

To the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest

The action of the 2014 General Assembly to permit same-sex marriages by ministers of the PCUSA and to redefine marriage as a covenantal relationship between “two people” rather than between a man and a woman places the PCUSA in irreconcilable conflict with both Scripture and its confessional tradition. As a consequence of this action, I can no longer endorse or be governed by the polity of the PCUSA. With this letter I hereby demit my ordination as a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.

It is the plenary teaching of Scripture that humanity has been created male and female, and that this creative order is the one proper basis for the covenant of marriage. Jesus cites and authorizes this order when he quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in relation to marriage: “From the beginning of creation ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ Thus, they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:7-8). Whenever same-sex relations are mentioned in Scripture they are always and without exception condemned as an improper deviation from this order (Gen 19; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Judg 19; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10). In no place are such relationships affirmed, and in no place are such relationships regarded as a God-ordained form of marriage. In its missionary outreach the early church was repeatedly brought into direct contact with cultures that practiced and celebrated same-sex relations, but no early Christian text affirms such relations, and all early Christian texts known to us uphold the Scriptural rule in declaring such behavior outside God’s revealed will in Scripture.

This same understanding governs the confessional tradition of the PCUSA. The Second Helvetic Confession (5.246), the Westminster Confession (6.131), and the Confession of 1967 (9.47) all expressly define marriage as a covenant before God between one man and one woman. The wording of other confessions that “God condemns all unchastity . . . within or outside of the holy state of marriage” (Heidelberg Catechism, 4.108), clearly presupposes marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The admonition of the Confession of 1967 is particularly relevant in light of the 2014 decision of the General Assembly, “Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man’s alienation from God. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by the world when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time” (Confession of 1967, 9.47). C-67 testifies to the positive role that orthodoxy plays in demonstrating compassion to people caught in moral confusion, whereas the decision of General Assembly does not acknowledge such moral confusion, or if it does, rejects historic orthodoxy in its attempt to demonstrate compassion.

I know of no doctrine or practice in Christianity that better qualifies for Vincent of Lerins’s famous definition of orthodoxy—that which has been believed and practiced “everywhere, always, and by all”—than the definition of marriage as one man and one woman before God. The approval of the 2014 General Assembly to allow teaching elders discretion to perform “any such marriage they believe the Holy Spirit calls them to perform” separates the Holy Spirit from the word, to which the Spirit bears witness, and from the life of the believing community, through which the Spirit bears witness. This effectively relegates sexuality and marriage to the subjective judgment of each individual minister. This can—and surely will—be used to justify other unions equally contrary to the divine will. In condoning same-sex marriage and redefining marriage the General Assembly of the PCUSA has heard another voice regarding gender and

marriage than the univocal voice of Scripture and tradition, and in its decision to embrace that voice it has chosen to follow another lord than the one and only Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ. An ecclesial body that turns from its orthodox heritage and teaches its members to do the same can no longer command, nor does it deserve, allegiance from the faithful. What the Apostle Peter said to the Sanhedrin I must say to a denomination that has substituted an alien anthropology for a Biblical and Christian anthropology: “I must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29).

In submitting this letter, I wish to reassure the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest that this is not a renunciation of either the Presbytery or its members, whom I honor as faithful servants of Christ. Nor do I intend this letter to be a renunciation of my original ordination vows, which I have endeavored to uphold since my ordination on October 2, 1971. This letter is, rather, a renunciation of the decision of the 2014 General Assembly, and the status to which it would oblige me, which would necessarily require me to disavow the integrity of my original ordination vows. I therefore, regretfully, demit my ordination as a teaching elder in the PCUSA.

James R. Edwards

June 27, 2014

James R. Edwards

Date