

Theology and Polity Comparison

Issues	Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)	Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)
<p>AUTHORITY</p>	<p>Scripture is described as infallible (infallible - never failing, always effective; does not deceive; incapable of mistakes)</p> <p>Authority goes first to Jesus Christ, then Scriptures, then the Westminster Confession of Faith (the only confessional statement required by EPC), then the Book of Order (consists of Book of Government, Book of Discipline, Book of Worship)</p> <p>"All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."</p> <p>"The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks."</p>	<p>Scripture is described as infallible (infallible - never failing, always effective; does not deceive; incapable of mistakes)</p> <p>Authority goes first to Jesus Christ, then Scriptures, then the Book of Confessions (same eleven confessional statements and catechisms as PCUSA), then the Consitution of ECO (consists of the Essential Tenets, the polity, and the Rules of Discipline)</p> <p>God's Word: The Authority for Our Confession - "We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son."</p> <p>"Biblical Integrity - We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, that teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives."</p>

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INTERPRETATION	<p>Reformed</p> <p>Westminster is the standard of doctrine as found in Scripture - all officers of EPC required to believe</p>	<p>Reformed</p> <p>"Confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture - confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions."</p>
DIVINITY OF CHRIST	<p>"He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever."</p> <p>"God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation."</p> <p>"Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life."</p>	<p>"Christ is both truly God and truly human... The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity."</p> <p>"Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God's presence."</p> <p>"In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relationship with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for he is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with him that a believer is able to know God as Father."</p>

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LORDSHIP OF CHRIST	<p>"He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He is now our High Priest and Mediator."</p>	<p>"The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead."</p> <p>"Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory."</p> <p>"Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God."</p>

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<p>ACCOUNTABILITY & DISCIPLINE</p>	<p>Permanent Judicial Commission is a committee of the General Assembly.</p> <p>Book of Discipline (one of three parts of Book of Order) - particular church has the right to elect its own officers...</p> <p>"The purpose of discipline is to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church. Ministers must instruct the officers and congregation in discipline and jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and courts of the church."</p>	<p>Each presbytery shall elect a permanent judicial commission from the pastors and elders within the presbytery. Once five presbyteries have been established, the synod shall elect a permanent judicial commission</p> <p>Rules of Discipline as contained in the Constitution - Failure of officers to continue to adhere to the Essential Tenets of ECO is grounds for a session or presbytery to remove an officer from service...</p> <p>"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:1-2</p> <p>Covenanted Biblical Community - Connect leaders in accountable relationships; Encourage collaboration; Minister out of God's unrelenting grace and covenant with His people</p> <p>Order - Commit to a shared way of life together; Unite around a shared theological core; Gather regularly to encourage discipleship</p> <p>Misisonal Affinity Networks - Narrative Questions</p>

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<p>ORDINATION STANDARDS</p>	<p>"Ministers should, according to the Scripture, have certain qualifications. They should be sound in the faith and have an aptitude for teaching. Their lives should reflect holiness and discipline which brings honor to Christ and which causes them to be well thought of by those outside the Church. They should have wisdom and discretion and should have adequate training to equip them for their task." (EPC Book of Order G10-2)</p> <p>The decision of whether to ordain women is not considered essential and is left to "the Spirit-guided conscience of particular congregations."</p> <p>"Ruling Elders should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being blameless in life, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office." (G10-5)</p>	<p>"The Ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king - reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons and ruling elders."</p> <p>"We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church..."</p> <p>"Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to: 1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help; 2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments; 3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity; 4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;</p>

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<p>ORDINATION STANDARDS (cont.)</p>	<p>"Deacons should exhibit especially those spiritual qualities of the Christian, and should be earnest and whole-hearted followers of Christ. They should be persons who are steady and reliable, well thought of by all. They should not be new in the faith and should be tested for faithfulness before election." (G10-8)</p>	<p>5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church; 6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death;7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant; 8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries; 9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters; 10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.</p> <p>In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God's holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God's will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper in-timacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy."</p>

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<p>DOCTRINE OF SIN</p>	<p>"Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace." (Essentials)</p> <p>Homosexuality is a sin and God forgives repentant sinners (Position Paper on Homosexuality)</p>	<p>"Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy."</p> <p>"As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments." We therefore hold one another accountable to: #1-10, including #7 "maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;"</p>
<p>MISSION OF THE CHURCH/ MISSIONAL MINISTRY</p>	<p>"The first duty of the Church is to evangelize by extending the Gospel both at home and abroad, leading others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.. The Church must never confuse its primary task of evangelism (the Gospel) with the fruit of the faith (good works)."</p> <p>Missional - our desire is that you will find a church that more than anything else wants our members to live missionally, making a difference in the world in which they work, live and interact with their neighbors</p>	<p>"Gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world."</p> <p>Evangelical - Advance the gospel of Jesus Christ; Plant new missional communities; Develop gospel-centered leaders</p>

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<p>MISSION OF THE CHURCH/ MISSIONAL MINISTRY (cont.)</p>	<p>"Our denomination wants to clarify for its member churches who we are and what we do as the United States and many other nations become mission fields that are larger, more spiritually diverse, and more antagonistic to the Gospel than ever before. The term "missional" has become common and therefore highly nuanced. We desire to define missional in a simple and specific way so that each EPC church can commit to a unified, obedient pursuit of the expansion of the Kingdom of God. A missional denomination:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Believes ministry begins with the local church. 2. Is made up of local congregations committed to being missional. 3. Believes that the Presbyteries and General Assembly, being expressions of the larger church, have an important role to play in identifying, equipping, and supporting leaders and churches. They are a key link in the principle of mutual accountability toward missional ministry and Biblical standards. 4. Constantly examines whether its polity, structures and programs are supporting or inhibiting that missional commitment..." <p>(From "Missional Church and Denomination", EPC website)</p> 	<p>"We aspire to reclaim a sense of covenanted biblical community, where unity is derived from a shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, rather than by structural mandate.... Congregations will gather together not to debate process or policy, but to collaborate, share best practices, encourage a Jesus way of life, and spur one another on to love and good deeds. These structures and policies are intended to serve the ministry and mission of Christ's Church, rather than the other way around." (Introductory Letter to ECO Polity Paper)</p> <p>The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus Christ as Head. Each congregation should strive to be a tangible, if provisional, demonstration of the Kingdom of God. Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in common: sharing the Good News of reconciliation to God in and through Jesus Christ, gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world. (Polity 1.0101)</p>

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<p>MISSION OF THE CHURCH/ MISSIONAL MINISTRY (cont.)</p>	<p>Inwardly strong, outwardly focused</p>	<p>"Pastors and ministries are healthier when there are opportunities for mutually supportive relationships. Therefore, pastors shall participate in a peer review with other pastors. The purpose of this review is to coach, encourage, and pray for one another as they strive for greater missional effectiveness. This peer review shall: a. Explore the health of each other's current ministry. b. Explore the future objectives for each other's ministry. c. Address challenges and obstacles to meeting those objectives. d. Share best practices and insights. e. Explore each other's physical, spiritual, relational and emotional health." (Polity 2.0402)</p> <p>Serve our communities and the world in Jesus' name</p>
<p>KNOWN FOR:</p>	<p>In Essentials... Unity In Non-Essentials... Liberty In All Things... Charity Truth, in Love</p>	<p>ECO seeks to serve the ministry and mission of Christ's Church. Our name represents a three-fold commitment to connect leaders through accountable biblical relationships founded in God's grace (Covenant), commit to a shared way of life together (Order), and ultimately, make disciples of Jesus Christ (Evangelical). The name ECO also speaks to our commitment to strengthen the "ecosystems" of local churches, providing the resources needed to grow, thrive, and reproduce</p> <p>Affirm education and the life of the mind</p> <p>Post-Denominational "Kingdom Vision" - seeking ways to fulfill its mission that produces healthy relationships and upbuilds the whole church of Jesus Christ - utilizes resources outside of ECO that reflect core values</p>

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INCEPTION	1981 EPC - leaders had become increasingly distressed by liberalism within their denominations; wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders	2012 "ECO exists to serve congregations and nurture leaders, building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ." "ECO is a Reformed denomination that is structured to feel like an association, with an emphasis on nimble governance, relational networks, and autonomy for local congregations."
MULTI CULTURAL INTENTION	"Eager to plant churches in urban communities and college towns."	"Just as earthly ecosystems draw richness from the right kind of diversity, ECO is committed to unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, young leaders, and every ethnicity." Ethnically and racially diverse leaders and speakers have been featured in regional and national events
WORLD MISSIONS	Priority on sending missionaries to unreached people groups - currently 90 missionaries serving in roughly 20 countries	Intentionally partnering with The Outreach Foundation, the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, and The Antioch Partners
CHURCH PLANTING	Are eager to plant churches across the US	Committed to growing and planting flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ Church Planting Conference held April 5 & 6, 2013

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DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE	Not mentioned in Essentials or Distinctives, but in Position Papers on Divorce and Remarriage and Sanctity of Marriage, marriage is described as, "a sworn fidelity, a solemn covenant between a man and a woman, entered into before God..."	We therefore hold one another accountable to, "maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;"
VIEW ON ABORTION	Bible affirms dignity and value of human life - Scripture gives "evidence that God accords human value and dignity to the unborn child." (Position Paper on Abortion)	"We will honor sanctity of human life above claims of human freedom." (Session and Congregational Covenant)
PER CAPITA CHPC in 2012 payed \$27.88 per active member (\$13,800) to PCUSA	No per capita tax - a voluntary contribution - it is currently \$23 per member and can not become mandatory	1% of annual church budget - mandatory
OWNERSHIP OF CONGREGATION'S PROPERTY	Guarantee in perpetuity the congregation's right to own and manage its property	Congregation owns property - "the non-profit corporation of a congregation so formed shall have the powers of a nonprofit corporation under applicable law, including the power to ... receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal..."
MEMBERSHIP	400 churches, 135,000 members	42 congregations, 30,000 members (in less than 2 years)