

Our Freedom of Religion at Risk: A Presbyterian Crisis

Convocation & Webinar organized by
Pittsburgh Presbytery



Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, Scotland

February 19, 2009
Beulah United Presbyterian Church
2:00—5:30 p.m. EST

Topics of Conversation

- The Westminster Assembly
- Covenant Theology and Freedom of Conscience
- Scrupling and the Adopting Act of 1729
- Church/State Separation and Church Property: Deference and Neutral Principles

The Westminster Assembly & its
affirmation of Presbyterianism as the
Scriptural witness for church order

Dr. Joseph Small

Convocation Discussion Starters:

1. Do you believe your session (teaching and ruling elders) is aware of the biblical basis for presbyterianism?
2. Do you believe your session is aware of the implications of Acts 4:32 for the Presbyterian claim the various congregations, collectively, are one Church?
3. What have you learned today about the Westminster Divines' rejection of congregationalism?
4. What impact does the loss of the Westminster Assembly's biblical basis for affirming a Presbyterian form of government have upon congregations and church families?
5. Is your session assuring that new officers are trained about the biblical basis for presbyterianism?

The Presbyterian tension between
Scottish Covenant Theology &
Scots-Irish Freedom of Conscience

Dr Euan Cameron & Dr. Beau Weston

Small Group Discussion Starters:

1. Have you been taught in your church's officer training about the role of the covenant in determining Presbyterian faith and practice?
2. What role do you think the concept of covenant ought to play in Presbyterian faith and practice?
3. How is the biblical concept of sin part of the covenant expectations of the Church's unity?
4. Was the biblical doctrine of sin the topic of scrupling during the Adopting Act of 1729?
5. How does Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43 (the Parable of the Weeds) instruct us about covenant and freedom of conscience?
6. What were the limits of scrupling during the Adopting Act of 1729 and do you believe the Church is observing them today?

**Covenant Community,
Freedom of Conscience &
Religious Liberty**

Rev. Mark Tammen

Convocation Discussion Starters:

1. Presbyterianism's foundation in the Scottish National Covenant assumed the Church and the state were divinely sanctioned to order civil life. How does the U.S. Supreme Court's doctrine of deference in resolving religious disputes preserve religious liberty?
2. The occasion of *Watson v. Jones* was the abolition of slavery by the federal government and the northern Presbyterian Church's ecclesiastical oath rejecting slavery as part of its covenant theology. Do you believe a shared covenant exists today between the Church and the state? Why or why not?
3. How does Presbyterianism's advocacy of freedom of conscience preserve the existence of a "national" covenant? In what way does freedom of conscience prevent the maintenance of a "national" covenant?

**Covenant Community,
Freedom of Conscience &
Religious Liberty**

Rev. Jeff Tindall

Convocation Discussion Starters:

1. Reading I Corinthians 6, do you believe using secular courts to resolve church theological disputes agrees with Presbyterianism's historic principles?
2. Do you believe the application of neutral principles by secular courts is in fact, neutral in its implications for religious freedom?
3. In what way do sessions and congregations seeking secular courts as a mediator for church property disputes affect religious freedom?
4. Do you see the involvement of secular courts in resolving church property disputes threatening religious liberty? Why or why not?
5. What would you like to see your presbytery do in response to the application of neutral principles by secular courts to adjudicate church property disputes?

Convocation Schedule

Introduction by Dr. Douglas Portz

Westminster Assembly by Dr. Joseph Small

Convocation Discussion

Scottish National Covenant by Dr. Euan Cameron

Adopting Act of 1729 by Dr. Beau Weston

Small Group Discussion & Feedback from Small Groups

Covenant Community, Freedom of Conscience &

Religious Liberty Issues by Mr. Mark Tammen, Esq.

Church Property Issues & Religious Liberty by Rev. Jeff Tindall

Convocation Discussion

Where Do We Go from Here? by Dr. Doug Portz



901 Allegheny Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15233

Phone: 412-323-1400

Fax: 412-323-2256

Website: www.pghpresbytery.org

Email: cmiller@pghpresbytery.org