

FROM CONFORMITY TO TRANSFORMATION
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Prologue

*“Be not conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed
by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2)*

The church by nature is both proactive and reactive. First and foremost, the church is a proactive community because the gospel, which calls the church into being and sustains its existence, is the story of God’s redemption of fallen creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church is proactive because this message, which defines the church’s mission, is good news and a great joy for the whole world.

As a consequence of this, the church is also and necessarily a reactive community, commissioned by Jesus Christ to be a faithful steward and defender of the sacred gospel entrusted to it. The church exists not in an ideal world but in the rebellious and broken world which Jesus Christ came to redeem. The church itself often conforms, both willingly and unwillingly, to this fallen world, and hence the church must live by the same judgment and grace that it proclaims to the world by learning to repent of its conformity to that which is contrary to God’s revealed will in Scripture and to apply God’s redemptive story revealed in Scripture to its own life. In so doing the church both declares and models God’s redemptive story to the fallen world in which it lives.

The Biblical story is a repeated narrative of both Israel and the church being called by God’s Holy Spirit from conformity with the fallen world to renewed life through transformation to the image of God, which is supremely manifested in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We believe that God’s Holy Spirit is calling the PCUSA today to move from conformity to transformation, and that we who are members of the PCUSA and followers of Christ must hear and obey that call.

The passage of Amendment 10-A ushers the PCUSA into an erroneous conformity with contemporary culture which believers in the word of God as revealed in Scripture, and as attested in the ecumenical and historic Christian tradition, cannot affirm and still remain faithful to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church. In this error we hear both a judgment on the PCUSA for heeding the voice of a hired hand who will abandon the church to culture, and also a summons of grace to hear and obey the call of the Good Shepherd, who is the one True Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:12). The present hour is a *kairos*-moment, both gravely dangerous and yet graciously propitious, in which the church must repent of its conformity to the world and humbly submit to the Lordship of Christ so that “Christ might be formed in you” (Gal 4:19).

The significance of Amendment 10-A is not limited to ordination of persons who espouse and/or practice same-gender sexual relationships, and it would be equally mistaken to craft a response to 10-A that reacts solely to this phenomenon. The three-decade struggle that eventuated in the passage of 10-A involved a complex of mistaken theological and ecclesial assumptions that are interconnected and inseparable. If believers in the PCUSA who adhere to the historic and orthodox Christian faith are to make a faithful response to these varied assumptions they must call upon the whole counsel of God. The passage of Amendment 10-A is no uncertain trumpet call. Rather, it musters historic and orthodox Christian believers within the PCUSA to forsake a cycle of mistaken conformities and enter fully and faithfully into the renewal of the church's mind so that it may be transformed according to the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Problems

Among the articles of faith that the church needs to confess anew in our day are the following:

- **Jesus Christ**

Conformity

The PCUSA has conformed and acquiesced to a creeping pluralistic understanding of salvation in which the person and work of Jesus Christ are mistakenly regarded as one among many or even infinite ways in which God offers and effects human salvation.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the PCUSA to reclaim the apostolic proclamation that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved" than by the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12); and to reclaim the confessional tradition that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death" (Barmen 8.11).

- **Redemption**

Conformity

The PCUSA has conformed to a subtle but perceptible theological shift away from a "Second Article" theology to a "First Article" theology. The shift, which is particularly evident in the debate over human sexuality, mistakenly confesses that God's act of creation is more definitive and authoritative than God's act of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the PCUSA to confess vigorously and proclaim faithfully that creation, including human nature itself, has been disfigured by willful

human disobedience, and that as a consequence creation is no longer a trustworthy representative or mediator of divine life. Creation itself is in need of redemption that can come only from the Creator, who, in the sending of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, “reconciles all things to God, having made peace through the blood of the cross” (Col 1:20).

- **Sin**

Conformity

In the decades-long debate over ordination of persons who either espouse and/or practice same-sex relationships the PCUSA has focused attention on this particular sin and diverted its attention, or given the impression of having diverted its attention, from other sins that Scripture declares equally or more injurious to the Body of Christ.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the church to hear in its rightful condemnation of unrepentant homosexual practice a self-condemnation for its neglect of other sins of the flesh such as fornication and adultery, as well as complacency to sins of unholiness, divorce, idolatry, greed, injustice, oppression, and neglect of the created order. The church must earnestly heed the words of the apostle Paul, “I say again as I said before, those who continue in these practices will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21). Whenever the church treats sin, in whatever form, with accommodation or complacency, it diminishes the costly self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, the only way “under heaven by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

- **Holy Spirit**

Conformity

The PCUSA has increasingly conformed to a willingness to accept cultural change as evidence of the Holy Spirit’s will for the church.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the PCUSA to reclaim the Biblical and orthodox teaching that the Holy Spirit is not an arbitrary divine agent working in tandem with culture, but the very presence of the mystery and power of God whose sole purpose is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, and to transform and restore all creation into his likeness.

- **Holy Scripture**

Conformity

The PCUSA has subtly conformed to a shift in thinking that identifies the locus of divine revelation in the individual human conscience, or in a divine spark within each human soul, as the true and final arbiter of ultimate reality.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates church to proclaim that God has not revealed himself ultimately and salvifically through the processes of nature, including human nature, which has been corrupted by a fall from grace, but that God's full and saving self-revelation can only be known in the history of Israel that culminates in Jesus Christ, as he is attested in Scripture.

- **Ordination**

Conformity

The PCUSA has conformed to a practice of ordination that is freighted with assumptions and understandings that often exceed and sometimes are at variance from the rudiments of the concept present in the New Testament.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates church to acknowledge that the word "ordination," and the office associated with it in the PCUSA, do not occur in the New Testament, and that a reconsideration of the office in light of its essential New Testament understanding is necessary given the changing denominational and ecclesial landscape in America and the world.

- **Denomination**

Conformity

The PCUSA, like most mainline denominations, has conformed to an understanding and practice of denominations that derives from intramural divisions among post-Reformation ecclesiastical bodies, which has also been heavily influenced by models from the corporate world.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the PCUSA to reconsider the concept of denomination from the perspective of the New Testament teaching on the ecumenical nature of the local church body.

- **Ecumenicity**

Conformity

The PCUSA, like many denominations, has conformed to a self-definition that is largely the result of church bodies differentiating themselves from other church bodies.

These definitions and distinctions are increasingly irrelevant in a post-Christendom and indeed post-Christian world. The essential Christian mission of the church today cannot be defined by or confined within past ecclesiastical fiefdoms.

Transformation

The gospel calls and obligates the PCUSA to reconsider the form and mission of its organizational structure in light of the true situation confronting the church today. The relevant distinctions today are no longer among various denominations, or even among Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, but the more fundamental distinction between Christianity and other religions, Christian and non-Christian, Christian and secular, church and world.

Proposal

(This is for us as a believing community to decide.)