

## APPENDIX TWO: SOME THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

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1. In 1973 the PCUS, the "Southern Presbyterian Church", was considering a merger with the northern Presbyterian Church (UPUSA). The PCA was organized in that year from congregations leaving the southern church. Today two-thirds of the PCA churches are in the south and southeast, where the old PCUS was.

2. I have a great deal of respect for the PCA. To best understand the PCA I recommend reading - "What's So Great About the PCA?" - by Tim Keller (pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, PCA, in New York City), online, 25 pp., June 2010, prepared for a discussion at the PCA General Assembly. Some excerpts:

a. "Within the Reformed churches, there has always been a tension between what George Marsden calls 'the Reformed branches' - - the doctrinalist, pietistic and culturalist impulses. 1. (Please read this footnote.) To understand the PCA today, we must trace out the history of these branches in American Presbyterianism."

"1. I am going to use George Marsden's terminology to describe the Reformed Branches, even though they are rather bland, and each one is a bit negative. Doctrinalists prefer to call themselves 'confessionalists' and pietists would rather talk about 'renewal' and the reformists or culturalists would perhaps prefer to call themselves 'kingdom' people. But in each case the other parties can rightly object that they believe in the confession or in spiritual renewal or in the kingdom as well, and they dislike the implication that they do not. Often the names we choose for ourselves are self-aggrandizing while insinuating negative things about any who differ with us. My roots are in what here is called the 'pietist' or 'revivalist' wing. I wince at those terms, and would prefer a more noble name, but for the sake of fairness and utility I will use Marsden's phraseology which is mildly insulting to everyone(!) See his essay, "Introduction: Reformed and American," in *Reformed Theology in America* [ed. David F. Wells; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997] " (page 1)

b. "This 'cultural impulse' of Reformed Christianity came to America, but soon the question posed itself--in such a pluralistic and democratic situation, how much emphasis should Reformed churches now put on reforming a society it could not control? Marsden says it was the issue of slavery that threw this question into sharpest relief. In the North, many Reformed churches were moderately anti-slavery. Indeed the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (which later merged into the Reformed Presbyterian Church and subsequently into the PCA in 1982) was one of the first U.S. denominations to not allow members to be slave-holders. But Presbyterian churches in the South strongly opposed any interference in the institution of slavery. They developed the idea of the spirituality of the church [underlining added] in which the church's role was not to speak to political issues but only to evangelize, catechize, and build up the church.

"This was, of course, an intensified form of the more Lutheran version of the two- kingdoms doctrine, but certainly a departure from the way the Reformed churches of

Scotland and the Netherlands had related to society. Nevertheless, this emphasis led many doctrinalist churches in the South to shed the older Reformed culturalist impulse. Meanwhile, many other Reformed churches in the North sought to address the new American situation by marrying the pietist impulse to the older cultural-reformist impulse. It was argued that, though in America no church would have a 'state-church' as it had in Europe, social reform could take place if enough of the populace converted. Then reforming legal structures (like abolishing slavery) would happen democratically." (page 5)

c. "Marsden notes many ironies about the Reformed 'culturalist' impulse. While the Old School in the South ostensibly held to an apolitical stance- 'the spirituality of the church'- in reality it became a strong defender of the Southern way of life. In other words, to say (in a 'Two-Kingdom' way) 'I'm against social reform, I just want to preach the gospel' is to be *de facto* supportive of the cultural status quo, and therefore to be a cultural conservative. 'Spirituality of the church' proponents like Thornwell and Dabney ended up as *de facto* supporters of slavery, and so they were culturally engaged after all." (pages 7-8)

d. "What do the branches look like today?"

"As I've sought to point out, the three 'branches' or 'impulses' seldom appear in pure form. Nevertheless, we can make some general statements about each approach so we can discern their influences on us.

"The doctrinalist impulse puts the emphasis on the corporate and the objective. The stress is on ministry done through church courts—Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly- and on people being brought to Christ through objective ordinances and processes like baptism and catechism. It takes a dim view of most para-church agencies and inter- denominational cooperation. There is more stress on uniformity of faith and practice than on freedom and diversity. Historic tradition is valued over innovation, and social adaptation is looked upon with great suspicion. These last two factors mean there is less freedom for individual Christians and local Sessions. Things are more tightly regulated.

"The pietist impulse puts the emphasis on the individual and the experiential. Pietists do ministry through church courts, but they are also supportive of ministry through para-church ministries. Pietists stress core doctrines over secondary ones, and feel more like part of the broader evangelical movement than do doctrinalists. This branch, like the doctrinalists, are generally suspicious of an emphasis on social justice and cultural engagement. While the doctrinalists fear cultural accommodation, the pietists are more afraid that it will detract from the pietists' main concern—evangelism, mission, and church growth.

"The culturalist impulse is like the doctrinalist in that it values theological reasoning and is suspicious of the individualism and pragmatism of the pietists. Culturalists emphasize community and the corporate in ways similar to the doctrinalists. However,

culturalists are more like the pietists in their openness to social adaptation. Indeed, they usually are more open to the 'new' than the pietists. And the culturalists pay the most

attention to what goes on outside the church in the culture. In particular, they usually give more heed to modern scholarship. Culturalists may show less concern with 'church growth' and overt evangelistic programs than either of the other two branches. Also [they] feel more affinity to 'the Great Tradition'—the Anglican, Catholic, and Eastern churches—than do the doctrinalists and the pietists." (page 9)

e. "There is a long list of these controversial issues over the years. Some generated intense debate and confrontation but have not recently taken center stage—like the battles over the MTW [Mission to the World- PCA mission board] cooperative agreements with non-Reformed mission agencies, MNA [Mission to North America] church planting methodologies, confessional subscription, and the days of creation. Many conflicts turn on the gospel/law distinction. Doctrinalists are concerned that the pietists' love of 'Sonship' teaching puts too much emphasis on grace and acceptance and not enough on the need for holiness. On the other hand, many believe that the culturalists' emphasis on the sacraments are leading toward a new legalism. Another perennial issue has been the role of women, and currently their relationship to the diaconate is under discussion. [The combined Sunday bulletin for the three Redeemer Presbyterian Church congregations in Manhattan lists elders, deacons, and deaconesses for all three congregations.] Finally, there is constant friction over how to interpret the Regulative Principle of worship, so much so that it is almost impossible to craft joint worship services at Presbytery or General Assembly without someone being seriously offended." (page 13)

3. Tim Keller served as Director of Mercy Ministries for the PCA before going to establish Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. In 1997 he wrote *Ministries of Mercy: the Call of the Jericho Road*, P. and R. Publishing. It is a fine, practical book on the church's ministry in the world. Another fine booklet was published in 2013- *What is Mercy Ministry?*, by Philip Ryken, president of Wheaton College and former pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and Noah Toly, Director of the Center for Urban Engagement (CUE) and Associate Professor of Politics & International Relations at Wheaton College. Both books have exciting visions of the church's ministries, but many "spirituality of the church" advocates would be unhappy with the books, because the authors contend there is a broad Biblical basis for the church's ministry in the world.

4. The PCA has a continuing controversy over the extent of subscription [agreement] to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms that is required of ministers and elders:

a. Dr. Morton Smith was the first Stated Clerk of the PCA, serving from 1973 to 1988. He is on the faculty of Greenville (S.C.) Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He advocates "strict" (every proposition) subscription.

b. Robert Dabney was the leading southern Presbyterian theologian after the Civil War. He "adhered so closely in both letter and spirit to the Westminster standards that in

a speech before the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly in the last year of his life [1898], he could seriously make this strong assertion: '. . . the [Westminster] Confession will need no amendment until the Bible needs to be amended.' " (Douglas Kelly)

c. Dr. William Barker, professor of church history emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), argues for a "system" subscription, and gives examples of the exceptions which may be taken to the Westminster Standards:

Dr. Charles Hodge- . . . in 1858 he wrote: "It is a perfectly notorious fact, that there are hundreds of ministers in our Church, and that there always have been such ministers, who do not receive all the propositions contained in the *Confession of Faith and Catechisms*." The Presbytery would have to decide if a candidate's exception to the *Westminster Standards* was contrary to the system of doctrine. Hodge did not regard such matters as "vows and oaths, of the civil magistrate, of marriage. [chapters 22- 24 of the *Westminster Confession*] as essential to the system."

J. Gresham Machen- In 1936 Machen wrote that, though the *Westminster Standards* oppose Premillennialism, a Premillennialist in the Presbyterian Church of America [now the OPC] can still hold to the system of doctrine taught in those standards:

"It is true, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms teach not the Premil- lennial view but a view that is opposed to the Premillennial view. That is particularly plain in the Larger Catechism (Q.s 87 and 88).

"But subscription to the Westminster Standards in The Presbyterian Church of America [OPC] is not to every word in those Standards, but only to the *system* of doctrine which the Standards contain.

"The real question, then, is whether a person who holds the Premillennial view can hold that system. Can a person who holds the Premillennial view be a true Calvinist; can he, in other words, hold truly to the Calvinistic or Reformed system of doctrine which is set forth in the Westminster Standards? We think that he can; and for that reason we think that Premillennialists as well as those who hold the opposing view may become ministers or elders or deacons in The Presbyterian Church of America [OPC] . . . . It is no new thing to take this position regarding creed-subscription. It is the position which has long been taken by orthodox Calvinistic theologians."

Dr. Barker gives his own exceptions to the Westminster Standards, as declared to his presbytery:

*"Amendments Concerning the Civil Magistrate"*

"The American Presbyterian Church amended parts of Chapters XX, XXIII, and XXXI of the *Westminster Confession* in the late 18th century, but somehow neglected to amend the Larger Catechism Q. 191 on the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: ". . . we pray

that . . . the Church [may be] . . . countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate... ." This is one statement to which I have taken exception."

*"Pictures of Jesus"*

"Although I do not advocate pictures or portrayals of Jesus, I find it difficult to be in accord with *Larger Catechism* Q. 109 on sins forbidden in the second commandment: ('. . . the making any representation of God, . . . of any of the three Persons, either *inwardly in our mind*, or outwardly in any kind of image . . .'), when reading such a passage as John's vision of our Lord in Rev 1:10-16. I believe the *Larger Catechism* statement represents a Puritan over-reaction to Roman Catholic abuses, and therefore, I have declared an exception to this particular part of the Standards."

*"Sabbath Practice"*

"A more common example of a modern-day exception concerns Sabbath observance. I believe it is incumbent upon candidates, elders, and ministers in Presbyterian churches to be sabbatarian—that is, to hold to the continuing relevance of the fourth commandment. The *Larger Catechism*, Qs. 117 and 119, however, appear to me to go beyond the teaching of Scripture with regard to some 'recreations as are on other days lawful.' We should seek to maintain the spirit of the Sabbath as our Lord Jesus taught and exemplified it in Mark 2:23–3:6." (William Barker, "System Subscription", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 63, (2001), pages 1-14)

5. The PCA has to deal with threats to leave the denomination and rejection of its supposed unfaithfulness:

"Five Reasons it Might Be Time to Leave the Presbyterian Church in America

"A resolution adopted by the Session of the Providence PCA, Fayetteville, NC, at its stated meeting on May 10, 2014

*"In order to safeguard the integrity of our congregation and maintain the kind of true biblical accountability and connectionalism prescribed in the New Testament, the session of Providence Presbyterian Church has decided to prayerfully begin the process of investigating other denominations to determine if we should affiliate with them. The session believes that this search should be conducted without haste and with due diligence and care.*

"1) **A Failure to Exercise Discipline:** [the "Federal Vision" controversy]

"2) **Anarchy in Worship:** While the PCA is supposed to follow the teaching of chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) which states that we are not to do anything in worship that is not prescribed in the bible, in actual

practice PCA churches ignore the RPW and do whatever they want to. This means that there is no uniformity in worship in PCA churches and one might find a PCA church whose worship seems positively Episcopalian, another whose worship resembles that of a Charismatic mega-church, another whose worship resembles that of the “Emergent Churches” and even a few that follow the Puritan RPW model. This creates huge problems when members of the PCA move and suddenly find that none of the PCA churches in their area have worship services that look remotely like the PCA worship to which they had become accustomed. In our case many PCA transplants who move to our city end up worshiping in charismatic churches instead of the two PCA churches in town because their former PCA churches had a charismatic worship style.

Regardless, preference rather than the regulative principle is usually the determining factor in how a PCA church will order its worship and most churches in the PCA are likely to ignore every part of Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession. This became painfully obvious during the recent intinction [1.] debate when the RPW, which should have determined the PCA’s answer to the problem, wasn’t even seriously considered. In addition to a lack of uniformity in worship, the PCA generally has a low view of the Lord’s Day and the Sabbath is more likely to be observed in the breach than in actual practice. . . .

**"3) A Failure to Safeguard the Sacraments:** In 2012 an overture to the GA that year attempted to insert language into the BCO to prevent the practice of intinction noting that dipping the bread in communion into wine instead of taking the bread and the wine in two separate sacramental actions is not what we are directed to do in scripture. During the debate regarding this overture, it became clear that many PCA churches were already practicing intinction and they fought hard to keep their practice. Several PCA ministers saw the attempt to ban intinction as an attempt to impose the Regulative Principle and fought hard against it as an attempt to “norm” worship and eliminate diversity. At no point in the debate did we consider that the only sections of the Directory of Worship in the PCA’s BCO [Book of Church Order] that have constitutional authority are the sections that deal with the sacraments, and that intinction failed to follow the guidelines established there and in the Westminster Standards. Ultimately, the anti-intinction amendment failed and intinction, which fails to administer the Lord’s Supper as Christ gave it to the church, was allowed to continue.

"2012 was also a bad year for the sacraments in the PCA because it was also the year that the GA decided, during the Review of Presbytery Records, that paedocommunion [2.] was an acceptable exception to the teaching of the standards and that presbyteries did NOT need to explain to the GA why they had ordained men who believed in it. The practical effect of this is that the PCA is now freely ordaining men who believe in paedocommunion, the belief is spreading, and several PCA churches already practice de facto paedocommunion. Inevitably the practice of paedocommunion will become de jure once enough men who believe in it are ordained.

**"4) A Failure to Maintain the Teaching of Scripture Regarding Six-Day Creation:** In 2000 the 28th PCA GA determined that there were four acceptable views of creation that her ministers could teach: Calendar Day, Day-Age, Framework, and Analogical Days. While this decision was confusing and contradictory (after all, Genesis 1-3 couldn’t possibly have four correct but contradictory interpretations!), one thing that everyone involved in the debate supposedly agreed on and affirmed was that THEISTIC EVOLUTION would never be an

acceptable view of creation in the PCA. However, one of our Presbyteries, Metro New York (MNYYP), and one of our best known Pastors, Tim Keller, of Redeemer PCA in Manhattan, have been promoting theistic evolution especially through Biologos, an organization that believes "that the diversity and interrelation of all life on earth are best explained by the God-ordained process of evolution with common descent". . . .

"5) **A Failure to Stand against Moral Compromise:** [Reformed University Fellowship at Vanderbilt]

[1. *Intinction* is the practice of observing the Lord's Supper by dipping the bread into the wine before consumption by the communicant. It is not found in the Bible and was not practiced in the church until the fourth century at the very earliest.]

[2. *Paedocommunion* is the practice of giving the elements of the Lord's Supper to infants and very young children who are not capable of the self-examination required in 1 Cor. 11:28.]

[The Great Lakes Presbytery, PCA, voted 16- 12 in favor of the amendment to ban intinction.]

[At its November 2, 2013 meeting, the Heartland Presbytery (nine churches in Kansas) voted almost unanimously to prohibit the practice of intinction in the churches within its bounds.]

6. PCA Presbyteries can refuse for many reasons to ordain ministers or admit ordained ministers by transfer:

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERY (15 churches in eastern Tennessee and 7 in western Virginia), from their web site:

"For much of those first thirty years, Westminster Presbytery was greatly divided. Going to a Presbytery meeting was like going off to the front lines of a war. . . .

"In the late 1990s, most men in Presbytery decided that it was impossible for us to live together. In January 2000, Presbytery overturned the General Assembly to divide the Presbytery into two theological presbyteries. Actually, the Overture requested that Presbytery be divided into two geographical presbyteries, but men of differing theological views could become a member of the Presbytery of their choice, regardless of where they lived. The Overture went to the General Assembly and was defeated by a very narrow margin . . . .

"To resolve the division, Presbytery appointed a Conflict Resolution Committee in 1999 to develop a statement that would be agreeable to the elders of Presbytery and be a basis for unity. . . . in October 2002, Presbytery adopted a statement that restored unity, and that unity has been maintained now for over a decade. . . .

#### "REPORT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMITTEE

Westminster Presbytery October 12, 2002

Nearly four years ago, the Conflict Resolution Committee was appointed by Presbytery. We have been working diligently to understand and resolve the conflict among us. Realizing that there is always more involved in conflict than just doctrinal issues, yet we believe that much of the conflict is

rooted in doctrinal issues. The "Statement Of Adopted Positions" below represents an enthusiastic consensus of our Committee. This list of items is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues, but we only seek to address those issues that have caused grievous conflict in the recent past within our Presbytery. We are asking each presbyter to consider the Report and to be ready to vote at the October Stated Meeting.

Recognizing that the 'Summary Of Adopted Positions' is not on the same level as the Confessional Standards, nevertheless Westminster Presbytery encourages all elders and churches to use the "Summary of Adopted Positions" as a set of guidelines and parameters in order to protect and promote the peace and purity of our Presbytery.

### SUMMARY OF ADOPTED POSITIONS

1. In regard to the issue of Creation, Presbytery has already stated our position that only those who believe in the 6/24 hour creation days will be received into Westminster Presbytery.

2. In regard to theonomy, Presbytery takes the position of the PCA General Assembly that has been documented in its own Minutes. Theonomy will not be used as a test for orthodoxy.

3. In regard to Freemasonry, Presbytery reaffirms its historical position recorded in the Minutes of Presbytery. Membership in Freemasonry is incompatible with Christianity, and no Freemason will be ordained as an officer in this Presbytery.

4. In regard to the issue of Paedocommunion, Presbytery reaffirms its position that it is an exception to the Confession and cannot be taught or promoted in our Churches.

5. In regard to the Regulative Principle of Worship, in view of its importance in the Scriptures, Presbytery affirms the Regulative Principle as taught in our Standards.

6. In regard to the issue of Ordination Conditioned on More Study, Presbytery commits itself not to ordain any man to the office of teaching elder unless he passes the examination in all areas required by the Book of Church Order. Every man must fully pass the examination before he will be ordained. Presbytery will avoid the concept that a man will be ordained conditioned upon his further study in an area where he has failed the examination. Presbytery will apply the same principle to ordained men seeking admittance from another Presbytery.

7. In regard to tongues, all miraculous tongues in the Scriptures were known languages and were revelatory. Those tongues ceased with the end of the Apostolic Age. Any position of holding to the existence of non-revelatory tongues including what is commonly called private prayer language, will be viewed as an exception to the Confessional Standards, and Westminster Presbytery will not allow such a view to be taught in this Presbytery.

8. In regard to Christian Education, Presbytery strongly encourages all of our elders to support Christian School Education or Christian Home Schools for their children. We recognize that, as an alternative to Christian Schools or Home Schools, for the present time within our geographical region of the USA, parental responsibility in education may be satisfied through government schools when accompanied by diligent parental

oversight, correction, and supplementation of the educational content offered by government schools.

9. Westminster Presbytery holds to the continuing, abiding validity of the Sabbath Day as stated in the Confession of Faith which is to be a day of joy and delight which God has given to His people. We believe that unorganized, informal recreation on the

Sabbath is an allowable exception to the Confession. Participation in organized sports is considered contrary to the Confessional Standards and an exception that will not be allowed for admittance into this Presbytery. We recognize that there are differing scruples on minor issues in regard to how to keep the Sabbath Day holy.

10. Women may not be ordained to either office of elder or deacon in the Church, and thus they must not exercise the authority that accompanies an ordained office. Westminster Presbytery affirms the teaching of Scripture that women should not teach men nor have authority over men in the Church (I Timothy 2:11-14; I Corinthians 14:34-35). Women should not be allowed to lead the congregation in prayer, Scripture reading, or teach a Sunday School Class where adult men are participating. Considering the fact that no Session is above the authority of Scripture, every Session should be careful that the principles in I Timothy chapter 2, are not violated in any other meeting of the Church under the authority of the Session. However, women should participate in corporate worship and are strongly encouraged to exercise their gifts outside of public worship."

7. A PCA board of elders might also set similar or additional requirements for belief and practice by members of its congregation.

8. In the RCA the principal of the "equality of the ministry" means that General Synod delegates are an equal number of ministers and elders from each classis. (Delegates' expenses are paid by the denomination.) In the PCA General Assembly delegates are not sent as an equal number of elders and pastors from each presbytery, with their expenses paid, but all pastors are eligible to attend and all congregations can send at least two elders, depending on the size of the congregation, with the costs being the responsibility of the delegates. In 2009 the denomination had 1,442 churches and 3,645 ministers. The General Assembly had a total of 1,081 commissioners attending, of whom 819 were Teaching Elders (ministers) and 262 were Ruling Elders, representing 620 churches. In 2012 there were 1,466 churches in the PCA, with 797 minister delegates and 278 elder delegates. In 2013 there were 1,008 Teaching Elders, 319 Ruling elders, representing 705 churches.