

[OVT-004] On Forming a Commission to Write a New PC(USA) Confession to Be Considered for Inclusion in the Book of Confessions—From the Presbytery of Arkansas.

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

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Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Arkansas Presbytery
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Arkansas overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to form a commission to write a new confession for the PC(USA) to be considered for inclusion in the *Book of Confessions*. This commission shall be formed by no later than December 31st, 2022.

Rationale

According to the Confessional Nature of the Church report, “In every time and place the church is called to make the implications of its fundamental confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ unmistakably clear and relevant” (*Minutes*, 1986, Part I, pp. 51–52, 516–27).

The *Book of Confessions* has not kept up with theological developments within the church. This is particularly clear regarding theological anthropology. An underlying question in our time is: what does it mean to be human in the 21st century? Oppressive theological anthropologies have elevated particular groups and reduced the humanity of those deemed “other” because of their race, gender, nationality, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. Secular anthropologies reduce the meaning and purpose of human life to immediate happiness and the accumulation of material possessions while also teaching that humanity is competitive by nature, viewing other individuals and groups as threats against the self. These anthropologies, which are widespread in our society, are part of a worldview that is destructive not only of our relationships with other people, but also of the world in which we live. These damaging worldviews promote the oppression and exploitation of the earth and its peoples. These worldviews are not consistent with God’s vision of humanity revealed in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in Scripture, and attested to in the life and ministry of the church. We have the opportunity as the church to provide a descriptive and prescriptive theological anthropology that is rooted in our theology and Scripture and addresses the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century.

The Confession of Belhar comes the closest to addressing these issues within our current *Book of Confessions*. While the Confession of Belhar offers a powerful call for justice rooted in our relationship to Jesus Christ, it does not provide a clear answer to the more basic question of what it means to be human in the 21st century. This new confession would include the exploration of traditional theological topics such as the *imago dei* and sin, along with the very real contemporary theological topics such as race, gender, community, and technology. It should incorporate a theological anthropology that leads to the development of an interconnected ethics in topics such as love, justice, sexual identity, equality, immigrant status, ecology, and reconciliation.

The documents in the *Book of Confessions* provide a deep and rich foundation for our faith, but they have not kept up with the theological developments of the church. It is time for the PC(USA) to write a new confession. This new confession would not only include a comprehensive theological understanding of what it means to be human, but also articulate the doctrines and beliefs of the church for the 21st century as it joins Jesus Christ's work and vision for grace, mercy, welcome, hope, justice, peace, compassion, and love.

Concurrence

Tres Rios Presbytery