

True Confession: A Presbyterian Dissenter Thinks About the Church

by Barbara G. Wheeler

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I have a practical problem. I joined the Presbyterian Church as an adult, in significant measure because I admire this denomination's theology of the church and its processes for making decisions. Today I find myself in strong disagreement with the Church about an important matter. How shall I conduct myself now that I think that my denomination has taken the wrong side on a serious issue?

The particular matter about which I disagree with the Presbyterian Church is this. The denomination has declared that homosexual acts are invariably sinful. I think that homosexual acts are morally equivalent to heterosexual ones. In some circumstances, both may be deeply sinful. Under other conditions, both may be used in God's service.

Homosexuality is not my assigned topic this afternoon, but before I turn to my subject, which is how those of us who disagree with the church on any serious matter should behave, I want to add four brief qualifications to what I just said, chiefly for the benefit of a few members of this denomination who regularly twist honest statements of conviction into propaganda.

First, my views about homosexuality are not the position of the Covenant Network. The Network is a loose association of persons who would like to see Amendment B removed from the Constitution for a variety of reasons. Some of them--some of you--share my perspective on homosexuality and the firmness with which I hold it. Others hold different views or have not decided what they think about the issue. The Covenant Network welcomes all who, whatever their views about homosexual practices, seek openness and tolerance in the Presbyterian Church.

Second, I want to make clear that I hold my position because of the Bible, not in spite of it. In my best moments, when, as Paul says, I accept the grace to want "what I want" (Romans 7:14-20), what I truly want is to live my life in alignment with God. Since I like Paul am not naturally inclined to do that, I cannot imagine how it would be possible without scriptures that

judge and contradict as well as comfort and affirm. I need scripture to say what it says, not to agree with me or confirm my preferences. In this case, I know that some passages put homosexual practices in a negative light, but these like the many precise Biblical injunctions that Presbyterians do not observe are overridden by much more blatant testimony. God rules everything. Through the whole history of God's dealings with us, God has exercised God's freedom to demolish categories we invent for our own convenience. I am convinced that God is doing this today, demolishing the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality which we constructed for our peace of mind, not God's glory. I want to testify here is that I did not learn about this deconstructive activity of God from some liberal political handbook. I learned it from the scripture that deconstructs me, freeing me, as Paul says, to delight in the law of God.

Third, I want to affirm that, as conservative Presbyterians emphasize, the Christian life is a disciplined life. On this matter, I am a conservative too. We follow Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the life of the world. If we want to live in his light and walk in his way, we too will be called to sacrifice, and among the things we are likely to be required to give up--some of our wealth, some of our power--are immediate sexual gratifications that would cause injury or pain to others. Foregoing something as pleasurable as sex is not easy. We need God's help, through the church, to find the grace to do that. Far from helping, however, the church's current teaching on sexuality militates against sacrifice and restraint. Homosexuals get no help at all in making moral decisions about their sexual behavior; all of it is simply dismissed as bad. Heterosexual relationships get off lightly too, if they are monogamous, because we think they are God's favored form. I am convinced that the equal treatment homosexual and heterosexual relationships, including the recognition that marriage is God's gift for both, would strike a blow, not for sexual license, but for much-needed sexual discipline.

My last qualification is addressed to those on all sides who say that the debate over homosexuality is not important enough to consume as much attention and energy as it does, that this is an academic matter (a phrase people use to minimize an issue) that does not affect the real life and mission of the church. I disagree. This is no small or limited difference. Presbyterian teaching about homosexuality shapes its current policies on ordination and marriage, which in turn shape and I think distort the church and the lives of its members. And I believe that this teaching does great harm beyond the Presbyterian Church. Non-Presbyterians are understandably unconvinced when we say that persons who are morally unfit for leadership in our organization should have rights of full participation in every other social undertaking. Because those outside our fellowship think that we judge all practicing homosexuals to be morally defective, we actively contribute to the hatred of homosexuals that is rampant in this society, hatred that leads to crimes of discrimination and violence. The Presbyterian Church's teaching about homosexuality is not a matter of academic theory. It is a matter of life and death.

I have spelled out my views about homosexuality not to persuade--that is an

activity for other settings--but to illustrate that I have a serious disagreement with my church, one on which I feel I must act. But how? Non-Presbyterian friends who know the distance between what I think and what the denomination teaches about homosexuality cannot understand why I continue to associate with a religious group that is wrong--dead wrong and deadly wrong in their view--on an important question. They push me pretty hard. One of them asked me recently whether I would join a club that admitted African-American members but would not let them hold office. At the same time, many Presbyterian friends push me just as hard, telling me that the only course for those who really love the church is to abide by its decisions and wait patiently as the whole body discerns where the Spirit is leading.

My guess is that most of you feel this same tension. You are here because you want the church to change, if not its doctrine on sexuality, then its policies on ordination, or its sometimes literalistic ways of reading the Bible, or its ethos, which seems to be increasingly inquisitorial and intolerant. All these are serious matters, and I would venture that you too feel you must do something about them. But what?

This dilemma is not ours alone. Those who don't fit under the umbrella of the Covenant Network face it too. If Presbyterian News Service reports on the Coalition meeting in Dallas in September are accurate, Presbyterians on the so-called other side are beginning to realize that, as long as Amendment B remains in the Constitution, the issues it was designed to settle are not going to go away, because Presbyterians like us won't let them. For some Coalition members, the prospect of investing major effort, every year, to preserve a law that is, as they see it, patently the will of the Presbyterian people and the will of God, is just as untenable as living in a church governed by Amendment B is for some of us. They long for a church in which this matter is settled, as do we, and they don't know any better than we how to achieve that. Shall we leave graciously, they are reported as asking, to search for such a church, or stay and renew the one we've got--a option that means, of course, facing challenges to Amendment B as long as it exists?(1)

When it comes to the topic of the church, the Covenant Network and the Coalition are in the same boat. All of us are steering through dangerous straits, with sirens on both banks luring us toward the toward the rocks and shoals with powerful arguments. The argument from one side goes like this: the Presbyterian Church is, after all, just a denomination, not the whole church. What finally matters is not our Presbyterianism but our Christianity. Therefore those who have honest and serious disagreements with the denomination may and perhaps should find or create another expression of the church that they believe is more faithful in its doctrine and discipleship. From the other shore, the song is equally compelling: the Presbyterian Church is, after all, an expression of the holy, catholic church. As such, it has authority from God. While working to repair any flaws in the church, we must not substitute our authority for God's. Therefore, while we who disagree with the church try to improve it, we should abide by its laws and keep its peace.

So: how shall Presbyterians who disagree with the church about a serious matter (as it turns out, that's a sizeable and very diverse group of us) behave? Ecclesiology--theories of the church--is Douglas Hall's assignment, not mine, but I cannot make headway on my practical problem, how to act in and toward the church, unless I begin with some basic definitions of what the church, as reformed protestants understand it, is and does. In the next few minutes, I will review some reformed ideas about the identity of the church and its purpose, with sidelong glances at other Christians' ideas in order to clarify ours. Doing this quickly will, of course, require a lot of generalizing and simplifying. I apologize for this, but it's necessary, because I want quickly to return to the practical questions that weigh so heavily on our consciences and our hearts.

What is the church? There is remarkable unanimity among Christians of different stripes about the terms that best express the church's fundamental identity. All of us affirm that the church is the community of those who through baptism become, in all their diversity, one body, and in all their human finitude and sinfulness, Christ's body. Different Christian traditions, however, inflect these definitions--community of the baptized, body of Christ--very differently.

Our Roman Catholic colleagues, for instance, frequently speak of the body of Christ as mystical. Different strands of Catholic tradition mean somewhat different things by this. Hierarchically-minded theologians like Cardinal Ratzinger, as Miroslav Volf explains in his wonderful new book, *After Our Likeness* (on which I'll rely at several points as I sort theories of the church) believe that the institutional church and especially the successors to the apostles who govern it are imbued with Christ's own kind of power.⁽²⁾ On some readings, this power extends even to salvation: "No salvation outside the church" means not only that the church is the location and mediator of salvation, but even its agent.⁽³⁾ As the actual body of Christ, mystically empowered to function as Christ in the world, the church does the saving, or at least some of it. Catholic spiritual writers place a different weight on the word mystical. For them it signifies a realm above and beyond natural reality where the church is fully and truly itself. It is a mystical realm into which Christians are sealed at their baptism. What these views have in common is their emphasis on the church, as Volf says, "from above," transhuman, Christ's body risen, free from the bonds of earth and death, ruling in power.

Free church traditions define the church as Catholics and other Christians do, as the body of those baptized into Christ, but, in their view, the body is far from mystical. Wherever two or three are baptized into fellowship in the name of Christ, says the free church, there is the church. The church is not larger than, above and beyond any actual human gathering, but fully present in each one, in all its earthy reality.

Again, there are multiple strands within this tradition. Baptists emphasize the gathering in Christ's name, the profession of faith that precedes sealing in baptism. If there is no profession, there is no baptism and no church. Congregationalists emphasize the gathering itself: the church is constituted

as the Spirit brings two or three into community through baptism. What these and other free views have in common is their humanity. "We are the church," exclaims Miroslav Volf, who himself stands in this tradition. God gives faith and the grace to gather in community, and the church can grow very close to God, but the free church is at its core a human reality, from below, not a divine reality from on high.

Where are we on this very rough spectrum? Reformed traditions seem to me remarkable less for their differences from these other Christian views than for their high degree of agreement with both. Calvin's favorite term for what God accomplishes in baptism is engrafting. We finite and deeply flawed human beings are joined by grace and the faith it enables to Christ in his goodness and glory, joined to create a single organic whole, the body of Christ. In the event, we remain who and what we are--the grafted part produces its own kind of fruit, not the host's. In this we join the free church: baptism does not set us on a course toward superhuman powers like infallibility or extract us from grubby human community to float above it in a mystical one.

But the grafted branch no longer lives on its own; it draws its very being from the host. The body of Christ for us is no mere metaphor for an organization with different but complementary parts, as it seems to be for some free churches. We like the Catholics believe that in baptism we become part of a church that is Christ's living body today. In baptism, says Bonhoeffer, "we are...set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth." (4) Our engrafting into Jesus Christ means that everything that has happened to him has happened to us. In reformed traditions, the church is both a fully human community--all churches, says Calvin, are "blemished," and also Christ's very body. (5) Holding these two dimensions together yields a rich, complex picture of the church's identity, all the more mysterious for not being mystical, all the more compelling for not being fully explainable in human terms. I think this picture of the church is just right, and I became a Presbyterian to affirm it.

Let turn now to the second basic issue: what is the body of Christ called to do? What is its purpose? Here too there is ecumenical consensus. The purpose of the church is worship, the giving of thanks and praise to God. We modern activist Christians are tempted to say ministry or mission, but the root of ministry is worship: our chief end is to glorify God. At the heart of worship--on this Christians also agree--is eucharist.

As we all know, worship and eucharist look very different in different Christian branches. For the Catholics and others who emphasize sacraments, the meal is paramount: Christ's delegates, with Christ's own special, more-than-human power to make the bread and wine substantially different, are to feed the faithful. The whole ministry of church, including teaching, governance and mission, is an extension of this act of feeding: significantly, those who have special power through the apostles to prepare and serve the meal are usually in charge of the other functions as well.

In free church settings, eucharist not a transformational event so much as a

reenactment. Someone once said that at the lowest end of the church spectrum eucharist is something like a patriotic play: it portrays an important historical event in order to instill values and foster loyalty. The free churches view the Lord's Supper as edifying for believers. It reminds them that as Jesus Christ has claimed them, they have claims on each other. At the table, they are joined in even closer fellowship: the community of the saints becomes stronger and more accountable, and each of its members truer in faith, holier in living, more righteous in discipleship.

We, the reformed, again drawing from both sides, take eucharist literally. The word means giving thanks. The church is called out of the world for the purpose of giving thanks for what God is doing in the world. We have our own doctrine of real presence, Jesus Christ known surely enough in the breaking of the bread that we are impelled, in Christopher Morse's graceful phrase, to "thank God for loving all the world." (6)

In order to do this, to give thanks and praise for God's accomplishments, it is necessary to discern the work of God--what God has done, is doing and will do. Hence the heavy reformed emphasis on confession, teaching the truth, and preaching, proclaiming the Word. For us, these are eucharist too. Avery Dulles, in his careful catalog of various Christians' models of the church, identifies ours as "herald," because, he says, we "emphasize faith and proclamation over interpersonal relations and mystical communion." (7) The metaphor fits, though Dulles misunderstands, I think, when he concludes that we believe that the chief and maybe only purpose of the church is to talk. Some Presbyterians may have given that impression,(8) but most of us know that giving thanks through hearing and proclaiming the Word of God has, as Volf says, a performative as well as declarative aspect. (9) Everything we do in gratitude to God--service and social action, prayer and sacrament, as well teaching and preaching--is true confession, the living word instantiated in our lives as much as heard from our lips.

Let me quickly extract two themes from this reformed picture of the church that I have sketched that will help us, I think, as we return to the practical problem of how we should behave when we disagree with the church.

The first is very obvious in reformed thought: God's initiative. God gave the church--Calvin, a one-covenant man, says it was given to Abraham--and God continues to give it to all who enter the covenant. We human beings engrafted into Christ's body make up the church, but we cannot unmake it. "Denials, betrayals and corruptions" of Christ's body, as Christopher Morse puts it, cannot prevent its resurrection.(10) Christ is the head of the church. We can do terrible things in and to it, but we cannot remove its identity as the church.

The second theme is not often recognized in the famously chilly ethos of Presbyterian and Reformed churches: the importance of community. (Garrison Keillor says that Calvinists are people who think that warmth, comfort and having a good time with others makes you stupid.) Neither covenant nor confession is possible without other people. God's love is more generous than ours, never exclusive. In binding us to God in Christ,

God also binds us to others in covenant community. And because Christian truth is a person, writes Thomas Torrance, it is not something we can tell ourselves.(11) It must be communicated to us by other persons. Our confession is social too: if it is not spoken by others to us and us to others, it is no confession at all.

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So: if I really believe these reformed affirmations, that we are engrafted at God's initiative into the church, an all-too-human body of us and other persons that is nevertheless Christ's own body, not ours; and if I really believe that our duty and privilege, as people called out by God's costly effort, is to testify, in community and as a community, to the mighty and merciful acts of God: if I really believe these things, how then shall I prosecute my disagreement with the Presbyterian Church?

I think these convictions about the nature and purpose of the church require me to observe two principles.

First, tell the truth. If the church is, indeed, constituted by grateful confession of true faith, then we have no choice but to say what, by the power of God's word and spirit, we deeply believe to be true. Humility is of course advisable. In the case of homosexuality, for instance, someone is wrong, and it could be me. But I'm pretty sure I am not wrong, and an increasing number of Presbyterians hold views similar to mine. Our identity as confessing Christians requires that we say so.

Not enough of us have been doing that. When Joseph Small visited the Coalition and Covenant Network conferences last year, he was struck by the apparent unwillingness at the gathering of this group to speak our minds about the issues that divide the church, especially homosexuality--the elephant in the living room, to use his image, that, he thought, we go to special lengths not to mention even though it's sprawled on our ecclesiastical couch and will not go away. There is an historical explanation for what Joe Small accurately observed. The Covenant Network was created to promote Amendment A by people who had among them various reasons for wanting to see it pass. It made sense to focus on the common concerns, such as openness and tolerance, rather than our particular causes, and we have continued in that mode, emphasizing the generalities we share rather than the specifics over which we differ.

But meanwhile circumstances have changed. Immediate and decisive repeal of Amendment B seems less likely now than when Amendment A was before us. In this light, I have come to agree that a sabbatical period in which we refrain from legislative action and judicial confrontation is a good idea, though not for the reason most often given for standing-down: because the church is tired of debating homosexuality and associated issues and needs time out to rest. If the church lives by the truth of its confession, then we its members get no vacation from any issue in which truth and life are at stake. In fact, in my view the only good argument for this sabbatical period is to make time and conserve attention for the searching reflection and

honest speaking that political fights often do not permit.

It is time for us, the Presbyterians who have been specializing in tact, to say what we think, civilly and reasonably--diatribes accomplish nothing--but also persuasively. We all do not think the same things. Those of you whose minds are not made up on the pivotal issues must frame your questions sharply. Those who have strong views about ordination and polity must state them with clarity and precision. And those who think, as I do, that homosexuality is the basic issue and that the church is in error when it teaches that God abominates homosexual acts committed in the context of covenant faithfulness while blessing heterosexual ones in the same situation--those of us who think that need to speak up, in clear, reasonable and inviting terms that stand a chance of changing the church's mind. Unity-and-diversity conferences are an excellent start, but the church must be sure that it gets around to talking about the full range of issues that divide us. It goes without saying, I hope, that there should be no penalty in a teaching church for the candid exchange of theological views.

Will vigorous conversation about these matters unsettle the church and upset some of its members? Probably it will, but that is no reason to hold back. The peace of Christ is not a sentimental blanket in which we hide and smother our differences. It is genuine reconciliation, obtained for us at a very high price, and we must expect to sacrifice some of our tranquility to discover it among ourselves. A confessing church is a struggling church. Honest expression and careful argument are God's work, and we should do more of both in the days to come.

A second principle for action also stems from reformed conceptions of the church: stay put. Separation from the body in which we have grown into Christ should be almost unthinkable. Calvin was adamant on this point. In one of his finest rhetorical passages he points to the church in Corinth, where "almost the whole body had become tainted..., where some hold the resurrection of the dead in derision, though with it the whole gospel must fall..., [and] where many things are done neither decently nor in order," and then asks how Paul responded. "Does he seek separation from them..., discard them from the kingdom of Christ, strike them with a final anathema?" No, Calvin answers, "He not only does none of these things, but he acknowledges and heralds them as the Church of Christ, and a society of saints."(12)

Calvin had very pragmatic reasons for his position: "By refusing to acknowledge any church, save one that is completely perfect, we leave no church at all."(13) Press reports tell us that some in the Coalition came to a similar conclusion as they surveyed alternative churches they might join if they decide to leave this denomination: they too have concluded that there are no church bodies without serious problems and flaws.

On our side of the aisle, there are additional pragmatic arguments for staying put. The most compelling for me, given my concern about homosexuality, is the fact that this denomination, with its history, social status, and many influential members, has impact far beyond its own

organizational boundaries. As I noted earlier, our condemnation of homosexual practices reinforces hatred of homosexuals throughout this society. Former moderator John Fife once said that every time a gay teenager commits suicide, there is a sense in which that goes on the Presbyterian Church's chart. If a small group of dissenters with views like mine decamps to another denomination or starts a new one, that will have limited and temporary effect on the social tragedy we have helped to create. But if the Presbyterian Church (USA), changes its official teaching on homosexuality, it will go a significant distance toward changing the message that moderate religion broadcasts to the world. Maybe even homosexual teenagers will hear it, and think differently about the meaning and value of their lives. One important reason to stay is that the harm that the PC(USA) has done can only be undone by the PC(USA).

The theological arguments for staying if we possibly can are even stronger than the pragmatic ones. Being engrafted into the church is no ordinary admissions process. Baptism is not a chummy bonding with those with whom we would naturally gather in clubs. It is not an easy process, as our constant use of bland terms like inclusiveness sometimes suggests. I am one who thinks that inclusiveness is a concept with a rather short theological shelf life. We stand in a tradition that has emphasized not automatic inclusion but God's choice. Granted, God chooses more generously and less conventionally than we do, but still, election is a strenuous and painful conjunction. Because of the price God paid to be joined with us, and because we are born into new life with God and each other as we are baptized into Christ's death, baptism accomplishes what other initiations do not. It joins us in Christ to those with whom we have few if any interests, background characteristics, preferences or opinions in common. It breaks down the barriers that divide, making people who can't stand each other fellow citizens and members of the household of God, because Christ died for all of them--and us.

If I want to testify, then, to what Jesus Christ has done for me, bringing me to him in this unique community that is his body, it follows that my chief reason for staying in this denomination is not my tie to people like you who share my taste for progressive ideas and moderate manners. I would hang out with you anyway, denomination or no denomination. My deepest bond, ironically, is not to you but to two groups with whom I am acutely uncomfortable but to whom, in Christ, I am inextricably joined.

One of these groups is those whom I have injured. My disagreement with one church policy does not change the fact that I have more power in the church because others have less. Homosexuals, minorities, and women not as lucky as I to find an institution that will accept their leadership are what Biblical scholar Ellen Davis calls our Ishmaelites, "the great nation less favored" of those to whom the church, by policy or practice, denies full benefits of membership and opportunities for ministry.(14) Sometimes, the less favored lash out in legitimate anger at the unfairness their situation. Much more often, sustained by the God who has saved their lives in the wilderness, those whom we have mistreated exercise amazing forbearance. They endure the prejudice and unjust laws we impose on them, sticking

with us, who exercise power that should have been theirs, and struggling not only for their rights but also for our integrity. As long as they stay, as so many of them do, ministering in love and faith to me their oppressor, how can I walk away?

The other group with whom I am deeply enmeshed, not by my choice but by God's sometimes puzzling providence, is my opponents, Presbyterians who hold some theological and religious ideas that are antithetical to mine. By "sheer grace," says Bonhoeffer, we are joined in Christ as firmly to those who do not meet our standards of doctrine and piety as to those who do.(15) I have had the privilege of experiencing this connection first hand. Over the last decade, I have studied conservative protestants, including Presbyterians, hanging out in their groups and institutions and getting to know them. I have learned three things about my kinship with them.

First, though there are indeed people in this denomination who are bent on making mischief and doing harm, there are many more who are well-intentioned, and they are found in all parties and factions. I know because I have formed Christian friendships, which mean more to me than I can say, with some conservative Presbyterians.

Second, I have learned that liberal, moderate and conservative Presbyterians share a deep deposit of faith. In the course of my research, I have listened to dozens of sermons by evangelical Presbyterians, and most of them treat the scripture they proclaim in ways I would have had I been preaching or in ways I wish I had thought of. Our unremitting focus on issues that divide, to the exclusion of large numbers of theological convictions on which God has given us a common mind, is ungrateful. Perhaps God is judging our ingratitude by withholding further mutual understanding until we show some appreciation for the community of faith we've got.

Third, at the points we are irreducibly divided, and they are very real, my opponents still minister to me because they, unlike my allies, almost always see my faults and offenses and name them. Without this ministry of our opponents, Bonhoeffer reminds us, we can easily become "proud and pretentious," cutting ourselves off from the work of grace by judging our faith and practice to be so correct that we don't need grace.(16)

So: because I have opponents who care about me as a Christian, who share with me one faith, one Lord, and one baptism, and who help to save me from self-righteousness, I conclude that I should remain in a church with them for my own good.

Tell the truth and stay put. One footnote to these two principles, and one last word. The footnote: I said that separation from the part of the body into which one has been engrafted should be almost unthinkable. What would make it thinkable? One condition might be restrictions on the freedom and opportunity to testify to the truth. Some Presbyterians live under such restrictions. Unlike the rest of us, they cannot both lead reasonable lives and be ordained to positions of governing and teaching authority. As I just said, the generosity of those who stick with us even so puts us the rest of us in

their debt. At the same time, others who make the painful decision to leave because the Presbyterian Church will not permit them to respond to God's call deserve our support and admiration for their courage.

Are there other reasons to leave that might apply to those of us who do have full rights in the church? At those rare and dangerous moments when the church deserts its profession of faith on a wholesale basis--apostasy is the term for such moments--all Christians have to decide whether to separate themselves, either leaving or taking actions that will get them expelled. Without in any way minimizing the seriousness of our mistake about homosexuality--it is a deadly mistake; it must be corrected--I have to say that I do not think the Presbyterian Church is anywhere near that point. This is still God's church. Our denomination presents to the world a true confession that contains some serious error. While working correct the error, we have ample foundation for worshipping and serving God together, with full and glad and grateful hearts.

One last word. It is a tall order--telling the truth, sticking together even though we disagree. It is easy to get discouraged. How can we sustain our spirits in this difficult time? Let's try leaning on the promises of God. Last spring, I fell under the spell of an obscure passage of scripture on which I have now preached twice. It fits again here. In it, Zephaniah tells a familiar story: the political and religious leaders of God's people in Jerusalem have made the usual mess. A wrathful Lord pronounces judgment on their crimes. Zephaniah quotes the Lord: I will pour out my indignation; in the fire of my passion all the earth will be consumed. But God's plans and Zephaniah's prophecy do not end there. Speaking again for the Lord, Zephaniah utters this remarkable promise, which seems to apply to the whole city, errant leaders and their victims alike:

I will remove disaster from you. I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the Lord and serve him with one accord. They shall do no wrong and utter no lies. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

It's a promise to all of us. All of us--Covenant Network, Coalition, More Light Presbyterians and the great non-joining middle--all of us: With God's help, we shall call upon the Lord and serve God with one accord. We shall do no wrong and utter no lies. We shall pasture and lie down, and no one shall make us afraid.

ENDNOTES

1. Alexa Smith, "Despite Frustrations, Presbyterian Evangelicals Say They'd Rather Fight Than Switch: 200+ Gather for Presbyterian Coalition Gathering IV," News Briefs, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Issue No. 9926 (October 8, 1999), 8-11.

2. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1998.

3. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 164, N. 29. Volf cites *Lumen Gentium* as a source for the view that the church is "a subject" of salvation.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954), 53.
5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprinted 1998) Book IV, Chap. I, 14; Beveridge II, 292.
6. Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 297.
7. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Edition (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1987), 76.
8. Old School Presbyterians, for instance, gave pride of place to teaching the truth in propositional form. In an extreme expression of this view, J. Gresham Machen wrote, "Christian doctrine is not merely connected with the gospel; it is identical with the gospel" (quoted in Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists and Moderates* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 141-42). Dulles criticizes the emphasis on verbal witness over action in the theology of Barth and others who place priority on proclamation, the Word as event, kerygma as a happening.
9. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 149.
10. Morse, *Not Every Spirit*, 300.
11. Thomas F. Torrance, "Introduction," in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), xxxiii.
12. The whole passage, Book IV, Chap. I, 14, reads as follows: "They [who "look for a church altogether free from blemish"] exclaim that it is impossible to tolerate the vice which everywhere stalks abroad like a pestilence. What if the apostle's sentiment applies here also? Among the Corinthians it was not a few that erred, but almost the whole body had become tainted; there was not one species of sin merely, but a multitude, and those not trivial errors, but some of them execrable crimes. There was not only corruption in manners, but also in doctrine. What course was taken by the holy apostle, in other words, but the organ of the heavenly Spirit, by whose testimony the Church stands and falls? Does he seek separation from them? Does he discard them from the kingdom of Christ? Does he strike them with the thunder of a final anathema? He not only does none of these things, but he acknowledges and heralds them as a Church of Christ, and a society of saints. If the Church remains among the Corinthians, where envyings, divisions, and contentions rage; where quarrels, lawsuits, and avarice prevail; where a crime, which even the Gentiles would execrate, is

openly approved; where the name of Paul, whom they ought to have honored as a father, is petulantly assailed, where some hold the resurrection of the dead in derision, though with it the whole gospel must fall; where the gifts of God are made subservient to ambition, not to charity; where many things are done neither decently nor in order: If there the Church still remains, simply because the ministration of word and sacrament is not rejected, who will presume to deny the title of church to those to whom a tenth part of these crimes cannot be imputed? How, I ask, would those who act so morosely against present churches have acted to the Galatians, who had done all but abandon the gospel (Gal. i. 6), and yet among them the same apostle found churches?" Beveridge II, 293.

13. Book IV, Chap I, 17. Beveridge, II, 295.

14. Ellen Davis, "Sermon for Tuesday of 4th Epiphany, Year 2," Marquand Chapel, Yale Divinity School, January 30, 1996, unpublished.

15. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25-27.

16. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27.

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