

## **Response of the Session of Church of the Redeemer, Deseronto, Ontario, to the Special Committee of Past Moderators About "On the Question of Unity and Diversity"**

January 16, 2018

As we respond as a Session to the paper "On the Question of Unity and Diversity," we first want to thank the Church Doctrine Committee for their diligent work. We appreciate their struggling with Scripture and their focus on Calvin and the reformation, who worked very hard for unity among the various churches of their time.

The Session of the Church of the Redeemer, Deseronto, after a long struggle with the issue, reached consensus about the document "On the question of Unity and Diversity" (hereafter referred to as "Unity") at its meeting of November 28, 2018.

We applaud the fact that "Unity" starts by quoting from Scripture—from the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me..." We do find it problematical though, that one of the fundamental principles of exegesis, to read Scripture in context, is not followed. "Unity" ignores that earlier in this prayer Jesus emphasizes that the church grows in truth. Verse 17 reads, "Make them holy by Your truth; teach them Your word, which is truth." Verse 19 reads, "And I give Myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by Your truth." John 17 does not emphasize unity above everything else. —In verse 14 Jesus says, "I have given them Your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." – Although Jesus prays for unity, in verses 14-20 there is also a strong separation between those who follow truth, as found in the Word, and those who do not.

When "Unity" quotes Romans 15:5-6, it again needs to be read within the context of the larger part. John McArthur comments about Romans 15, "In these final five chapters, Paul explains in great detail how believers are to practically live out the rich theological truths of chapters 1-11." William Hendriksen, in his excellent commentary picks up on what McArthur said. These commentators place unity within the context of truth, as revealed in the Word of God.

The Session of the church of the Redeemer had great problems with the paragraph that is named "Disagreeing in Faith, Romans 14" ("Unity" page 8). Surely dietary laws are nowhere on the same level as the LGBTQI issue! Andy Cornell address the issue succinctly and accurately with a series of questions, "...does what we eat and drink carry eternal consequences? Does what we do with our bodies in a sexual manner carry eternal consequences? Is it fair to compare the two?" (In his open letter)

The Bible, on many occasions, calls Christians to unity within the body of Christ. We agree that striving for unity should be taken very seriously and all believers should work as diligently as possible towards it, but it should never replace truth. We, therefore applaud the paragraph named Denominations and Unity that starts on page 4 of "Unity" with an emphasis on the supreme authority of scripture.

The Session of the Church of the Redeemer appreciates the quotes from Calvin (page 1, paragraphs 3-5) and the conclusion that is reached in paragraph 6, “This gives Reformed Christians a strong commitment to unity in the visible church. Even though the ‘purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ...’ somewhere there is one that does deserve our allegiance and membership: ‘Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to His will.’” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV)

Please note that the Westminster Confession of Faith says, “...according to His will.”—The church needs to seek and follow God’s will above everything else!

Calvin and Reformed theology as a whole, must be read in context. It is worth noticing that the Reformers searched the Word of God to answer the question of which churches were actually churches. Although there was some debate, the Reformed churches eventually settled on the belief that the Word revealed three essential outward marks by which any discerning person could determine whether any given congregation was truly a church: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin” (Belgic Confession, Article 29). Living Faith affirms this truth, “...the church is present when the Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and as it orders its life according to the word of God.” (7.1.6) The Belgic Confession continues: “As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry” (Belgic Confession, Article 29)

Session finds the paragraph in “Unity” that reads “Can We Agree to Disagree?” (page 8) not to be true. “Unity” states, “The different answers to the question of LGBTQI welcome and inclusion are not simply two different opinions, but two different commitments growing out of profoundly different ways of looking at the world.” –That is not true! We found that elders and members, holding profoundly different worldviews, also in regards to the LGBTQI issue, came to the same consensus based on our interpretation of Scripture. The consensus in Session was reached, not by our worldviews, but by what Scripture dictates! Items that “Unity” alleges that bring tension such as different understandings of the Lord’s Supper, marriage equality, ordination to church office are not even on our radar! At the end our worldview should play second fiddle, since we, as a denomination, are bound to be driven by the dictates of Scripture!

This leads to a cardinal question: When a part of the Church has strayed so far away from the truth, as revealed in Scripture, that it cannot be called the true church of Christ anymore, should one remain in unity with it any longer?

\*\*The Apostle Paul is clear about this, “Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don’t touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.” 2 Corinthians 6:17

**\*\*In the Revelation, Christ calls the congregations in Ephesus and Pergamum to break with the Nicolaitans. The church in Thyatira is reprimanded for following the ways of Jezebel. Both the Nicolaitans and Jezebel were still very much part of the visible church, but in reality have strayed so far away from the truth that God calls His people to separate themselves from them.**

It is notable that both the Nicolaitans and Jezebel were involved in immorality and assaulted the church with sensual temptations. In the light of Romans 1:18-32 one wonders if the present issue in the PCC does not lead to the same immorality as what the early church were reprimanded for not separating from.

“Unity” states correctly on page 8 that the LGBTQI debate "is the tip of an iceberg of disagreements, most of which lie unexamined beneath the surface." The most important question is therefore, to rephrase the Belgic Confession, Article 29, “Does the Presbyterian Church in Canada rely more upon men than upon Christ and His word?” If the PCC strives to remain true to the Word, it can be viewed as a true church and God calls us all to unity. Then we need to struggle together, bringing the LGBTQI into the light of the Word and find answers there. If the PCC “...relies more upon men than upon Christ...” it has ceased to be a true church, and God calls us, just as for Corinth, Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira to separate. In that case (we pray it is not) the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith brings great comfort, “Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to His will.” (Chapter XXV) —Then those who hold Biblical truth dear need to separate from the PCC and join “...a church on earth to worship God according to His will.”—Being part of such a church is absolutely essential. We totally agree with The Second Helvetic Confession “...but we esteem fellowship with the true church of Christ so highly that we deny that those can live before God who do not stand in fellowship with the true church of God, but separate themselves from it. For as there was no salvation outside Noah’s ark when the world perished in flood; so we believe that there is no certain salvation outside Christ, who offers himself to be enjoyed by the elect in the church; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the true church of Christ.” (Chapter XVII, “Unity” page 2)