

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH and the PC(USA) on the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ

The Auburn Declaration:

"Some of us regard the particular theories contained in the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of all confidence and fellowship."

In 1927, the General Assembly responds to "The Auburn Declaration," and declares that these five teachings are no longer "essentials" for ordained leadership:

- The inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit and the inerrancy of Scripture as a result of this.
- The virgin birth of Christ.
- The belief that Christ's death was an atonement for sin.
- The bodily resurrection of Christ.
- The historical reality of Christ's miracles.

Excerpts from The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing:

"At the same time, we should not insist on the exclusive use of the traditional trinitarian names, lest we quench the Spirit and even foster idolatry. Such a view would insufficiently acknowledge the divine mystery, would neglect the freedom of God's children to glorify God imaginatively with all our hearts and minds, and would diminish the joy of knowing God ever more fully."

In this act of gift sharing, we recognize the Trinity as

- Giver, Gift, and Giving;
- Truth, Goodness, and Beauty;
- Sun, Light, and Burning Ray.

In praising the triune God we use biblical language, both classic –

- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
and surprising –
- Mother, Child, and Womb.

We may use words that speak of the inner relations of the Godhead –

- Lover, Beloved, Love,

and those that speak of the loving activity of the Three among us –

- Creator, Savior, Sanctifier,
- Rock, Redeemer, Friend,
- King of Glory, Prince of Peace, Spirit of Love.
- rainbow of promise, ark of salvation, dove of peace

Excerpts from a PC(USA) defense of The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing:

As for appropriate ways of speaking of the triune God, the Report strongly and repeatedly affirms the traditional trinitarian designations of Father, Son, and Spirit. According to the Report, "The language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rooted in Scripture and creed, remains an indispensable anchor for our efforts to speak faithfully of God" (331-332). On at least a dozen occasions, the Report employs the language of Father, Son, and Spirit, and it upholds the use of this language in baptismal practice in concert with the church catholic. Cut loose from this anchor, "the historical faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church risks being set adrift" (333-335).

Thus in venturing other ways of speaking of the reality and activity of the triune God, we must always be guided by the words of Scripture and creed that speak of God as Father, Son, and Spirit" (356-357). Yet while privileged, these designations of the triune persons do not preclude other supplementary designations that seek to bring out some particular aspect of the infinite riches of the triune life and activity toward us.

With the anchor of the language of Father, Son, and Spirit in place, "we are liberated to amplify and expand upon the ways of naming the triune God" (336-337). We are free to speak of "God, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God," of "God the Speaker, God the Word Enfleshed, and God the enlivening Breath," of "God the Lover, God the Beloved, and God the Love that binds Lover and Beloved," of "God from whom, God through whom, and God in whom, are all things," of "God the compassionate mother, God the beloved child, and God the life-giving womb."

The one aspect that this report fails to acknowledge is:

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." (Exodus 20:7 NIV)

We interpret this to mean that we do not have the right to envision new names or formulas for the Godhead which have not specifically been revealed by God Himself.

The 218th General Assembly only received this document and did not adopt it. However, the document has nonetheless been published and distributed to our congregations with a study guide by the PC USA Office of Theology and Worship at the direction of our General Assembly.

We now have a document which has been received by our General Assembly, prepared by our Office of Theology and Worship, a study guide prepared for it, a publishing and distribution plan of it to all of our congregations. In our estimation, our own Office of Theology and Worship is now promoting materials that run contrary to the Third Commandment.

**Overture O-12 to the 218th General Assembly, section 4,
Recommendation 1 as amended, and approved as policy of PC(USA):**

- To encourage congregations of these faiths (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) to celebrate religious holidays together, setting aside days of worship during which there can be congregational suppers, and dialogue groups.

A statement of the issue from Beaver-Butler Presbytery's Open Declaration concerning errors of the 218th General Assembly (2008):

The most profound errors of this Church Council are biblical. While a range of valid methods and approaches to biblical interpretation is practiced, this range must be defined confessionally, and it must be faithful to a Reformed theological framework. We acknowledge and confess that we look to Jesus Christ as the Word of God Living, yet we also affirm, with the Confession of 1967, that Scripture is the Word of God Written. Faulty interpretation and skewed exegesis of Scripture gave rise to two unbiblical actions of the General Assembly. These were (1) the recommendation encouraging Presbyterians to seek worship opportunities with Jews and Muslims, and (2) the approval of a study guide for the previously received Trinity paper.

1. While specific language that Muslims, Jews, and Christians worship "a common God" was removed from the final resolution, the recommendation encouraging common worship between Jews, Muslims and ourselves was based on the assumption of the removed language. This practical recommendation remained unchanged in final form. This recommendation is not congruent with the Scriptural witness to the Divinity and the univocal Lordship of Jesus Christ, or of the full divinity and co-equality of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Father within the Godhead. We worship the thrice-holy, Triune God. Because of their theology, neither Muslims nor Jews can participate in worshipping the Triune God. So, too, we betray our faith when we deny the Divinity and presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in any worship context. This recommendation is based on a profound misrepresentation of the Trinity. Therefore we cannot sponsor worship together and should not be encouraged to do so.
2. Further, the argument has been made and advanced that the Study Paper on the Trinity utilizes only Scriptural language and imagery for the discussion of the Deity. Although this is true, the method employed continuously throughout this paper routinely confuses the natures of simile and metaphor to such a degree that it effectively confuses what we think we know about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a great many places it skirts perilously close to propounding either pantheistic (God is everything) or panentheistic (God is in everything) views of God.
3. One may argue, and many have, that studies of such important topics as the Trinity risk "pushing the envelope" theologically and philosophically, but that such risks must be taken as we delve deeply into the Doctrine of God. We agree that we should study deeply, but we also believe that we must mine with care the great treasure-filled depths of God's Word. We must always pay primary attention to contexts, historical situations and literary genres of the texts we study. Our goal should always and only be to reflect the truth contained therein, and never to speculatively invent or intuit material that is at best tangentially contained. To do so we risk becoming false guides.

2011 New Form of Government of the PC(USA)

nFOG

"F-1.0403 The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, *or theological conviction*. There is *therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person*. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall *guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life* to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution."

(REALLY? OUR THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE?

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

F-2.0104

Councils shall be *guided by* Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

REPLACED: 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. G-6.106b

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

The Official Stance of First Presbyterian Church of Dunellen

On the Trinity

The LORD our God, the LORD is one. The one true God exists in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that each Person of the Trinity is engaged in all that God has done, does now, and will yet do. The LORD our God is the One who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

On Jesus

Jesus Christ is the living Word, the promised Messiah, and the eternal Son of the Father, sent in mission to the earth. Incarnated in the womb of the virgin Mary, He is fully God and fully human, come to reconcile God and humanity. During His earthly ministry Jesus lived a sinless life, healed the sick, raised the dead, drove out demons, befriended sinners, preached the gospel to the poor, and died as our substitute on the cross. He rose bodily from the dead, ascended to the Father, and remains our faithful Mediator and High Priest. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by faith in Him. He is the only Head of the Church, our Lord and Savior.

OUR CORE VALUES - Commitments that are central to who we are as a church

NUESTROS VALORES CENTRALES: Compromisos que son centrales a quienes somos como iglesia.

- There is one God who has revealed himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Hay un Dios que se ha revelado en tres personas: Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo
- The Bible is God's inspired and authoritative word for faith and life
La Biblia es la palabra inspirada y autoritativa de Dios para la fe y la vida.
- Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone¹
La salvación es solamente por gracia a través de la fe en Jesucristo.
- The goal of our ministry is to transform people into fully devoted followers of Christ.
La meta del nuestro ministerio es transformar a la gente en seguidores completamente consagrados a Cristo
- The decision to follow Jesus calls us to purity in every area of our lives²
La decisión de seguir a Jesús nos llama a la pureza en cada área de nuestras vidas
- Worship is our joyful response to God's majesty, holiness, and love
La adoración es nuestra respuesta gozosa a la majestad, al santidad, y al amor de Dios
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ transcends race, language, and culture
El evangelio del Jesucristo trasciende la raza, la lengua, y la cultura
- We are called to love one another, and love our neighbors as ourselves
Somos llamados para amarnos unos a otros, y amar al prójimo como a nosotros mismos
- All human life is sacred from conception to natural death, because we have all been created in God's own image
Toda la vida humana es sagrada desde la concepción hasta la muerte natural, porque todos hemos sido creados a la imagen de Dios
- Prayer is the key that unlocks God's power for Christian life and ministry
La oración es la llave que abre el poder de Dios para la vida cristiana y el ministerio
- All spiritual gifts are at work in Christ's church, and are given for the common good³
Todos los dones espirituales están en funcionamiento en la iglesia de Cristo, dados para el bien común
- Every Christian has been shaped by God for ministry
Dios ha formado a cada cristiano para el ministerio
- Jesus is coming again
Jesús viene por segunda vez.