

SIXTEEN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY AND WILSONIAN CHRISTIANITY

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In a recent post (May, 2005) on the Moscow, Idaho list-serve "Vision 2020," a participant could not find any differences between conservative evangelical Christians (CECs) and Doug Wilson, so he wonders why we single out Wilson and not the others. In response I have listed 16 ways that they differ.

Without having the courtesy to tell me, Wilson did respond on May, 30 on his own blog. I have now added his response and my rejoinders on July 25. Next time, Doug, please do the right thing and send me a carbon copy. I had to autoerotically google myself in order to find your response. Come to think of it, blogging without telling your personal targets is a rather blatant form of autoeroticism.

Note: I draw the following from my evangelical friends and acquaintances as well as my in depth study of them in my book [God, Reason, and the Evangelicals](#). In the early 1980s when I started my research for this book, I had a rather monolithic view of CECs, but I was pleasantly surprised at their great diversity. The freedom from denominational ties has liberated some of these thinkers from traditional Christian doctrine, particularly in the area of divine power and divine foreknowledge. I also discovered that a strong minority of them have rejected "detailed inerrancy," a view that leads Wilson to a form of ethical relativism that holds that slavery is OK if the slaves have Christian masters, and that any act is right as long as Wilson's God commands you to do it. See #5 for details.

Another Note: In his eagerness to defend himself, alert readers will notice that Wilson does not answer the main point of my exercise: to wit, to show that he differs from most CEC thinkers. **By defending his own views, he reconfirms my original thesis.**

Yet Another Note: Wilson suggests that I am out to settle a "personal score." This is news to me. One of my jobs, and it will continue until I die, is to protect the Academy from its detractors and its fraudulent imitators. That is a professional, not a personal, duty. I find Wilson to be a very charming person, and I enjoyed him very much as one of my students. It is just a great shame that he has not used his philosophy degree very responsibly. For more on my personal history with Wilson click [here](#).

1. No CEC minister I know has declared that he heads up a "New Reformation." Read for yourself the arrogant and self-aggrandizing statements at <http://www.credenda.org/issues/15-4presbyterion.php> or read Wilson's *Reformed is Not Enough* (Canon Press, 2002).

DW: Turns out, neither have I. I don't think that I head up a New Reformation. But I do think that we can all learn from and apply in the microcosm what great Reformers have done with ages and continents. Learning and applying at your own level is what every Christian is called to do. And as it happens, my level is a small university town in northern Idaho.

NG: In his early days Wilson called himself a "New Testament" Christian, following the religion of "historic" Christianity. I was surprised to learn that at some point (late 80s?) he became a conservative Presbyterian. I listened to a tape of a debate that he had with a minister from Grangeville. Wilson spoke for the affirmative on the question of "Is Calvinism Biblical?" and I believe that the bright guy from Central Idaho soundly defeated Wilson. He was especially effective in demonstrating that the God of the Bible does not foreclose the future by damning people before the creation of the world before they have a chance to act on their own. After reading *Reformed Is Not Enough* and after my debate on the Trinity with Doug Jones, Wilson's right hand man, I'm not sure he's a Calvinist at all. (See this [link](#) for the debate on the and this [link](#) for my questions about Calvinism.) Jones' view of the Trinity appears to be Eastern

Orthodox and many conservative Presbyterians are now asking for Wilson's excommunication. Wilson appears to be as free and easy with his theology as some Unitarians I know.

2. No CEC pastor I know would sanction an April Fool's stunt, complete with stealing UI letterhead and using some else's FAX line, to announce an alleged UI sponsored lecture entitled "Topless and Proud." He tells us how proud he was of his son-in-law's actions:

"By the time you receive this, our local police will probably have forgotten all about it, so a little bragging is now safe, and perhaps it is even in order. But first some background. Our local city council, through a series of ridiculous circumstances, decided to quit restricting female toplessness. The noble senior editor of this journal [Wilson's son-in-law], encouraged by some winks and nudges from me, not that he needed any, made up a flyer which announced a topless and proud lecture series by topless feminist scholars." See the full text at <http://www.credenda.org/issues/11-3meander.php> and the police report at <http://dougspotch.com/looter.htm> at the bottom of the page.

DW: Gier takes umbrage at my sanctioning of an April's Fool's joke of some years ago, in which flyers were distributed all over the UI campus, announcing a series of lectures by top feminist scholars. In the advertisement, the top feminist scholars were to deliver said lectures while topless, making them top topless scholars. The lectures were on things like "breasts as embodied intuitions," and other such post modern hooah. Anyhow, because these are difficult times to be a satirist in, a bunch of people thought the lectures were for real, and it caused quite a commotion for a day. Gier is quite right that I thought it was a hoot, and even aided and abetted somewhat. But he is wrong that the main perpetrator was my son-in-law. The senior editor of *Credenda* at the time was Doug Jones, and he was the evil genius behind the real time *reductio*.

NG: Wilson condemns himself out of his own mouth. I repeat my original claim: no self-respecting CEC minister would sanction such an act against the major university in her town. Doug: that was university letterhead that Jones used and a departmental FAX machine!

3. While most CEC ministers believe that homosexuality is a sin, very few join Wilson & Co. in calling for their execution. The *Daily News* caught Wilson in a generous moment when he admitted that the Bible would also sanction exile rather than death. Two articles in Wilson's *Credenda Agenda* (vol. 3: nos. 9, 11) supported capital punishment for "kidnapping, sorcery, bestiality, adultery, homosexuality, and cursing one's parents."

DW: Gier maintains that I support capital punishment for any number of things, including bestiality, adultery, cursing one's parents, and homosexuality. The fundamental mistake that Gier makes here is in failing to distinguish a refusal to apologize for those things being capital offenses in the Bible, and wanting to impose such legislation now in the modern world, across the board. I will not do the former, and I don't want to do the latter. Because those things are in the Scriptures, and because we are called to be biblical absolutists, there is clearly no inherent injustice in such sanctions. At the same time, Christ came to save sinners from their sins, and from the consequences of their sins. This includes the sin of homosexuality, and the consequences of homosexuality. Christ is the Savior of the world; He came to bring mercy to the world. As a minister of this gospel, I preach forgiveness of sins, including homosexual sins, and invite everyone to come to the mercies of God in Christ. I do not want to send homosexuals to their deaths. I want them to turn from their sins, turn from death, and come to Jesus Christ. But does their sin *deserve* death? You bet. But so do *my* sins deserve death. The prophet Ezekiel put it well -- the soul that sins shall die. There are no exceptions to this reality, for all have sinned, and Christ is the only Savior.

NG: Presumably with the sanction of Wilson himself, Greg Dickison (*Credenda Agenda* vol. 3: nos. 9, 11) states that "*if we could have it our way*" (my emphasis), then there would be capital punishment for "kidnapping, sorcery, bestiality, adultery, homosexuality, and cursing one's parents." Dickison also quotes biblical passages (without qualification) that support slavery as "ordained and regulated by God," death for apostasy (Deut. 13.6-9), and cutting off a woman's hand for touching a strange man's genitals (Deut. 25.11,12). When Christianity rules Moscow, the USA, or the world, then these will be the laws.

Furthermore, if Wilson's sins are equal to the homosexuals', why then are they the only ones who are denied basic civil rights? Wilson can change his arrogance and intolerance, but gays and lesbians cannot change their God-given attraction to the ones they love. It is execution or banishment for them only that Wilson recommended.

4. Very few CEC pastors lead their congregations in imprecatory prayers against their enemies. According to a former church member, Wilson's favorite seems to be "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouths" (Ps. 58.6).

DW: Of course, this is what is involved in psalm singing. It is not possible to sing psalms without noticing that the psalmist had enemies, just like we do. And so we do sing, and pray, in an imprecatory way. We also sing and pray in line with the instructions of the *rest* of Scripture, which includes the injunction to love our enemies. This is harmonized by asking God to destroy our enemies, and our first request is that He would destroy them *as enemies* by turning their hearts, and making them our friends. But if that is not His pleasure, we still ask God to deal with His enemies according to His Word, and the lies that they tell.

NG: Come on, Doug, you can't be serious! Millions of Christians sing the psalms without a single hint of cursing their enemies. (Literal interpretation of scripture once again runs amok!) My Unitarian choir sings sacred lyrics all the time, knowing full well that we are engaged in an aesthetic exercise, not a theological one. I don't know how many Christians have told me that they go to church to sing and socialize not accept dogma.

5. Most CEC theologians, such as Stephen Davis, consistently reinterpret biblical passages that impugn Yahweh's moral integrity, but Wilson revels in pronouncing that every immoral act seemingly committed by Yahweh was indeed committed by him. Commenting on the stories of Abraham and Job, Douglas Jones, Wilson's right hand man, actually admits that God is "morally insane" and "dangerous and unpredictable" ("Playing with Knives: God the Dangerous," *Credenda Agenda* 16:3). In his book *Debate about the Bible*, Davis wisely argues that it was sinful Israelites, not God, who carried out the genocide of the Canaanite peoples.

DW: Gier objects that I do not explain away the passages that teach that God commanded the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites. He refers me to the high example of Stephen Davis, who says that it was the sinful Israelites, not God, who carried out the genocide of the Canaanite people. The problem is that the Bible says that *God* commanded it, and a problem related to this first problem is that I know how to read.

NG: Yes, I know that you can read. (We would have not have accepted you into our graduate program if you could not.) It is the way you read the Bible that is the problem. If given enough time to reflect on the implications, I'm certain that most evangelicals would side with Stephen Davis on this important point. Wilson's concession that God commands genocide undermines the moral foundations of Christianity, and makes it impossible for Wilson to condemn any action as immoral.

6. No CEC minister that I know has paid the gambling debts of errant college students out of church funds. Even though the IRS requires that a 1099 be filed for any payment over \$600, no such document exists for this \$1,000 transaction. For the entire story, as yet to be covered by the local press and complete with letters, e-mails, affidavits, tape recordings, see <http://dougspotch.com/index.html>.

DW: Gier objects to the fact that I paid the gambling debts of errant college students out of church funds. Except that I didn't.

NG: Is Wilson now telling us that he paid these debts out of his own pocket? That is not how anyone privy to this scandal understands it. People can read all the documents at <http://dougspotch.com/index.html> to judge this piece of historical revisionism, at which Wilson is getting very adept.

7. Very few CEC ministers who run their own schools would openly deny that they have these schools, but Wilson, who accredits 157 schools, regularly speaks at their commencements, and requires that they read his textbook on Christian schools and buy his books, said the following:

"Do your schools support neo-Confederate and Christian nationalist views? Yes or No? MY SCHOOLS? I DON'T HAVE ANY SCHOOLS OKAY, OKAY. WE REPUDIATE ALL ICKY VIEWS. NEVER HEARD OF 'EM." Wilson's full caps in his reply to my questions, posted on Vision2020 on December 9, 2003 at <http://mailman.fsr.com/pipermail/vision2020/2003-December/005891.html>.

One of Wilson's Moscow graduates is principal of Carey (NC) Christian School and he was forced to withdraw Wilson's booklet *Southern Slavery as it Was*, whose co-author is a founding director of the neo-Confederate League of the South. For more see www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/slavepage.htm.

DW: Though I am on the board of ACCS (Association of Classical and Christian Schools) I am an *ex officio* member, meaning that I don't have a vote. There are about ten other members of the board who do vote. I have not been on any accreditation visits. Gier knows not whereof he speaks.

NG: John Calvin was not a citizen of Geneva and could not vote, but he was the absolute authority and all things moral and theological. The Provost of the University of Idaho is an *ex officio* member of the Faculty Council and because of that Council members rarely ever vote against the administration. Defending Wilson on this point, Dale Courtney states on his blog that these schools are not required to read or assign Wilson's writings. But the Cary Christian School Board must "have read, and be able to articulate the key concepts and principles of *Recovering The Lost Tools of Learning* by Douglas Wilson, Crossway Books." I would like the e-mail addresses of all the other schools so that I can check to see if this is really the only Wilson school that makes this requirement. It's too bad that I can't trust Wilson if he says that it is.

8. Not many CEC churches, even in the South, support neo-Confederate views, but one of Wilson's best friends Steve Wilkins is a founding director of the neo-Confederate League of the South (LOS). The LOS has been declared a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the LOS is taking more control of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who just elected Kirk Lyons to its national executive board. An outspoken racist, Lyons was married by neo-Nazi Richard Butler in 1990, when Butler still had his compound in Hayden Lake.

DW: Neo-Confederate, etc. But Gier has an interesting way to finally nail me on this one. One of my best friends is Steve Wilkins (true). Steve is a director of the League of the South (was true). The LOS has been infiltrating the Sons of Confederate Veterans (I dunno). The SCV just elected Kirk Lyons to its national executive board (did they?). Lyons is an outspoken racist and was married by Richard Butler of the Aryan Nation in 1990 (whoa). And Richard Butler was once involved in a love triangle with Kevin Bacon and Jennifer Lopez. Okay, I made up the last one.

NG: Again Wilson does a clever dance around this one. If Wilson is not a neo-Confederate, why is it that it is Lee's birthday, not Washington's or Lincoln's, that is celebrated in Logos School? Why is it that Lee portrait is proudly displayed in classrooms and the Confederate flag displayed at social functions? Why is it that a conservative Presbyterian minister wrote to the *Moscow Pullman Daily News* that he saw a Confederate flag in Wilson's office, along with other Civil War memorabilia? And why is it that Wilson wrote an editorial for *Credenda Agenda* supporting the general idea of succession?

With regard to Steven Wilkins, he was a founding director of the League of the South, but when we made it an issue in the Wilson Saga, he became a consultant to the Board of Directors, and when we continued to make that an issue, he is now an Affiliated Scholar. Even if he disappears from their website, he is still connected to a Southern hate group. The Southern Poverty Law Center (I dismiss Wilson's slurs in this direction) has documented the League of the South's attempt to take over the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Yes, Kirk Lyons was elected to the latter's executive board and yes he was married by Richard

Butler.

9. Most CEC ministers would support the international genocide treaty, but not Wilson. "Do you support the international conventions against genocide? Yes or No? THIS ISN'T A PRO-LIFE TRICK QUESTION, IS IT? IT IS? THEN NO" (<http://mailman.fsr.com/pipermail/vision2020/2003-December/005891.html>). Notice Wilson's flip style in this exchange: This is typical of the way he debates. As I liked to say: those who live by the flip will die by the flip.

DW: He draws this conclusion from the fact that in a previous exchange, when he asked if I supported international conventions against genocide -- "Yes or no?" -- I replied with a question of my own. "This isn't a pro-life trick question, is it? It is? Then no." Gier does not like my "flip" style. And I don't like it when pro-abortionists like Gier posture as though they were against genocide.

NG: When I asked him those 12 questions back in December, 2003, I expected serious answers. But Wilson cannot restrain himself, and I told him then that I would take him at his word, even his famous Flip Wilson word. But wait, Wilson has answered seriously: God commanded genocide so it must be right (not wrong).

10. All but a few CEC pastors would defer to CEC scholars in their congregations, but not Wilson. When Tracie McKenzie, a University of Washington civil war expert and a member of the Seattle Christ Church, dared to object to the errors in the slavery booklet, Wilson rejected his advice to withdraw the booklet.

DW: Gier objects to the fact that I differed on a question of history with a history professor within my own denomination. And I did do this, I acknowledge it. But lest there be no accountability at all, I submitted the manuscript of my forthcoming book on this vexed historical question to one of the top historians in the country, and he gave the book the mother of all blurbs. I hope Gier will approve of this as a substitute.

NG: One of my prized piece of correspondence is from F. F. Bruce, a CEC Bible scholar, who admitted that a prominent British historian destroyed his credibility by supporting the historicity of Luke census. (Yet another top CEC who has the intellectual integrity to reject "detailed inerrancy.") In a similar way, I believe that Prof. Genovesse will live to regret writing a blurb for Wilson's re-write of the slavery booklet. (Perhaps he thought that his professional colleagues will not be reading titles from Wilson's home grown press.) The Southern Poverty Law Center has noted the good professor's growing affiliation with the neo-Confederates. We should all admire Prof. Tracie McKenzie for standing up to Moscow's John Calvin and having the courage to call him an intellectual fraud. Incidentally, the charges of plagiarism in the first edition still stand, and the authors who were copied (20 percent of the booklet) reject outright the thesis that is presented without shame in Wilson's second edition. We are confident that all professional historians will follow suit.

11. Very few CECs would support Wilson's practice of infant baptism, an act that makes them, according to Wilson, Christians in more than just a nominal way. How much more nominal this state of grace is, is hard to determine in Wilson's writings. Personally, I believe Wilson has switched from adult baptism so that he has more control over these children and their parents.

DW: Most CECs do not support infant baptism, and I do. Further, Gier thinks he knows *why* I support infant baptism. This particular ecclesiastical practice gives me "more control over these children and their parents." Jeepers. I don't know where to start a reasonable response to this line of attack, so I will just move on before Gier accuses me of spiking the communion wine with arsenic and laughing *bwaa ha ha ha* during the benediction.

NG: Please note that Wilson confirms my thesis that he differs significantly from most other CECs. Both Luther and Calvin joined Catholics in liquidating those who believed in the reasonable proposition that people should be a consenting adults before they confirm themselves as Christians. If it had not been for religious liberals in America, Baptists and many other evangelicals who follow them would not exist today. Finally, now that I know more about how Wilson operates than I previously and naively assumed, I stand

by my claim that Wilson made this doctrinal turn primarily out of a desire to control, a sin that will bring him to the lowest levels of Dante's Hell. The sexual sinners he condemns will forever chase their lovers at the second level, their only punishment being that they will never catch them.

12. Not very many CEC ministers start their own denomination when their current sect criticizes them. Conservative Presbyterian denominations are notorious for their strict discipline, but it appears as if rules are broken left and right in Wilson's Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches. See <http://dougspotch.com/index.html>.

DW: The problem here is that the formation of our presbytery had nothing whatever to do with any controversy. But to buttress his claim that in our presbytery "rules are broken left and right," Gier refers us all to that unimpeachable web-site dougspotch.com. This is a website you can rely on -- it is what they call a smear-reviewed journal.

NG: According to standard conservative Presbyterian rules, elders, such as Roy Atwood, who lose control of their children must be removed from their office. In the Morton Street Casino scandal this did not happen. I grant that Dougspotch is not a refereed journal, but neither is *Credenda Agenda* or Canon (Vanity) Press, but it contains documents, most on Christ Church letterhead, which Wilson has not denied or disputed.

13. Most CEC pastors would respect other CEC colleges, but Wilson believes that very few of them meet his standards of true Christianity. Wilson states that "evangelical establishment, particularly the evangelical establishment as now represented by its flagship colleges and publications, is completely adrift" (*Credenda Agenda* 17:1). See also his "Classical Learning and the Christian College" at <http://www.canonpress.org/pages/pdf/pgs/quest.pdf>. Finally, check out his article "Why Evangelical Colleges Are Not" in *Chronicles* (September, 1998).

DW: When it comes to colleges, I am critical of the mainstream evangelical establishment. That is true. I am. Is that bad?

NG: Once again Wilson has confirmed the fact that he stands apart from most CECs. These fine Christians send their children and their financial gifts to these well respected liberal arts colleges, where I have had the privilege to lecture and whose faculty I meet every year at meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. They have my respect and admiration; Wilson does not.

14. Most CEC theologians would reject Wilson's "Federal Vision" in which the individual self is supplanted by a collective self and where women would lose their right to vote.

DW: I am terribly interested in how Gier concluded that the individual self is supplanted by the collective self in the Federal Vision, and I am further interested in why he, a student of Buddhism, would have a problem with it. Couldn't it just be a John Knox meets Siddhartha kind of thing? But it isn't, and Gier's dog is biting the tires of the wrong car again. And on women voting, Gier also has it wrong. In our church polity, we have a system of household voting, and we have women who vote. Gier needs to do some actual research before pronouncing on things like this.

NG: If Wilson will withdraw his omelet analogy that he uses to explain the Federal Vision, then I will reconsider my objection. (Obviously, individual eggs do not preserve their identity in the mix.) But we now have it on the film *Our Town* that he, along with Steve Wilkins and George, believes that only propertied males should vote. Wilson's example of a few female heads of households voting in his church is better evidence for his clever definition of democracy: two coyotes and a lamb deciding what to have for lunch. Furthermore, households are abstract collectives not real individuals. In my church all members, real individuals, get to vote.

Finally, Wilson demonstrates once again why he got such a low grade in my Buddhism class. The first half of the class is devoted to the study of Pail Buddhism, which does not dissolve the individual self into the Dharmakaya, but presents a view of the self that is significantly similar to the Hebrew view of the self. A graduate student and I have just finished a paper entitled "Hebrew and Buddhist Concepts of Self," which I have sent to Atwood, Jones, and Wilson. (No reply of course.) At first we vetted the paper with the best Buddhist and Bible scholars we know, and now it is being reviewed by two anonymous scholars chosen by the editors of *Asian Philosophy*. If the paper is rejected, we promise that we will not call the reviewers Buddha-haters, slanderers, or banshees. Would that Canon Press had such a review mechanism for its submitted manuscripts.

15. Most CEC colleges and universities in the Pacific Northwest regularly attend and participate in the regional meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature. At the Moscow meeting in April 2003, 40 percent of the papers were presented by faculty from these schools. As president of the region that year I invited faculty and students from Wilson's New St. Andrews College (NSA) to participate. No one from NSA showed up, even though there were no travel expenses. Later NSA Dean Roy Atwood responded that they had better things to do.

NG: I am still awaiting Wilson's reply on 15 and 16. Try not to be too superficial in your response, Doug.

16. Most CEC ministers would not instruct their congregants to anathemize other evangelical churches in their area. A recent anonymous post from a Christ Church member calling himself "New Man" makes these condemnations clear. One church is led by a solid Hebrew Bible scholar and devout Christian who was recruited to come to Moscow by Wilson's father.

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NG: Once again Wilson has confirmed the fact that he stands apart from most CECs. These fine Christians send their children and their financial gifts to these well respected liberal arts colleges, where I have had the privilege to lecture and whose faculty I meet every year at meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. They have my respect and admiration; Wilson does not.