

BEYOND REBUILDING? SHAPING A LIFE TOGETHER

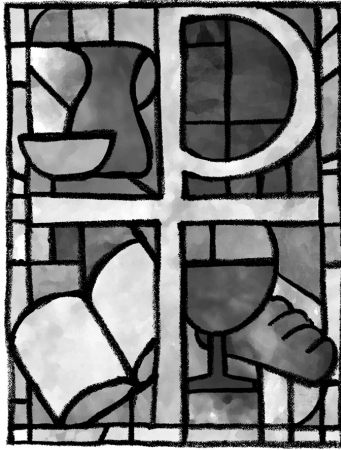
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BEYOND REBUILDING? SHAPING A LIFE TOGETHER

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(formerly Synod Executive of the Synod of Mid-America)**

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Contents

Foreword by Barry Ensign-George	5
I. Another Possible Church for a New Day <i>José Luis Casal, General Missioner, Tres Rios Presbytery</i>	9
II. What Can the Presbyterian Church Do to Turn Around Its Long Decline? <i>Carol Howard Merritt, Pastor, Western Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.; author and speaker</i>	24
III. Overcoming the Presbyterian Power Trap: Toward an Authentic Multicultural Witness in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) <i>J. Herbert Nelson II, Pastor, Liberation Community Presbyterian Church, Memphis, Tennessee</i>	32
IV. Rebuilding – or Building Up? An Alternative View of the Church and Its Future <i>Cynthia Holder Rich, Lilly Research Fellow, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan</i>	43
V. Thought Provoking, but Insufficient: A Reply to William J. Weston’s “Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment” <i>John L. Williams, Honorably Retired (formerly Synod Executive of the Synod of Mid-America)</i>	54

Foreword



Have we structured our life together in a way that serves our best aspirations? Do the current institutional arrangements of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) help us flourish? Of the many things we carry with us from previous generations of Presbyterians, do they all continue to work well—or is it time for some of them to be reworked, reshaped . . . or even replaced?

In *Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment* (Re-Forming Ministry Occasional Paper No. 3), Elder William (Beau) Weston sought to answer just such questions. A sociologist and careful student of the PC(USA), Professor Weston focused on structure, and on groups within the denomination that might have insight which could help us move forward. Weston called on us to draw more intentionally on the gifts and skills of presbytery executives, stated clerks, and “tall-steeple” pastors. He proposed that our structures for pursuing representation have succeeded in building a commitment to broad diversity in our leadership, and that the structures can and should be set aside. He urged us to work to ensure that in our common life as a denomination we are led by people whom we trust and are willing to follow.

In the Foreword to that paper I expressed my hope that Weston’s essay would be a contribution to the discussion we are now having about the structures which shape our life together in the PC(USA) (a discussion that already includes new proposals about our *Book of Order*).

Weston’s paper inspired a range of responses, to say the least: from quiet agreement, to a mix of agreement and disagreement, to strong disagreement, to disappointment and hurt, to anger. In the midst of often strong reactions there have been many thoughtful responses—the makings of an engaged, intense conversation.

Beyond Rebuilding? Shaping a Life Together carries that conversation forward. As conversation about Weston's paper developed, I invited a diverse group to offer their answers to the questions at the beginning of this Foreword, responding to *Rebuilding* but always focusing on questions of the PC(USA)'s present and future.

What they offer us is a rich mix.

José Luis Casal, general missionary of Tres Rios Presbytery, provides a full-spectrum theological and organizational look at our shared life in the present moment. Among the practices he commends is "hermeneutical accountability," openly sharing our differing interpretations of the Bible with one another in settings shaped not by our oppositions but by a renewed willingness to learn how we arrive at the place where we stand on debated issues.

Carol Howard Merritt, pastor of Western Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., and author of *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation*, as well as *Reframing Hope: Vital Ministry in a New Generation*,¹ points us toward the importance of young adults in our present and for our future together. Merritt highlights the opportunity to meet a generation of rising adults during a time in which our faith and its traditions have much to offer them, turning our attention away from ourselves, breaking the endless loops we find our life together running.

J. Herbert Nelson II is the pastor of Liberation Community Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, a congregation which (in Rev. Nelson's words) "evangelizes the poor into membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." Nelson probes the realities of racism in the life of the PC(USA), past and present, calling for us to confront lingering racism and to continue taking concrete steps toward the fuller diversity to which we've committed ourselves.

Cynthia Holder Rich is the Lilly Research Fellow at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Rich turns to some of the sociological sources drawn on by Weston, finding in them a sharp awareness of the importance of incorporating diversity and new participants in the leadership of any social organization. She affirms the importance of our commitments to diversity in leadership, because in doing so “we are becoming more the church that [the Apostle] Paul envisioned.”

John L. Williams is Honorably Retired, having served as synod executive of the Synod of Mid-America, among other calls. Williams is a lifelong Presbyterian, and a good candidate for a member of a “Presbyterian Establishment.” Williams calls for a broader perspective to guide us toward a better future. In particular, he reminds us of the role of theology in the midst of our discernment of the way to which we are called.

I hope that these strong contributions will bring greater fullness and depth to our conversation about how to shape a present that leads toward the fullness God calls us to.

We encourage you to join this conversation. We have set up a Facebook group for discussion of the paper, and invite those who are on Facebook to join the discussion (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/create.php?customize&gid=158963983225#/group.php?gid=158963983225>). In addition, we invite your e-mailed comments. These can be sent to barry.ensign-george@pcusa.org or anita.brown@pcusa.org. Finally, we welcome responses sent to us through the postal service: Re-Forming Ministry Program, Attn.: Barry Ensign-George, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon St., Rm. 2619, Louisville, KY 40202.

This conversation started within the Re-Forming Ministry program. Re-Forming Ministry seeks to cultivate communities of theological friendship. It calls together pastors, governing body leaders, and professors, gathering them in groups to think the church's faith together in and for the church. This initiative has been funded primarily by a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment. Further information about the Re-Forming Ministry program can be found at the Re-Forming Ministry Web site: <http://www.pcusa.org/re-formingministry>. I invite you to visit, read other papers presented there, and learn about the program.

The Re-Forming Ministry Occasional Papers series is one of three series of Occasional Papers published by the Office of Theology and Worship. None of the volumes in these series is a Presbyterian policy statement. Our intent in publishing the volumes in these series is to encourage deeper reflection and broad conversation. We hope that this paper will inspire its readers to such reflection and conversation.



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Note



1. Both published by The Alban Institute Press.



I. Another Possible Church for a New Day

José Luis Casal

Theological Bases

The most demanding challenge of our time is how to be the church of Jesus Christ with a clear message for the people we serve. The Bible challenges us to see and respond to the “signs of the times.”¹ In our efforts to address this challenge, we sometimes miss the point and confuse the target. An example is when we confuse church with structure and try to fix the structure to save the church. The actual world crisis complicates this challenge. Humankind is living in a global crisis. The issues of war and peace, ecology, gender, race and culture, and global economy dominate the world scenario. These “signs” of our time are challenging the church in a dramatic way. Systems and structures are usually connected to these issues. This is when we step upon very dangerous ground where we may miss the point and confuse the target. The question that may help us to redirect our conversation is very simple: Are we to save a system (structure) or humankind?

If our goal is to save the system, then we need to use the tools of sociology, economy, and political sciences. But the Word of God challenges us to proclaim God’s salvation of humankind; therefore, we need to use hermeneutics, theology, and church history. Systems and structures in the church are always subordinated to the salvation of humankind and if we miss this point we may be repeating the same mistakes of the secular society. One of the main responsibilities of the church is to be the conscience of the nation: announcing the gospel of salvation for every individual and denouncing injustice and all kinds of evils that diminish the image of God present in every human being. We need to perform our role with a

humble and profound sense of service, not as masters but as servants for the edification of the Body of Christ.

One of the most important developments in Christian thought during recent years is the understanding of mission as God's mission (*Missio Dei*). The old interpretation connected mission with evangelization, the planting of new churches, the creating of schools and community agencies connected with churches, and the sending of individuals as messengers of these projects. *Missio Dei* is a holistic approach in which the sender is God and the church is sent to heal, liberate, and plant the seeds of the Kingdom in each community, town, city, and country. What kind of functional structure do we need to be faithful to these goals? Paul Hooker in his essay

The new Form of Government our denomination is discussing is a basic effort to rebuild our system in a better direction.

“What Is Missional Ecclesiology?”² states that the commitments of a missional polity include providing “flexibility for mission in a changing and variable context” and encouraging “accountability on the parts of its covenanted partners to one another.” These two commitments point out the weakest part of our actual structure: flexibility is minimal and accountability is based more on individuals than on governing bodies.

The new Form of Government our denomination is discussing is a basic effort to rebuild our system in a better direction. It is not the last word, but at least eliminates the rigid structure of the actual establishment for a more biblical interpretation based on a conciliar mentality that encourages participation and diversity. The Council of Jerusalem³ was a deliberative body where churches were equally represented and authority was discerned by the assembly (*ecclesia*). The failure of councils in the church's history came when they were transformed from a deliberative body to an authoritative body. With Constantine councils became part of the Roman establishment, exchanging flexibility and representation for authority and ecclesiastic hierarchy. As John Calvin said in the sixteenth century, let's go “to the sources” to revitalize the image of councils with the spirit and purpose we find in the Bible.⁴ We need to look at the *Book of Order* with a new vision: this means less book and more order. To reduce the size of the book is not to destroy the Presbyterian system but to allow the practice of

the imagination we promise in our ordination vows and to give space to the renewed action of the Holy Spirit that we claim in our most known motto, “*Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda.*”⁵

Leadership Mentality

In our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) we have a deep problem of leadership. During these last years we have seen the strengthening of a “corporative”⁶ mentality at every level of our church. Some of the job descriptions for pastors or positions in governing bodies describe the job more as a chief executive officer than as a minister of the Word and Sacrament or a church’s leader.

This “corporative” mentality may work for a corporation but certainly not for the church. Some of the main characteristics of this mentality are the concentration of power in a few hands—the opposite of our shared and representative form of government; the concentration of the activities of the corporation on the headquarters—the opposite of the concept that recognizes the local church as “*Missio Dei*”; the change of deliberative processes for executive decisions or board directions—that is, the diminishing of the power and impact of presbyteries and synods in favor of a central power and hierarchy; and the use of finances as normative for activities and services that gradually replaces stewardship with fundraising campaigns.

These things affect our capacity to be a church. For instance, standard corporate practice is to have security personnel escort employees whose position has been terminated from the employer’s premises. This practice may make sense for a corporation that handles technological secrets, formulas of production, and secret investments. Even in these cases, Christians cannot accept a practice that humiliates a human being. But in the church we don’t have any kind of secrets to justify that policy and if we have something that we think may be in danger when we fire or “downsize” individuals, we need to behave in a different manner.

In our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) we have a deep problem of leadership.

The “corporative” mentality also creates problem for the church because of the way corporations handle relations with unions. We don’t have unions

in the church but we have caucuses, advocacy groups, and Committees on Representation who play similar roles. For a “corporative” mentality these church groups may be perceived as a potential danger to the functioning of the establishment, and this generates suspicion and creates divisions in the body of Christ. In the Bible the poor, women, children, outcasts, and gentiles were recognized by Jesus and his followers not as a problem but as part of the solution to the problems. In the Bible advocacy was a practice

The main responsibility of the advocate is to intercede on behalf of other people: it is the voice of the voiceless.

with strong roots in the Old Testament, but it was also part of the history of salvation, with God as the main advocate for humankind. John’s writings translate the Greek word *parakleton* as advocate or comforter. He uses the same word to name the Holy Spirit. The main responsibility of the advocate is to intercede on behalf of other people: it is the voice of the voiceless. Our governing bodies within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

should look at these groups as part of the solution to our national crisis. We need to increase their participation instead of diminishing their funding or eliminating their organized presence among us.⁷

Multiculturalism Under Review

We need to review our whole idea of multiculturalism. In a general sense, this concept has been understood as the recognition and celebration of other cultures, but it also can be used as a new type of “apartheid.”⁸ When our idea of multiculturalism does not go beyond the level of a gathering every year and/or an occasional joint worship services, when we accept multiculturalism but reject the permanent interaction with another culture, we are in the ground of apartheid. In practice this is what Herbert Marcuse, the famous German American philosopher, called “repressive tolerance” that allows racism, discrimination, and xenophobia to flourish in the name of diversity, tolerance, and freedom.⁹

We are not only in need of cultural celebration and recognition but also of cultural interaction and tension. This is cross-culturalism. We need to expose others to our culture and we also need to be exposed to the culture of others, and to be open to deal with tensions and conflicts this openness creates. The result will be something different but better if it keeps the best of

each culture. The gospel was revealed to humankind wrapped in a particular culture, but the Holy Spirit exposed the gospel to the action and reaction of different cultures. During this process we accumulated good and not so good experiences. The result is a Christian faith that has roots in many places and has assimilated the teachings that God has been providing along the centuries and through different cultures. This is what Emil Brunner, the famous Swiss Reformed theologian, called “God’s revelation to humans.”¹⁰ It is the adventure to find signs of God’s accompaniment along the centuries and to learn from that experience. A missional church is culturally vulnerable, biblically grounded, and spiritually sensitive to the permanent revelation of God.

Undercover Racism

Now that we have the first African American president some think it is time to dismantle the system that made his election possible. We hear voices in our society claiming the disappearance of Affirmative Action and other programs. We have similar voices within the church.

John L. Jackson Jr. in his book *Racial Paranoia* defines what he called “Cardio Racism” as “what the law can’t touch, what won’t be easily proved or disproved, what can’t be simply criminalized and deemed unconstitutional.”¹¹ It’s not easy to discover Cardio Racism within the church because the fear of being perceived as racist makes us act “politically correct,” even when we don’t understand the whole meaning of what we are doing. There is also a great amount of naïveté and sometimes people are not aware of the racist implications of what they are saying. The first time I attended the Association of Executive Presbyters (AEPs), I discovered how few racial ethnic senior executives we had: 1 Hispanic, 4 African Americans, 3 Koreans, and 1 Japanese American. We were 9 out of 173, 5 percent. The percentage of women was a little better but still far lower than that of the white males. During the Assembly I called it to the attention of my colleagues by saying, “Friends, I hear a lot of information about the multicultural church and about diversity and inclusiveness, but it looks to me as if this movie hasn’t arrived at this theater.” This is an example of what I call undercover racism present in our denomination. We don’t have any rule prohibiting racial ethnic persons from being elected to these positions but these numbers were real and are still in similar proportion. This analysis may be applied to other areas like senior pastors of large congregations, synod executives, etc.

There are some places where we are more careful with inclusivity like the General Assembly Mission Council and our General Assemblies. This is possible because our Constitution has a mandatory Committee on Representation that oversees and promotes fair representation at every level of the church. What would happen if we eliminated this committee? Discrimination and racism would probably be more evident, and we would see less racial ethnic, youth, and women in our structure. General Colin Powell said recently in an interview on CNN, “Racism is not over in the United States.” This is also true in our church.

We may apply similar approaches to the immigrant debate. John L. Jackson says in his book, “The immigration debate in the United States today is rhetorically distinct from traditionally more blatant forms of xenophobia. For one thing, there is little mention of race as a biological excuse for discrimination at our borders. Everything is about culture, not biology—cultures at war, cultures clashing, cultures under siege. Literary critic Walter Benn Michaels is just the loudest voice warning us against such weaponized versions of culture, versions that serve as little more than euphemism for the entrenched racism of old.”¹²

Missional Structure

A missional structure organizes the work of the church in a way that facilitates flexibility to respond to God’s mission (*Missio Dei*). If we start from the assumption that local churches are organized to be instruments of *Missio Dei*, the offices that provide resources, training, and support to local congregations should be as close as possible to them.

The programmatic area located in Louisville is far away from local congregations and because of the geographical diversity of the areas where churches are located, they have to produce neutral or general resources that do not always fill the expectations of congregations, creating rejection and critiques. Programmatic areas should be located at the synod level. Synods may produce materials more adjustable to the situations and conditions of the geographical areas where they are located. At the synod level it is easier to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, resources and training activities. Officers may receive direct and immediate feedback from the congregations because they will be accountable to congregations. In recent years, some

synods have eliminated programmatic areas for financial reasons to the point that some of them have practically disappeared. The relocation of these areas to synods will increase synods' participation in the life of the church, reconnecting our programs with local congregations and saving money by the redistribution of our financial resources in a better manner. With this model the General Assembly in Louisville would only need a coordinator to facilitate and share information on what is happening around the country and to coordinate national or regional gatherings according to the needs of the synods.

Another area that should be directly in the hands of their constituency is the racial ethnic division. With the disappearance of the National Presbyterian Cross Caucus the work and influence of racial ethnic caucuses began to decrease. Because of financial reasons the denomination has been reducing the budget for caucuses every year but at the same time has kept functioning offices to work with those groups. These offices are accountable to personnel in Louisville who cannot be directly involved with the work of every racial ethnic group. This disconnection makes it impossible to evaluate the performance of the officers properly. A different model of structure is needed. First we need to empower the work of caucuses, encouraging cultural interaction. Certainly we cannot jump immediately on this because a process of preparation is necessary for each constituency to understand other cultures and to begin to interact with them. The methodology of cultural proficiency is the tool that we need to use in this period of preparation.

A missional structure organizes the work of the church in a way that facilitates flexibility to respond to God's mission (*Missio Dei*).

We need to fund our caucuses so they may hire a full-time officer who will work for them and will be accountable to each group. Each caucus would be responsible for the types of activities and their annual program. This structure would allow us to combine the racial ethnic offices into one office that would periodically contact moderators and full-time officers of each caucus to keep our denomination informed about cross-cultural activities and facilitate gatherings and events of cultural interaction with the caucuses according to their needs.

To improve trust and confidence we need to share power, reduce expenses, invest in congregations, and develop a missional perspective.

The rest of the organizational structure of the General Assembly is still unclear and dysfunctional. Ordinary members of our churches do not understand who is doing what and where the levels of accountability are. The internal division between GAMC and OGA is not perceived by our common people. For an outsider, General Assembly is everybody who works in the building, and this division does not make sense. I am sure we would be more efficient if these two areas were transformed into one.

A missional structure in Louisville might be focused on constitutional works, publications, ministry and vocations, ecumenical and interfaith relations, international relations, a legal area, a connectional area to facilitate the interaction of programs at the synod level, and those programs that have special funding. This more manageable structure would help us to decentralize the work of the church, empowering our synods, presbyteries, and local churches.

It has been said that there is a crisis of trust in our church. This deficit of trust is deeper and more dangerous than the financial deficit. To improve trust and confidence we need to share power, reduce expenses, invest in congregations, and develop a missional perspective.

Participatory and Deliberative Assemblies

To complete the analysis of our structure we need to talk about our biennial meeting, the General Assembly. The first problem we need to address is the volume of business we intend to cover in a week. The commissioners are overwhelmed by hundreds of different types of documents. Resolutions, overtures, reports, authoritative interpretations, and recommendations are addressed in a “Chamber of Commerce Fair” scenario where numerous groups try to “sell” their ideas, usually connected with the documents the commissioners have to discuss and vote on. This environment reduces the time available for deliberation, discernment, and dialogue and forces commissioners to make quick decisions. Another consequence of this

overload of business is the ambiguity and inconsistency of different decisions. Sometimes it looks as if two different groups were in session at the same time and place but producing different results. We need to find a way to reduce the amount of business for discussion in each Assembly. Maybe we need to reshape the process of overtures to GA or maybe we need to establish some order according the type of documents submitted to the Assembly.

One of the most important achievements of our Assemblies is what we call “advisory delegates.” Through this principle we have empowered different groups to have an advisory voice in the Assembly for the benefit of the commissioners. The presence of the youth has been tremendously valuable and significant and we need to keep them as part of our structure. It is folly to believe we can lose our youth and still build a meaningful

. . . We have empowered different groups to have an advisory voice in the Assembly for the benefit of the commissioners.

and relevant church structure. The main idea is to give voice to the voiceless and to grant presence to groups which have been pushed to the background. Not every group needs to be represented, but those who have been silenced for a long time do. We have a problem of inconsistency because there is no other place where we repeat this model. The solution is not to eliminate the advisory system but to extend the system to our synods and presbyteries. It would be good also to open this advisory system for racial ethnic groups or to create some regulations that may guarantee more inclusive representation among commissioners.

Fundraising and Stewardship

One of our pathological problems is the reluctance to speak about stewardship. Pastors and elders avoid preaching on this, and the pledge system in our churches sometimes is addressed as a financial system. The word tithes is not used in many churches, and the annual budget of the congregation depends on our capacity to raise funds instead of our acceptance of the biblical challenge. Fundraising has replaced stewardship, and this is another example of our “corporative” mentality. Fundraising may be a tool for particular things in some institutions, but the solution for the church budget is the biblical mandate of tithing and the collection of offerings.

The influence of fundraising in the church is so strong that we try to solve the financial problems by targeting “major givers” or “donors.” This influence also creates competition among different governing bodies trying to solve their problems by targeting individuals directly. We need to solve the financial problems of the church by sharing what we have instead of competing for donations. We need to recover the biblical image of the “widow’s offering” and the importance of the tithe.¹³

When we research the idea of offerings and tithing in the Bible, we discover that these practices were adopted by the people of God as a system to keep a fair distribution of the wealth and also as a system to avoid accumulation of capital. It was a system to redistribute God’s blessings among his children.¹⁴

Gospel and Technology

The major revolution of the second half of the twentieth century was the microchip revolution. The technological advances of the last fifty years create a barrier that sometime isolates older generations. Generational attitudes are creating real differences in dealing with theological problems, biblical interpretation, and the missional calling of the church. This technological future will happen with or without our permission and participation, so the real problem for the church is not how to be relevant for this technological generation, but how to continue being relevant to older generations in a technological era.

The impact of technology presents an ethical challenge to the church. We need to begin to analyze the meaning of preaching in the era of “texting,” or the impact of Google in Bible study and hermeneutics. A major success of our General Assemblies is the incorporation of technology. We need to continue improving our technological capacity. Blogs, Facebook, social networking, and chat areas are the future of interaction between human beings. The main problem we need to address is how to stop the race toward individual

Face-to-face interaction has been and still is the foundation of the church.

isolation that is implicit in technology. Face-to-face interaction has been and still is the foundation of the church. *Koinonia*¹⁵ cannot happen in isolation; virtual reality, where you live something that is not real, cannot substitute for real behavior, where your actions have ethical implications. But maybe it is time to investigate the possibilities of an “electronic

koinonia.” Is it a challenge? Yes, and we will never know the answer if we do not try.

While we discuss these issues, we need to continue using the technological tools that will allow us to spread the gospel, announcing the old message with a new format.

Hermeneutical Accountability

We cannot address the renewal of the Presbyterian Church if we ignore what many people have called “the elephant in the room.” The discussion around human sexuality is one of the most profound and transformative theological challenges facing our churches today. This discussion has dominated our Presbyterian debate during the last thirty years. The center of discussion has been ordination standards. Both parties claim that they are tired of discussions that take away our energy and ignore the most important mandate for the church, but both parties continue reviving the debate every year. The heart of the problem is hermeneutical—how do we interpret Scriptures? It is no secret that we had and we still have in our congregations gay and lesbian persons. Some of them are now openly known but others are still living a double life. Some churches have practiced the unwritten policy “don’t ask, don’t tell,” and other churches have decided to challenge the system and open the door to these persons.

Through the years, the church has been discussing many different arguments: medical research, theological explanations, and biblical interpretations. We have been using a confrontational and argumentative hermeneutic. Years ago, debate was more passionate, subjective, and emotional; now it is more civil, objective, and respectful but still confrontational and argumentative.

Another circumstance that confuses and complicates the debate within the church is the way our society addresses and discusses this issue and the ramifications for inclusiveness, civil rights, laws, etc. The experience of cultural and religious diversity has led many persons to conclude that religious beliefs and moral values are a matter of personal preference, and this is not correct. The discussion around moral standards complicates the scenario, and for the first time the church is not dictating the agenda. Seeking to restore the influence and leadership of the church on the social and political arena is not the answer but a way to rebuild or repatch the

establishment. The Constantinian Era has passed away, and we are living in new times where the church has to be only the church with a clear message of redemption, justice, and peace. We are *Missio Dei*, and we are called to challenge the social, political, and cultural structure of our world and country.

Several years ago we created an experiment called the Peace, Unity, and Purity Task Force. We put together people of different and antagonistic positions with the mandate to work together and to produce a report about ordination standards. This group discovered how to work together in spite of their differences, realizing that this discovery was the real treasure they had to share. Their experience confirmed that the only way to be connectional is to be relational. They followed a process to discover the will of God called “discernment.”

After this important experiment maybe the logical step would be a period of time to allow the church to enter in a relational process. This is what I call “hermeneutical accountability.” Our church needs to be engaged in hermeneutical conversations, not by trying to convince anyone or to confront different positions but to care for each other. “God is Lord of our conscience,” but God is also the loving presence who cares for our personal growth. This is the foundation of hermeneutical accountability. The way to practice this is when we are mutually invited to share our biblical interpretations for the mutual edification of the believers, the Body of Christ.¹⁶ John Calvin, speaking about the Sacrament of Communion, said, “In order fully to comply with our Lord’s injunction, there is another disposition which we must bring. It is to confess with the mouth and testify how much we are indebted to our Savior, and return him thanks, not only that his name may be glorified in us, but also to *edify others* (emphasis added).”¹⁷

Unfortunately, because of our confrontational and argumentative mindset we paid more attention to the PUP report and recommendations than to the relational process they discovered. For that reason we are here again

voting one more time on the ordination standards. Apart from the final outcome of the vote I believe we are missing the most important part of the valuable experiment we created, the relational process. Many brothers and sisters have been claiming that the delay of justice becomes injustice, but also justice at any cost becomes injustice. We believe in the “costly grace” announced by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer,¹⁸ but grace is a process of death and resurrection, a process that is always relational and demands our sacrifice. That is the cost: to build up the body of Christ. This process is wrapped in the most challenging and mysterious concept of the Bible, the *kairos*, the time of God. The process to discover the will of God through the action of the Holy Spirit is a costly relationship. The main problem we need to discuss is not only if we are ready to listen to the voice of God, or if we are ready to move under the leading of God, or if we are ready to follow God’s word, or if we are ready to wait for the *kairos* of God, but if we are ready to love each other, working in the edification of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The “possible” Church for a new day is not a utopia; it is a reality we may and we have to be ready to assume. Recently, a friend told me that if the church of the future would return to the 1950s, then the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) would be ready for the future. We need to renew, reinvent, and reimagine the church, and we don’t have to be afraid of this process, because renewal is “an earnest of eternal life and joy.”¹⁹ Are we willing to take the challenge of a new church? It is our turn to respond.

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Notes



1. Matthew 16:3.
2. Paul Hooker, "What Is Missional Ecclesiology?" Paper presented at the meeting of the Synod of the Sun, February 11–12, 2009. Available online at <http://www.pcusa.org/formofgovernment/pdfs/missional-ecclesiology09.pdf>.
3. For a complete study of the Council of Jerusalem, consult A. Wikenhauser, *Los Hechos de los Apóstoles*, Colección Biblioteca Herder, 96 (Barcelona: Herder, 1967), 232–267, esp. 250–265.
4. For more information about the role of councils and political structures in the Bible, consult Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Religion of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 257–316.
5. *Book of Order*, G-2.0200. "The church affirms 'Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,' that is, 'The church reformed, always reforming,' according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit." A footnote adds that this Latin phrase could be translated "The church reformed, always to be reformed" according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.
6. "Corporative" is not an actual English word. I prefer to use it here in this essay since using the word "corporate," which would be proper, is liable to be misunderstood by Presbyterians as referring to the collective nature of the church or business.
7. For more information on this issue consult "Hearing and Singing New Songs of God: Shunning Old Discords and Sharing New Harmonies," Report of the Women of Color Consultation Task Force to the 218th General Assembly (2008): Recommendations. Available at <http://www.pcusa.org/acwc/wocctaskforcereport02-22-08.pdf>; Recommendations will be found on 10.
8. Derived from the Afrikaans word for "apartness," apartheid is a term that came into usage in the 1930s and signified the political policy under which the races in South Africa were subject to "separate development" (Dictionary.com).
9. Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," available online at <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/65repressivetolerance.htm>. This essay examines the idea of tolerance in our advanced industrial society. The conclusion reached is that the realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, and opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed.
10. "God's kingdom is thus a matter of the dramatic in-breaking of God's spirit, rather than of evolution. It is not a movement of man's gradual progress toward God, but of God's revelation to humans." Emil Brunner, *The Divine Human Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1934).
11. John L. Jackson Jr., *Racial Paranoia* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2008), 87.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 197. Jackson is citing Walter Benn Michaels, "Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (summer 1992): 655–85.
13. Luke 21:1–4; Exodus 25:2; 29:39; Amos 4:5; Matthew 5:23; Genesis 14:20; Deuteronomy 12:14.

14. For more information about the economical implications of the biblical images of tithes and offerings consult Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 133–137.
15. *Koinonia* is a Greek word that means communion, communication, fellowship.
16. 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 10:23; 1 Peter 2:5; Jude 1:20.
17. John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Accessed online: <http://www.ondoctrines.com/2cal0505.htm>; the quoted passage is from paragraph 25.
18. "Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus; it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'" Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised and unabridged edition, translated by R. H. Fuller, translation revised by Irmgard Booth (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 48.
19. Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. III, analysis of Psalm 103. Available at www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc3.Ps.civ.html.



II. What Can the Presbyterian Church Do to Turn Around Its Long Decline?

Carol Howard Merritt

As Beau Weston points out in “Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment,” the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been declining in membership for the last forty years. Ministers and members often speculate why there has been a decrease, and we hear reasons ranging from our theological viewpoints, to the way that we educate our pastors, to the encouragement of women’s ordination, to the fact that we talk about the possibility of ordaining people who are in same-gender relationships. There are those who believe that we have lost members because we have been unable to deconstruct our institutional church quickly enough.

In the midst of these voices, Weston has given us another perspective on the matter. He states, “If the Presbyterian Church is to end its endemic crisis and turn around its long decline, it will need to rebuild the Presbyterian Establishment,” defining an establishment as “an integrated body of authoritative leaders.”

I would like to look a bit more at the question that lies at the heart of Weston’s paper. It is the query that many of us are passionate about answering: What can the Presbyterian Church do to end its endemic crisis and turn around its long decline?

I do not agree with Weston’s conclusion that rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment is going to turn around our decline. As I mine the pages of Weston’s paper, I do see that there are things that we can change, governing

bodies that we can restructure, and this is where I concur with some of what Weston outlines.

For instance, our synods have gone from robust mission-oriented bodies with great concern and resources for our seminaries, to bodies with wonderful leadership and dwindling budgets. Unfortunately, in many circumstances they have become an extra layer of beauracracy, and yet we keep them running even when we do not see much need for them. Of course, dismantling the synods is not going to be the answer to turning around the Presbyterian Church's decline.

So, if the key to our membership decline as a denomination is not in rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment or restructuring our middle governing bodies, then what is it? Clearly, we need to do something. What can we do to turn around this long pattern of dismal decreases?

We can do what growing churches do: we can love our neighbors, care for our communities, and tell people about the good news of Jesus Christ. In our particular denomination, the most crucial thing for us to do is to envision a church that ministers from generation to generation.

Ministering from Generation to Generation

If we look around our congregations and add twenty years to the people in the pews, many of us realize that our churches may not last another generation. When we calculate the estimated life span of most of our members, there is a crisis looming that is far more treacherous than what has occurred in the last forty years. Clearly, we will need to respond with great haste, not only to the attrition that occurred in the last few decades, but also to the great loss that will be coming soon.

Our decreasing membership rolls not only represent a critical moment for our denomination, but they also mirror a perilous time for a generation of young adults in our society at large. Robert Wuthnow, who teaches Sociology of Religion at Princeton University, estimates that six million men and women under the age of forty-five are missing from our churches.¹ They do not attend the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or any other mainline denomination, and they are increasingly walking away from our country's evangelical churches.

So as we ask what we can do to reverse our diminishing membership, there is a clear answer: if we hope to have a vital denomination in the next twenty years, we can begin to reach out to an emerging generation, a group of men and women who are longing to be a part of spiritual traditions and social justice movements. Our evangelism, ministries, and new churches can be geared toward young adults, men and women in their twenties and thirties.

As a pastor, I realize that it is difficult to focus attention on attracting and ministering to young adults, especially with increasingly aging congregations. Our structures encourage the leadership skills of older members who may be out of touch with the needs and hopes of the young. So, as we visit hospitals and nursing homes, neglecting ministry with a new generation becomes easy as we go about our day-to-day work. Yet, as we imagine a vital, growing denomination, reaching out, addressing the needs, and encouraging the beliefs of young adults will be crucial.

Why would we focus on young adults above other generations? Most obviously, men and women in their twenties and thirties are not as established in their routines or religious preferences. Denominational loyalty is a thing of the past and—writing as a woman who grew up a conservative Baptist and converted to Presbyterianism—that is a wonderful thing.² As we begin reaching out to young adults, we realize that they are much more fluid in their denominational preferences; so, we are more likely not

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only to attract men and women who were baptized and confirmed in the Presbyterian Church, but also people who walked away from other mainline churches, evangelical congregations, or those with no faith tradition at all. In other words, we can move beyond relying on a strategy of propagation to populate our congregations, and begin looking at our larger communities.

In addition, demographically, the men and women who are coming of age in our country make up the largest generation in American history; furthermore, they are highly educated, spiritually hungry, and

socially concerned. In other words, this massive number of men and women are wandering, and they are often looking for the things that we have been nurturing in our Presbyterian churches for hundreds of years: a connection with God, the world, and a community. Not only do they have tremendous gifts to offer our denomination, but as Presbyterians, because of our commitment to social justice and spiritual traditions, we are uniquely positioned to reach out to them.

Of course, it will take a great deal of intention, but the coming years could be an extremely fruitful time for Presbyterians. However, it will mean that we, as a denomination, will need to begin an extensive effort to shift our focus, take the following steps, and begin to imagine other measures.

- (1) We can shift from relying on a new generation to drift back into our sanctuaries when they get married and need to have their children baptized. Instead, we can reach out to them where they are, as men and women who may not have any faith tradition, a stable career, or a nuclear family.
- (2) We can begin to rethink our advertising, and move from investing thousands of dollars for an announcement on flat newsprint, to making sure that our church websites are well designed and interactive. We can reach out with new media and engage in social networking.
- (3) We can move from mourning our dying churches, to seeing a church closing as an opportunity for new life. We can begin reinvesting our resources—not in the stock market, but directly into planting innovative spiritual communities. Planting churches is the single best way to grow a denomination. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we have hundreds of pastors who would like to start congregations. What if we made it our goal to support them in their dreams and visions?
- (4) We can broaden our focus, from not only welcoming those who “know what it means to be Presbyterian,” but also to inviting and accepting men and women from a variety of backgrounds. Learning to talk to people outside of our church walls, about faith and everything else, we can become beacons of hope and restoration. And, in this particular time, we can especially minister to those who are leaving politically conservative evangelical megachurches.

- (5) We can begin to stop allowing our young gifted pastors to flounder, without positions or without adequate salaries to cover their educational debt. We can encourage the placement of our recent seminary graduates, creating new jobs for them, and taking care that they are paid according to the cost of living in the area in which they serve.
- (6) We can take measures to reduce our dependence on the leadership of our retired elders and ministers to make inherited structures continue. Instead, we can begin to imagine new ways to encourage a new generation and share leadership with a wider diversity of ethnicities.

Sharing Leadership with a New Generation

Out of all the things that we can do, sharing leadership and giving real power to a new generation may be the most important. Certainly, the wisdom that comes from years of experience and service should always be valued. But in our denomination, we clearly hear the voices of those with experience; we do not always tune our ears or give significant authority to men and women who may not have a thick resume, but do have vision, innovation, and a long-term future stake in our denomination.

According to Weston, we need to focus our attentions on rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment. He argues that in the Sixties, we dismantled our authoritative structures when we required that decision-making bodies be made up of women and diverse ethnicities and we encouraged youth leadership. In Weston's opinion, men and women should be chosen to lead our church, based on an equal representation of elders and ministers, and on their ability to lead. The fact that men or women are successful in their

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professional lives usually indicates their leadership ability, and if pastors are the heads of tall-steeple churches, then that also points to their skills as administrators.

On the other hand, when we began to think of our leaders in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender, Weston argues, we are less likely to choose those with the most authority, power, and influence in our

society. Over the last four decades, after structuring ourselves to the whims of the sixties, we have been losing our authority in the culture, and our members in the local church.

Weston’s recommendations concerning representation seem to be imprudent and contrary to what God calls the church to be.

To begin, as a pastor, I strive to make sure that the very best leaders are part of our decision-making bodies. Yet pastors and nominating committees often find it more practical to stretch, to look for leadership within and beyond those our culture sees as successful, because it help us to understand and attract a wider variety of people.

We learn to consider people who may not be a part of our intimate circle of friends, men who may not be members of the dominant ethnic group, or women who might make less money than they do. Often, we can see leadership as something that the church can help a person develop, so we might choose someone who has not had much experience yet. Overall, maintaining the Committee on Representation’s guidelines encourages a greater discipline and rigor in finding the best leadership possible.

Would nominating committees ordinarily choose men and women, and people from diverse ethnicities, if they did not have to? Perhaps they would. But Weston goes even farther in ensuring a much smaller, much less diverse pool of candidates when he suggests that our tall-steeple pastors should be the natural leaders in our denomination. Even though women make up half (or more) of our seminary enrollment, they only make up three percent of those who are at large churches.

If the leadership is made up of a diverse representation of gender, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic class, then that is a primary indication of a healthy organization.

Abiding by the Committee on Representation’s requirements—engaging in this stretching exercise and taking a disciplined look at the full pool of membership for the best possible candidates—can have immeasurable, lasting effects on an organization. If the leaders of an organization know the particular needs of certain groups, they can also be more adept in attracting people who are like them.

As a woman and member of Generation X, having leadership that is made up of men and women from a variety of ethnicities and ages is absolutely

crucial when I decide to become a part of an organization or a church. If the leadership is made up of a diverse representation of gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic class, then that is a primary indication of a healthy organization. If the appropriate diversity is not sitting around the leadership table, I will choose not to become a part of the body, or if I do become a part of it, then helping to transform the leadership becomes a primary goal. If there are people my age or younger involved in the leadership, then I know that the organization will have a slightly different perspective. This shift toward inclusion will become even more important as we reach out to adults under the age of twenty-five, because they make up the most ethnically diverse generation that our country has ever seen.

What Is God Calling the Church to Be?

Finally, as a pastor, I must dig a bit deeper at this point. It is my vocation to not only look at what would be administratively practical and prudent, but to also consider the ways in which we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this context, our most poignant ministry as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has not and will not come from being the most powerful authority in our country. It is not how many Presbyterian politicians sit in Congress, or how many of our elected leaders are chief executive officers, or even how many of our General Assembly representatives come from tall-steeple churches. As we minister in the name of our crucified Savior, Jesus Christ, we know that our most profound message is one that proclaims healing in our own brokenness, hope in the midst of death, and abundant life to the hurting world in which we serve. We have a gospel that often calls us to speak truth to the ruling powers, incites us to dream of the reign of God, and stimulates our merciful imaginations.

Focusing our energy on rebuilding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a center of power and authority in our culture may distract us from doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. It may divert us from hearing the voices of those who have long been silenced, and keep us from laying down our own lives for “the least of these.”

In this moment in our history, the world does not need another religious institution bent on amassing power. The world needs us to be the church, the Body of Christ, imitators of the one who gathered young men and women

of lowly estate, transformed their lives, and turned the world upside down. The good news and work of Jesus Christ is not found in efforts of establishing an institution of rich and powerful members; rather, it is maintained by the proclamation of a God who suffers and

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taught us to see the suffering of others.

Notes



1. Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 52–53.
2. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, accessed on May 5, 2009. Forty-four percent of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.



III. Overcoming the Presbyterian Power Trap: Toward an Authentic Multicultural Witness in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

J. Herbert Nelson II

My Story of Race, Gender, Power, Faith, and Being Presbyterian

As a child growing up in the segregated South during the 1960s, I was always aware of my race and the negative connotations toward African Americans. The “Orangeburg Massacre” remains an obscure event in United States history, but it is one event that shaped my consciousness regarding racial domination, power, and control.¹ On February 8, 1968 (two months before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.), twenty-seven African American students were shot in the back and three were killed by white state highway patrolmen, after a peaceful protest at the front entrance of South Carolina State University. The protest focused on integrating Harry Floyd’s bowling alley, which was located near the college campus. The three students killed were Samuel Hammond, Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith. Delano Middleton was a Wilkinson High School student returning home from the movies. The single redemptive act since that dreadful night in Orangeburg was Governor Mark Sanford’s cursory apology thirty-five years later.² The State of South Carolina has not comprehensively undertaken steps toward truth and reconciliation of its actions. Consequently, Orangeburg still remains captive to the burden of historical memory regarding systemic racism leading to death and pain.³

I was only eight years old and the son of a Presbyterian pastor who served as state conference president of the South Carolina Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the

height of the civil rights movement. Our family lived through the Orangeburg Massacre. We lived through the fear of curfews, military vehicles in our city streets, school closings, and unapologetic dominance, control, and murder by white highway patrolmen.

During the same period we lived within a segregated denomination—the Presbyterian Church. I was raised, ordained, and served my first call in all-black governing bodies in our denomination.⁴ The church of Jesus Christ represented for me the microcosm of a segregated society with all of the vile and vicious racial overtones coated with talk of Jesus’ love. It was clear that the church shared within its own ranks a devalued view of African Americans.

While my father served the church and the community as an advocate for the civil rights of all people, I became increasingly aware that the Presbyterian Church vacillated between its posture of racial inequality and adherence to the Scriptures that announce God’s claim that all of humankind is created in the likeness and image of the Almighty (Genesis 1:26). The images of Eugene Carson Blake, speaking on

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behalf of the ecumenical movement at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with Dr. King during the March on Washington, were overshadowed by a church divided over the issue of slavery.⁵ During the same period women of color were not ordained in the Presbyterian Church.⁶ Like the society in which the church existed, we did not symbolize a multicultural existence. People of color and women called by God were denied the freedom to serve the Presbyterian Church with equality of power in relationship to the dominant white lay and clergy persons of the denomination.

I contend that reunion of the Northern and Southern churches in 1983 did very little to address the inherent racism and sexism within the church. Furthermore, reunion did not prepare the PC(USA) for a balanced view of forming an authentic multicultural denomination, because of its consistent failure to address the intersections of race, gender, and class. Therefore, we are not prepared in this current period to engage an authentic claim to becoming a multicultural denomination until we deal with the inherent racism, classism, and gender discrimination within our own ranks. Race, class, and gender inequality are driven by issues of power, domination, and

control. Until we learn to share power as Christians, we will only develop a “multicolor denomination,” not a multicultural denomination.

It is important for us to understand that a discussion of culture is more expansive than simply exploring race, class, and gender differences. Culture includes communal norms, values, relationships, and expectations. Biblically we are inundated with the cultural connections within the Jewish community. “[B]ut go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (Mark 1:44b) affirms the priest as the community gatekeeper. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Matthew 11:28a) illustrates the agrarian culture within the society through Jesus’ use of farming analogies. Jesus’ encounters with women, poor people, and persons deemed unclean by Jewish law illustrate the risk necessary to cross societal boundaries to establish multicultural relationships. Although the Bible is filled with many examples of both the complex and normative variances of Jewish culture, it is important to acknowledge that we are similarly governed today by communal norms, values, relationships, and expectations. As such, an appropriate definition of culture for the purpose of this writing is “the way we do things around here.”⁷

Multiculturalism requires us to encourage others to affirm their cultural norms, values, relationships, and expectations. In view of the recent conversations regarding multicultural ministries in our denomination, it is important that the issue of power as it relates to race and gender be adequately defined. Presently, we are crippled by a model of white male domination at all governing body leadership levels within the PC(USA). Until we are forthright in a discussion of the issues of power—its redistribution, its racial and gender construct within governing body structures, and its impact on the history and the future of an authentic multicultural church—it

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will remain the greatest barrier to authentic multicultural possibilities within the PC(USA). We cannot authentically encourage a multicultural hope without transforming the way we view church governance, budgets, mission, hiring practices, justice issues, and other significant aspects of defining who we are as Presbyterians. We must begin by moving beyond the parochial demonstration

of culture that includes only native food, dance, worship styles, and clothing. Discriminatory practices, which include but are not limited to cursory apologies for historic denials of human freedom, offering token elected positions to oppressed persons, and Committee on Representation reports with no enforcement power, still permeate the church and are all deterrents to our hope of a multicultural denomination. Additionally, we avoid serious discussions on naming the racism, sexism, classism, and other ills which lead us to declare that we live in a post-racial or post-gender driven society.⁸

Pluralism as a Stated Denominational Value

The congregation shall welcome all persons who respond in trust and obedience to God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the membership and ministry of his Church. No persons shall be denied membership because of race, ethnic origin, worldly condition, or any other reason not related to profession of faith. Each member must seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons. (G-9.0104) Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel. (PC(USA) Book of Order, G-5.0103)

Our statement on pluralism in the *Book of Order* along with the theology expressed in The Confession of 1967 and A Brief Statement of Faith are powerful views for organizing the church in a diverse and pluralistic culture. However, we have not had a plausible and comprehensive discussion on race and culture since reuniting in 1983. It is appalling that such a discussion is deemed nonessential to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God and for all members of the PC(USA), since the two denominations (the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church U.S.) split over the issue of slavery 122 years before reuniting. I also contend that we have not had a plausible discussion on gender inequality, the impact of immigration, or the intersections of race, class, and gender. Theologically and politically, we have become a single-issue denomination, focused on the ordination of lesbian and gay persons. The ordination discussion is narrowed to a theological and political power fight between the privileged white conservative, moderate, and liberal elements of the PC(USA). Simply put, it is a white family fight!

All other racial ethnic groups are invited into the discussion only as political allies, but the intersections of homosexuality, race, gender, and culture are very seldom taken seriously by white Presbyterians. Therefore, the complexities of culture which are inclusive but not limited to race, class, and gender are excluded, leaving minorities in the denomination distanced from the discussions.

We already witness this struggle among cultures of people in our denomination who do not affirm the ordination of women. Some groups uphold their standard that women should not be ordained to preach the gospel or serve certain churches. However, we send the message to women graduating from seminary that the doors in the PC(USA) are wide open and their opportunities are limitless. Beau Weston, in his recent paper entitled "Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment," argues: "There may have been a case for a season of affirmative action to be sure that women really were included everywhere. Better than a rule requiring women's inclusion, though, is a consciousness of the positive benefit of including women's

We are not strong enough on our own to chart a new direction

gifts at all levels of the church. I believe that such a consciousness is deep and wide in our church."⁹ I challenge Weston's assumptions based on the experience of my own clergy spouse, who served as pastor of four churches after leaving seminary to make a salary package that met the presbytery minimum. There were no males out of our graduating class who had to endure such a ridiculous call to ensure adequate compensation. Today, women flounder from parish associate positions to odd jobs offered by friends in the ministry, because they are unable to receive a call from churches whose culture does not affirm women in the ministry. I contend that this is not simply a racial, class, or gender struggle. Various intersections of race, class, culture, age, and traditions are the root causes.

There are three starting points for moving us in an authentic direction of multiculturalism. First, we must call upon the Lord. We are not strong enough on our own to chart a new direction by restructuring and political maneuvering. As Jesus told his disciples when they could not heal the demonic boy and asked him, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus responded, "This kind can come out only through prayer" (Mark 9:28b-29). Political wrangling and polity will not address the deep spiritual power necessary to overcome the historical, societal, and church entrenchment in

race, gender, and class we encounter. We must remember that our mission is not simply the building of a strong denomination. We are called to build the Kingdom of God! This awesome task requires our deepest sense of spiritual centering.

The Bible is the framework upon which the present power arrangement must deconstruct itself. The Bible provides a framework for discussing God's intentions for a new movement together through revisiting the power of God to break down barriers among people. Furthermore, it provides a starting point for discussing the particularities of various cultural expressions of faith.

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In Acts 10, Peter's new awareness of his cultural privilege was met with a revelation from God through a dream. His faith in God spoke to him. When Peter (a Jew) and Cornelius (a Gentile) discovered a place to discuss the intentions of the Lord God for their lives within a community of believers, they could agree that the present reality of the church needed to be reformed. Cornelius was baptized and the Jerusalem Church loosened its restrictions against Gentiles entering the faith. Peter declared, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). The Scripture records that Peter then ordered the Gentiles to be baptized (Acts 10:44–48). God's mandate stood at the center of this new revelation for the Church. I believe that time in prayer and biblically centered study is a must in building an authentic multicultural witness.

Secondly, we must challenge and dispel the myth that some in the denomination hold concerning gender and race. Weston contends that need for the inclusion of racial safeguards and oversight such as ensuring representation on committees and employment are no longer necessary.¹⁰ I contend that multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon in our church or society. PC(USA) and United States history is rooted in multicultural development. The struggle of the church and society is learning to share power among various cultures of people while claiming the fullness of God's intentions for our diversity. Because the PC(USA) has not fully acknowledged

its exclusions of persons from various entities, such as committees and employment opportunities within the denomination, the work of oversight remains vital. I contend that if we are serious about a multicultural direction it is imperative that Committees on Representation be given both oversight and enforcement power. Furthermore, it is imperative that governing body meetings, visioning processes, and personnel guidelines reflect our stated commitment to pluralism and inclusion of all persons. Denominational statistical data should be published regarding the PC(USA)'s progress in fulfilling its commitment to multicultural participation, particularly in decision-making positions throughout the denomination.

It is time people of color, women, and various enclaves of eclectic communities in our church be asked what we envision the church becoming rather than hearing pronouncements on how to remain faithful to a denominational/company line.

Weston's view that tall-steeple pastors are often "excluded from the stream of leadership" within the denomination is true. Tall-steeple pastors are vital to the growth and development at every level, because of their skills and executive experience. However, it must also be acknowledged that some tall-steeple pastors opt out of denominational leadership, because of their access to resources and the relative autonomy of tall-steeple congregations. A cautionary point regarding tall-steeple pastors is that the overwhelming majority of tall-steeple pastors are white males.¹¹ Although I do not believe that it is Weston's intention to be exclusionary on this point, it is imperative that

we recognize that many tall-steeple PC(USA) congregations have not extended cross-cultural (race and gender) calls for the position of pastor. Therefore, ensuring that leadership among tall-steeple pastors does not become an exclusive norm is essential. Other cultures must be acknowledged in our attempts to broaden our witness toward a multicultural denomination. Church size and location; new church developments, redevelopment, and historic congregations; youth, young adults, and seniors all bring contextual and generational views to the table that must be considered as we free the church for effective witnessing and decision making.

Thirdly, it is imperative that broad-based discussions among Presbyterian Christians be created so that open dialogue about various intersections of culture will be fundamental to growing beyond the “isms” that cripple our church. If taken seriously, these discussions will raise some pertinent inconsistencies in our distribution of power and claims to assert an authentic multicultural direction. It will demand that we address issues such as the withdrawal of funding from African American New Church Developments. It will challenge the political usage of the term “racial ethnic,” which lumps all people of color together as though there are two races of people in the church—whites and the rest of us.¹² It will investigate and transform the dismal employment numbers among persons of color and women in major decision-making positions at General Assembly, synod, and presbytery levels across the denomination. It will demand that we press toward greater diversity by going beyond the nominating and election of one or two “colored faces” at the table in the name of inclusion. It will call for the support of churches that reach out and evangelize the poor into membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rather than hanging the “for elite only” sign at our doors. It is time people of color, women, and various enclaves of eclectic communities in our church be asked what we envision the church becoming rather than hearing pronouncements on how to remain faithful to a denominational/company line. Authentic multiculturalism in the PC(USA) cannot be achieved by denominational Web site images or public-relations gurus. If we are serious about a multicultural future it demands a discipline in the Spirit to be forthright about our flaws regarding the full inclusion of all persons and commitment to doing something significant about correcting them.

Moving Toward an Authentic Multicultural Witness

Multiculturalism is not simply the coloring of the water with a sprinkling of different people. It demands a willingness to define communal norms more broadly than one standard for all. Intersections of race, class, gender, and other diverse facets of human existence must be considered in all circumstances. Culture is defined by more than race, class, or gender alone. Authentic Christian multiculturalism proactively encourages persons to affirm their culture within the context of a Bible-centered, theologically constructed, and communally nurturing group that shares power as an innate aspect of their inclusive witness.

Discussion of our theological views will bring differences. Nonetheless, it is important that these discussions craft theology in a manner that creates an environment of mutual respect as well as an affirmation of a new, diverse, communal culture. Dispensing with politeness among the oppressed that often “goes along to get along” is as important as identifying uncomfortable dominant norms that inhibit full participation by all. Our challenge in this new age is to seek to become a new creation rather than reinventing the church through the cultural norms, values, relationships, and expectations of yesteryear.

Notes



1. See Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984).
2. I use the term *cursory* to describe the casual nature of such modern-day apologies that are often devoid of full truth-telling regarding the complicit nature of the criminal justice system in such killings and cover-ups. Many of the apologies are offered thirty to forty years after the victimization and are increasingly insignificant to the families and communities who were blatantly disregarded in the legal processes that exonerated the white perpetrators of the crimes committed against them and their loved ones. Such systemic evil (i.e., legal complicity) is supported in the Orangeburg Massacre, given the fact that not one white highway patrolman was prosecuted for the shooting of twenty-seven and killing of three unarmed students. However, I contend that Orangeburg is not an isolated case. We are witnessing a recent rash of court decisions throughout the South that are sentencing old white men in poor health for the killings of African Americans during the civil rights movement decades earlier. Byron De La Beckwith killed Medgar Evers in 1963 and was sentenced to life in prison thirty-one years later, after he had contracted heart disease, high blood pressure, and other ailments. Edgar Ray Killen killed three civil rights activists—Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney—in 1964 and was not convicted until forty-one years later. These men lived their lives in the communities in which they committed the crimes. Their presence terrorized victims’ families and persons within the towns who were aware of their guilt and the possible participation of others in the murders who still remained free.
3. Bass and Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre*, 205–215. Cleveland Sellers was sentenced to one year. He was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was under surveillance during the student protest. On February 8, 2003 (35 years after the Massacre), at a memorial service held on the South Carolina State University campus, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford formally apologized for the actions made by South Carolina highway patrol officers that resulted in the Orangeburg Massacre. However, the Orangeburg community is defined by this pivotal

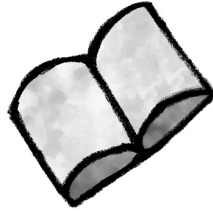
marker of history that still permeates stymied development of Orangeburg and the State of South Carolina with regards to progressive movement in the areas of race, gender, and class.

4. I grew up in Atlantic Presbytery and served my first call in Yadkin Presbytery. Both were all-black governing bodies of the former United Presbyterian Church. Whereas they represented a segregated aspect of the United Presbyterian Church, there were opportunities for empowerment among African American people that do not currently exist within the PC(USA). I contend that a challenge of the PC(USA) is to learn from the model of empowerment through civil rights, campus ministry, community based programs, and establishing hope for an oppressed people. See *All-Black Governing Bodies: The History and Contributions of All-Black Governing Bodies*, A Report to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Approved by the 205th General Assembly (1993) (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]); Joel L. Alvis Jr., *Race and Religion: Southern Presbyterians 1946–1983* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1994). Alvis documents the racism in the former Presbyterian Church U.S. Alvis contends that although churches in the Presbyterian Church U.S. were not segregated into all-black governing bodies there were strong power dynamics that heavily oppressed African Americans within the ranks of the denomination. These power dynamics were consistent with similar forces operative in the society. Race and class were prominent factors in the distribution of power and wealth in the church and society.
5. The Presbyterian Church U.S. and the United Presbyterian Church did not reunite until 1983. During the 1960s Eugene Carson Blake was the stated clerk of the United Presbyterian Church.
6. The first white woman ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church was Margaret E. Towner, in 1956. The first African American woman ordained as minister of Word and Sacrament was Katie Geneva Cannon, in 1974. The first Native American woman was not ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament until 1985 (Holly Haile Smith). There may be several factors that led to women of color lagging behind the ordination of white women. However, the intersections of race, class, and gender are clearly consistent with the limited rights for people of color during this same period.
7. See M. Jason Martin, "That's the Way We Do Things Around Here: An Overview of Organizational Culture," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 7, no. 1 (spring 2006). Also, M. Jason Martin, "The Way We Do Things Around Here: The Culture of Ethnography," paper presented at the Ethnography and Education Conference, Oxford University Department of Educational Studies (OUDES), 7–8 September, 1998. This definition of culture is used in various disciplines. For the purposes of this writing, I am citing two resources: one is in the field of organizational development and the other, ethnography. Both of these areas are addressed in this writing.
8. Barack Obama's election as president of the United States is an example of our societal stretch to support the notion that we are affirming a multicultural shift in power. However, we cannot separate his election to office from the economic interest of Anglo Americans and the country's teetering financial future, deemed the worst since the Great Depression. At the core of this election was the question "Which candidate will deliver

the message of change from the direction of economic disaster?" It is naïve to believe that more than 400 years of systemic evil based on race, gender, and class are overturned by one election. I make the same argument regarding the election of moderators of color or naming females to governing body committees. These elections are not always indicators of openness to new race, gender, and class realities. Many appointments and nominations are politically motivated or even attempts to embrace the polity of the church (i.e., Committee on Representation quotas or standards). However, these attempts do not go far enough if power is not shared and distributed in equal measure.

9. Beau Weston, "Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment" (Louisville: Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] Office of Theology and Worship, 2008), 13.
10. *Ibid.*, 15
11. There are tall-steeple pastors of color and women in the PC(USA), such as Robert Burkins at Elmwood United Presbyterian Church and Christine Chakoian at First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois; however, these persons represent a significant minority among those leading tall-steeple congregations.
12. (See Weston, 13–15.) Weston and I do have some common ground on this point. Both Weston and I contend that the use of the term racial ethnic and the failure of the denomination to acknowledge the particularities of human struggles and oppression within various racial contexts is not good. However, I contend that the denomination's lack of acknowledgement provides a reason for the continuation of policies that ensure racial inclusion. Weston contends that despite the failure to acknowledge particularities regarding oppressions among racial groups the time for policies that ensure inclusion of such groups should be over.

The use of the term racial ethnic often eliminates the need for the denomination to deal with the specificity of culture, particularly regarding race. Lumping people of color together asserts that all of the issues, values, norms, relationships are the same. It further declares all non-white people monolithic in their concerns. Growing concerns are arising among African Americans regarding the political use of this term, particularly with regards to Church Development issues. An example is that New Church Developments designated for African Americans by some presbyteries a few years ago have now been changed to a racial ethnic designation. In some instances this places African Americans into contention with emerging immigrant groups that are now receiving resources once specifically designated for African American New Church Developments.



IV. Rebuilding—or Building Up? An Alternative View of the Church and Its Future

Cynthia Holder Rich

Introduction

William Weston assessed the state of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in his essay, “Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment.” In my field, assessment is a hot topic. Aided by a mountain of recent research, we work as theological educators to assess learning outcomes and to devise educational strategies in such a way that the hoped-for outcomes are achieved. Weston’s article assesses outcomes as well—what he sees as the outcome of a variety of decisions, strategies, and events in the history of the PC(USA) and its predecessors. His assessment makes some valid points, which are addressed below.

To correctly assess learning, however, one must start with clear goals. This is also the case for the Church. We must be clear on the goals, and the source of the goals, for what we do and who we are in the world. I take issue with Weston’s argument from this perspective—concerning goals and their source. I pray that the outcome I come to from the assessment shared here proves helpful, as we strive together to serve church and world in Jesus’ name.

Assessment Case Study: Mission and Church in Madagascar

Protestant mission was begun in Madagascar by the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1818. Their operative missiological strategy went a long way to determine the outcome—the nature of the founded church. The LMS began in the palace in Madagascar, founding a school for the children of the royal court, and missionaries translated the Bible into the language of

the royal family. Today the people of this royal line, the Merina, continue to hold much wealth, controlling most of the business and industry, having the highest education rates, and occupying most of the governmental positions. Additionally, the Merina language has been enfranchised, and other island languages have been disenfranchised in turn. Indeed, almost no texts are available in these other languages, and powerful interests within the Merina community work to make sure other languages are not recognized. This has had a significant impact on education and literacy outside Merina areas on the island. Finally, the LMS-founded church has a limited profile in many regions, as the Merina are limited in their ability to share the good news among people who have been on the receiving end of what they perceive to be historical and current oppression. In this case, the founding strategy of introducing the gospel first and foremost to the powerful (thus furthering their empowerment) can be assessed by the outcome apparent today.

What Does This Mean for Us?

The mission strategy used by the LMS in Madagascar was mirrored in many countries across the globe, and like communions (many of which are named Presbyterian) were founded. These bodies include in their membership many of their societies' elites. This is not a situation strange to us as Presbyterians in North America, of course. We are used to being in power and among the elites, with our membership including presidents, senators, representatives, and signers of the Declaration of Independence. I learned in Sunday school that the U.S. Constitution was modeled after the Presbyterian one—not surprising when we consider our historical emphasis on educated clergy and our founding of universities and other schools everywhere we go. It is a history about which many of us are proud and in which we take comfort and form identity.

But being in power (or to use Weston's term, authority), whether socioeconomic, educational, or governmental (which often travel together), raises issues when we try to follow Jesus. Clearly this was true for the first Christian congregations. The church in Corinth was racked by conflict over those with power and wealth sticking it to the powerless poor in the community. Issues arose in Rome as well.¹ The PC(USA) has also known struggles over class and status,² and over race.³ Clearly, none of these power struggles are at an end, among Presbyterians or in the global Christian community. Any assessment based on evidence demonstrates that these

struggles have produced often-painful outcomes—and, by the grace of a God who can make a way out of no way, much sharing of the good news of Jesus as well.

Because the stumbling block of power for Christians in our faith journey is so great, believers who hold power must take care to hear and to be informed and/or corrected by the “voices of peoples long silenced.”⁴ In Madagascar, non-Merina people respond with laughter—and anger—to statements by Merina officials that the injustice—perhaps even oppression—is past. Part of the skeptical reaction to Weston’s essay may be due in part to his membership in a group that continues to hold the most power in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—highly educated white males. I hold membership in perhaps the second most powerful group—highly educated white females (*and* minister of the

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Word and Sacrament *and* theological seminary professor), and I know that my vision is often obscured by my privileged place. At times, it is difficult for people of less privilege to credit what I say as valid. Additionally, those in subordinate positions know things that those in power/authority do not,⁵ which we in the church ignore to our peril.

As we face the future, then, the pain we Presbyterians have inflicted on each other, born of sin, is on the journey with us. The question for us is how we, as a communion with many privileged people in our pews and leadership, can serve today in North America and the world in ways that are faithful to God and to the building up of the body and the realm of God in the world.

Our Task: Responding and Building Up

Weston’s main argument is that the church’s authoritative establishment, which has been torn down or has deteriorated through a series of external and internal events and decisions (some of which he does not view as valid—or as valid anymore), must be rebuilt. He bases his recommendations for a better future on revised or newly created structures through which the

Weston's main argument is that the church's authoritative establishment . . . must be rebuilt.

church does its work. I have a fourfold response. First, I review some of the research on church growth and decline published in the last forty years, and search for implications. Secondly, I discuss the work of E. Digby Baltzell. Informed by these analyses, I address the dichotomy which Weston presents in a causal relationship: that inclusion of new constituencies in leadership has led to a less authoritative church and to the loss of the establishment. Finally, I address the nature of the body, the church, and offer directions toward a common and faithful future.

a. Research on Church Growth and Decline

The world today is different in many ways from that of the 1950s. A clergy colleague, known in the '50s and '60s for growing a congregation from its small charter group to 1500—all in seven years—said he accomplished this feat by “opening the doors on Sunday morning.” It was comparatively easy to grow a church in the post-war era, particularly in the society in which many Presbyterian congregations found themselves.

Today the task and how we accomplish the task are different. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life U.S. Religious Landscape Survey⁶ demonstrates this truth. Of the 35,000 adults surveyed in 2008, over 20 percent reported a non-Christian faith or no affiliation—very different from a report published in 1960, which cited only Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to cover the U.S. religious waterfront.⁷ Changing religious attitudes and practices among North Americans have been noted by a number of scholars, who paint a complex picture of factors implicated in these societal shifts.⁸ Increased individualism, pluralism, globalization, and vast increases in spiritual/religious practice options in U.S. society all play a role. Seemingly unrelated factors have implications as well; research shows that the majority of “mainline” Protestant congregations are located in areas likely to lose population.⁹ It is clear that church decline can be attributed to many identified factors—and to some that have yet to be identified.

b. Baltzell and the Protestant Establishment

Weston notes that he has been especially influenced by a few scholars. One of these is E. Digby Baltzell, author of the book from which Weston

borrowed the name of his essay. Baltzell's volume, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America*,¹⁰ forms the basis of Weston's understanding of the sociological term *establishment*. Baltzell defines this term in depth, in the context of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) society and hierarchy in the 1800s–1900s. (Baltzell is credited with coining the term WASP.) The argument advanced is that a Protestant establishment existed, built through values held among people with what is classically termed “liberal democratic values” and an “Anglo-American heritage” of shared beliefs and norms on which (he asserts) our democracy is founded. The establishment included upper-class elites who held moral authority in society, whose ideas were respected to the degree that their leadership was followed.

Caste, in relationship to *establishment*, is a central theme throughout the book. Baltzell understands caste as a degenerated form of establishment, which develops when an upper class of people who have led in the past, and who protect their privileges and prestige, does not continue to lead. Part of the indication that their leadership role has been abdicated is that the assimilation (*sic*) of new elites is halted due to unwillingness to include people of diverse racial-ethnic origins.¹¹ Baltzell concludes:

*. . . The traditional standards upon which this country was built and governed . . . are in danger of losing authority, largely because the American upper class . . . is no longer honored in the land. For its standards of admission have gradually come to demand the dishonorable treatment of far too many distinguished Americans to continue as a class to fulfill its traditional function of moral leadership.*¹²

Baltzell, writing in the 1960s, saw anti-Semitism (and thus, exclusion of Jews from leadership positions) as the primary obstacle to the continuation of the traditional authoritative establishment, which was then composed solely of white Protestants. Further, he noted that this Protestant caste refused to include/assimilate in leadership a growing group of other people, including new immigrants and African-Americans.

Two points should be noted. Baltzell was not promoting an establishment as a leadership strategy for the church, but for the society; and by the time of his writing, Baltzell saw the decline of the establishment as a

product of its own prejudice. For establishment to flourish, it seems, inclusion is a prerequisite.

c. Assessment, Our Goals, and Their Source

Research has shown that church decline cannot be explained by the loss of an authoritative establishment. Nor can it be assigned to the increase of diverse constituencies in leadership, a case of manufacture of causal relationship that is not evidence-based. Weston's dichotomy is not substantiated by research. The situation is much more complex.

The existence of scholarship explaining these issues does not lessen the urgency, however, of membership loss over recent decades. While I disagree with the solutions he proposes, Weston rightly calls our attention to the problem. As he notes, we have "equivocated as evangelists," and we must confess and repent. In response, I am heartened by the work in many congregations and presbyteries with the Rev. Martha Grace Reese of Gracenet Inc.¹³ Rev. Reese's approach of increased spiritual vitality through the development of vibrant prayer lives for pastors and church members, leading to increased awareness of the call of God to reach out to the unchurched outside every congregation, has proven life-giving in a number of Protestant denominations, including our own. This and other effective approaches¹⁴ can help us engage *metanoia*—the transformation by the renewal of our minds to which God calls us all.¹⁵

Speaking "as one without authority"¹⁶ and aware of my own "total depravity,"¹⁷ I am troubled by the claim that any one person or group are "natural leaders." The model proposed lacks awareness of the universal nature of the call to ministry incarnated in the priesthood of all believers. Further, understandings of vocation—that it is God who chooses who will lead, often choosing individuals who do not seem (from a human point of view) "naturally gifted"—are missing in Weston's assessment.

In the case of tall-steeple pastors (TSP), having served on or witnessed the work of a number of investigative commissions to address sexual harassment/misconduct charges against certain members of this group, and having witnessed significantly flawed administrative work from some TSP during my ministry, I reject Weston's claim. Leadership carries a seductive risk of believing ourselves to be what we are not—those to whom "all power and authority in heaven and on earth"¹⁸ has been given. It can thus invoke

understandings that those who are “naturally” gifted do not have to abide by the rules that others do. Further, many TSP are not in fact formed for leadership as he suggests; their charisma often leads them into large-church leadership in their first call. Teaching these young men has taught me that for many, their belief in their own gifts (oft-encouraged by congregational approval) can impair their humility—and their ability to receive wisdom from professors who teach or scholars they read. Sin crouches at the door for us all; the notion that some among us are more “naturally” gifted than others can encourage sinful beliefs, practices, and relationships with one another.

Finally, while leadership in the church is a real issue that calls for exploration, denominations are not ultimately tall-steeple (or large) congregations that happen to have tens of thousands of franchises. Leadership is contextually and culturally conditioned and understood. Weston’s analysis demonstrates no awareness of the long and significant history of African American Presbyterianism, north and south, nor of Latino/a Presbyterianism, nor of Korean and Korean American Presbyterians across the nation. More recent immigrants from around the world now color the way we are—and how we understand—church together. A more complex, multifaceted exploration is needed to discern what leadership God is calling us toward as we move together into the future.

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I thank Weston for introducing me to the work of Baltzell. I only wish he had employed the entire argument, cogent for this discussion, which interfaces with discussions on evangelism and who should lead the church. If the Protestant establishment fell under its own bigoted weight, to quote Weston, “so be it.” Having repented of the sins of the past, we are called now to discern ways to open our doors to new faces, voices, and leadership. Martha Grace Reese, in her study of 30,000 Protestant congregations, found that she had to delete from her study all predominantly racial-ethnic congregations, because they skewed the data, making the white congregations look as if they were doing better than we are.¹⁹ Clearly, some people know things that other people don’t! Some of the new leadership that we need to look to for direction are in those racial-ethnic congregations. Others are under the age

of thirty, a generation mystified by the infighting in our church Weston rightly decries. Their questions are not ours, their ways of understanding church do not mirror their parents', and their imaginings about starting churches and calling people to faith in Jesus are often innovative and inspired. As a seminary professor, I regularly engage in conversations about new forms of church, new ways of forming people for ministry, new patterns of theological education. These spiritual conversations excite me, confirming and renewing my faith in the vibrancy and resiliency of Christ's church.

Conclusion

At its heart, the Re-Forming Ministry project explores ecclesiology: the nature and content of the church, how it is and how it should or could be. Weston calls us to a hierarchical vision of leadership, in which church growth is founded in "natural" leaders who are given freedom to lead and to not be distracted by those he deems less effective. Weston's lack of concern with the way "the chips may fall" in patterns of inclusion and exclusion in his model coheres with his claim that mandates to force inclusion are no longer needed. Inclusion is not the priority for the future; effective leadership is. To the extent to which this model is made possible within Presbyterian polity, well and good; and where it is not, we must change that polity to the extent to which it stands in the way of Weston's recommendations.

I have a different vision. Paul called members and leaders of the church at Corinth toward a more inclusive style of leadership. In 1 Corinthians, Paul described the church as a body, in which all parts are needed and require attention for the whole of the body to be healthy. While in the 1950s, there

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were more Presbyterians and we had more societal impact, attention paid to some parts of the body was certainly lacking. What has occurred since the 1950s is that we have become more inclusive in membership and in leadership—which, by Paul's standards, would suggest that we are attending to the body. We are becoming more the church that Paul envisioned. In an increasingly pluralistic world, we have a long way to go, and sin holds us back in myriad ways. But diverse growth is a strength, not a weakness.

However, the grace of the body's diversity can also feel messy, difficult, and inefficient in achieving ministry "success." The history of the church documents our rush at times to be "effective"—and sometimes, our loss of focus on the gospel's goal. As we study the Confession of Belhar together,²⁰ one example from the history of the struggle from which that confession emerged may be instructive. From the early 1800s, congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) experienced conflict over the unwillingness of some Afrikaner members to celebrate the Lord's Supper with "black" or "coloured" members of the church. Some white members left the church; other members and some congregations stayed, but withheld their funding from the national church. The issue was resolved in the Synod of 1857, which stated that the unity of the body at the table was clearly the gospel's intent; but because of the "weakness of some," and out of fear that financial support for the church's mission would continue to decrease, separate administration of the sacrament would thereafter be permitted. This decision eventuated in the construction of apartheid's foundation in the church.²¹ We must ask: What intent of the gospel have we already sacrificed, or are we willing now to sacrifice, for the weakness of some? How does our own fear of decreasing financial support impact the decisions we make as we go forward?

We are clearly called to move from the place where we are. Often, a demonic spirit of division seems ready to consume us, and endless fights about sexuality distract us from confronting and repenting the sins of racism, sexism, and investment in our own comfort, blocking us from the goal of sharing Jesus' good news. To overcome the barriers among and within us will require a breaking of our hard hearts and a breaking open of our minds to let in new visions that I am sure God is even now sending us in every conceivable medium (and, undoubtedly, in ways that we, with our limited comprehension and impaired hearing, cannot conceive).

To make a clear-minded assessment of our situation requires that we focus unstintingly on the goal and its source. Our life is not found in the structures by which our work is organized; life is found in relationship with Jesus and in following his leadership. Only through focusing on this sacred goal will we be able to repair and rebuild the relationships we have broken through our own sinful focus on anything but the gift of our vocation as salt and

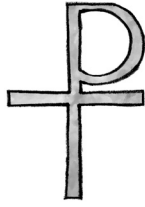
light. Focusing solely on this will lead us to the outcome of faithfulness we seek to achieve. Let us reach toward that goal as we pray—even so, Lord Jesus, come!

Notes



1. Reta Halteman Finger, *Roman House Churches for Today: A Practical Guide for Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
2. Cf. Richard W. Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians: Capitalism and the Morality of Economic Success," in Mark A. Noll, ed., *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Jackson W. Carroll and David Roozen, "Congregational Identities in Presbyterian Congregations," in *Review of Religious Research* 31, no. 4 (June 1990): 351–369.
3. Cf. Gayraud Wilmore, "Recollections: The Black Revolt and the United Presbyterian Church, 1963–1973," in *Journal of Presbyterian History* 85, no. 1 (spring/summer 2007): 57–69.
4. From A Brief Statement of Faith (Presbyterian Church [U.S.A], 1991).
5. Cf. James C. Scott, particularly *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University, 1992).
6. Available at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>.
7. Richard Lambert, *Religion in American Society* (American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1960).
8. Key works in this field include Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., *Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950–1978* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1978); Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
9. Roger Stump, "The Effects of Geographical Variability on Protestant Church Membership Trends, 1980–1990," in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 4 (December 1998): 636–651.

10. Random House, 1964.
11. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
12. *Ibid.*, 381–382.
13. <http://www.gracenet.info/default.aspx>.
14. Another helpful resource is the work of the Vital Churches Institute, whose president, Stan Ott, has developed the Acts 16:5 Initiative (www.vitalchurchesinstitute.com).
15. Romans 12:2.
16. Thanks to Fred Craddock for his key teaching on this for the last few decades.
17. From the traditional TULIP schema of key points of Reformed theology, the first of which is “total depravity of humankind.”
18. Matthew 28:18, quoted in the Form of Government (G-1.0100).
19. *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 28.
20. As directed by action of the 218th General Assembly, 2008.
21. Chris Löff, “The History of a Heresy,” in John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid Is a Heresy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 10–23.



V. Thought Provoking, but Insufficient: A Reply to William J. Weston's "Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment"

John L. Williams

Did the Presbyterian Church dismantle its authority structures, its establishment, in the 1960s and 1970s? Does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) need to rebuild its establishment? In "Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment," Professor William J. Weston answers "yes" to both questions and raises the question of what organizational structures will best serve the flourishing of our denomination in the future.¹

Weston defines establishment as "an integrated body of authoritative leaders" (p. 8). At its best an establishment helps an organization run smoothly, work for a clear purpose, and settle crises. It brings "the best leaders into positions of power in the most efficient way" (p. 25). It develops these leaders and creates mechanisms "through which dissenting leaders can be heard" (p. 25). In the past, members of this Presbyterian Church establishment tended to share common maturing experiences (church camps and conferences, colleges, seminaries, and committee service). They were loyal to denominational theology and polity and were often heads of denominational agencies or national committees, governing body officers or executives, pastors of larger congregations, or key elders with years of church service.

Weston believes that the Presbyterian Church intentionally dismantled its establishment in the '60s and '70s. He applauds the church's removal of barriers to the participation of African Americans and women as it embraced

the new consciousness of most Americans; but he argues that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) overreacted to the exclusions of the 1950s when it mandated representation of women, racial ethnic minorities, and youth; created Youth Advisory Delegates and Committees on Representation; required the rotation of session members; diluted the authority of denominational leaders; and enlarged committees and agencies to accommodate representation. Loss of the church's natural leaders, staff-dependency, and denominational drift and indecision were the negative consequences of its overreaction.

Weston's plea for rebuilding the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s establishment follows from his analysis of the '60s and '70s. He argues that generations "now coming to power take it for granted that sex and race are no reason to exclude an individual from anything" (p. 12) and that representational mandates and structures should therefore be abolished (although he wants to maintain the parity of elders and ministers). He also proposes the removal of constraints preventing the emergence of the PC(USA)'s natural leadership and strategies for including pastors of larger congregations and presbytery executives in the denomination's leadership establishment.

Based on my Presbyterian experience, I agree with many of Weston's proposals, have serious reservations about some of them, and would raise questions about all of them.

My comments on Weston's article in the following paragraphs arise from a lifetime of Presbyterian experience. I am an oldest son of Presbyterian parents. I was baptized and nurtured and professed my faith in Jesus Christ in a large Presbyterian congregation. I was active in its youth program and attended church camps and conferences. The congregation's pastors, elders, and educators influenced and befriended me. I attended a Presbyterian-related college and received Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Presbyterian seminaries. I was pastor of two small Presbyterian congregations and a committee moderator in my presbytery. I have served as a presbytery associate general presbyter, a presbytery executive, a synod executive, and on General Assembly committees. I've attended thirty General Assemblies. I suspect that Weston would have considered me a part of the PC(USA)'s establishment.

Based on my Presbyterian experience, I agree with many of Weston's proposals, have serious reservations about some of them, and would raise questions about all of them. In general I find his analysis and his proposals thought-provoking and believe that his proposals need additional deliberation and/or major revisions.

. . . The way forward is through foundational questions and systemic, multidimensional approaches

Based on my experience, I also doubt the accuracy of Weston's statements that church officers "are no longer expected to be bound by any confessional statement" and that "it is common for church officials to ignore" the PC(USA)'s polity and discipline (p. 28). A few well publicized cases of confessional or polity defiance do not make such practices widespread or common.

My major concern about Weston's article, however, is its limited perspective. Weston analyzes only the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s organization and organizational history since the 1950s; and his proposals for change are really a set of organizational fixes, thus giving us a one-dimensional view of the PC(USA). My experience has convinced me that the way forward in the PC(USA) is not through one-dimensional approaches and not through planning, management processes, organizational changes, or polity revisions. Don't misunderstand me. I am not opposed to planning, management, or organizational changes. I have used these techniques in my work. Nor am I opposed to polity revisions. I believe such revisions can help us, and I support the current efforts to revise the Form of Government. But I am also persuaded that planning, management, reorganization, and polity revisions are at best short-term fixes or solutions to limited problems. They merely scratch the surface of the PC(USA)'s more deeply rooted dilemmas and often leave entrenched, long-term, and systemic patterns untouched.

What then will propel us forward? I believe it will require a yet-to-be-defined combination of theological restatement for our time, deep contextual analysis, clarity of purpose, shared vision, courageous leadership, and attention to congregational worship, nurture, and spiritual formation, remembering always that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and head of the church. In short, the way forward is through foundational questions and systemic,

multidimensional approaches, a way much harder to conceive, much less achieve, without divine help than a set of organizational fixes.

Weston's article touches lightly or not at all on theology, context, purpose, vision, courageous leadership, and congregational work. It specifically mentions theology twice, once to consider the pros and cons of theological representation and once to complain that the adoption of *The Book of Confessions* meant church officers are no longer bound by confessional statements. The first is a helpful, reasoned discussion; the second feels more like nostalgia for the Westminster Standards than something substantive, not to mention its questionable accuracy. Missing from the article is any attention to the role of belief, theology, or theological reflection in the life of the PC(USA). Missing is an examination of the role theology, especially Christology and ecclesiology, can and should play in rebuilding an establishment and in guiding an establishment's behavior. As a previous General Assembly said, "Theology matters." It cannot and should not be disconnected from the church's organizational arrangements.

Absent also from Weston's article is any mention of the context in which the PC(USA) works. Surely the PC(USA), as it carries out Christ's mission at home and abroad, needs to ponder philosopher Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* on the rise and pervasiveness of unbelief in North Atlantic societies.² Surely the PC(USA) must ruminate on the meaning of the digital age, the new Christian movements in the Global South, economic crises, and dozens of contextual phenomena. And surely such deep contextual analysis is and will be an essential part an establishment's work as it leads the PC(USA).

As a previous General Assembly said, "Theology matters." It cannot and should not be disconnected from the church's organizational arrangements.

Weston's article does say that an establishment helps an organization "work for a clear purpose" (p. 7); and it criticizes, perhaps correctly, the church's use of "visioning exercises" (p. 29). But it does not analyze either the role of an establishment in identifying a clear purpose or shared vision or the complex exchange of information and ideas between leaders and followers that is necessary to maintain purpose and vision. Nor does it consider the difficulties an establishment will face in a democratized church where many

members feel that their views regarding the church's mission should and will always be heard and, to the extent possible, followed.

The article appears on the surface to comment extensively on leadership, but a closer examination reveals that its discussion of leadership is limited primarily to identification of those who are members of the establishment and their backgrounds and training. The article neglects entirely more profound questions about leadership: the nature of leaders' work; the effects of leaders' being or presence on church systems; and why imaginative, courageous leadership is essential in all social settings from familial to institutional to societal. To reflect on these questions, we must turn from Weston's article to other works, such as Ronald Heifetz' *Leadership Without Easy Answers* or, better, Edwin Friedman's *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, a work that describes leadership as an emotional process in an emotional field.³

To its credit, Weston's article recognizes that congregations are "the fundamental institution of church life" (p. 23); but beyond that assertion, the article says little about the congregational worship, nurture, and spiritual formation that are the foundational building blocks in the development of leaders. If the PC(USA) decides to rebuild its establishment, I would respectfully suggest that it is more important to begin with attention to congregational nurture and formation than to our denominational arrangements. From attention to congregational nurture and formation all, not just a few, can grow in faith and knowledge.

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I challenge Weston and all who are interested in and concerned about the PC(USA)'s future to expand their repertoire of perspectives on and responses to the PC(USA)'s life and dilemmas; to entertain systemic, multidimensional approaches; and to look beyond organizational fixes to more foundational questions. In the final analysis organizational fixes alone won't save us from ourselves. More, much more, will be needed, including a heavy dose of prayer and the grace of God.

Notes



1. William J. Weston, "Rebuilding the Presbyterian Establishment," Re-Forming Ministry Occasional Paper Series, no. 3. Available at <http://www.pcusa.org/re-formingministry/papers/rebuilding.pdf>.
2. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
3. Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Press, 1999).



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