

Actions to influence the future of the Presbyterian Church begin to emerge

Ordination standards, authoritative interpretation, abortion, the Trinity, peace, unity, and purity, and Middle East divestment policy are already beginning to appear as subjects for the General Assembly's attention. The GA will meet in Birmingham, AL from June 15-22, 2006.

Ordination standards

The mainline denominations have been dealing with sexual standards for ordination for many years. In spite of clear teaching in Scripture and in our confessions on sexual relationships and the meaning of marriage, and in spite of the convictions of most Presbyterians—whose views have been registered in presbytery votes as well as in Research Services surveys—the push to change the standards continues.

As of this writing, eight presbyteries have adopted what More Light Presbyterians (an advocacy group for homosexual ordination) call the “Reforming - Ordination” overture: Heartland, Cascades, Western Reserve, Detroit, Des Moines, Twin Cities, Genesee Valley and Mid-Kentucky.

The overtures, if adopted, will ask the presbyteries to vote again on removing “fidelity and chastity” as requirements for ordination. It would be the fourth round

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Baby in his mother's womb at eight weeks of development

Photograph courtesy of Life Issues Institute

Lutherans defeat effort to change ordination standards

Delegates to the assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA), the mainline Lutheran denomination, defeated a proposal that would have allowed ordination of persons in homosexual relationships.

The vote, taken on August 12, failed to get a majority of votes. The change would have required a two-

thirds affirmation of the body.

The body also rejected an attempt to move the denomination toward approval of ceremonies to bless same-sex relationships.

The ELCA decisions were in response to proposals from a denominational task force that had met for three years.

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Statement of Purpose

Presbyterians Pro-Life seeks to be a prophetic witness to the Presbyterian Church (USA), upholding the sacred value of human life and the family. We believe the Scriptures teach that God, who made us in His own image, has forbidden us to shed innocent blood.

Therefore, Presbyterians Pro-Life is committed to protecting the right to life of every human being from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. In decisions about life and death, the sanctity of life of both mother and child must be respected, and every effort to preserve their lives should be made. This leads us to stand against abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, and any other practice which would devalue human life.

Presbyterians Pro-Life is convinced that a return to the Biblical teaching concerning the sacred value of the family is essential to recovering respect for the sacred value of individual human lives. God has ordained the family, the basic social unit of all human institutions, to propagate, protect and nurture human life.

Presbyterians Pro-Life is committed to strengthening the bonds of family love and nurture, and to protecting innocent life.

Presbyterians Pro-Life (PPL) is composed of lay and clergy members of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

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**Call PPL at 412-487-1990
Visit our web site at www.ppl.org**

What the Presbyterian Church has said about abortion

“The unborn, though enclosed in the womb of his mother, is already a human being, and it is an almost monstrous crime to rob it of life which it has not yet begun to enjoy.”

• John Calvin, Commentary on Exodus 21:22, 16th century

“This Assembly regards the destruction by parents of their own offspring, before birth, with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature; and as the frequency of such murders can no longer be concealed, we hereby warn those that are guilty of this crime that, except they repent, they cannot inherit eternal life. We also exhort those who have been called to preach the gospel...that they be no longer silent, or tolerant of these things, but that they endeavor by all proper means to stay the floods of impurity and cruelty.”

• Presbyterian General Assembly, 1869

“The fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized....As Christians, we believe that this should not be an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. Their decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society.”

• Presbyterian General Assembly, 1962 and 1965

“Problem pregnancies are the result of, and influenced by, so many complicated and insolvable circumstances that we have neither the wisdom nor the authority to address or decide each situation. Christians seek the guidance of Scripture in the midst of relationships and circumstances of awesome proportions that affect their interpretation and decision making.”

• Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly, 1992

Unplanned pregnancy? Churches want to help!

If you are facing an unplanned pregnancy and need help

- **There are several thousand pregnancy care centers located in most communities in the United States.**
- **Most pregnancy care centers offer their services free of charge. They want the very best outcome for you and your baby, and they want to help.**
- **PPL can help you locate a pregnancy care center near you.**
- **We also have a list of Presbyterian churches whose members want to walk alongside you in your pregnancy.**

And if you have had an abortion and need the ministry of the church, contact us. We want to help you.

**Contact us for confidential help at
412-487-1990 or ppl@ppl.org**

Presbyterians Pro-Life

The G.A. and the future of the PC(USA)

of voting on this matter since 1996. Each vote has upheld our standards by a greater margin.

The overtures this year would eliminate the current authoritative interpretation (AI) of the constitution. That can be done with a majority vote of the GA alone. No vote of presbyteries is required.

The authoritative interpretation (AI) says, "Unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in Form of Government" (in the *Book of Order*). The AI, adopted and reaffirmed by General Assemblies, gives explicit interpretation to the "fidelity" and "chastity" language of the *Book of Order* (BOO).

Removal of the AI will be understood by some in the church to clear the way for a reinterpretation of the BOO standard to permit ordination of those in homosexual relationships.

An alternative overture

Another overture is being circulated that offers churches and presbyteries an alternative to the "Reforming - Ordination" overture. It reaffirms our constitutional definition of marriage and says,

Therefore, no sexual union outside the bonds of marriage, such as in domestic partnerships or same-sex unions, is within the will of God or approved by this body.

Readers can find this overture on www.presbycoalition.org along with other helpful overtures.

Abortion

Funding

As of August, one overture on abortion is on its way to GA. It is an overture calling the GA offices to stop funding The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). The RCRC is a lobby of religious organizations that advocates for abortion as a good moral choice. The overture is based on the premise that Presbyterians should not be forced to support abortion with their tithes and offerings to the church.

PPL has several overture suggestions for sessions to consider that are timely. We have two that address the use of tithes and offerings for abortion.

Support for women and babies

PPL also is supporting use of an

overture to encourage churches to explore ways to be of support to women and babies in difficult pregnancies.

Aspects of the current GA abortion policy address the high numbers of abortions in our country and urge churches to find ways to reduce the numbers. No practical suggestions are offered by the policy. An overture that seeks specifics would help put teeth in the policy recommendations. The church ought to be able to do much more to help.

Late Term Pregnancy

A number of churches are considering an overture on late term abortion. The PC(USA) is in a muddle on whether babies who can live outside the womb are worthy of the church's moral voice of protection. The overtures are asking for a clear moral statement of opposition to late term abortions.

Baptism as a sign of grace

Presbyterian theology is tied to the humanity of the unborn. Our particular view of baptism rests on the belief that we do nothing to effect our salvation, and the children of believers are as much a part of the covenant as their believing parents because of God's grace to us. John Calvin said in one of his tracts: "God pronounces that he adopts our infants as his children, before they are born." PPL is suggesting that those words ought to be a part of our *Book of Order's* teaching on baptism.

The PPL website has overtures for churches to consider sending to GA. PPL has resources to support the overtures and to help churches through the overture process.

The Trinity

Following several years of study, a task force of the Office of Theology and Worship will be bringing a report to GA on the Trinity. The report is found at www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/issues/trinityfull.pdf. The office has been soliciting evaluation of the paper prior to their presentation at GA.

Peace, Unity, and Purity task force report

The Peace, Unity and Purity (PUP) task force was created by the GA of 2001.

They were charged to address and help resolve the disagreements in the denomination, to "lead the Presbyterian Church (USA) in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century." Integral to its work have been concerns for our theology, for biblical interpretation, and for the issues tearing at the fabric of our life. Sexual standards are foremost among those concerns.

The task force report was released in stages. Release of their recommendations for GA action stirred the greatest reaction. In their initial response, The Presbyterian Coalition noted how much of the task force's work was done behind closed doors. They expressed concerns that their "proposed Authoritative Interpretation appears to permit what the Constitution currently prohibits."

The task force will bring their recommendations to the GA in June. Their final report is posted at www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/.

Middle East divestment

Divestment from companies doing business in Israel was not on the average Presbyterian's radar screen going into the 2004 GA. Coming out, it was one of the hottest issues of the 216th GA. Some commissioners were asking, "Where was I when we took that vote?" Nevertheless, it is a legacy of that Assembly, and it will be back at the 217th in Birmingham. General Assembly offices are at work deciding which companies will be affected.

There is at least one overture asking for reversal of the action taken in 2004.

More to come

Other issues already are beginning to surface for the 2006 GA. To stay abreast of the issues as they develop, consult Presbyweb.com or the websites of various renewal organizations such as Presbycoalition.org, Layman.org, PFRenewal.org, and PPL.org. You can make a difference. Consider the possibilities on page 10 of this newsletter.

Pro-Life 101: There's really only one question

Scott Klusendorf, Director of Bio-Ethics for an organization called Stand to Reason, has written a little book called *Pro-Life 101: A Step-By-Step Guide to Making Your Case Persuasively*.

The argument

Pro-Life 101 begins with a logical delineation of the heart of the matter. Klusendorf explains that there is only one question, not many.

The pro-life argument is that elective abortion takes the life of a defenseless human being. The rationale for that argument is clear and to the point:

1. Intentionally killing an innocent human being is a moral wrong.
2. Elective abortion is the intentional killing of an innocent human being.
3. Therefore, elective abortion is a moral wrong.

If the rationale is correct, elective abortion is wrong. If, however, abortion does not take the life of an innocent human being, it requires no more justification than having your tooth pulled.

Most arguments sidestep the central issue

The book argues that “choice” arguments ignore the most basic—and most important—consideration in deciding the morality of abortion. Choice, privacy, bodily rights, and back-alley abortions side-step the central issue. Klusendorf illustrates the point with a little dialogue.

An example of dialogue that gets to the heart of the matter

“Abortion Advocate: Abortion is a private choice between a woman and her doctor.

Pro-Lifer: Do we allow parents to abuse their children if done in private?

“Abortion Advocate: Of course not. Those children are human beings.

Pro-Lifer: Then the issue isn't privacy. It's, What is the unborn?

“Abortion Advocate: But many poor women cannot afford to raise another child.

Pro-Lifer: When human beings get expensive, may we kill them?

“Abortion Advocate: Well, no, but aborting a fetus is not the same as killing a person.

Pro-Lifer: So, once again, the issue is, What is the unborn? Is the fetus the same as a person?

“Abortion Advocate: But you're being too simplistic. This is a very complex issue involving women who must make agonizing decisions.

Pro-Lifer: The decision may be psychologically complex for the mother, but morally it is not complex at all. When black people are mistreated in a certain society, do we spin a tale about complex, agonizing decisions for the white people in power or do we condemn the evil of racism?

“Abortion Advocate: Aborting a fetus that is not a person is one thing, discriminating against a black person is quite another.

Pro-Lifer: So we're agreed: If abortion kills a defenseless human being, then the issue wouldn't be complex at all. The question is, What is the unborn?

“Abortion Advocate: Enough with your abstract philosophy. Let's talk about real life. Do you really think a woman should be forced to bring an unwanted child into the world?

Pro-Lifer: The homeless are unwanted, may we kill them?

“Abortion Advocate: But it's not the same.

Pro-Lifer: That's the issue, isn't it? *Are they the same?* If the unborn are human like the homeless, then we can't kill them to get them out of the way. We're back to my first question, What is the unborn?

“Abortion Advocate: But you still shouldn't force your morality on women.

Pro-Lifer: You don't really believe what you just said, do you? You'd feel very comfortable forcing your morality on a mother who was physically abusing her two-year-old, right?

“Abortion Advocate: But the two cases are not the same.

Pro-Lifer: Oh? Why is that?

“Abortion Advocate: Because you're assuming the unborn are human, like toddlers.

Pro-Lifer: And you're assuming they're not. So the issue is quite simple, isn't it? It's *not* about forcing morality; it's *not* about privacy; it's *not* about economic hardship; it's *not* about unwantedness; it's just one question: What is the unborn?”

The material used here is by permission of Stand to Reason, Signal Hill, CA. To get a copy of the book or for more information, contact them at www.str.org.

“The offspring of believers is born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb...are included in the covenant of eternal life...Nor are they admitted into the Church by baptism on any other ground than that they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born.”

• John Calvin [Antidote to Council of Trent], Tracts III:275

Christian Faith and the issues of life: Life issues considered in the context of the Apostles' Creed

by Terry Schlossberg

“I believe in the Holy Ghost”

John Calvin wrote that in The Apostles' Creed “the whole history of our faith is summed up...succinctly and in definite order, and that it contains nothing that is not vouched for by genuine testimonies of Scripture.” One source calls our attention to the personal nature of the Creed. It is not simply a “cold summary of doctrine”; it has the quality of a catechism, answering basic questions of what the Christian believes about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, and about the Church. Furthermore, we have argued in this series that the Apostles' Creed is a concise way of showing that Christian Faith applies to abortion and to the other critical moral issues of life and death in our society today.

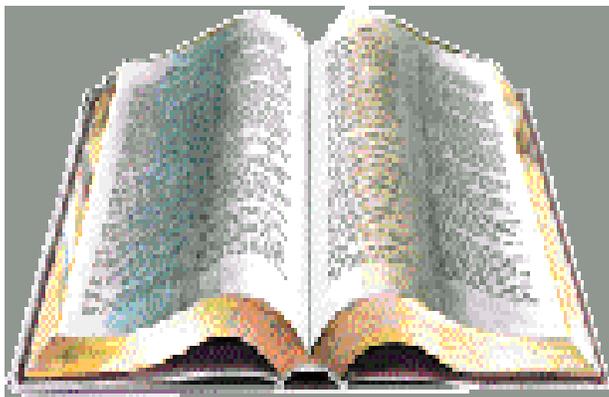
The Trinity completed: Prelude to the church

The Creed has now moved to the third person of the Trinity. The Trinitarian structure of the Creed is completed. When the Heidelberg Catechism comes to this third part, it emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in believers' sanctification (*Book of Confessions*, 4.024). Karl Barth says that the whole of the Creed is about us (*The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*). It affirms God's work in and for us. It is a compact summary of God's action in the creation, the redemption, and the fitting of human beings for his kingdom.

The Apostles' Creed tells us nothing about the Holy Spirit. We must turn to other confessional documents. The Nicene Creed, for example, allows us to declare something about the Holy Spirit: He is “the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.” (See also, The Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.051-.054)

There is a flow to this Creed that is similar to the Nicene. Christians speak of the three Persons of the Trinity, and even commonly refer to the “first,” “second,” or “third” person, following the Creeds' order. Luke Timothy Johnson, in his book *The Creed*, draws our attention to the placement of the Holy Spirit in these creeds. It is no accident that the Spirit immediately precedes reference to the Church. He is the tie between the Son and his Church.

Karl Barth explains that the Holy Spirit is what makes the Church something other than another human institution. It is the Holy Spirit who makes the



Church Christ's own Bride, and empowers the Church to be the visible presence of Christ in the world.

The intimacy of God with the human race

Our purpose here is not to be exhaustive of what can be known of the Holy Spirit, but rather to show how deeply involved with us he is and how important he is to the Church's life in Christ and to our thinking and actions on the issues of life and death.

Just as the Father made himself visible to us in his Son, so also the Father and the Son continue in relationship with us in the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that he would be with us always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). Then he left and sat down at the right hand of God. This is a biblical paradox: Jesus gone, yet present.

But Jesus told us that unless he left, the Holy Spirit would not come. And then he promised a Spirit of God that would be more empowering than his own human presence. He would lead us into the Truth; he would convict the world of sin; he would enable believers to do more than Jesus did in his earthly walk (Cf John 14).

Yet the Holy Spirit was not simply a New Testament promise and his appear-

ance did not only follow the departure of Jesus. John Calvin says that the Holy Spirit tended the “confused mass” that existed before Creation. The Spirit “everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth...in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement...” He has been from everlasting and will be to everlasting.

The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. Here is an affirmation crucial to our belief in the veracity of Scripture on the one hand, and to our confidence that the Spirit is faithful to that Word in our day. Calvin names the Holy Spirit as the Author of Scripture. The Westminster Confession notes the necessity of the Spirit's inward illumination for us to gain a saving understanding of the Scripture, and affirms the completeness of Scripture in declaring “no new revelations of the Spirit (*Book of Confessions*, 6.006).” Calvin says we can judge spirits by their faithfulness to God's Word because the Holy Spirit “cannot vary or differ from himself.” This view of the relationship is constant in our confessions and is a hallmark of Reformed Faith.

Perhaps it is in the Confessions' teaching on “effectual calling” that we see most concisely and summarily the work of the Holy Spirit in saving us from ourselves. The Westminster (6.064f) says that God's Word and Spirit enlighten our minds to understand the things of God, renew our wills, set our commitments toward what is good, drawing us to Christ. By the power of this Holy Spirit living in us, we are “more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true

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The Apostles' Creed and abortion

holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14)

The Holy Spirit is our Helper. John calls him the Paraclete, the one who walks beside us to help us all our lives long. He is the One who travels with us, guiding us into the truth when our own natures resist it; he is the One who enables us to choose the good when our own natures want to choose the course of least resistance; he is the One who forgives and restores us when we fail out of ignorance or even defiance, when we find in his grace the power to repent.

The Lord and Giver of Life

We often speak of God as the Creator and Sustainer of life. This is not an abstract theological notion. The Scripture teaches that God not only was involved in Creation in Genesis 1, but also continues to be involved with his world. Couples who try and succeed or try and fail to conceive children are evidence that every human life is a gift from God. Scripture teaches that God is intimately involved in creating every new human life in his own image. Thomas Torrance reminds us that Jesus became one of us, not in the account of Luke 2, but rather in Luke 1 where the angel's prophecy is fulfilled and Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost. If God withdraws his Spirit from us, we die. We are enlivened physically and spiritually only as a gift of God's grace and through the work of his Spirit in us.

Each of us belongs first to God. The Holy Spirit is the Lord of life. To think we are our own is an idea contrary to our identity in Christ. We know better.

The One who sanctifies us

There is an old Enlightenment idea that says, “Every day in every way we're getting better and better.” There's no basis in the natural world for believing that statement. But the Holy Spirit's role in our lives, as the confession says, is to help us love sin less and less, and more and more desire to be obedient to God's will (Cf *Book of Confessions* 6.075). We are not able to better ourselves in any way that has eternal significance. But the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in us

“God's Holy Spirit can enable us to believe and live so that no unborn baby's life is threatened by what the Church says or does, so that those babies and their families are welcomed and cared for by the Church.”

with the goal of making us more like Christ. Scripture admonishes us to seek that daily renewal and progress toward becoming like Christ.

At the heart of the biblical idea is that we can know what is true and right, and we can do it. With the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can overcome our natural aversion to doing the right thing instead of our own thing. John Calvin writes on this subject as if he has been watching us. He says in the *Institutes* that we humans rarely object to a moral principle if it is stated in general terms. The objections are made when the principle is applied to a particular case. “The adulterer will condemn adultery in general, but will privately flatter himself in his own adultery.” (II.II.23)

The Holy Spirit has a tough assignment in keeping us from falling, but he has the power to do it. The circumstances that seem overwhelming to us are not overwhelming to God. There is a biblical promise that God is working out his own good purposes in the lives of all those who love him. The long journey of Joseph in Genesis is a good biblical example of the rough road that promise of God can take and the tests of faith that accompany what God is doing in us. But he means to fit us for his kingdom.

Being fit will mean God's Holy Spirit has enabled us to reject the idea or opportunity to abort a child. Or it means he has not left us broken in guilt and sorrow after abortion, but has forgiven and restored us, enlivened us, given us hope, and continued to work out his good purposes in us.

The One who dwells in us—his temple

This biblical idea that God lives in us speaks not only to his power and presence alive in us, but also to our part of the relationship. Calvin quotes Augustine:

If we are bidden to make a temple for the Spirit out of wood and stone, because this honor is due to God alone, such a command would be a clear proof of the spirit's divinity. Now, then, how much clearer is it that we ought not to make a temple for him, but ought ourselves to be that temple? And the apostle himself sometimes writes that 'we are God's temple' [1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16], at other times, in the same sense, the temple of the Holy Spirit" [1 Cor. 6:19].

Augustine is citing Paul. “Shun immorality,” Paul says. “Don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit—and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:18,19) His argument is that we have been purchased by Christ at the cost of his blood. His words ought to get our attention. They are among the most counter-cultural words of our time. They are exactly opposite the idea of autonomy. They tell us we are accountable to God for our bodies and the decisions we make about our bodies.

The Holy Spirit is not only the link between Christ and his Church. He also is the link between us and our unborn children. He is the One who creates and fashions those children. He is the same One who will help us avoid the deaths of those little ones. And he is the same One who will resurrect the lives of those who have fallen by taking the life of an unborn child or by encouraging someone else to do that. The whole Church today is in need of this resurrecting power.

Robert Munger wrote a little book called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. The thrust of the book is to encourage believers to ask God's indwelling Spirit to examine and clean up every aspect of our lives so that we become more fit vessels for his presence. God's Holy Spirit can enable us to believe and live so that no unborn baby's life is threatened by what the Church says or does, so that those babies and their families are welcomed and cared for by the Church.

Terry Schlossberg is the executive director of The Presbyterian Coalition and an elder at The National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

Still Birth

by Charles Partee

Being one, I like to defend ministers whenever and wherever possible. Our “too too solid flesh” is subject to considerable frailty, but in a Presbyterian pulpit there is little excuse for blatant and pompous stupidity.

Listening to a Christmas sermon our family learned a painful lesson in the hermeneutics of suspicion. The text was “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1). According to the preacher, God is a mighty fortress and this verse encourages God’s people to “come to the fort!” By then our first son had some awareness of etymology, and began serious squirming until he could check whether the word “comfort” had anything to do with “coming to the fort.”

Most pastors see their role as comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has lots of both so there is plenty to do. Amid the myriad tragedies of our lives, we all need real comfort.

Surely among the most gut-wrenching, heartbreaking events in a pastor’s life is the first visit to a woman whose baby was stillborn. The happy miracle of birth often reminds us that terrible tragedy is never far away and this earth is not our final home.

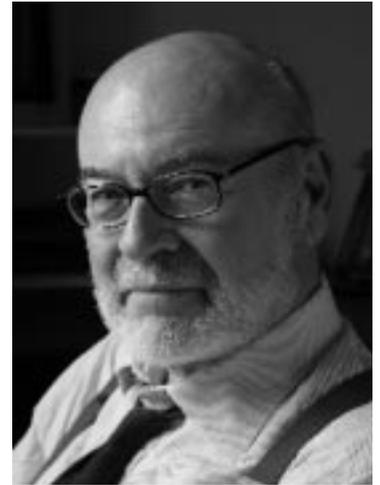
In my third month of seminary my home pastor learned that the daughter of a college friend had just lost her baby in the city where my divinity school was located. When my pastor telephoned, I am certain it never occurred to him to ask me to call on the grief-stricken couple. They needed a real, tried and true minister of the gospel—not a first year seminarian scared out of his wits by self doubt and vicarious pain.

I was requested to ask one of my seminary professors to call on the young wife and husband. For this service I recognized there would be no honorarium. Moreover, some of the professors’ teaching pastors had never themselves been pastors. Some professors exuded such an aura of busy importance that I

could not imagine asking them to include on their agenda what might be only God’s order of the day. Some were so sharply academic that I could not envision them as other than helpless in a hospital room with a woman who was expecting for nine months and had been denied motherhood on the last day.

The one professor I felt confident in asking to call was a man lightly esteemed in the seminary community and whose theological position I strongly rejected. Within the hour he was at her bedside in the hospital. That day I learned the profound truth that when people are hurting they do not care what their pastors know. At that moment they need to know that their pastors care.

In later years I never had any trouble weeping with those who weep nor rejoicing with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). The former was especially easy. It is simply not true that men and boys don’t cry. For that reason, I really appreciated the bracing comment of a colleague who observed to me, “You cannot comfort anyone when you are slobbering all over them.”



Not long ago I stood in the rain with a young couple beside a tiny hole in the ground that would soon contain their baby’s body. With the heavens above us weeping, I hoped to God I was now a real minister exactly like the reverend professor whose theological views I still oppose.

Charles Partee is P.C. Rossin Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Most of his scholarly writing concerns the theology of John Calvin.

Forgive them all, O Lord: our sins of omission and our sins of commission; the sins of our youth and the sins of our riper years; the sins of our bodies and the sins of our souls; our secret and our open sins; our sins of ignorance and our sins of presumption; the sins we have striven to hide from others and the sins by which we have led others to sin; forgive them, O Lord, forgive them all for his sake, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, who now stands at your right hand to make intercession for us, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

• John Wesley

Abortion: The data is encouraging, but keep your eye on the numbers...

...and remember the importance of the moral voice of the church

Abortions are down in the U.S. and there is a reported downward trend since the 1980s. Though the trend is encouraging, the numbers of abortion continue at a rate well in excess of one million per year. Today, more than one out of every five babies conceived in the U.S. is aborted.

The numbers continue to exceed one million per year

At this writing, abortion is in the news almost every day. Because the nation is facing changes in the make up of the Supreme Court, advocates on both sides are crying for a declaration from nominees on where they stand on the matter of *Roe v. Wade*.

In the midst of this cry for a position, the *Washington Post* reported, once again, in July that abortions are declining. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, described as the research arm of Planned

Parenthood, reports that for every 1,000 pregnancies in 2002 that did not result in miscarriage, there were 242 abortions. In 2000 the figure was 245 and in 1990 it was 280. The variance is not great, but the trend is in the right direction.

Why the decline in numbers?

Reasons for the decline are speculative, but the polls show a marked increase in pro-life views among youth and a decline in sexual activity among teenage males. The *Post* article includes pregnancy clinics (pro-life pregnancy care centers now outnumber abortion clinics) and abstinence programs. These alignments may be more moral than political. The numbers have been declining in both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Who has abortions?

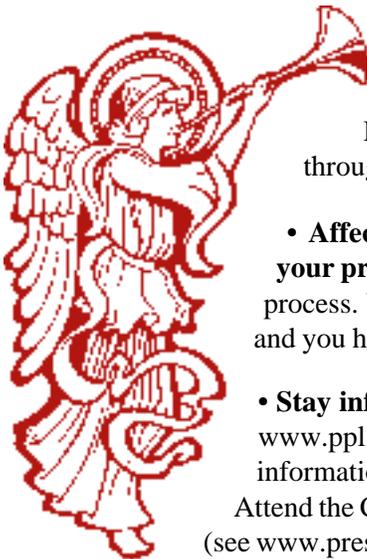
Those who have abortions tend to be predominantly non-white, teenagers or in their early twenties. Twenty-five percent of abortions are among unmarried women.

The culture needs the moral voice of the church

The decline is encouraging but the numbers continue to be high. There remains a great need for the church's voice encouraging sexual morality and the preservation of human life—in all quarters of the church. It is the application of the Gospel of our Lord to the way we live. And it can change a culture.

How you can make a difference

Important things you can do right now:



- **Send an overture to change the denomination's position on abortion.**

PPL has overture suggestions and can help you through the overture process.

- **Affect the election of G.A. commissioners from your presbytery.** Get involved in the nominating process. Your commissioners are critical to the outcome and you have a right to know their convictions.

- **Stay informed.** Follow the PPL website at www.ppl.org. Subscribe to presbyweb.com for up-to-date information on developments in the denomination. Attend the Coalition's Gathering IX in Orlando. (see www.presbycoalition.com for information)

- **Teach God's value for life in your church. PPL has resources to help.**
- **Start a chapter of PPL in your church or presbytery.**
- **Start a ministry for those who suffer from the effects of abortion decisions.**

Contact PPL. We have resources to help!

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End of life counsel

We must guard our souls against decisions aimed at the complexities of our own lives rather than the needs of our "neighbor." We must be careful to avoid becoming the priest or the Levite of the parable: unwilling to take on the "burden" of another's infirmity. Or deciding that the needs of elderly family members are diminishing our own quality of life.

Our need for the church's ministry

Christians do not hold that preservation of life is the highest good, that every life must be prolonged as long as possible and at whatever cost. Judgments must be made. They are being made every day; but not all with a clear conscience before God. This is an area where pastors can minister by preaching and teaching. We need to hear more from the pulpit that will give godly guidance to the decisions of families.

And we must not neglect the ministry of help. Church members want to make decisions that please God. They need the believing community's prayer support and tangible acts of ministry to do that.

Pastoral counsel on the end of life

Making moral decisions at the end of life appears more complex than decisions regarding the beginning of life. The end of life at least has its own set of complexities that test the wisdom of families, medical professionals and pastors.

Often the complexities of individual situations can be reduced when the principles are clearly established and placed in the context of what we know to be true.

First principles

There are some basic Scriptural understandings that should govern every Christian's approach to end of life decisions. The overarching principle is to begin with God and not with the circumstances. The framework in which we come to the issues is critically important to our decisions. If we examine the difficulties of the situation with the purposes of God ever before us, we are less likely to err in the judgments we will have to make.

1. God creates each of us in his image.

He has purpose and intent for each of us. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He is fully aware of the circumstances of our lives and is active in them. Ultimately, our lives and the outcomes of our lives are in God's hands.

Further, God, though completely trustworthy, also is unpredictable. People are unpredictable. Conditions are unpredictable. The situations and turns of events of individual lives can baffle even the professionals. The person declared to be in a "persistent vegetative state (PVS)" today may be an awake and conversant person tomorrow. It happens.

2. God forbids us to kill the innocent.

Jesus called himself "The Way, the Truth, and the Life." He said he came to give us abundant life. In contrast, Scripture teaches that death is the "last enemy," that which Jesus came to destroy (1 Cor 15:26).

This understanding leads us to seek life and not death for each other. It helps us draw distinctions between those who are injured and infirm but not dying, so that no matter how we judge their circumstances we will not act to bring about the death of anyone.

3. God charges us to love our "neighbor."

The example Scripture gives is of the man who was beaten and left on the road all but dead (Luke 10). We are not told what became of the man, whether he recovered to live a normal life or spent the remainder of his life suffering the effects of the

attack on him. The point of the parable is to show what God expects of those who follow the Savior. So we learn that "good" was that the Samaritan "took care of him," and that he spent his own resources in the care of the man without asking about the worth of the life of the man.

Scripture tells us that whatever we do to another human being, even "the least" among us, we do to Jesus (Matt. 25:40). Does that mean those who are mentally handicapped? Those with dementia? Those who are bedridden and unable to communicate verbally? Whom shall we say is excepted?

Applying the principles

Lutheran theological ethicist Gilbert Meileander, in several of his recent writings (See *First Things*, May 2005, pp. 17-21, for example) applies the principles to particular circumstances. We should never aim at the death of any other human being, he says. What we do should not be done in order to end another person's

life. He also has said that we may regard some treatments as "burdensome" or "useless," but ought never to regard another human being in those terms.

Meileander counsels us to think in the direction of life and not of death in our decision making. That means we would avoid the temptation to believe another person has such poor quality of life that we ought to end his suffering by hastening his death. Instead, we would aim at decisions that enhance the person's life. We might withhold or withdraw treatments that provide no benefit or are more burdensome than helpful, but we would not withdraw or withhold care.

Our need to recognize temptation

This matter of caring for the least of our brothers and sisters may be the crux of the matter for many, if not most, of the situations we face. Our modern life makes the ministry of presence—modeled by the Good Samaritan—increasingly difficult.

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Terri Schiavo: Only a higher law was violated

Writing in the journal *First Things*, Robert T. Miller, assistant professor of law at the Villanova University School of Law, explains that there was no breach of law in the Terri Schiavo case. Terri's rights under the law were not violated, he says. And therein lies the problem. Further, her case was exceptional only in the press and in the process attention she received. The following is Miller's conclusion.

"Laws authorizing a guardian to starve to death a ward are profoundly immoral, even as applied to those who would have wanted to die; we do not accommodate suicides. But in hundreds of cases around the country every year, such laws are enforced, and hundreds of people die like Terri Schiavo. The only extraordinary thing about the Schiavo case is that her parents

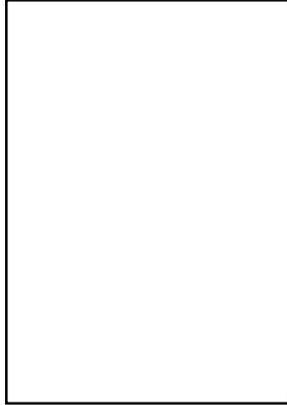
have done everything in their power to prevent her death, with the result that Schiavo has received much more process and much more publicity than others to whom the same thing has happened. One commentator described the Schiavo case as the 'crime of the century.' In fact it is a banal, run-of-the-mill crime of a kind that happens every day in the United States.

"And for this, we cannot blame the courts. The fault lies not in our judges but in ourselves, for we have created a society in which the law allows the strong and healthy to determine that some of the weak and infirm have lives not worth living and then to kill them."

• from *First Things*, May 2005, p. 16

War and Peace: Thoughts about J. Gresham Machen

by Pastor Don Elliott



During my vacation in July I resolved to read about J. Gresham Machen. I have been ambivalent about him. I viewed him as someone who was orthodox, but led a separatist movement, as a scholar but intolerant of the thoughts of others, as a giant in Presbyterian history but also with a giant ego.

My ambivalence about him led to my avoiding him. His was a voice from theological battles of the past that led to the starting of a new denomination. I knew full well that those theological battles were still raging, and now at warp speed.

Can war and peace co-exist?

In my ministry I have always had a tension between “war and peace.” I know that a war has been going on for the truths of the gospel within the PC(USA). At the same time I realize that peace is my experience and calling. How can “war and peace” reside together? Aren’t they mutually exclusive? I had concluded that Machen would not give any help in this tension.

But I have now read books both about and by Machen, and I have changed my mind. Yes, he was orthodox, but he did not lead a separatist movement as much as he was dismissed from the denomination. Yes, he was a scholar, but his apparent intolerance of the thoughts of others was only in faithfully standing for the basic truths of the gospel. Yes, he was a giant in Presbyterian history, but his place in that history cannot be disallowed by simple references to his temperament and personality. Machen knew the balance of “war and peace.”

Paul showed how it is done

I found this balance expressed best in his last sermon as a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in

Miller Chapel on March 10, 1929, “The Good Fight of Faith.” In it he expounded on the ministry of the Apostle Paul, who was a primary subject of Machen’s academic work. In Paul, Machen found an apostle who was at war and at peace at the same time. How could that be?

Machen observed that Paul was a fighter whose struggles were not just with the world outside the church. Paul’s physical hardships were not the chief battle in which he was engaged. His greatest battles were against the enemies in his own camp. He was threatened on all sides either by an all-engulfing paganism on the one hand, or on the other hand, by a perverted Judaism that missed the real purpose of the Old Testament law.

Machen knew from his studies of Paul that there was something about the faith and the church that necessarily called for warfare. And he knew that God’s instruments in the great triumphs of faith were not pacifists. He said that those—both ancient and modern—who have spent their time considering the consequences or looking for compromises, have little affinity for Paul.

The heroes of faith were fighters

The real companions of Paul, he said, are the great heroes of the faith. And all of them true fighters: Tertullian against Marcion; Athanasius against the Arians; Augustine against Pelagius; Luther against kings and princes and popes for the liberty of the people of God. Luther, Calvin, and Knox—and all the rest who have valued truth more than their own lives—are our own heroes of the Reformation. It is impossible to be a true soldier of Jesus Christ and not fight.

The easy way out of conflict

In this sermon to students, Machen warned that, “If you decide to stand for Christ, you will not have an easy life in the ministry.” He also warned that we can all too easily find a way out of the conflict. We can be loved for preaching the Gospel, if only we “vote against that Gospel in the councils of the church the next day.” We may believe in supernatural Christianity to our hearts’ content “if [we] will only act as though [we] did not believe in it. A man may believe what he pleases provided he does not believe anything strongly enough to risk his life on it and fight for it.”

It is a battle of love

Machen also knew that fighting for the faith could get out of balance. He warned about having the right motive. We do not find courage by lusting for conflict or by simply resolving to fight. “For this battle is a battle of love; and nothing ruins a man’s service in it so much as a spirit of hate,” he said.

Fighting a godly fight

Machen struggled with how to be godly in

the fight knowing that ungodliness was always at the door in the midst of strife and controversy. The answer, he said, lay in the simple paradox of Paul’s life.

Paul was a great fighter because he was at peace. He who said, “Fight the good fight of faith,” spoke also of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding”; and in that peace the sinews of his war were found. He fought against the enemies that were without because he was at peace within; there was an inner sanctuary in his life that no enemy could disturb.

Peace is essential to godly war

Then Machen gave as clear a gospel call as I have ever read. When I realized that he was preaching to seminary students and was simply calling for a peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, I was struck with the connection of experiencing the gospel with contending for the gospel. War (fighting for the faith) and peace (being right with God) are reconciled.

Have you yourselves that peace, my friends? If you have, you will not be deceived by the propaganda of any disloyal church. If you have the peace of God in your hearts, you will never shrink from controversy; you will never be afraid to contend earnestly for the Faith.

The cruelty of tolerance

Machen’s last words in that sermon challenge us today:

But God save you from such a neutrality (tolerance) as that! It has a certain worldly appearance of urbanity and charity. But how cruel it is to burdened souls; how heartless it is to those little ones who are looking to the Church for some clear message from God! God save you from being so heartless and so unloving and so cold! God grant, instead, that in all humility but also in all boldness, in reliance upon God, you may fight the good fight of faith. Peace is indeed yours, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. But that peace is given you, not that you may be on-lookers or neutrals in love’s battle, but that you may be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

After reading this sermon, I imagined hearing it in a renewal gathering in the PC(USA) today where we live in the context of a denomination where so many are pro-choice, pro-multiple theologies, and pro- “anything goes” sexuality; and I heard a call to “war and peace.” I didn’t hear anything that was schismatic. I didn’t hear anything that was governed by modern virtues of plurality, loyalty or tolerance. I heard a call that should be on the hearts of all who claim biblical authority, godly morals, and Reformed theology.

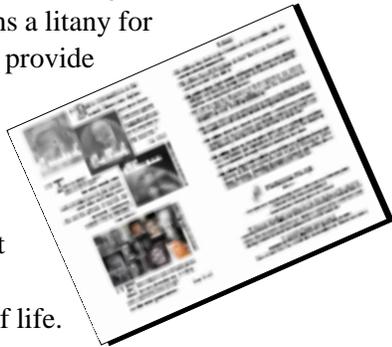
Don Elliott is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Corinth, MS and President of PPL.

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday materials available

PPL has Sanctity of Human Life Sunday (SOHLS) materials available for use by churches. SOHLS is usually observed on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. However, PPL materials are suitable for use at any time of the year.

PPL SOHLS materials focus on the wonder of God's gift of each human life. This year's packet includes a bulletin insert with Scriptures that emphasize God's creation, call, and choosing of each one of us. The insert contains a litany for use during worship. We provide a master of the insert that can be copied for the number needed for your congregation.

The SOHLS packet also contains a sample sermon on the subject of life.



“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation.”

• Psalm 71:18

Pro-Life efforts in the church need your support

These are troubled times in the Church. The Presbyterian Church (USA) faces an almost constant temptation to lose her identity in Christ. The PC(USA) Washington Office issues a steady stream of advocacy against biblical marriage, against abstinence for the unmarried and against any restrictions on abortion.

This is not the biblical message. This is not the historical message of the Christian Church.

Show your support for reform in the denomination on the issues of life and death and sexuality: Support the ministry of Presbyterians Pro-Life.

PPL is working for change. Change in the denomination and change in peoples' lives. We need your partnership. Please give generously. Invest in reforming the Church that your children will inherit!

PPL News is available on audiotape. This is a resource designed particularly for our readers with limited vision. If you have a friend or relative who is not reading the PPL News because of the ten point type, please make that person aware of this service which is a gift from a faithful Presbyterian pastor in Pennsylvania.

Every Reader Response

“Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them” (Jeremiah 1:17)

____ Enclosed: My contribution to support PPL's work \$ _____

____ Our church, named below, wants to be contacted to walk alongside women in crisis pregnancies.

Please send me the following resources:

- ____ A *Pure Hearts! Pure Lives!* packet
- ____ A “God Gives Us Life Through Adoption” packet
- ____ A copy of “Abortion and the Medical Benefits Plan of the Presbyterian Church (USA)”
- ____ PPL's “Life Support” prayer ministry
- ____ A sample packet of PPL materials
- ____ Information on starting a local chapter of PPL
- ____ A catalogue of PPL resources
- ____ A **Sanctity of Human Life Sunday packet**

More resources:

- ____ “Discovering Grace”: A resource packet for local ministry (suggested contribution \$9).
- ____ The PPL adult curriculum video series: “Created, Loved, and Called” (suggested contribution \$59/VHS; \$25/DVD)
- ____ A copy of *Not My Own: Abortion and the Marks of the Church*, by Terry Schlossberg and Elizabeth Achtemeier (suggested contribution \$10)
- ____ Videotape of PPL 2004 G.A. event, featuring Frederica Mathewes-Green and Tara Winter (suggested contrib. \$20)

Name		Church and location	
Street Address		City	State Zip
Daytime phone		Email address	

Please return to PPL, 3942 Middle Rd., Allison Park, PA 15101. PPL is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization of members of the PC(USA).

A financial statement is available from PPL upon written request

Woman to Woman: "R" words

by Marie Bowen

Rrrrr! Singers work very hard to develop a rolled "R" sound. In voice lessons, my first efforts were pitiful. Later, when crawling on the floor with my first son playing "trucks and tractors," I developed a great "Vrrrrroom and Rrrrrrrrrr"!

Roots

Lately I've been thinking about words that begin with "R." Words like **roots**. I'm a gardener. I know it is futile to pull weeds in hot dry weather when the earth is sun-baked and hard. Pulling will simply break off the stem and leave the root embedded. When rain comes, it will grow again. Such weeds are deeply anchored and pulling won't remove them. They must be dug with a hoe or spade.

The roots of sin can be like that: stubborn and persistent. Eve's sin was threefold. **She believed a lie** that was completely contrary to what God had spoken to her and Adam. **She did not trust** in the essential goodness of God. **She chose to disobey** God's rule.

In the PC(USA) we have sinned with regard to abortion. The 1992 abortion policy leads women to **believe a lie**: that abortion "can be a morally acceptable... decision." The policy is contrary to the whole teaching of scripture regarding the ownership and value of human life.

Rights

Our church tells a woman that we can offer no guidance to her; she alone is responsible to make this choice. We affirm her **right** to control her own life and we intimate that *any* decision she makes is good. The policy omits any reference to God's power to move positively in her

situation, to change circumstances, or to bring good into her life through a child. PC(USA) abortion policy **fails to encourage women to trust** the essential goodness and power of God to transform, redeem, and restore their lives!

Rules

Once a woman believes abortion is an acceptable choice and that God is

"...We need to confess our guilt in the complicity of abortion, return to the cross and throw ourselves at the feet of a merciful God"

powerless to help redeem her situation she may well reason that choosing abortion will allow her to return to her own plans and reinstate her former lifestyle. She knows the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and yet the church tells her abortion is acceptable. It's her **right** to take ownership over the life of the fetus and choose to destroy that life. Ignore God's **rule!** Assert your rights! "Surely you will not die!" The lie conceives and brings forth sin.

Repentance

It is not just the woman who has sinned. The PC(USA) has sinned in its abortion policy. We need a new "R"

word: **repen-**

tance! We

have all

sinned. *I* have

believed lies,

failed to trust God and broken his rules. *I*

need to repent...often! The PC(USA)

needs *corporate* repentance. As a

denomination we need to confess our

guilt in the complicity of abortion, return

to the cross and throw ourselves at the

feet of a merciful God. Throughout

scripture, **repentance** always turns God's

heart from judgment to **restoration**. We

need restoration in the PC(USA)!

We who call ourselves pro-life and

work to change the policy of our denomi-

nation may think we are justified by our

protest, but I believe God calls us to

identify with the sin of our church, to

intercede, mourn and repent on her

behalf. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem,

let's weep for his church.

Special "R" words for Terry

For 18 years, Terry Schlossberg has worked tirelessly as Executive Director of Presbyterians Pro-Life. She has been a clear and consistent voice for truth in the church. We will truly miss her leadership.

Terry, **Rest, relax** and **rejoice** in the work of your hands! May God grant you a **rich reward** for your good labor.



Presbyterians Pro-Life

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