

June 5, 2007

Fathers and brothers,

Several open letters have been circulated prior to this year's General Assembly questioning the integrity and the wisdom of the *Report of the Ad Interim Study Committee on Federal Vision, New Perspective and Auburn Avenue Theology*. While we respect our brothers' sincere concerns, we write to express our support for the integrity of the process and the Committee, along with the modest recommendations which the Committee brings to the 35th General Assembly. We offer these humble answers to the objections which have been raised.

First, it has been suggested that the composition of the Committee was unfairly weighted. On the contrary, the Committee represents a broad range of thought within the PCA, bringing together many who have in the past disagreed on less essential (though important) issues. These seven elders are from seven different presbyteries and have between them served faithfully in at least 20 different churches across the PCA. One is a former moderator of the PCA, another is the Vice President for Academics of our denominational seminary, and a third, the chairman, was an active member of the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Network (PPLN) that spearheaded the passing of the "Good Faith Subscription" amendment. Three others are faithful and active ruling elders that have served the PCA in a variety of capacities. This broad composition highlights the tremendous opportunity for different "camps" across the PCA to join together at the 35th General Assembly to reaffirm what unites us most as a church: the centrality of God's grace in all of salvation. Further, such accusations reveal a mistrust of the motives of the Committee and the denomination's moderator, who has faithfully served our church, beginning in the RPCES, for over 35 years, including service as the editor of the PCA's news website. This is a form of *ad hominem* and does not address the substance of the report itself, nor the report's nine clear declarations which represent straightforward readings of the Westminster Standards with which few could disagree.

Second, it has been suggested that the lack of a minority report representing the views of the Federal Vision men is evidence that the Committee's report is unfair. In actuality, the vast majority of PCA Study Committees have produced unanimous reports. In the 35 year history of the PCA, 17 such unanimous reports have been produced. Included in this number are Study Committee Reports on such significant theological issues as Creation (2000), Divorce and Remarriage (1982), Fencing the Lord's Table (1990) and Spiritual Gifts (1974) and such significant ecclesiastical issues as Judicial Procedure (1996), Number of Offices (1979) and Strategic Planning (2005/2006). In fact, only three PCA Study Committees have reported to the General Assembly with minority reports attached. Rather than bemoan the lack of a minority report, the Assembly should be thankful that the Committee could speak with one voice on these issues, and bring clarity and instruction to the church.

Third, it has been suggested that the report leaves too many questions unanswered and lacks quality scholarship. Writing a report that is both informative and succinct enough

to be useful is indeed a balancing act and we appreciate that not everyone will be satisfied with how this balance is achieved. As a whole, the Report is comprehensive, sober, and judicious, without being large and unwieldy. Study Committees have historically been erected in the PCA precisely because it is impossible for the Assembly to act as a committee of a whole on matters such as this. Without reservation, we trust the scholarly qualifications and the integrity of the Committee. Three of the members have PhDs (Paul Fowler, Edinburgh, '73; Ligon Duncan, Edinburgh, '95; Sean Lucas, WTS, '02). These three men have been professors in at least five different seminaries, teaching New Testament (Fowler), theology (Duncan) and church history (Lucas). They, along with the other men on the Committee, are known to be thoughtful, fair-minded and generous scholar-pastors. The report is a reflection of a year's worth of their careful study.

Further, concerning the 27 questions which one open letter found on the internet asks, there are ready answers, most found within the report itself or its footnoted materials. It is one thing to ask questions; quite another to research the original sources oneself, or to suggest that the report, when carefully read and considered, is unclear. Nevertheless, in an effort to alleviate concerns, several PCA elders who have interacted with the Federal Vision have provided one response giving brief answers to the questions, trusting that these will go some of the way towards alleviating their concerns. It can be found at <http://humbleanswers.wordpress.com>. There may be other responses, but the main point is that we trust the Committee's research on behalf of the PCA, and thank them for their hard work in bringing us clarity and instruction in these important matters.

Fourth, it has been asserted that the Study Committee Report represents a "narrow" understanding of the Confession in contrast to the PCA being a "system subscription denomination." This is a simple misimpression. The PCA's good faith subscription was intended to guard against modification to the core of our beliefs (such as justification) while allowing some measure of liberty on secondary and tertiary matters. In fact, it is our concern that if the PCA cannot find the courage to speak her mind clearly regarding matters which clearly are "fundamentals of our system of doctrine" (BCO 21-4), then the PCA will no longer be a "good faith subscription" denomination and will inevitably balkanize into strict-subscriptionist and loose-subscriptionist camps, and our good faith system will be lost. We must not let this happen.

Finally, it is said that the Study Committee Report is premature and will put an end to the conversation. Our reply is that there is a time to remain silent, and a time to speak. Now is the time to speak. The conversation and debate concerning the Federal Vision has been going on for many years, and many different churches and presbyteries have been troubled. If some of our churches or presbyteries have been unaffected, we are thankful. But many others are asking for help and instruction from the General Assembly that they may know where the PCA stands. At least two NAPARC denominations and several Reformed seminaries have studied the issue and have spoken. We are convinced that the time has come for the PCA to make her mind clear on the fundamental matters of election, assurance of salvation and justification. We agree with the reformers that justification is the article by which the church must stand or fall.

It is neither proud nor unseasonable to reaffirm where we stand on these issues with clarity and decisiveness. We are convinced that if the PCA is to maintain a relevant and merciful witness in our ever changing culture, we must never change our perspective on the freeness and the greatness of the justification Christ has bought for us. If the PCA is to maintain a humble orthodoxy, she must never compromise these doctrines of grace, no matter how subtle the challenge or from where it arises.

Brothers, we recognize what our BCO preface says so well, that “men of good character and principles may differ,” particularly on matters of practical wisdom. We respect those who have concerns about this report and continue to welcome them as our brothers in One Church. At the same time, we urge the Assembly to speak clearly and decisively on these fundamentals of doctrine, by passing the recommendations made in the Study Report, that we may remain One Church united around the gospel of grace.

Your brothers in Christ,

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Chris Hutchinson
Pastor, Grace Covenant PCA, Blacksburg, VA

Fred Greco
Pastor, Christ Church PCA, Katy, TX

Jeff Hutchinson
Pastor, Trinity Church, Asheville, NC

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Mark Gibson,
Pastor, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Beaumont, TX

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