

Resolved: Pittsburgh Presbytery, in the discharge of its pastoral duty as an ordaining body, is desirous of placing neither any candidate for ordination nor any examiner in a potentially equivocal moral position.

To that end, Pittsburgh Presbytery recognizes that candidates for ordination are expected to answer the following question with an affirmative answer:

[W-4.4003c] Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

Further, Pittsburgh Presbytery notes that the confessions of the church declare, among many other things and for example, that:

[C-3.19] (W)e believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk...

and

[C-1.2] We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end;

and

[C-6.131.1] (UPCUSA) Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter,

cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life.

or

[C-6.133] (PCUS) Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.

Therefore, Pittsburgh Presbytery offers the following guidance to potential candidates for ordination by Pittsburgh Presbytery: the only acceptable answer to the above referenced question is an unqualified "Yes," or "I do." An answer of "Yes, with departure," or "I do, with departure," is considered the moral equivalent of "No," or "I do not," and is unacceptable; and will bar a candidate for ordination from being ordained by Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Rationale

While Pittsburgh Presbytery appreciates the latitude offered by the General Assembly in its Authoritative Interpretation of 2008 which "requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination," it also recognizes that the ordination question referenced above requires either a "Yes" or "No" answer. The question presumes that "the essential tenets of the Reformed faith" are in fact "expressed in the confessions of our church" and that they are "authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do."

Pittsburgh Presbytery notes that in their "prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis" of each candidate for ordination that each and every examiner has vowed "[that they will] be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people of God" Therefore, to qualify a candidate for ordination who expresses a "departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice" places the examiner in danger of vacating their own ordination vow: intellectual and moral consistency with regard to their own vow taken would require the examiner to protest any departure from "the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church." Furthermore, the qualification of a departure by an examiner would place him or her in a place of exercising authority over the "essential tenets of

the Reformed faith” as they would be making a determination over which of the ideas or truths expressed in the confessions of the church are “authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do,” and which are not; such authority is only vested in the General Assembly under our constitution and applicable case law.

Likewise, any “departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination” places the candidate in danger of telling an untruth when required to answer the ordination question. If, as has been observed, the only appropriate answers to the ordination question are “Yes” and “No,” the departing candidate may be placed in a moral quandary in which they either affirm that which they truly do not believe or practice, or answer negatively, and thus be barred from ordination. If the answer “Yes, with departure” is to be accepted as a legitimate answer to the ordination question, then the church is at risk of losing its theological stability and identity as “expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do”; the logical consequence of this answer is that there is no longer an absolute standard of theological truth, and this clearly contradicts the assertion that “the essential tenets of the Reformed faith [are] expressed in the confessions of our church [and are] authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do”

The conclusion is that the only meaningful standards for ordination are “the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do” and that these standards must be objectively, conscientiously, and impartially applied to each and every candidate examination