACTICES** – The 2010 General Assembly’s “parade of animals” in its “worship” was bizarre at best, and struck many in attendance as outright pagan. The Native American shaman’s non-christian prayer added to a degree of shock and concern for many.

**PROGRESSIVE REVELATION.** Syncretism often is the result of adherents of a redefined idea of “Progressive Revelation”. The original, orthodox view of that term is that God in Scripture has continued to reveal and to refine or expand what He has previously revealed to mankind through the Holy Spirit (such as the promise to Eve that One would come to crush the serpent’s head; Isaiah and other prophets predicting the nature and work of the coming Messiah; the appearance, words and work of Jesus; finally the New Testament to further explain and help believers understand the implications of a crucified and risen Christ). Each expansion has been given by God without contradicting His previous revelations.

The erroneous “modern” twisting of the term “Progressive Revelation” is that we can simply delete or ignore what Scripture says if we wish, claiming some “new revelation from God”.

This is a very serious error and perversion of the Christian faith. One of its sad deceptions is that it denigrates the claims, person and work of Jesus Christ, as it asserts that “Oh, everybody is nice and right; let’s just all get along and not ever hurt each others’ feelings!” The fact is that there is real Truth!

- **SNOBBERY** – There is a rampant Academic Arrogance among many PCUSA Revisionists. They have set themselves as lords over scripture and feel free to ignore scripture through their acceptance one or more of these three erroneous and heretical concepts:
  - “The Bible is but an ordinary collection of religious thoughts”
  - “THEY (i.e., the whole New Testament Christian community) were simply ignorant / backward / primitive”
  - “Paul (or any other Scripture writer with whom they disagree) was stupid / mean / ignorant of the things we now know.”

Those who have bought these deceptions (or some variation of them) feel no need to address difficult Biblical texts; they simply discard them as inconvenient to their personal likes or dislikes. Such a response is not an option for those of us of the historic, Presbyterian faith (see below, under “SCRIPTURE”).

- **SUBSTITUTION** – This is the practice of replacing the Truth of God’s revealed will in Scripture with something else. The PCUSA is rife with those who say:
  - “My opinions / experience / feelings will carry more weight than Scripture;” or
  - “My personal opinion / interpretation is equally as valid as anyone else’s.”

What both views ignore is that for faithful Christians, the ultimate measure of what is “Right” is that which has been revealed by God in Scripture, NOT that which has been thought up or imagined by anyone of us.

- **SLACKNESS** – Whether out of reaction to past harsh church discipline, or from cowardice, or from muddled thinking, or from the fear of being judged by other people as “unloving,” the PCUSA has recently, and far too often, failed to exercise godly Church discipline against what Scripture defines as “false teaching” or “immoral behavior.”

John Knox, a founding father of Presbyterianism in the 1500’s, listed what he called the “Marks of the True Church.” As he explained it, the absence of any ONE of the three means that the True Church of Jesus Christ is absent. His three marks are:

- 1. the true preaching of the Word of God;**
- 2. the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus;**
- 3. ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered.**

At this point, the PCUSA as a denomination has faltered regarding both number one and number three, for reasons mentioned above.

## THE KEY ISSUES

**I. THE NATURE OF GOD** - Does God change His mind on what is “sin” as the prevailing PCUSA leadership claims? Does God change, according to our own imaginings?

### A. THE PCUSA

#### RE-IMAGINING GOD

- **Not a New Issue:** The PCUSA was one of the primary financiers of the *Re-Imagining God* conference of 1993. Held in Wichita, it was noted for its goddess-worship themes, denial of the atonement and contradictions of Christian doctrines, such as speaking against the atoning death of Christ. The conference created a backlash throughout much of the PCUSA, including withholding of monies by numerous congregations, and the 1994 General Assembly affirmed that “Theology matters”. The 1994 General Assembly declared that the Re-Imagining movement went beyond the bounds of Christian faith. The language of that conference re-emerges in our denominational women’s study materials. Re-imagining Conference Speaker Delores Williams, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all...atonement has to do so much with death...I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses, and blood dripping, and weird stuff...we just need to listen to the god within.”
- **Christ’s Death for us is “wrong”:** Rita Nakashima Brock, who told a Re-Imagining god Gathering in Minnesota in 2003 that Christians are wrong to believe Jesus died for their sins, was the keynote speaker at a denomination-sponsored event for women at the Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina.
- By majority vote in 2011, the PCUSA has opted to ignore the clear and unwavering voice of Scripture by “deciding” that sexual sins – or at least some portion of them - are not to be considered wrong for Presbyterians.

#### LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD -

- **Feminists’ Terms for God** – A host of prayers at recent General Assemblies include prayers:
  - to Goddess Sophia,
  - to Mother Earth,
  - to Mother God.
- **A New Twist in Trinitarian Terms** - A recent PCUSA theological fad is that terms have been invented, adopted and employed, outside of how God has revealed Himself, as though we have the right to simply describe God in ways that suit us. Much of the new language revolves around function, rather than God’s revelation of His own character, although some have been more creatively “out there” than others. Recent PCUSA General Assembly references to God have included such non-biblical inventions as:
  - “Mother, Child and Womb”
  - “Rock, Redeemer, Friend”

- “Lover, Beloved, Love”
- “Our Father/Mother God”

## B. SCRIPTURE:

- *“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.” (Malachi 3:6)*
- “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, yes and forever” (Hebrews 13:8)
- *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17-18)*
- 1 Thess 4:3 “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction **does not reject man but God**, who gives you his Holy Spirit.”
- *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit....” [Matthew 28:19]*

## C. OUR REFORMED HERITAGE:

- The Bible is referred to as “Holy Scripture,” “the Word of God written,” “to be the rule of faith and life” [*Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 1*]
- The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it **ought to be believed and obeyed**, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, **because it is the Word of God**. [*Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 1*]
- Sin is defined as “any want [i.e., “lack”] of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” [*The Shorter Catechism, Q.14*]

## II. THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

### A. THE PCUSA

- **PLURALISM** – “an assertion that there are ‘many roads to heaven’; that EVERYBODY is somehow right – even if they make opposite statements about sin, salvation, etc.” or the view that “what you believe really doesn’t matter, as long as you are sincere.”

From the newly voted-in PCUSA *Book of Order* section on “Government”:

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, **or theological conviction**. There is therefore ***no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person***. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

#### **REALLY? OUR THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE?**

This is for some people the logical conclusion of their “inclusion is our highest priority” view. But it is a statement far outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity, especially for our Reformed understanding of the Christian faith. Such an assertion has no business being included in our *Book of Order*! One’s “theological conviction” is one’s beliefs about God (and more loosely, one’s understanding about spiritual matters).

Do these people really think it doesn’t matter whether we refer to God as one who use to be like man (the Mormons)? or whether God is the Allah of the Muslims? Or whether He is just sort of learning as he goes along (like the Process Theologians believe)? Or whether we even need to believe He exists or cares about those who seek Him (see Hebrews 11:6)? Or is it now all right to believe that He is “one with the trees and rocks and all creation” – the pantheists’ view (see Romans 1:22-23)?

- **UNIVERSALISM** – “the teaching that all people will ‘be saved’ / go to heaven”
  - **Everybody is Now to be Counted as IN**  
**The New “Government” section of our *Book of Order*: f-1.01 God’s mission**  
 “The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, **redeems**, sustains, rules, **and transforms all things and all people**.”
  - **“REDEEMS...AND TRANSFORMS ALL”?** This is universalism wearing its best face, with its deceptive, sweeping sweetness. Presumably, it comes from a liberal / neo-orthodox aversion to the issues of sin, judgment, and the exclusive claims of Jesus.
  - **Muslims now to be considered “our brothers and sisters”**  
 The 218th General Assembly (2008) instructed the Office of Interfaith Relations and the Office of Theology & Worship to “undertake a study of current and evolving Presbyterian theological understanding of our relationship with **our Muslim sisters**”

**and brothers."** The 2010 General Assembly approved the paper, which contains that very language, and "commended it to the church **for study and guidance.**"

Question: They think we should now consider Muslims our "sisters and brothers?"

**B. SCRIPTURE:** In contrast,

- John 1:12 says, "As many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become sons of God, even to those who **believe** on His name."
- John 3:16 states, "...that **whosoever believes in Him** should not perish, but have everlasting life." God reserves salvation and certain blessings for those who bow the knee to Him. (see also: John 14:6; I Timothy 1:15-16)

**C. OUR REFORMED HERITAGE:**

- "In the Gospel God declares his love for the world and his desire that all men should be saved; reveals fully and clearly the only way of salvation; promises eternal life to all who truly **repent** and **believe** in Christ....there is **no other way of salvation** than that revealed in the gospel...." [*Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. X.2, X.4*]
- Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions: of being in the favor of God and estate of salvation; which hope of theirs shall perish: yet such as truly **believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience** before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God: which hope shall never make them ashamed. [*Westminster Confession of Faith chap xx.1*]
- **Everybody is NOT saved!** Regardless of the revisionists' new *Book of Order*, all things and all people are NOT redeemed and transformed! The way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it [Mt. 7:14]. God's work of Redemption and Transformation are reserved for those who submit their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ, as God's Word states.

### III. THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE & ISSUES OF CHURCH AUTHORITY

#### A. THE PCUSA

- **The unimportance of Scripture to Revisionists** - Our Current PCUSA VICE MODERATOR Whitsitt – “Where the Confession and I differ however is whether or not our relationship with God in Christ is dependent on us knowing, believing, or observing anything in scripture. I do not believe it is.” (09/21/2010 online assertion)

- **Bible just a “Guide”** THE BIBLE DECLARED TO BE ONLY A “GUIDE FOR US,” RATHER THAN A REVELATION TO BE OBEYED -

Until May 10 of this year, our *Book of Order* listed the requirement that “Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.”

The newly approved change now merely says, “Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

Scripture has now been demoted from that which requires that we “obey” to that which now officially is but a “guide”. This is a dramatic and drastic shift in a denomination’s view of Scripture.

- **The Bible Just a “Container” for God’s Word. Perhaps. Sometimes.**

Prayers and common language among PCUSA pastors and worship resources use the descriptor that “the Bible **contains** the Word of God,” or that it merely “**witnesses to** the Word of God”; or as Scripture is being read, we are to “**listen for** the word of God.”

#### B. SCRIPTURE:

- “All scripture is inspired by God [lit. “God-breathed”], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” [II Timothy 3:16]
- “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God...” [II Peter 1:20-21]

#### C. OUR REFORMED HERITAGE:

- *Sola Scriptura* – “**Scripture Alone**” – one of the great the affirmations upon which the Reformers stood firmly. It means that Holy Scripture alone is the rule, guide and standard for theology and polity of the Church of which Christ is the head.
- John Calvin, one of our great 16<sup>th</sup> c. Presbyterian Fathers referred to the Bible as “The Word of God, written.”
- The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, taken seriously by most Presbyterians until lately, uses the same language.

## IV. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

### A. THE PCUSA

- The PCUSA works very hard to be “inclusive” of everyone, regardless of their lifestyles and now, apparently, regardless of their beliefs!
- **Requirements for Church Membership:** The Newly-approved Form of Government section of the PCUSA’s constitution (i.e., the *Book of Order*) NOW asserts: “God unites within the Christian Church *“persons...regardless of ...theological conviction”* (i.e., what one believes about God), - as written and approved by the majority of PCUSA presbyteries in 2011 in the new section on “membership”.

**The odd Inconsistency:** Besides that heretical statement, the New Form of Government also says, “the triune God, incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, gives to the Church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership.” This is an orthodox Christian statement. So which will it be? Will congregations simply get to choose whether their church will have some knowledge of the Lord as a prerequisite to membership or not? Or will churches simply offer new members “theological” and “non-theological” seating?

### B. SCRIPTURE:

- we need to “*believe that God exists and rewards those who seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6)
- the gospel “*...is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes [in Christ]....*” (Romans 1:16)

### C. OUR REFORMED HERITAGE:

- prior to the 2011 adoption of the New Form of Government, the definitive statement in the PCUSA *Book of Order* regarding “The Meaning of Membership” was:  

“One becomes an active member of the church **through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life.**”

## V. CHURCH LEADERSHIP

### A. THE PCUSA

- **SEXUAL STANDARDS ABOLISHED FOR ELDERS AND CLERGY**

**Standards for those Ordained as Pastors and Elders:** Denomination-wide STANDARDS FOR SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OF PCUSA CLERGY / ELDERS are **ABOLISHED** as of 2011

- **Restraint Voted Out:** In May, 2011 the PCUSA deleted from our *Book of Order* the requirement that persons to be ordained to church office must “...live either in **fidelity** within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or **chastity** in singleness; persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.” (based upon).

**Did it Really matter?** The vote was really a moot point, because in recent years at the national level, the PCUSA has failed to exercise church discipline consistently in certain areas of sexual sins, as it has chosen to disregard both Scripture and its own Presbyterian constitution (*The Book of Order* and *The Book of Confessions*). Now the PCUSA officially says that local presbyteries may choose to ignore any or all of Scripture’s restrictions regarding sexual conduct.

- **A Portent of Things to Come:** Any questions about the practical implications of this official change in leadership standards were clarified in a letter sent to all PCUSA churches and pastors immediately after the May, 2011 vote to abolish the Biblical standards for sexual behavior. The letter, signed by the PCUSA General Assembly Stated Clerk (Gradye Parsons) and its Moderator (Cynthia Bolbach) made the point that “**persons in a same-gender relationship may be considered for ordination and/or installation** as deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA).”

One cannot help but wonder what other behaviors clearly called “sin” in Scripture – either of a sexual nature or some other category - will be officially sanctioned by the PCUSA in the future.

### B. SCRIPTURE:

- 1 Thess 4:3-8 “*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*”
- 1 Cor 6:9-11 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners

will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (NKJV)

### C. OUR REFORMED HERITAGE -

- **Definition of Marriage:** “Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.” [*Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. Xxvi.1*]
- **Christian Freedom:** “They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty; which is, that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.”
- **Ordination Vows:** The ordination vows of the PCUSA’s *Book of Order* even STILL requires that elders, deacons, and ministers are to vow before God that they will hold to the basics of our Presbyterian Christian faith, and that they are to be “**under the authority of Scripture.**” Note the following two questions for those being ordained:

From the PCUSA *Book of Order*, (w-4.4003):

- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as **authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do**, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?”
- d. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, **under the authority of Scripture**, and be continually guided by our confessions?”