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# Following Jesus While Rejecting the Bible? Yet Another Tragedy in Mainline Protestantism

*This is yet another tragedy in the sad history of mainline Protestantism's race toward total theological disaster.*

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Yet another denomination has voted to ordain openly homosexual candidates to its ministry. Yesterday, the Presbyterian Church (USA) presbytery of the Twin Cities in Minnesota voted to approve a change to the church's constitution that will allow the denomination's 173 presbyteries to ordain persons without regard to sexual orientation.

The Twin Cities presbytery cast the deciding vote in what is now a 33-year effort to remove all restrictions on homosexuals serving in the church's ordained ministry. It became the 87th presbytery to affirm the action of the church's 219th assembly last summer authorizing the constitutional change. The action not only concludes over three decades of controversy over the ordination standards; it also reverses actions taken in 1997, 2001, and 2008, when similar efforts failed.

In 1996, the denomination restated its ordination requirements to include "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness." That policy had also required that candidates "refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."

The new constitutional section will read:

*"Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation. Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates."*

All references to marriage and chastity are gone, along with the language about refusal to repent of sin. The new language speaks instead of submission to the Lordship of Christ and being guided by Scripture and confessions. In any other context, that language might not seem revolutionary, but in this case, it means the denomination's surrender to those pushing for the normalization of homosexuality.

Put another way, this church has now decided that "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" is just too restrictive.

Grady Parsons, Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly, explained the meaning of the change: "Clearly what has changed is that persons in a same-gender relationship can be considered for ordination . . . . The gist of our ordination standards is that officers submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and ordaining bodies (presbyteries for ministers



and sessions for elders and deacons) have the responsibility to examine each candidate individually to ensure that all candidates do so with no blanket judgments.”

Why now? Parsons suggested that the victory by proponents of the ordination of homosexuals has come because of the exodus of larger conservative congregations from the denomination (approximately 100 over the last five years), the fact that many Presbyterians seemed “ready to get past this argument,” the growing acceptance of homosexuality in the larger culture, and the less controversial wording of this revision. He, along with others, expressed some measure of surprise and relief that the decision was made.

He told *The New York Times*, “We’ve been having this conversation for 33 years, and some people are ready to get to the other side of this decision. . . . Some people are going to celebrate this day because they’ve worked for it for a long time, and some people will mourn this day because they think it’s a totally different understanding of Scripture than they have.”

The Presbyterian Church (USA) now joins the Episcopal Church (US), the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in ordaining openly homosexual candidates to the ministry.

Both sides in this controversy understand the meaning of the decision. While this action deals specifically with ordination standards, it is really about the larger issue of homosexuality. Most observers expect that the decision to allow same-sex marriages will follow closely.

But even beyond the specific issue of homosexuality, the church faced two of the most fundamental questions of Christian theology — the authority of the Bible and the Lordship of Christ. In making this change, the church clearly affirms that one may submit to the Lordship of Christ without submitting to the clear teachings of Scripture.

That is a fundamental error that leaves this denomination now in the implausible position of claiming to affirm the Lordship of Christ while subverting the authority of Scripture. The removal of the constitutional language about marriage and chastity, coupled with the removal of the language about repentance from what Scripture identifies as sin, effectively means that candidates and presbyteries may defy Scripture while claiming to follow Christ.

Clearly, this action could not have happened without this denomination having abandoned any required belief in the full authority, inspiration, and truthfulness of the Bible long ago. This most recent decision sets the stage for the total capitulation of this church to the normalization of homosexuality — an act of open defiance against the Scriptures.

In a “churchwide letter” to the denomination, PC(USA) leaders stated:

*Reactions to this change will span a wide spectrum. Some will rejoice, while others will weep. Those who rejoice will see the change as an action, long in coming, that makes the PCUSA an inclusive church that recognizes and receives the gifts for ministry of all those who feel called to ordained office. Those who weep will consider this change one that compromises biblical authority and acquiesces to present culture. The feelings on both sides run deep.*

Well, the feelings no doubt run deep, but the injury to this church runs far deeper than feelings. This is yet another tragedy in the sad history of mainline Protestantism’s race toward total theological disaster.

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Laurie Goodstein, “[Presbyterians Approve Ordination of Gay People](#),” *The New York Times*, Tuesday, May 10, 2011.

“[Presbyterians to Allow Gay to Be Ordained Ministers](#),” *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Wednesday, May 11, 2011.

Jerry van Marter, “[PC\(USA\) Relaxes Constitutional Prohibition of Gay and Lesbian Ordination](#),” Presbyterian News Service, Tuesday, May 10, 2011.

“[Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\) Approves Change in Ordination Standard](#),” Presbyterian News Service, Tuesday, May

10, 2011.

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