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EVERYONE DID AS THEY SAW FIT
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For The Renewal Fellowship in the PCC

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (RELEVANT)

I was born in Toronto, Canada to immigrant parents of Korean descent. I have been a member and/or a Pastor in the PCC for over 25 years, albeit mostly in the Korean PCC church context. I started pastoral ministry at Toronto Korean Presbyterian Church in 2006, and in 2007 was going to complete denominational requirements for ordination at Knox College. Instead, the following year I entered into a program at McMaster Divinity College where I studied the New Testament, and specifically the Historical Jesus because I wanted to know what was at the root of our Christian faith. I continued on in pastoral ministry while continuing to study. I loved my ministry, I loved my church and thought of it as somewhat of an ideal model of how two cultures—a Korean speaking (first generation) culture, and an English speaking (second generation) culture—could co-exist under one roof and do ministry. In fact, our church possessed two senior ministers: a Korean Ministry (KM) Senior Minister and an English Ministry (EM) Senior Minister. Our church had gone through a

leadership change, and in this change, the structure of our leadership and ministry changed. No longer was the English Ministry given a space to carry out the type of ministry we had felt as if God had called the English Ministry to do at our church and in our community. Two Ministers of the English Ministry, along with myself, ended up leaving our church within a year's time span. This experience had left me angry, jaded, and I swore never to set foot in a Korean church again.

Since then I've learned not to swear or make promises. Five years ago as I was finishing up my studies at McMaster and was getting ready to seek a career in teaching at a seminary when I ran into an old congregant member, who asked me to consider coming back to TKPC to lead the English Ministry. The leadership that was in place when I left was the same, but through an extended period of prayer, I felt God leading me to come back. So I did. Then immediately I sought out to complete denominational requirements for ordination. This is where I learned more intimately about the PCC, outside the Korean HanCa Presbyteries context. First, I learned that there were a lot of great, deeply committed, kind followers of Jesus Christ. Second, I very quickly learned that people in our denomination were very pessimistic about its future and how long we could survive. And, third, I also learned about the place of Koreans in our denomination.

I. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A. Koreans in the Presbyterian Church in Canada: A Question of Us and Them?

What is the place for the Korean in the Presbyterian Church in Canada? Something else that I learned at Knox College mostly, but was also echoed in my other denominational experiences, tongue in cheek, was that "I was Korean." People were pointing that out to me all the time, amongst the students, the professors, and even in the comments and feedback that I would receive from assignments. Because I was Korean I needed to join the Asian centre's singing performance; because I was Korean, I was asked to share my "Korean perspective," on a topic in class; because I was Korean, I had received comments from an assignment where I was told that I shouldn't use the bible as a proof-text nor treat it like a textbook. And these comments were made without specifically pointing to any examples. Prior to officially entering into this denomination as a minister I thought I was just Jonathan, and a Canadian; but I guess this denomination was teaching me, or telling me something about "my identity," that I am Korean.

During this time I learned or inferred a few things about how the denomination views "the Korean." First, all Koreans are alike: they think the same, they act the same, and if you've talked to one it seems like you've talked to them all. Second, many feel as if they're obliged to "lend an ear" to the Korean, but I wonder if something being heard does not sit well with one's sensibilities, if any real listening continues to happen. Third, we are Korean, and not simply like the rest of the denomination. Lest I not commit, myself, the sin that I am pointing out, I must state

that this has simply been my observation, which has been perceived from my myopic, limited interactions.

B. The Presbyteries of Eastern and Western HanCA: Official Statements of the Presbyteries

The following is a large portion of the petition which both HanCa Presbyteries have recently submitted to our denomination indicating where we feel as if we are at in this denomination (I have taken out the whereas):

The vast majority of congregations from both the Presbyteries of Eastern HanCa and Western HanCa are questioning if there is a place for us in this denomination, and also whether those not holding to the agendas and adopted ideologies of the Western, primarily Anglo-driven, dominant culture are really welcomed, and

Presbyteries of Eastern and Western HanCa are extremely alarmed at the current state of our denomination, and not only because of the specific nature of the recommendations being handed down from GA 2019 to change our doctrine, but more so due to the manner in which those who seek change have been attempting to do so, and what this trajectory of change indicates about the nature of our denomination, for we believe we are moving in a direction that betrays our longstanding theological beliefs and practices of ministry, as indicated in our subordinate standards.

Moreover in the PCC we know that many are seeking to redefine our relationship to our subordinate standards, and in similar fashion our scriptures, which in practice seems tantamount to promoting or adhering to only that which one finds to be amicable; and with the unpalatable, often invoking the claim of relativity of interpretation, thus rendering it impossible for our subordinate standards or scriptures to function as that which we can subordinate ourselves to, nor uphold as any kind of real authority.

In the PCC we see the increasing erosion of the unity, clear-direction, and purpose that our subordinate standards once provided. What now serves as their replacement and is able to again bring us together? In the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) are our subordinate standards now subordinated to the loud moral clarion calls of justice, the contents of which are handed down to us by our Politically Correct Culture (the other PCC)?

In the Presbyterian Church in Canada, is the passage taken from the Book of Judges to describe pre-monarchic Israel an apt description of our denomination: "In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." (Judges 21:25).

Since those in the HanCa Presbyteries remain faithful to our subordinate standards, and do not follow the transient nature of current Western culture, nor adopt its today-popular moral standards, we have experienced mistreatment at the hands of many in the PCC which has caused us much pain and raises alarm, for we have collectively experienced many instances of slander, ridicule, racism, and even sadly demonization, which all unequivocally seems to be saying that there is no place for “the Korean” in this denomination, and

Similarly in our nation’s past, the actions of our forebearers indicated that there was no place for First Nations peoples who held on to their culture, beliefs and practices in this “new nation,” and such sentiments were promulgated by our own denomination as we established numerous denominationally run residential school, for which we have rightly confessed and spelled out the nature of our sins, as indicated in our confession:

We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism, and the assumption that what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited.

(The Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1994)

However, is our denomination now really different from the denomination of our past, and should the dominant culture in our denomination not entertain the possibility that they are perhaps again following in the hegemonic sins of their ancestors? And for this reason congregations in our Presbyteries implore the larger PCC to take notice of our current plight of marginalization in our denomination, and provide a safeguarded place for us here, for we believe that we too are created in God’s image and have a specific mandate from God to live out our gospel calling in this nation, which is in complete accordance to our denomination’s subordinate standards. (*End of Official Statements of the Presbyteries)

C. What Guides our Denomination: Questions of Doctrine & Polity

I love our doctrine and polity, but I question what role they play in our denomination. Because I love our doctrine and our polity this is the reason why, though perhaps there have been other options for denominational affiliation, I have never seriously considered any other. But there are times when I question whether our polity still provides real guidance for how our denomination conducts itself; and also especially whether our doctrine, as contained in our subordinate standards, has any resemblance to what we actually believe.

II. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

A. The Erosion of Authority

So now to briefly address the question of “how we got here?” The following is a simple answer: society and culture changed and while this was taking place the church was sleeping, and got swept away in its current of change. Either we weren’t paying attention to the change happening, or we were too busy with more “important matters,” or we thought that the change would not penetrate our dams or get across our moats. How to stop this drift? Maybe the PCC already has an answer. In *Living Faith* the following is stated:

“The Bible has been given to us by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life. It is the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience. We subject to its judgment all we believe and do.” (5.1).

Now the statement above is undermined by the stock phrase that is often invoked in discussions related to matters of the interpretation of scripture: “well that’s just your interpretation.” If this statement is correct, then no further dialogue can take place, for everything is reduced to subjective, relativism. There is no one thing outside of the individual that one can point to which can serve as any type of authority. The authority on “what is true,” if we still wish to use the language of true/truth, can only be the individual. This then undercuts that ability for the Bible to serve as any type of rule of faith and life for the church, and no one can subject themselves to “its judgment [in] all we believe and do.”

Perhaps the observation by Albert Schweitzer of those studying the historical Jesus is an apt description of what is taking place in our denomination when we study our scriptures. Schweitzer noticed in his survey of those studying the historical Jesus, that quite often the portrait presented of Jesus by the scholar eerily looked like himself or herself.

Surely, we do not believe that truth is merely relative. If the driver of a car, in which you are a passenger, is vehemently attempting to convince you as you are fast approaching an intersection with a red facing light, that red really means go, and has no interest in your “subjective opinion,” screaming that it means stop, then you at that time may begin to start preparing yourself to meet your maker. In this ridiculous example to highlight a point, if pure subjectivity reigns at the end of the day, society cannot function (no communication is possible). And in our example we see that a traffic light not only becomes meaningless, it even become dangerous. What then of scripture?

B. Who is to Blame?

Who is to blame? Perhaps we are!! I believe that our churches, long before the seminarian enters into any one of our three theological colleges already has undergone major, foundational—at least in terms of laying down a functional framework—training in biblical interpretation, how to do theology, and how to practice ministry. One very indicative observation comes in the characteristic manner of a lot of our preaching. On one extreme there are those who during the preparation of the sermon bypass any real interaction with the chosen biblical text, and immediately know already what the sermon is going to be about. And hopefully in these cases a lot of erroneous remarks are not being made; and to play on the title of a book by a NT scholar, hopefully we are getting “The Right Doctrine [even though they may be] from the Wrong Texts.” However, there are those times, when indeed there are some egregious things that are said, and sadly the common lay folk sitting in the pew takes no notice. No one is saying that exegetical or expository sermons are the only way to preach, and it’s true, many times our congregant members do not need to hear this type of minutia. But one thing I’ve come to know is that the more that one needs to simplify a biblical passage, say with a children’s sermons, the more that the preacher better understand the text, so as not to severely misrepresent what the text is saying as it is being simplified.

In the interpretation of scripture I believe that the statement by seventeenth-century Lutheran Greek-language scholar Johann Albrecht Bengel is an important one: “Apply yourself wholly to the text, and apply the text wholly to yourself.” This statement reminds us that in order for something to have any real influence on us, we cannot simply see it as an extension of us, or functionally reduce it to a mere projection of our thoughts and feelings. This “idolistic” manner of interpretation may be mitigated through a wrestling with the text in a manner where some form of Hegelian dialectic is taking place.

C. A Possible Way Forward

How do we rectify this situation in our denomination? First we could go the route of submitting ourselves to an outside (external) authority, and maybe in our denomination this looks something like our subordinate standards; or second, we could be open to the multiplicity of voices which span history, cultures, continents, various socio-economic levels; and where we see the highest frequency of attributions being given to a particular view, maybe that’s where truth likely resides. [This is one suggestion, but nonetheless, I think we can all agree that maybe we need to revisit the topics of 1. what is scripture? 2. how do we interpret scripture? And 3. how is scripture authoritative?]

Aside: The Presbyterian Church in Canada or The Presbyterian Church of Canada?

In somewhat of an aside, but a pertinent point, we have all been reminded repeatedly of the importance of the preposition "in" that is found in the name of our denomination, The *Presbyterian Church in Canada*. A name is chosen with the intention that the referent reflects its given name. Does the Presbyterian Church in Canada live up to its name? Do we represent well our intended identity and nature? Today we fear that our denomination looks more like the Presbyterian Church of Canada. For our denomination to truly be the Presbyterian Church in Canada we believe it is important for it to reflect the multiple expressions of Presbyterianism found in the PCC that have its roots in other cultures and ethnicities of the world. However, today, in the PCC it seems only important to hear, heed, and adopt the form of Presbyterianism that has been interpreted and influenced by that which has been idealized in Western culture. There is a danger when the PCC does not take into account other forms of Presbyterianism but only relies on one, Western cultural expression of it--it may find itself to be in error, but not able to recognize it. When multiple expressions of Presbyterianism (and Christianity) come together the truest, most accurate, and faithful expression of it will likely be found at the intersection of these multiple expressions. For this reason we hope that the PCC does not continue to ignore the many voices and expressions of Presbyterianism in the PCC, of which the Korean expression is but one, to their overall detriment.

III. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

A. The Need for Effective Communication

1. Effective Communication Requires a Redefinition of Terms via. Lived Out Experience

Why is it that those holding to a traditional view of marriage and sexuality in this denomination are viewed as those who are unloving and promote hate? Surely there are those who hold to traditional views and indeed act in unloving and hateful ways; but holding traditional views on this topic does not necessitate one being unloving or a promoter of hate. In fact, it should have no bearing on the chosen manner that one chooses to act. Unless in our society we define love with total acceptance, and see kindness as excluding any form of questioning or contention. In this regard those holding to a traditional view are at a disadvantage because our society today often does equate love to blind acceptance, and kindness as consenting to the will and wishes of an individual. So how does the person who believes in the traditional view of marriage and sexuality prove that they are indeed loving and kind? They redefine what loves means to them. As much energy that is spent on defending the traditional claim of marriage and sexuality should also be devoted to actively loving those who identify with other forms of sexuality. Perhaps something we have

miserably failed at in our own contexts and in our own churches is showing how those who identify as LGBTQI can experience real love, and real acceptance in our communities. To show them that our communities can be viable places where they can thrive and grow in their devotion to God. Love is a verb, and hence requires action, and this is something that a lot of us may need to repent of.

2. Effective Communication Requires Better Mediums: Close Proximity

The above topic perhaps invokes a look at the phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message.” McLuhan argues that in order to effectively communicate, the primary focus should be on the communication medium itself, and not the specific message that it carries. In the debates regarding human sexuality in our denomination, surely the content of our message (i.e. what we are trying to communicate) is at odds with those promoting full inclusion, but does the character of our communication (i.e. the mediums which we employ) further exacerbate our polarization, and effectively prevent any real communication from taking place?

What then is an important requisite for real communication to take place? Many could be listed, but in my experience, something that is inextricable is “proximity,” or “closeness.” Try talking about something difficult over email; or try talking about something difficult over text message; the phone; through video chat; or face-to-face in physical proximity. In ministry it’s easier to hate a congregant member when you see them in passing weekly; it’s harder to remain hating them when you have to talk with them weekly; it’s even harder to remain hating them when you have to do life together with them. What I have noticed is that real communication, and any real reconciliation that goes beyond mere lip service, can only take place when opposing parties are constantly rubbing shoulders together, and are doing life together.

Perhaps, to date, there needs to be a hard look at how communication has been attempted. And maybe we need to differentiate the message (content of communication) from the mediums (character of communication) being employed. This may help us to arrive at a place of further clarity on each component, so as to provide us a more effective strategy or method of communication. Perhaps the greater culprit of the two causing our ineffective communication is the mediums we have chosen to employ. Should we then not seriously reassess our chosen mediums?

Aside: Real Communication at General Assembly?

Can we really communicate with one another at GA if we are speaking into a microphone, addressing only the moderator, which in reality is tantamount to a monologue, wherein the speaker is attempting to make his or her own voice heard, while at the same time possibly being motivated with the temptation to win an argument, sound intelligent, appear morally superior, or present themselves as the victim of injustice. Anyone who has taught communication to young couples wanting to marry, or counselled those in serious dispute, know that this is a recipe for disaster. In fact immediately post GA, many feel as though they've just come out of a war, and psychologically suffer for extended periods of time. At GA anything but communication is happening; rather, here, we are setting ourselves up for even greater polarization, and divide.

Perhaps, then, the only real places where reconciliation and understanding can be brought about are in our homes, churches, and maybe even in our Presbyteries; but to date, I'm not very hopeful about our General Assemblies. But I did like very much the attempt at GA 2020 by the group of "Young Ministers" who worked together on the remits. Maybe this method should further be studied.

3. Effective Communication Requires Contextualization: The Law From Above & The Law From Below

The message of the bible, the gospel, and kingdom are always applicable, and deeply relevant this side of heaven; but perhaps how we are communicating that message requires some reconsideration. This brings up the topic of contextualization. Many of us do theology from a top-down direction; but maybe we also need to consider the theology that goes from the bottom-up. Paradigms of these approaches can be found in our scriptures. The Mosaic Law is often considered to be something resembling a top-down approach, but we also have our Wisdom Literature that looks something like a bottom-up or ground-up approach. The two, if we are pursuing truth, should not contradict, but mutually inform. I would argue today that in our often unwelcoming, secular, "post-everything" society there is desperate need to do theology from the ground-up. There are not many people today who are going to be convinced by any statement that is substantiated with the words "because the bible tells me so." This means we cannot forget to employ into our discussions of God the empirical data, which is the primary domain of study for such disciplines as history, philosophy, and the many sciences.

B. Where to Invest Your Energy? Our Children, Taught by Christ or Caesar?

I have worked with children and youth for many years; in fact, a year and half ago I took up the position of Interim Education Director at our church, and I am now the full Education Director. I did this because I believe that the most important ministry in a church is the one which pertains to the teaching and discipling of our children and youth. And here's something that I've observed in 1.5 to 2 student generations

(1 student generation is approx. to 5 years) vis-à-vis to the question of homosexuality and full inclusion: 2 student generations ago, most youth in the church would have thought that homosexuality is wrong; today most youth would not even give it a second thought, and would wonder why anyone would question it. This paradigmatic shift in thought did not take place as a result of the church's teaching; it took place because of the teaching of society and culture, and more specifically the teaching of values, morals, and ethics which our public education systems has taken upon itself to disseminate to our children. In effect our children instead of being taught by Christ, are being taught by Caesar (Matt 22:21).

No one needs to remind us that we live in a pluralistic society. However, I ask myself if I can live in a denomination that holds to the sole position of full inclusion for all purported type of sexualities. Perhaps I could function and do ministry in such a denomination, but things changed a lot for me when I thought about the children at our church. I am older, and I have the ability to critically think, hear multiple perspectives, and weigh things out; but a child does not have this faculty anywhere near developed to handle such tasks. I, quite frankly, believe we do a disservice to our children and youth when we cannot provide them with a stable environment in which to learn. There's one thing if the outside world is discrediting their beliefs, there's another thing when the denomination to which one belongs is shouting the same things. For this reason, doing ministry in a denomination that negates, and does not provide space for, what one teaches is not what I believe to be a viable option.

C. Eyes & Ears Open: Coming Back to the Korean Church

I never would have thought that my return to the Korean church would have taught me such important lessons. First, I learned that I didn't know Korean culture as well as I thought I did and that in order to really get to know a group of people you have to rub shoulders with them, walk with them, and struggle together with them. Again, it is harder to hate someone while being in close proximity to them. Second, I learned that if you think you're going to reach the outside multicultural community, but you can't even get along with the people inside, sharing the same roof, not only do you lack integrity, but you're probably a little naive.... Third, if you're going to reconcile two groups to one another, you're going to need a person who acts as a mediator, one who does not side with one group over the other, nor pursues the interests of one group over the other. This middle person will likely not be liked by many on either side, and has a high chance of often getting, figuratively crucified. But these people are absolutely necessary if any form of real understanding or reconciliation can take place.

I am thankful to the PCC for reminding me that I am Korean. This cultural resource is proving invaluable for faithful Christian Living. In my role as Education Director, I believe it's important to teach our children Korean Culture, not because everything about Korean Culture is right, but because not everything in Western Culture is right. In fact, I will always encourage our children to rub shoulders with those belonging to all faiths, cultures, backgrounds . . . because you're bound to learn something new, or be ever more certain of what you already believe.

D. Faithfulness, not Winning: The Victory Has Already Been Won

I have learned that the "ends never justify the means," and if the means don't match up with our ends, then there is highly likely a chance that the ends we are aiming for are not the right ends, or the ends we arrive at through improper means will not be the ends that are honouring to Christ. For this reason, the believer, as best as he or she can, should simply desire to live out their lives in faithfulness to Christ, in the manner which Christ has already indicated to him or her. In other words, I believe that what we need to do is simply represent Christ as best as we can.

And in desiring to live out our lives in faithfulness to Christ, if we do not experience misunderstanding, criticism, and dare I say even at times maybe even being accused of possibly being the devil (Luke 11:15), then maybe we should question if we really are following in the ways of Christ.

The hardest thing I have ever done in my life, is try to be a faithful Christian as best as I know how. My wife asked me recently, "when was the last time you were filled with joy?" And I told her it was the time when I fully, without reserve gave my life to Christ. And I thought about when I lost that perpetual joy, and immediately I knew the answer: it was when I realized that living the Christian life involved people; it involved loving people, working together with people, and sacrificing yourself for people.

Ministry is difficult, and there are indeed periods of time when I ask God, "if this cup can be taken away from me?" but then there are those moments in ministering and interacting with people where you get a hit of overwhelming encouragement, and are reminded of why you do what you do.

A week ago today, I got a message from a congregant member who said that he needed prayer. He said that he was experiencing so much stress at work and that his boss was blaming him for everything, which was affecting his home life. In his prayer request he said that because he wanted to represent Christ at his work, he was trying to not lash back at his boss. My first message to him was that I told him that I'd pray for him, and then not too long after that I said, if you'd like for me to pray for you on the phone, please call me. And as he called me, and as we were talking I could tell that he was weeping. And that really did a number on me because here was a guy who would instead of giving his boss maybe the talking he deserved, instead chose to suffer to the point of crying tears, and this so that he could represent Christ well at his work.

E. What is Your Cross? Live Faithfully

Not everyone is called to be in between two cultures, or between two groups holding polarizing views on the topic of marriage and sexuality. Also, not everyone is called to remain in a deeply fractured denomination, and for this reason we should not judge those who wish to stay and those who wish to leave. But there are some whose cross may be just that, to stay and to faithfully live out their Christian witness in this denomination, so that they can be a source of Christ's renewal here.

CLOSING PRAYER