

Conservative Presbyterians Elect Progressive Academic Who Bemoans 'White Privilege' As Moderator Of Annual Meeting

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Wendy
Wilson

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A college professor who promotes progressive theories on race and white privilege was elected moderator Tuesday for this week's annual meeting of leaders in the conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

The PCA is the second largest Presbyterian denomination after the liberal mainline Presbyterian Church (USA). Since forming in the early 1970s, the PCA has been known as a conservative evangelical body standing in sharp contrast to the liberal mainline denomination. But in recent years, the PCA has experienced increasing internal division over race, the role of women in the church, and how to respond to cultural pressure to overturn biblical teachings on marriage and sexuality.

The PCA has a strong presence in Middle Tennessee. Its larger churches include Christ Presbyterian in Nashville, Covenant Presbyterian in Green Hills and Christ Community in Franklin.

More orthodox believers in the denomination are alarmed by the changes. But they are stymied by a growing progressive influence bringing radical secular ideas into the church, often wrapped in select Bible verses about compassion and generosity that leave conservatives afraid of being called racist and uncaring.

Alexander Jun, the moderator chosen for this week's General Assembly meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, is co-author of a new book titled *White Out: Understanding White Privilege and Dominance in the Modern Age*. Jun, who teaches at Asuza Pacific University, a Christian school in California, wrote the book with Christopher S. Collins, his colleague at Asuza and at Race and Justice in Higher Education (RJHE), a think tank launched in 2015. The RJHE [website](#) describes the book in the following way:

In this book, Collins and Jun explain “the role of Whiteness and a defense of White dominance in an increasingly diverse society. Whiteness is socially constructed, just as race is undoubtedly a social construct, documented through various periods in history. This book proposes that White Out is a learned habit that serves to defend White dominance in a multicultural age. White Out is a strategy that covers systems, dispositions, and actions that cannot cover the full indentation or impact. However, the action of blotting, either intentional or unintentional, serves to obscure experiences of people of color in lieu of a competing definition of reality. The authors introduce the White Architecture of the Mind as a metaphor highlighting the mind as a collection of walls, doors, windows, and pathways that influence individuals to react based on a systemic logic that was socially constructed reason. White Out, a byproduct of a White architecture of the mind, is a set of individual actions, choices, behaviors, and attitudes that are guided by a system that predisposes these attitudes and perpetuates privilege for core members of a dominant majority. The often-unconscious purpose in denying privilege and articulating colorblind ideology is to support a larger system and view of reality. The concepts covered in this volume include: White Pain, Whitefluena (privilege as a virus), White 22 (White if you do, White if you don't), Whitroggressions, Angry White Men, White Pilgrims, and Good White Friends.”

On its [Facebook page](#), the RJHE provides the following about its mission:

Research associates at Race & Justice in Higher Education (RJHE) orient social justice through the lens of race and ethnicity. We examine the multiple facets of racial justice efforts at institutions of higher education, as well as explore ongoing activities, resistance, and challenges to diversity, equity, and change. RJHE Scholars build on existing research and literature on racial justice advocacy work, including Critical Race Theory, Critical White Studies, and additional alternative identity development theories.

In a lecture last year at Biola University, Jun criticized the Western and North American focus on the individual and the “myth of meritocracy.” He implied that people are hurt when it is suggested that laziness is the reason for not getting ahead, as opposed to there being institutional discrimination blocking people’s way. “To say that you worked hard and that you deserved this is to say other people weren’t working hard,” he said.

Jun, who is Korean-American and an elder at a Korean Presbyterian church in California, is the first ethnic minority to be moderator at a PCA annual meeting. While conservatives on social media are expressing concerns over his teachings, others are celebrating his presiding role and the diversity he brings to the denomination.

Scott Sauls, pastor of Christ Presbyterian in Nashville, called Jun “a solid soul” in a Facebook post and said he was “so pleased by this.” David Cassidy, pastor of Christ Community in Franklin, also celebrated on Facebook, calling Jun “an excellent scholar” and “brilliant.”

The PCA is not the only conservative Christian church body to be roiled in recent years by theories on race that critics say manipulate spiritual teachings about the global body of Christ and, in the name of diversity, hurt church unity as racial grievances take center stage.

Conservative blogger William H. Smith, a former PCA pastor, has taken a critical look at “racial reconciliation” efforts in both the PCA and Southern Baptist Convention.

“What conservative evangelical churches have coming at them is a train pulled by two powerful locomotives. One locomotive is race. The other locomotive is gender (or what used to be called sex),” Smith writes.

In January 2016, Smith wrote a blog post criticizing Michelle Higgins, director of worship and outreach at a PCA church in St. Louis where her father is pastor. Higgins is a Black Lives Matter activist who has attracted an enthusiastic following in the denomination as well as controversy. She has said that evangelicals “have committed adultery with white supremacy.”

Smith said what Higgins is promoting “is political progressivism, liberation theology, and social gospel” and that it can’t coexist with theological orthodoxy.

“One or the other will have to move out,” he wrote. “This does not end well for the PCA.”

At last year’s General Assembly meeting, the PCA voted to repent for past racism. Wrote Christianity Today on June 24, 2016:

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) overwhelmingly voted last night to repent for its racist actions during the civil rights era, even though the denomination wasn't founded until nine years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

But “during the civil rights period, there were founding denominational leaders and churches who not only failed to pursue racial reconciliation but also actively worked against it,” read the one-page overture, which passed 861 to 123.

Fifteen years ago, the PCA apologized for “covenantal involvement” in past racial sins but did not name specific denominational offenses. Last year’s apology also included remorse over failure in the present to “lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins and personal bigotry.”