

FIVE SOLAS

REFORMATION FAITH AND THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

In the sixteenth century the Christian Faith was often expressed in terms of five unalterable beliefs they called the “Five Solas” of the Protestant Reformation.ⁱ How does the PC(USA) now relate to these standards, particularly in the aftermath of the 2012 GA?

1. SOLA SCRIPTURA – SCRIPTURE ALONE

Sola Scriptura affirms the Bible is the sole source of God’s written divine revelation and is our authority in all matters pertaining to faith and life. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

The Erosion of Authority

Although the PC(USA) still affirms in its Confessions that the Bible is the source of our faith and life, in its practice, individual interpretations are valued above the truths of Scripture.

- The 2012 GA approved a statement that included the phrase, “we acknowledge that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not have one interpretation of Scripture.”ⁱⁱ An overture requiring candidates to “live a life in obedience to scripture” was rejected.ⁱⁱⁱ The assembly also **rejected the assertion that Scripture and Confessions are the basis for our organizational decisions.**^{iv}
- In the recent GA Permanent Judicial Commission *Parnell* case, the Commissioners found “a vast diversity of interpretation of Scripture and the Confessions regarding human sexuality” and pointed out that “the Book of Confessions reflects that the Church listens to a multitude of voices in shaping its beliefs.” They determined that “such thoughtful disagreement among reasonable and faithful Presbyterians is itself an important and faithful part of the Reformed tradition.” Both in the *Parnell* decision and many times at the 2012 GA, these points were used to emphasize that **Scripture and the Confessions are not unified in what they teach and therefore cannot be used to tell anyone how to behave.**^v
- One renewal leader summarized the actions of GA in this way: “Although the PCUSA ordination vows say that our creeds, catechisms and confessions are “reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do,” it is now evident and is part of the record of the last General Assembly that Part I of our constitution, the *Book of Confessions*, is **not binding related to governance of our church. The *Book of Order*, on the other hand, has now apparently been elevated to ‘our only infallible rule of faith and practice.’**”^{vi}

2. SOLUS CHRISTUS – CHRIST ALONE

Solus Christus affirms that our salvation is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. His divine nature, sinless life and purchase of our lives on the cross alone are sufficient for our salvation and reconciliation with the Father.

The Erosion of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life

Although the PC(USA) still affirms the importance of the example, teachings and work of Christ, fewer and fewer are willing to call him Lord and to agree that “no one can come to the Father except through” him (John 14:6).

- The 2012 General Assembly passed a resolution encouraging participation in the “Words Matter” project, which **seeks to eradicate words like “lord,” “lordship,” and “king,” including the term “Lord” for Jesus**, as well as contrasts like “light/dark” and terms like “spiritual blindness.”^{vii}
- **The new *Book of Order* contains several instances of universalism – the idea that all faiths lead to the same truth and that all people will be saved whether or not they believe in Jesus.** All attempts to amend these were rejected at the 2012 GA. One example is the guarantee of the full rights of church membership “regardless of... theological conviction” (F- 1.0403), without mention of faith in Jesus. Another example is the first paragraph of the new *Book of Order*, which begins with the claim that “the triune God...redeems...all people” (F-1.01). Scripture makes it clear that only those who believe will have everlasting life - “whosoever believes in him” (John 3:16), and that Jesus alone is the “way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

- According to the Fall 2011 Presbyterian Panel Report, **only 41% of pastors agree that “only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved.”** The number drops to 27% of specialized clergy.^{viii}

3&4. SOLA GRATIA & SOLA FIDE – GRACE ALONE and FAITH ALONE

Sola Gratia and *Sola Fide* can both be found in Eph. 2:8: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” *Sola Gratia* affirms that there is nothing we do that can earn our salvation, but we are saved by God’s grace through Christ’s death on the cross. *Sola Fide* affirms that the faith to believe and trust in the Lord and his saving grace is also a gift.

The Erosion of the Gospel

The PC(USA) makes frequent references to grace, but has a false understanding of the nature of fallen humanity. From what are we saved? Injustice and oppression are the usual answers, and thus justice is seen as the solution – not salvation in Jesus Christ.

- At 2012 GA Ecumenical Breakfast, Luciano Kovacs, the keynote speaker, declared that **“God’s justice is THE gospel.”**^{ix} Later in the week, the GA passed overtures supporting the Occupy movement, abortion, the EPA, and Cuba, while denouncing corporal punishment and corporations operating in the West Bank. Efforts to divest from Israel passed in committee but failed on the floor of the assembly by two votes.
- At almost midnight the last night of the 2012 GA, commissioner Kate Murphy lamented during a debate on how to spend more money on another study about justice issues, **“How to make more disciples of Jesus Christ... is the one thing we have yet to talk about** on the floor of General Assembly.”^x
- A teaching elder was recently received into Coastal Carolina presbytery who openly stated that **he does not believe that Jesus died for our sins. He also denied the Trinity.** Neither denial was seen as the abandonment of an essential tenet of the Reformed faith nor a barrier to his serving as a teaching elder in the PCUSA.^{xi}

5. SOLI DEO GLORIA – TO GOD ALONE THE GLORY

Soli Deo Gloria affirms that, because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, our worship must glorify Him at all times. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God, and for His glory alone.

The Erosion of Exclusivity

The PC(USA) says that it glorifies God, but can appear more interested in being politically correct. Many things, people, and ideas are being placed equal to or even above the Lord in worship.

- At GA 2012, several “Ecumenical” Advisory delegates were actually *interfaith* advisory delegates for the first time, including a **Muslim and a Hindu priest who chanted over the assembly and proclaimed that he accepted “all religions as true”**^{xii}—a sentiment that has been expressed by others in PCUSA leadership.^{xiii}
- In the opening worship service of the 2012 GA, **liturgical dancers wearing rainbow stoles draped the communion table and the cross in rainbow-covered fabric.** Although God established the rainbow as a symbol of his promises, in modern times the rainbow has come to symbolize the pro-gay agenda. To place that on top of the cross and communion table was highly offensive to many gathered commissioners.^{xiv}
- The 2012 GA has voted again for the Belhar Confession, a confession which **places “unity” above any other doctrine of the church** – potentially even such significant doctrines as salvation or the deity of Christ.

ⁱ What follows is based, loosely, on the 1996 Cambridge Declaration. monergism.com/The%20Cambridge%20Declaration.pdf

ⁱⁱ 220th General Assembly Item 7-17 pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4063

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=3831>

^{iv} <http://juicyecumenism.com/?s=70%25+presbyterians&search=Go>

^v oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pjc22003.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=30575>

^{vii} 220th General Assembly Item 11-15 pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=3941&promoID=238

^{viii} pcusa.org/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel_profile_survey_2011_summary_color.pdf

^{ix} <http://mateenelass.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/its-a-topsy-turvy-world-in-pcusaville/>

^x http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFJ3bG9_7bY&feature=relmfu - counter 2:10:30

^{xi} <http://wordtolife.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/did-jesus-die-for-the-sins-of-humanity-or-not/>

^{xii} <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHJx2PzGajg&feature=plcp>

^{xiii} <http://holstonpresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Open-Source-Church-1st-TheoinRes-2-7-12.pdf>, 9th commandment

^{xiv} <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/6/30/moderator-cindy-bolbach-opens-220th-general-assembly/>