

What They Did and Did Not Say: Considerations for the Vote on Amendment B in Your Presbytery

By William P. Campbell

On January 31, 2009, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina voted to accept Amendment B and became the first of the PCUSA presbyteries to drift from its voting stance in 2001 on the same issue. It appears that over this eight year span, the Presbytery of WNC has shifted its ecclesiastical weight from the right to the left. For the sake of the rest of the presbyteries that have yet to vote on Amendment B, I offer reflections on what the victors in our presbytery did and did not say.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that they have personal friends and family members who suffer greatly by feelings of rejection from the PCUSA. Their stories about homosexuals being rejected by the Church were quite emotional.

What they *did not say* is that our congregations will gladly receive homosexuals. In fact, we are already blessed with great numbers of homosexuals who seek to live faithfully to their Lord in marriage or singleness. Over half of homosexual males today are living in heterosexual marriages, and many of us could not even identify them in our congregations if asked to do so.¹ In every congregation I have served, I have struggled alongside not only gay singles, but those with homosexual leanings who are married. In the same way, any of us can (and should) visit a nearby Exodus Conference or a related support group, where we can meet countless men and women who once believed they would be forever homosexual, but who by the power of the gospel were changed. Thus we too can share emotional stories in our presbyteries, not only about the human need for love and acceptance, but about God's power to change lives.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that we must give an option for ordination to the select, faithful homosexuals who claim to be locked into life-long monogamous relationships.

What they *did not say* is that consistent behavior does not equate with faithfulness to God's standards. The problem with creating our own standards is that humans tend consistently to do what *feels* right rather than what *is* right. Our first concern in this regard should not be about the two to three percent of our population that is homosexual, but about the ninety-seven percent of our population that is heterosexual. Our concern should be for married couples who are not satisfied sexually and who are itching to look outside the bounds of marriage for fulfillment. Our concern should be for the heterosexual singles who would like to be sexually active and who outnumber our gay population by ten to one. With this in mind, let us not lower our historic standards, but rather shore them up against the standards of Scripture.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that they have gay friends who have tried all of their lives to change, but could not.

What they *did not say* is that we humans are all broken by sin. Most of us have propensities that may not change and wounds that may not heal this side of heaven. But God's redemptive power is a keeping power, not based on our efforts but on God's grace. Amendment B promotes a marked shift from grace to works, from "*repentance ... of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin*" (G-6.0106b) to "*the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards*" (*Amendment B*). The Scriptures tell us that our sincere efforts are not as powerful as is God's grace.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that there are different ways to interpret the Bible on the matter of homosexuality, even by biblical scholars.

What they *did not say* is that the recently developed theologies promoted by progressive theologians were unheard of in the two-thousand year history of the Church and remain a minority opinion today. Worst, the approach needed to arrive at these non-orthodox positions is based on arguments that dig into history and cultures in a desperate attempt to alter what select portions of the Scripture clearly state.² Honestly, if their methods of biblical interpretation were used on other sections of the Scripture, many essential biblical doctrines could be shredded. The problem with their methods is not the incorporation of scholarship, but the spinning of scholarship

with agendas. There have been so many theological and cultural assaults on the Romans 1 passage, for example, that each new attempt makes the clear meaning of the text seem all the more unassailable. Our reformed understanding is that the Bible should interpret itself, and that the plain and primary meaning of the text can be discovered even by the average reader.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that it took the Church time to get over slavery and to ordain women, and that it is about time that we ordain gays and lesbians.

What they *did not* say is that the abolition movement was fueled by scriptural standards taught by Paul. They also forgot to mention that even some the most conservative sectors of the Church have ordained women for thousands of years. Nowhere does the Bible say that it is a sin to be a woman, but sexual practice outside the bonds of marriage is clearly prohibited in God's Word.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that they have friends who are gay and who have stated their unwillingness to be baptized by a church that won't allow them to serve in all of the positions of the Church.

What they *did not* say is that nearly every organization, religious or secular, holds higher standards for their leaders than they do for their members. Furthermore, leadership is not a right, but a responsibility, placed on the few who are called to represent the many.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that the Gospels (with an emphasis on John's Gospel) promote a Jesus who is kind and loving, not a watchdog.

What they *did not* say is that it was because of love that Jesus not only protected the woman caught in adultery, but told her to "go and sin no more" (John 8). Christ spoke against sin in his day, in all sectors of the religious community, and they angrily hung him on a cross. We are called to follow in His steps, showing love and compassion to everyone while speaking the truth with boldness.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that their amendment is a softer, nicer version of the statement that it seeks to replace (G-6.0106b).

What they *did not* say is that this softening actually removes the hinges from the last gate holding back the more than one third of our presbyteries that are pushing to exercise local option related to the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The fidelity and chastity clause (G-6.0106b) has become the centerpiece of this relentless push since 1996, and if it is removed, the 2008 decision by the highest judicial court in our denomination (the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission's Bush decision) will become unhinged.

Amendment B supporters *did* say that Amendment B, like our ordination vows, promotes a historic line-up of authorities: Christ, the Scriptures, and our Confessions.

What they *did not* say is that our vows affirm each of these authority levels, one at a time, but Amendment B lumps them together in a manner that removes Christ from Scripture. Changing the wording from "*Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture ...*" (G-6.0106b) to "*...pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures ...*" (Amendment B), takes our footing from the objective truths of God's Word to subjective opinions about where Jesus is leading us. In this line-up of authorities, humans come out on top, and Jesus will most certainly become warm and fuzzy.

Amendment B supporters *did* say (this was whispered in my ear by one of our presbytery leaders after the vote) that most people simply don't believe we should single out one particular sin.

What they *did not* say is that the fidelity and chastity clause (G-6.0106b) does not single out a particular sin, but rather affirms God's standards for marriage, as did Christ. Our Lord wisely affirmed God's creative order, which is woven into the fabric of the whole Bible, from Genesis, where one man and one woman are brought together in marriage, to Revelation, where Christ is symbolized as the Bridegroom of the Church. By affirming this standard,

both Jesus and those who vote against Amendment B hold the Church back from the slippery slope of aberrant sexuality of all forms.

Amendment B supporters did say, through their votes, that they hope their amendment will win in a majority of the presbyteries.

What they *did not say* is that the relentless push by the theologically left-leaning sectors in our denomination, if not abated, will cause us all to lose. Imagine a pastor pushing a minority opinion on her or his congregation over more than a decade until those who disagree left or until the church split. We would call that an egregious violation of everything pastors are called to be and do. When our national leaders, our general assembly delegates, and our presbytery commissioners push agendas that do not heal but hurt our Church and that do not unify but split our ranks, how are we to respond? Once the presbyteries finish voting on Amendment B (which will likely be defeated), let us say together as a whole Church that it is time to put the debates aside and to unify together around the Great Ends of the Church. In this way we can all be winners as we strive to serve a hurting world for the glory of God!

Dr. William Campbell is the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, NC.

¹ Ross, M.W., "Married homosexual men: prevalence and background," *Marriage and Family Review* (1990), 14:35-57. See also Whitehead, Neil & Briar, *My Genes Made Me Do It!* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Hunting House Publishers, 1999), 39.

² Scriptures that speak directly to the topic of homosexuality include: Genesis 2:21-25; 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. Related texts include: Deuteronomy 23:17-18, Judges 19:22-25, 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46, 2 Kings 23:7, Ezekiel 16:50, 2 Peter 2:6-10, Jude 7, and Revelation 21:8; 22:15.