

Standards

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One of the absurdities of post-modernism, as applied to semantics, is the notion that no one can ever fully understand what any other person wants to communicate. This is absurd purely because the post-modernist must admit that no one will be able to understand what he is trying to explain about the subject.

The Bible

God is absolute and his truth is absolute. We accept the Bible as the absolute Word of God: to the Church it is the supreme *standard*. The Presbyterian Church of Australia bows before the authority of God's Word as the only rule of faith and practice.

As a confessional church the Presbyterian Church of Australia own and accept the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) as an exhibition of the sense in which we understand the Scriptures. Thus the Confession is another *standard*, however sub-ordinate to the Bible.

It now follows logically that office bearers of the Church must agree as far as these *standards* are concerned. By the vows they make they bind themselves to these standards. There is no ambiguity at this point.

It seems as if some spirit can make itself master of the Church to make the absurdity of post-modernism a reality. Although we might vehemently deny it, we might unknowingly practise it. The trap might lie in the argument that the Word and Confession must be "freshly" interpreted and applied "for our time". We heard the cry to be relevant – a well-meaning cry, but what does it really mean?

Vows of Office Bearers

Back to the matter of vows of office bearers. It is assumed that all who make these vows and sign the ordination register understand what the words mean and what the implications for their office are.

First question

There is no doubt that the first question means that the Bible is the Word of God.

Do you believe the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the only rule of faith and practice?

This Word is the only standard for life in the Church. It implies that man-made traditions, how noble it may look, should not have a role to play in shaping the theology and practice of the Church. It also cuts out all humanistic, liberalistic, socialistic, economic or market-driven principles which might present themselves for discipleship, evangelism, church growth, mission or worship.

It is disturbing to observe how some regard the Old Testament, creating a discontinuity between it and the New Testament. Covenantal Theology as expressed in the WCF suffers heavily.

Second Question

Do you accept the Westminster Confession of Faith as amended by the General Assembly and read in the light of the Declaratory Statement, as an exhibition of the sense in which you understand the Holy Scriptures, and as a confession of your faith; and do you engage [promise] firmly and constantly to adhere thereto and to the utmost of your power to maintain and defend the same?

This question is similarly easy to understand: the office-bearer owns the Westminster Confession of Faith as an exhibition of the sense in which he understands the Bible. Because this is possible he also vows to firmly engage, constantly adhere, and defend it with the utmost of his power. It would be impossible to answer "yes" to this question if there was any ambiguity.

It is equally disturbing to hear that very large chunks of the WCF are now regarded as non-essential to the faith which can be interpreted or discarded with at will.

¹ Feel free to duplicate this file or quote from it. The Name of the Lord be glorified!

More alarmingly is the fact that some office bearers do not have a clue what the Bible really teaches, let alone the WCF. Some go out of their way, not to defend and adhere, but to look for ways to bring into discredit the teachings of the Confession.

Third Question

It is certainly not by accident that the third question of ordination focuses on worship. Worship is standards applied/theology practised. Theology shapes worship and worship impacts upon theology. Is it possible to adhere to correct theology and not worship correctly? Is it possible to worship wrongly and still expect to adhere to correct theology? No!

Once again the question presupposes a *standard*: purity. It is pure, not because it is practiced in the Church, but because it is based on infallible *standard* of the Bible. Some office-bearers are not sure what this particular vow means. Yet, they still vowed that they “own” the purity of worship.

It is also worthwhile to consider the fifth vow: *“Are zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire to save souls, and not worldly interests or expectations (so far as you know your own heart), your great motives and chief inducements to the work of the Holy Ministry?”*

Do we see this in church life?

These vows have this in common: all areas of life must be under the Kingship of Jesus Christ to his honour and glory. The practical application of these vows differs: the third is aimed at corporate worship, while the fifth concerns evangelism/mission. These two things are not to be confused. The primary purpose of corporate worship is the gathering of God’s people to corporately worship Him his way of the day He ordained for it. Evangelism is effective living (everyday worship in all areas of life) as children of God, aimed at winning the lost so that they too can be counted into the family of God whom they now worship.

Do we really have this zeal? If so, how actively are we involved in the desire to worship God his way, and to save souls? Would it be an exaggeration to state that the majority of office bearers do not know how to explain basic doctrines to those under their care - building them up in their most holy faith - or salvation to the lost? Are we really fishers of men?

Is it perhaps so that some men are made leaders in “recognition” for their leadership in other social circles, but honestly they do not even live in a personal relationship with the Saviour?

We must return to standards

It is time that we return to *standards*; we need to understand that truth is absolute. Different opinions about the truth are impossible. That’s a nonsense which is only probable if there is some credibility to the absurdity of post-modernism. It has no place in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this truth Jesus Christ died to satisfy the righteousness of God. For this truth many thousands were willing to give their lives. For this truth we should be willing to give all we have, even if it means that we have to die in the process. We have to take up our cross and follow Christ who is the Truth and the Life.