

A Study of the  
***Westminster  
Confession  
of Faith***

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Leadership Training

# Introduction

T

he Westminster Assembly convened in

Westminster Abbey in London on July 1643. This body engaged in honest and thoughtful activity for five years, six months, and twenty-two days. Thoroughness is conspicuous in all of its work. Church historians agree that this was one of the most learned bodies ever assembled on this earth for the formulation and promulgation of Christian truth. The personnel of this body were composed of the intellectual cream of the British Isles. Every member was carefully selected on the basis of learning and intellectual gifts.

This group of divines was characterized also by deep and genuine spirituality. These men were spiritual giants. For the full period of their labors it was their custom to set aside one entire day of each month for prayer and fasting. The men who composed this assembly were, therefore, prepared intellectually and spiritually for their task.

In our day of renewed interest in Biblical theology it is well to remember that the primary rule these servants of Christ laid down for themselves, to guide in all their discussions, was: "What any man undertakes to prove as necessary, he shall make good out of Scripture." Every member was required to take the following vow, and it was read to all of

the members every Monday morning: "I do seriously promise and vow in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace and good of His church."

Present in this body of men were some of the most brilliant of contemporary philosophers, but they permitted not one iota of human philosophy to influence their creedal statements. Their sole objective was to think Biblically and to express the mind of Scripture. The success of this undertaking is evidenced in the fact that although better than three centuries have passed since the publication of this work, the Confession of Faith has needed no significant change during all this time.

Richard Baxter, a contemporary of the Westminster divines, wrote in his autobiography an evaluation of this assembly. He affirmed: "The Divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities, and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more speak the truth, even in the face of malice and envy, that, as far as I am able to judge by the information of all history of that time, and by any other evidence left us, the Christian world, since the days of the apostles, had never a Synod of more excellent divines (taking one thing with another), than this and the Synod of Dort." Dean Stanley of the Anglican Church declared that of all Protestant Confessions the Westminster Confession exhibits "far more depth of theological insight than any other."

Fair-minded scholars must concede that the goal that the Westminster Assembly kept before it of giving "to the

accepted Bible system of truth a complete, impregnable statement, to serve as a bulwark against error, as a basis of ecclesiastical fellowship and cooperation, and as a safe and effectual instrument for the religious instruction of the people of God and their children," has been attained in a marvelous way. Judged by any sensible standard the Westminster Assembly ranks among the greatest of the ecclesiastical assemblies or councils in the entire history of Christianity.

"During the past three decades many Presbyterians have ignored or failed to appreciate the wealth of Christian truth found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the official creed of Presbyterianism. The result is, the Calvinistic system means little to them. This neglect of our inheritance has proved expensive to our Church. It is a source of weakness. Many who wear the label "Presbyterian" are destitute of knowledge and respect for this classical creedal statement of the Church." *Dr. John Richardson*

# ***“Digging Deeper”***

## Reading Materials:

Essential Truths of the Christian Faith by R.C. Sproul

The Westminster Confession of Faith (Summertown ed.)

Baptism (booklet by Francis Schaeffer)

## Assignment 1

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 1-9
2. Read article We Don't Have Forever, by Francis Schaeffer (in front of class folder)

## Assignment 2

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 10-18
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 1 & 2.

## Assignment 3

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 19-20, 44-55.
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 3-6.

## Assignment 4

1. Read the Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 25-36, 56-64.
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 9 & 10.

#### Assignment 5

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 65-71.
2. Read The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 11-18.

#### Assignment 6

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 5, 21-24.
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 7 & 8.

#### Assignment 7

1. Read The Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 75-83.
2. Read The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 27-29.
3. Read Baptism. (white booklet, Francis Shaeffer)

#### Assignment 8

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 37-43.
2. Read Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 30.

#### Assignment 9

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 72-74, 97-102.
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 32 & 33.

# Leaders For Christ's Church

## CLASS 1

### I. Introduction to the Course

- A. The schedule
- B. The resource materials
- C. The assignments and tests
- D. The officer training aspects
- E. The Rationale for the Course – Why are you here?

Knowing God (and His purpose for us) is crucially important for the living of our lives. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. **The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God.** Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul. J.I. Packer Knowing God.

- To know God
- To know Yourself and your purpose
- To increase your love for God and his bride, the church.

## II. Why Does Christ's Church Need Strong Leaders?

A. The Church is called to disciple others to lead the Church for future generations.

B. The Church is the hope of the world.

“There is nothing like the local church when it’s working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized of this world. Whatever the capacity for human suffering, the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness.” Bill Hybels

**Matthew Parris** is a newspaper columnist for the Times of London and a self-described atheist. He wrote an article titled ***“As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God.”*** Parris born and raised in Africa, admits that saying this runs counter to his beliefs, but he cannot ignore the difference that he sees in African Christians and in African churches.

“I’ve become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular aid workers, government projects, and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people’s hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.... The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appears to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, and engagement with the world—a directness in their dealings with others—that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.”

***“As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God.”***

***As a Christian, I truly believe the church is the hope of the world.***

The Church is the HOPE OF THE WORLD – it is what Africa needs; St Johns County needs, every life in this room needs....

C. Leadership matters.

### **III. The Office of the Elder**

A. The task of the elder is to provide spiritual oversight and governance for the body of Christ (Acts 20:17, 28-31).

B. This office has its roots in the Old Testament with the division of work by Moses (Exodus 18:21, 22). The elder was the old sage, "bearded ones", who sat in the gates of the town (Ruth 4:1, 2) settling disputes and ruling over local affairs (Ezra 6:7). These elders later formed a ruling council that came to be called the Sanhedrin.

C. When the apostles planted new churches in the post-pentecost age they also appointed elders in every church (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:21-23).

D. The word for elder in the Greek is Presbuteros and refers to the character required of the office holder. A synonymous term for the office is Episkopos, which means bishop or overseer, and refers to the duty of the office. These offices are not separate, (Acts 20:17, 28 and Titus 1:5, 7) but are one and the same.

E. The New Testament Church was connectional. The elders of local churches make up a presbytery, which provided spiritual leadership and doctrinal direction for the churches of the area (I Timothy 4:14, Acts 15:1,2).

F. The PCA distinguishes between teaching elders and ruling elders. The distinction is in the area of giftedness--some elders are called to be particularly devoted to teaching and preaching (I Timothy 5:17, Ephesians 4:11).

## IV. The Office of the Deacon

A. The roots of this office are also in the Old Testament. In the dispersion, the Jewish synagogue had two officers, the elders and the Levites who cared for the property and gave alms to the poor. It can be said that preachers stand in the shoes of the O.T. prophets, elders in the shoes of O.T. kings, and deacons in the shoes of O.T. priests.

B. Deacons were present in the N.T. Church, which is made clear by their mention in Philippians 1:1, and the list of qualifications for the office found in I Timothy 3.

C. The term diakonia means to serve. The model for the office is found in Acts 6, when the apostles are overrun with the administrative work of the early church and are accused of distributing the mercy gifts of the church with partiality. They respond by selecting seven outstanding men to care for this ministry so they will be free to be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word.

D. The role of the deacon is to lead the church in ministries of mercy and to be administrative assistants to the elders.

E. All office holders are to be chosen by the people (Acts 6:3).

## V. The Qualifications for Church Officers

A. The scriptures make it very clear that all church office holders are to be men. Though Galatians 3:28 stresses the unity of all believers, it is not meant to obliterate all distinctions within the body. In I Timothy 2:9-15 it is clear that women, in the context of the church, are to be entirely submissive and are not to teach or exercise authority over men. Paul is not expressing a matter of custom or personal preference, but argues from these creation facts:

1. Adam was formed first.
2. Eve was taken out of Adam (I Corinthians 11:8).
3. Eve was made for Adam's sake, not vice versa.
4. Eve was deceived by Satan.
5. Adam was cursed for being led by his wife.

B. An officer must be a man of good character:

1. He must be above reproach,

respectable, and have a good reputation, even with those outside the church (I Timothy 3:2, 7).

2. He must be devout and prudent (Titus 1:8, I Timothy 3:2).

C. An officer must have his family life in order.

1. He is to be the husband of one wife (I Timothy 3:2).

2. He must manage his household well, including controlling his children (I Timothy 3:4, 5, 12).

3. He must have a wife who is not a gossip (I Timothy 3:11).

D. An officer must be self-controlled.

1. He must not be addicted to wine (I Timothy 3:3,8).

2. He must not be pugnacious or contentious, but gentle (I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7).

3. He must not be a lover of money (I Timothy 3:3, 8). (Note the contrast between I Timothy 3:3 and 3:8. Much stronger language is used for the deacon, which confirms that they were charged with

the handling of the funds.)

4. He must not be a “double-talker” (I Timothy 3:8).

5. An officer must be useful.

i. He should be hospitable (I Timothy 3:2).

ii. He should be able to teach, exhort, and refute (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9). (Note that deacons are not required to be apt to teach, but are to "hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Deacons, it would appear, must be able to give assent to doctrine, while elders must be able to teach it.)

E. An officer must not be a new convert, lest he fall victim to his pride and be unable to resist the sure attacks of the devil (I Timothy 3:6).

F. Officers and leaders of Cross Creek Church are to lead in repentance.

The new community is a place where Jesus dwells—by His Spirit. If He is there, it is a place where people are made new—where spiritual life is formed in them. We are broken and we need fixing. Church is a place where God is at work and we move on the journey toward

wholeness. Church is not just a place where we conform our thinking to right beliefs, not just a place where we learn to profess the right things—it is a place where we get the gospel deeply or better put—the gospel gets us. We don't just learn what justification by faith means—but we are reconciled to our Father by the work of Jesus for us and it transforms us. Once barren hearts begin to produce lovely fruit—love, joy, and peace. In fact, if there is no transformation, then there is no salvation—for if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.

Leadership will not simply be defined as those who are the best Bible scholars, or managers in our midst. Small group leaders, church officers and staff must be experiencing gospel transformation in their own hearts, minds, marriages and families to be truly leading. Leaders at Cross Creek are not simply those who sin the least but they are the ones who repent the most. (Cross Creek Pastor's Class Notes.)

## **VI. RECEPTIVE GRACE AND HANDLING THE DIFFERENCES**

A. How do Christians interact and perceive each other from different theological camps?

B. Receptive Grace

In Romans 14:1, Paul tells those who know the grace of God to *“receive the one who is weak*

*with respect to faith.*” Notice that Paul calls the person “*weak*”—spiritually and theologically. So Paul gives a negative evaluation of the person’s character and beliefs. Yet Paul calls us to receive—to engage, to enter into relationship with those that we evaluate as wrong. He says that we should evaluate the beliefs and practices of others, but then we should love them, and engage them and enter into relationships with them.

**Obviously, it is enormously hard to be sympathetic, caring, open, and non-judgmental with a person whose beliefs you evaluate as being seriously in error.** Why is it so extraordinarily hard? Now we just said it is not wrong to make negative evaluations of a person’s belief or behavior. Rather, what makes it wrong is if you *enjoy* making negative evaluations even if you only make them deep within your heart. The question is: do you enjoy contrasting your own views and practices with those of others? Do you enjoy seeing others ‘trashed’ in the paper or reviews? Do you enjoy despising other people, being critical of them, even if you don’t say anything outwardly? This is a sign that our heart has not been apprehended by grace to the extent that it overflows towards others. Where are we going to get the power to have our negative evaluations yet still move towards others whom we perceive as wrong?

“The gospel of grace moves us to say: ‘I am loved because when I was believing all the wrong things, Jesus came and entered into my reality, took on the weakness of my human nature, radically re-adjusted His life for me, and died for me.’ A Christian’s self worth is based on the one who was excluded for us—Jesus was socially and spiritually cast out. Now we are free to disagree even sharply with people and yet do so without any ill will, without the need to withdraw or exercise power in the relationships with them. **You have the power (the secure position) to disagree with love, respect, deference and humility, with no inner need to win the argument.**” —Tim Keller

## Assignment

1. Reading Assignments: Essential Truths of the Christian Faith by R.C. Sproul; The Westminster Confession of Faith (Summertown ed.); Baptism (booklet by Francis Schaeffer)
2. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith (Sproul), sections 1-9
3. Read We Don't Have Forever, by Francis Schaeffer

## Unbelieving 'born-again'

WORLD ^ | 12/6/03 | Gene Edward Veith

SECULARISTS, LIBERALS, AND MUSLIMS DO NOT need to fear conservative Christians, says Dave Shiflett in The Wall Street Journal. Christians, he says, are not all that interested in converting the heathen. They don't really believe that there is such a thing as the heathen, tending to believe instead that every religion is equally valid.

"Even the most feared of Christians—the dread 'born-again' who have cost the high priests at People for the American Way so much sleep—often embrace the modern orthodoxies of tolerance and inclusion over the traditional teachings of their faith."

He cites poll data from Christian researcher George Barna that 26 percent of born-again believe all religions are essentially the same and that 50 percent believe that a life of good works will enable a person to get to heaven.

He goes on, though, to cite data that cast doubt on whether some of these born-again Christians will be there. More than one in three (35 percent) born-again Christians do not believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead.

Isn't that a rather important thing to believe in? Especially in light of Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" [that they do] "and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead," [this they do not do] "you will be saved" [so are they?].

Over half of born-again Christians (52 percent), according to Mr. Barna's data, do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living entity. In Acts 19, the Apostle Paul came across a group of people who said that they were Christians, but they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. They had to be reevangelized and rebaptized.

Slightly more born-again Christians believe in the devil than believe in the Holy Spirit, though 45 percent do not believe that Satan exists. Ten percent believe in reincarnation.

Twenty-nine percent believe it is possible to communicate with the dead.

As for moral issues, one out of three born-again Christians (33 percent), according to Mr. Barna's numbers, accept same-sex unions. More than one out of three (39 percent) believe it is morally acceptable for couples to live together before marriage. And, significantly, born-again Christians are more likely than non-Christians to have experienced divorce (27 percent vs. 24 percent).

Mr. Barna defines "born-again Christians" as those who report having made a personal commitment to Christ and expect to get to heaven because they accepted Jesus. He has a subcategory of born-again Christians—"evangelicals"—who meet more stringent criteria of biblical faith. But these amount to only 8 percent of American Christians, with 33 percent being the less-orthodox "nonevangelical born-again."

Is this rampant unbelief among people who have accepted Christ an example of biblical illiteracy? Or is it a positive conviction that faith is a purely subjective experience rather than an appropriation of objective truths?

Either way, this is strong evidence of how American Christianity is conforming to the dominant secular culture. It is all right to be religious, according to the dictates of postmodernism, as long as your faith exists just in your head. If you start claiming that your beliefs are more than just a private mental state that makes you feel good, asserting instead that what you believe is objectively real and valid for everybody, then you are an intolerant menace to society. Many Christians apparently agree, feeling solace in their own private mental decisions and mystical experiences, without reference to the God outside themselves who is revealed in His Word and in His slain and risen Son.

Preachers sometimes exhort people to "invite Jesus into

your heart" without proclaiming who Jesus is and what He has done for sinners. This is evangelism that forgets to preach the gospel. The result will be "nonevangelical born-again."

New Christians, like babies, need to be fed, taught, and cared for; otherwise, they will die in their cribs. They need intensive nourishment from the Word of God.

At least Christians are not the only ones addled by their culture into holding contradictory beliefs. Atheists are just as confused about their theology. "Half of all atheists and agnostics say that every person has a soul, that heaven and hell exist, and that there is life after death," reports Mr. Barna. Moreover, "one out of every eight atheists and agnostics even believes that accepting Jesus Christ as savior probably makes life after death possible." They believe that accepting Christ can bring eternal life, even though they don't believe in Jesus Christ. Just like "nonevangelical born-again."

# Wandering Shepherds

## Gene Edward Veith

Gene Edward Veith, Jr., is Professor of English at Concordia University-Wisconsin, where he has also served as Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences. He has authored numerous books, of which *Postmodern Times* received a *Christianity Today* Book Award as one of the top 25 religious books of 1994. He was a Salvatori Fellow with the Heritage Foundation in 1994-1995 and is a Senior Fellow with the Capital Research Center. He is currently the director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia University, a center devoted to the study of Christianity and culture. He is the cultural editor of [World magazine](#).

Gay activists, feeling invincible with all of their victories, held a summit at the United Nations, in which the next phase of their conquest of the culture's moral code was announced. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission listed the remaining laws that it wants changed, including "age of consent" laws. That is to say, the laws against pedophiles, apparently the next group to come out of the closet and to insist on the legality and the morality of their sexual preference.

At the meeting, as reported by the Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute, Paula Ettelbrick, executive director of the IGLHRC, called for a "showdown with religion." One panel member, Princeton University professor Anthony Appiah, called for limiting religious freedom whenever it poses a "challenge" to the homosexual agenda. This would involve criminalizing as "hate speech" religious teachings and Bible readings that brand homosexuality as sinful—a measure

already on the books in Sweden and that is being considered in Canada.

Ironically, this initiative to take on religion took place the same week that the Episcopal Church allowed its congregations to hold services blessing same-sex unions and elected Gene Robinson bishop of New Hampshire, the first openly noncelibate and nonrepentant homosexual bishop in the Anglican Communion.

The United Church of Christ already allows their clergy to be practicing homosexuals and stages gay weddings. The Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have refused to go this far but are wavering, with "study documents" set to open the door. While the gay radicals are looking for a "showdown" with religion, it appears that the liberal, mainline Protestants are getting out of Dodge—or even joining up with the outlaws.

But for all of the fuss over the Episcopalians choosing a gay bishop, what should have been an even bigger scandal has received scant attention. For decades, the Episcopal Church and other Anglican bodies have been electing bishops who are not even Christians.

John Shelby Spong recently retired as bishop of New Jersey. For his whole ecclesiastical career, he wrote and preached against every tenet of the Christian faith. Bishop Spong, author of *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, did not believe in the virgin birth, the doctrine of the incarnation, the deity of Christ, the resurrection, or the existence of God. In England back in 1984, David Jenkins scorned the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as "a conjuring trick with bones." This did not prevent him from being consecrated as bishop of Durham, the fourth-highest post in the Church of England. Richard Holloway, the former head of the Anglican Church in Scotland, also dismissed the notion that Jesus rose from the dead. And these were not the only bishops, entrusted to

oversee their church, who rejected even the most basic tenets of the Christian faith.

But this is old news. These particular bishops have all retired by now, though others with similar views continue to wield authority. The point is, the Episcopalian embrace of homosexuality happened only after decades in which the authority of Scripture was jettisoned and Christian doctrine became optional.

Heresy is even more harmful to a church than homosexuality. Choosing a bishop who is gay is bad enough, but choosing a bishop who rejects Christianity is surely even worse. And it should not be surprising that a church that has rejected the authority and the truth of the Bible would take the far lesser step of saying that sexual immorality is OK.

And those who no longer believe in Christ—His deity, His cross, His resurrection—can no longer offer homosexuals and other sinners the gospel that their sins are forgiven in Christ. Instead, they can offer them nothing stronger than the fiction that they have no sins that need forgiving.

There are believing Christians in the Episcopal Church, a tradition that has given us John Donne, T.S. Eliot, and C.S. Lewis. The ruling liberals are confident that they will not revolt, saying that the conservatives made threats when the ordination of women was instituted but didn't do anything about it. This time, with the support of Anglican bishops in Africa and Asia, it may be a different story.

But such controversies all go back to the battle for the Bible. The church bodies that rejected the inerrancy of Scripture in the 20th century now have no basis for resisting the homosexual agenda or any other cultural pressure. They have been sliding down the slippery slope and now they have nothing to grab onto to stop their fall.

If the gay activists want a "showdown" with religion, those Christians who hold to the Bible will be like Gary Cooper in

High Noon, abandoned even by their friends and family members, outnumbered and outgunned, but refusing to back down.

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## **Church: Love It, Don't Leave It** **By Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck**

Here's what Bono, Oprah, and the guru speakers on PBS won't tell you: Jesus believed in organized religion and he founded an institution. Of course, Jesus had no patience for religious hacks and self-righteous wannabes, but he was still Jewish. And as Jew, he read the Holy Book, worshiped in the synagogue, and kept Torah. He did not start a movement of latte-drinking disciples who excelled in spiritual conversations. He founded the church (Matt. 16:18) and commissioned the apostles to proclaim the good news that Israel's Messiah had come and the sins of the world could be forgiven through his death on the cross (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:14-36).

For almost two millennia, it was axiomatic that Christians, like, actually went to church (or at least told other Christians they did). From Cyprian to Calvin it was believed that for those to whom God "is Father the church may also be Mother." But increasingly Christians are trying to get more spiritual by getting less church.

Take a spin through the religion section at your local bookstore. What you'll find there is revealing - there are "revolutionary" books for stay at home moms, teenagers, and Christian businessmen. There are lots of manifestos. And most of the books about church are about people leaving the church to "find God." There are lots of Kerouacian "journey" stories, and at least one book about the gospel according to Starbucks. It used to be you had to overthrow a country to be considered a revolutionary, and now, it seems, you just have to quit church and go pray in the woods.

We've been in the church our whole lives and are not blind to its failings. Churches can be boring, hypocritical, hurtful, and inept. The church is full of sinners. Which is kind of the point.

Christians are worse than you think. Our Savior is better than you imagine.

But the church is not all about oppression and drudgery. Almost every church we know of visits old people, brings meals to new moms, supports disaster relief, and does something for the poor. We love the local church, in spite of its problems, because it's where we go to meet God. It's not a glorified social/country club you attend to be around people who talk and look just you do. It's a place to hear God's word spoken, taught and affirmed. It's a place to sing praises to God, and a place to serve others. It's a place to be challenged.

The church is more than plural for Christian. It is both organism and organization, a living thing comprised of a certain order, regular worship services, with doctrinal standards, institutional norms, and defined rituals. Without the institution of the church nurturing the flock and protecting the faith for two thousand years, there would be no Christianity. If Gen Xers (like us) and their friends want to be against something, start a revolution. If you want to conserve truth and grace for twenty centuries, plant a church.

We love the church because Christ loved the church. She is his bride--a harlot at times, but his bride nonetheless, being washed clean by the word of God (Eph. 5:25-26). If you are into Jesus, don't rail on his bride. Jesus died for the church, so don't be bothered by a little dying to self for the church's sake. If you keep in mind that everyone there is a sinner (including yourself) and that Jesus Christ is the point and not you, your dreams, or your kids, your church experience might not be as lame as you fear.

Perhaps Christians are leaving the church because it isn't tolerant and open-minded. But perhaps the church-leavers have their own intolerance too--intolerant of tradition, intolerant of authority, intolerant of imperfection except their own. Are you open-minded enough to give the church a

chance--a chance for the church to be the church, not a coffee shop, not a mall, not a variety show, not Chuck E. Cheese, not a U2 concert, not a nature walk, but a wonderfully ordinary, blood-bought, Spirit-driven church with pastors, sermons, budgets, hymns, bad carpet and worse coffee?

The Church, because it is Christ's church, will outlive American Idol, the NFL, and all of our grandkids. We won't last, but the Church will. So when it comes to church, be like Jesus: love it, don't leave it. As Saint Calloway once prophesied to the Brothers of Blues, "Jake, you get wise, you get to church."

**Kevin DeYoung** is senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. He serves on the executive team of RCA Integrity, a renewal group within the Reformed Church of America. **Ted Kluck's** work has appeared in *ESPN the Magazine*, *Sports Spectrum Magazine*, *ESPN.com Page2*, and several small literary journals.

## **Washington Post Article**

**By Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck | July 1, 2009; 12:54 PM ET**

# **Why the PCA Only Ordains Men to Ecclesiastical Office**

## **The Authority of the Word and the Wisdom of the Church**

L. Roy Taylor

### Why the PCA Only Ordains Men to Ecclesiastical Office

The question, "Why does the PCA ordain only men to serve as ministers, ruling elders, and deacons?" comes up often. Some see the question as a human rights issue. Their line of reasoning is: 1) society and the Church were wrong on issues such as racism, slavery, segregation, minority rights, and women's civil rights; 2) society and the Church came to a better understanding of those matters; 3) since society now grants women such rights as voting, holding public office, leadership positions in the business world, and so forth, the Church should grant women the right to be ordained to ecclesiastical leadership.

If human rights were the question, the PCA's position understandably could be regarded as anachronistic or chauvinistic. But ordination is a biblical and theological issue, not a human rights issue. The PCA limits ordination to ecclesiastical office to men because we believe that that the Bible itself limits ordination to

men in both the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 24:1,9-11; Numbers 11; Acts 6; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). And Scripture is "the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined" (Westminster Confession of Faith I.10).

What about the decisions of the Church, acting as a body? Do they carry weight? We do not believe that the Church is infallible (Westminster Confessions of Faith XXIV.5; XXXI.3) as some do, but at the same time we reject the polar-opposite perspective of

others who regard as worthless the wisdom of the Church accumulated over the centuries. Certainly, we do believe that the Church is wise. The "decrees of councils, [and] opinions of ancient writers" (Westminster Confession of Faith I.10), however, must be sifted through the grid of Scripture. What is biblical, we accept; what is inconsistent with the Bible, we must reject.

We respect the three-fold standard of tradition, stated in the fifth century, as "that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." In other words—universality, antiquity, and consent. The consensus of the Church, developed over centuries of grappling with Scripture, is to be seriously considered. The ordination of women as teaching elders has never been the majority opinion of the Church. In Presbyterian, Reformed circles the idea is of relatively recent origin (first in 1956 in the United Presbyterian Church, then in 1965 in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and in 1995 in the Christian Reformed Church). Therefore, unless convincing Scriptural proof requires such a major change, we are reluctant to abandon the restriction of ordination to men, because that is what the majority of the Church has believed, throughout the world, for millennia.

Different views stem from how one understands the Bible

The purpose here is not to give a lengthy analysis of all positions on this issue or to exegete all relevant biblical texts. Many have penned books and articles on the subject in recent decades. It will be helpful, though, to recognize the broad range of positions on whether women should be ordained. Some of the differences stem from how one understands the nature and authority of the Bible, and other differences arise from how one interprets Scripture.

For a theological liberal, who holds that the Bible is essentially the record of men's thoughts about God rather than God's authoritative revelation of Himself and His will through the prophets and apostles, no biblical or exegetical argument is necessary. The human-rights argument will suffice. For the neo-

orthodox theologian, who listens for a word from God when reading the Scriptures, it is not a matter of what the biblical text objectively says; it is more a matter of what one experiences when encountering the biblical text. Biblical interpretation becomes subjective. In that paradigm, if one feels that ordaining women is the spirit of the biblical text, the rite is justified.

For the neo-evangelical, although the Bible is inspired and authoritative, it is a mixture of divine truth and human error. Paul King Jewett, in *Man: Male and Female*, argues that when Paul wrote on essential theological issues such as justification, he wrote as Paul, the Liberated Apostle. When he wrote on the role of women, however, he reverted to his old chauvinistic perspectives as Saul the Pharisaical Rabbi. Accordingly, when we read Paul's passage in Galatians 3:26-28, the Liberated Apostle sets forth an inspired Magna Carta of Christian liberty, but when we read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35, or 1 Timothy 2 and 3 on the role of women in the Church, he reverts to his Pharisaical chauvinism. According to Jewett, any understanding of a particular passage which does not agree with Paul's fundamental statement of Christian liberty (Galatians 3:26-28) is inconsistent with the Bible as a whole. The PCA believes "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice" (Book of Church Order 21 -5; 24-6). We therefore reject any justifications for the ordination of women that are based upon aberrant views of the nature of Scripture itself, such as those of the liberal, the neo—orthodox, and the neo-evangelical.

Reform must always bring belief and practice in line with Scripture. A basic principle of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation was *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est* (the Church reformed is always reforming). Some use that slogan to buttress the argument that since society's views on the leadership role of women in business and government have changed, the Church should follow suit, change its views, and ordain women. In doing this they miss the point underscored by

John Calvin in *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*, essentially that reforms in the Church are to be according to the Word of God. All evangelicals who are consistent with that basic Protestant principle agree that the Church should constantly be reforming in order to bring its beliefs and practices more closely in line with Scripture. Ongoing reformation of the Church is to be based on the Bible, not the changing culture.

Some use the "Wesleyan quadrilateral"—a combination of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—to formulate the doctrines of the Church. We have mentioned the relation of Scripture and tradition already- that Scripture is supreme and tradition is helpful as tested by Scripture. Reason also plays a role in the formulation of theology. Paul frequently used logical explanations in his epistles. There is an obvious logical structure to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which itself advocates the use of "good and necessary consequence" (WCF 1.6), or logic, in developing doctrine. But any logical conclusion that is contrary to Scripture is simply erroneous. One might deduce that since Christians are graciously forgiven, they may live in perpetual sin, but Paul explicitly denounces such logic (Romans 6:1, 15). Likewise, if the Scriptures do not mandate the ordination of women, no logical argument that arrives at a conclusion contrary to the Scriptures is valid. Reason is not superior to or even on par with Holy Scripture; biblical revelation is supreme.

What role does personal experience play in understanding an issue such as the ordination of women? Personal experiences (whether religious or general life experiences) may lead to deeper biblical insights and affect our theology. There is a problem, however, when subjective experience becomes the arbiter of objective biblical truth. All Protestants hold to: 1) the "perspicuity of Scripture" (that the message of salvation in the Bible is sufficiently clear that one does not need to be a formally trained theologian to understand it); 2) "the priesthood of believers" (that every Christian has direct access to God and

needs no human priest or saint as an intercessor); and 3) "the liberty of conscience" (that the Church may not require Christians to believe or practice anything not taught in Scripture). One concept popularized in the early 20th century, "the soul competency of the believer," goes well beyond these three tenets. According to "soul competency," each Christian has both the ability and the liberty to interpret the Bible through a personal conversion experience with Christ, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the dictates of conscience. For those who accept this doctrine, objective, time-tested principles of biblical interpretation take a back seat to subjective individual experience, and an autonomous individualism begins to set itself apart from, and above, the collective, long-term wisdom of the Church. This perspective makes a subtle but dangerous shift from the principle that Christ is the central and unifying theme of all Scripture, to making one's personal Christian experience the determining factor in biblical understanding. Whether one "feels led" to a particular position on ordination is not the standard; what the Bible objectively teaches is.

Some Christians interpret the relevant passages differently. Let us be clear that we are not saying that anyone who disagrees with our position on ordination simply does not believe the Bible. Some who advocate women's ordination do reject the authority, plenary inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture, and as churches' views of Scripture are eroded, they tend to reflect the culture of the day. The ordination of women is but one example. On the other hand, there are indeed other Christians who share the high view of Scripture held by the PCA, but who believe that women should be ordained to church leadership because they interpret the relevant passages of the Bible differently.

Some fellow evangelicals, who hold to an orthodox view of Scripture, advance biblical, exegetical arguments for the ordination of women by using one or more of three basic lines of argument: 1) The equality of men and women in Christ is not

limited to their standing in the sight of God but also extends to leadership roles in the Church; 2) The controversial passages that appear to restrict the role of women in the Church are culturally conditioned and are to be interpreted in light of passages that set forth equality in Christ; and 3) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God, empowers women to exercise any spiritual gift men receive, including ordained leadership in the Church.

Gilbert Belezikan's argument in *Beyond Sex Roles* illustrates the view that the equality of men and women in Christ extends to their leadership roles in the Church. Adam and Eve were both created in the divine image (Genesis 1:26-27) and had dominion (Genesis 1:26, 28). The term "helpmate" connotes equality (Genesis 2:18), Belezikan says, although physical differences are necessary for procreation (Genesis 1:28). Becoming "one flesh" means developing interdependency, and has no overtones of hierarchy. The fall into sin upset the balance of God's plan so that male leadership in marriage originated through satanic influence, antithetical to the original creation design (Genesis 3:16). The argument continues that "patriarchal oppression" subsequently became part of Mosaic Law relating to property rights, adultery tests, and divorce legislation. In spite of the patriarchal culture, there were occasional female spiritual and political leaders (Deborah the Judge, Judges 4-5) and prophetesses (Huldah, 2 Kings 22-23). Belezikan says that with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant, all former distinctions of race, social status, and gender roles are abolished (Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 5:28; Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13), marriage is restored to its pre-Fall egalitarian relationship (Ephesians 5:21-33), and the husband as "head" of the wife means "source of" or "servant role," without any connotations of authority. Therefore, women are to be ordained.

Belezikan's argument presents several problems. First, Paul makes theological points of the creation sequence—first Adam, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:14-15; 2 Corinthians 11:8-12). Second,

male leadership in marriage is not depicted in Genesis 3:16 as a concession to Satan, but as the divine arrangement from the Fall until the Second Advent. Third, to label parts of the Mosaic Law "patriarchal oppression" does not do justice to the divine inspiration of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Fourth, there is indeed a radical newness in Christ and the New Covenant so that all types of people have an equal access to God, and equal standing in Christ, and all are incorporated into the Church. But to apply that to ordained office requires an extrapolation that Paul does not make in any of the passages cited. Finally, to exegete "head" in these passages as "source of" or "servant role" without any connotations of authority is innovative and strongly disputed.

Richard and Catherine Kroeger, in their book *I Suffer Not a Woman*, address one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Ephesus, where Timothy was ministering, was the center for the worship of Diana or Artemis (Acts 19:21-41), a mother goddess, and the Mother God of all pagan gods. The religion was led by priestesses, glorified Eve and the serpent, taught an extreme matriarchy, and involved a cultic ritual (and perhaps literal) murder of a male victim. The Kroegers argue that 1 Timothy 2 is a unique, culturally conditioned passage, just like Paul's requirement that women wear a head covering when praying or prophesying in the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Just as women were not required to keep absolute silence in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 11:2-16), but were not to disturb worship by disruptive questioning, so 1 Timothy 2:12 does not require absolute silence either. Paul's prohibition regarding women (v. 12) does not mean that women are not allowed to teach men at all, but that women are not allowed to teach the Ephesian heresy of female superiority.

In response we answer, first, that most Reformed scholars recognize the uniqueness of the Gentile culture in Corinth and do not teach that it is a sin for a woman to participate in worship

without a head scarf. Second, Paul's stated reasons for restricting the authoritative teaching (preaching) of women in public worship are the creation sequence (1 Timothy 2:13) and the Fall (2:14), not the worship of Diana. Third, admittedly the word "authentein," translated "to usurp authority over," was used in earlier instances to mean "to murder," but there is no indication in the context that ritual male sacrifice was Paul's reference.

A final argument used by some fellow evangelicals is that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon women authorizes their ordination to ecclesiastical office. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, first upon Christ (Isaiah 61 :1 -3; Matthew 3:13-17) and then on the Church (Joel 2:23-28; Acts 2:1-41) is a sign of the inauguration of the "last days" and the expansion of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit empowers Christians by filling us, and equips us to serve by endowing us with spiritual gifts. The basic flaw in this argument is that there is a difference between a responsibility, a gift for service, and an ordained office. All believing parents, for example, have the responsibility to teach their children about God (Deuteronomy 6:7), though they may not have the spiritual gift of teaching. Some believers, not all, have the gift of teaching (Romans 12:7). Beyond the responsibility and gift of teaching, there is the office of teaching elder (1 Timothy 5:17). Having the gift of teaching does not necessarily mean that one is called to the office of teaching elder.

The PCA's position on ordination is based on biblical and theological principles and solid historical precedent. That said, a challenge faces the PCA: "Recognizing that we do not ordain women to ecclesiastical office, how best may women use their life experiences, providential talents, and spiritual gifts within the Church for the glory of God?"

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