

Three 'Jesus is Lord' overtures are scuttled

By John H. Adams, The Layman Online, Posted Tuesday, June 12, 2001

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – A committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) scuttled three "Jesus alone is Lord" overtures and substituted in their place a comment calling on the Office of Theology and Worship to prepare a broader view of Christology using *The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*.

With its comment, the committee skirted an up-or-down vote on the three overtures, which concurred in affirming that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior of all humanity – and not just those in the Christian faith.

Proponents of those overtures appeared ready on June 11, the night the committee reached its decision, to prepare a minority report to present to the full General Assembly.

There was one attempt to placate the advocates of the three overtures. A proposed amendment to the comment would have inserted a phrase about the "singular saving Lordship of Jesus Christ," but the committee rejected that proposal. It then voted 45-9, with three abstentions, to lateral the issue to the Office of Theology and Worship.

The outcome appeared predictable after committee members, participating in four roundtable discussions about the overtures, reported back in plenary session. The facilitators for those discussions listed far more objections to the overtures than agreement with them.

In their reports, they called the overtures "a power play;" an excuse to vent "underlying feelings that have been pent up;" an unnecessary repetition of tenets that have already been affirmed by the denomination; a "lose-lose" situation if the committee voted on the amendments; a confused and abbreviated understanding of who Jesus is; and a failure to represent God as trinity.

The harshest attack on the three overtures was aimed at Overture 01-52, which sought to require that the stated clerk and the executive director of the General Assembly Council affirm that Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all humanity. Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and Executive Director John Detterick were in the audience, but they made no statements to the committee.

Marj Carpenter, who was granted the floor because of her status as a former moderator of the General Assembly, was one of the last to speak. "I don't want any litmus test," she said. But she also urgently pleaded with those who favored the three overtures not to "pick up your marbles" and leave the denomination.

"Sometimes we come close to going astray," she said. "Don't leave us. Pray about it and get on with it."

After facilitators reported to the full committee, it moved quickly to get the overtures off the table and respond, instead, with a comment calling for the preparation of study materials. There was one gratuity: The comment included thanks to the originators of the overtures for bringing their concerns to the General Assembly.

The three overtures emerged in the wake of a controversy over a Peacemaking Conference sponsored by the denomination in 2000. The Rev. Dirk Ficca, a Presbyterian minister, told the conference that there were two views of salvation: instrumental and revelatory.

By instrumental, Ficca said there were those who believed that Jesus alone was the instrument of salvation. By revelatory, he said there were other ways – including other religions – by which people could experience salvation.

Krista Painter of La Jolla Presbyterian Church in California, an advocate for one of the overtures, told the committee that she attended the Peacemaking Conference with her daughter. After Ficca's keynote address, Painter said her daughter attended a youth gathering that was part of the conference. She said her daughter was told, "Now you can tell your friends, even if they don't believe in Jesus Christ, that they can still go to heaven."

Another overture advocate, Charles Castle of San Joaquin Presbytery in California, told the committee, "Sometimes people in the church have trouble dealing with the basic essence of Jesus Christ." He contrasted that with God, who "gave the truth straight, not airbrushed."