

# ARPTalk (10)

<http://arptalk.weebly.com>

February 14, 2009

*ARPTalk(10.1)*

## **CORRECTION AND APOLOGY**

### E-mail from Dr. Bill Crenshaw:

“Chuck baby —

If you're going to quote me, you at least ought to get the quotes right. Unless truth is something you avoid. What a surprise that would be.

Giving you all the respect you deserve,

Bill”

### Response to Dr. Crenshaw:

“Bill,

Thanks for the e-mail.

I stand corrected. The next issue of ARPTalk will have a correction—the first article.

The conversation occurred some time ago. The occasion was a quizzing of John Carson in the Bowie Art Center.

Do you disagree with the sentiment? What are the exact words?

Chuck”

### Dr. Crenshaw's response:

“Chuck — Long time ago, so I don't know if I can resurrect what I said then. I'm quite sure I never used the phrase "funnymendalist," but I may have referred to that famous golfer Bobby Jones. As for the sentiment, I think it's

fair to say that you, I, and most everyone connected with the college are concerned about Erskine's future.

Bill”

**Obviously, Dr. Crenshaw and I remember the incident differently. Indeed, it was a long time ago. I am sure I misheard him.**

**Dr. Crenshaw, I apologize. I apologize for the “funnymentalist” remark that I attributed to you. I stand corrected. We at *ARPTalk* work to get it “right.” Thank you for drawing my attention to this matter.**

*Charles W. Wilson*

**(continue to the next article)**

## ARPTalk(10.2)

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS:** Some *ARPTalk* readers don't seem to know what full-blown UNIVERSALISM looks like. The following from a PC(USA) minister gives the readers of *ARPTalk* an opportunity to examine the incredible exegesis of one who has abandoned the inerrant Scriptures of the Bible for the idolatry of self-authority. Most of us in ARPdom live in a sheltered world of Truth. This article will blow the roof off your shelter.

After you have read this article, answer this question: Why does the ARPC continue to have any kind of fraternal relationships with the PC(USA)?

This sermon is found at the website of The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville  
([http://www.pclawrenceville.org/sermons/2008/sermon\\_2008\\_06\\_01.html](http://www.pclawrenceville.org/sermons/2008/sermon_2008_06_01.html)), a PC(USA) congregation in Lawrenceville, NJ. There is also an audio link at the website for you who have the stomach to listen to such evil. Ugh! Say, didn't the Apostle Paul warn the Ephesian elders about "savage wolves" not sparing the flock of God?

*Charles W. Wilson*

## **SARVA DHARMA SAMA NATVA**

1 Peter 2:4-10, John 14:1-14

Wow, it's such a pleasure and an honor for me to be here among you, to be blessed by this worship—by that music—to see so many colleagues and friends from former lives and from this life, now. To count on Catherine and Jeff and Will and neighbors and friends. Disciples of Jesus together.

Well, here's a week in the religious life at The Lawrenceville School—a week from last fall:

On Sunday evening, Greg Jones, a Baptist preacher and our Hallelujah Chaplain—tall, dark, regal—preaches a sermon called *Standing on Tiptoes*. And he has our students standing on their tiptoes looking for God's love that is coming their way and he has the students singing and clapping and swaying in praise—in praise of that loving God.

**On Monday evening students come into the Chapel, slip off their shoes, and quietly take their places on Zen cushions. Phil Jordan, the Chair of the Religion and Philosophy Department who spent four years living in a Zen Monastery, leads the ZaZen, or sitting mediation. We begin with a chant, and then chimes. Incense is lit. We bow to one another, focus and breathe.**

**Wednesday morning at 7:30: students come for Holy Communion from the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*—some sleepy eyed and still in their pajamas, some showered and ready for the day. We break the bread and take the cup.**

**Wednesday evening is the Hindu puja—a puja to Lord Krishna. There is worship to Brahman, who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. There is a reading from the Bhagavad Gita: Krishna’s wisdom. We practice darsan, which is moving our fingers over a lit candle and touching our eyes to let the light of God into each of us. We share Prasad: hot and spicy treats offered to Krishna, and then enjoyed by all.**

**It is Sukkot. The beginning of Sukkot this week—the Jewish festival of booths, the feast of the harvest. The Jewish students welcome everybody into their Sukka—I think you have one here—ours is built with corn stalks around a grove of hemlocks by our chapel. There are special prayers for Sukkot. We each have a lulav—a willow branch—in one hand, and an etrog—that’s a citrus type of fruit—in another. And we wave them in praise of the God of creation. And then Domino’s pizza is delivered to the Sukka.**

**On Friday at noon Muslim students gather in our mosque for Jummuah Prayers: “Allah Waback Allah....” It is Ramadan. The students are fasting and will gather again at sundown to break the fast with dates and raisins.**

**Sunday there is Catholic Mass celebrated with our priest, Father Javier Diaz. Originally he comes from Columbia, and this day he celebrates the mass in Spanish—a bit of home for our students for whom Spanish is their first language and a bit of a boost for our students who are hoping for Spanish to be their second language.**

**And on a given week, there might be a Quaker meeting; or a Universalist Unitarian gathering. There might be Taize worship or Kripalu Yoga, which for no apparent reason attracts our football players. Astonishing to see those bug solid guys attempt yoga position.**

**Now you might be asking, right about now, “What in tarnation is going on in that school next door, and why?” You might ask me, as I sometimes ask myself, “How did a nice Methodist minister—a Christian disciple—end up in a yoga position herself? Or how did I end up buying prayer rugs in Brooklyn, or Prasad, the Hindu Holy food, in Edison?” Well, at The Lawrenceville School we believe that the exploration of the religious and spiritual dimension of life is an essential component of our students’ education. We believe for them to be citizens and leaders of our**

**global village, they need to have the opportunity to develop understanding and respect for practices different than their own. We want them to be committed to their own faith, and we want them to be committed to learn about other faiths—to learn from each other. They have to go to Chapel twice a term, whether they want to or not!**

**So what happens for me when a minister like me bumps up against a text like the one appointed today from the gospel of John? “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” No one? No one? Does that mean the Hindu can’t reach Brahman? Or the Buddhist Bodhi satva? What does it mean for those who practice Judaism right here? Or for the Muslim who holds Jesus dear as a prophet? “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” No One? No One? What do we do with a text like this in a world like ours? What do we do with a text like this in a world like ours?**

**Now up at Union Seminary, where Jeff and I were both students, the Bible classes were, hands down, the most rigorous and demanding. We were taught to study the texts, closely, thoughtfully, carefully, seriously. Some of us, like Jeff, were taught to study the texts in the original language: in the Hebrew and the Greek. We were taught to determine the date of the text and the writer. The place a particular passage has within its historical context. And for most of us, this Biblical study was a labor of love, and gave us enormous joy—a big part why we were there.**

**Here is some of what we learned about the Gospel of John. That John cared deeply about who Jesus was and described Jesus in the most beautiful language he could imagine: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” No shepherds come to the stable in John. No stars or angels to herald the birth. Words alone describe the birth of Jesus: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”**

**And here is something else we learned: that John cared deeply about who Jesus was, yes, but also about who Jesus is to us. And so with language and imagination, again, John creates the great I AMs:**

**I am the bread of life.  
I am the light of the world.  
I am the good shepherd.  
I am the resurrection and the light.  
I am the true vine.  
I am the way, the truth, and the life.**

**These are all precious descriptions of Jesus to those of us who practice Christianity. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

Here is something else we learned: that because John's gospel was written at the end of the first century John's gospel is fraught with anti-Semitism which is simply wrong. And that because John's gospel was written at the end of the first century and John is trying to encourage Christians in the face of persecutions, there are phrases like: "No one comes to the Father except through me." It's like a coach revving up a team before a big challenge, "We're # 1! We're the one and only! Let's go get 'em! No one but us!" Important for the game on that day perhaps, but maybe not for all days—for our day.

"I am the way the truth and the life"—yes. "No one comes to the Father except through me"—maybe for those first century Christians. Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe not for the twenty-first century Christians.

And lastly, one other little learning from heart of John's gospel. Served up to us as if on a silver tray: the reality of God's love for us. Two hundred and eighty two times, John refers to this great love. We know—Raymond Brown made us count them. At the heart of John's Gospel—at the heart of "the way, the truth, and the life"—in John's gospel is God's love for each of us and all of us together. And our capacity as a result to love neighbor as self. That great love divine, all loves excelling, beckons us to reach out and to love all our neighbors! And in our global village our neighbors are people of all faiths, and our love is filled with respect and understanding because we are Christians. Our love is open and ready for reciprocity because we are followers of Jesus. We have decided to follow Jesus. That great love divine, all loves excelling has an equal regard for all faiths; a love for our own faith; a commitment to who we are as Christians; and an equal regard to the faiths of others.

Now I'd like to ask you to look at your bulletin. Take a look at your sermon, where it says, "Sermon." And I would like you to just take a look at that. Now look up at me. Will you repeat\* after me, please: *Sarva. Sarva. Dharma. Dharma. Sarva. Sarva. Dharma. Dharma. Sarva Dharma. Sarva Dharma. Sarva Dharma. Sarva Dharma. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. So well done!*

This is Gandhi's principle of equal regard for all faiths. Gandhi, as you know, was a practicing Hindu who read the sacred texts of all faiths, and for whom the teachings of Jesus were of utmost importance. The teachings of Jesus, our Jesus guided Gandhi every day of his life.

*Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Come, my way, my truth, my life. Guide us to an equal regard for all faiths. Sarva Dharma Sama Natva. Christ is made a sure foundation to create a faith in us that frees us to love our neighbors—love that is divine and all-excelling. They will know we are Christians by our love.*

**Sarva. *Sarva*. Dharma. *Dharma*. Sama. *Sama*. Natva. *Natva*. Sarva Dharma Sama  
Natva. *Sarva Dharma Sama Natva*.**

**Amen.**

***\*Italics indicate congregational response.***

**June 1 , 2008**

**The Reverend Sue Anne Steffey Morrow**

**(continue to the next article)**

## ARP Talk(10.3)

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS: What on earth!?! Last year the PC(USA) lost more people than the ARPC has members. The exodus continues! Once again, for my brothers who want to maintain cordial relationship with the PC(USA): WHY? Doesn't the Bible say that we are to shun the "works of darkness?"**

**This is Universalism gone to perversion! In the words of the calypso song of my youth: "How low can you go?"**

*Charles W. Wilson*

# **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN, PRESBYTERIAN, METHODIST, LESBIAN, BUDDHIST, UNITARIAN WEDDING CEREMONY?**

Presbyterian News Service  
August 13, 2008

## **Pittsburgh minister headed back to court over same-sex wedding ceremony**

*Re-trial for Janet Edwards set after original charges were dismissed*

by Evan Silverstein  
Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE — The Rev. Janet Edwards, a Presbyterian minister in Pittsburgh, is headed back to church court later this year for conducting a marriage ceremony for two women even though charges against her for performing the nuptials were dismissed in 2006.



**Edwards, a parish associate at the interdenominational Community of Reconciliation, will face two charges when she goes before the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) of Pittsburgh Presbytery on Oct. 1. The two charges against her allege that Edwards knowingly acted in defiance of her ordination vows and of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Constitution by performing the ceremony.**

**“This has been a very long journey,” Edwards told the *Presbyterian News Service*.**

**Edwards has never denied officiating at the June 2005 marriage ceremony of Brenda Cole and Nancy McConn, who reside near Wheeling, WV.**

**The PC(USA)'s *Book of Order* defines marriage as between a man and a woman, and church courts have ruled that Presbyterian ministers may not utilize the denomination's marriage liturgy in same-sex ceremonies.**

**Edwards has steadfastly argued that there is no prohibition on same-sex wedding ceremonies in the PC(USA) because the courts have said clergy “should not” conduct them — language she believes is advisory, not binding.**

**The Rev. James C. Yearsley, a Presbyterian minister who is currently serving in Florida, filed a complaint against Edwards shortly after she performed the lesbian marriage, only to see the charges against her dismissed on a technicality in November 2006. The presbytery PJC ruled that an investigating committee filed charges against Edwards after its deadline for doing so.**

**Yearsley submitted a new grievance against Edwards in February 2007. Seven other PC(USA) ministers and six elders from Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Washington state signed on to the new complaint, joining Yearsley as “co-accusers.”**

**One of the co-accusers, the Rev. L. Russ Howard, eventually withdrew his name from the complaint after the congregation where he's a pastor left the PC(USA) for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.**

**A Pittsburgh native, Yearsley has been pastor of Village Presbyterian Church in Tampa, FL, since February 2006. When he filed his original complaint against Edwards he was serving as pastor at Mt. Hope Community Church, a Presbyterian congregation in suburban Pittsburgh.**

**In the new complaint the church leaders accused Edwards of acting in “willful and deliberate violation of her ordination vows” as stated in the *Book of Order* by performing the same-sex wedding ceremony of Cole and McConn.**

**McConn, a longtime Presbyterian and former member of Dallas Presbyterian Church in Dallas, WV, currently worships at a Unitarian congregation. Cole was raised Methodist but now is a practicing Buddhist.**

**Yearsley and the co-accusers also contend that Edwards performed a marriage ceremony that was “heretical and apostate” in that it was “contrary to the Word of God and the Book of Confessions by expressing Buddhist doctrine anathema to the Christian faith.”**

**Edwards, who was ordained by Pittsburgh Presbytery in 1977, and served as its moderator in 1987, said she does not believe she violated her ordination vows or the denomination’s constitution by marrying the two women.**

**Edwards, a direct descendant of legendary Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, could face a number of punishments, including removal from ordained ministry, if she’s convicted.**

**The charges against Edwards follow another church court ruling earlier this year involving the marriage of same-sex couples. The Rev. Jane Adams Spahr, a Presbyterian lesbian activist from San Rafael, CA, was found not-guilty of misconduct in April after a trial on charges that she violated the PC(USA)’s constitution by performing weddings for two lesbian couples.**

**The Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly (GAPJC), the PC(USA)’s highest court, found that Spahr did not violate denominational law when she officiated at the weddings in 2004 and 2005. The GAPJC found that the ceremonies Spahr performed were not marriages, so she did not violate the church’s constitution, the high court ruled.**

**The ruling overturned an earlier decision by the Synod of the Pacific’s PJC that found Spahr guilty of misconduct and gave her a rebuke — the lightest possible punishment.**

**“I’m sure that we will press the parts of the Spahr decision that supports my presiding at the wedding and calling Brenda and Nancy’s relationship a marriage,” Edwards said.” We see a lot of positive things in the Spahr decision.”**

Yearsley said he plans to attend Edward's trial in October if he can possibly make it to the proceedings in Pittsburgh.

**(continue to the next article)**

## ARPTalk(10.4)

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS:** Many thanks to Rev. Vaughn Hathaway, First Presbytery (ARPC), for this article by Dr. Gerstner. According to Mr. Hathaway, he found the article when it was published in 1991 in the March issue of *The Presbyterian Advocate*, a publication of the *Concerned Presbyterians of the PCA*.

Some of us knew Dr. Gerstner. He was slow in withdrawing from the PC(USA). I remember a conversation about 1978 when I asked him why he didn't withdraw to the ARPC. I found out that he wasn't happy with us either. I learned that asking Dr. Gerstner questions could result in self-sacrifice.

This article is dated, but it is appropriate. Remember, in 1991 the PC(USA) had not reached its present level of disgust and infamy.

Some of the formatting and punctuation in this article are odd. With the exception of the font, I have left it as I found it.

*Charles W. Wilson*

# **THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH APPLIED TO THE PCUSA**

by John Gerstner  
March, 1991, *The Presbyterian Advocate*

The traditional marks or tests of the presence of a true church are three in number. The first is the Word; the second, sacraments; and the third, church discipline. If it is a true church, the Word of God is soundly preached, the sacraments properly administered, and discipline effectively applied.

I will apply these three marks of a true church to see if the PCUSA (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.) is such. Of course, the PCUSA claims to be a true (Presbyterian) church and to possess the three marks. Virtually all organized "churches" claim the same, but many do not pass the "tests." Does the PCUSA?

## **I. Does the PCUSA preach the Word of God?**

**The PCUSA does not even acknowledge the existence of the Word of God infallibly inspired and inscripturated. Nowhere in her Book of Order does she refer to the Scripture as inspired, infallible, inerrant.**

**When the PCUSA is being precise, it does not even refer to the Bible as the Word of God. Jesus Christ is the Word of God, and the Scriptures only a "unique and authoritative" witness to the Word of God (Christ). Scripture is not even infallible, but merely a "unique and authoritative" witness. It is not inspired by the Spirit, but made by Him to be this witness and "God's Word to you" (not objectively so).**

**"These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him" (G-2.0200). [In this study, the three parts of the Book of Order are: G - Form of government, D - Rules of Discipline, S - Directory for the Service of God.] "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the church universal and God's Word to you?" (G-14.0207). We notice even the unique and authoritative witness is "by the Holy Spirit . . . God's Word to you." It is not in itself, but only "by the Spirit," God's Word "to you."**

**These are precise and deliberate statements suggesting that, when the Book of Order is defining the Bible, it is not as the Word of God, properly speaking. Occasionally, almost as a slip of the tongue, the Bible is called in traditional language the Word of God, or simply "Word." For example, "The pastor is responsible for studying, teaching, and preaching the Word . . . (G-6.0202), where "Word" undoubtedly but inconsistently means Scripture. However, in the creeds of our Book of Confessions, the Bible is the very Word of God. For example, The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of "Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written . . ." (Chapter 1, 2). Essentially the same doctrine is found in The Scots Confession, XVIII, XIX.**

**Even the amended Confession of 1967 refers to "The Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God**

written." (9.27) However, in 1967 they were only "received and obeyed" as such. They were not affirmed to be such.

To the PCUSA's credit, it does assert that the Scriptures alone "gives principles to guide" (G-2.0400). What these scriptural principles which guide are remains unstated, however.

We may note here that the Book of Confessions is not subscribed or required, in whole or part, to be believed by PCUSA officers. Rather, officers must promise to "be instructed and led by those confessions . . . ." (G-14.0208). What that means is nowhere in the Constitution defined, though it is asserted that the church can discipline one who rejects the "faith of the confessions" (G-2.0200). What that means - "faith of the confessions" - is not defined either. It is also asked of the would-be officer, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions . . . ?" (G-14.0208). But "essential tenets" are not listed, "adopt" is not a synonym for believe, and the officer is still only "guided" by, not committed to, these tenets.

Traditionally in Presbyterian churches, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms were subscribed, not propositionally, nor in substance only, but as the "system of doctrine" required to be believed by would-be officers.

Thus the:

**MANUAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE  
GOVERNMENT, DISCIPLINE, AND WORSHIP OF THE PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Thirteenth Edition**

**Published for the Office of the General Assembly by the Publication  
Division of the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian  
Church in the United States of America 1945**

**The main features of the Presbyterian System, as contained in the  
Westminster Standards, and more especially in the Confession of  
Faith, are its views in theology, duty, worship, and government.  
Concisely stated, they are as follows:**

**Theology**

**The fundamental feature of the Presbyterian System is a body of theology, or a statement of what we are to believe concerning God, in himself, and in his relations to man. The name "Calvisintic" has been applied to this theology in general, yet the Standards contain three great theological elements, which, with the doctrines classified under them are as follows:**

**1. The General Christian Element. -- The general Christian doctrines set forth in the Confession affirm reverently and emphatically that God is; that he exists as a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three persons yet one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; that he is the eternal, infinitely holy, wise, good, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent Spirit; that from all eternity he planned his universe, with all things therein; that he created all things, that he governs all things; that the free will of man is his gift, involving man's responsibility to his Creator; that he permitted sin, and has fixed his punishment; that salvation from sin is by Him of whom it is written, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish"; that all men shall rise one day from the dead, and shall receive at the bar of God the awards of final destiny. These doctrines, in their general form, however they may vary in particulars, are held universally by those persons entitled to be called Christians.**

**2. The Protestant Element. -- The chief Protestant doctrines of the Confession are those of the supremacy of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme and infallible rule of faith; the supreme lordship of God over the conscience; the vicarious sacrifice and sole mediatorship of Christ; the justification of the penitent sinner by faith alone; the passing of saints at death immediately into heaven, and their instant and complete perfection in the state of glory. These doctrines unite evangelical Protestants into a vital oneness of faith.**

**3. The Calvinistic Element. -- The third element in the confessional system is that which may be called the distinctively Calvinistic. In one sense the entire system is Calvinistic, for it recognizes the sovereignty of God as its controlling idea from first to last. From another viewpoint, however, the doctrines composing this third element are the differentiating features which separate Calvinists from other evangelical Christians. These doctrines historically bear the name of the five points of Calvinism, and are: (1) Unconditional as opposed to conditional predestination; (2) definite atonement or particular redemption as opposed to indefinite atonement; (3) total as opposed to partial depravity; (4) efficacious as opposed to**

**uncertain grace; (5) final as opposed to partial perseverance. These five points are the affirmation of the sovereignty of God in its relation to the salvation of the individual. Presbyterians declare in regard to every true Christian that his salvation is not a reward for faith, but that faith and salvation both are gifts of God; that each believer is the object of a peculiar, definite, gracious, costly, victorious, and everlasting love; that the power of and tendency to sin in man is of such a nature that he is utterly unable to save himself; that the regeneration is an act of God, and of God alone -- a sinner cannot be both father and child; that when the Spirit of God moves efficaciously in the human soul, the new life must result; and that the soul whom God hath loved in Jesus Christ he loveth to the end, the regenerate person not being of the number of those "who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." [p. 32ff]**

**Nothing like such an historic commitment to Calvinism is even approached by the contemporary PCUSA Constitution. No PCUSA officer is required to be a Calvinist unless "instructed and led by" means committed to as something believed to be the truth of God. This is certainly not the understanding of the overwhelming majority of officers in the PCUSA today.**

**"Instructed and led"-by-subscription has been the way the PCUSA cut itself loose from its historic Calvinistic moorings. In doing so, it set out anchorless, free of reformed, of evangelical, or even catholic moorings, into the open sea battered by every wind of pluralistic doctrine.**

**It is no wonder that the PCUSA has lost money, members and integrity. No one will deny the loss of members and money. But, some will ask, "integrity"? Integrity is lost when a church continues to call itself Presbyterian and reformed though constitutionally it is no longer Presbyterian, Protestant, or even Catholic in its affirmation of faith binding on its leaders.**

**When the PCUSA Assembly in 1967 adopted The Book of confessions, she became a non-confessing church. Adopting many confessions the way we "adopted" them made us a non-confessing church. As I wrote in "Christianity Today," December of the same year, so far as our many confessions were concerned, we were the most orthodox denomination in history. That was confessions-wise. Subscription-wise, we did not affirm our belief in one of those confessions.**



**We can only sadly conclude that the PCUSA miserably fails the first, the doctrinal, test of a church. Our church neither confesses the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, nor does it teach (officially) the Bible's catholic, evangelical or reformed principles as binding on any of its ordained ministers. One need only read "Monday Morning" magazine regularly through the years to see every conceivable variety of doctrine held by its ministers, without any fear whatever of a heresy trial. The PCUSA practices the pluralism it preaches.**

**I am not denying that the PCUSA affirms here and there its reformed character. "*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*" (G-2.0200).**

**What I am saying is that she nowhere defines "reformed," or anywhere in the Book of Order lists one -- not to mention all five -- of its principles. The one specifically reformed doctrine mentioned by the Book of Order is "election" (G-2.0500). However, it is stated in such an ambiguous way that any anti-reformed Christian could readily affirm it. Moreover, believing even that ambiguity is not mandatory. The very word, "predestination" -- Presbyterianism's best-known doctrine -- is nowhere to be found in the entire Book of Order.**

**If preaching of the Word of God is the first and most fundamental work of a true church, the PCUSA is not a true church.**

**II. Does the PCUSA properly believe in and administer the sacraments?**

**1. The nature of the sacraments.**

**The PCUSA misunderstands the nature of the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism, it believes, brings salvation; and the Lord's Supper unites any recipient with Jesus Christ. The constitution does not use the traditional language of sacerdotal churches, *ex opere operato*, but it approximates that thinking.**

**Infant baptism is a sign and seal that recipients are "heirs of the covenant" (S-3.0300 Parents are to have faith in the child's salvation "as your own" (ibid). The baptized child is a "member of the household of faith," and God will bring the child to accept salvation**

**(ibid). This last expression, which says that the baptized child will be saved, is incompatible with the others which say the child is saved. In common with them, however, it does guarantee the salvation of the baptized child sometime in the future (a delayed *ex opere operato*). According to S-3.0400, God "gives the baptized ones the Holy Spirit . . . ."**

**Not only is infant baptism effective to salvation, but believer's baptism is as well. "God gives the baptized ones the Holy Spirit, whose life within them enables them to share the reconciling work of Christ, and finally to share with him the victory" (S-3.0400). This is also much closer to *ex opere operato* because it seems to say that, at the time of baptism, the Holy Spirit "enables" (regenerates?) "them." It is to be remembered that the Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opere operato*, properly understood, does not claim any regenerating power in the water of baptism, but in the Holy Spirit, who is supposed to work at the time of baptism (baptismal regeneration).**

**So the PCUSA Constitution sees baptism as something that it is not. Instead of being a mere sign and seal (signifying the meaning and divinely sealing it to the recipient if he is, or when he becomes, regenerate), PCUSA baptism conveys by the Holy Spirit what it signifies and seals.**

**With respect to the Lord's Supper, the same -- if not nearer -- approach to *ex opere operato* teaching defines the nature of that sacrament also. "The breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine show that Christ gave his own body to be broken and his life to be poured out on behalf of humanity, in the offering of himself on the cross. The distribution and partaking of the elements show the reality of believers' union with Christ by faith and their willingness that Christ's presence should abide in them" (S-3.0500). All that the distribution and partaking actually show is the recipients' profession of faith in and union with Christ. But for the PCUSA, they show the reality of the professed believers' union with Christ.**

**One may think that I am unfair here because the statement speaks of the "believers'" union with Christ. But the statement says that the "distributing and partaking of the elements" show the believers' union with Christ, which they certainly do not do. Some partakers eat and drink "condemnation," not union with Christ (I Cor. 15:19).**

## **2. The Administration of the Sacraments**

**Sad as is the PCUSA's misunderstanding of the nature of the sacraments, its administration of them is even worse. The PCUSA administers both sacraments to those to whom they do not belong.**

**First, the PCUSA administers infant baptism to those God does not specify. According to the Scriptures, at least one parent must be a believer if the child is to be "holy," (I Cor. 7:14), that is, set aside to the Lord as signified and sealed by baptism. In the PCUSA, both parents of baptized children may be "inactive members" who must, as we shall see, be unbelievers. In G-5.0202, it is stated that "active members" (professed believers) could and should present their children for baptism. According to G-0203, the same privilege belongs to inactive members. "An inactive member of a particular church is a member who does not participate actively in the church's work and worship. An inactive member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of an active member except the right to speak in the meetings of the congregation and to vote and hold office." So an inactive member is permitted to have his children baptized. That privilege is not removed.**

**But an "inactive member" implicitly is an unbeliever. He is defined as one "who does not participate actively in the church's work and worship." This inactivity must have been for at least two years for an active member to be "removed by the session . . ." (G-10.0302) to inactive membership. Surely, this amounts to a definition of a non-believer, unless the PCUSA teaches antinomianism. It is the equivalent of excommunication, except that the PCUSA does not bar from communion simply for unbelief, as we shall see even more clearly below.**

**The "inactive member" is a disciplined, one-time active member whose behavior -- "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16) -- shows him to be an unbeliever. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding, he may have his children baptized. Thus the PCUSA authorizes the baptism of children of unbelieving parents. For Paul, at least one parent had to be a believer for the child to be "holy." None is necessary for the PCUSA.**

**So far as I know, we do not have any Mafia hit-men who are baptized, non-believing communing members under the pastoral care of the PCUSA. There is nothing to prevent this. If non-homosexual hit-men were to become active members and apply for**

**ordination, a special task force might be appointed to study the matter for a couple of years. Probably the General Assembly would declare, by an overwhelming majority, that hit-men may not be ordained to the ministry of the PCUSA.**

**Admitting unbelieving adults to the Lord's Supper is implicit and explicit, but admitting unbelieving children is even more strongly emphasized by the Form of Government of the PCUSA. "A baptized member of a particular church is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such baptized members are entitled to the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and to participation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper" (G-5.0201). Children are not only entitled to the Lord's Supper, but "the session shall counsel the families under its care to prepare their baptized children for participation in the Lord's Supper" (S-3.0400). Thus, unbelieving baptized children are not only permitted to sin by receiving the Lord's Supper; they are encouraged by the session to do so.**

**So the sacred privilege of the Lord's Supper is given to the "dogs." Some will immediately respond: "Yes, and Christ did the same. He gave His blessing reserved for His children to a Syro-Phoenician 'dog'" (Mark 7:26ff). But from that narrative, it is clear that Christ gave His blessing (healing) to a one-time unbelieving "dog," who by her faith proved herself to be a "child" of God. Anyone who by faith becomes a child of God is entitled to, according to Scripture and reformed doctrine, baptism and Eucharist for himself/herself, and infant baptism for the offspring. For the PCUSA, on the other hand, faith is quite unnecessary for Font or Table.**

**An objection to this interpretation of the PCUSA administration of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper may arise from the description of administration in S-3.0500d: "The minister shall invite to partake of the Sacrament (of the Lord's Supper) all those who are active members . .... The invitation shall include baptized children who are being nurtured and instructed to participate with an understanding of the significance of the invitation to the Lord's Table and of their response in faith. Yet, those who are unprepared, who are self-sufficient and unrepentant, should be warned not to come to the Holy Table."**

**Here the minister is said to invite to the Lord's Supper "active members." That might seem to bar inactive ones. However, it cannot imply that, inasmuch as inactive members are specifically entitled to the Lord's Supper in G-5.0203. In G-5.0300, even "non-members" are specifically entitled to receive the Lord's Supper. Certainly inactive and non-members, by definition, should be viewed as "unprepared, self-sufficient, and unrepentant," but obviously are not.**

**With respect to baptized children, we have seen that they are entitled, and even urged, to come to the Lord's Supper, though they have not professed faith. Consequently, the statement about their "response in faith" must refer to the antecedent statement that they "are being nurtured and instructed to participate with an understanding of the significance of the invitation to the Lord's Table and of their response in faith." Presumably, this means that the baptized child, even while unbelieving, should be nurtured to see the "significance" of that hoped-for future event. It certainly cannot, consistent with the Book of Order, demand present faith.**

**The second test of a true church, the sacraments, the PCUSA fails totally as to their nature and administration. How can any organization engaged in the desecration of the sacred sacraments be called a church of Jesus Christ?**

**If proper understanding and administration of the sacraments is a mark of the true church, the PCUSA is not a true church.**

**FINAL COMMENTS FROM THE EDITOR: We all know that what Dr. Gerstner has written in this article is true. Is there anyone in the ARPC who disagrees with him?**

**Dr. Gerstner did not leave the PC(USA) in haste. My call to withdraw all fraternal relationship in this issue of *ARPTalk* and in previous issues of *ARPTalk* is not done in haste. This has been a long time coming. In 1991 it was awful and the culture of the PC(USA) hasn't improved. What business has the ARPC in cavorting with unbelief, perversion, untruth, and idolatry? If we are going to have a relationship with the PC(USA), then let's also establish a relationship with the Unitarian Church? Apart from the name "Presbyterian," are there substantive differences between the two—neither one of them love the God who reveals His presence and glory in the pages of the Bible?**