

# **Resource Packet Campaign to Reclaim Biblical Teaching**

**2010-2011**

**10-A: "Fidelity and Chastity"**

**10-1: Proposed New Form of  
Government**

**10-2: The Belhar Confession  
Board of Pensions Benefits**

**Issues and Process in the Upcoming Votes**

**Additional Resources:**

[www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org](http://www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org); [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org)

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October 2010

Dear Friends in Christ,

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which Is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1,2)*

Once again the General Assembly has given opportunity to us in our presbyteries to speak to issues that are a source of division in our whole culture. Once again our Lord is calling on us to give witness to him—to “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Titus 1:3).”

The Christian Church in our time is greatly troubled both within and without. The authority of Scripture is at the heart of the trouble within. In the words of The Confession of 1967, “The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures.” This is what we profess.

But this is no longer held to be true in some quarters of the Church. The diminishing of Scripture to the status of one authority among many is the underpinning of the effort to bring sweeping changes to the Presbyterian Church (USA). As you consider the major amendments before your presbytery in the next few months, we urge you to examine them for subtle ways in which the authority of Scripture is undermined.

### **The Proposed Amendments**

There are three major votes this year. Many presbyteries will be planning for these votes in separate meetings from fall until the end of June, 2011. They are 10-1: a proposed new Form of Government; 10-2: a proposal to add the Belhar Confession to the Book of Confessions; and 10-A, proposed replacement language for G-6.0106b.

**G-6.0106b.** This is the paragraph of the *Book of Order* which, in its current form, calls for obedience to Scripture and holds up “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.” The proposed replacement would remove both. This is the fourth effort to ask for presbytery assent to change the Church’s scriptural moral standard for sexual practice. Other mainline denominations have fallen to the current cultural trends on this matter. We have not. We need once again to reaffirm our commitment to Scripture’s authority on sexuality by voting NO on this proposed amendment. We also need to give witness by our actions to the power of God to transform lives.

**A new Form of Government.** This is a long and complex amendment, fraught with problems that the Campaign team identifies (on-line, and inside this packet of resources). But we can anticipate yet-undiscovered problems that will only come to light if this new polity is put into practice. Concerns begin with language in what would be a new “Foundations” section, not only its status but also its content in describing us theologically and ecclesiastically. Concerns continue throughout the document and beyond. For example, it is little known that the GA authorized a committee to recommend which existing authoritative interpretations would survive under the new Form of Government. The recommendations and the GA’s action on the recommendations would not be known until 2012, well beyond the end of voting. That alone has huge implications since we currently have a long history of authoritative interpretations that are an essential part of our governance.

**The Belhar Confession.** Why add the Belhar Confession? The Belhar did not arise as a confession from people in the pews of our denomination who find that it responds to major concerns among us. It came from a GA level committee. PC(USA) Research Services found in surveying Presbyterians that it is all but unknown among us. A GA level committee studied the Belhar for two years, and The Office of Theology and Worship issued a study paper on the document. Nevertheless, the confession and its

contents remain unfamiliar to most of us. That alone is a reason to delay its consideration for status as one of our confessions. There is concern about Liberation Theology in the document and concern that its language is being advocated to support the acceptance of “gay and lesbian” practices by the Church. Clearly, this confession bears much more study by our churches.

### **The Resource Packet**

This packet is a basic resource provided by the Campaign to Reclaim Biblical Teaching. It contains essential helps for your preparation for the votes in your presbytery. The packet has analyses of the amendments and talking points. It also has a substantive section on organizing as a network in your presbytery to prepare for the meetings. It points to ministry resources and encourages a movement of prayer for our denomination and for each of our churches.

All of the resources in this packet are further supplemented by on-line resources that will be developing throughout the voting cycle.

We hope you will find the packet to contain a wealth of materials that you will use.

### **Resource People**

In addition to this packet and the on-line resources, there are Campaign Directors available in virtually every presbytery. We are developing new ways to enhance your ability to be in contact with others in your presbytery. Contact Campaign Coordinator Terry Schlossberg ([terryschlossberg@comcast.net](mailto:terryschlossberg@comcast.net) or 703-680-4571) for assistance. We want to help you toward success in these votes. Our goal is that we will work together as a strong and faithful witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

May God be glorified by our fellowship and faithful actions this next year.

The Campaign Coordinating Team  
Elder Terry Schlossberg  
Pastor Jim Tony  
Pastor Bob Davis  
Elder Katie Moffett

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## Prayer of Confession

by Mateen Elass

O God, King of Zion clothed in majesty, You are our sure defense. Great You are and greatly to be praised. The whole earth is full of Your glory. Together with the seraphs we cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,” and feel the foundations of the thresholds of heaven and earth shudder under the weight of Your effulgence. With Isaiah we lament, “Woe is me, for I have unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips.... For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!”

Our guilt is ever before us, Lord. Though You have brought us into Zion and unveiled to us her strongholds, and urged us to number her towers and survey her soaring ramparts and know the safety of her citadels, yet we continue to live in fear of the forces of darkness. While we should be telling the next generation, “This is our God, the Prince of life who has conquered the grave, the Victor who holds the keys of death and Hades, our God forever and ever,” we instead have huddled behind fortress walls, afraid to emerge from the shadows to follow You in reclaiming Your Kingdom.

We have received Your appointment as heralds, to go out into the fields of harvest and trumpet Your coming, secure in Your strong hands. Yet we feel like lambs cowering before wolves. Forgive our paralyzing fear, Lord; our disobedience born of unbelief. We call ourselves evangelicals, but we want to hide in Zion. Only reluctantly have we engaged the world; only with diffidence have we called out the enemy and unsheathed the sword of truth.

We confess that we have loved our church positions more than Your Kingdom, that we crave the sweet aroma of praise so much more than the acrid smoke of the battle field. As we face the prospect of protracted struggle which will tax already bone-weary bodies, many of us want to silently slip away into anonymity. But You have called us to march in Your strength, and promised Your victory. So we will go. Protect us, Lord Jesus, from the doubts that assail us. But equally, gracious God, protect us when You work mightily through us in the fray—protect us then from believing our own press clippings. As the realms of darkness must retreat from Your light, as the gates of hell must shatter before the advance of the church militant, spare us, we pray, from the hubris of our fallen hearts: “Even the demons are subject to us....” Help us to remember in times of victory as well as setback that because of Your sovereign, electing grace our names are written in heaven, and in that truth find our joy.

So we raise our Ebenezer in tribute to Your unmatched work of salvation, grateful beyond words that You sought us when we were strangers, wandering far from Zion, and to rescue us from danger interposed Your precious blood. Gladly with the saints of all ages we confess:

O to grace how great a debtor *daily* I’m constrained  
to be.

Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering  
heart to Thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the  
God I love.

Here’s my heart; O take and seal it, seal it for Thy  
courts above. **Amen.**

*Rev. Dr. Mateen Elass is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Edmund, OK. This prayer was offered at the Presbyterian Coalition, Y’All Come meeting, in Chicago, August 17, 2010. Used with permission.*

### Additional Prayer Resource

The Campaign’s Coordinator for Prayer Partnerships is Elder Katie Moffett. She has created a dynamic prayer calendar on the web at [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org). The calendar provides a weekly list of presbyteries to pray for. Let prayer be at the center of our preparations for the all that we do in the campaign and in all our work to Reclaim Biblical Teaching! Contact Katie at [cfmoffett@msn.com](mailto:cfmoffett@msn.com).



# **I.**

## **Resources for Debates on Amendment 10-A (G-6.0106b)**



## Amendment 10-A: A Comparison

by Carmen Fowler

For the fifth time the General Assembly has asked presbyteries to ratify an amendment to the *Book of Order's* Form of Government, G-6.0106b.

### The current text:

*G-6.0106b. "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. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), 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."*

### The proposed replacement language

*"Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates."*

### What's the difference?

- **Responsibility shifts from individual to judicatory:** Currently, it is the individual called to office in the church who is held to the standard of a life lived "in obedience to the Scriptures and in conformity to" the church's confessional standards. If amended, the individual would be free from all express standards and instead, the governing body would become responsible for applying standards to individual candidates.
- **Local option replaces national standard:** Currently all sessions, in relationship to elders and deacons, and all presbyteries, in relationship Ministers of Word and Sacrament, share one national standard. If amended, literally everyone would be free to do what is right in their own eyes.
- **Guidance replaces obedience:** Currently, the express standard is that each and every ordained officer in the PCUSA "lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church." If amended, language of "obedience" and "conformity" is replaced with "guided by."

*Rev. Carmen Fowler is President of the Presbyterian Lay Committee. To read the entire article, go to [www.layman.org](http://www.layman.org), Sept. 20, 2010. Reprinted with permission.*



## Amendment 10-A Shifts the Source of Authority

by Carol Shanholtzer

***“Scripture is the means God has provided for us to learn the mind of Christ. Our Confessions uniformly teach that God has given us Scripture as our authority to be obeyed and God gives believers the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds to understand Scripture.”***

Those working to change the standards for sexual behavior in our denomination through this year’s proposed Amendment 10-A “Gifts and Requirements” seek to do so through a subtle but radical shift in the source of authority.

### **How is the will of Christ to be known if not through Scripture?**

While using language which at first glance may seem attractive, the proposed Amendment 10-A subtly but effectively moves us off of our foundation by changing the source of authority for obeying God. The current wording in G-6.0106b specifies that officers of the Church are to “lead a life in obedience to Scripture.” The proposed Amendment 10-A demotes “Scripture” to the role of being one source of guidance: “governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.” The vague locus of authority in Amendment 10-A is alluded to in the sentence “Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000).” Although obviously all officers are to submit to Christ’s Lordship in all aspects of life, the critical question is how the will of Christ is to be known.

Is there a difference between being obedient to Scripture and submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life? While those should both be descriptions of Christian living, the meaning described in the Rationale for the amendment makes them very different. The difference centers in how we know what kind of life Jesus requires of us. The Rationale for Amendment 10-A posits three arguments supporting the Amendment: (1) that our standard should be to live according to the life and teaching of Jesus, (2) that salvation is a gift of grace and we are justified by faith (but there is no mention of repentance), and (3) even though G-6.0106b is in the *Book of Order*, there is no consensus in our denomination about the morality of same-sex practices. This line of thought shows that the intent of the Amendment is to replace the “authority of Scripture” with a perceived “authority of Christ” that is separate from and may contradict Scripture. This concept is in direct conflict with our denomination’s most basic understanding of authority.

What is to be our authority for knowing Christ’s will? The Presbyterian answer is the foundational Reformation principle “*sola scriptura*” (“Scripture alone”), proclaiming Scripture as our sole authority.

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God’s grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith. (G-2.0400)

Scripture is the means God has provided for us to learn the mind of Christ. Our Confessions uniformly teach that God has given us Scripture as our authority to be obeyed and God gives believers the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds to understand Scripture:

The Westminster Confession: The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either **expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.** . . . The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the **Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.** (6.006, 6.010)

The Scots Confession: When controversy arises about the right understanding of any passage or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk [Church] of God, we ought not so much to ask what men have said or done before us, as **what the Holy Ghost uniformly speaks within the body of the Scriptures and what Christ Jesus himself did and commanded.** For it is agreed by all that **the Spirit of God,**

**who is the Spirit of unity, cannot contradict himself.** So if the interpretation or opinion of any theologian, Kirk, or council, is contrary to the plain Word of God written in any other passage of the Scripture, it is most certain that this is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost, although councils, realms, and nations have approved and received it.... As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their **authority to be from God, and not to depend on men** or angels.... So far then as the council confirms its decrees by the plain Word of God, so far do we reverence and embrace them. **But if men, under the name of a council, pretend to forge for us new articles of faith, or to make decisions contrary to the Word of God, then we must utterly deny them as the doctrine of devils,** drawing our souls from the voice of the one God to follow the doctrines and teachings of men. (3.18-3.20)

The Second Helvetic Confession: We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of **both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men.** For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same. . . Therefore, **we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided.... We teach that the will of God is explained for us in the law of God, what he wills or does not will us to do, what is good and just, or what is evil and unjust.** Therefore, we confess that the law is good and holy. (5.001-5.002, 5.013, 5.080)

The Theological Declaration of Barmen: **Try the spirits whether they are of God!** Prove also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church to **see whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions of the Fathers. If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God....** (8.04)

The Confession of 1967: The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the **Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed** as the word of God written.... (9.27)

The Rationale for the Amendment states that ordained officers should be “always seeking to live according to the life and teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We would do well to remind ourselves of how Jesus viewed Scripture and what he taught about it while he lived on earth. Jesus himself confirmed the absolute authority of the Old Testament for others and submitted to it himself (Matt. 4:1-10, 5:18-19, 19:4; Luke 4:1-12, 16:17, John 10:35). He chastened the Jewish theologians because they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Mt 22:29, Mk 12:24). Jesus declared that he came to fulfill the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17, 21:42, Luke 4:21).

Others tell us that the final authority for Christians is not Scripture, but Christ, whom we must regard as standing apart from Scripture and above it. He is its Judge; and we, as His disciples must judge Scripture by Him, receiving only what is in harmony with His life and teaching and rejecting all that is not. **But who is this Christ, the Judge of Scripture? Not the Christ of the New Testament and of history. That Christ does not judge Scripture; He obeys it and fulfills it.** By word and deed He endorses the authority of the whole of it. **Certainly He is the final authority for Christians; that is precisely why Christians are bound to acknowledge the authority of Scripture. Christ teaches them to do so. A Christ who permits His followers to set Him up as the Judge of Scripture, One by whom its authority must be confirmed before it becomes binding and by whose adverse sentence it is in places annulled, is a Christ of human imagination,** made in the theologian’s own image, One whose attitude to Scripture is the opposite to that of the Christ of history.<sup>1</sup>

To live under the Lordship of Christ is to live a life in obedience to Scripture. John Calvin’s writing underscores the same concepts. Neither Christ nor the Holy Spirit leads us in a way that is contrary to Scripture. Addressing the relationship between the Holy Spirit, Christ and Scripture, Calvin writes:

.... But what kind of Spirit did our Saviour promise to send? One who should not speak of himself (John 16:13), but suggest and instill the truths which he himself had delivered, through the word. **Hence the office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends.** (*The Institutes*, 1.9.1)

.... But they say that it is insulting to subject the Spirit, to whom all things are to be subject, to the Scripture: as if it were disgraceful to the Holy Spirit to maintain a perfect resemblance throughout, and be in all respects without variation consistent with himself. True, if he were subjected to a human, an angelical, or to any foreign standard, it might be thought that he was rendered subordinate, or, if you will, brought into bondage; **but so long as he is compared with himself, and considered in himself, how can it be said that he is thereby injured?** I admit that he is brought to a test, but the very test by which it has pleased him that his majesty should be confirmed. It ought to be enough for us when once we hear his voice; but lest Satan should insinuate himself under his name he wishes us to recognize him by the image which he has stamped on the Scriptures. **The author of the Scriptures cannot vary, and change his likeness. Such as he there appeared at first, such he will perpetually remain.** There is nothing contumelious to him in this, unless we are to think it would be honorable for him to degenerate, and revolt against himself. (1.9.2)

.... For the Lord has so knit together the certainty of his word and his Spirit, that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us there to behold the face of God; and, on the other hand, **we embrace the Spirit with no danger of delusion when we recognize him in his image, that is, in his word.** Thus, indeed, it is. God did not produce his word before men for the sake of sudden display, intending to abolish it the moment the Spirit should arrive; but he employed the same Spirit, by whose agency he had administered the word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the word. In this way **Christ explained to the two disciples (Luke 24:27), not that they were to reject the Scriptures and trust to their own wisdom, but that they were to understand the Scriptures.** (1.9.3)

### **Loss of God's mercy in forgiveness**

The rationale for Amendment 10-A does not speak of repentance. It emphasizes only that we are saved by grace through faith. We are all sinners. The grace of God enables us to recognize our sin and to repent. Ordination to church office is open only to repentant sinners. The Confessions are very clear in their exposition of the biblical teaching that repentance is a duty that "is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it":

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments. Although repentance be not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it. As there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent. Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly. (6.081 - 6.085)

G-6.0106b currently requires officers to live "in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness." The third point of the rationale indicates that since this wording has not ended the conflict over sexual behavior in the church, the provision should be removed. The intent behind this change is apparently to allow ordaining bodies to say that someone can "submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life" while violating the scriptural prohibitions against sexual immorality.

Biblical teaching is consistent and clear in its condemnation of homosexual practices.<sup>2</sup> **What the Rationale describes as "a single, highly contested interpretation of Scripture" is in fact our Confessional interpretation of Scripture and is the view that the church has held throughout its history.** Sexual morality is addressed in a number of our confessions (7.247-7.249, 4.108-4.109, 5.245-5.247, 5.251, 6.131-6.139, 7.130, 9.47). In teaching what we must avoid, the confessions specifically include "adultery," "fornication" and "sodomy" (7.249) as well as "homosexual perversion" (4.087) as being forbidden by God. In teaching our positive obligations, the confessions and catechisms emphasize that because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6:19-20) all Christians, married and single, have the duty of chastity (purity) in "body, mind, affections, words, and behavior" (7.247-7.248).

Presbyterians believe Scripture reveals to us the "whole counsel of God." God does not lead us in a way contrary to Scripture. To obey Scripture is to obey Christ. To live under the Lordship of Christ includes repenting of sin and earnestly seeking to live a holy and righteous life:

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. (6.110)

### **ACC advice and the Adopting Act of 1729**

The advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) included in the Rationale asserts that Amendment 10-A would “restore the ordination practices and principles affirmed in the Adopting Act of 1729.” In 1729<sup>3</sup> the decision was made that ministers must confess the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms as their confession of faith. This was done because the Synod felt “obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so hand down to our posterity.” Ministers were allowed to state “scruples” against articles “not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government.” Ministers stated scruples only against clauses in two articles of the Confession that addressed the relationship between church and state. The Synod unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples by excepting those clauses that were “not essential” from the Adopting Act and explained how those articles were to be interpreted. In sharp contrast, Amendment 10-A would allow persons to be ordained who claim an understanding of Christ’s will that contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. Thus human thinking would be allowed to replace Scripture as the supreme authority. Although the Adopting Act of 1729 is not our standard for officers today, for the ACC to claim that Amendment 10-A would be consistent with the Adopting Act of 1729 is an egregious misunderstanding of the Adopting Act. The entire purpose of the Act was to maintain the faith pure and uncorrupt. The supreme authority of Scripture, described in detail in Chapter I of the Westminster Confession, is the most central, essential concept that underlies the entirety of the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The authority of Scripture is still unambiguously upheld throughout our *Book of Confessions* today.

### **Sola Scriptura under attack in Amendment 10-A**

Amendment 10-A’s attempt to remove the “fidelity/chastity” requirement for officers currently found in G-6.0106b is an extremely serious attack on our denomination’s ability to uphold biblical standards for sexual morality. But the implications of Amendment 10-A go far beyond that. “*Sola scriptura*,” the authority of Scripture alone, is really what is under attack in Amendment 10-A. If we decide to allow ordaining bodies to accept the claim that Christ is leading individuals to embrace a lifestyle Scripture clearly forbids, we have abandoned our entire understanding that “Scripture alone” is our authority, and the consequences of abandoning that foundational Reformation principle are unimaginable.

*Throughout the above article, emphasis in bold was added and does not appear in the original documents.*

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1. J. I. Packer, “*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972), pp 61-62.
  2. James R. Edwards, “The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality,” *Theology Matters*, Mar/Apr 1996.
  3. Chapter II of Baird’s Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the Assembly, cited in *Historic Documents of American Presbyterianism: The Adopting Act of 1729*.  
<http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/subscription/adoptingact.html>

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## Talking Points

### How Maintaining the Church's Current Fidelity and Chastity Standards for Officers in the Current G-6.0106b is Crucial for the Church

#### **Current wording in Book of Order G-6.0106b:**

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. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), 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.

#### **Proposed replacement wording (Amendment 10-A):**

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

The proposed amendment would replace the specific wording currently in G-6.0106b with ambiguous, meaningless wording, thereby removing from the *Book of Order* all standards for sexual behavior from the requirements of ministers, elders and deacons. However, sexual expression is a central issue in the way we live out our faith. To confess that Jesus Christ is Lord means that we allow every area of our lives to be ordered by Scripture, including our sexuality. Our current ordination standards are the church bearing witness to the truth revealed in Scripture and expressed by our Confessions.

The Church's witness is that when a Christian professes faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, that faith is confirmed in the Holy Spirit's work to produce a repentant and transformed life. Jesus told his disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). While all Christians are called to live as instructed by Scripture, leaders are given a special calling to exemplify faith through holy lives, obedient to God's Word. Our ordination standards reflect the high calling of leaders in the church to live as "examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3). The standards for officers call to mind the blessing of obedience, the incomparable power of God at work in our lives, and the calling to minister the same grace and reconciliation to all.

#### **The standards unify us with the Church around the world and throughout history.**

In every generation and throughout the world, church leaders and theologians have consistently and repeatedly affirmed the biblical teaching and the church's historic witness that God's design is for sexual intimacy to be confined to the marriage of a man and a woman. Scripture, our Confessions and the historic witness of the church have been clear that God's gift of sexual expression is to be limited to marriage. The current wording of G-6.0106b in the *Book of Order* makes explicit what has been understood at all times and in every place in the Christian Church.

#### **The current fidelity and chastity ordination standard in G-6.0106b is Presbyterian polity at its best in response to controversy. It is the right decision.**

The Church has faced many controversies on important matters throughout its history and has always acted to resolve significant controversies in order to avoid wavering between two opinions. It is unfaithful for the church to make a division permanent by accepting contrary lifestyles involving a critical matter of faith. Historically the church's method of resolving controversies has been a thorough examination of Scripture. Challenges to the biblical, historical sexual standards for church officers have been before this denomination for more than 30 years. Governing bodies have taken numerous opportunities to examine and re-examine Scripture. Our Confessions, which church officers affirm in their essential tenets to be "reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and to do" speak with one voice on this matter.

Each time our church has considered requirements for officers, our church has come to the same conclusion as those in previous generations: that sexual intimacy is to be confined to the marriage of a man and a woman. In 1997 our church stood against the culture and stated explicitly in our polity what it had always held to be taught by Scripture and our Confessions by placing G-6.0106b in our *Book of Order*. The current standards are the way our church says that we will do in our behavior what we say we believe.

### **The current standards of sexual behavior honor the Lordship of Christ.**

Our Constitution in both the *Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order* affirms that, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word....” (Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.109) The only rival to God as Lord of our conscience is that we become lords of our own consciences. When we confess that God alone is Lord of our conscience, we are confessing that we are not lords of our own consciences, free to determine right living for ourselves. Rather, we are committed to God’s rule in our lives through his Word. The Church has affirmed what God’s Word clearly speaks and we are called to allow the Holy Spirit to shape our consciences so that we desire to live repentant lives. The corporate conscience of the church, bound by God’s Word in Scripture, is set forth in our theology (*Book of Confessions*), and becomes the rule of our corporate life in our polity (*Book of Order*).

### **The current standards for sexual behavior call the church to ministries of reconciliation**

God promises true peace when there is first reconciliation with God through Christ. That reconciliation and peace must be the gracious word of the church to all people. We are called to welcome those who are struggling with sexual conflict and gently urge them toward the throne of God where they can find forgiveness, healing, and peace.

## **Arguments and Responses**

*Current G-6.0106b: “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. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), 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.”*

### **“Those who are called to office...”**

#### **1. Doesn’t the current G-6.0106b set a standard that violates the consciences of some Presbyterians?**

The intent of the current G-6.0106b is to protect true Christian liberty by raising up biblical standards that constrain the consciences of leaders, whose speech and practices are meant to model the Christian life for the world and for the people of God. In this case, the conscience that is perceived to be violated is in need of Christian ministry to prompt it gently toward repentance and renewal in Christ.

The Confessions uniformly reflect the biblical witness that sexual expression is to be limited to the marriage of a man and a woman. When individuals accept ordained leadership, they agree to limits on their freedom of conscience:

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body.... (G-6.0108b)

#### **2. By denying ordination to homosexual people, isn’t the church missing out on their gifts?**

We can distinguish between good traits and wrong behavior. What allows gifts to flourish is living in repentance and obedience as God’s servants.

### **3. Don't Presbyterians agree that homosexuals should be welcomed into the church?**

All people become members of the church by confessing Jesus Christ is Lord over every area of their lives including their sexual expression. Membership implies a desire to turn from sin and be more and more conformed to Christ. The ordination standard expects leaders to have attained a level of maturity in Christ that serves as a model of Christian living.

### **4. Isn't ordination a right of every baptized church member?**

Baptism is a "sign and seal of the covenant of grace." It is not a call to leadership. Ordination is not a right but a gift and call from God. Leaders are judged by a higher standard (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and teachers have a special responsibility (James 3:1). Refusal to repent of known behavior that the Bible calls sin is an indication that a person is not ready for church leadership.

### **5. We are not an inclusive church if we don't ordain homosexuals (G-4.0403). Isn't it discrimination to rule out a class of people for ordination?**

The current G-6.0106b makes no judgment on a class of people. Sexual practices that the Scriptures and confessions call sin are not covered by G-4.0403 guaranteeing "full participation." This is the issue—does the church want to affirm the full participation of those who engage in a lifestyle contrary to Scripture and our confessional standards? The answer has been "no" throughout our church's history.

### **"Are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture..."**

**6. How can we "obey the Scriptures" when we can't agree on what the Scriptures mean?** Scripture speaks often, clearly and with one voice on marriage and sexual expression. The Bible describes incest, adultery, bestiality, fornication, prostitution, and homosexuality in negative, prohibitive terms (1 Cor. 6:18). Involvement in unrepentant, ongoing sexual sin is one of the few reasons Paul gave for excommunicating a church member (1 Cor. 5:1-5, 11-13).

### **7. Doesn't obedience to Scripture include loving our neighbor and accepting others unconditionally? Isn't this a matter on which we should exercise mutual forbearance?**

The broad message of Scripture also includes the fall of humanity, the need for a Savior, the necessity of repentance and obedience, the power of the gospel, and the hope of glory! "God is love" does not make God unwilling to call sin what it is or to require our submission to his will.

Mutual forbearance is not a means of approving behavior that God does not accept. It is an admonition to bear with a brother or sister who is struggling, and sometimes failing, to overcome sin. Forbearance is not intended as a waiver for behavioral standards of ordination. Scripture's admonition to us to bear with each other and to be constantly willing to forgive should instruct us: our attitude and behavior should be characterized by humility, recognizing that we all sin and are all continually in need of forgiveness, repentance, and restoration.

### **8. Isn't it true that Jesus never talked about homosexuality, either to approve of it or condemn it?**

God's will is expressed in the whole of Scripture: "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Although Jesus does not explicitly refer to same-sex intercourse, implicit references exist in Mark 7:21-23 and Mark 10:17-22. See Robert Gagnon's book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon, 2001), pp.191-192. Jesus did clearly affirm marriage, quoting Genesis 2:24: "And a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

### **9. In keeping the current *Book of Order* wording, aren't we worshipping Scripture?**

No. "Sola Scriptura" ("Scripture alone") was one of the key principles of the Reformation. It means that Scripture is our authority for faith and life. To treat it as such is not to worship Scripture, but to give it the place God intends it to have. The Westminster Confession states it this way:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture....

**10. Since the Spirit is still working among us (indicated by continued questioning) shouldn't we be open-minded and seek discernment on this subject before deciding?**

The Spirit does not lead us into any "truth" that contradicts what God has revealed in the Scriptures. Every new idea must be tested and found consistent with the revelation we have already received (1 John 4:1). The Spirit helps us to apply universal truth to new situations.

**"Among these standards..."**

**11. Isn't the church picking only on homosexual sin?**

The value of the current G-6.0106b is that it does not single out homosexual sin, but calls all leaders of the church to fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness. There are other sins that take hold of us and that have a destructive effect on the Body. Scripture addresses them, and so should we in the church. Though homosexuality is being promoted today as an acceptable behavior, resisting that should not be an excuse to ignore other sinful behavior.

**12. Wouldn't Amendment 10-A simplify our life as a denomination? Isn't it in the best interest of Presbyterians to make these decisions in our local governing bodies and protect ourselves from decisions handed down from the national body?**

The current G-6.0106b was not a dictate handed down from the General Assembly. Quite the contrary; it was a decision made by the vote of representatives from local sessions at the meetings of their presbyteries.

Far from simplifying our life, if Amendment 10-A were to pass, it would create unprecedented chaos and conflict. Instead of ordination standards being held in common by us all, each ordaining body (session and presbytery) would set its own standards, and those standards would not be consistent but could vary for each person seeking ordination.

Officers (deacons, elders and ministers) are ordained to the whole church and ordained for life. The responsibilities and privileges of ordination continue even if an elder transfers church membership. Removing the standards clears the way for all manner of sexual expression outside of marriage by church leaders. Your congregation, if it chose to obey the clear biblical witness on sexual behavior, would nevertheless have no choice but to recognize elders ordained in Presbyterian churches that hold to a different set of standards. Presbytery Committees on Ministry, Committees on Preparation for Ministry, Administrative Commissions, and Permanent Judicial Commissions, would likely include elders and clergy holding a variety of sexual standards.

*All actions of any governing body are on behalf of the whole church:*

The governing bodies are separate and independent, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate governing body." (G-9.0103) The church "is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members.... (G-1.0302)

It is incumbent upon these officers, and the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God. (G-1.0303)

**13. Won't Amendment 10-A take us back to the more peaceful days before 1978 when there was no such standard and each church decided ordinations for themselves?**

Before 1978, the standard was clearly evident in Scripture and the Confessions. Those documents so guided the behavior of leaders in the church that it would be impossible to name even a handful of Presbyterians confessing to be in a homosexual lifestyle who were ordained prior to 1978. Sexual standards became an issue only when changes occurred in our culture and the long, consistent teaching of the Church was challenged. Throughout its history, the Church has held a standard that sexual intimacy belongs only within the context of the marriage of a man and a woman.

**14. Doesn't the current G-6.0106b only intensify conflict in the church and lead to a growing number of court cases?**

Court cases arise from violation of constitutional standards. The courts are charged with the duty to see that the constitution is upheld. By removing current requirements and substituting vague language, the church will invite more, not fewer, court cases.

*“Among these standards...” in a changing society*

**15. The Bible says that homosexual practice is a sin, but society is increasingly accepting of the gay lifestyle. Hasn't the church, too, been moving steadily toward acceptance of homosexual practice?**

The evidence shows that the church has responded consistently and with even increasing conviction that it intends to maintain the biblical standard for sexual behavior. The worldwide Church today, with only a small minority exception, continues to affirm the biblical teaching. The PC(USA) as a body has acted with that majority:

The 1996 GA approved what is now section G-6.0106b in the *Book of Order* and sent the proposed amendment to the presbyteries. After a vote of 97 presbyteries in favor and 74 opposed, the amendment became effective in 1997. The 1997 GA sent an amendment to replace the “fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness” language of G-6.0106b, but the attempt failed with 59 presbyteries voting yes and 114 voting no. The 2001 GA sent an amendment proposing removal of G-6.0106b, but it failed with 46 presbyteries voting yes and 127 voting no. [Historical material from “What G-6.0106b Means: A white paper prepared by The Presbyterian Coalition Task Force on Church Discipline.”]

The Presbyterian Panel, a survey program of the PC(USA) Research Services, in its summary for 2006-2008, reports that a majority of Presbyterian pastors, elders, and members nationwide disapprove of the ordination of “sexually active gay and lesbian persons.”

Increasing cultural acceptance calls for a Christian response of loving concern for the sinner, well-reasoned arguments based on Scripture, and prayer for change in the culture. Within the church, we should make every effort to lead our brothers and sisters gently toward repentance.

**16. Hasn't the church discovered its interpretation of Scripture was wrong on the issues of slavery, divorce and women in leadership? Isn't it also possible that the church has been wrong in concluding that homosexual practice is sin?**

The following excerpts from an unpublished paper by Robert A. J. Gagnon (Associate professor of New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and author of the book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Abingdon, 2001) are instructive:

Slavery:

“Scripture does not express a clear vested interest in preserving slavery, whereas Scripture does express a clear vested interest in restricting sexual intercourse to heterosexual pairings.” “Slavery is not grounded in pre-Fall structures; heterosexual complementarity in sexual intercourse is. In relation to the cultures of their day the biblical stance on slavery pushes in the direction of its curtailment and eradication; with respect to the biblical stance on same-sex intercourse a reverse situation holds, pushing as it does in the direction of expanding and deepening the ban on same-sex intercourse.”

Divorce:

“Whereas the Bible speaks with one voice on the issue of homosexual behavior, there is some diversity within the canon on the question of divorce that would justify some degree of diversity within the church. (Deu. 24:1-4, Mal. 2:13-16, Matt. 5:32, 19:9, 1 Cor. 7:12-16)”

Women in leadership:

“Women were described in leadership in the OT (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther). Women were involved in Jesus' ministry. There are leadership examples in Acts (18:2, 18, 26) and in Paul's letters (Rom. 16:3, 1 Cor. 16:19, 2 Tim. 4:19) There were other women serving as co-workers with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel (Rom. 16, Phil. 4:2-3). There are no similar positive precedents for homosexual behavior anywhere in the Bible.”

The above quotations demonstrate that slavery, divorce and women in leadership are not valid scriptural analogies to homosexual behavior. Yet even if the church has been wrong in some areas, that does not justify taking a clearly anti-scriptural view of sex outside of the marriage of a man and a woman.

Biblically speaking, it is not wise to develop our wisdom from the world's perspective (1 Cor 1:18ff) nor to follow in the footsteps of the Israelites during the time of the Judges, when "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6 NRSV) The Scriptures, on the other hand, are God-breathed and useful for our guidance and correction (2 Tim. 3:16).

**"These standards..." in light of scientific research**

**17. Isn't homosexuality inborn, genetic? Isn't it wrong to close the door to people who can't help being what they are. What the Bible means by "homosexuality" is different from our 21st Century understanding. Back then they didn't understand that some people are just born homosexual. If homosexuality is an inborn predisposition, isn't it cruel and unChristian to impose our current standard?**

The preponderance of current research shows that genetics play only a weak and indirect role in homosexual *orientation*. Nevertheless, the issue before us is the ordination of those engaged in unrepentant homosexual *practice*. The Bible does not condone sexual relationships outside marriage by those who would claim a predisposition to heterosexuality.

Homosexual orientation may not be chosen, but homosexual acts are chosen, making the person who chooses them morally responsible. Biology is not destiny, as every person is created by God with the ability to make moral choices regardless of their biological predispositions. Some studies have "suggested" that the propensity to such things as adultery or lying or alcoholism is genetic. "Inborn" does not necessarily mean "normal" or "God ordained."

Many secular psychologists have documented cases of changes in practice and even in orientation. Christians claim the transforming power of God in Christ. We cannot deny that claim for those caught in this particular sin. Amendment 10-A sends a message of despair to those caught in sexual sin, whether homosexual or heterosexual. It sends the message that they are stuck in their sin and there is no hope.

People caught in sexual confusion are experiencing the conflict between their sinful humanity and the will of God, which is a conflict we all experience in various arenas. God's will is often difficult, but it is always life-giving. He offers us forgiveness in Christ and the transforming power of his Spirit to live in conformity with his will.

What is truly cruel is to allow and encourage church leaders to live a lifestyle God has clearly condemned in Scripture.

**18. Isn't it true that there is no evidence that conversion therapies work to change sexual orientation? Rather, isn't the goal of therapy is to help the homosexual become comfortable with his or her sexuality? Doesn't the American Medical Association says that the emotional disturbance evident in some homosexuals is due to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment?**

The Gospel is powerful, and Christ is able to bring healing and fulfillment in ways consistent with God's call to holy living. The church must continue to proclaim the power of the Gospel to those who are looking for hope and healing! (See the testimonies of redemption in this set of resources.)

**"These standards..." in light of who we are**

**19. Homosexuality is not an issue: it is a condition of life for some Presbyterians; don't they deserve our respect and acknowledgement of their gifts for ministry?**

We recognize the worth of all persons, but we reject the belief that to disagree with someone's behavior is somehow to dehumanize that person. The woman caught in adultery (John 8) was not an "issue" either. "Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.'"

**20. Aren't we sexual beings and we should live sexually? What right have we to require celibacy of homosexuals? Isn't it unreasonable to insist that anyone live without sex?**

We are not only physical beings; we are also spiritual beings, called to show the fruit of the Spirit, which includes faithfulness, patience and self-control. God has given one avenue for sexual expression. It is the gift of marriage between a man and a woman. Sex outside of marriage is not God's will.

**"Persons refusing to repent of what the confessions call sin..."**

**21. Aren't we making a tiresome fuss over a non-essential of the faith?**

Both Scripture and human experience confirm that homosexuality is sin of significant proportions, and has significant consequences both physically and spiritually. Conformity to Christ's will as revealed in his Word is essential for our lives. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is connected to living lives of obedience to his Word and his will. Jesus linked love for him with obedience ("If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). He teaches faithfulness to marriage vows (Matt. 19:1f) and he teaches us to avoid sexual sin (Matt. 5:27f; 15:19). Sexual behavior is a major teaching in the commandments given by God to Moses and elaborated on by Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to "go, and sin no more," thereby identifying the sexual relationship outside marriage as sin and offering his own grace to cover the sin and redeem the person. If we accept the culture's norm for sexual expression, we will deny God's prerogative to define sin, and the power of God to redeem us from sin and reconcile us in Christ.

Faith and obedience are clearly linked in the Gospel message and our sexual behavior is a central issue of obedience. Our bodies are not our own. They are temples of God's Holy Spirit. We are told to honor God with our bodies. (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

**22. It isn't anybody's business who I sleep with, is it?**

By our ordination vows, we have submitted to the authority of the church and agreed to abide by its discipline. The moral character of our leaders is the church's business (W-4.4003e).

*We are indebted to the Rev. Mary Naegeli, minister at large in San Francisco Presbytery, who listened to arguments made in debate at General Assembly in 1996, wrote them down, and gave us responses to consider. She organized the questions largely by sections of G-6.0106b. Many of the arguments expressed and answers given are from her work. Other arguments and answers from the more recent debates have been integrated. Revised Sept. 2010.*



# **What They Did and Did Not Say: Considerations for the Vote on Amendment 10-A in Your Presbytery**

*by William P. Campbell*

*Pastor Campbell reflects on what he heard in his presbytery's debate*

## **Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that they have personal friends and family members who suffer greatly by feelings of rejection from the PCUSA.**

What they *did not say* is that our congregations will gladly receive homosexuals. In fact, we are already blessed with great numbers of homosexuals who seek to live faithfully to their Lord in marriage or singleness. Over half of homosexual males today are living in heterosexual marriages, and many of us could not even identify them in our congregations if asked to do so.<sup>1</sup> In every congregation I have served, I have struggled alongside not only gay singles, but those with homosexual leanings who are married. In the same way, any of us can (and should) visit a nearby Exodus Conference or a related support group, where we can meet countless men and women who once believed they would be forever homosexual, but who by the power of the gospel were changed. Thus we too can share emotional stories in our presbyteries, not only about the human need for love and acceptance, but about God's power to change lives.

## **Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that we must give an option for ordination to the select, faithful homosexuals who claim to be locked into life-long monogamous relationships.**

What they *did not say* is that consistent behavior does not equate with faithfulness to God's standards. The problem with creating our own standards is that humans tend consistently to do what *feels* right rather than what *is* right. Our first concern in this regard should not be about the two to three percent of our population that is homosexual, but about the ninety-seven percent of our population that is heterosexual. Our concern should be for married couples who are not satisfied sexually and who are itching to look outside the bounds of marriage for fulfillment. Our concern should be for the heterosexual singles who would like to be sexually active and who outnumber our gay population by ten to one. With this in mind, let us not lower our historic standards, but rather shore them up against the standards of Scripture.

## **Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that they have gay friends who have tried all of their lives to change, but could not.**

What they *did not say* is that we humans are all broken by sin. Most of us have propensities that may not change and wounds that may not heal this side of heaven. But God's redemptive power is a keeping power, not based on our efforts but on God's grace. Amendment B promotes a marked shift from grace to works, from "*repentance ... of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin*" (G-6.0106b) to "*the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards*" (Amendment B). The Scriptures tell us that our sincere efforts are not as powerful as is God's grace.

## **Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that there are different ways to interpret the Bible on the matter of homosexuality, even by biblical scholars.**

What they *did not say* is that the recently developed theologies promoted by progressive theologians were unheard of in the two-thousand year history of the Church and remain a minority opinion today. Worst, the approach needed to arrive at these non-orthodox positions is based on arguments that dig into history and cultures in a desperate attempt to alter what select portions of the Scripture clearly state.<sup>2</sup> Honestly, if their methods of biblical interpretation were used on other sections of the Scripture, many essential biblical doctrines could be shredded. The problem with their methods is not the incorporation of scholarship, but the spinning of scholarship with agendas. There have been so many theological and cultural assaults on the Romans 1 passage, for example, that each new attempt makes the clear meaning of the text seem all the more unassailable. Our reformed understanding is that the Bible should interpret itself, and that the plain and primary meaning of the text can be discovered even by the average reader.

## **Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that it took the Church time to get over slavery and to ordain women, and that it is about time that we ordain gays and lesbians.**

What they *did not say* is that the abolition movement was fueled by scriptural standards taught by Paul. They also forgot to mention that even some the most conservative sectors of the Church have ordained women for thousands of years. Nowhere does the Bible say that it is a sin to be a woman, but sexual practice outside the bonds of marriage is clearly prohibited in God's Word.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that they have friends who are gay and who have stated their unwillingness to be baptized by a church that won't allow them to serve in all of the positions of the Church.**

What they *did not say* is that nearly every organization, religious or secular, holds higher standards for their leaders than they do for their members. Furthermore, leadership is not a right, but a responsibility, placed on the few who are called to represent the many.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that the Gospels (with an emphasis on John's Gospel) promote a Jesus who is kind and loving, not a watchdog.**

What they *did not say* is that it was because of love that Jesus not only protected the woman caught in adultery, but told her to "go and sin no more" (John 8). Christ spoke against sin in his day, in all sectors of the religious community, and they angrily hung him on a cross. We are called to follow in His steps, showing love and compassion to everyone while speaking the truth with boldness.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that their amendment is a softer, nicer version of the statement that it seeks to replace (G-6.0106b).**

What they *did not say* is that this softening actually removes the hinges from the last gate holding back the more than one third of our presbyteries that are pushing to exercise local option related to the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The fidelity and chastity clause (G-6.0106b) has become the centerpiece of this relentless push since 1996, and if it is removed, the 2008 decision by the highest judicial court in our denomination (the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission's Bush decision) will become unhinged.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say that Amendment B, like our ordination vows, promotes a historic line-up of authorities: Christ, the Scriptures, and our Confessions.**

What they *did not say* is that our vows affirm each of these authority levels, one at a time, but Amendment B lumps them together in a manner that removes Christ from Scripture. Changing the wording from "*Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture ...*" (G-6.0106b) to "*...pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures ...*" (Amendment B), takes our footing from the objective truths of God's Word to subjective opinions about where Jesus is leading us. In this line-up of authorities, humans come out on top, and Jesus will most certainly become warm and fuzzy.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say (this was whispered in my ear by one of our presbytery leaders after the vote) that most people simply don't believe we should single out one particular sin.**

What they *did not say* is that the fidelity and chastity clause (G-6.0106b) does not single out a particular sin, but rather affirms God's standards for marriage, as did Christ. Our Lord wisely affirmed God's creative order, which is woven into the fabric of the whole Bible, from Genesis, where one man and one woman are brought together in marriage, to Revelation, where Christ is symbolized as the Bridegroom of the Church. By affirming this standard, both Jesus and those who vote against Amendment B hold the Church back from the slippery slope of aberrant sexuality of all forms.

**Those who favor removing the current G-6.0106b *did* say, through their votes, that they hope their amendment will win in a majority of the presbyteries.**

What they *did not say* is that the relentless push by the theologically left-leaning sectors in our denomination, if not abated, will cause us all to lose. Imagine a pastor pushing a minority opinion on her or his congregation over more than a decade until those who disagree left or until the church split. We would call that an egregious violation of everything pastors are called to be and do. When our national leaders, our general assembly delegates, and our presbytery commissioners push agendas that do not heal but hurt our Church and that do not unify but split our ranks, how are we to respond? Once the presbyteries finish voting on Amendment B (which will likely be defeated), let us say together as a whole Church that it is time to put the debates aside and to unify together around the Great Ends of the Church. In this way we can all be winners as we strive to serve a hurting world for the glory of God!

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## The Pastoral Dilemma

by Thomas Gillespie

When unavoidable controversial issues affect people we know and care about, as is the case in the current public ecclesial debate on homosexuality, the human factor is crucial in the disputation. Those who seek love in same-sex relationships are people—sometimes family or colleagues, or as with pastors, members of our congregation. Thomas E. Schmidt reminds us of the importance of the personal dimension of the issue in his book, *Straight & Narrow Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*:

These are people with faces, people with names, often Christian people, and whatever we conclude about the larger issues their stories represent, we must never lose sight of their individual struggles, their individual pain, their faces. If we neglect faces, we neglect the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

In that concluding sentence, Professor Schmidt articulates the pastoral dilemma. How shall I deal with this issue in such a way that I neglect neither the faces of the homosexual people I know and care about nor the gospel of Jesus Christ? Put positively, how shall I, as a minister of the gospel, serve the homosexual people I know (and don't know) in my congregation?

### Paul and the saving power of the Gospel

My understanding of the gospel, as well as that of the Reformed theological tradition in which I stand, has been shaped in no small measure by the canonical letters of the apostle Paul. In Rom. 1:16, he declares programmatically that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation for everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The gospel is power, God’s power, God’s saving power. From what then does the gospel save us? Paul argues in Romans that the gospel delivers us from: (1) the power of sin to oppress us (Romans 6); (2) the power of the Law to condemn us (Romans 7); and (3) the power of death to hold us (Romans 8). Those thus liberated are declared just before God, and in their liberation God demonstrates his own justice. “For in [the gospel] the justice of God is revealed” (Rom. 1:17).

With regard to the oppression of sin, Paul gives examples elsewhere of the gospel’s liberating power. Of special interest is a text that relates the power of the gospel explicitly to the issue of homosexuality, 1 Cor. 6:9-11. The literary location of this brief passage is a section of 1 Corinthians (5:1-6:20) in which the apostle is addressing two instances of behavior in the Corinthian congregation that do not honor the gospel, one a matter of incest (5:1-13) and the other a case of fraud (6:1-11). In speaking to these matters, Paul introduces a series of “vice catalogues” (as they are called in New Testament scholarship) that give specificity to the ways in which sin evidences itself as an oppressive force in human life (5:10,11, and 6:9-10).<sup>2</sup> In the first (5:1) he lists the sexually immoral, the greedy, robbers, and idolaters. In the second (5:11) he repeats the list and adds to it revilers and drunkards. In the third (6:9-10) he warns that “wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God” and identifies the endangered as all those previously mentioned, plus thieves. Further, the sexually immoral are now specified as fornicators, adulterers, male prostitutes, and sodomites.<sup>3</sup>

Before stating the point that I wish to make from this third vice catalogue, however, it is imperative that we notice two important features of these three lists. The first is that sexual sins are not singled out for exclusive attention, but are conjoined with sins of economic injustice (perpetrated in a variety of ways by the greedy, robbers, and thieves) and the sin of religious idolatry. The second notable feature of these lists is that sexual immorality is specified first as heterosexual fornication and adultery, and only then is it further identified as homosexual behavior; which is to say that the latter is no lesser or greater an instance of sin than the former.

Unfortunately, in my judgment 1 Cor. 6:9-11 has been used in the debate on homosexuality primarily to establish the biblical view that same-gender sex is sinful. What is often neglected is the concluding verse, which attests to the power of the gospel to liberate people from conditions and consequences of behavior that is subject to divine indictment. The text reads:

And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)

Imagine such a congregation. Not *all*, to be sure, but *some* nonetheless were—in their pre-Christian lives—greedy, robbers and thieves. Some were drunkards and revilers. And, yes, some were fornicators, adulterers, male prostitutes, and sodomites. That was then, however. The *past tense of the verb* is crucial to our understanding of what the apostle is saying: “And this is what some of you *were*.” Now the situation is different. These very people were *washed, sanctified, and justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God.

Gordon D. Fee calls this text “one of the more important theological statements in the epistle.”<sup>4</sup> He explains:

As in 1:30, the three verbs are primarily metaphors of salvation, each expressing a special facet of their conversion in the light of the preceding sentences: they had been “washed” from the filth of their former life-styles expressed in the preceding list; they had been “sanctified,” set apart by God for holy, godly living that stands in stark contrast to their former wickedness; though formerly “unjust,” they had been justified, so that now right with God they may inherit the kingdom that before they could not. . . . Finally, since the three verbs refer to the same reality, and since each of them has “God” as the implied subject, the two prepositional phrases are to be understood as modifying all three verbs. The latent Trinitarianism of the sentence, therefore, is difficult to escape. God has effected salvation “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

The significance of this exegetical commentary on 1 Cor. 6:11 is its assurance that here we are not skating near the blue ice of the canon where its central witness to the gospel is thin. Rather, that witness is firmly attested in terms of the gospel’s cleansing, sanctifying, and justifying power to effect transformation of human life, including, and in particular, its moral character. Idolatry, greed and thievery, fornication and adultery may be deeply ingrained patterns of human conduct, but they are not *necessary* patterns because of the gospel. The same is true, Paul attests, of those given to same-gender sex. Evidently, there were faces in the Corinthian church whose experience of the gospel confirmed the apostle’s assertion.

Undergirding and informing this apostolic statement of the need for the possibility of homosexual transformation is the biblical understanding of creation. What qualifies homosexual liaisons for inclusion on Paul’s vice list is stipulated in his discussion of this topic in Rom. 1:26-27. Put simply, they are “against nature” (Greek *para physin*, v. 26). The apostle is speaking here, of course, in the idiom of the Stoics. But the term *nature*, as used here, is if not *baptized* by Paul the Christian, then at least *circumcised* by Paul, the Hellenistic Jew. For the Hellenistic Jew characteristically filtered Stoic terms through the medium of Jewish monotheism and thus identified *nature* with God’s Law and creative intention.<sup>6</sup>

Two comments by German New Testament ethicist Wolfgang Schrage are pertinent here. The first is that in Rom. 1:26 “*physis* designates what is consonant with the order of creation.” The second is that for Paul, “Marriage is consonant with the created order.”<sup>7</sup> The divine intention for human sexual relations, as attested in the Genesis accounts of creation and affirmed by Jesus, is the union of male and female in marriage (Gen. 2:24; see also Matt. 19:1-6).<sup>8</sup> It is this norm that makes homosexual behavior (as well as fornication and adultery) for Paul “a tragic distortion of the created order.”<sup>9</sup> It is this distortion (among others) that God transforms by the power of the gospel to cleanse, sanctify and justify (1 Cor. 6:11). Such, in brief, is the pastoral response of the apostle Paul to the faces of those he knew and cared about who engaged in homosexual practice.

How then should the pastoral dilemma be resolved? Because the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), I am faithful to the faces of the people I know and care about when I tell them the gospel truth: that the power of the triune God is at work in and through the good news of Jesus Christ to liberate all from the oppression of sin, whether their particular vices are sexual or nonsexual, and, if the former, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual in kind.

1. Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 11.
2. Wolfgang Schrage, “Vices are not petty offenses but signs of human sinfulness...” *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 129. For other examples of such lists in the Pauline corpus, see 2

Cor. 12:20-21; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:29-31; Col. 3:5, 8; Eph. 5:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:2-5; Tit. 3:3,; see also Mark 7:21-22; 1 Peter 2:1; 4:3; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.

3. The terminology here is from the New Revised Standard Version, as are all citations from the biblical text.
4. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 245.
5. *Ibid.*, 246.
6. Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986), 196.
7. Schrage, 204-5.
8. For an insightful discussion of marriage as "a natural institution of which the New Testament has a good deal to say," see Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 69-71.
9. Hays, 207.

Excerpted with permission from "The Pastoral Dilemma" in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, edited by Choon-Leong Seow (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, 1996), p. 113-122. *Dr. Thomas Gillespie is the retired past President of Princeton Theological Seminary.*



# The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality

by James R. Edwards

The English word “homosexual” is a derivative of two words, the Greek word *homo*, meaning “same,” and the Latin word *sexus* meaning “sex.” “Homosexual,” therefore, means same-sex activity, male with male, or female with female. In contemporary parlance male homosexuals are often called “gays,” and female homosexuals “lesbians.” The word “homosexual” is of relative modern origin, having been first coined about 1890. English translations of the Bible naturally do not use this modern term. The Scriptures are nevertheless acquainted with same-sex activity, and on each occasion where it is referred to it is condemned. The following is an examination and evaluation of the relevant biblical evidence on the subject.

## Old Testament

### *Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*

The most explicit and important reference to homosexuality in the Old Testament occurs in the Holiness Code of Leviticus. Leviticus 18:22 specifically states, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” The commandment is repeated in Leviticus 20:13, with the prescription of the death penalty for its infraction, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” In the Leviticus 18 passage the mention of homosexuality occurs in contexts of gross immorality: the verse preceding the prohibition of homosexuality in 18:22 forbids child sacrifice, and the verse following forbids bestiality. Moreover, in both passages male homosexuality is called an “abomination.” The Hebrew word for “abomination,” *ḥēʾat* (*tohevhah*) means an object of loathing. It is the strongest condemnation in the Old Testament for violations of an ethical and religious nature.

**Objection:** Some argue that *ḥēʾat* (*tohevhah*) refers to ritual (i.e., Jewish cultic infractions) as opposed to moral violations incumbent on all persons. They argue, for example, that the prohibition against homosexuality in Leviticus is analogous to the prohibitions against eating pork or having sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period. If these commandments have lost their validity for us today, why should the prohibition of homosexuality be maintained?

**Response:** The Old Testament does not place homosexuality in the category of ritual or cultic infractions. *ḥēʾat* (*tohevhah*) occurs in Leviticus only in 18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 20:13, where it refers to the gross immorality of the Canaanites. The Greek translation of the term in the Septuagint, *βδελυγμᾶ* (*bdelygma*), also means something detestable, arousing God’s wrath. It too is reserved for grievous moral offenses. Moreover, the same word for “abomination” occurs in a list of *Gentile* sins in the Apocrypha in *Wisdom of Solomon* 12:23, which indicates that *βδελυγμᾶ* (*bdelygma*), like *ḥēʾat* (*tohevhah*), is used with reference to human moral offenses, not Jewish cultic violations. (For further examples, see Deut. 12:31; 18:9, 12; 20:18; 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:2; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:2; 36:14; Isa. 44:19.)

The Reformed theological tradition, in particular, differentiates between cultic laws and moral laws in the Old Testament, the former being fulfilled in Christ, the latter retaining their moral force. This is evident in Scripture itself. Jesus, for example, permitted the eating of unclean foods (Mark 7), but he upheld the heterosexual model of creation (Mark 10:6-9). It is equally significant that although ritual prohibitions in the Old Testament are often ignored or violated by the early church, the prohibition against homosexuality is never questioned, but repeated and maintained in the New Testament and early church.

## Other Old Testament Texts

In addition to these explicit prohibitions of homosexuality, the Old Testament elsewhere describes homosexual acts in equally reprehensible terms.

### *Genesis 19 and Judges 19*

Genesis 19 and Judges 19 describe attempted homosexual gang rapes. Genesis 19:4-8 reads,

Before the men lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.’ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, ‘No, my friends. Do not do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But do not do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.’

Similarly, Judges 19:22-24 reads,

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, ‘Bring out the man who came to your house so we may know him.’ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, ‘No, my friends, do not act so wickedly; seeing that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, do not do such a disgraceful thing.’

**Objection:** Despite the plain meaning of these passages, a revisionist interpretation argues that the sin described here is not one of homosexuality but one of inhospitality. The supposed inhospitality consisted either in Lot’s having received and entertained two foreigners whose intentions might be hostile toward the community (since Lot was himself a foreigner), or in the inhospitality of the men of the town toward the strangers, or in both. The verb “to know,” it is argued, does not carry sexual connotations in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, but only the intent to become acquainted with the strangers.

**Response:** This interpretation is unpersuasive. It is highly questionable, first of all, whether inhospitality was forbidden as a sin in the Torah, and its punishment was certainly not ordained in the destruction of a city. More importantly, context and vocabulary in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 clearly indicate an attempted homosexual assault on the guests, since both stories indicate that the aggressors were (or would have been) satisfied by the surrendering of women to be sexually molested. The verb “to know” is a translation of the Hebrew [דָּ] (*yada*), which in Genesis 4:1, for instance, carries sexual connotations. That is the clear meaning of the verb in Genesis 19:8 in reference to the “daughters who have not known a man”; the context of Genesis 19:5 likewise demands the meaning of a (homo)sexual assault. In Genesis 19:7 Lot begs the men of Sodom not to do this wicked (וְעָרְוּ, *tareu*) thing. These observations vigorously deny the suggestion that the men simply wanted to become acquainted with the strangers. Finally, in Genesis 19:13 the outcry of God against Sodom is so great that the city is destroyed. The same is also true in the Judges passage. In Judges 19:22 the Hebrew verb is also [דָּ] (*yada*), again with homosexual connotations. And in v. 23 the deed is called (וְעָרְוּ, *tareu*), “a wicked thing.”

Further references to Sodom’s sins frequently allude to or mention the sin of homosexuality. Jude 7 castigates the Sodomites who “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust (Greek = “other flesh”). Second Peter 2:7 refers to Genesis 19 with the expression, “the licentiousness of the lawless.” The Greek word for “licentiousness,” ἀσελγεία (*aselgeia*), is a strong term describing debauchery, sexual excesses, and brutality. In Ezekiel 16:46-50 Sodom is cited as a model of moral corruption, whose sin is called “abominable.”

Extra-biblical texts similarly refer to Sodom’s homosexual sin. The *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4-5, in the Pseudepigrapha, warns not to “become like Sodom which departed from the order of nature.” The first century Jewish philosopher Philo (*On Abraham* 133-136) vigorously condemns Sodom, where “men mounted males without respect for the sex nature.” The Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.200-201) speaks of the “Sodomites’...outrage to the youthful beauty” of the men Lot had received under his roof. The homosexual attack is alluded to in 3 Maccabees 2:5, where “the people of Sodom . . . were notorious for their vices,” and in Jubilees 16:6, which refers to “the pollution of Sodom.”

The church fathers, likewise, regarded the “Sodomites’ offense, like that of the men of Gibeah (Judg. 19:22) [as a] demand for carnal knowledge of a neighbor’s guests” (M. Pope, “Homosexuality,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [Supl], 415). The divine displeasure with Sodom is signaled by its annihilation, which, incidentally, appears throughout the Biblical tradition as the symbol *par excellence* of divine vengeance (e.g., Matt. 10:15; 11:23-24; Luke 10:12, Rom. 9:29, and elsewhere in Philo and Josephus).

The attempted homosexual assaults in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 were not the extent of the sins committed, of course, as the subsequent rape of the women indicates. In the corrupt moral climate of Sodom, however, the rape of women was viewed as the lesser of two evils in comparison to a homosexual assault.

### ***Deuteronomy 22:5***

Deuteronomy 22:5 also bears a relationship to our subject. The text reads, “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination (חַבְדָּת, *tohavvath*) to the Lord your God.” The mention of transvestitism and its association with “abomination” is likely a reference to sexual inversion (see M. Pope, *IDB[Supl]*, 416).

### ***Deuteronomy 23:17-18***

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 is also a relevant text.

Let there not be a female temple prostitute among the daughters of Israel, and let there not be a male temple prostitute (כַּדֵּשׁ, *kahdesh*) among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot (זִנְיָה זֹהֲנָח, *zohnach*), or the wages of a dog (כֶּהֱלֵב, *kehlev*) into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination (חַבְדָּת, *tohavvath*) to the Lord your God.

**Objection:** It is sometimes suggested that this text does not refer to homosexuality, but only that it forbids Israelites from participating in Canaanite fertility cults.

**Response:** The rabbinic tradition was agreed that Deuteronomy 23:17 referred to passive sodomy (*Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 54a-54b*), although opinions varied whether it was punishable by death. Deuteronomy 23:17-18 must be read in conjunction with 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46, and 2 Kings 23:7, all of which allude to the presence of cultic prostitution, including male prostitution, in Jerusalem in the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries B.C. These texts, along with 1 Kings 15:13, suggest that the queen mother maintained a fertility cult to the goddess Asherah in the Jerusalem temple (see S. Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult of Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 112/3 (1993) 385-401). The following points are worthy of mention in connection with this evidence. First, since temple worship in Israel was limited to males, male cult prostitutes or “dogs” would have to refer to homosexual cult practices. Second, although homosexual practices were obviously infertile, homosexual copulation (along with heterosexual copulation) was apparently believed to effect fertility in a magical way. Finally, and most importantly, the reform effort associated with King Josiah (and Deuteronomy is generally associated with that reform) strenuously and systematically uprooted these sexual cult practices.

### **Note I:**

#### **Homosexuality and the Order of Creation**

The argument that homosexuality is a God-given orientation or lifestyle, as is commonly asserted today, cannot be considered apart from reference to the order of creation in Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1:26 states that humanity is created in the image of God, and that being male and female reflect that image. The argument is frequently heard today that a sexual act is moral insofar as it expresses true affection between consenting individuals and gives pleasure to them. This is, however, neither a Biblical nor a moral argument, for as such it can be used to justify, in addition to homosexuality, adultery, group sex, sex with children, and even sex with animals. It defines a human person simply as a sentient being, which leads to a disembodied kind of love, whereas the image of God that is expressed in maleness and femaleness assumes a distinctiveness and continuity of self, sexual nature, and moral activity. The Apostle Paul, as we shall see, in fact appeals to this design in creation when he discusses the aberration of homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27.

God created the human race not in uniformity, but of complementary sexes, male and female, whose union is described as “one flesh.” Heterosexual union, as guarded and preserved in the covenant of marriage, is not simply a human choice or one variety of sexual union among many, but an order of creation. It is a holy vocation in the sense that only this form of union allows humanity to fulfill God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Male and female thus find their mutual fulfillment, as

well as their procreative function, in their complementary opposite, a teaching that is reaffirmed in the New Testament in Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:6-8; and 1 Corinthians 11:7, 9.

It is often observed that Jesus made no pronouncement regarding homosexuality. It is sometimes inferred from this that homosexuality was therefore of no moral concern to our Lord. It should be noted, however, that on the question of marriage in Mark 10 Jesus corrected the liberal divorce policy of the tradition of the elders, which appealed to the Torah (Deut. 24:1,3), by citing God's design and purpose for marriage between one man and one woman in Genesis 1-2. If, according to Mark 10:6-12, the only alternative to faithful heterosexual marriage that Jesus permitted was that of celibacy, how probable is it that he would have accepted homosexual marriage, which was unequivocally repudiated in the Old Testament and Judaism?

#### **Note II:**

##### **Cultural Attitudes toward Homosexuality in the Ancient Near East**

It is often asserted that ethical teachings in the Bible, and specifically teaching regarding homosexuality, are culturally conditioned, i.e., that they were biased by the culture(s) in which the Israelites and early Christians lived, and hence cannot be regarded as absolutes for our day. The following evidence dispels this notion in the case of homosexuality.

In Mesopotamia, legal texts virtually ignore homosexual acts;

Among the Hittites, there was apparently no prohibition of homosexual acts;  
In Ugarit, no information is available on the subject;

In Egypt, pederasty (adult males engaging in sexual intercourse with boys) was disapproved, but otherwise homosexuality was evidently not proscribed;

In Greece, homosexuality was as a rule viewed (and promoted) as a higher form of sexuality (e.g., Plato's *Symposium*).

In Rome, the Greek norm was adopted and carried to more decadent extremes, although the Stoic ideal of monogamy attempted to counterbalance otherwise widespread moral degeneracy.

As this review indicates, the Ancient Near East was ambivalent or permissive regarding the issue of homosexuality, and sometimes affirmative of it. The Biblical position on homosexuality does not reflect cultural norms, but more often than not opposes them. It is thus erroneous to assert that the Bible's position on this question is culturally determined.

#### **New Testament**

##### ***1 Corinthians 6:9-10***

The earliest New Testament text bearing on homosexuality is 1 Corinthians 6:9-10,

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Two terms in the above text deserve attention. The first is *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*), which the NRSV translates "male prostitutes." The denotation of *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) in Greek literature is "soft," such as soft garments worn by fastidious people (Luke 7:25). It can, however, carry a connotation, as it does here, of "soft" persons or passive homosexual partners, specifically "men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually" (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 489 [including a list of references in secular Greek literature where *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) carries the same meaning]). The recent *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (2.381) defines *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as "reprehensible examples of passive homosexuality." The translation of this term in the Latin Vulgate, *mollis*, carries a corresponding sense. The presence of *πορνοι* (*pornoi*, fornication) and *μοιχοι* (*moichoi*, adultery) in this passage clearly indicates that *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) is to be understood in the sense of sexual immorality.

The second term is ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*), which the NRSV translates, “sodomites,” a term deriving from the infamy of Sodomy described in Genesis 19. Although this is the first occurrence of the term in Greek literature, there can be no doubt about its meaning. A compound word, ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) means “(males) going to bed (or copulating) with males.”

Objection: It is sometimes argued that the above two terms condemn only pederasty, i.e., sex between an adult male and a “call boy,” rather than homosexuality between consenting adults.

Response: A number of scholars have argued convincingly that Paul coined ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) from the presence of two adjacent words in Leviticus 20:13 (ἀρσενος κοιτην, *arsenos koiten*; see D. Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9,” *Biblioteca Sacra* 150 [1993] 479-492). Leviticus 20:13, it will be recalled, is the strongest prohibition of homosexuality in the Old Testament. If, as appears likely, the Apostle Paul has this text in mind in utilizing ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) in 1 Corinthians 6:9, then the term cannot be limited simply to the Greek practice of pederasty, as John Boswell and others argue, but must be seen as an all-encompassing condemnation of homosexuality (as in Lev. 20:13), including consenting adult homosexual relationships. Hence, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich (p. 109) correctly define the term as “a male homosexual, pederast, sodomite,” as do Liddell, Scott, and Jones in the definitive *Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 246). *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (1.158) defines the term as “referring to a male who engages in sexual activity with men or boys.”

The term appears again in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 1:10 where it is paired with πορνοὶ (*pornoi*, fornicators), again establishing an illicit sexual practice. A century after Paul (about A.D. 155), ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) was used by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, in his epistle to the Philippians (5:3) warning young men “to cut themselves off from the lust of the world.” Polycarp then quotes 1 Corinthians 6:9, and refers to the behaviors described therein as “iniquity” (ἀτοπία, *atopia*). The Latin Vulgate translates ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) as *masculorum concubitores*, which, according to Cassell’s *New Latin Dictionary*, means “the lying together or copulation of men.” Cassell’s includes passages from Cicero and Vergil where it carries this same sense.

### ***Romans 1:26-27***

The most unequivocal condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament occurs in Romans 1:26-27,

Therefore God handed them over to dishonorable passions, their women exchanged the natural drive for the unnatural drive (χρησις, *chresis* = “relations” or “functions,” especially of sexual intercourse), likewise also the men, having left the natural desire for women burned in their desire for one another, men for men, working out the shameful and receiving the just punishment that their error (or wandering) necessarily caused.

Objection: It is sometimes suggested that this passage is not a condemnation of homosexuality *per se*, but of persons who “exchange” their natural heterosexual orientation for homosexual acts.

Response: This view wrongly projects the modern concept of personality orientation onto the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul does not address the origins, motivations, or gratifications of homosexuality, including the modern concept of “sexual orientation.” Arguments from such causes, whatever their biological, psychological, or sociological merit, would simply have been seen by the Apostle as further manifestations of the power of sin to confuse and blind human thinking (Rom. 1:28). The proscription here, as everywhere in Scripture, refers solely to *homosexual acts*.

Romans 1:26-27 actually broadens the biblical condemnation of homosexuality to include the practice of lesbianism. In Romans 1:26-27 homosexuality is cited not because it is worse than other sins, but because it illustrates the problem of idolatry in 1:18-32. As Gentiles “exchanged” the truth of God for a lie and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator, so lesbianism and homosexuality “exchange” a natural relationship for an unnatural one. Idolatry and homosexuality, in other words, represent theological and moral rebellion against God. The failure to worship and glorify God results in idolatry, and the failure to find one’s sexual fulfillment in the opposite sex results in homosexuality. Idolatry and

homosexuality inevitably result in an inversion or turning back on self for a fulfillment that God intended to be completed by the other. The result is alienation from God.

That “unnatural relations” (παρὰ φύσιν, *para phusin*) carries the sense of something contrary to the order of nature is evinced by its usage again in the analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11. There Paul writes that Gentiles “were cut off from their natural stock (κατὰ φύσιν, *kata phusin*) of the wild olive tree and ingrafted into the unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν, *para phusin*) cultured olive tree” (Rom. 11:24). Not surprisingly, παρὰ φύσιν (*para phusin*) becomes used for homosexuality in several subsequent Greek writers (see Athenagoras [13]; Philo [*On Abraham* 135-136, *On Special Laws* 3.39 preserves a stinging rebuke of pederasty as the “pursuit of unnatural pleasure,” τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκει]; Plutarch [*Dialogue on Love* 751-752]; Dio Chrysostom [*Discourse* 7.135, 151-152]; Josephus [*Against Apion* 2.199, 273, 275]; and the *Testament of Naphtali* [3:3-4]).

### **Note III:**

#### **Why are References to Homosexuality Relatively Infrequent in the Bible?**

The frequency (or infrequency) of a statement is not necessarily an indication of its importance. Marriage vows, to take but one example, are said only once, but few will want to argue from this that they are of little importance. Nevertheless, it is often argued that because homosexuality is mentioned relatively infrequently in the Bible that it was relatively unimportant, and should be regarded so today.

This is an unwarranted conclusion. For one, the Hebrew tradition showed reticence and restraint with regard to explicit sexual references. Whenever possible, it employed euphemisms (e.g., the verb “to know”) in order to avoid references to genitalia and to genital acts. This same reticence applied to acts of same sex intercourse.

Second, and more importantly, same-sex activity stood in obvious variance to the design of creation, wherein male and female become “one flesh,” in both pleasure and procreation. The scarcity of references, in other words, is exactly what we would expect in a tradition that universally affirmed the God-giveness of heterosexuality and deplored deviations from that norm. Other acts that the Old Testament regarded as deplorable (e.g., child sacrifice) are mentioned no more frequently than homosexuality. This same argument, incidentally, applies to the relative infrequent mention of homosexuality in modern reference works. To cite but two examples. The fifteen-volume *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (1912; supplemental volumes, 1955) contains no entry on the subject of homosexuality. Again, Oxford University Press’s two-volume *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (1992!) contains no entry on the subject. Surely few will argue that the omission of the subject in these works is due to the fact that homosexuality is either widely approved, or of little moral importance. The answer, rather, is that it has been considered self-evident that the Judeo-Christian tradition always and everywhere condemned the practice of homosexuality. Hence the point needed not be re-established or elaborated. The reason homosexuality is under discussion today is not because the Scriptures are unclear on the subject, but because modern sexual practices have radically changed.

A third reason for the relative infrequency of the subject relates to the ethnic environment in which the biblical writings arose and to which they were addressed. A general pattern can be observed. Where biblical authors were writing to Jews living in a Jewish environment, references to homosexuality are relatively infrequent. The reason for this is because homosexuality was (and still is) a rare phenomenon in Jewish society, and hence posed little problem. The pattern changes, however, when Judeo-Christian authors began to address their counterparts in the Hellenistic Diaspora where homosexuality was widely practiced, and where it threatened the purity of faith and life. This explains the vastly increased number of condemnations of homosexuality in the extra-Biblical books of the Pseudepigrapha during the intertestamental period, which by and large were addressed to faith communities in the Diaspora (e.g., Pseudo-Phocylides 3; Sibylline Oracles 2.73; 3.185; 3.596; 4.34; 2 Enoch 34.2; Jubilees 13:18; 16:5-6; 20:5; 3 Maccabees 2:5; Pseudo-Philo 8:2; 45:1-6; and in the Testaments of Naphtali 3:5; Isaac 5:27; and Jacob 7:19-20). Each of these references expressly prohibits and condemns the practice of homosexuality.

A similar pattern is evident in the New Testament. Thus, Jesus, who moved in a predominantly Jewish milieu, made no reference to homosexuality, whereas Paul, who ministered in a Hellenistic milieu, makes specific reference to it in obvious places like Corinth and Rome. This pattern persists in the extra-Biblical books of the New Testament Apocrypha. The Apocalypse of Peter (32), for example, which probably arose in Egypt in the first half of the second century, contains the following passage: “There is no rest from torture, [for those] who defiled their bodies, behaving like women. And the women with them, these were those who behaved with one another as men with a woman.”

A survey of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence regarding homosexuality results in a massive and unqualified condemnation of the practice. Richard Hays rightly summarizes the evidence thus: “Every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period . . . adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries” (“A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *JRE* 14/1 (1986) 202).

#### **Note IV: Homosexuality and Idolatry**

Along with the increase in references to homosexuality in biblical and extra-biblical works directed to the Diaspora, there is a similar tendency in the same works to refer to homosexuality in conjunction with idolatry. This is, as we have seen, the case in Romans 1:18-32, and is more often than not the case in the texts cited above. Idolatry was regarded as the single greatest threat to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The mention of homosexuality in conjunction with idolatry thus indicates its seriousness as a moral offense in the eyes of that tradition.

#### **Note V: Homosexual Orientation and Moral Accountability**

Many homosexuals claim that they have no awareness of having chosen homosexuality. A conclusion sometimes drawn from this is that the individual has no capacity to choose sexual orientation, and hence that sexual orientation is beyond moral prescriptions, including those of Scripture.

“Sexual orientation,” as noted earlier, is a modern concept that is alien to Scripture. The biblical and extra-biblical texts cited above refer solely to sexual practices. The gospel does not address sin at the level of creation, but at the level of redemption. That is to say, Scripture does not give conclusive answers as to why things are the way they are in the world, but it does speak of their transformation by the power of God. Thus, although human beings do not choose the state into which they are born, they do have a choice over how they respond to their state. Hence, a predisposition or orientation toward a certain course of action does not produce a “right” to do it, or justify acting upon it. The current state of behavioral research indicates that sexual orientation is more a function of post-natal psycho-social development than of biological constitution. Human sexual behavior is the product of a network of interacting factors, and *human choice cannot be eliminated as one of them*.

Whatever the ultimate causes of homosexuality, the church should not fall into the error of thinking of homosexuality as a behavior that cannot be resisted. “It must be made quite clear that the genuine invert is not necessarily given to homosexual practices, and may exercise as careful control over his or her physical impulses as the heterosexual” (Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London: Archon Books, 1975], p. xi). This salutary statement was written by a scholar who *advocated* homosexual causes. To be human means to be able to make moral choices. The gospel does not make moral demands that believers cannot fulfill, and that includes the biblical proscriptions against homosexual practices.

The gospel assures believers of forgiveness and grace as they struggle with sin. Paul establishes grounds for this hope immediately following mention of homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, “And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul states, “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

Again, in Galatians 5:1, Paul speaks of Christian freedom as receiving God's gracious word of justification, and of a subsequent reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit and resistance to the works of the flesh.

### **Conclusion**

Without fail, biblical and extra-biblical sources condemn the practice of homosexuality. There is no text in Judeo-Christian literature from Leviticus to Constantine that condones it. This should be sufficient and compelling evidence against accepting the practice of homosexuality as a gift of God, or as an alternative and morally justifiable lifestyle. Churches, particularly those whose creedal traditions assent to the authority of Scripture, must give full weight to the scriptural position on this subject in both their teaching and in the ordering of their life. The above evidence argues that the church cannot ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals to the offices of ministry and maintain fidelity to Scripture and creeds.

At the same time, the gospel requires love and understanding of persons of homosexual lifestyle, and the offering of all available help to those who desire it. Persons of homosexual inclination who choose to remain celibate and resist their temptations through faith, prayer, and abstinence have every right to the sacraments and offices of the church, including ordination, that are open to every other sinner who, by God's grace, struggles against sin and relinquishes his or her life to the transformation of the gospel.

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# Biblical and Confessional Teaching on Marriage and Sexuality

by Carol Shanholtzer

In 1997 our denomination amended the *Book of Order* by adding section G-6.0106b, which specifies “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness” as requirements for all church officers. The specific wording in that section did not represent a change in the church’s understanding or practice. It was added because of an opinion in the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) case *Hope Presbyterian Church v. Central Presbyterian Church* (Remedial case 206-3). That opinion indicated that explicit wording must be added to the *Book of Order* to ensure that a future GAPJC would not overturn our denomination’s standards related to ordained office and sexual behavior.

After the addition of section G-6.0106b to the *Book of Order* accomplished that purpose, numerous attempts have been made to have that wording and those ordination requirements removed. Amendment 10-A “Gifts and Requirements,” on which presbyteries are voting this year, would remove the current “fidelity/chastity” wording from the *Book of Order* and replace it with vague, meaningless language. Amendment 10-A would have the effect of removing from the *Book of Order* all standards limiting sexual behavior of church officers. The basis for our current standards—that marriage between a man and a woman is the only relationship in which sexual expression is moral—is clearly taught in Scripture and the Confessions.

## I. Biblical teaching

Our society assumes that people are free to set their own moral standards. Presbyterians’ moral standards focus on knowing and obeying God’s will. Presbyterians embrace the central Reformation principle “*sola scriptura*” (“Scripture alone”), which means we look to Scripture as our sole authority to learn God’s will.

When Jesus walked on earth as God incarnate, he could speak face to face with the people he encountered. Now, after the death and resurrection of Christ, the way he speaks to us is through Scripture. The Holy Spirit illumines our minds to understand Scripture. What Scripture says, God says. Referring to the adequacy and authority of Scripture, our *Book of Confessions* teaches:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men....” (The Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.006)

We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same....Therefore, we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided....(The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.001-5.002, 5.013)

...If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the word of God...(The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.04)

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written....(The Confession of 1967, 9.27)

For Presbyterians, it is Scripture—not human opinions, feelings, scholarship or reason—which is our authority for distinguishing right from wrong and for living in a way that pleases God. Presbyterians do not believe God gives new revelations that contradict what Scripture teaches. Scripture is our sole authority.

In Scripture, God teaches us how to live in a way that honors him in every aspect of our being, including our sexuality. The boundaries God places on our lives enable us to live life at its fullest and best. Biblical teaching related to marriage, singleness and sexual morality provides a sufficient basis for the people of God to know his will, to live in a way that is pleasing to him, and to receive his blessing, whether in marriage or the single life.

Scripture reveals that God created humanity as male and female and ordained the relationship of marriage to be the norm for human living. Within a life-long covenant of marriage, a man and a woman are to fully experience and enjoy sexual intimacy as God's good gift and are to welcome children as a blessing from God. (Gen 1:27-28, Gen 2:24-25, Psalm 127:3, Psalm 128:3-4, Matt 19:4-6, Eph 5:22-33, I Cor 7:1-9)

Scripture also teaches that some are called to live in singleness for a portion or all of their adult life. While our culture convinces many that they are captive to their biological drives, whether heterosexual or homosexual, Scripture teaches that God enables his people to overcome any temptation. By abstaining from sexual intimacy in obedience to God, the unmarried believer demonstrates love for God and is enabled to focus on serving him with undivided devotion. Faithfully serving God always brings blessing and joy. (I Cor 7:32-35, I Cor 7:17, Gal 5:22-26, I Cor 6:19-20, John 14:15, I John 5:3-4a, John 15:9-11, I Cor 10:13, 2 Peter 2:19, Psalm 119:30-32, Psalm 73:25-26, Psalm 16:11)

Ours is a culture in which many unmarried couples "live together" and adultery is common, but Scripture clearly forbids such practices and warns that sexual immorality in any form is not to be found among the people of God. (Ex 20:14, Mark 7:18-23, Matt 15:17-20, Jude 3-8, Rom 13:12-14, I Cor 6:9-11, I Cor 6:18-20, I Cor 5:1-13, Gal 5:16-24, Eph 5:1-10, Col 3:1-10, I Thes 4:1-8, Heb 12:14-29, Heb 13:4, Rev 21:1-8, Rev 22:10-20)

While our culture is increasingly accepting of the practice of homosexuality, Scripture unambiguously includes homosexual practice among the forms of sexual immorality. (Lev 18:22, Lev 20:13, I Cor 6:9-11, Rom 1:26-27, Jude 7)

Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10). He also said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15). When Satan tempted Eve in the garden, Satan lied when he told her that God's words were not trustworthy. Satan also lied when he said obeying God would deprive Adam and Eve of something that would be good for them. (Gen 2:16-17; Gen 3:4-5)

The culture that surrounds us perverts and abuses God's good gift of sexuality, and it is all-too-easy for Christians to absorb the culture's distorted view and to see sexuality as the world sees it. God has made clear to us the boundaries that accompany this gift. We must decide if God is worthy of our trust and if we will endeavor to obey what he has commanded.

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom 12:2)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (I Cor 6:19-20)

## **II. Confessional understanding**

The *Book of Confessions* contains the confessional statements which, although subordinate to Scripture, are standards in our denomination. The *Book of Order* defines the role of the Confessions in this way:

While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. (G-2.0200)

Some who seek to change the standards related to sexual morality argue that since we don't follow Old Testament dietary laws or many other Old Testament instructions, we shouldn't have to follow biblical teaching about sexual morality, claiming that biblical moral teaching is equally outdated. The Westminster Confession (6.103 - 6.104) explains that there are three types of laws found in the Old Testament: ceremonial laws (which are no longer in effect), judicial laws (which are no longer binding) and moral laws (which are still binding). We are always bound by God's moral law. The purpose of Christian liberty is to serve God in holiness:

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation. (6.105)

Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.... (6.106)

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. (6.110)

Sexual morality is addressed in a number of our confessions (7.247-7.249, 4.108-4.109, 5.245-5.247, 5.251, 6.131-6.139, 7.130, 9.47). In teaching what we must avoid, the confessions specifically include "adultery," "fornication" and "sodomy" (7.249) as well as "homosexual perversion" (4.087) as being forbidden by God. In teaching our positive obligations, the confessions and catechisms emphasize that because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6:19-20) all Christians, married and single, have the duty of chastity (purity) in "body, mind, affections, words, and behavior" (7.247-7.248).

The Westminster Confession teaches that "the Church is concerned with the establishment of marriage in the Lord as Scripture sets it forth." (6.132) It also defines marriage as uniting one man and one woman and describes some of the ways in which married Christians are to show their love and care for one another:

Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life.... Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live. Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of their moral and spiritual character, for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (6.131, 6.133-6.134))

The Confessions also emphasize the necessity of repentance:

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy

nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments. Although repentance be not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it. As there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent. Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly. (6.081 - 6.085)

In addition, the Confessions assure those who turn from sin, purposing to live a new life of obedience, that because of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, we are forgiven and freed from all that is in our past:

... for the sake of Christ's reconciling work, God will no more remember my sins or the sinfulness with which I have to struggle all my life long; but that he graciously imparts to me the righteousness of Christ so that I may never come into condemnation. (4.056)

### **III. *Book of Order* requirements for officers**

The *Book of Order* includes these applications of biblical and confessional teaching in the requirements for church officers:

... In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.... (G-6.0106a)

[This wording will be removed if Amendment 10-A is approved:] 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. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), 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. (G-6.0106b)

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body.... (G-6.0108b)

The "fidelity/chastity" standard is not an obscure point of theology, but rather is a practical aspect of daily life commanded unambiguously by the teaching of Scripture, specifically taught in our Confessions, and is a requirement which our presbyteries have carefully examined and reaffirmed time after time in recent years in voting on proposed amendments to the *Book of Order*.

Over the past 30 years as our culture's sexual mores have radically changed, challenges to our denomination's understanding of marriage and sexuality have been unrelenting. When presented with each effort to redefine marriage and redefine what is moral sexual expression, our presbyteries have consistently refused such changes and have reaffirmed the biblical and confessional understanding. God's definition of marriage and the limits of moral sexual expression are set forth in Scripture and do not change. It is critical to our church that the biblical and confessional standards be maintained and upheld throughout the whole denomination.

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## **Change in Homoerotic Behavior and Feelings is Possible: Genetics Play Only a Weak and Indirect Role**

*by Christopher H. Rosik*

There are a limited but growing number of current empirical studies that address the question of the potential for change in same-sex attraction and behavior. In the interest of brevity, this analysis will focus on the most prominent of these studies. The reader seeking to gain further education in this literature is encouraged to review other studies that provide background and research data on attempts to modify same-sex attraction and behavior (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Nicolosi, Byrd, & Potts, 2000; Rosik, 2001, 2003; Shaeffer, Hyde, et al., 2000; Schaeffer, Nottebaum, et al., 2000; Throckmorton, 1998).

### **Landmark research by Robert Spitzer**

The first landmark study in this area was conducted by Robert Spitzer (2003). This study is important in many respects. The first point has to do with the background of the author. Spitzer is widely recognized as the architect of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). He only decided to study the issue of change in sexual orientation after talking with several ex-gays who were protesting the APA's stance opposing change efforts at the 1999 APA convention. Prior to his study, Spitzer believed that while homosexual behavior could be resisted, no one could really change his or her sexual orientation. He now believes that some **people can and do change**. Moreover, Spitzer has described himself publicly as an "atheist Jew." Given all these facts, it is impossible to view his study as being the product of antihomosexual, self-serving, political or religious bias, common terms used to dismiss most of the other relevant studies supportive of change efforts. Spitzer's data, however, align nicely with what prior studies have reported.

Secondly, Spitzer's (2003) study significantly improved on the earlier research by carefully assessing for the emotional components of homosexual experience (e.g., subjective ratings of sexual attraction, sexual fantasies during masturbation and heterosexual sex). He also limited his subject pool to individuals reporting at least five years of sustained change from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation, obtaining a sample of 200 eligible respondents who he personally interviewed. Using fairly strict criteria, **Spitzer found 66% of male participants and 44% of female subjects had achieved good heterosexual functioning.** Of the 33 men who rated most extreme on the homosexual indicators, a surprising 67% achieved good heterosexual functioning. While 20% of the sample reported being heterosexually married prior to change attempts, 76% of the men and 47% of the women reported being married at the time of the interview. Even though 42% of the men and 46% of the women reported their sexual attraction to be exclusively homosexual before change attempts, 17% of the men and 55% of the women indicated exclusive heterosexual attraction upon interview. Depression was indicated as a problem prior to change efforts by 43% of the men and 47% of the women, while these statistics had fallen to current levels of 1% and 4%, respectively.

### **Recent study by Jones and Yarhouse confirms earlier findings**

More recently, Jones and Yarhouse (2007) summarized the initial findings of their important study on change of unwanted homosexuality, which followed 73 participants involved in Exodus International affiliated ministries over a three year period. This longitudinal research design allowed for stronger conclusions to be made about causation than can occur with typical correlational studies. Across several respected measures of sexual experience, the authors concluded that on average, significant change away from homosexual orientation and toward heterosexual orientation was documented. They further observed that the average movement away from homosexual orientation was medium to large, while the average movement toward heterosexual orientation was somewhat smaller. **Contrary to the prevailing wisdom, participants who reported the strongest degree of same-sex attractions also reported the most significant changes toward heterosexual functioning. No meaningful evidence of harm from participants' attempts to change was discovered.**

## Nature, nurture and the church's ministry

For the most part, subjects who report experiencing improvement in heterosexual functioning are devoutly religious and often indicate that their relationship with God is an important factor in their ability to change. The best integrative theories about the causes of homoerotic attraction suggest that several interacting factors are involved to varying degrees in any one individual. The primary influences are thought to be of genetic, biological, developmental, and psychosocial origin. This has implications for understanding the issue of change. It suggests that many homosexual persons, especially men, cannot simply choose to feel heterosexual attraction. **Change takes courage, motivation, and perseverance.** Even then, some will probably have to contend with a certain degree of homosexual feelings throughout their lives.

Yet it is also incorrect to say that people are born gay, lesbian or bisexual, at the very least in terms of being anatomically designed for homoerotic behavior. Human sexuality is much more complex than eye color, and developmental, social, and cultural influences cannot be left out of the equation. The best twin studies now indicate that **genetics play only a weak and indirect role** in the development of homosexuality (Bailey, Dunne, & Martin, 2000; Bearman & Bruckner, 2002). Identical twins have identical genes and upbringing, but the odds are only about 1 in 10 that both twins will report same-sex attractions. **Even the American Psychological Association has now gone on record as endorsing the perspective that sexual orientation is not determined by any particular factor but likely includes influences from both nature and nurture (APA, 2008).** The studies by Spitzer (2003) and Jones and Yarhouse (2007) underscore that change in same-sex attraction is a viable outcome for some and that for many others less than complete modification of homoerotic feelings still results in significant improvement in psychological well-being and spiritual satisfaction. **Those within our denomination who desire to increase their heterosexual potential deserve our compassion and assistance in the journey, not our complicity in the untruth that real change never occurs.** (emphases added by editor).

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## Ordination of Sexually Active Gay Men and Lesbians

by Christopher Rosik

Lately I have been reading many letters containing *pro and con* arguments for overturning the Presbyterian Church's ordination standard. That standard now limits positions of leadership to those who maintain fidelity in heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness.

Social and theological liberals tend to argue from biology and/or theology that the biblical prohibition against homosexual conduct is antiquated. According to their argument, certain homosexual sexual behavior among religious leaders should be exempted from this exclusion.

In response to this, I have offered some observations and related questions that I believe need to be answered by anyone who argues for such an exception to the historic religious standard--i.e., that sexual contact is reserved for heterosexual marriage:

(1) We should not treat gay men and lesbians as a monolithic group. In fact, a good body of research provides a convincing rationale for differentiating between lesbians and gay men in terms of erotic plasticity (Baumeister, 2000). For example, Whisman (1996) found a higher percentage of lesbians (31%) than gay men (18%) who described their sexual orientation as being a conscious, deliberate choice. Rosenbluth (1997) found that 58% of 90 lesbian couples reported choosing their current sexual orientation.

This raises an interesting question. If equal access to positions of religious leadership is predicated on homosexual orientation being *created by God* and not chosen, then what do we do with those (primarily) lesbians whose same-sex involvement is consciously chosen? To be consistent with the premise, these lesbians would need to be singled out for exclusion. If they are not, then the creation argument is given the appearance of being disingenuous.

Of course, individuals who experience some same sex attraction but remain committed to fidelity in heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness may still be perfectly able to serve in an ordained capacity.

(2) How we treat bisexuality discloses a great deal about the philosophical consistency of our position regarding homosexuality. Zinik (1985) defined the bisexual person as having:

- (a) the capacity for sexual arousal by members of both sexes,
- (b) sexual activity or sexual desire for sexual contact with both men and women, and
- (c) self-identification as being bisexual.

This definition remains fairly well accepted today.

Much emphasis is placed by social liberals on affirming faithful (and, I assume, sexually monogamous) homosexual relationships, since it is assumed that God created the homosexual attraction. But bisexuality poses a serious challenge for adherents of this line of thinking, since bisexuals are typically considered to have, by nature, sexual inclinations toward both sexes between which they can simultaneously choose.

What would one do if a candidate for ordination indicated that he or she was bisexual? Should they be required to limit themselves to faithful sexual activity with only one person of the opposite (or same) sex? Would this not be a denial of their true nature?

In addition, if we mandate that bisexuals deny their nature in order to be ordained, then wouldn't this policy support what traditionalists have been saying all along--that biblical faithfulness may legitimately require sexual self-denial?

Or, perhaps bisexuals should be allowed to have "faithful" sexual relationships with two people--one man and one woman. This would appear to be consistent with the premise of bisexuality as God-given...but

then, having two partners clearly violates the biblical mandate of sexual monogamy. Such a solution suggests that ultimately, sexual monogamy is unimportant in either homosexual or heterosexual relationships.

It seems clear to me that any religious leader arguing in favor of ordaining sexually active homosexual persons *simply must indicate how they will resolve the problems posed by bisexuality*. Indeed, the plight of bisexuals appears inextricably linked to that of gay men and lesbians within the sexual-minority community.

(3) The situation with transgendered individuals raises still further questions. Transgender is a term used to describe persons who have a persistent and distressing discomfort with their assigned gender. They are born anatomically as one biological sex, but live their lives to varying degrees as the opposite sex. The limited number of gender-dysphoric persons who I have seen clinically (prior to any sex reassignment surgery) take it as a “given” that their condition is due to some neurobiological problem. The scientific literature generally supports this notion, at least for a group of “core” gender dysphoric people, although psychosocial factors probably play a greater or lesser role in any individual case. But if we accept this conclusion, then clearly the origins of transgenderism are not part of God’s creative intent.

So then if a transgendered person seeks ordination, it appears that the logical argument in support of ordination would be that the person was born with a biological defect for which they were not responsible and which sex reassignment surgery corrected. Again, this is very different than celebrating transgenderism as part of the intended rainbow of God’s sexually diverse world.

If we are told the church must ordain practicing homosexual persons because the homosexual was “born that way,” then shouldn’t the church also accept into leadership transgendered persons only on the basis that they are “designed that way” by their maker as well?

How does one resolve this inconsistency without undermining the rationale of those in the church who now say it is God’s intent that we bless homosexual relationships? Or is their whole argument a smoke screen?

Generally, when I ask these questions, I am struck by the silence that I receive. Only a few people respond with counter views, and those few do not seem able to grasp my point.

I invite religiously oriented readers to try out these questions where such issues are at stake, and see if you receive a more satisfactory response than I seem able to obtain. There is too much at stake for the faith community to allow their leaders to leave such questions unasked and unanswered.

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## **II.**

# **Resources for the Debate on The Proposed new Form of Government**



# **A Critique of the Proposed Replacement for the Form of Government in the *Book of Order***

*by Carol Shanholtzer*

A completely rewritten Form of Government is being sent to the presbyteries for their votes. It would have far-reaching impact on our denomination. This amendment would replace the entire Form of Government section of the *Book of Order* with two sections: a new section called Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and an entirely-rewritten Form of Government section. An “Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures Required by the Form of Government” was commended to governing bodies by the General Assembly and follows the text of the replacement Form of Government in the amendment packet.

The General Assembly (GA) made a number of changes to the draft documents they received, including the correction of several of the serious problems. However, most of the changes made by the GA were minor modifications in wording with no significant effect. The end result is that almost all of the fundamental deficiencies that characterized the draft which was sent to the GA remain in the version which is being sent to the presbyteries for their votes.

## **A new fourth section, Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, will be added to the *Book of Order***

The *Book of Order* currently consists of three sections: Form of Government, Directory for Worship, and Rules of Discipline. If the amendment sent to the presbyteries is approved, a fourth section, Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (numbered with a prefix “F-”), will be added as the first section of the *Book of Order*. The ramifications of having a separate “Foundations” section cannot be known unless the documents are put into use and authoritative interpretations are made by the GA or by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC). Foundations provision F-3.03 states the following:

The statements contained in this section, ‘The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,’ describe the ecclesiological and historical commitments on which the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rests. Provisions of any part of this Constitution are to be interpreted in light of the whole Constitution. No provision of the *Book of Order* can of itself invalidate any other. Where there are tensions and ambiguities between provisions, it is the task of councils and judicial commissions to resolve them in such a way as to give effect to all provisions.

In its “Comment” to the GA, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) wrote: “The creation of a new section of the *Book of Order* requires consideration of both its contents and how they relate to the other parts of the *Book of Order*.”

Although much of the material in the Foundations section is included in the first few chapters of the current Form of Government, changing just a few words or sentences can have a significant impact. For example, our current Form of Government in G-2.0500b states, “Thus, the creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God’s people.” The new Foundations section retains that concept using different wording. The second paragraph of section F-2.01, however, also adds a sentence declaring that the creeds and confessions of this church “appeal to the universal truth of the Gospel while expressing that truth *within the social and cultural assumptions of their time*.” [emphasis added] Of course each confessional statement was written in a specific historic and cultural context. But, to state that in the *Book of Confessions*, authors of the creeds and confessions expressed truth *within the social and cultural assumptions of their time*, is a far different claim than acknowledging historical context. The new statement explicitly invites the possibility that faulty cultural assumptions could have resulted in inaccurate interpretations of Scripture being incorporated into the *Book of Confessions*. It clouds the issue of how the contents of the *Book of Confessions*, our subordinate authority, will be authoritatively interpreted by the GA and the GAPJC to apply to our denominational life in the future. For example, one of the constitutional questions requires officers to “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...be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God” (W-4.4003c). Will this requirement contained in the Directory for Worship section of the *Book of Order* take on a different meaning because of that new sentence included in the Foundations section that describes the purpose of confessional statements? Will our confessional exposition of Scripture, which specifies that marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman, be interpreted in the future to be a product of “social and cultural assumptions” of the time rather than God’s unchanging truth?

**Foundations section sets no theological limits and  
mandates inclusion of “all persons and groups” as officers**

Another highly significant change in the Foundations section is the diversity provision, F-1.0403, which states:

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.

Does the church really want to adopt the wording “regardless of...theological conviction”? Does the church truly want to approve a provision stating that the PC(USA) “shall guarantee full participation...in... governance...to all persons or groups within its membership”—thereby making ordination to office a *right* of every church member? When these documents go to presbyteries for their votes, they can no longer be amended. Presbyters must vote “yes” or “no” on the wording as it is received.

**Impact on the “fidelity/chastity” requirement cannot be known**

The “fidelity/chastity” requirement currently found in G-6.0106b is retained in the proposed replacement Form of Government as G-2.0104b. Presbyteries are therefore being asked to approve a document which states in G-2.0104b that “fidelity/chastity” is required for officers while section F-1.0403 (quoted above) guarantees full participation in governance to all persons or groups within its membership. Section F-3.03 (quoted above) requires that conflicts be resolved in a way that will “give effect to all provisions.” However, when provisions are mutually-exclusive, that is not possible. Which of these mutually-exclusive provisions will prevail? If the replacement to the Form of Government is approved, the answer will be determined in the future by an authoritative interpretation either by the GA or by the GAPJC. The concern of many is that because the guarantee of participation in governance is in the Foundations section, material in the Foundations section is likely to be considered to have more weight than provisions in the other three sections of the *Book of Order*. No one can know the outcome before an authoritative interpretation is made. All that is required for an authoritative interpretation is a majority vote of one General Assembly.

**We become a hierarchical,  
rather than a connectional, denomination**

The *Book of Order*, in G-9.0103, currently describes our governing bodies as being “separate and independent.” In the 1992 remedial case which determined that per capita contributions by sessions are voluntary, *Central v. Long Island* (Remedial Case 204-5), the GAPJC wrote in its decision:

These issues go to the heart of our Presbyterian system of church governance. Our system is unique. It neither imposes decisions from the top down nor allows particular churches to operate in a vacuum.... While our Book of Order speaks in terms of “higher governing bodies,” we

acknowledge that our system contemplates a partnership of church governance in which each governing body has responsibilities, exercises authority, and carries out mission in particular areas (G-9.0103).

Instead of describing governing bodies as “separate and independent,” the new Foundations section vaguely describes them only as “distinct” (F-3.0203). In “What is Missional Ecclesiology?,” a paper offered by OGA as an on-line resource accompanying these amendments, Paul Hooker (one of the four writers of the new documents) states, “As sessions guide and *govern* the work of congregations, as presbyteries nurture, guide, and *govern* the work of sessions, and as synods and the General Assembly support and *govern* the work of presbyteries...” [emphasis added].

Although the specific word “govern” is not used in the replacement Form of Government in describing relationships between governing bodies, the hierarchical concept it denotes is unmistakably present in multiple places, including the structure for mission. Currently each governing body carries out mission in its own sphere of responsibility and authority. Under the current Form of Government, the session is responsible for the “mission and government” of a congregation (G-10.0102). Under the replacement Form of Government, this is no longer the case. The General Assembly has the responsibility and power to “establish[ing] a comprehensive mission strategy and priorities for the church” (G-3.0501a); a synod’s “responsibility may include developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, a broad strategy for the mission of the church within its bounds and in accord with the larger strategy of the General Assembly” (G-3.0401a); the synod “is charged with ...developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, joint plans and objectives for the fulfillment of mission, providing encouragement and guidance to its presbyteries and overseeing their work” (G-3.0403a); and, interestingly, a presbytery has responsibility for “assisting congregations in developing mission and participating in the mission of the whole church” (G-3.0301c), has authority to “develop strategy for the mission of the church in its district” (G-3.0303a), and “leads and guides the witness of its congregations” (G-3.0301). The session is left out of the chain entirely and its responsibility is limited to “leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church” (G-3.0201c).

Leaving the session out of the chain was not an oversight. When someone on the Assembly committee moved to amend the wording to give the session the authority for the mission of the congregation, Presbytery Executive Paul Hooker (one of the authors of the documents and a resource person to the Assembly committee), spoke against amending the language, saying that such a change would begin to deflect away from the authors’ intent because the amendment sees mission as the prerogative of a congregation when the church exists to serve the mission of God, not our own mission. A basic flaw in Hooker’s argument is the premise which assumes that the session is incapable of discerning the mission God intends for that congregation but that the hierarchy of governing bodies is able to discern God’s will and convey those instructions to the congregation from the GA, through the synod, and through the presbytery.

Under both the current and the proposed Form of Government (G-3.0101) “The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher council. Powers not mentioned in this Constitution are reserved to the presbyteries.” This means that if the *Book of Order* does not expressly give a power to the session, the session does not have that power.

Other notable manifestations of a hierarchical structure can be seen at a congregational level. Currently in G-7.0103, “The members of a particular church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect.” In the replacement Form of Government G-1.0103, however, “The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly).”

The instructions in the Advisory Handbook “Policies and Procedures Guide for the Work of the Session” include: “What follows is a listing of those areas in which a presbytery is required to or justified in reviewing the work of the session of a congregation.”

The Handbook then presents a chart listing 45 references to sections in the Foundations and the replacement Form of Government. It summarizes the topic of the cited constitutional provisions and lists “Questions or Options to Consider” for the presbytery’s review of the session. Many questions are routine; others go beyond what would now be considered standard. These are some of the questions:

Each council shall develop procedures and mechanisms for promoting and reviewing its implementation of the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation. Has the session developed such procedures and mechanisms? .... Elections in the congregation are to be fair, just, and inclusive. Is a nominating process in place that represents the diversity of the congregation and is it made up of a majority not currently in active service as ruling elders or deacons? Is evidence given of the concerns for diversity being addressed? ... Meetings conducted decently and in order. Is some form of procedure agreed to and followed? . . . Has the presbytery initiated discussions with the session as to mutually beneficial mission activities? ... Are any directives from the presbytery properly recorded?

All of these examples demonstrate a relationship between governing bodies which is very different from our current governance.

### **Other serious problems also remain in the documents**

Significant problems are found in numerous areas of the documents proposed to replace the current Form of Government. Among the important areas of concern are the following:

- The opening sentence of Foundations (F-1.01) expresses universalism, stating “God...redeems... all people.” Although the *Book of Order* is not our primary source for theology, one would expect that the theological statements it contains would accurately reflect our confessional beliefs.
- Many of the specifics now included in our Form of Government have been removed from the new documents. Each governing body will need to write and adopt its own rules for how those situations will be handled. This means a loss of church-wide standard procedures in such basic matters as how Pastor Nominating Committees relate to presbyteries and how ministers move from one church or presbytery to another. Each presbytery is free to set its own rules within the broad boundaries of the five sentences describing the call process in the proposed G-2.08.
- Approval by a majority of the presbyteries is needed for amendments to the *Book of Order*, but such approval is not needed for changes to manuals of governing bodies. Key matters, such as how persons prepare for the ministry, including the number and subjects of ordination exams and how they will be graded, have been removed from the replacement Form of Government. These will need to be written and incorporated into General Assembly manuals. If the replacement for the Form of Government is approved, a majority of commissioners to any future General Assembly is free to change any of those requirements without approval by the majority of presbyteries.
- The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) does not typically take “positions” on matters before the GA, but it did take a position *opposing* the replacement of the Form of Government because of its direct impact on the GAPJC’s work. The GAPJC stated the following in its document:

Authoritative Interpretations (AIs) are interpretations of *specific* wording. If one or more words are changed in the text, it may no longer be said that a prior AI authoritatively interprets the new wording—such an interpretation would require either a new GA action or a new GAPJC decision. The interpretive history of the *Book of Order* represents decades of work on the part of the church working out procedures for pastoral call processes, Freedom of Conscience rights, Committee on Ministry authority, etc., which will be called into question by new wording. [emphasis in original]

The GAPJC called particular attention to the lack of due process requirements for pastors in termination processes, noting that provisions in the current G-9.0505(b) 1 and 2 contain precise language and that the interpretive history of those provisions contains at least nine separate GA and GAPJC Authoritative Interpretations related to those requirements. The GAPJC noted that the replacement Form of Government is silent on specific due process requirements and clearly renders the history of past Authoritative Interpretations invalid.

- Currently G-4.0301e reads, “Decisions shall be reached in governing bodies by vote, following opportunity for discussion, and a majority shall govern.” In the replacement document section F-3.0205, the words “and discernment” were added, so the sentence reads: “Decisions shall be reached in councils [governing bodies] by vote, following opportunity for discussion *and discernment*, and a majority shall govern.” [emphasis added] The new wording indicates that discussion alone is not an adequate process before voting since there must be (“shall”) opportunity for discussion “and” discernment. That wording demonstrates that ordinary parliamentary process following *Roberts’ Rules of Order* is not adequate and something more is *required*, but what that provision will be interpreted to mean cannot be known now. After attending the 2003 GA of the Uniting Church of Australia, which uses a “consensus method” of decision-making, Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons wrote an article<sup>1</sup> recommending that the PC(USA) further explore consensus decision-making. Moving in that direction would fit with this change in wording.

### **Familiar terms are replaced with unfamiliar ones**

Although the most significant changes are the substantive ones, a sampling of which has been described in this paper, presbyters should be also aware that familiar terminology is replaced with unfamiliar terms. The term “governing bodies” disappears and is replaced with “councils.” “Officer” and “office” (referring to the offices of deacon, elder and minister of the Word and Sacrament) become obsolete and are replaced by “ordered minister” and “ordered ministry.” (Therefore elders would be “ordered ministers,” not “officers.”) The term “officer” is redefined to mean only “officer of a council [governing body].” “Elder” is replaced with the current alternative term “ruling elder.” “Minister of the Word and Sacrament” is replaced with the current alternative term “teaching elder.”

### **Conclusion:**

**It is unwise to discard our entire basis for government in exchange for these fundamentally-flawed documents**

It is difficult to overstate the significance of replacing the entire Form of Government with the completely rewritten material being presented to the presbyteries. The contents have not simply been consolidated, but rather have been *substantively changed* in such basic ways as to mandate unlimited inclusiveness, establish a hierarchical rather a connectional relationship between governing bodies, and place virtually all of the interpretive history of the *Book of Order* in jeopardy. The significance of adding a fourth section, Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, on interpretation of the other three sections of the *Book of Order* cannot be known in advance of adopting the document.

The consequences of making so many significant, substantive changes without carefully considering the ramifications of each one should be a cause for genuine concern for all presbyters. The turmoil caused by the replacement of the entire Form of Government is the last thing our denomination needs at this difficult time in our history. We would be far wiser to amend our current *Book of Order* as needed instead of discarding the entire basis for our government in exchange for these fundamentally-flawed documents

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1. “A Consensus Observed” by Gradye Parsons, *Perspectives: An Online Publication of the Office of the General Assembly*, Sept 2003.

<http://oga.pcusa.org/perspectives/sep03/consensus.htm>

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# Talking points on the proposed replacement for the Form of Government

## Contents by Area of Concern

### *Purpose and timing of a replacement*

1. Changes are too significant to approve in one step.
2. Nothing in the nFOG makes the church more missional.
3. Lacks argument to show that the replacement is demonstrably better.

### *Hierarchy*

4. Changes the way we are governed. Shifts power and responsibility away from congregation and toward presbytery and GA.
5. Loss of “separate and independent” governing bodies.
6. Congregation no longer responsible for its own mission.
7. Presbytery permitted to adjust number of commissioners from session to presbytery.
8. We cannot know whether a session will continue to determine how a congregation’s money is used until GA or the GA-PJC issue an authoritative interpretation.

### *Local option in presbyteries*

9. Loss of consistency within the “connectional” body.
10. Call process for pastors can be different in each presbytery.

### *Ordination*

11. Surprise changes in ordination exams.
12. Creates a right to ordination.
13. Impact on “fidelity/chastity” requirement cannot be known.
14. Creates an inappropriate diversity.

### *Litigation and authoritative interpretation*

15. Separate “Foundations” section increases ambiguity in interpreting the constitution.
16. Introduces ambiguity into interpretation of the *Book of Confessions*.
17. Negative impact on decisions of the GA-PJC.
18. Vagueness will require increased litigation in church courts.
19. A committee has been appointed to tell us in 2012—after the voting is complete—which authoritative interpretations still apply.

### *Due process*

20. Loss of due process for pastors in termination process.
21. Allows “designated entity” to dissolve pastoral relationship when neither congregation nor pastor concur.
22. Increases presbytery “review” of congregations.

### *General process changes*

23. Removes “permissive powers” of the congregation.
24. Officially changes the way in votes are taken in the PC(USA).
25. Requires rules written by each governing body to cover provisions that will have been removed.

## **Purpose and Timing of a Replacement**

1. This amendment contains too many **changes that are much too significant to approve in one step**. We can’t possibly know the consequences of voting on the whole package. Instead, presbyteries should continue to bring proposed changes as separate amendments so they can each be studied carefully before we vote on them. In approving this amendment, we would be throwing away our entire basis for governing ourselves and replacing it with an entirely new Form of Government. These documents are extremely difficult to compare side-by-side because the organization of the two is completely different. Our first obligation must be to do no harm to the church. We all know how our

current Form of Governments works and how to amend it as needed. We cannot know what the real impact would be of all the changes in the replacement Form of Government. The church at such a precarious time in our history cannot afford to take such a risk, therefore we must vote “no.”

2. **Nothing here makes the church more missional or better.** It just creates confusion. Approving this replacement Form of Government won't solve any of the problems that we have. It would create more work because of the need to write more manuals. It would also create confusion that actually would distract us from our mission. We do need to be more missional, and we can become more missional under our current Form of Government. We just need to adopt a more missional mindset and commit ourselves to making a difference in the world. Speaking to the committee at General Assembly one of the four authors of the replacement Form of Government answered a question by saying that there is nothing in the current Form of Government that prevents the church from being missional. He said it is a matter of “attitude.” It is far better for the church that we keep our current Form of Government, but change our attitude.
3. The real question is, **“Is this replacement Form of Government demonstrably better than the present Form of Government?”** If not, it should not be adopted. The whole basis for our governance is too important to be blindly discarded so we can embrace something untried and new. Our current Form of Government has been developed and refined over years so that many provisions have well-established authoritative interpretations. Approving a replacement Form of Government is not going to end the process of proposed amendments being brought to every General Assembly. Amendments will continue regardless of what is in our Form of Government. The difference would be that if we approve the replacement Form of Government, we will be starting from scratch. The meaning of all the new wording will need to be worked out through years of litigation in the church courts. This is not what we need at this time in our history. The replacement Form of Government is NOT demonstrably better than the present Form of Government, therefore we should vote “no” on the amendment.

### **Hierarchy**

4. This amendment doesn't just streamline the content of the Form of Government—it **entirely changes the way we are governed.** The replacement Form of Government **creates a hierarchy of governing bodies and shifts the focus of power in a local congregation away from the session and onto the presbytery and General Assembly.** Our current G-7.0103 states, “The members of a particular church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect.” That is reasonable. Church members elect their pastors and elders and voluntarily place themselves under their leadership. In contrast, the replacement Form of Government in G-1.0103 says “The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session *and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly).*” This amendment creates a hierarchical system that is completely different from our current way of governing ourselves. What will it mean that church members will be led by the General Assembly? This is a *major* change. Something this significant should be debated separately, not buried in a big package of changes.
5. Under the current Form of Government, our governing bodies are “separate and independent” (G-9.0103). In Remedial case 204-5, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) ruled that per capita contributions by sessions are voluntary. In making this ruling, the GAPJC referenced the section in the current Form of Government that describes governing bodies as “separate and independent.” In that decision, the GAPJC wrote: “our system contemplates a partnership of church governance in which each governing body has responsibilities, exercises authority, and carries out mission in particular areas.” In the proposed replacement Form of Government, **governing bodies are no longer described as “separate and independent,” but instead are only vaguely described as “distinct.”** One of the four writers of the replacement Form of Government, Presbytery Executive Paul Hooker, wrote in his “Missional Ecclesiology” paper (which is provided by the Office of the General Assembly as a resource for this amendment) that “sessions guide and *govern* the work of congregations,” “presbyteries nurture, guide and *govern* the work of sessions,” and “synods and the General Assembly support and *govern* the work of presbyteries.” Clearly he envisions a hierarchical relationship between governing bodies, with each

one “governing” the one below it. This hierarchical relationship is embodied in the structure for mission set forth in the replacement Form of Government To replace “separate and independent” governing bodies with a system in which governing bodies are aligned in a hierarchical structure is an extremely significant change which should not be incorporated into a replacement Form of Government.

6. The current Form of Government makes the session responsible for the “mission and government” of a congregation (G-10.0102). **Under the replacement Form of Government, the session is only responsible for the government of a congregation and not for its mission.** Under the replacement Form of Government the General Assembly “*establishes* a comprehensive mission strategy and priorities for the church” (G-3.0501a). The synod develops strategy “*in accord with* the larger strategy of the General Assembly” (G-3.0401a) and is responsible for providing “encouragement and *guidance* to its presbyteries and *overseeing* their work” (G-3.0403a). The presbytery (not the session) “*leads and guides* the witness of its congregations” (G-3.0301). The session sits on the sidelines, with only the power to “lead the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church” (G-3.0201c). This is an extremely significant change and is a gutting of the session’s powers. This should not be included in an entirely rewritten document.
7. Currently G-11.0101 provides a chart showing the number of additional elders congregations with larger memberships are entitled to send as commissioners to presbytery. This specificity is removed from the replacement Form of Government. Although the replacement Form of Government’s G-3.0301 instructs that presbyteries “shall take into consideration the size of congregations,” the **new ambiguous language also allows the presbytery to adjust numbers of commissioners sent by sessions so that the presbytery can fulfill undefined inclusiveness criteria.** This purportedly more flexible proposed replacement Form of Government permits representation that is actually less fair in representing congregations.
8. During GA, amendments made by the Assembly Committee demonstrated that committee’s intention that sessions should continue to have the authority over deciding how *all* of a congregation’s money will be used and that no per capita or mission funding of the denomination can be required. However, the provisions that the Assembly Committee amended are not the only sections that deal with money. The replacement Form of Government still speaks of the “interdependence” of the church in “funding of mission” (G-3.0106). The next paragraph specifies that the session’s authority to direct its “benevolences” shall not be compromised, but the document does not define benevolences. The problem is that when the same sentences and phrases occur in the context of our current Form of Government, they have been authoritatively interpreted to mean that the “separate and independent” session has complete responsibility and authority over how all of a congregation’s funds are used. The new wording is in the context of an entirely new Foundations section and an entirely new Form of Government section in which governing bodies are no longer “separate and independent,” but only are “distinct” and are related in a hierarchical manner. It will be up to a future authoritative interpretation by a General Assembly or General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission to **determine whether those provisions mean that a session will continue to have the power to determine how all of a congregation’s money is used.** We cannot know in advance what the decision will be.

#### **Local option in presbyteries**

9. **Lack of consistency between presbyteries will be a problem.** Under the replacement Form of Government, Presbyteries aren’t even required to have a Committee on Ministry or a Committee on Preparation for Ministry. When someone moves from one presbytery to another, that person will not have any idea how the new presbytery is organized or how the new presbytery’s system works. Currently those critical committees are the same in all presbyteries. That helps things flow smoothly because everyone knows what to expect and the important rules are the same in all presbyteries. Under the replacement for the Form of Government, each presbytery must come up with its own structure and invent its own processes. There will be confusion and potentially an entirely new system to learn each time a person moves to a new presbytery. While the culture around us is dying, the church should have better things to do with our time and energy than being preoccupied with

ourselves and becoming enmeshed in inventing new structures and writing new rules. We can tweak the Form of Government we have to make it work better. We can't afford to throw it out and start over with an incomplete Form of Government that requires each presbytery to spend time designing structures and writing more rules.

10. The current Form of Government clearly spells out the process by which the congregation, pastor nominating committee, presbytery, and Committee on Ministry work together in calling a new pastor to serve a congregation. The process is consistent across the denomination and was approved by the majority of the presbyteries when the provisions were incorporated into the current Form of Government. Under the replacement Form of Government, **the process for calling a new pastor can be different in each presbytery.** Under our current Form of Government, the roles of the Committee on Ministry and the Pastor Nominating Committee are clearly defined in the *Book of Order* and the important aspects of the process are therefore consistent from one presbytery to another across the whole church. Under the replacement Form of Government, within the broad boundaries of the five sentences describing the call process in G-2.08, each presbytery is entirely free to create its own rules. In the national process we have now, we protect the balance between the powers and responsibilities of the presbytery and those of the Pastor Nominating Committee. If this replacement Form of Government is approved and each presbytery devises its own procedures, we lose that careful balance and we lose the protections that have wisely been established over the years.

### **Ordination**

11. When jurisdiction over a process is removed from the *Book of Order*, it is no longer necessary for a majority of the presbyteries to approve changes related to that process. Currently the number and subjects of the ordination exams are listed in the Form of Government along with instructions for how exams will be graded. Since this is in the *Book of Order*, any amendment requires approval of a majority of the presbyteries. None of this is included in the replacement Form of Government. Therefore **a majority of any General Assembly can change the number of ordination exams and/or the subjects that are covered.** Is that really the rightful role of the General Assembly? Isn't the ordination process for ministers of sufficient concern to the whole church that presbyteries should retain authority to approve any changes? This replacement Form of Government shuts presbyteries out of the process entirely, and that is not the way things should be done. In addition, there is no provision specifying who will grade the exams. Even after all the revisions, the replacement Form of Government does not move us in the right direction and we should vote "no."
12. The replacement for the Form of Government **includes kinds of diversity that are not appropriate.** The proposed Foundations F-1.0403 states that "God unites persons...regardless of...theological conviction." According to the replacement Form of Government, **there are no limits to acceptable theological convictions** in the church. Is that really what we want to say? No limits at all? Our current, more specific diversity language in G-4.0403 guarantees full participation to persons with "different theological convictions consistent with the Reformed tradition." When we are approving constitutional amendments we have an obligation to evaluate wording carefully, to understand the implications of what is written, and to do what is right for the church. The expression of diversity is a key aspect of the replacement Form of Government. Numerous other provisions in the replacement Form of Government refer back to it. This description of required diversity goes far beyond what is appropriate. The amendment must be defeated.
13. The diversity provisions in Foundations F-1.0403 of the replacement Form of Government **makes ordination to the office of elder the right of every church member!** Our current constitutional understanding of ordination is that ordination to church office is God's special calling to some. The replacement Form of Government states, "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation...in...governance...to all persons or groups within its membership." Governance is conducted by elders. The replacement Form of Government **explicitly states that ordination to the office of elder would be a right guaranteed to all persons who are church members!** This provision makes no sense at all. How can everyone who becomes a member of a congregation have a *guaranteed right* to be an elder? We have an obligation to be careful in what wording we approve for our constitution. This document is not a suitable replacement for our current Form of Government.

14. The **impact of the replacement Form of Government on the “fidelity/chastity” requirement cannot be known.** The wording in the current G-6.0106b “fidelity/chastity” requirement is retained in the replacement Form of Government as G-2.0104b. However, the diversity provision in Foundations F-1.0403 states that the PC(USA) “shall guarantee full participation...in...governance...to all persons or groups within its membership.” Although the *Book of Order* is to be interpreted in a way that gives effect to all the provisions, when two provisions are mutually exclusive, this is not possible. Which of these mutually-exclusive provisions will prevail? If the replacement Form of Government is approved, the status of the “fidelity/chastity” requirement will be determined by an authoritative interpretation by the General Assembly or the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission. An authoritative interpretation requires only a majority vote of one General Assembly.

### **Litigation**

15. Instead of having the three sections our *Book of Order* currently has—Form of Government, Directory for Worship and Rules of Discipline—this amendment would add a fourth sections called “Foundations,” numbered with the prefix “F-” and make it the first of four sections in the *Book of Order*. **Having a separate “Foundations” section adds ambiguity.** Because it is described as having “foundational” material, does it have more authority than the other parts of the *Book of Order*? If it does, it should say so. If it doesn’t, why wasn’t it just incorporated as the first part the Form of Government? It just makes one more area that will need to be decided by authoritative interpretations of the *Book of Order*, either by the General Assembly or by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission. It does not help the church to have a constitution that is not clear. There is ambiguity throughout the provisions of the replacement Form of Government. “New” is not better when ambiguities and conflicts are introduced, as they are in this proposal. The church needs is clarity, not more subjects to have conflicts over. More reasons for conflict is exactly what approving this amendment would bring.
16. The replacement Form of Government **introduces ambiguities into the interpretation of our *Book of Confessions*.** Foundations F-2.01 states that the confessions express the truth of the Gospel “*within the social and cultural assumptions of their time.*” This goes far beyond saying the contents of the *Book of Confessions* were written in a particular historical and cultural context. Instead, the replacement Form of Government explicitly invites the possibility that faulty cultural assumptions could have resulted in inaccurate interpretations of Scripture being incorporated into the *Book of Confessions*. This raises ambiguity about how the *Book of Confessions* functions as our subordinate authority. Will a future General Assembly or General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission make an Authoritative Interpretation that the Directory for Worship’s definition that marriage is between one man and one woman is based on faulty social and cultural assumptions at the time the confessions were written? A change of such significance as raising questions about whether the confessions are a reliable exposition of Scripture and express God’s eternal truth or whether they are truth mixed with the social and cultural assumptions of their time should not be buried among all the other changes in this replacement document.
17. Although the **General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission typically does not take “positions” on matters before the General Assembly, it did take a position opposing the replacement Form of Government** because of its direct impact on the GAPJC’s work. The GAPJC wrote:
- Authoritative Interpretations (AIs) are interpretations of *specific* wording. If one or more words are changed in the text, it may no longer be said that a prior AI authoritatively interprets the new wording—such an interpretation would require either a new GA action or a new GAPJC decision. The interpretive history of the *Book of Order* represents decades of work on the part of the church working out procedures for pastoral call processes, Freedom of Conscience rights, Committee on Ministry authority, etc., which will be called into question by new wording.
18. The newness and vagueness of the replacement Form of Government will lead to **increased litigation in the church courts.** Our current *Book of Order* has been authoritatively interpreted by both the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission and the General Assembly over many years, so

that the meaning of numerous provisions has been well-established. If a replacement Form of Government is introduced, the continuing applicability of all of these authoritative interpretations is placed in question. If this replacement Form of Government is approved, the next General Assembly will have the authority to decide which Authoritative Interpretations will continue to apply and which are obsolete. With so many vague and conflicting provisions in the replacement Form of Government, the church will spend a large amount of human and material resources in litigation over the coming years to define the meaning of the replacement Form of Government's provisions. This is not a wise focus for our church in these difficult times. When our culture is crying out for good news, we should have better things to do than being preoccupied with ourselves and spending our resources fighting over what the new, ambiguous, or conflicting provisions in a new Form of Government really mean.

19. We will not know until well after the voting is finished which of the current authoritative interpretations (AI) of the Form of Government continue to apply. Authoritative Interpretation is a critical part of our system of government in applying the Book of Order to specific situations or actions. **We are likely to lose a number of significant AIs.** In response to concerns expressed by a member of the GAPJC, the GA adopted Item 07-11, in which the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, empowers the Moderator to appoint a Special Committee on Existing Authoritative Interpretations of the Book of Order. The special committee shall be composed of six members recommended by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, and the Office of the General Assembly, and charged to make recommendations to the 220th General Assembly concerning the status of specific existing authoritative interpretations of the Constitution based on the Status of Authoritative Interpretations as shown [in the ACC comment].

#### **Due Process**

20. In writing about why the replacement Form of Government should *not* be approved, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) called special attention to the replacement Form of Government's **lack of due process requirements for pastors in termination processes.** The GAPJC noted that the replacement Form of Government is silent on specific due process requirements and clearly renders the history of past Authoritative Interpretations invalid. The GAPJC also reported that there is an interpretive history of the current provisions that contains at least 9 separate Authoritative Interpretations defining these requirements. The replacement Form of Government contains *no* specific due process requirements at all. It is not wise for the church to discard all the careful and thoughtful work that has brought us to our current well-defined processes and start over with no defined due process protections for pastors in termination processes.
21. G-11.0502h presently says that a presbytery may only delegate to its Committee on Ministry the authority "to dissolve the pastoral relationship in cases where the congregation and pastor concur." The replacement Form of Government agrees that an installed pastoral relationship can be dissolved only by the presbytery (G-2.0901), but it also states that a presbytery "may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery," including "dissolution of relationships" (G-3.0307). This would **allow a presbytery to grant power to a "designated entity" to dissolve a pastoral relationship even when neither the congregation nor the pastor concurs.** Checks and balances that are incorporated into our current Form of Government are missing from the replacement that is before us. We can't afford to give up protections that are important to our life together.
22. The Advisory Handbook which accompanies the replacement Form of Government lists "those **areas in which a presbytery is required to or justified in reviewing the work of the session of a congregation.**" The chart then shows 45 references to sections in the replacement Form of Government, summarizes the topic of the cited provisions, and lists "Questions or options to consider" for the presbytery's review of the session. These questions go beyond what would now be considered a standard review and include the presbytery inquiring into the session's development of procedures and mechanisms for "promoting and reviewing its implementation of the church's commitment to inclusiveness and representation." It asks, "Has the presbytery initiated discussions with the session as to mutually beneficial mission activities?" It also asks, "Are any directives from

the presbytery properly recorded?” The Handbook does not explain what sort of “directives” a presbytery might issue.

### **General process changes**

23. The new Foundations section F-3.0205 specifies that **governing bodies “shall” have discussion “and discernment” before voting to make decisions.** Since the sentence uses the word “shall,” its provisions are mandatory. The addition of the words “and discernment” to the sentence contained in the current Form of Government indicates that under the replacement Form of Government, discussion alone would not be an adequate process before voting. An Authoritative Interpretation by a General Assembly or General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission will be needed to determine what kind of additional “discernment” process is required. All we know from the sentence is that the discussion process alone, as described in *Roberts Rule,s* is not adequate. Since this new requirement would apply to “governing bodies” it would affect how sessions and presbyteries must operate whenever they make a decision.
24. Both the current and the replacement Form of Government specify that all business conducted at a meeting of the congregation must fit into one of five specified topics. In G-7.0304 the current Form of Government lists topic (5) as “matters related to the permissive powers of a congregation such as...” and then gives an example of one of the topics currently included in the “permissive powers” of a congregation. In the replacement Form of Government only five specific topics are listed. **There would no longer be any “permissive powers of the congregation.”**
25. Every governing body, including every session, would have to examine its manuals of policies and procedures and would need to **write and adopt new rules to replace specifics that are found in the current Form of Government, but are missing from this replacement Form of Government.** We are familiar with what provisions are included in the current Form of Government. If we approve the replacement Form of Government, we won’t even know where to look for the provisions. A session will have to first check the replacement Form of Government and if it can’t find the requirement there, it will have to look through its own manuals and records to see if a provision covering that situation was adopted. The net result would not be less paper and fewer rules. The net result would be *more* rules (because each governing body will have to adopt its own) and less carefully-written rules (because we won’t have the benefit of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution reviewing the language of each governing body’s rules and providing for clarity of expression as it does for proposed *Book of Order* amendments).

**For additional resources see [www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org](http://www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org); [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org).**



### **III.**

## **Resources for the Debate on The Belhar Confession**



## CONFESSION OF BELHAR

September 1986\*

**11.1. We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

**11.2. We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

### **We believe**

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;<sup>1</sup>
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;<sup>2</sup>
- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;<sup>3</sup>
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;<sup>4</sup> that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;<sup>5</sup>
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;<sup>6</sup>
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;<sup>7</sup>

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

### **11.3. We believe**

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker; that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.<sup>7</sup>
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;<sup>8</sup>
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

#### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

### **11.4. We believe**

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;<sup>9</sup>
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;<sup>8</sup>
- that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;<sup>10</sup>
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;<sup>11</sup>
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

#### **Therefore, we reject any ideology**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

**11.5. We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

#### Endnote

This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Section numbers are OGA suggestions based on the document's five original sections and the numbering from *The Book of Confessions*.

### SCRIPTURAL ALLUSIONS

#### Section 11.2.

1. Eph. 2:11–22
2. Eph. 4:1–16
3. Jn. 17:20–23
4. Phil. 2:1–5; 1 Cor. 12:4–31
5. Jn. 13:1–17; 1 Cor. 1:10–13; Eph. 4:1–6; Eph. 3:14–20; 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 1 Cor. 11:17–34; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3–4
6. Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11; Eph. 4:7–13; Gal. 3:27–28; Jas. 2:1–13

#### Section 11.3.

7. 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Mt. 5:13–16; Mt. 5:9; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21–22
8. Eph. 4:17–6:23; Rom. 6; Col. 1:9–14; Col. 2:13–19; Col. 3:1–4:6

#### Section 11.4.

9. Deut. 32:4; Lk. 2:14; Jn.14:27
10. Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16–17; Jas. 1:27; Jas. 5:1–6; Lk. 1:46–55; Lk. 6:20–26; Lk. 7:22; Lk. 16:19–31
11. Ps. 146; Lk. 4:16–19; Rom. 6:13–18; Am. 5

#### Section 11.5.

12. Eph. 4:15–16; Acts. 5:29–33; 1 Pet. 2:18–25; 1 Pet. 3:15–18



## A Critique of the Belhar Confession

by Sue Cyre

Presbyteries are being asked by the General Assembly to vote on whether the Belhar Confession should be added to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitution in the *Book of Confessions*. A majority vote by 2/3 of the 173 presbyteries is needed for the confession to be included.

The Belhar Confession, named after the town where the Confession was drafted, was adopted in 1986 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa to denounce the sin of apartheid. The Presbyterian Church in our country also spoke forcefully to the sin of racism two decades earlier. The Confession of 1967, which is part of our *Book of Confessions*, confesses, “*God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary.*” (9.44) The Confession then goes on to list specific areas to be addressed such as housing, employment, and education.

Should the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) add the Belhar Confession from South Africa to our *Book of Confessions*? There are two reasons why the answer should be NO. First, although the Belhar spoke to racism in South Africa, the words of the Confession, as well as the understanding of some who interpret it, demonstrate that the Belhar Confession may be applied broadly to other issues. Second, the Belhar Confession posits a very different understanding of “unity” and “justice” than Scripture and our Confessions. Christian faith teaches that unity is a result of truth. In the Belhar truth is subordinated to unity.

### **The Belhar Confession Is Not Limited To The Sin of Racism**

The Belhar Confession was written in response to apartheid, yet its major sections address “unity” and “justice” with the sin of racism addressed briefly in section 3. The themes of unity and justice appropriately condemn the sinful “separation of people on a racial basis.” The language of Belhar, however, does not limit its application to the sin of racism.

Allen Boesak, one of the architects of Belhar, told members of his Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa in 2008 that the Belhar should be used to end discrimination against those who practice same-sex behavior. Boesak claimed, “Based on Belhar, the church should fully accept gay members, should perform gay marriage ceremonies and allow ministers in gay relationships to serve in the church.”<sup>1</sup> Although Boesak’s own church rejected his interpretation of the Belhar, the fact that he would see its potential for this purpose demonstrates that Belhar can be used in this expansive way.

Speaking to a group at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary this past April on the Belhar, Boesak told the group, “the demand for inclusivity goes well beyond the issue of race” to include “women, people with disabilities and those whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual.”<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence of an intent to apply the Belhar to same-sex behavior in the PCUSA. Cynthia Holder Rich, a member of the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns that initially brought the Belhar to the General Assembly acknowledged that the Belhar is being used to “press other issues.” She told a joint meeting of the PCUSA Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Advocacy Committee of Women’s Concerns, and the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns that met in January 2010, “Theologians have used this document to press issues other than race.... You may or may not know that that is part of the international conversation.... This document is about freedom. People of different sexual orientations are not free and so this document could be used to free people.”<sup>3</sup>

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) is a Formula of Agreement partner with the PCUSA and has approved the Belhar. The RCA interprets the Belhar in their official study guide to go beyond racism “to all forms of exclusion” including same-sex behavior. The study guide uses the Belhar to apply to the

Israel-Palestine conflict and always in a way that is pro-Palestinian. The RCA Commission on Christian Action has publicly said they use the Belhar in addressing issues before them that include: the farm bill, Sudanese refugees, the Iraq War, immigration, minimum wage increases and America's embargo of Cuba.<sup>5</sup>

How will this expansive interpretation of unity be used in the church? The Rev. John Austin, of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City and member of the Special Committee that recommended to the GA that the Belhar be added to the Book of Confessions, said, "The church needs to be transformed by Belhar."<sup>6</sup> We should ask, since the church rejected racism more than 40 years ago, how will Belhar transform the church? What new teaching does Belhar confess that will transform the church?

### **Belhar Is In Conflict With Scripture and the Confessions**

The Belhar Confession uses "unity" and "justice" differently than Scripture and the Confessions use them. The Belhar posits that since Christ's work of reconciliation is completed, the church "must" manifest a visible unity. And "*anything* which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted" (italics mine). It then goes on to "reject any doctrine" which threatens this visible unity. In Belhar doctrine or the church's witness to the truth is subordinated to "unity." Scripture and the Confessions, however, view "unity" very differently. Scripture and the Confessions understand "unity" to be a result of accepting the truth that is revealed in Scripture and witnessed to by the doctrines of the church in the Confessions.

Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Scripture unites people from different races, genders and classes. Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). The Galatians passage does not say that beliefs or behaviors do not matter. Rather it says that each person regardless of class, gender or race finds salvation in Christ alone. Later in Galatians 5, Paul gives a long list of "acts of this sinful nature" and concludes, "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Clearly, while race, gender and class do not affect salvation, "acts of this sinful nature" can affect salvation. What individuals believe and therefore how they live matters to their salvation.

The Belhar appears to say that beliefs and behavior do not matter and should not threaten unity when it claims "*anything* which threatens this unity... must be resisted." The rationale in the report sent to the General Assembly from the Special Committee on the Belhar Confession similarly states that *convictions* are subordinate to unity when it declares, "This confession expresses clearly our own church's longing for unity across barriers we see in our own situation of different spiritual gifts, backgrounds, *convictions*, languages and cultures, both within our church and across denominational lines" (italics mine). Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff that spiritual gifts should not divide us. The Galatians 3:28 passage would apply to languages, backgrounds and cultures. However, there are *convictions* that divide us. For example, some Presbyterians, even clergy, reject the sacrificial atonement of Christ or reject the clear words of Scripture on sexual behavior. Aren't these among the important theological and moral teachings where what is true must divide from what is not true?

The Barmen Confession in our *Book of Confessions* was forged in response to Hitler's imposition of his ideology on the church. In confessing Barmen those believers refused to subsume the revelation of Scripture to the German state's ideology and thus they broke the unity of the German Evangelical Church, the state church, by forming the German Confessing Church. They confessed in Barmen, "*Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and beside this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation*" (8.11-12) Those believers refused to elevate "unity" over revealed truth.

The Preface to the Barmen declares, "In opposition to attempts to establish the unity of the German Evangelical Church by means of false doctrine.... the Confessional Synod insists that the unity of the

Evangelical Churches in Germany can come only from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit.” (8.01)

The Second Helvetic Confession shows this relationship between truth and unity, “unity consists not in outward rites and ceremonies, but rather in the truth and unity of the catholic faith. The catholic faith is not given to us by human laws, but by the Holy Scriptures....”

In contrast to these confessions, the Belhar places unity above everything including revealed truth. The Belhar confesses, “we reject *any doctrine*, which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of *diversity* and in despair of reconciliation” (italics mine). Is this “diversity” related to sexual behavior? Or to beliefs about the nature and work of Christ, or to birth status like “Jew and Gentile, slave and free”? Belhar isn’t clear.

Scripture and the Confessions are clear that false beliefs and sinful behavior cause disunity. It was the false priests and prophets that Jeremiah condemned who proclaimed “peace, peace” when there could be no peace because of Israel’s idolatry and sinful behavior (Jer. 6:14). Jeremiah was viewed by the false priests and prophets as the unity breaker. Ahab called Elijah the “troubler of Israel” because Elijah’s condemnation of sin destroyed unity. And Jesus said he came not “to bring peace but a sword” (Matt.10:34). We should seek unity but it cannot be at the expense of truth. Scripture and the Confessions are clear that as long as sin continues in us, unity cannot be realized fully. To attempt to produce unity apart from truth, as the Belhar does, is to deny truth matters and to put “truth and falsehood on a level” which the *Book of Order* rightly calls “pernicious.” Presbyteries should vote NO to including Belhar in the *Book of Confessions*.

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1. “Boesak quits ‘anti-gay’ church” by Neels Jackson, [www.news24.com/New24/South\\_AfricaNew/0,,2-7-1442\\_2404899,00.html](http://www.news24.com/New24/South_AfricaNew/0,,2-7-1442_2404899,00.html)
  2. “Apartheid foe Boesak speaks to Louisville Presbyterians,” by Peter Smith, [Courier-Journal.com](http://Courier-Journal.com), April 26, 2010.
  3. “Committees support elevating Belhar to confessional status” by Carmen Fowler, *The Layman*, Posted Wednesday, January 27, 2010, [www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=26703](http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=26703)
  4. The Reformed Church in America Study Guide, [www.rca.org/belhar](http://www.rca.org/belhar);  
<http://images.rca.org/docs/aboutus/BelharGuideComplete.pdf>
  5. “Why Not Belhar?” by Kevin DeYoung, *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, January 2010 Essay; [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=6245](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=6245)
  6. *Layman*, January 27, 2010.

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## **Belhar Talking Points**

*by Sue Cyre*

**1. Argument by those supporting Belhar: Belhar fills a significant gap: there is little mention in classical confessions of the biblical principle of God’s justice and special care for the poor and suffering.**

**Response:** Yes this is an important biblical principle. The Old Testament clearly states that the nation of Israel is to properly care for widows and orphans. Those who were hungry were given permission to glean the fields. In the New Testament many passages address the poor and hungry. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats, the king replies to the righteous, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Acts 6 describes the process for ensuring that all widows receive food. In Acts 11, the Antioch church takes up a collection for the people in Judea to provide help during a famine.

Our confessions do not ignore this biblical teaching. They already speak forcefully to the issue of justice.

### **The Larger Catechism**

“Q. 141. What are the duties required in the Eight Commandment? A. The duties required in the Eight Commandment are: truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to everyone his due, restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills and affections, concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose of those things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and a diligence in it, frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretyship, or other like engagements; and an endeavor by all just and lawful means to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.” ( 7.251) Paragraph 7.252 lists the injustices forbidden by the eighth commandment.

### **The Heidelberg Catechism**

“Q. 110. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment? A. He forbids not only the theft and robbery which civil authorities punish, but God also labels as theft all wicked tricks and schemes by which we seek to get for ourselves our neighbor’s goods, whether by force or under the pretext of right, such as false weights and measures, deceptive advertising or merchandising, counterfeit money, exorbitant interest, or any other means forbidden by God. He also forbids all greed and misuse and waste of his gifts.” ( 4.110)

“Q. 111. But what does God require of you in this commandment? A. That I work for the good of my neighbor wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would have others deal with me, and do my work well so that I may be able to help the poor in their need.” (4.111)

### **Second Helvetic Confession**

In stating the responsibility of the civil magistrate, the confession advises, “Let him protect widows, orphans and the afflicted.” (5.254)

### **Confession of 1967**

“The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world’s poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of population. The church calls every man to use his ability, his possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to him by God for the maintenance of his family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise men’s hopes for better conditions and provide them with

opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.” ( 9.46)

The church has demonstrated its care for the poor, hungry, and suffering throughout its history. God has a concern for the poor. Jesus condemns the priests for making the temple a den of robbers and oppressing the people. But Jesus also accepts the sincere devotion of powerful men like the Pharisee Nicodemus, the Roman centurion (Luke 7), and the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. The Gospel message of reconciliation to God and our fellow humans applies to all social classes. God’s covenant promises in Scripture are for all who have faith in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. The message of Scripture is that “everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” rich and poor alike. All people can be reconciled to the Father through faith in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

By contrast, the Belhar’s claim that God is in a “special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” pits one group against another. It fixes blame for sin particularly upon one social group, demanding that “the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.” Belhar assumes a simplistic division of society between oppressed and oppressors, insisting that “the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged.” But in some sense everyone can claim to be a victim who has been wronged, and everyone has participated in individual and social sins that wrong other people.

The Belhar Confession represents a soft form of the liberation theology that was so deeply controversial in the 1970s and 1980s. That theology raised legitimate concerns about poverty and social injustice; however, it was not fully embraced by churches in either Africa or the United States. Liberation theology in its more hardcore forms suffered deep embarrassment because of its identification with Marxist movements that failed to deliver their promises of uplifting the poor. Does the PCUSA wish to give its stamp of approval to a document like Belhar that is so closely associated with this disputed theological movement?

## **2. Argument by those supporting Belhar: Belhar is the only confession that the global church has from Africa and the southern hemisphere.**

**Response:** The contribution of African Christians has long been recognized by the Christian church. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, an Egyptian leader from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, wrote a creed which was revised and became the Nicene Creed.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, “North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of the heroic few or an inclusive church of all who confessed Jesus Christ, leading to the addition of ‘holy’ (belonging to God) and ‘catholic’ (universal)” to the Apostles’ Creed (from face page of the Apostles’ Creed in the Book of Confessions).

Augustine, 354-430, Bishop of Hippo, greatly influenced Christian faith. He is considered a saint in the Catholic Church. Calvin’s theology drew heavily from Augustine. Hippo was in what is today Algeria, in North Africa.

There is great growth today in the church in sub-Saharan Africa. We should be alert to expressions of faith from that area. But the Belhar Confession is a limited, liberation-theology manifesto. It is far from the only confession of Christian faith coming out of Africa. If we want more recent confession from the global south, we should be looking at a range of possibilities before settling on one. The Belhar committee was not asked to look at the various confessions to select one for the PCUSA.

We have joyfully received the theological witness of the African continent in the past. We continue to seek ways to share and reaffirm our faith with brothers and sisters in Africa and on every continent. However, the Belhar contains a theology that falls short of the high standards that we have for confessions

of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is not sufficiently centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not rooted strongly enough in the Scriptures. It is focused more on social criticism than on proclaiming the Gospel. And while that social criticism was appropriate in the South Africa of the 1980s, it does not arise out of the lived faith of U.S. Presbyterians in 2010. The PCUSA should not add Belhar to its Book of Confessions.

### **3. Argument by those supporting Belhar: The Belhar Confession is needed to address racism.**

**Response:** The PCUSA already has the Confession of 1967 in the Book of Confessions which clearly and directly denounces racism and calls for specific actions::

“God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.”

It is true that the PCUSA desires to become more multicultural. However, a new addition to the Book of Confessions will not increase participation of non-Anglo Presbyterians.

If racism is the main focus of Belhar, it is not mentioned until point number 3 and then only briefly. Belhar’s treatment of racism is useful, but it is a small part of the document. The broader issues of unity and injustice, without biblical definition, become open-ended, vague, and potentially injurious to both faith and practice. For example, Belhar claims, “We reject any doctrine which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin.” By saying that a refusal to pursue “visible unity” is sin, the Belhar elevates unity over truth and purity. But sometimes the church needs to risk its unity in order to proclaim biblical truths that have been challenged.

Likewise, consider Belhar’s categorical rejection of “any doctrine which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.” Are we sure that *every* “human or social factor” is irrelevant? Wouldn’t it be possible that a person might be a member of a movement (e.g., a neo-Nazi group) or a practitioner of a behavior (e.g., sex trafficking) that was so contradictory to Christian teaching that it was incompatible with church membership? Do we want in our confessions to make sweeping assertions such as that “true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership in this church”? Is not “true faith” necessarily expressed in specific beliefs and a pattern of life that confesses Christ to the world?

### **4. Argument by those supporting Belhar: The Belhar Confession is what the church wants.**

**Response:** There are practical considerations. How many people have studied the confessions that are already in the Book of Confessions? Why will it be useful to add another unstudied confession? The Belhar Confession is not an expression of what U.S. Presbyterians believe that is arising from the conviction of the people. This came from the top down when the 12-member Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) recommended to the 2008 General Assembly that the PCUSA begin the process of including Belhar in the Book of Confessions. According to a recent Presbyterian Panel survey, only 17 percent of pastors are familiar with Belhar; 1 percent of members and 2 percent of elders are familiar with Belhar. According to the *Book of Order*, “In these confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world: who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do.” With so few ministers, members, and elders familiar with Belhar, it would not seem to fit those criteria.

Belhar makes a sweeping assertion when it maintains that “the church must witness against any form of injustice.” This unqualified phrase would seem to impel limitless political crusades against anything that

church leaders consider to be “injustice.” What other topics will be identified by Belhar advocates as “injustice”? America’s stance toward Israel/Palestine? A minimum wage that is too low or too high? Low rates of union membership? Restrictions on immigration? The lack of “single payer” federally controlled health care? Insufficiently strict environmental regulations?

Kevin DeYoung observed in an essay in the *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, January 2010, that the Reformed Church in America (RCA) Commission on Christian Action said that the Belhar Confession speaks to issues such as the above. He also mentions possible implications of Belhar for the farm bill, Sudanese refugees, the Iraq War, and America’s embargo against Cuba. DeYoung observes that the RCA study guide speaks of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and always in a way that is pro-Palestinian. DeYoung concludes, “Belhar speaks directly to political, economic, foreign policy issues and it is always in support of left-wing politics.”

Do we want a confession that is so closely linked to one side of the political spectrum, when our denomination is so politically diverse? If Belhar is to be used for political purposes, shouldn’t we know how it will be used before we approve it? Can we know how it will be used since the language about siding with “the wronged” and against “injustice” is so open-ended?

**5. Argument by those supporting Belhar: The Belhar Confession has nothing to do with the debates about homosexual practice and same-sex unions. Supporters of Belhar argue that while Allen Boesak, one of the architects of Belhar, has said that the Belhar should be used to promote homosexual marriage and ordination, his own church rejected the application of Belhar to homosexual practice.**

**Response:** Yes. But the fact that one author interprets Belhar as a tool to promote homosexual marriage and ordination, demonstrates that at least some people see it this way. The language of Belhar implies that any group that declares itself to be “wronged” can use Belhar to promote its position. The Reformed Church in America includes disapproval of homosexual behavior as a “wrong” to be overcome by Belhar. Kevin DeYoung in the article cited above observes, “Several times in the study guide [the RCA study guide on Belhar] the pro-gay paper ‘Exclusion, Inclusion, and Participation’ by David Lawrence from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches is quoted. The link between homosexuality and Belhar is not made up by fear-mongering conservatives out of thin air. The official denomination study guide [RCA] points us in that direction.”

It is certainly possible to interpret various sentences in the Belhar to require the church to drop its teaching distinguishing the marriage of man and woman (approved) from homosexual relations (disapproved). For example, “We reject any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people ....” Would this phrase imply that traditional marriage, by “absolutizing” the necessary complementarity of the two created sexes, is therefore unjust? Or “We reject any doctrine which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation.” Would this phrase require the PCUSA to reject policies on ordination and marriage that are held to “alienate” persons in same-sex relationships?

**6. Argument by those supporting Belhar: In the RCA, advocates of gay ordination have publicly stated that they respect the importance of Belhar and agree that if the confession were adopted, it would not be used as leverage to push the gay ordination agenda.**  
([www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09547.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09547.htm)).

**Response:** If such a promise were made by PCUSA representatives, we should understand that the promises or intentions of one group of people do not speak for the whole church and cannot bind any session, presbytery, court, or General Assembly. The language of the Belhar must be interpreted on its own merits and cannot be interpreted by promises made outside of the document itself.

**7. Argument by those supporting Belhar: Even though Belhar does not express the entirety of Christian doctrine, the other confessions in the Book of Confessions will serve to balance Belhar.**

**Response:** The proposed new Form of Government rewords several sentences in the section on the confessions in F-2.01 which may prioritize confessions to give more weight to the newest confession. The replacement Form of Government would add, “They [confessions] claim the truth of the Gospel at those points where their authors perceived that truth to be at risk... They appeal to the universal truth of the Gospel while expressing that *truth within the social and cultural assumptions of their time*. They affirm a common faith tradition, while also from time to time standing in tension with each other” (italics added). That rewording in the proposed replacement FOG may imply that earlier confessions speak to their own times while the Belhar is for our times.

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**For additional resources see [www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org](http://www.reclaimbiblicalteaching.org); [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org).**



## **IV.**

# **Debating in the Presbyteries**



## Prepare for the Presbytery Debate and Vote

### Begin in your congregation

- Issue a call for prayer for the Church. Set aside a specific time and place for a service of worship that focuses on prayer and repentance (Contact Prayer Coordinator Katie Moffett, for help: [cfmoffett@msn.com](mailto:cfmoffett@msn.com)).
- Hold a Town Meeting or other forum to inform your congregation and let them know what steps the session of your church will be taking (See the report of the GA at <http://www.presbycoalition.org/219th%20GA%20summary%20Coalition1.pdf>)
- Teach the relationship between the Gospel and purity of life in relationship to sexual practices and marriage, in sermons and in the education program of your church.
- Offer ministry to those in sexual conflict in your church and community. For help, look here: <http://www.oneby1.org/>

### Take immediate steps in your presbytery

**Build a working team.** As soon as possible call a meeting at a central location inviting those pastors and elders who share your concerns about the amendments. Your team may be this group or a smaller sub-set of the group.

Don't assume that everyone knows what is being voted on. Provide documents with the wording and, where applicable, provide comparison documents. For example, provide a side by side comparison of current and proposed language for G-6.0106b. There are comparison documents for the current and proposed nFOG on line. And there are helpful critiques of the amendments available on line, as well ([http://www.presbycoalition.org/campaign\\_home.cfm](http://www.presbycoalition.org/campaign_home.cfm)).

**Help determine how the presbytery debate will be conducted.** A person, committee, or group in your presbytery is planning the process for these votes. You, or another leader from your group, should aim to be a part of that planning process. Get involved. If you are not included in the planning, you should at least be in close touch and know as soon as possible what to expect. Aim to influence how the process will be conducted in your presbytery.

**Be alert to how “discernment” will be used.** Some forms of discernment decision-making can easily become manipulative and coercive. Parliamentary process gives the best protection for minority and majority voices to be heard and the majority will to be determined. You will want to work for a fair and clear process that preserves the rights and responsibilities of every voting presbyter.

If there are presbytery-sponsored presentations prior to the vote, help to ensure that the selection of topics and speakers provides for competent presentation and equal time.

If there is a worship service associated with the debate, ensure that it is free from the politics of the vote.

### Planning in the weeks and months leading to the vote

With your team, develop a plan to inform clergy and elder friends in your presbytery of the importance of the votes, the content, possible debate points and the process involved. Some ways to do this are:

- Make calls and personal visits to expand your support base; encourage new contacts' attendance at your meetings. Offer to speak to sessions or hold a joint meeting of sessions.
- Write several informational letters or emails to all the pastors/clerks of session in your presbytery about the need for them to be informed and present for the vote.
- Obtain and distribute resources to those you know are working with you.
- Hold informational meetings.

- Provide a general information session on the content and implications of the amendments for everyone in your presbytery who chooses to come (plan for at least an hour).
- Hold a separate meeting or two to work through the issues, floor speeches, and the process with your friends (plan for two hours);

### **Get out the vote**

Let your witness on the issues be a show of faithful strength, in numbers as well as in floor speeches. Not every presbyter will speak, but every presbyter should come prepared to vote. Invest in encouraging a strong, biblically-faithful vote in your presbytery.

- Identify churches and pastors that you expect to be allies and reach out to them personally.
- Focus on getting out the elder vote. Inform elder commissioners and have a plan for ensuring that they make the meeting at which the vote is taken.

### **Planning for the day of the vote**

Ask your churches and sessions to be in prayer for the meeting and the outcome of the vote.

#### Prepare for the mechanics of the meeting at which the vote is taken

- Consider whether a recommendation on the vote will come from a committee. Work toward “yes” means “yes” to the amendment, and “no” means “no” to the amendment (as opposed to “yes” or “no” to a committee’s recommendation).
- Aim to influence the vote(s) as an order of the day to avoid a late-in-the-meeting vote.
- Consider whether you want to move to have a written ballot to decrease peer pressure. If a voice or hand vote is taken, be ready to call for a “division of the house” if you question the Moderator’s determination of the vote. Any presbyter can rise to request this immediately after the vote.
- Consider how you will attempt to correct errors of process. Have a copy of Marianne Wolfe’s booklet, *Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (USA)* with you ([http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/parliamentary\\_procedure.pdf](http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/parliamentary_procedure.pdf)).
- Arrange for how many of your friends will be prepared to speak against the amendment in debate, what point each will make, and how they will position themselves in the room with respect to the microphones.
- Be sure that there will be a system of alternating “for” and “against” speakers in the debate so that a balance of voices is heard.
- Decide who will be ready to call the question and when that would be timely.

#### Prepare for the arguments in support of your position and how you will plan your speeches:

- Anticipate the arguments that will be made in support of amendments. Discuss how you would answer them and which are the better and most effective responses. Write them down.
- Consider which are your better arguments overall. Be proactive as well as reactive.
- Consider your most effective speakers for this situation. Listen to speeches and critique them for length, content, and effectiveness. Which areas are most important to cover? Who will speak to them? On which points do you want more than one person to be ready?
- Prepare for short (two minute maximum) debate speeches that make a single point.
- Do not neglect the Scripture because you think it will be discounted in debate. Remember its power to convert and transform by the Holy Spirit’s work.

**There is a Campaign Director available to assist you. Contact Terry Schlossberg ([terrerschlossberg@comcast.net](mailto:terrerschlossberg@comcast.net) or 703-680-4571) for the name of the person in your area.**

## Process Issues in the Presbytery Debate

### 1. Before the presbytery meeting:

#### a. Participate in presbytery planning for Amendment B

1) Give input to Bills and Overtures Committee: Most presbyteries have a Bills and Overtures Committee that meets before the presbytery meeting and prepares a recommendation to the whole presbytery on each item of business. Depending on the makeup of your presbytery, it can be of value to try to speak to this committee and encourage it to recommend defeat of Amendment B. If you can't convince the committee to recommend defeat of Amendment B, suggest that they make no recommendation. If you think it would be of value to give input to this committee, call your presbytery office, find out who is chair of the Bills and Overtures Committee and request that the committee conduct a hearing before they decide on their recommendation.

2) Have a "yes" vote mean "in favor of Amendment B" and a "no" vote mean "opposed to Amendment B": Sometimes instead of voting directly on the amendment, the vote is taken on the recommendation the Bills and Overtures Committee brings to the presbytery. In that circumstance if a Committee recommends defeat of the amendment and the vote is taken on the Committee recommendation, a "yes" vote would mean agreeing with the Committee in its opposition to the amendment. This is EXTREMELY CONFUSING to voters since those who oppose the amendment would need to vote "yes" to accomplish their intent. It is far better instead to say "the Committee recommends that you vote 'no' on the amendment" and have the vote be on the amendment itself. In that case those who oppose the amendment would vote "no," which is the logical approach. Clarity on the meaning of a "yes" and a "no" vote benefits everyone, and the only way to achieve clarity is to vote on the amendment itself, not on the committee recommendation. Speak with the presbytery Moderator in advance of the meeting to be sure the votes will be taken on the amendments themselves, not on the committee recommendations.

3) Work to have optimum docket time for the vote on Amendment B: Through the appropriate committee of your presbytery, try to have the time for action on Amendment B locked in as an "order of the day" at a time in the meeting which would enable the maximum number of participants to be present and not be tired. The intent is to avoid confusion about what time Amendment B will be considered and avoid last minute changes which might catch people off guard. Even if the debate is scheduled at an inconvenient time, an "order of the day" is a set time around which you can plan. This scheduled approach is much better than attempting to make changes to the docket at the time of the presbytery meeting.

4) If you believe a secret (written) ballot would decrease peer pressure to approve the amendment in your presbytery, work to have this vote taken by a written ballot: Talk to the Moderator in advance of the meeting and request that those planning the meeting plan for and bring a recommendation for voting on Amendment B by written ballot.

5) Have alternating speakers "for" and "against" Amendment B during the presbytery debate: Some presbyteries have adopted a special rule eliminating the requirement for alternating viewpoints in the debate (phrased as "alternating microphones will not be used"). This is an unfair process that favors those sophisticated enough to monopolize the microphones. Speak with the presbytery Moderator in advance of the meeting to be sure the Moderator will ask alternately for speakers who favor and oppose Amendment B. This does not mean that debate stops when only those on one side of an issue remain who wish to speak. It just means after each speech the moderator will ask if there is someone who wishes to speak on the opposite side.

In cases where the chair knows that persons seeking the floor have opposite opinions on the question...the chair should let the floor alternate, as far as possible, between those favoring and those opposing the measure. In large assemblies, various devices are sometimes used to assist the chair in following this rule, such as having members seeking recognition hold up cards of different colors, go to different microphones "for" and "against," or the like." (Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised [RONR] 10th ed, Ch XII Assignment of the Floor; Debate, pp 367 - 368)

## **b. Prepare voters who seek defeat of Amendment B to participate effectively**

1) Educate and prepare participants who seek defeat of Amendment B: Call a strategy meeting inviting only those pastors and elder commissioners who you are sure want to see Amendment B defeated. Review why defeat of Amendment B is so critical to the church. Go over suggested talking points. You may wish to plan who will try to give what point in the presbytery debate to be sure that a variety of points will be covered. Expect that debate time will be limited to two minutes per speaker and urge participants to plan for that timeframe. Also encourage them to have a one-minute version of their remarks ready in case debate time is shortened to allow more participants to speak. You can make only one good point in a two-minute speech. Don't try to do more than that or you will dilute your impact. Planning in advance will allow your team as a whole to cover the points—you don't have to say everything in one speech.

2) Get voters who seek defeat of Amendment B to the presbytery meeting: Be sure sessions that oppose Amendment B get their full number of commissioners to the meeting. Divide up the list of those who want to see Amendment B defeated and make calls before the meeting to get the vote out. If transportation is a problem, offer to arrange carpools. This is especially important if some participants are unable to drive at night and might leave the meeting before the vote is taken if they need to drive themselves to the meeting. Be sure everyone who seeks defeat of Amendment B knows the meeting date and location. Emphasize the critical importance of staying for the entire meeting in case the docket time is changed at the meeting or there is an attempt to reconsider the vote late in the meeting. This matter is critical for the church and is worth the time investment.

## **2. At the presbytery meeting**

### **a. Optimize fairness in the procedures**

1) Have quick access to a microphone which can be easily seen by the Moderator: Arrive at the meeting early enough so key participants can sit in places that enable them to get to a microphone quickly in case they need to respond rapidly to a situation.

2) Consider carefully whether it is wise to attempt changes from the floor:  
Voting by ballot: If voting by ballot is not the recommendation the planning committee brings to the floor and you believe voting by ballot would decrease peer pressure to support Amendment B, you may wish to move from the floor that the vote on Amendment B be taken by ballot.

“...a vote by ballot can be ordered by a majority vote....” (RONR, 10th ed., Ch XIII Voting, p 398)

3) Voting on Amendment B itself rather than committee recommendation: If voting on Amendment B itself is not the recommendation the planning committee brings to the floor, you may wish to move from the floor that votes be on the amendments themselves rather than the committee recommendations. Both sides benefit from clarity and voting on committee recommendations instead of the amendments themselves creates a very high level of confusion.

4) Changes in docket: A last-minute change in the time for voting on Amendment B is very risky and is undesirable because some participants may have made plans based on the time that was published in advance. It is ordinarily much wiser and more fair to work in advance to have the vote on Amendment B scheduled at an optimum time and then stick with whatever time was published in advance rather than seeking a last-minute change. Be sure no “order of the day” for other business is scheduled after the amendments since if the debates on the amendments are long, another order of the day could interrupt consideration of the amendments and move the rest of the amendment consideration to the end of the meeting after everyone is tired and some voters have left.

### **b. Participate effectively**

1) Follow the rules of the debate in presbytery: When it is time for debate on Amendment B, each speaker needs to get in line at a microphone immediately. Address the moderator and make your point clearly, always speaking the truth in love. Respect the time limits. It is helpful for speakers to begin a speech by saying “I speak against the amendment.” It is VERY important to end each speech by reminding voters how that speaker urges them to vote, “I ask you to vote ‘no’ on Amendment B.” Using

the phrase “vote no” helps commissioners who may be unclear on the process to know how to vote to accomplish their intent.

Note: Amendments to the PC(USA) constitution sent from GA for ratification are not amendable. Presbyteries must vote to accept or reject proposed constitutional amendments as they are presented, and do not have the option of changing the wording.

2) Be sure voters know what a “yes” vote means and what a “no” vote means before they vote:

If you were unable to get the presbytery to vote directly on Amendment B and instead the presbytery is voting on a committee recommendation that opposes the amendment, there will be great confusion about what a “yes” and a “no” vote means. If that happens, IMMEDIATELY after debate has ended (and BEFORE voting has begun) stand and loudly say, “Point of order.” Be at a microphone and continue, “Moderator, there is a lot of confusion about voting. If I want to vote to defeat Amendment B, how do I vote?” Stay at the microphone seeking clarification until the Moderator provides clear instructions. This will not be necessary if the vote is taken on Amendment B itself.

3) If the Moderator rules that Amendment B was APPROVED on a closely divided voice vote or a close vote taken by a show of hands, immediately call for a “division of the house.” This requires repeating the vote with voters standing so they can be clearly seen (and counted if necessary) to be sure the correct conclusion is reached.

Immediately after the Moderator announces the results of a vote taken by voice or by a show of hands, if there is reasonable doubt that the Moderator ruled correctly on the vote, any member, without being recognized by the Moderator, from his seat can interrupt and loudly say, “Division!” or “I call for a division.” The Moderator must then immediately take the vote again, first having the affirmative stand, then by having the negative stand. (RONR, 10th ed, Ch VIII Incidental Motions, pp 270 - 273)



## Parliamentary Procedure and “Discernment” Processes

The *Book of Order* requires that “**Meetings of governing bodies, commissions, and committees shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order*, except in those cases where this Constitution provides otherwise.**” (G-9.0302) Since the Constitution does not provide otherwise for Presbytery meetings, presbyteries must conduct their deliberations in conformity with *Robert’s Rules of Order*. By knowing the boundaries provided by *Robert’s Rules of Order*, presbyters are empowered to keep processes within the limits allowed.

Under the ordinary rules of debate, each member has the right to speak twice on the same question on the same day (*Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* [RONR], 10th ed., p 41). If the body wishes to allow members to speak more times, it can do so by voting to have the whole group function as a committee for a portion of the meeting [RONR p 472]. There are three options for functioning as a committee. Two of them are a “**Committee of the Whole**” (over which another member, appointed by the presbytery Moderator, would preside) or a “**Quasi Committee of the Whole**” (over which the presbytery Moderator would preside). In either of these forms, **results of the work as a committee have the status of recommendations** “which the assembly is given the opportunity to consider further and which it votes on finally under its regular rules.” [RONR p 513]

A third option, which is **not appropriate for a presbytery meeting**, is to deal with the matter by “**informal consideration.**” “Informal consideration” is very different because a **final decision** is made during the “informal consideration” process. “Informal consideration” is suitable **only for small meetings** [RONR p 513]. “The ‘informal’ aspect of the consideration applies only to the number of speeches allowed in debate on the main question and its amendments; **all votes are formal, and any other motion that is made is under the regular rules of debate.**” “Informal consideration” is not appropriate for large groups. “Informal consideration” does not allow a “discernment process” that deviates from standard parliamentary procedure.

Under *Robert’s Rules*, the will of the majority prevails. In circumstances that limit minority rights (e.g. ending debate), a 2/3 vote is required.

*Robert’s Rules* allows the presbytery (by majority vote) to move to “Quasi Committee of the Whole” or “Committee of the Whole” (the distinction is explained above). To incorporate a special “discernment process” that does not use parliamentary procedure, during the time in Committee of the Whole (or Quasi Committee of the Whole), it is likely that the leader would propose forming small “**breakout groups**” of about ten members as allowed in *Robert’s Rules* under “Aids to the crystallization of opinion.” [p 525] These breakout groups would not use parliamentary procedure and would be guided through a “discernment” process. **When “breakout groups” or any other process to “aid the crystallization of opinion” is used, *Robert’s Rules* explicitly states, “Whatever method is used, in the end, the pending measure must be returned to the full assembly for final consideration under normal parliamentary procedure—just as in the case of a referred question reported back by a committee—and the assembly must make the final decision, if whatever is to purport to be a product of the assembly is to be valid as the assembly’s act.”** [RONR p 525]

When the motion on an amendment is placed before the presbytery (regardless of whether or not it was preceded by time spent as a committee of the whole or quasi committee of the whole to use a “discernment process”), the body has a right to engage in parliamentary debate on the motion. The debate ends only when no one else wishes to speak to the motion or when a member, who has been recognized by the moderator, moves “the Previous Question,” that motion is seconded, and it is approved by a 2/3 vote. As long as at least 1/3 of the group wishes to continue debate, debate must be allowed to continue. Insisting on time for debate avoids substituting a small group discernment process for proper parliamentary process.

**Use of Point of Order.** In parliamentary procedure, the moderator (Chair) is delegated “the authority and duty to make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary law.” [RONR p 247]. If a member believes

that procedural requirements are being violated in a way that will cause harm if allowed to stand, that member has the right, without being recognized by the moderator, to stand, interrupt and loudly say, "Point of Order." That person should quickly go to a microphone and explain what is wrong. The moderator may consult with the parliamentarian or others and then will rule, either accepting what the member said and correcting the process or will determine that there is no violation. [RONR p 244 - 246] If a member believes the moderator has ruled incorrectly, a member may, without being recognized by the moderator, stand, interrupt, and say, "I appeal from the decision of the Chair." A "second" is required. The moderator then will state what is at issue, may explain the reasons for his decision, and must take a vote on the question, "Shall the decision of the Chair be sustained?" If the body votes "yes," the moderator's ruling stands. If the body votes "no," the moderator must change to accommodate the will of the body. [RONR p 251 - 252]

**NOTE:** Although the above description summarizes how a "discernment process" could be used, it is important to recognize that parliamentary procedure is the best method for considering controversial business. The easily-readable booklet *Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* by Marianne Wolfe ([www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/parliamentary\\_procedure.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/parliamentary_procedure.pdf)) describes ways in which parliamentary procedures enable management of differences of opinion "in such a way that decisions may be made in a situation of high conflict without damaging the reconciliation to which we are committed in the preservation of unity." The rules of decorum, including addressing all remarks to an impartial moderator who ensures a just hearing of all points of view and prevents members from attacking one another, enable the honest and vigorous debate of ideas. When vigorous debate does not occur, it allows "unspoken conflict to build to levels serious to the unity of the body."

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**APPENDIX:** Someone in each presbytery's group working to oppose the amendments should purchase the latest edition of *Robert's Rules* (readily available in bookstores and on-line):

*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10th ed, 2000, Da Capo Press

The index is easy to use and there is no need to read the whole book in order to be able to understand the basics shown below and to look up answers to other questions. In the following excerpts from *Roberts' Rules*, **bold type** and *italics* are shown as they appear in the book. Items are underlined to add emphasis that pertains to our situation.

## **52. COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE AND ITS ALTERNATE FORMS** [p 512 - 514]

The *committee of the whole* and its two alternate forms, the *quasi committee of the whole* (or *consideration as if in committee of the whole*) and *informal consideration*, are devices that enable the full assembly to give detailed consideration to a matter under conditions of freedom approximating those of a committee. Under each of these three procedures, any member can speak in debate on the main question . . . as often as he is able to get the floor. As under the regular rules of debate, however, he cannot speak another time on the same question so long as a member who has not spoken is seeking the floor. . .

- In a *committee of the whole*, which is suited to *large assemblies*, the results of votes taken are not final decisions of the assembly, but have the status of recommendations which the assembly is given the opportunity to consider further and which it votes on finally under its regular rules. Also, a chairman of the committee of the whole is appointed and the regular presiding officer leaves the chair, so that, by being disengaged from any difficulties that may arise in the committee, he may be in a better position to preside effectively during the final consideration by the assembly.

- In the *quasi committee of the whole*, which is convenient in *meetings of medium size* (about 50 to 100 members), the results of votes taken are reported to the assembly for final consideration under the regular rules, just as with a committee of the whole. But in this case the presiding officer of the assembly remains in the chair and presides.

- *Informal consideration*, which is suited to *small meetings of ordinary societies*, simply removes the normal limitations on the number of times members can speak in debate. . . The regular presiding officer remains in the chair; and the results of votes taken during informal consideration are decisions of the assembly, which are not voted on again.

### **Informal Consideration**

As explained above, if a question is considered in either a real committee of the whole or in quasi committee of the whole, the recommendations of the committee or quasi committee must be reported to the assembly and then the assembly must take action on these recommendations. In ordinary societies whose meetings are not large, a much simpler method is to consider the question informally, which in effect only suspends the rule limiting the number of times a member can speak in debate on the main question and any amendments to it. [p 523] . . . The “informal” aspect of the consideration applies only to the number of speeches allowed in debate on the main question and its amendments; all votes are formal, and any other motion that is made is under the regular rules of debate. . . [p 524]

#### **Aids to the Crystallization of Opinion** [p 524 - 525]

The more traditional aids to the crystallization of opinion in societies have been, simply, to take a Recess or to refer the matter to a committee--often a large committee composed of members representing differing views in the society, such as a committee of the whole or one of its alternate forms. In more recent years, a practice has developed of establishing breakout groups with every member in attendance being urged to participate in a group. Each breakout group, of which there may be many, is usually kept small--frequently ten or twelve persons--and a moderator is appointed for each group. Often, the groups meet during a recess or adjournment of the assembly. Sometimes, the conclusions reached by the various breakout groups are conveyed to a committee that assembles them and attempts to report a consolidated response to the assembly. At other times, the breakout groups report through their moderators directly to the assembly after it has been reconvened and the matter under consideration is again pending. These reports are in the nature of debate. Whatever method is used, in the end the pending measure must be returned to the full assembly for final consideration under normal parliamentary procedure--just as in the case of a referred question reported back by a committee--and the assembly must make the final decision, if whatever is to purport to be a product of the assembly is to be valid as the assembly's act.

### **43. RULES GOVERNING DEBATE**

Debate, rightly understood, is an essential element in the making of rational decisions of consequence by intelligent people. In a deliberative assembly, this term applies to discussion on the merits of a pending question--that is, whether the proposal under consideration should, or should not, be agreed to. That the right of debate is inherent in such an assembly is implied by the word *deliberative* . . .

While the amount of debate on a motion in actual practice will depend on such factors as its importance, how strongly it is contested, etc., every member of the assembly has the right to speak to every debatable motion before it is finally acted upon; and subject only to general limitations on debate established by parliamentary law or the rules of the body as explained below, this right cannot be interfered with except by a two-thirds vote [p 373]

### **16. PREVIOUS QUESTION** (Immediately to close debate) [p 189 - 194]

The *Previous Question* is the motion used to bring the assembly to an immediate vote on one or more pending questions [p 189]. . . A motion such as “I call for [or ‘call’] the question” or “I move we vote now” is simply a motion for the Previous Question made in nonstandard form, and it is subject to all of the rules in this section. [p 193 - 194]

. . . It is out of order when another has the floor. . . Must be seconded. . . Is not debatable. . . Requires a two-thirds vote. [p 191 - 192]

The forms used in making this motion include: “I move the previous question” . . . Calls of “Question!” by members from their seats are not motions for the *Previous Question* and are disorderly if another member is speaking or seeking recognition. [ p 199]



## **V. Resources on Additional Amendments and the Board of Pensions**



## Proposed Amendments from the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

by Bob Davis

Here is my summary of the proposed amendments. The “item number” refers to the pc-biz designation; it is important to cross-reference because my summary is not a direct quote of the proposed language. This is my review – and mine only – if it is helpful, great; if not, ignore it.

Here’s what is relevant for the process:

- Pursuant to G-18.0201, **amendments to the Book of Confession** require four steps: a) recommendation by a special committee appointed to study the matter; b) the affirmative majority vote of the General Assembly to which the special committee reports; c) the affirmative vote of two thirds of the presbyteries; and, d) affirmative vote and enactment by the next ensuing General Assembly.
- Pursuant to G-18.0301, **amendments to the Book of Order** require two steps: a) approval by one General Assembly; and b) a majority affirmative vote of all the presbyteries.

### No. **Amendment 10-1, Part 1 of 3, amending the Form of Government as a Whole. Item 07-01: nFoG.**

If you do not know what we currently have in the G-section of the *Book of Order* and are simply trusting that “it is too cumbersome,” you should be aware that approving the nFoG would open Pandora’s box to a whole new level of cumbersome. The more ambiguous and “flexible” nFoG will require enormous energy on the part of sessions, presbyteries and synods to create and adopt “rules,” “policies,” and “manuals” for all the things it took out. There will be a flood of remedial cases to figure out what is and is not allowable. It breaks down the connective bond.

You should not feel bad if you are confused about what would be the consequences of adopting the nFoG. The experts do not know, either. For example, not mentioned or included in the materials sent out with the Amendments is the action on Item 07-11, in which the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly,

empowers the Moderator to appoint a Special Committee on Existing Authoritative Interpretations of the Book of Order. The special committee shall be composed of six members recommended by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, and the Office of the General Assembly, and charged to make recommendations to the 220th General Assembly concerning the status of specific existing authoritative interpretations of the Constitution based on the Status of Authoritative Interpretations as shown below:

#### “Status of Authoritative Interpretations

“While the status and applicability of any authoritative interpretation is subject to the judgment of the assembly, it is the considered judgment of the ACC that if this proposal to amend the Form of Government were to be approved, generally speaking the status of authoritative interpretations would vary according to the relationship of newly approved language to previous language.

“1. If language approved in the Constitution explicitly restates the content of existing authoritative interpretations, it is no longer an authoritative interpretation but is incorporated into the Constitution.

“2. If language is approved that is identical to, or essentially the same as the language of constitutional provisions that have already been interpreted, current authoritative interpretations would continue in force. The ACC believes this would apply, for example, to authoritative

interpretations regarding current G-6.0106b, G-6.0108, G-8.0201, and G-9.0404d.

“3. If language is approved that is substantively different from currently interpreted constitutional language, clarification from the General Assembly would be required as to the status and applicability of existing authoritative interpretations through the provisions of G-13.0103r.

“4. If language is approved that contradicts the substance of an existing authoritative interpretation, the current interpretation would have no effect.

“5. If language is approved that totally removes a constitutional provision that has been authoritatively interpreted, the authoritative interpretations attached to that provision would be removed as well.”

Remember, this committee will not report until June, 2012. Essentially, this is an admission that we will not know what the nFoG would actually do until the next General Assembly receives this committee’s report -- that is, after the voting takes place.

There is something in the nFoG for everyone to not like. The current Form of Government may not be perfect, but it represents a lot of discerning work over the course of time. Voting yes is like handing a 16-year-old the keys to a race car, telling him to stand on the gas and figure it out as he goes, then sending him down the track hoping he does not hit anything.

The vote on this item is a straight yes/no vote. There are no “yes, if...” or “yes, but...” votes allowed. **(No.)**

**No. Amendment 10-2. Part 2 of 3, Confession of Belhar. (Item 16-12):** *Adding the Belhar Confession to the Book of Confessions*

This one does not lend itself to a quick summary. For me, inclusion in the *Book of Confessions* is not warranted. The Confession is important for its own historical context, but is problematic when the attempt is made to export it into different contexts. Specifically, one of the primary authors is urging that it be used as a justification to mandate the ordination of self-avowed, unrepentant practicing homosexual persons. If that is the effect and import into our circumstance, it is not a Confession that will unite us. It will further divide us and heighten tension regarding ordination standards, rather than resolve them. There are other reasons, but this one is sufficient to end the question for me.

**(No.)**

**Amendments 10-A through 10-O; Part 3 of 3.**

**No. Amendment 10-A. (pc-biz Item 06-09):** *Amending G-6.0106b.*

The amendment proposes changing the language of G-6.0106b. On its face, it is a good application of theoretical and desired Presbyterian principles. The problem is that it changes our understanding of the authority of Scripture and ignores the practical reality of how the ordination standard debate has played out within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

- If adopted, governing bodies would be “guided” by Scripture and not bound to live “in obedience to” Scripture (compare the current with the proposed new language).
- It is a statement of trust in an environment of distrust; it is local option. As demonstrated by the expanding “rights” of Certified Christian Educators in Item 06-01, the historical pattern in the Presbyterian Church is: what is permissive becomes mandatory; shortly after, what is mandatory becomes essential.
- It is not a compromise, it is a reversal of our historic and current standard. The language is aspirational, it is not constitutional. **(No.)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-B. (pc-biz Item ):** *Amending G-9.0203b, removing a Stated Clerk or Clerk of Session.*

The *Book of Order* does not provide a mechanism for removing an elected officer from their office for non-performance. This amendment specifies the process. **(Yes.)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-C. (pc-biz Item ): On Amending G-9.0404 requiring sexual misconduct policy.**

This one is simple enough to quote in its entirety: “All governing bodies shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy.” **[Yes.]**

**Yes. Amendment 10-D. (pc-biz Item 05-06): On Amending G-9.0801 regarding participation and representation.**

This is mostly editorial changes – from percentages to “numbers nearly as equal as possible” – to allow a little more flexibility for presbytery and synod nominating committees in making nominations. This should not be controversial. **(Yes.)**

**No. Amendment 10-E. (Item 05-04) Amend G-11.0407 regarding “registers.”**

This would add the requirement for stated clerks of presbyteries to maintain “registers” (as contrasted with “rolls”) of Certified Christian Educators and Commissioned Lay Pastors who have been granted voice and vote rights. The substantive portion of this proposed amendment is the inclusion of the possibility of a Commissioned Lay Pastor being commissioned for a “validated” (non-congregation-specific) ministry. For me, the register question is non-consequential; but I am not in favor of expanding CLP’s to “validated” positions. **(No)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-F. (Item 06–01): Amending G-11.0407 and 14.0730b regarding voice and voting rights for Certified Christian Educators.**

Here, the issue is the limit – “during their term of service in an educational ministry under the jurisdiction of the presbytery” – for voting rights at presbytery for Certified Christian Educators who are also elders. This extends the voting pool at presbytery, but in a specific and limited way. It extends voice rights at presbytery to all Certified Christian Educators; an expansion from permissive granting of voice rights. **(Yes).**

**Yes. Amendment 10-G. (Item 04-01): Amend G-12.0100 and D-5.0101 to modify synod functions to allow synods sharing common boundaries to share administration services and create a shared permanent judicial commission.**

This is a cost-cutting reality of decline. It allows for the maintenance of a bare-bones synod structure. It makes sense. **(Yes)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-H. (Item 05-05). On Amending G-13.0108 and G-13.0111a, and 13.0202b Regarding Nominations Process**

This is a similar editorial change as Amendment 10-D, Item 05-06 above, applied to the General Assembly Nominating Committee. Again, this should not be controversial. **(Yes)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-I. (Item 16-02) Amending W-4.400 to add “prayer.”**

This would add language to ordination vows to include “prayer.” No one objects to prayer. That said, just to illustrate the point, this is the kind of amendment that makes the *Book of Order* more of a manual than a Constitutional statement – and, unless our behavior changes, will be why the nFoG cannot succeed in its stated goal to make us missional. Digression aside, **(Yes.)**

**Yes. Amendment 10-J. (Item 05-26) Amending D-6.0103 regarding Stay of Enforcement**

There's a long story behind this one; the gist of which is that there was a loophole in the process that allowed a stated clerk to sit on documents for a period of time sufficient to exhaust the time for a stay of enforcement to be issued, thereby ending the case and impinging on the rights of an appealing party to be heard. This amendment remedies that loophole. [Yes.]

**Yes. Amendment 10-K. (Item 05-25)** *Amending D-6.0306, D-8.0302, and D-13.0302 regarding preliminary questions.*

Wow. This one is truly a “due process” amendment; it simply allows closure of a case where a decision is unchallenged that a party does not meet the “standing” questions for filing a disciplinary case (remedial or disciplinary) or appeal. [Yes.]

**Yes. Amendment 10-L (Item 05-20)** *Amending D-10.0202 reviewing investigating committee work.*

The amendment adds the responsibility for an investigating committee to determine that the accusations have previously been made and/or evaluated. [Yes.]

**Yes. Amendment 10-M. (Item 05-25, rec. 2)** *Amending D-10.0401 regarding Time Limits.*

Extend the “statue of limitations” for filing of charges on disciplinary offenses to 5 years from 3 years. There is nothing magic about a time limit for the initiation of discipline – particularly because the goal is redemption, reconciliation, and restoration; thus, a change from 3 years to 5 years is a matter of discretion. Enough people thought the change would be an improvement; I have no argument. [Yes.]

**Yes. Amendment 10-N (Item 05-02):** *Amend D-13.0102 and D-13.0106 to reverse a previous amendment allowing the prosecution in a disciplinary case to appeal a not guilty verdict.*

Although the prior change was a departure from American criminal law, it was a response to presbytery permanent judicial commissions’ refusing to apply constitutional standards to specific disciplinary cases – most notably those involving pastors performing “same-sex marriages” and G-6.0106b. Restoring the prior standard will function to encourage further departures from constitutional standards with no corrective recourse available. Even so, the “prosecution appeal” is not an answer to willful departures from constitutional integrity. (Yes)

**Yes. 15. Amendment 10-O (Item )** *On Amending D-13.0404, decision of Permanent Judicial Commission.*

If Amendment 10-N is not approved, this amendment provides that the successful appeal of a *not guilty* verdict by the prosecution will result in a new trial. [Yes.]

*The Rev. Bob Davis is pastor of Chula Vista Presbyterian Church, Chula Vista, CA.*

# The GA “Urges” Board of Pensions to Extend Benefits to Same-Sex Partners

by James R. Tony

## The General Assembly Action

The recent 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (GA) passed a resolution that “1. Urge[d] the Board of Pensions ...to extend eligibility for spousal and dependent benefits under the Plan to Benefits Plan members, their same-gender domestic partners, and the children of their same-gender domestic partners.... 2. Approve an increase in dues for the Benefits Plan of up to 1 percent, effective January 1, 2012....”

Participation in the Board of Pensions (BOP) plan is mandatory for all installed pastors. The *Book of Order* stipulates that the terms of call for an installed pastor, “shall include participation in the Benefits Plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), including both pension and medical coverage...” (G-14.0534). In the language of the *Book of Order* the word “shall” makes an action mandatory.

This means that when a congregation has an installed pastoral position (even in a vacancy situation), the congregation must pay DUES for plan participation. Dues are not paid for individual coverage; thus, they are not like “premiums” to an insurance plan. Instead dues are a percentage of salary; they are paid into common funds: a retirement fund and a medical fund. Then the common fund is used to make retirement and medical payments to individuals. Thus a portion of what is paid out to any individual who is a “member” of the plan is paid by each and every contribution to the plan. This distinction from ordinary medical insurance is important.

This GA action, if the BOP adopts it, would require church members to support—with their tithes and offerings—practices that Scripture, our confessions, and the *Book of Order* call sin. In authorizing the BOP to raise mandatory dues up to one percent, the mandatory dues could increase from the current 31.5% to 32.5% of the pastor’s effective salary. This amounts to an actual increase of 3.17% to congregations. If this is implemented, the coverage and dues increase will be effective January 1, 2012.

Presbyteries will not vote to approve this requirement. Nothing constitutional or official stands in the way of the BOP implementing what the GA urged them to do. However, the BOP has discretion in how and for whom to provide coverage. Therefore members, sessions and pastors can write letters to the Directors of the BOP and share their deep concerns. They can ask the BOP not to implement this action of the 219<sup>th</sup> GA.

## Some Considerations

1) This action, if implemented, forces sessions and individuals to support financially what Scripture, the confessions, and the *Book of Order* call sin.

2) The *Book of Order* requires that installed pastors participate in the BOP plan. Others may also participate in the plan. Participating clergy and elders cannot be in same-sex relationships, since to do so is prohibited by the sexuality standards for ordained officers in G-6.0106b. The proposed extension of coverage to same-sex partners only applies to church employees, such as youth directors, music directors, Christian education directors, and church secretaries who are not ordained elders. Employers (sessions, institutions and agencies) already possess the freedom to cover their employees through a wide variety of elective plans without using the power of the BOP to coerce other congregations to pay for same-sex coverage. It is noteworthy that the “urging” of the 219<sup>th</sup> GA did not extend to opposite-sex domestic partners.

3) The General Assembly included a comment in their recommendation that the BOP “be highly urged to provide relief of conscience, ...for those congregations for whom these actions cause a moral dilemma.” It is questionable, however, that a satisfactory relief of conscience can be found. Since covering same-sex partners and dependents crosses the whole breadth of the plan, it would likely require a separate plan and likely require higher dues for those covered. Unless everyone is forced to pay the higher dues, would unequal dues be discriminatory? Would civil law allow unequal dues based on same-sex behavior?

4) The proposed increase of up to 1% does not reflect potential increases to comply with the Federal healthcare plan recently approved by Congress. These significant dues increases affect small churches disproportionately. Some years ago, it took a congregation of about 125 members to support a full-time pastor. Since a majority of PCUSA congregations have 150 members or less, as dues increase and minimum compensation packages increase, and as PCUSA membership declines, more churches may be unable to call a pastor. This increase in mandatory dues, directly affects the ability of churches to do ministry.

This action of the General Assembly regarding BOP coverage demonstrates how the sexual behavior of one part of the church affects us all. If the proposed amendment 10-A is approved by the presbyteries, it will remove the clear standards of “fidelity and chastity” for church officers from the *Book of Order* at G-6.0106b. That action would strengthen the case that to cover partners in homosexual relationships by the mandatory BOP would be contrary to our standards. The “urging” of the General Assembly demonstrates that even in the short run, there is no freedom to be granted in allowing for a difference of opinion about the moral standard of sexual behavior. This proposal demonstrates that those who wish to change the standard intend to force their moral position on the whole church.

Editor’s Note: Write letters directly to the Board of Directors for the BOP, urging them not to adopt the changes the GA requested. The names and addresses of the Directors can be found on the *Theology Matters*’ website [www.theologymatters.com](http://www.theologymatters.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, M.W., “Married homosexual men: prevalence and background,” *Marriage and Family Review* (1990), 14:35-57. See also Whitehead, Neil & Briar, *My Genes Made Me Do It!* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Hunting House Publishers, 1999), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Scriptures that speak directly to the topic of homosexuality include: Genesis 2:21-25; 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. Related texts include: Deuteronomy 23:17-18, Judges 19:22-25, 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46, 2 Kings 23:7, Ezekiel 16:50, 2 Peter 2:6-10, Jude 7, and Revelation 21:8; 22:15.

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