

AlbertMohler.com

A Date with Disaster — Presbyterians Approve Homosexual Clergy

Monday, June 30, 2008



Meeting in San Jose, California, the Presbyterian Church USA, the liberal branch of American Presbyterianism, moved to approve homosexual clergy on June 27, 2008 — a date that may well mark a final blow against biblical orthodoxy in that denomination.

The PCUSA has debated sexuality issues for decades now, with activists for homosexual ordination pressing their case until they finally got their way at the denomination's General Assembly. In that historic meeting, the General Assembly actually approved several proposals.

Even before dealing directly with the question of ordination standards, the General Assembly approved a first step toward revising the denomination's official translation of the historic Heidelberg Catechism. Once again, the crucial issue was homosexuality. The question was "complex and multi-layered," as the proposing group admitted.

Here is how the official PCUSA news office [described the issue](#):

Most of the Assembly's attention focused on Question 87 of the catechism: "Can those who do not turn to God from their ungrateful, impenitent life be saved?"

The current text of the answer reads: "Certainly not! Scripture says, 'Surely you know that the unjust will never come into possession of the kingdom of God. Make no mistake: no fornicator or idolater; none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion, no thieves or grabbers or drunkards or swindlers, will possess the kingdom of God.'"

According to the overture rationale, two phrases in the current answer that were supplied by the 1962 translators do not appear in the original text or in any translations produced prior to 1962. The primary phrase that is in dispute is "or of homosexual perversion."

The words "homosexual perversion" in an official church document would, to say the least, present a challenge to approving the ordination of active homosexuals. The General Assembly voted to approve the change, arguing that the issue was accuracy in translation. Those opposed to the change noted that the catechism is making a direct reference to [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#), which explicitly *does* include homosexual behaviors among those condemned.

That out of the way (though requiring further action at the next General Assembly), the denomination then turned to the issue of standards for ordination. The language to be replaced requires that all ministers of the church must live in "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness." That language, consistent with Scripture and Christian tradition, is to be replaced with a new standard that would require nothing at all with reference to sexual integrity.

The new wording [would read](#):

Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination

and installation, pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation and establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.

The new wording is liberal in application and neo-orthodox in form. The minister must merely pledge to live in obedience to Christ, but with no reference whatsoever to what Jesus would require in terms of sexual ethics. The language about following where Jesus leads "through the witness of the Scriptures" reduces the Bible to a witness and obedience to utter subjectivity.

The proposed amendment to the standards now moves to the denomination's 173 regional units (presbyteries) where it must receive sufficient support. Similar efforts have failed in the past, but many believe that this proposal will be difficult to defeat. The defection of many conservatives from the denomination (and some churches as well) may weaken the opposition.

Nevertheless, even without the change in the standard, local presbyteries may well move to ordain active homosexuals anyway. The [Associated Press](#) explains how:

Of equal importance to advocates on both side of the debate, the assembly also voted to allow gay and lesbian candidates for ordination to conscientiously object to the existing standard. Local presbyteries and church councils that approve ordinations would consider such requests on a case-by-case basis.

That vote was an "an authoritative interpretation" of the church constitution rather than a change to it, so it goes into effect immediately. The interpretation supersedes a ruling from the church's high court, issued in February, that said there were no exceptions to the so-called "fidelity and chastity" requirement.

Taken together, these changes represent a disaster for this church. In capitulating to the demand that homosexuality be normalized, the church turned its back on the Bible, on its own tradition, and on the protests and prayers of its members who would, of all things, expect their ministers to exhibit "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness."

Just reflect for a moment about what the removal of those words really means. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA has just proposed to define its own denomination as a church for which those words no longer make sense.

