



Reclaiming Jesus movement invites Presbyterians to rethink discipleship

Authorizes the PC(USA) to develop, in coordination with the Reclaiming Jesus movement, ancillary materials to expand this process of study, examination, comment, and prayer and to make these materials, along with the RJ materials, available to individuals, congregations, sessions, and presbyteries. (excerpt from General Assembly 223, Item 14–12)

In 2018, the leaders of several Christian denominations and organizations in the United States issued a statement calling on Christians in the United States to “reclaim Jesus.” The Reclaiming Jesus statement has drawn attention and participation from people both within and outside Christian churches in the United States. In our bitterly divided nation, some might see the statement as one more ideologically partisan voice. However, these Christian leaders intend honestly to question the state of the church and the political situation in the United States, grounding the statement in Scripture and Christian doctrines.

The 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), meeting in June 2018, commended “to its members, congregations, and presbyteries the Reclaiming Jesus statement concerning matters of Christian faith and how that faith interacts with the ‘spirits’ of our times.” The Assembly commended the statement for study, comment and prayer. This paper provides a brief outline of the statement’s contents, notes points at which the statement expresses theological affirmations that are also affirmed by the PC(USA), and provides links to the text of the statement as well as study material for engaging the statement.

A Brief Outline of the Statement

The Reclaiming Jesus statement concentrates on “public discipleship.” It reclaims who Jesus’ followers *are* and what they *should do*. The statement expresses and builds on a Christian understanding of what it is to be human, how disciples of Jesus are to live, and what faithful disciples are to do both within the church and in the world. By so doing, the statement calls for careful thought about Christian disciples’ “relationship with God, each other, and the most vulnerable.”¹ It calls for both reflection and actions that embody a faithful relationship with God, each other, all people and all creatures of God.

The Reclaiming Jesus statement has six points. These six points display significant agreement with what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms in our *Book of Confessions*. The statement echoes our confessions regarding humanity in relationship to God and others and, also, regarding our way of practicing discipleship in daily spiritual lives.

The first two points of the statement reclaim a theological understanding of what it is to be human. These points affirm, first, that God created all human beings in the image of God and, second, our unity in Christ. When it comes to humans as God’s created beings, all are equal; and the church should be particularly clear on this message because all Christians are equally one in Christ.

The next two points affirm Christian disciples’ commitment to the most vulnerable and the necessity of truth for the formation of disciples for faithful action and living in the world. Our faith is to be embodied by what we do for the least of the world (women, the poor and the marginalized) and our commitment to God’s call to speak and live in truth.

The last two points of the Reclaiming Jesus statement affirm that Christian discipleship is lived out through servanthood and stewardship, instead of dominance and authoritarian rule, following the example of Jesus’ leadership of humility.

In all six points the foundational theological premises are these two: a. God created all of us in God’s image, and b. Jesus’ disciples must follow the examples of Jesus’ life and ministry. The statement is theologically sound and timely at this historical moment.

Agreement with theological affirmations made by the PC(USA)

1. Theological affirmations about being human and human responsibilities

¹ See the conclusion paragraph of the Reclaiming Jesus statement.

In the *Book of Confessions*, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the following about being human and about our responsibility toward others and ourselves, as stated in A Brief Statement of Faith:

We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. (*Book of Confessions*, 11.3, Lines 27 to 32).

That statement integrates multiple confessions in our Reformed tradition about humans created in God's image and likeness, expressed in current language. It is more than clear that the PC(USA) affirms that all humans are created in God's image regardless of gender, race, nationality and so forth, while upholding the unity of humans "to live as one community" (*Book of Confessions*, 11.3, Line 32).

2. Theological affirmations about the call to discipleship in public arena

Regarding discipleship, The Directory for Worship encourages the practice of stewardship both within and outside the church, and in public space, as a way of spiritual practice:

The practices of fasting and feasting are ancient expressions of lament and celebration. The festivals and seasons of the Christian year provide rhythms of fasting and feasting centered on the life of Christ and the events of salvation history. Events in the life of the world, nation, community, or individuals may also call for acts of thanksgiving, sorrow, penitence, or protest.

The disciplines of stewardship and self-offering are a grateful response to God's love for the world and self-giving in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are called to lives of simplicity, generosity, hospitality, compassion, and care for creation. Tithing is a primary practice of Christian stewardship and self-offering. We are accountable to God for how we use our material goods, spiritual gifts, and time in God's service. (The Directory for Worship, W-5.0103)

It is again clear that the Reformed discipleship the PC(USA) seeks is not limited to the church. Our discipleship extends to the “events of salvation history,” even engaging the “acts of ... protest” when demanded, “in the life of the world, nation, community, or individuals” (The Directory for Worship, W-5.0103). Thus, discipleship is not only personal but also public.

Links to Resources

The creators of the Reclaiming Jesus statement have provided a wealth of resources for engaging the statement. Here are links to resources for such engagement:

Main webpage: reclaimingjesus.org

The statement: reclaimingjesus.org/sites/default/files/downloads/reclaiming_jesus.pdf.

The main webpage also offers a one-page summary of the statement, which can be downloaded here:

reclaimingjesus.org/sites/default/files/downloads/reclaimingjesus_summary_clean_1.pdf

Jim Wallis has recently published a book exploring the Reclaiming Jesus statement, “Christ in Crisis: Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus”: book.sojo.net