

A Report on the PCUSA by Jerry Tankersley
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REPORT ON THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) MY PERSONAL HISTORY AS A PRESBYTERIAN

I was ordained as a pastor in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA in August of 1963. This August will mark the 50th anniversary of my ordination. Since I was a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, the Presbytery of Los Angeles required me and others to take an additional year in a Presbyterian Seminary in order to ensure that we understood Reformed theology and polity and would be faithful leaders and not promoters of schism. I did the extra year at Princeton Theological Seminary and earned a Th.M. in History of Doctrine.

Fuller Seminary was founded by some who came from fundamentalist, schismatic traditions that had troubled the denomination in the past. The policy of the Los Angeles Presbytery, along with many other presbyteries across the USA, reflected a lack of trust in the theological world view of any faculty or graduate of Fuller. What the Presbytery did not completely realize was that Fuller had become a seminary committed to the integrity of all faithful expressions of the Christian faith, and in particular the Presbyterian Church. At Fuller we were encouraged to enter the mainline denominations with the purpose of loving and serving them, even though they were not perfect. When I took my ordination vows they were as important to me as my marriage vows. They were not vows to be easily broken. I knew that I was linking my life with a church that had been on a long journey with strengths and weaknesses that I would need to accept, celebrate, and in which to seek the spiritual transformation of my own life.

PRESBYTERIANS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

The Presbyterian Church had good reason to be concerned about leaders who might advocate for separatist movements. It had watched this process at work for two hundred fifty years. The history of the Presbyterian Church from the earliest part of the 1700's had been one of conflict, division, reconciliation, and reunion caused by differing views of Scripture, truth, essential tenets of the Reformed faith, and their application to the ever-changing circumstances

confronting the nation as it expanded into the frontier. Like the nation, the church struggled with issues of authority, race, war, poverty, wealth, violence, scientific discovery, property rights, justice, civil rights, and the allocation of power.

Presbyterians and Christians of all kinds immigrated to America to experience freedom of religion. The truth was that they all carried the infection of original sin. They were unable to escape mistrust of others and outright denial of the rights of other believing Americans. Before long Presbyterians were dividing and seeking to perfect the church.

Since the early 18th century Presbyterians were at the forefront of many of the social, political, economic, and cultural controversies that divided and united the citizens of the United States. King George of England called the American Revolution the Presbyterian rebellion. That was a fair judgment. The quest for autonomy, personal freedom, and space to build a new nation and church divided Americans into factions, parties, states, nations, religions, associations, fellowships, denominations, and congregations seeking the blessings of freedom and life together without fear of the other. That journey has continued to this day as we are seeing the search for freedom and unity lived out anew in our time.

A simple diagram of the Presbyterian family will give you some idea of just how divided Presbyterians have been throughout its history (See Figure 1 below).¹

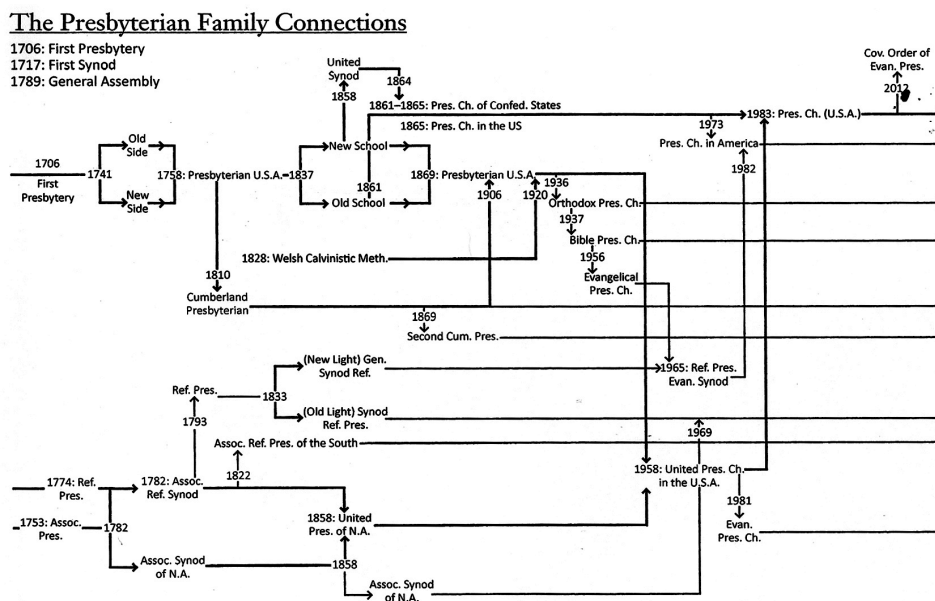


Figure 1. The Presbyterian Family and the History of Divisions

¹ Bradley Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), Appendix.

PRESBYTERIANS AND CHALLENGING CHANGES

For the past 50 years the great social chasms that have opened in western culture have had to do with issues of post-World War II America. Our Confession of 1967 (adopted as a part of our *Book of Confessions*) named them as: racial discrimination, war and peace, wealth and poverty, and anarchy in sexual relationships.² The Confession of 1967 called the church to God's mission of reconciliation through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the pursuit of love, justice, and peace. We have sought to overcome what Richard Sterns of World Vision named, "the hole in our gospel."

During these years we have had a front row seat to a number of social upheavals and cultural changes in both church and society. The generations born after WWII have seen governments struggling to tell the truth about war. We have listened to nightly body counts in distant places and seen the faces and names of our fallen children posted on the nightly news. We have experienced the social unrest of the 60's and 70's with the loss of trust in political authority. Each decade seemed to have been branded by slogans that caricatured the decade: "I'm not a crook," "Greed will save America", "Turn on, Tune in, and Drop out", "the Me Generation", "The Culture of Narcissism", "The Age of Addiction", etc. Through the years we have felt betrayed by the spiritual and moral failure of authorities. Many believe that our institutions have been unable to cope due to human weakness. We long to realize a new utopia where all is made right only to be repeatedly disappointed by what and in whom we have trusted. Now in this new millennium Americans are divided into separate camps and civility has been lost.

For the past 35 years the emerging issue for the PCUSA has been the heated debate about human sexuality and behavior in regard to our ordination standards and understanding of marriage and family. Within our parish we have seen families struggling to keep the doors of communication open. Our youth have come of age in a narcissistic culture committed to "drugs, sex, and rock and roll." We were one of the earliest cities in America that experienced the rise of sexually transmitted viruses that led to STD's and to the plague of AIDS. Whether we were comfortable with it or not many families within our city and church were pressed to deal with stresses that previous generations may not have faced. We soon realized that we were not alone

² *The Book of Confessions*, Part I of The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

and that churches and presbyteries across America and throughout the western world were facing the same issues we were confronting. Amazingly, we have come through these times and our youth have excelled with the strong support of parents who were committed to academic success and hard work.

With all of these social and cultural changes our information technology has exploded. We live in the information age with the awareness that “big government” may be watching us. We have become anxious about privacy. Since 9/11 we live in the Age of Terrorism and wonder if we will ever again feel secure. How much military power will it take to secure us? How long and how wide will our border fences need to be to keep the aliens out? We long for the good ole days not knowing how to get back to foundational truths and communities, nor how exactly to move forward into a New Age of hope.

It was inevitable that gender identity and behavior become major issues for all Christian churches, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. Indeed, these have become perplexing and dividing issues for the larger culture. Now these issues have come to the halls of the U.S. Congress, to the White House, and to the U.S. Supreme Court. They have also risen to the halls of Presbyterian General Assemblies, Presbyteries, and congregations. Research into the development of gender identity and behavior has continued. We have learned much. There is still much to learn. Biological life remains a mystery.

The Presbyterian Church has from its beginning valued education and has established colleges and seminaries committed to leading in the alleviation of ignorance and prejudice. We have built hospitals around the world and sent medical personnel along with educators and servants of all kinds for the work of God’s kingdom. We have been passionate about training educated pastors and teachers. In the process, the two thousand year tradition of the Christian church has frequently been explored, questioned, and reformed by new discoveries and deeper insight into the Scriptures and into the benefits of modern science.

Since 1978 Presbyterian General Assemblies have been asked by interest groups within the church to affirm a growing societal consensus that Christian persons of different sexual orientations and behaviors ought to be allowed and welcomed into church membership with the same membership rights of other members, i.e., to be ordained as teaching and ruling elders, to baptize their children, and to be married. That is, if they possessed gifts and responsible

behaviors consistent with biblical and confessional standards of morality. I could never have guessed that my ministry would be during decades of conflict, anger, and fear related to so many fears.

Two years ago when a majority of presbyteries approved the principal of “local option standards” in regard to ordination standards for congregations and presbyteries I wrote a Pastoral Statement that was affirmed by my fellow staff pastors and a majority of our session. It stated what I think is the teaching of both Old and New Testaments and that is that human sexual relationships were intended by God to be celebrated and enjoyed within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. That also means that I support ordination to church office only for those who are able and willing to live according to the biblical standard of “fidelity and chastity” whether married or single. This applies to either heterosexual or homosexual Christians.

Most recently, our congregation was one of thirteen PCUSA congregations chosen to participate in the PCUSA’s new *Theology of Marriage* curriculum pilot project. In seeking to moderate the discussion of twenty of our very bright, intelligent, and committed disciples, I found myself understanding how deep our differences run and how passionately we are committed to our convictions. I honor them all whether or not I agree with them all.

As a pastor I am aware that many of our fellow citizens and church members have been caught up into the chaos of the larger culture’s sexual anarchy. I am convinced that the church’s mission is to extend compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and the hope of new beginnings in right relationship with God and others. In the early 1980’s the mayor of our city appointed me to the city’s first *AIDS Education Task Force*. I learned a lot. I became friends with many in the gay community. We worked together for the peace and well-being of our city (Jeremiah 29:4-7). I provided pastoral care for many dying persons with a disease that no one understood and about which there was much fear. I read many books and listened to many lectures. I participated in some painful public confrontations between persons and groups who could not agree about either heterosexual or homosexual conduct.

I believe, as our church constitution affirms, in “freedom of conscience.” There are faithful members of our congregation who do not agree with my interpretation of Scripture in the matter of sexual ethics. There are member families who have responsible gay or lesbian children,

brothers or sisters. I respect their sensitivities and convictions and seek to love all persons and families. All believers are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I want all people, whatever their life experience, to be welcome in our church. But such inclusivity within the church is a threat to some.

We may not be of one mind on all issues. I am fairly sure that will not happen until Jesus returns to perfect the creation. Until then we are called to “clothe ourselves in love which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14). In between the first and second coming of Jesus we will need to speak the truth in love, to agree, to disagree, to argue, to debate, to dialogue, and to patiently wait until God’s Word and Spirit brings about a resolution to heartfelt differences. No church can escape this challenge. Those who withdraw from the PCUSA seeking like-mindedness will inevitably confront their differences and be required to patiently forbear as they work together to build their fellowship. The truth is that all who transfer their churches into other Reformed denominations will also transfer their strengths and weaknesses, their gifts and their sins. Until the New Creation of God’s kingdom comes there will be no realized utopia on planet earth.

THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

What this means to me is that I am committed to being at the table of fellowship within the PCUSA in dialogue with Scripture and our *Book of Confessions* until the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and our Reformed tradition make it clear that I should do otherwise.

I hold to a biblical and Reformed doctrine of the church that informs me that the church is made up of “saints and sinners” at the same time. The flesh and the Spirit are in conflict in every believers heart and in the heart of the church. If we begin to focus upon one behavior that we call sin we will be in trouble. Indeed, we could choose from a long list of sins that we could easily see in others. It is much harder for us to see the beam that is in our own eyes. As baptized believers we have been forgiven and welcomed into a community within which we may grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord. In this fellowship the Word and the Spirit of God seeks to transform us and to impart to us each the mind of Christ.

I believe that Jesus was right when he warned his disciples about “weeding the field filled with wheat and weeds” (Matthew 13:24-30). Only the angels of God know how to do this and

they will do it at the end of time, but until then, if we try to remove from the church the weeds of sin we will likely rip up a lot of good plants. This does not mean that I oppose church discipline. Indeed, John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, said that the three signs of the true church are that the “Word of God is preached, the Sacraments are administered, and discipline in the faith practiced” (“The Scots Confession”, *Book of Confessions*, 3.18).

THE MOVEMENT TOWARD DISMISSAL FROM THE PCUSA

I want you to know and most of you do, that there is a growing group of congregations within the PCUSA who have decided to seek dismissal from us. Since January there has been a process of discernment within Los Ranchos Presbytery about these matters. Not all churches have participated. The Presbytery has not required any church to engage in this process. At our session retreat in January, I told your session about this and asked them if they wanted to engage LPC in a process of discernment about our continuing relationship with the PCUSA. They were unanimous that we are a healthy congregation and that our calling is to invest our energies in God’s mission through us.

I believe that changing the label of our denomination will not enhance our mission. It would likely introduce the toxin of division into our church family system and weaken us. You may not agree. And that is fine, but this is where I am and I believe your elected session also. However, it is a session’s responsibility to discern these matters in conversation with your pastors and the leadership of Los Ranchos Presbytery.

I have been told that at least ten of Los Ranchos’ congregations will soon ask the Presbytery to enter a process of dismissal to some other Reformed body of like-minded believers. Pastors, groups of pastors and lay members have, it seems to me, put the PCUSA publicly on trial and have accused it of being “apostate, heretical, and corrupt”. The issues that have been lifted up are these:

“the authority and interpretation of Scripture”,
“the nature of Jesus Christ as Son of God”,
“whether or not Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world”,
“the refusal of the PCUSA to uphold its Constitution and to discipline those who violate its polity,” and

“ the teachings of the Scriptures and our Reformed Confessions on marriage, family, and sexual identity and behavior.”

It is alleged that whatever the PCUSA says we believe we do not believe or practice. While we have an excellent Book of Confessions, now endorsed by the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO) and the Fellowship of Presbyterians, and other documents approved by the denomination, e.g., *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*, the church authorities are so diverse in their interpretations that little guidance can be given to address conflicts. Corporately, it is alleged, the PCUSA is filled with hypocrites who do not believe our ordination vows or Confessional truths. It is argued that we do not hold our heretics accountable and we do not discipline those who violate their vows. These assertions are filled with partial truths and they paint the whole church with a broad brush which I do not believe to be true. I know too many faithful Presbyterians of different political camps across the PCUSA who love God and seek to glorify God and who are deeply disturbed by these generalizations.

It is true that the PCUSA has been losing members consistently over the last 50 years. This growing loss of members in western mainline denominations is being attributed to a lack of theological integrity and committed discipleship. The facts are that the PCUSA since reunion in 1983 has dropped in membership from 4.3 million members to just over 1.8 million. Many explanations for this loss have been suggested. This loss of membership has been accompanied by an increasing mistrust and even hostility toward religion in the western world. Almost all Christian churches, including the Southern Baptists, are showing membership losses in the U.S. Amazingly, in the southern hemisphere of the earth, in the poorer parts of the world, Christianity is growing more rapidly than any other religion.

THE NEED FOR BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RENEWAL

I share our critics concerns. Something is happening in western culture that is rapidly marginalizing the church. I suspect it can be attributed to many causes. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that the authority of God speaks through the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments. Every level of the church needs to surrender itself or place itself under the authority of the Lord who inspired the writers of the Bible and who still speaks through the written, spoken, and living Word.

The Scriptures witness to the God of Israel incarnate in Jesus Christ. They reveal that Jesus is the “way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through faith in him” (John 14:6). The witness of Scripture is that at the cross of Jesus God made peace through the blood of Jesus, reconciled us to himself and us to each other. At the cross atonement for humanity’s sin was made, dividing walls of hostility broken down, and Jews and Gentiles were incorporated into one new humanity, the Church of Jesus Christ, filled with the Spirit of Christ for sake of doing God’s mission (Ephesians 1-6).

The Scriptures reveal that in Jesus the Christ the heart of God’s love was made known. On the Day of Pentecost the love of God was poured into the church’s heart and the believer’s souls through the power of the Holy Spirit. This Word and Spirit mediate a new standing in grace to those who believe in Jesus. The believer is given the gift of the righteousness and holiness of Christ and then called to become who they are in Christ (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians). But in this lifetime the process of sanctification is never complete. In good and bad days we still live by grace, repent of our sins, and seek the mind and will of Christ. We do not know everything. We see dimly as in a mirror. Knowledge puffs up, but love build up (I Corinthians 8 and 13). The Scriptures promise that the Lord, who is the Spirit, will one day transform us and conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Those baptized into Christ have confessed that Jesus is Lord of body and soul. He owns us and is restoring us to the persons he intended us to be from the beginning. It is always progress and not perfection. The Living Lord is the head of the church.

Of course, this means that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us new hearts. Jesus comes to live within us. Therefore, we do not want to do anything that will grieve the Holy Spirit. That means that how we express our sexuality, how we use power, how we spend our money, and how we use our time are stewardship responsibilities. In every dimension of our lives we seek to please God and live for the glory of God. Discerning God’s will and doing it becomes the first priority of our lives. As a Spirit filled people of God the mission of God shines forth into a spiritually darkened and lost world. We are sent forth to be God’s kingdom people.

I pray that the church’s identity and mission may be strengthened and empowered. Christians of all kinds need to wake up to what is happening for the sake of seeking spiritual

renewal in a world not unlike the days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-44). There are many places in our world where we can see the ruins of a culture that lost its reason for being and slowly was destroyed from within. Only God knows if this is western civilization's future. God will have his church, but will we be anything more than a historical footnote or a building ruin?

LOS RANCHOS DISCERNMENT

On Saturday, June 15, 2013, the Los Ranchos Presbytery approved its policy of discernment in regard to a congregation's dismissal with church property. Some of you may not know that our Book of Order says that all properties of the local church are held in trust through the presbytery for the mission purposes of the PCUSA. Therefore, a presbytery cannot dismiss a congregation to another Reformed body without a careful consideration of the market value of the congregation's property. The presbytery has a fiduciary responsibility to the national church, the PCUSA, to guarantee that the mission purpose and programs of the larger church are fully protected from any congregation voting to withdraw from the denomination without making a good faith payment on the value of the property (Book of Order G-4.02).

“The Trust Clause reflects our understanding of the church as a communion of saints across time, with responsibilities both to those who came before and those who will follow. When a congregation seeks to leave the PCUSA, it is breaking what is often a significant historic relationship; it is also departing from a fellowship in which its officers have participated, by whose polity they have pledged to be governed, and with which many members may feel bonds of affection.”³

For those congregations seeking dismissal from the PCUSA, our presbytery's property policy will now require that each congregation's session enter into a time of discernment with a presbytery team to discern what is in the interest of congregation, presbytery, and the PCUSA. Financial considerations will need to be considered. There is no one formula as to how these negotiations will be considered. Once an agreement has been reached then it will be brought to the floor of the presbytery for discussion, debate, amendment, and a final vote. As you may imagine, this is likely to be a painful process that if not handled wisely could lead to wounds in

³ Tom vs San Francisco (Decision of the General Assembly of the PCUSA).

the family of faith for many years. May God have mercy upon us! Nothing arouses passions like money and property and its control. Please pray for our presbytery.

Those who advocate schism accuse the western church of hypocrisy when it comes to truth and obedience to the essential tenets of the gospel of Christ. It is true that we live in a post-modern, post-Christian world that is highly suspicious of any ultimate truth. The larger culture celebrates “open-mindedness” and “tolerance” with the encouragement “to live and to let live.” Our children are taught in the public education system in America that we live in a pluralistic, secular, deeply divided world, and that we could find ourselves continually at war if we seek to impose upon others our own subjective values and world views.

MY CONVICTIONS ABOUT SCHISM

One of the books that shaped my theological reflection about the church was written by President Edward John Carnell, the President of Fuller Seminary and my Professor of Christian Ethics in the late 1950's. He made some very important points about the *Classical View* of the Reformed church.⁴

All other things being equal, a Christian should remain in the fellowship that gave him spiritual birth.

Both Jesus and Paul remained faithful to the Jewish Temple and to the Synagogue. Even though Jesus was rejected by a portion of his family, he never stopped loving and praying for the Israel of God and the Church. He prayed that his disciples would all be one even as he and the Father were one. (John 17). All people would know that they were his disciples if they had love for one another. (John 13:35). Jesus died for his church and for the world. The cross stands over us all. The Holy Spirit has inspired our confession of faith that Jesus Christ, through his life, death, and resurrection, is our Savior and Lord, the only way to the Father. The inspiration for spiritual formation has come to me through spiritual directors committed to the PCUSAs and our life together. This theology of the church is taught in our Book of Confessions.

⁴ See *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, by Edward John Carnell (The Westminster Press, 1959), see pp 133f.

A Christian should judge the claims of a church by its official creed or confession, not by the lives of its members.

It is likely that there are teaching and ruling elders in the PCUSA who are not of one mind on the list of essential tenets of the Reformed faith. From the early 1700's we have argued about forcing all leaders of the church to subscribe to a list of essentials. We all believe that there are essentials, but we have learned that freedom of thought and interpretation of biblical texts are foundational. Any time we have sought to create a like-minded church, a perfect church, we have ended up with heresy trials that divided committed Christians.

Our confessions have rejected perfectionism and settled for progress in growing into the grace and truth of the revelation we have received in Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, to whom the Scriptures bear unique and authoritative witness. The authority of Scripture is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, who inspired the writers of Old and New Testaments and who continues to speak the Word of God through the written Word and proclamation of the Word.

My hope for the church would be that we will keep our heads and our hearts in the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments as we are guided in their interpretations by the Book of Confessions. As long as the historical creeds and confessions guide us they lead us to the authority of the One Sovereign God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They lead us to the fulfillment of the promises of God to Israel in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They inspire within us the confession of faith that Jesus is Lord. They call for the peace and unity of the church. The ordination vows for elders and deacons in the PCUSA commits us to these essentials of the Reformed faith.

The prophets of the Old Testament raged against Israel's unfaithfulness, but never once advocated that a righteous remnant separate from the larger elect people of God. The Apostle Paul addressed many issues of sin in the Corinthian church, but never advanced schism from the body of Christ. Just the opposite, he argued for the unity of the body of Christ, for the use of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit, and for the better way of love. He had the humility to confess that all of our knowledge is partial and that we see reality only dimly. Paul called the church to grow up into spiritual maturity, a maturity that could embrace, accept, forgive, and work for reconciliation. Yes, a maturity that could call the church to have the mind of the servant Christ

and to love as we have been loved. Paul knew he had not yet arrived, but he was inspired by the Spirit to know the fullness of the grace and power of Christ's death and resurrection (Philippians 2 and 3).

I believe that the Apostle would have written a firm word to many of us who have tried to fight and to win in the battles of church and culture. At the end of the day we may discover that we have done more harm and left much more wreckage than we could have imagined. This is true for all sides in our conflicts. This includes progressives and conservatives. I need and we all need to repent of our willingness to discount our brothers and sisters and even to destroy the unity of the church for the sake of establishing our moral superiority and our political power.

Edward John Carnell ended his discussion of Orthodoxy by asking how we determine if a denomination may rightfully be called a church. He answered:

1) **Is the gospel taught in the creed or confession?**

He argued that if the system of doctrine taught in Romans and Galatians is reflected in its creeds and confessions the true church is to be found. If a denomination departs from this gospel it forfeits its right to be called a church. Our Book of Order states the great Protestant watch words: *Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone*. These great doctrines the PCUSA has enshrined in its Constitution and we are called to live into the reality of justification by faith alone in the promises of God and sanctification in the Spirit of Christ.

2) **Is the gospel free?**

What he asked was whether or not the preachers and teachers of the church were free to proclaim the gospel. Our answer must be **"Yes!"** Martin Luther was not free to preach the gospel of Romans and Galatians in the Roman Catholic Church of the 16th century. He did it anyway and was excommunicated. He never intended to leave the church. Therefore, until I am commanded by the PCUSA not to preach the good news of God's grace, I will be a faithful member of this denomination.

3) **Is the Christian free to protest against abuses?**

Carnell writes: **"The Christian must speak against abuses with power and grace. And if his words fail to effect a change, he must patiently wait for a new opportunity to**

speak. He may not take the law into his own hands by provoking schism, for formal judgment belongs to God, not man.”⁵

Our denomination is filled with good Protestants. We surely have the right to protest. The question is what we do while we wait for our protests to bear fruit. Maybe they never will, but surely, we must speak and live in such a way that our trust in God’s faithfulness are manifest.

4) Separation from an existing denomination is justifiable on only two criteria: Eviction and Apostasy.

Regarding Eviction:

In our own time, no one is being evicted from the PCUSA. We are free to preach and to live the gospel. We can protest.

Regarding Apostasy:

“If a denomination removes the gospel from its creed or confession, or if it leaves the gospel but removes the believer’s right to preach it, the believer may justly conclude that the denomination is apostate. Before the believer takes a settled attitude one way or another, he must bring his convictions to the touchstone: he must seek the counsel of the brethren and the wisdom of classical theology. A spirit of divisiveness is not prompted by the Holy Spirit, for love is the law of life, and love remains unsatisfied until all who form the body of Christ are united in one sacred fellowship.”⁶

I want you to know that I do not want my legacy to be one of leading our congregation out of the PCUSA. For me that would violate all that has directed my ministry since my ordination. My family was evangelized by the Presbyterian Church in Amarillo, Texas. As a ten year old I was baptized into this covenant family. During seminary days I suddenly awakened to the truth that the Presbyterian Church was my spiritual family. It has nurtured my spiritual life, imparted truth and grace to me, and allowed me to serve Jesus in many ways and places. Never has the denomination told me I could not preach the Scriptures or proclaim the gospel of Christ. I have discovered that an evangelical leader in our denomination may stand for its highest offices. What seems important for all groups in the PCUSA is whether or not we are committed to the church and loyal to its theology and polity. Freedom of thought and openness to learn is

⁵ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodoxy*, 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

valued. When the church no longer allows this freedom, but seeks to enforce conformity to a position that is not advocated in Scripture or our Confessions, then I will quietly withdraw from the PCUSA. But we are a long way from that. All we have to fear is fear itself.

I believe, have taught, and proclaimed the revealed truth of God. This truth is personal. It was manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection reveal God's rescue plan for humanity. Christian knowledge and truth have been revealed by the Word and Spirit of Christ. His light of truth illumines our way in the darkness. His truth points to the only way to a blessed or happy life. I make no apologies for defending and proclaiming the values and the spirituality of the kingdom of God. God's mission is being advanced in the world. Standing on tip toe in faith, hope, and love, we long to see the final and complete day when heaven and earth totally and perfectly overlap and interconnect in the fullness of eternal life.

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Pastor, Laguna Presbyterian Church, June 30, 2013