

New Covenant Presbytery Presentation on Amendment 08-B

February 7, 2009

Rev. David Peterson

I can usually gauge my feelings about any presentation I'm making by the temperature of my hands. The colder my hands, the greater the intensity. Right now my hands are cold! This issue that has dominated the life of the PCUSA for 30 years is before us once again.

My father was an "on-the-other-hand" kind of man. No matter what the subject, sooner or later he would say, *On the other hand*. Sometimes it drove me crazy, but he taught me to be a moderate person who appreciates other's opinions—which is where I am on the topic before us today—the issue that has been before us in one form or another for more than 30 years.

I have come to believe that Christian discipleship is built around TRUTH. *If you continue in my Word you will be my disciples and you will know the TRUTH and the TRUTH will set you free.*

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I might walk in Your TRUTH.

On the other hand, I have also come to believe that Christian discipleship is built around LOVE. *A new commandment I give you, that you LOVE one another as I have LOVED you...*

Faith, hope LOVE abide, but the greatest of these is LOVE.

Following Jesus requires both TRUTH and LOVE—CONVICTION and COMPASSION.

Because...

- TRUTH that is not moderated by LOVE easily turns to sinful arrogance and divisions

On the other hand...

- LOVE that is not moderated by TRUTH easily embraces permissiveness that affirms sinful behavior.

Scripture says, *We must no longer be little children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by the craftiness of deceitful scheming, but speaking the TRUTH in LOVE we must grow up into Christ, the Head of the Body.*

In this current debate on the endorsement of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered lifestyle I have tried to hold to the moderate position guided by both TRUTH and LOVE. This is the position I find in the Bible and that is currently held by our Book of Order.

Now don't be fooled by the language of the amendment. The language itself seems innocent enough, but the underlying issue is the endorsement of the gay, lesbian, transgendered, bisexual lifestyle.

So as a moderate—an on-the-other-hand kind of person—I urge you to vote *No* on Amendment 08-B. By every standard of measure this amendment, if adopted, will move the PCUSA to the far margins in three ways.

1. If adopted it will move the PCUSA to the fringes of Biblical scholarship. While homosexuality is the subject of only a handful of passages in the Bible's nearly 32,000 verses, human sexuality is the subject of thousands of these passages. Human sexuality is the subject of thousands of passages in the Bible and not one, not a single passage—not one affirms or upholds the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered lifestyle as part of God's plan for humanity. Amendment 08-B moves the church to the farthest margins of Biblical scholarship because it refuses to allow LOVE to be moderated by TRUTH.
2. If adopted this amendment would move the PCUSA to the outer fringes of the global Christian community. There are approximately 2.1 billion Christians in the world today. Of this 2.1 billion, less than ½ of 1% of believers are in denominations or communities that would embrace this amendment— ½ of 1%-- Amendment 08-B moves the PCUSA to the far fringes of global Christian community because it refuses to allow LOVE to be moderated by TRUTH.
3. Far from breaking down barriers, this amendment, if adopted will create 173 new barriers in the 173 Presbyteries that will adopt their own personalized understanding of this issue. For generations part of the glue that has held the PCUSA together is the trust that a decision made in Burlington, VT can be embraced in Burlingame, CA. Amendment 08-B will leave every Presbytery with its own widely differing standards and trust will be lost because it refuses to allow LOVE to be moderated by TRUTH.

There are some who say that as the church changed its mind on slavery and women the time has come to change its mind on the gay, lesbian, transgendered bisexual lifestyles. But there is a fundamental difference here. With slavery and women the church changed because it read the Bible. In the sexuality debate the church is being asked to change by rejecting the Bible.

There are some who say the key is to separate Jesus from the Bible. But Jesus Himself said He came *not to destroy the law but to fulfill it*.

In all honesty, if it was up to me, if there was no Bible or global Christian community or Book of Order I'd probably vote the other way, because my heart is deeply stirred by the pain carried daily in this community. But there is a Bible and there is a global Christian community and there is a Book of Order and so I urge you to vote *No* on Amendment 08-B to hold TRUTH and LOVE together and to hold our church together. Thank you.