



THE
PRESBYTERIAN
COALITION



Maintaining a Clear Witness

March 30, 2009

Dear Sarah,

Scott Sunquist is associate professor of World Christianity at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He spoke to his presbytery in their recent debate and vote on Amendment B. His opening words were: "Let's be clear: we are voting today on whether to open the door to allow homosexual practice to be an acceptable moral practice in our church."

Professor Sunquist introduced himself as "an ordained minister, former missionary with the PCUSA, husband, father, grandfather, historian, and the local 'mission guy.'" This is an excerpt from his speech:

I do not like that we have to stand here again to resist the cultural tide of broader and more open sexual practice, but that is the case and so I want to make it very clear what a historian's take is on what we are doing.

We are voting to make it clear that we as Christians have different, higher standards than the cultural tide of our time. The Christian life, in contrast to the cultural life around us, has always been a testimony to Truth. An essential part of our witness to the world is that the Church, the Body of Christ, is where the love, justice and holiness of God can be found.

Jesus called us to a higher standard. Paul called us to a higher standard, and we read in the early apologetic writings reference that the Truth of the Gospel is seen in the Church: "[Christians'] marry like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share the board with each other, but not their marriage bed...they obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require." (Letter to Diognetus). Other early Christian documents in the Roman world as well as in the Persian Empire ("Dialog on Fate" by Bardaisan) confirm that our witness to the surrounding culture is revealed by our lives.

In the past Christians have let the culture seep into the councils and leadership of the Church. We have supported unjust wars, crusades, torture and even slavery. By God's grace, and often with much struggle we learn to resist these incursions in the Church and unite with the global and historic Church.

Today, we are being asked again, "Will we maintain our clear witness as the Body of Christ, with all of our imperfections, and say 'no' to practices that misrepresent the gospel to the world?"

We are not rejecting people, but behaviors. If we were rejecting people, not one of us would be here. We are simply saying that since this is one of the major cultural issues of

the time, we must be clear about it and leave no ambiguity.

The same was true of slavery. Abolitionist churches had to state clearly that no slave holder could be a leader in the church. Today the cultural tide regarding sexuality is sweeping away our communities, and so our churches must be unambiguous in being the salt and light to the surrounding culture.

I encourage us all, with the great saints of the past, and for our present and future witness to give a clear witness to Christ's transforming power and retain our moral standards.

If you are in a presbytery that has not yet voted, please go and register your opposition to the church being swept up in the cultural tide. Call on the other churches in your presbytery to join you in voting "no" on Amendment B.

Plentiful resources are available on our [website](#).

Yours in Christ,

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