

FIVE SOLAS

REFORMATION FAITH AND THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

In the sixteenth century the Christian Faith was often expressed in terms of five “solas” of the Protestant Reformation. How does the PC(USA) relate to these standards?

1. SOLA SCRIPTURA – SCRIPTURE ALONE

Sola Scriptura affirms the Bible to be without error in all matters pertaining to faith and life, the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

The Erosion of Authority

Although the PC(USA) still affirms in its Confessions that the Bible is the source of our faith and life, in its practice, individual interpretations are valued above the propositional truths of Scripture.

- The Confession of 1967 states that Scriptural authority is determined not by Scripture but by the interpreter. In effect this means that our intellect is valued above the plain meaning of the text (C67 – 9.27)
- Those who deny key biblical doctrines remain unchallenged. For example, in a sermon on Pentecost 2012, Rev. John Shuck denied that most of the events in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles ever happened.ⁱⁱ Previously, Shuck has denied many of the central tenets of the Christian faith.
- In the recent GA Permanent Judicial Commission Parnell case, those who sought to reference the authority of Scripture were told that since there are so many interpretations of the Bible, it cannot be used to provide any one position. ⁱⁱⁱ

2. SOLUS CHRISTUS – CHRIST ALONE

Solus Christus affirms that our salvation is accomplished by the work of Christ alone, our Mediator. His divine nature, sinless life, and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation with the Father.

The Erosion of Christology

Although the PC(USA) still affirms the importance of the example, teachings, and work of Christ, it seems much less certain about His lordship.

- The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns is bringing a resolution to the 2012 General Assembly encouraging participation in the “Words Matter” project, which seeks to eradicate the term “Lord “ for Jesus.[iv](#)
- According to the Fall 2011 Presbyterian Panel Report, only 41% of pastors agree that “only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved.” The number drops to 27% of specialized clergy.[v](#)
- The 2001 General Assembly failed to support a motion to declare “the singular, saving lordship of Jesus Christ.

3. SOLA GRATIA – GRACE ALONE

Sola Gratia affirms that, in salvation, we are rescued from the consequences of our rebellion by God’s grace alone. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ, overcoming the effects of the Fall, releasing us from bondage to sin, and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

The Erosion of the Gospel

The PC(USA) makes frequent references to grace, but has a humanistic (optimistic) understanding of the nature of fallen humanity. From what are we saved? Injustice and oppression are the usual answers.

- Liberation Theology, with Marxist overtones, has replaced salvation with justice and evangelism with political activism. Many extreme left wing causes have received support.[vi](#)
- Liberation Theology has also led the denomination to denounce the state of Israel and to compare its policies to Nazism. Divestment from companies seen to be helping Israel is being promoted.[vii](#)
- St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX, received an avowed atheist into membership, not because of religious conviction, but because he approved of the church's politics.[viii](#)
Grace is cheapened when it is not linked to either sincere repentance or saving faith.

4. SOLA FIDE – FAITH ALONE

Sola Fide affirms that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only perfect satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

The Erosion of the Atonement

The PC(USA) continues to issue a call to faith, but the focus of that faith is often not the finished work of Christ.

- In 1993, at the "Re-Imagining" conference, supported by PC(USA) funds, one speaker declared, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff..."[ix](#)
- In 2002, at a Covenant Network conference, a speaker declared the atoning death of Christ to be an outdated doctrine.[x](#)
- In 2010, Margaret Miles gave the Sprunt Lecture at Union Seminary in Richmond, VA in which she suggested replacing the cross with a lactating breast.[xi](#) She said, "The cross is inappropriate as a symbol of God's love."

5. SOLI DEO GLORIA – TO GOD ALONE THE GLORY

Soli Deo Gloria affirms that, because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, our worship must glorify Him at all times. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the

authority of God, and for His glory alone.

The Erosion of Exclusivity

The PC(USA) says that it glorifies God, but can appear more interested in being politically-correct. For example, commitment to diversity and inclusivity at any cost has led them to universalism.

- The new Form of Government begins with the claim that “the triune God... redeems... all people” (F-1.01); this is universalism, the belief that all people will be saved, irrespective of belief in Christ.
- The new Form of Government guarantees the full inclusion of all people “irrespective of theological conviction” (F-1.0403), without mention of Christ as the means of salvation.
- Traditional language for God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been rejected, both by radical feminists who disapprove of masculine language, and by those who do not wish to offend people of other religions or those with no religion at all. [xii](#)

[i](#) What follows is based, loosely, on the 1996 Cambridge Declaration. monergism.com/The%20Cambridge%20Declaration.pdf

[ii](#) shuckandjive.org/2012/05/pentecosts-miracle-sermon.html

[iii](#) oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pjc22003.pdf

[iv](#) pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3941&promoid=238

[v](#) pcusa.org/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel_profile_survey_2011_summer_color.pdf

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