

A Walk Through the Woods

by Rev. Mary Holder Naegeli, Walnut Creek, California

THERE ARE DEEP THEOLOGICAL flaws in some seemingly acceptable assertions being made in current debates about homosexuality and marriage. In order to sort these out, please join me on a walk through the forest of the PCUSA. Imagine yourself surrounded by the great redwood trees of California and be aware of its tightly intertwined root system. Though shallow by most standards, redwood roots extend laterally for great distances and weave themselves amongst the roots of nearby trees. They are not “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). As we walk among these ancient spires, we are going to examine some very closely. I hope by the end of our tour you have gained an appreciation of the whole forest and can discern the diseased limbs causing infection within it. Mindful that this forest may seem at some points to be more like a maze, I offer the following nature trail guide to identify points of interest along the way.

Trail Marker No. 1: The God-as-Trinity Tree

We start at the very center of the Presbyterian forest, the point around which all Presbyterian life revolves. It is a huge tree with many facets. The church coined the term “Trinity” to describe the great mystery of one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a lively, relational fellowship of three distinct persons existing as one essence: God the Father, creator and sustainer of all that is and the initiator of relationship with that creation; Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate among us to inaugurate the Kingdom and to reconcile sinners to God; and the Holy Spirit indwelling believers to convict of sin, regenerate to new life, empower, and equip for ministry.¹ While describing their distinctions as we experience them, we also affirm that they are of one substance. So when we perceive the work of the Holy Spirit, we know that God is acting; when we believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ, we know that God was acting; and when the Father embraces us in covenant love, we know that God is acting. They cannot be separated from each other; one is not willing or capable—by God’s very nature— of “going rogue” to say or do something the other two would not. In support of this assertion, we recognize moments in the biblical narrative in which the Trinity is present:

1. Creation (Gen. 1 with Col. 1:15-17)
2. Anunciation (Luke 1:35)
3. The baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16f and par.)
4. Stephen’s stoning (Acts 7:55)

The Trinitarian formula for baptism was evident in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, who commanded us to “baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19f). These three are and act together.

So the Trinity represents one God, the God of the universe, the God above all gods, the God who existed in loving relationship

even before human beings were created. While Jesus was teaching in the early first century, he referred to the mutuality of the Trinity of which he was one person: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30); “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (John 15:26). The Apostle Paul was well aware of this divine three-in-one when he observed, “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6).

We need this God-as-Trinity Tree firmly planted in our Presbyterian forest, because some in our midst want to separate Jesus from the Trinity as though only Jesus is to be obeyed, or attribute to the Holy Spirit ideas that are out of synchronization with the Trinity, as though the Spirit can add new and contradictory “revelations” to God’s word.

Trail Marker No. 2: The Path Around the God-as-Trinity Tree

It is one of the mysteries of our faith that this God-as-Trinity Tree, under certain light conditions, can be seen or experienced as one of three trees of its substance. As we walk around its circumference, we detect that there are specific aspects of this intertwined three-in-one tree worth examining. For now, note that they are all grounded together as one tree (do not ever forget this!) and cannot be separated to plant as individual trees in isolated parts of the forest. Nevertheless, we can make some observations at points marked on the trail.

Trail Marker No 3: The God as Jesus Christ Tree

Jesus as Lord of All. The first sermons by post-Pentecost disciples proclaimed, “Jesus Christ is Lord of all!” (Acts 10:36 [Peter], and 17:24 [Paul]), identifying for us the central affirmation of the Christian Church for all ages. In ringing tones throughout the New Testament, Jesus Christ is exalted and praised. He is unsurpassed in power, rule, and authority. There is no one higher than this One who relinquished the prerogatives of heaven, took upon himself full humanity while retaining his deity, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, healed many, declared and demonstrated the Kingdom of God, died on the cross, rose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven (Phil. 2:5-11). The *Book of Order (BOO)* says,

“All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named . . .”²

The apostle Paul proclaimed this “one Lord” (1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 4:5) who is now “seated at [God’s] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named . . .” (Eph. 1:20f).

As we ponder this Jesus, we become aware that different people may be picturing a different Jesus, depending on their theological presuppositions. A recent issue of *Christianity Today* offered a helpful cover story by professor Scot McKnight that reflected on efforts to discover the “real” Jesus.³ He challenges us to consider what we mean when we say “the Real Jesus”: is it the Jewish Jesus, seen as the son of Jewish parents, student of Jewish rabbis, victim of Jewish political clashes? Is Jesus the Canonical Jesus, the one interpreted by the four gospel writers as Messiah, Son of God, and the agent of God’s redemption? Is Jesus the Orthodox Jesus, reflecting the amplified understanding of Jesus developed by the theologians of the early church? Does one mean the Historical Jesus, the person behind all the testimonies about him, reconstructed by scholars on the basis of modern historical methods? Or perhaps, one is referring—honestly now—to the Personal Jesus, the personality you and I have each projected onto Jesus Christ and likely cast in our own image?

When challengers of basic Presbyterian faith and polity insist that we are to obey Jesus Christ (in contrast to obeying Scripture), which Jesus are they talking about? What other Jesus do we have than the one who is revealed to us in the Scriptures (the Canonical Jesus) and proclaimed as Lord, Savior, Teacher, Son of God, and Messiah (the Orthodox Jesus)? The assertions of these challengers must be examined for the possibility that their Jesus can be separated from Scripture and the witness of the Church. But more on that later, when we get to the Scripture Tree.

Jesus as Head of the Church. The authority of Jesus as Lord extends into the life of the Church, over which Christ is “head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). God has “put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:22). Presbyterians put it this way: “The Church, as Christ’s body, is bound to his authority,” which means that any authority the church might perceive itself to have is derived from the authority of Jesus, the basis for our mission.⁴ Jesus himself makes this clear in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19f): “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Jesus as Lord of all and head of the church expects that his people will do as he says. But mystified, Jesus once asked, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46)

If we are sincere in calling Jesus Christ the Lord of all and the head of the church, we must also be sincere and guileless in our willingness to follow where he leads and do what he says. This is the essence of “obedience to Christ.”

Trail Marker No. 4: The Path Between the God-As-Jesus Tree and the Church Tree

As we continue around the periphery of the God-as-Trinity Tree, we notice there are a few pathways leading out from the center. We will first take the path that links the God-As-Jesus Tree to the Church Tree. Later we will come back to this same spot, and

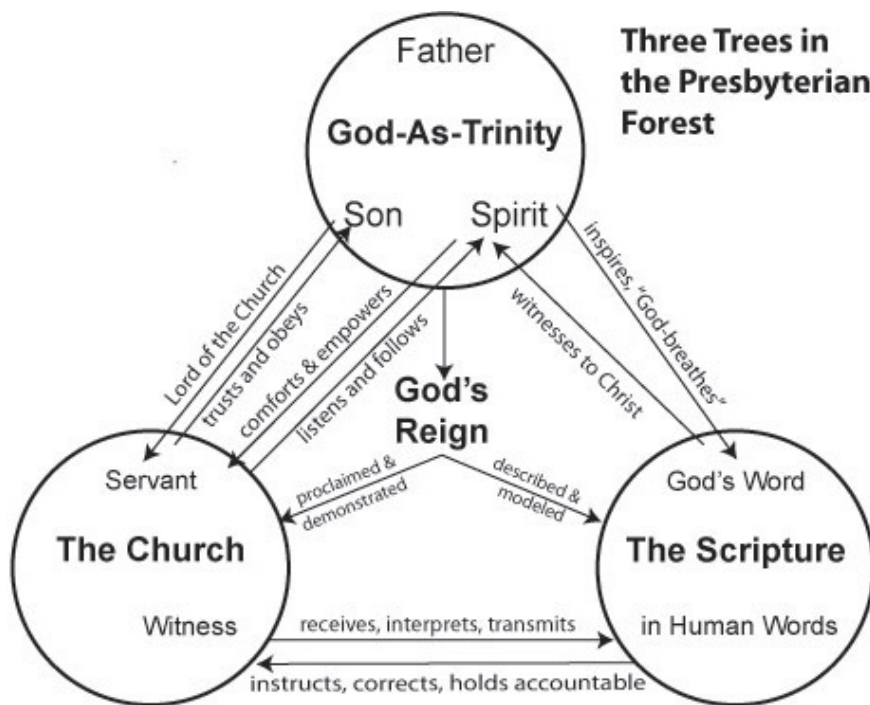
take the path from the God-As-Holy-Spirit Tree to the Scripture Tree. As we circle the Church Tree, we will discover that a trail links it also to the Scripture Tree by a two-way path, so follow this guide to keep you from getting lost.

The church’s origins rest with God, whose covenant with Israel extended to include those who would follow Jesus the Messiah (Eph. 2:11-21). Jesus brought the church into being, not as an ecclesiastical structure but as a community of faith gathered around knowing him. His intention was that his disciples, after his departure, would carry on the work of proclaiming and demonstrating the Kingdom of God to the world. He imparted authority to the church to do this, after Peter’s profession of faith: “. . . on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19).

Pentecost, commonly identified as the birthday of the church, more accurately was the day that the already existing community of faith was empowered to proclaim the gospel. Previously, Jesus had given it the authority to do so. This link will become important as we explore more fully the call of the church, but along this pathway we are reminded that any strength, authority, or power the church might possess has been imparted by Jesus Christ and is derivative of his own authority. The church is not to act on its own or do what is right in its own eyes, but to come back to its roots in obedience to Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the classic affirmation, “The church reformed, always to be reformed,” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.⁵ The church reforms by re-turning (repenting) to its biblical roots after wandering down bunny trails of false belief or scandalous practice.

Trail Marker No. 5: The Church Tree

The roots of this God-planted Church Tree run deeply through the history of Israel, when God’s intention to establish a covenant



relationship with faithful people (starting with Abraham) was revealed. The seed of righteousness based on faith was planted in Abraham's heart (Rom. 4:16), and those who followed in his footsteps were declared part of God's set-apart people. So when Jesus invited his (Jewish) disciples to believe in him and thereby know the Father (John 14:7), and when Peter introduced Gentiles to the Savior (starting in Acts 10:9-44), both were demonstrating God's intention that all who believed in Jesus Christ would be counted among God's People made righteous in him. To this day, a declared faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is all that is required for membership in a Presbyterian church.⁶

The Church empowered by the Holy Spirit. "Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, for its service to God."⁷ Its mission to the world is to make disciples, to introduce them to the worship and service of God, to teach them everything Jesus had commanded, and to demonstrate Kingdom living in the world.⁸ We are not left to figure this out entirely on our own, nor are we expected to draw upon mere human strength. Jesus had said, just before he left, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The first sign of the Spirit's outpouring was the miraculous proclamation of the gospel among Jerusalem pilgrims in their own languages. That same Spirit, which we will examine later, brought to life the movement that gathered and deployed those who would "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

*The Church instructed by the Word of God.*⁹ God gave a second equipping gift to the church. Even before the New Testament books were gathered into a "canon,"¹⁰ the people of God were in possession of the Old Testament. The books of Moses (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible), the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, collected the written testimonies to God's redeeming work in the world. The reality that YHWH God wanted to be known by name (Exod. 3:13), have an ongoing relationship with Abraham and his progeny (Gen. 12:1-3), and define the terms of covenant in life-giving ways (Exod. 20) is staggering evidence of God's great love and care. God is not coy, arbitrary, or playing hard-to-get; from the very beginning God has wanted to be in open and unhindered relationship with human beings. In the course of this great story of God and his creation, God gave commandments that, when observed, would keep us in fellowship with God's purposes. To stray from these meant unchaperoned forays into the dangerous territory of "life on one's own."¹¹ So the Old Testament—"Scripture" to first century followers of Jesus—described a way of life and wooed God's people into saving relationship with their creator and sustainer. Jesus quoted from the Old Testament regularly; the Scriptures guarded his heart when tempted (Luke 4:1-12); his vocabulary for communicating his own calling was found in Isaiah (Luke 4:18); and the foundation for the redemptive purposes of God through Jesus Christ was articulated in the overarching story of God's covenant people Israel. Jesus himself taught from the Law and demonstrated not only the letter of the Law but also its spirit (Matt. 5-7), helping his followers to discover faith as a way of life rather than a set of

meaningless rote rules to follow.

It was the responsibility of the church to receive this Word, to put it into action, and to transmit it (Luke 5:8-15). On the corporate level, the Church was God's agent for collating, affirming, and distributing the word of God written. On the personal level, the apostle Paul was acutely aware that he had received a precious gift of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures, and considered it a sacred trust to pass on to others. "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures . . ." (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Trail Marker No. 6: The Path From the Church Tree to the Scripture Tree

This trail goes in both directions between the Church Tree to the Scripture Tree. We have described how, through the witness and work of the Church (inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit), we came to possess the Scriptures and share God's Word with the *world*. In this limited sense, the Scriptures are mediated to the world by the Church. However, the Scripture as God's word written imparts God's will upon the *Church* through instruction, information, and correction, and thereby holds the Church and its members accountable to the will of God (2 Tim 3:16).

Trail Marker No. 7: The Scripture Tree

As we approach this redwood of the faith, a walk around its periphery reveals a connecting path that heads straight back to the God-As-Spirit Tree embedded as One of Three in the Trinity Tree, where we started. In order for us to appreciate fully all the aspects of the Scripture Tree, we must trace its roots from the Trinity Tree, since one of Scripture's hallmarks is that the word written gives an authentic and sufficient witness to the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ. "The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy

Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written."¹² So our discussion pathway leads us back to God, Three in One—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the God who wants to be known.

Trail Marker No. 8: The God-As-Spirit Tree

The Holy Spirit is God eternally present with us (John 14:16), dwelling in our hearts by faith (Rom. 5:5). The Spirit was sent by God as an Advocate, a witness on Jesus' behalf (John 15:26), our intercessor (Rom. 8:27), to convict us of sin (John 16:8), to bring us to life in Christ (Rom. 8:9-11), and to endow us with spiritual gifts for the work of ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-11). All the Holy Spirit does is intended to bring people to an authentic, vital, and pure relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Nicene Creed affirms that the Holy Spirit is One with the Father and the Son.¹³ The Spirit, while making Christ known to individual believers and the church, does not fabricate anything that is contradictory to the self-disclosure of God in the Scriptures.¹⁴ The Spirit speaks what the Spirit hears from God-As-Trinity, just as Je-

As we circle the Church Tree, we will discover that a trail links it also to the Scripture Tree by a two-way path.

Jesus did only what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19). “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13). This unity of the Trinity is what makes our union with Christ possible: the Spirit of God acts upon and within us to invite us into a right relationship with the Father, provided by the atoning work of the Son. The Spirit has no plans whatsoever to take us by any other path than “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 4:6) to the heart of our loving Father.¹⁵

The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe in Christ. Peter made the connection clear in his first sermon after Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). While the Holy Spirit is at work *on* all people, the indwelling Spirit’s work *within* is limited to Christian believers, because the Spirit cannot be separated from Jesus Christ, who waits to be invited into one’s heart.

The Holy Spirit as One of Three participated in the writing of Scripture. When Paul reminded Timothy that “all scripture is inspired by God,” he used the word literally translated “God-breathed.” *Theo* is “God” and *pneustos* is “breathed” from the same word for “spirit,” *pneuma*. The Spirit is at work in and through Scripture, having been present and active when it was written and present now as it is read and preached. The Spirit has a vested interest in God’s people getting the Word right, because the Scripture is the Spirit’s word to the church. The Word of God is known to Paul as “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). One can test any assertion attributed to the Spirit by evaluating its consistency with the word of God written. The authority of the Bible in the life of the church is based squarely on the work of the Trinity, working in concert to make known God’s will and way to those God calls his own.

With the origins of Scripture recognized as coming from God, we can now return to the Scripture Tree for a closer look.

Back to Trail Marker No. 7: The Scripture Tree

God’s Word. While saying that the Scripture is “God-breathed” or “inspired,” it is not sufficient to say that the Bible contains inspired passages or is simply inspiration to us. It would also be inaccurate to say that parts of the Scripture can exist alone as Scripture, because it takes all of Scripture to accomplish—infallibly and authoritatively (Isa. 55:6-11)—what God wills. We know what God intends this self-revelation to achieve because of the claims it makes (cf. 2 Tim 3:16f); the Holy Spirit, at work in the written word and dwelling in our hearts, confirms that this is indeed God speaking as *living* word. The Scripture is God’s ongoing word to humanity.

In human words. We also affirm that the Bible is God’s Word expressed in human words. God chose to make this self-revelation in ordinary human language, so we could hear it. The Scripture itself is not God,¹⁶ but it infallibly points to God as one who wants to be in covenant with us through Jesus Christ. God’s Word in human words demonstrates that God desires full participation with humanity; and Jesus entered our world in time and space, language and locale, in order to make reconciliation with God possible.

Bearing a living witness to Jesus Christ. “The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God’s self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ We have two biblical examples of the Scriptures pointing to Jesus Christ. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus talked to two confused disciples who were trying to sort out the events of Easter day: “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Philip, a gifted evangelist, shares Christ with an Ethiopian pilgrim returning from Jerusalem: “Philip ran up to [the chariot] and heard [the Ethiopian] reading the prophet [Isaiah]. . . . Then Philip, starting with this scripture, proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:29-35).

Authoritative in the life of the church and the believer. By virtue of its divine origin, the word of God carries the authority of its author: “The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written.”¹⁸ This “receiving and obeying” brings us back to the path between the Scripture Tree and the Church Tree, in that the word of God is given to the church as the sufficient statement of God’s heart, mind, and expectation for the people of God.

The Bible is our rule for “faith and manners.”¹⁹ The authority of Scripture lies in its ability “to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Properly understood. The task becomes “rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20f). We understand that the word both in its parts and in its entirety requires interpretation, which, we believe, must be guided first by the Holy Spirit through Scripture, and then by the confessional statements of the church. Scripture is the lens through which we see God’s will clearly. Human beings are not the lens, and our eyes are clouded by spiritual cataracts. We need the Scripture to bring God’s will into focus.²⁰ Paul’s exhortation to Timothy was to remain faithful to the word of God, to study it, teach it, and not be persuaded to change the message when orthodoxy became unfashionable or dangerous (2 Tim. 3:10-7).

The New Testament writers understood the church’s authority to rest solely upon its faithfulness to the Word of God. Foundational principles of the Presbyterian Church (USA) acknowledge this important link: “All Church power is only ministerial and declarative; that is, *the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners*; . . . all the decisions of a church governing body should be founded upon the *revealed will of God*.”²¹

The Spirit is at work in and through Scripture, having been present and active when it was written and present now as it is read and preached.

Out of the church's understanding of Scripture come standards, which bind church officers to a pattern of behavior that relies on the grace of God, repents of sin, and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. "Among these standards is the requirement" that church officers "live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness."²² This is a biblical standard, fully supported not only by Scripture but also by the church's teaching in our Confessions.

But it is precisely here, at the point on the trail where the Word of God must be interpreted, that we find challengers to Presbyterian faith and polity obscuring the path.

Bunny Trail No. 1: "We can accept the authority of the Scripture, but reject the church's interpretation of the Scripture related to homosexuality or same-sex marriage."

The controversies in the PCUSA revolve around "rightly explaining the word of truth." It would be a brazen denial to say that the Bible has no authority in matters related to homosexuality, and few would make such a denial. Rather, challengers of Presbyterian faith and polity seek to *interpret* the authoritative word of God in a way that allows for the very behavior Scripture unequivocally condemns.²³ We can only appeal to the plain meaning of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments, the complete lack of any modulation or softening of that meaning as the Scripture unfolds (between Lev. 18:22 and 1 Cor. 6:9), and a strong Genesis-based understanding of marriage complementarity (Gen. 1:27f, 2:18-25) to make this case. Furthermore, the witness of the church—through its confessional interpretations of the Scripture through the centuries—rejects the notion that homosexual behavior is acceptable.²⁴

Bunny Trail No. 2: "The Holy Spirit is re-interpreting the Word of God, and we must be open to the new thing God is doing."

Believing that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8) and that the Triune God is unified in purpose, message, and ministry, we reject any "new thing" contrary to God's word that might be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Rather, we see this as blasphemy: attributing something to the Spirit that is undue, untrue, or defaming. "Reformed and always being reformed, according to the Word of God" does not entitle us to invent something totally new or unheard of or contradictory to the church's teaching. What *is* new, and accomplished by the Holy

Spirit, is a regenerated responsiveness to Jesus Christ, Lord of All, and repentance made possible by the kindness of God (Rom. 2:4).

Bunny Trail No. 3: "It is wrong to say that we are to obey Scripture (as in G-6.0106b). Rather, we are called to obey Jesus Christ to which Scripture gives witness."

Implicit in this assertion is that, somehow, Jesus is detached from the word of God. You can see how this would be possible if one rejected a Canonical or Orthodox Jesus in favor of a Personal Jesus. However, the link between the Word Become Flesh and the Word Written forged by the interlocking roots between the God-as-Trinity Tree and the Scripture Tree has been demonstrated above. It is something relatively new to claim that the word of God does not require our obedience; but in the era of historical-critical inquiry of the Scriptures, the humanness of the Bible has wrongly diminished the church's confidence in the affirmations of biblical infallibility and authority.

On the particular topic of homosexuality, it is claimed that because Jesus is silent on the issue, we are free to take that silence as approval of some sort of sexual arrangement we deem appropriate or acceptable. But Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 as the defining word on marriage, obligating us to measure all other sexual relationships against that standard (Matt. 19:5).

We must be very careful, lest we fall into Eve's sin. Eve could be said to have followed her conscience, by regarding the forbidden fruit and coming to the very-well-meaning conclusion that it was "good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). But her decision failed the most basic test of the well-shaped conscience, obedience to God's word.

Conclusion

Just as a redwood forest is tied together by the interlocking roots of its trees, the Presbyterian Forest is grounded in the Trinity, to which the Church and the Scriptures are linked. When we understand that God does not act or speak at cross-purposes with himself, our doctrines of divine revelation, knowledge, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church all fall into place. The debates before us are not "only about sex," but about the very biblical and theological roots of our faith! So "keep your head in all situations" (2 Tim. 4:5, NIV) and take fellow Presbyterians for a walk through the Presbyterian forest.

Notes on "Walk"

1. PCUSA, *Book of Confessions 2007*, Scots Confession, 3.01: "We confess . . . one God alone; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

2. PCUSA, *Book of Order 2009/2011*, G-1.0100a.

3. Scot McKnight, "The Jesus We'll Never Know," *Christianity Today* 54, no. 4, (April 2010) 22-28.

4. *Book of Order*, G-1.0100d.

5. *Ibid.*, G-2.0200.

6. *Ibid.*, G-5.0200.

7. *Ibid.*, G-1.0100b.

8. The formal Presbyterian statement of the "Great Ends of the Church" as "the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of

divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world" (*Book of Order*, G-1.0200).

9. Historically, the terms "Word of God" and "Scripture" have taken on different meanings. The confessions, most notably the 2nd Helvetic Confession (1566) and the Westminster Confession (1646) use the phrase "Word of God" synonymously with the Scripture. For our purposes here, Scripture and word of God (small "w") will both refer to the written corpus, and the Word will refer to Christ (after John 1:1) and the *logos* of God.

10. This transmission included the citation from books of the New Testament by church fathers in early second century; Athanasius in 367AD was the first to name all the NT books that would later be identified as canonical, a step finally taken at the Council of Hippo in 393AD. (F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1988], 209, 232.)

11. Referred to in heartbreaking fashion by Paul in Romans 1, in which—three times—it is observed that “God gave them up” to the lust of their hearts (1:24), degrading passions (1:26), and to a debased mind” (1:28).

12. *Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9.27.

13. *Ibid.*, 1.3.

14. *Ibid.*, Westminster Confession, 6.006.

15. Our confessions are quite clear that Jesus is the only way to salvation: “Jesus, the only savior and redeemer,” Heidelberg Catechism, 4.030; “Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the World, and the true, awaited Messiah,” Second Helvetic Confession, 5.077; “very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man,” Westminster Confession, 6.044; “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.021; “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death,” Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.11.

16. Donald Bloesch uses the analogy, “The Bible is the Word of God as a light bulb is related to light. The light bulb is not itself the light but its medium” (*Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 59).

17. *Book of Order*, W-2.2001.

18. *Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9.27.

19. Historic Principle of Church Order, number 7, found in *Book of Order*, G-1.0307.

20. “For just as the eyes, when dimmed with age or weakness or by some other defect, unless aided by spectacles, discern nothing distinctly; so such is our feebleness, unless Scripture guides us in seeing God, we are immediately confused” (Calvin, *Institutes*, I/14:1).

21. *Book of Order*, G-1.0307.

22. *Ibid.*, G-6.0106b.

23. A thorough treatment of the biblical witness regarding homosexuality can be found in Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001). A progressive approach, which insists that all the direct prohibitions against homosexual behavior can be dismissed either on the basis of cultural context or an overarching rule of love, is typified by Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2006).

24. e.g. *Book of Confessions*, Heidelberg Catechism, 4.087.

