

Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

Twelve Reasons:

5

presbyterians for renewal

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

Learning from History

by John “Mike” Loudon, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, FL

The great theological issues of the Church did not resolve themselves quickly, or without much discussion, dissension, and pain. Our understanding of God as a Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, took centuries to define. The Apostolic Fathers, including Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp, addressed the issue. Apologists like Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Theophilus of Antioch, sought to use both Greek philosophy and Biblical language to describe God. Irenaeus waded into the controversy, as did Tertullian. Origen added his thoughts, and then along came Arius and Athanasius facing each other in theological battle. The Emperor Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD to resolve the matter, but it was not until the Council of Constantinople in 381 that a final decision was reached, and Christians defined our belief in a Triune God.

The Trinitarian controversy was just the tip of the iceberg. Next came the Christological controversy and the Church's struggle to understand who Jesus Christ truly is. We Evangelicals think we have a pretty good handle on this, but such was not the case in the early centuries of the Church. There were the Ebionists who denied that Jesus was divine. There were the Docetists who moved in the opposite direction and questioned the humanity of Jesus. The Gnostics who developed an elaborate, descriptive philosophy of cosmic speculation. The Monarchians believed in a dualism of spirit and matter. Tertullian and Origen did battle with them. Origen wrote on the subject, and so did Arius and Athanasius. But Nicaea did not settle the Christological issue; next came the Apollinarins who were Monophysites and believed in only one nature. There was Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuetia, Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria. The Council of Ephesus dealt with conflicts between Cyril and Nestorius. The Synods of Constantinople in 448 and in 449 waded into the controversy. Finally the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD set about to resolve the dispute over “Who Is Jesus Christ?” The Chalcedonian formula gave equal recognition

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to both the unity and duality in the persons. The divine Word is a unity existing in two natures, each of which is complete and retains its own distinctive properties and operation.

Next came the Ecclesiological controversy, which was followed by the Anthropological controversy, and the Sacramental controversy. One of the best studies of all of these church controversies is Dr. Donald McKim's book, *Theological Turning Points* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1988). The bottom line is that it took centuries for these issues to be resolved, and even then, some disagreed and went their separate ways.

The history of the Presbyterian Church is no different. In this country alone we have debated various issues and divided a number of times. Often our divisions have led to reunions years later. There was the Old Side and New Side split of 1741 over evangelism methodology, and then the Old School and New School division in 1837 over revivalism, and the division of the denomination North and South in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War. The famed Modernist and Fundamentalist debates of the early twentieth century and concerns with the Board of Missions led some to leave and form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the early 1930's. Women's Ordination and fears of reunion with the Northern Church led the founders of the Presbyterian Church in America to leave in 1972, and theological and political issues led to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church being formed in 1978.

Church history instructs us that some of the greatest and most important controversies over theological and moral issues took time to be resolved. In the meantime, we who claim the name of Christ are called to maintain our convictions with patience and with hopeful endurance, trusting God to bring resolution in His time. There are many Evangelical pastors, and lay leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are working for spiritual renewal, and there are many faithful congregations where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and lived each week. There are many PC(USA) congregations teaching scriptural truth, seeking justice, and reaching out to people in mission, and service with the love of Jesus Christ. They are all around us.

My prayer, and the prayer of those on the board of Presbyterians For Renewal, is that God would impress upon your heart to stay and minister within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and lovingly feed God's sheep in this pasture, working where God is already at work.