

AN OPEN THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION TO THE PC (USA) EXPLICATING
MAJOR ERRORS OF THE 218TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AS A CHURCH COUNCIL AND THE MEANS OF THEIR REDRESS

1 Introductory Remarks

2 The Universal Church of Jesus Christ has long affirmed its role as the declaratory and
3 magisterial Prophet in the world. This is universally acknowledged and accepted by all
4 segments of the Body. After much prayer and reflection upon many selected scripture passages
5 (but especially Ezekiel 33-34 and Matthew 18:6-9 and Mark 9:42-50), we, as presbyters, stand
6 convicted of our responsibility as watchmen and shepherds and our obligation to speak to the
7 sin of our own communion.

8 We discern multiple errors coming from the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian
9 Church (USA) that have breached covenanted confessional standing (Status Confessiones).
10 These errors must be labeled and opposed lest we be guilty of failing to raise alarm or of leading
11 “the least of His little ones astray.”

12 Therefore, we, the Presbyters of Beaver Butler Presbytery, are profoundly saddened by many
13 of this Assembly’s actions.

14 What we now say and resolve to do, we do in love for our brothers and sisters. We cry out
15 with fervent voices that the flock is under attack and we, individually and collectively, must
16 return to the shepherd immediately.

17 Seeking to be humble, faithful servants of Christ and the Church, we offer this statement out
18 of love (Romans 12) rather than anger or malice.

19 Guided by G-1.0307¹, we affirm that councils, indeed, may err. This one has. The erroneous
20 actions of this Assembly have threatened the very notion of covenanted orthodoxy and
21 orthopraxis. As we are reminded in G-1.0304², right belief and right practice are inseparable.

22 We discern five categories of errors made by this assembly.
23

¹ G-1.0307 — “That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church governing body ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.”

² G-10304 — “Truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior’s rule, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

24 Diplomatic Errors

25 While it can be argued that diplomatic errors are benign in nature, they vary in degree and
26 scope. History is littered with diplomatic mistakes that sparked disunity among people groups.
27 Most wars are predicated upon or instigated by diplomatic errors. It is our estimation that this
28 General Assembly committed such an error this year in approving a two million dollar legal
29 defense fund for the denomination to be used for property cases in civil courts.

30 On its face, this ruling might seem minor to some. It was an action that was certainly within
31 the scope of the powers of the General Assembly, and, it would seem, in line with the provisions
32 of the constitutional trust clause. However, creating this fund as an extra giving opportunity
33 and thus a part of the mission budget equated property defense with the mission of the Church.
34 It further gave the impression to many of funding a war chest encouraging Presbyteries to seek
35 legal action to preserve property interests. We see this as a grave threat to the unity and witness
36 of the Church Universal and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. At best, this action has confirmed
37 the opinion of many that our denomination is primarily interested in mammon. At worst, some
38 have received it as a declaration of war against our own congregations.

39 This action has eroded our trust, damaged our witness to the Church and Jesus Christ, and thus
40 has done damage to our covenant life.

41
42 Tactical Errors

43 The Assembly erred tactically when it failed to allow debate on the second provision of
44 Overture 05-09. This overture was a combined attempt to change the fidelity and chastity
45 amendment (G-6.0106b) and provide an Authoritative Interpretation that would nullify all
46 previous Authoritative Interpretations concerning ordination standards, particularly those
47 speaking to homosexual behavior as sin. The Assembly debated the proposed revision of the
48 Constitution to substitute a revised wording for G-6.0106b but failed to debate the proposed
49 Authoritative Interpretation attached to the overture. It is the Moderator's responsibility to
50 insure, per Robert's Rules, that all motions receive adequate consideration through debate. If
51 the Moderator was unaware of this provision, the Stated Clerk should have corrected him
52 immediately when he proceeded to call the question on both provisions in the overture after
53 only having debated the first. The Stated Clerk failed to do so.

54 Further, the Moderator and Stated Clerk demonstrated neglect by not separating these two
55 important issues for individual consideration when they had chosen to do so on matters of much
56 lesser import to the life of the Church. The Assembly itself also erred when it failed to do so as
57 a body despite repeated attempts by various delegates.

58 Further still, after the General Assembly approved an overture rendering all previous
59 Authoritative Interpretations "without further force or effect," it then proceeded to correct a
60 previous Authoritative Interpretation from the 217th General Assembly that it had just ruled as
61 having no further force or effect. Not only is this logically nonsensical, it is, at best, tactically
62 irresponsible.

63 By committing these tactical errors, the 218th General Assembly stepped outside of the spirit
64 and letter of our shared rules of order, and has thus broken our denominational covenant and
65 damaged our covenant life together.

66
67 Constitutional Errors

68 The greatest constitutional error of this Church council has to do with the approach of the
69 General Assembly of legislating through Authoritative Interpretations. Authoritative
70 Interpretations have been abused by recent Assemblies on a number of occasions in an effort to
71 change the Constitution's plain meaning without proper ratification by vote of the Presbyteries.

72 Further, by reversing all previous Authoritative Interpretations that have rightly proclaimed
73 the biblical norm of fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman and chastity in
74 singleness, the General Assembly has sought to do by fiat what four previous denominational
75 votes have disallowed by ever increasing margins. These constitutional errors have violated our
76 trust and broken our denominational covenant by abuse of means for constitutional reform.

77
78 Judicial Errors

79 The intent and plain meaning of G-6.0106b, otherwise known as the fidelity and chastity
80 amendment, has not changed in spite of Authoritative Interpretations to the contrary. Its
81 meaning is plain. Unless it is removed, no Authoritative Interpretation can change its plain
82 meaning. Even if it were to be removed, no ruling by any of our governing or judicial bodies
83 could contradict the plain meaning of the Scriptures on this particular subject. Therefore, the
84 218th General Assembly erred judicially by overruling court decisions that rightly interpreted
85 and applied this provision of the Constitution and Scripture. This injustice to our Constitution
86 has violated our trust and broken our denominational covenant by incorrectly overruling the
87 GA PJC.

88
89 Confessional Errors

90 The argument proposed for accepting and propounding the adoption of a re-translation of the
91 Heidelberg Catechism is Biblically, theologically and logically erected on shaky ground for
92 several reasons.

93 1. There is no truly demonstrated need for adopting a re-translation into English of the
94 Heidelberg Catechism. The translation utilized by the denomination was perfectly acceptable
95 when it was adopted. In fact, the translation adopted was used precisely because it spoke to a
96 specific concern facing the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. when it was adopted.
97 Homosexuality was becoming an increasingly large topic for moral and ethical evaluation and
98 discussion throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s that demonstrably it was not when the
99 catechism was written by Ursinas and Olevianus in 1562.

100 2. The apparent rationale for adopting a re-translation into English appears to revolve
101 around removal of the phrase "homosexual perversion" from the litany of proscribed behaviors

102 contained in the answer to Question 87. The argument advanced is that this language is not
103 contained in the original German of the Catechism, and that most other English translations lack
104 this phrase. This argument is true insofar as it goes and would be more compelling were it not
105 for the fact that the litany in the question is a quote from I Corinthians 6:9-10³ which most
106 definitely contains the phrase. If we are to be Biblically accurate, then we must indeed maintain
107 the current translation contained in the Book of Confessions.

108 3. The argument is made that we must adopt the new translation because fidelity to the
109 historical accuracy of the original Heidelberg Catechism demands our attention and immediate
110 action. This argument is frankly un-compelling. And, in fact, were this logic and rationale
111 applied to the entire Book of Confessions, then we would be forced to strip the BOC of all
112 historic amendments made to the Westminster Standards by our antecedent denominations and
113 re-adopt the original 1646 version of the Confession of Faith. Of course, were we to do so, we
114 would be rejecting our current adopted standards with regard to marriage and divorce, the place
115 and role of the civil magistrate, reinstate denial of any ordained office to women, and the
116 necessity of covenanted uniformity of religion in any nation where there are Presbyterians.
117 This would be an outcome that none of us would accept.

118 So then, we are effectively left with an important constitutional/confessional change whose
119 very purpose was to remove a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:9 in a grossly irresponsible way that
120 does violence to the Scriptures. This error, and its apparent motivations, places our standing in
121 the Reformed community of faith throughout history and in our world in jeopardy and thus
122 violates our denominational covenant and further erode our trust.

123 Biblical Errors

124
125 The most profound errors of this Church Council are biblical.

126 While it is to be acknowledged that there is a range of method and approach to biblical
127 interpretation practiced among us that is agreed upon as valid or acceptable, it must also be
128 recognized that this openness itself is still confessionally defined and, thus, is to be understood
129 through the framework of Reformed theology. We acknowledge and confess that we look to
130 Jesus Christ as the Word of God Living, yet we still recognize with the Confession of 1967 that
131 Scripture is the Word of God Written.⁴

³ I Corinthians 6:9-10 — “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Book of Confessions / 9.27 — “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 Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.”

133

134 Two of this Assembly's actions resulted in serious errors being made with regard to faith and
135 order of the Christian life because of either faulty scriptural interpretation or skewed or missing
136 exegesis. These were the recommendation that encouraged Presbyterians to seek worship
137 opportunities with Jews and Muslims and the approval of a study guide for the previously
138 received Trinity paper.

139 While specific language that Muslims, Jews, and Christians worship "a common God" was
140 removed from the final resolution, the recommendation encouraging common worship between
141 Jews, Muslims and ourselves was based on the assumption of the removed language. This
142 practical recommendation remained unchanged in final form. This recommendation is not
143 congruent with the Scriptural witness to the Divinity and univocal Lordship of Jesus Christ, or
144 of the full divinity and co-equality of Christ and the Holy Spirit within the Godhead. Scripture
145 tells us that Christ and the Father are one. Scripture tells us that the Spirit is Divine. We
146 worship the thrice-holy, Triune God. Neither Muslims nor Jews can participate in worshiping
147 the Triune God because for them to do so is, by their own lights, a blasphemy for them. So, too,
148 is it blasphemous for us to deny the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit in any worship
149 context. This suggestion is based on a gross error in basic biblical doctrine, a profound
150 misrepresentation of the Trinity. Therefore we cannot worship together and should not be
151 encouraged to do so.

152 Further, the argument has been made and advanced that the Study Paper on the Trinity
153 utilizes only Scriptural language and imagery for the discussion of the Deity. To a certain degree
154 this is true, however the method employed continuously throughout this paper routinely
155 confuses the natures of simile and metaphor to such a degree that it effectively confuses the very
156 nature of what we think we know about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a great many places
157 it skirts perilously close to propounding either pantheistic (God is everything) or panentheistic
158 (God is in everything) views of God.

159 One may argue, and many have, that such studies of important topics inherently run the risk
160 of "pushing the envelope" theologically and philosophically, and that such risks must be taken
161 as we delve deeply into the knowledge of the Doctrine of God. We agree that we should study
162 deeply, but also carefully as we mine the great treasure-filled depths of God's word. We must
163 always pay primary attention to context, historical situation and literary genre of the texts we
164 study. Our goal should always and only be to reflect the truth contained therein, and never to
165 speculatively invent or intuit material that is at best tangentially contained. To do so is neither
166 smart, nor correct and potentially leaves us in the unenviable position of becoming false guides.

167 Additionally, theological issues aside, copies of this thirty-seven page, recently revised Trinity
168 paper were not made available for commissioner review until six hours before the vote and
169 copies of the study guide were never provided to commissioners at all. Commissioners were
170 asked to approve a study guide that they had not reviewed for a paper whose revisions they did
171 not have adequate time to review with and that with limited debate. This kind of blind faith
172 might have been warranted in a former era of our denomination but in today's environment of

173 questionable decisions by upper governing bodies it is out of place.

174 In the aggregate, these errors represent a fundamental disconnect between historic, orthodox
175 Christianity and the rulings of our General Assembly. These rulings do violence to our unity
176 with the Church universal and threaten our relationships with mission partners all over the
177 globe. These rulings have violated our trust, broken our denominational covenant, and continue
178 to threaten our unity with the Church universal.

179

180 Concluding Remarks

181 We fully recognize and accept the duty of councils of the church to interpret and apply
182 Biblical and Confessional interpretations and statements to everyday life as circumstances rise
183 and demands are placed upon us to speak to our own times and cultures. Yet, even as we are
184 committed to this principle, we appeal to Chapter Two of the Second Helvetic Confession in its
185 entirety. In fact, our stand is fully consistent with our current discipline and is grounded in that
186 confession's own words. We cannot abide the ruling of any council which breaches Status
187 Confessiones.

188 BOC-5.011 — INTERPRETATIONS OF THE HOLY FATHERS. "Wherefore we do not despise the
189 interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises
190 concerning sacred matters as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we modestly dissent
191 from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to,
192 the Scriptures. Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they
193 all, with one consent, will not have their writings equated with the canonical Scriptures, but
194 command us to prove how far they agree or disagree with them, and to accept what is in
195 agreement and to reject what is in disagreement."

196 BOC-5.012 — "COUNCILS. And in the same order also we place the decrees and canons of
197 councils."

198 BOC-5.013 — "Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or
199 matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of councils;
200 much less by received customs, or by the large number of those who share the same opinion,
201 or by the prescription of a long time. WHO IS THE JUDGE? Therefore, we do not admit any other
202 judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what
203 is to be followed, or what to be avoided. So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men
204 which are drawn from the Word of God. Certainly Jeremiah and other prophets vehemently
205 condemned the assemblies of priests which were set up against the law of God; and diligently
206 admonished us that we should not listen to the fathers, or tread in their path who, walking in
207 their own inventions, swerved from the law of God."

208

209 Resolutions

210 The errors of this Assembly fail to live up to its professed theme of justice, mercy and
211 humility. Our trust has been violated. Our denominational covenant has been broken by our
212 own highest level governing body. We refuse to break that covenant. We will honor it by
213 constitutional, confessional and biblical adherence. It pains us but we must take corrective

214 action in an attempt to restore this broken covenant and the Church herself. Therefore, we, the
215 Presbyters of Beaver-Butler Presbytery, make the following resolutions:

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- 217 • We do not now and will no longer recognize ordinations that are constitutionally or
218 biblically unsustainable. We will vigorously examine each candidate seeking admission
219 to our Presbytery, especially from Presbyteries who cannot share this affirmation in good
220 conscience.
- 221 • If a session and/or congregation over which any one of us might preside as moderator
222 presents a candidate exhibiting any behaviors in violation of the clear meaning of G-
223 6.0106b, we refuse in advance to ordain them on biblical and constitutional grounds.
224 Our consciences are bound to the Word of God and not the worldly ruling rendered by
225 this assembly that a Minister of the Word and Sacrament has no choice but to ordain in
226 all situations.
- 227 • We will not seek common worship opportunities with Jews and/or Muslims. To do so
228 would be to ask all parties involved to commit blasphemy since Muslims and Jews do not
229 recognize the Divinity of Christ or the Holy Spirit and we cannot deny either. We will
230 continue to engage in dialogue with Jews and Muslims seeking to introduce Jews to their
231 Messiah and Muslims to their Mahdi who is the One Lord Jesus Christ in both cases.
- 232 • We refuse to act in accordance with the Authoritative Interpretations adopted by the
233 218th General Assembly. They have no further force or effect in our Presbytery because
234 they are constitutionally, biblically, judicially and tactically unsustainable. Their
235 institution has done violence to our covenant life. Further, these interpretations cannot
236 change the plain meaning of the Constitution which still holds full force and effect in
237 Beaver-Butler Presbytery.
- 238 • We further affirm that no Authoritative Interpretation, Advisory Opinion, alteration to
239 the Constitution, or re-translation of our confessions can change the plain meaning of
240 the Bible's teaching concerning sexual norms, now accurately reflected in our
241 Constitution. Even if the Constitution is successfully altered, an outcome that would
242 profoundly disappoint us and that we will work against, we will continue to uphold
243 biblical standards for ordination particularly in areas of sexuality regardless of any
244 amendments to the contrary.
- 245 • We do not and will not agree with Advisory Opinion #22 from the Stated Clerk's office
246 nor will we support it in our governing body. This ruling denies the plain meaning of
247 our Constitution and wrongly rules that local option is now our reality in the PC USA.
248 Since we cannot abide the Authoritative Interpretation upon which this ruling is based,
249 we cannot abide this ruling either.
- 250 • We will actively discourage our congregations from giving to the new legal defense fund
251 Extra Commitment Opportunity created by this assembly as it encourages both our

252 congregations and our upper governing bodies to be actively disobedient to 1 Corinthians
253 6:1-8. We urge congregations and Presbyteries to “rather be wronged” than engage in
254 civil law suits over property.

255 • We will not work to promote same gender civil unions within our commonwealth nor
256 encourage anyone else to do so in their states. Rather we will support biblical definitions
257 of marriage in our society, seeking to fulfill the great ends of the Church by preserving
258 the Truth and promoting social righteousness.

259 • We will encourage other Presbyteries and/or congregations to join us in this declaration.

260 • We will continue to publish the Gospel once and for all handed down to the saints, grow
261 our members in the One Lord Jesus Christ, and continue to participate in the
262 transforming work of God according to His Word within our denomination and
263 Presbytery.

264

265 We cannot and will not recant these statements. Our consciences are captive to the Word of
266 God. We will not cease these proclamations if rebuked. We will not accept discipline that, like
267 many of the GA actions, rests on human institution instead of God's Word. Here we stand. We
268 can do no other. We trust in God through Christ for His deliverance and grace.

269

270 Our Defender is Strong,

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272 The Presbytery of Beaver Butler

273 Individual Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Session Representatives undersigned

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