

Into The Study Episode 197

Speaker Welcome to Into the Study, the podcast from the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. I am Tim Shaw, associate minister here at IPC, and I'm here with our senior minister, Doctor Terry Johnson. Doctor Johnson. We were this last week at the PCA General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. Any reflections or what's the report you're bringing back from General Assembly? It's mainly positive. Let me say that again. It's mainly positive. Um you know, we there were two important elections that took place that have a long term impact on the PCA and the direction in its future. One was Mel Duncan, who is the the brother of Ligon, who is the chancellor of the reformed seminaries. He was elected moderator. As you know, we have a ruling elder one year teaching elder the next year, and it rotates back and forth. And so this was the ruling elder year and we elected Mel. Well, Mel represents the the most conservative element of the PCA. I think I, I think it's right to clarify, we don't have liberals, but we do have progressives and they get very confused about what our mission is and about what how narrow our doctrinal standards need to be to be interpreted and what exactly our mission is. So there's, there's no one who's coming out with a, you know, a defective view of Scripture or saying that we shouldn't, um, subscribe to the Westminster standards. But there is definitely a progressive wing. There's always pushing the envelope when it comes to worship. And when it comes to women, um, serving as officers or if not as officers, having the label deaconess or some other form of confusion. So, uh, with with Mel, you're talking about the most traditional, uh, right wing, biblical, reformed part of the denomination. And then we probably even more important, we elected Fred Greco to be the stated clerk of the denomination. He's a he's a trained lawyer. He's been a minister for about twenty years. And now to put him in that position that represents a revolution. These are Twin Lakes Fellowship guys that are very much akin to us in Confessionalist concerns and in all these ways, very, very much so. Overwhelming sea change. Oh, it is. And and, you know, when you think about the who, who has occupied that position, his predecessors over the last, really probably the last thirty years, thirty five years going back, uh, to Morton Smith. Um, and then those who have succeeded him have always been of the more moderate wing of the PCA, the ones who are less strictly reformed and more progressive in their outlook. I mean, Roy Taylor, the last one for the last twenty years, just just entered the EPC. So far the far to the left of us. Yeah. I didn't know that. And then then his successor right. Brian Chappell. Brian Chappell was left because of um some indiscretions, some indiscretion on his part with regard to his criticism of people who were to the right of him. Right. Which was revealed in a piece of paper that he he flashed at the camera, he flashed at the camera that could be clearly seen. Blew it up and said, what in the world? I mean, why, he's got an enemies list. You can't be in that position and have an enemies list. Uh, so I mean, I wouldn't I wouldn't hesitate to have Brian Chappell come and preach for our missions conference. I mean, I don't think he's a bad guy, but he was definitely the more moderate wing of the denomination. And and so that's all the point being made is that Fred Greco is, is way on the right wing. And so that's that is a sign of the direction, the trajectory of the PCA right now. Uh, and it's, it's, it's in a more consistently, uh, forcefully, definitively reformed direction. And we can all give thanks for that. I don't really see that when it comes to worship. And, you know, I'm disappointed at General Assembly every year that I do have to acknowledge that, uh, we sang more Psalms than every year.

We're singing more Psalms. It's interesting. Maybe the argument that we ought to include a Psalm whenever we have worship in the Presbyterian Church, maybe, maybe that's starting to gain some ground. Yeah. Uh, so there's that. And then, um, well, there were some overtures. Uh, I mentioned I mentioned one of them Sunday morning, the overture to celebrate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary. And that got some discussion, which is almost, I would say even that there was a need of discussion was disappointed because the overture was just to thank God for America and its two hundred and fifty years. And it was it was no more than that, but it did. I mean, within the PCA. There is this continuum of viewpoint, and it tends to lead to controversy sometimes. Right. And I think having the Chinese fellow. Yeah. From the fellow from Taiwan get up. And I mentioned him Sunday morning and he gave a hilarious but resounding speech. I mean, people just forget about these things. I mean, there's an argument that can be made, and I would make both sides of the argument. And I think I do at one time or another on a pretty regular basis. One is maybe the greatest force for good in the world is the United States, because, as he mentioned, what keeps Communist China from overtaking Taiwan or overrunning all of Asia? I mean, they got one point two billion people. They've got an absolutely gigantic army. They could do whatever they want. What keeps them from doing it? United States military. What keeps Russia from rolling over Eastern Europe again? They want to get back Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania Ukraine and Ukraine. That's what they want to do. What keeps them from doing it? Well, it's the United States, which is the big stick behind NATO. Um, what keeps, uh, the Islamic nations and Islamic radicals from from, you know, overrunning regions throughout the world? Again, it's America pushing back against the Iranians and the Hezbollah's and the Hamas and teaming up with Israel to, to keep to check the power of Islam. So that's why I think there's a very good argument to be made. The greatest single force for good in the world today is the United States. God uses America political force for good. Yeah. I mean, to be realistic about I mean, about, uh, the umbrella of American power that provides freedoms where the church can operate. Yes. So that's the connection, right? And I'm glad you made it because it's, it's the important one to see because the, you know, life does not divide up neatly into. Well, here's the religious and here's the political. It's the. Freedom of the church. How much freedom do you think the church has in China? How much would the church have wherever Chinese power is extended? How about Islamic power? How much freedom would the church have there? How about with the Russians? I mean, they they pretend to be Christian and then they, you know, they blow up the Kiev Cathedral. Uh, how much freedom would there be for non-Orthodox believers? Uh, you know, those who are Protestant in Russia, they're already, um, enduring limitations on their freedom to worship and to preach as they, as they would. Uh, so the Orthodox Church has gotten support from the Russian government, but nobody else has. And in fact, it's been the opposite. So, and we, we really can't go back in there anymore. I went I went there ten years ago, maybe it was fifteen years ago now. I went in there twice, went in and went into Ukraine in the Kiev area. And then the second time went into Saint Petersburg, which is Russia proper. Kiev, of course, is Ukraine. But, you know, is it safe to go there now? Uh, I don't think, you know, you cannot count on not being arbitrarily arrested by the Russian government, which has happened to missionaries who've who've gone over there. Uh, so so the political that's why I say God is providentially using the American military, the power of the United States to preserve liberty and freedom throughout throughout the world so that the church can conduct

its ministry. And if there were a power vacuum into which China and Russia and radical Islam could step into, it would mean, uh, serious, serious problems, uh, persecution and even martyrdom for Christians all throughout the world. Yeah. I've been reading the books by Raymond Ibrahim, this, uh, Egyptian who's a student of Victor Davis Hanson that wrote the book defenders of the West. And I'm reading The Two Swords of Christ. And there's a third book that precedes them both, but it's a whole history and he's just mostly quoting from. The first sources about the Crusades and the defense of the West. Throwing these stories that the history of North Africa, the history of the Holy lands, the history of Asia Minor, um, there's there is a Christianity. Um, uh, it's oversimplistic to say always just the, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. It's true. And yet the church needs protection from a sword. Uh, oftentimes, at least historically, as far as we're concerned, um, God can do whatever he proves to do providentially. But I say, ordinarily, um, it's better to live under freedom for, for just strong to stand up for what's right. Well, I just recently I was reading the numbers, all of which I forget, but I was just seeing the numbers of, of Christians who were settled in Islamic lands who now have had to leave And we're talking about hundreds of thousands of Christians who were once in Syria, who were once in Lebanon, who once were in Jordan. It reduced the numbers down to the hundreds. And and and the reason is that, you know, the the militancy of Islam. And we have been at war with Islam going all the way back to the eighth century. Mhm. Uh, seventh century, I guess, is what the six hundreds. So, uh, we, we tell ourselves that everybody believes in pluralism now, and everybody believes in religious liberty and all that. And the fact of the matter is, they don't you know, I'm quoting Tom Holland all the time, but, you know, he makes this point. We we just assume this, that they have the same outlook. And in Muslim countries, they don't. They think um, they think Allah is meant to rule through the Islamic religion, and that means Sharia law. And that means one religion. And you may be tolerated, but you better not step out of line. And the toleration is arbitrary and limited and often spills over into bloodshed and has throughout the history. And you know, these crusades have a bad name, but the Crusades were a response to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. So there was a call to to go and liberate the brethren. Uh, so what you know, what we're what we're saying is that we, we are very, very blessed in this country. That's why we do celebrate the Fourth of July. And we're happy about this two hundred and fiftieth anniversary because we, our families, our churches, we are the beneficiaries of the freedom and the abundance of American civilization. Uh, I guess the flip side, which we were going to get to is, you know, America is also, you know, poisoning the whole world with our pornographic culture, right? So there's always been this struggle, though, this fight for the soul of America going all the way back to John Witherspoon, who, who, you know, on the Arbella as they're about to land in New England, establish the New England colony, is casting the vision for America as the city set upon a hill. The famous words quoted by President Reagan in the nineteen eighties. He revived, you know, the Witherspoon image of America to be a light to the nations, a city set upon a hill. Um, where where true Christianity was established. So you have that vision and then you've got the vision of the ACLU. Then you've got the vision of the LGBTQ or even just a very enlightenment vision. I mean, there's a there's a tension between, I don't know, Franklin and Edwards, who are roughly contemporaries. Uh, we talk about that often. You know, what if what if Edwards had survived his smallpox inoculation and had been a larger force in politics as he was president of Princeton College at the time, the College of New Jersey. All of his

disciples supported the war for independence. Yeah. Uh. Bellamy. Um. Timothy. Dwight. Yeah. Bellamy. Dwight. Um, there's a Jonathan Edwards, Jr. They all supported the war for independence, so, you know, it makes you wonder if Edwards wouldn't have been on board as well, or if he could have been a corrective to, you know, a more broadly enlightenment view of the state and all. That's all that's, you know, how the balance would have been set up or the language might have been different. Yeah. I'm, you know, just a single line in the sermon, but which I think captures it pretty well is to say that America is a Christian nation with a secular government. Yeah. How are we a Christian nation? Well, everything about us is Christian. And I think only when you step back and say, well, our institutions, our laws, our assumptions, the declaration, Um, all, all of that arises out of a Christian worldview that you don't see anywhere else in the world except for Christianity has been. And so yes, we are, we are thoroughly shaped by Christian concepts of God and of humanity, the fallen fallen humanity, the need for division of powers, uh, limited government law, rule of law because of human nature and an understanding that the rights and liberties are gifts of God, we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator. It's born out of the Christian West. I mean, it's a product of Christendom. It is. Yeah. And all its thinking and all its language, its all its traditions and histories and all its what it's trying to be. Um, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism. They are not going to produce a democratic society with freedom of religion. It's just not it's it's not happened. It never happened. It never would happen. And so it's about time that American people woke up to that. And, and, uh, recognized it. And we're grateful to God for the fact that we have all these benefits that we inherit just because we happen to be born. I mentioned I mentioned you weren't around for the sermon. But anyway, I mentioned that that Americans, American Christians are, uh, you know, we're born on third base and act like they hit a triple. Yeah. Well, as though as though this were ordinary, though, this is the way it works in the world. It's not the way it works in the world. It only works in in the world in which Christianity has had an influence. And, um, you know, the rest of the world is, is not on third base. The rest of the world is back there on first base with limitations that we don't suffer under. Or they're on second base. We're on third base. We're not yet home. Home is heaven, but we're on third base where we're where we enjoy so many of the benefits of a Christian civilization. The people on second base, they have fewer. The people on first base, they don't have any. So some are still in the batter's box where literally they have no none of the benefits that we have. And so it's important to understand where we stand, where we are placed in the whole scheme of things and realize that we are we have these benefits by the hand of God, and we've been blessed by him. And, and gratitude is called for, even if you know, should. Should we be grateful, even if we were in this country and of this people in a way. And it and it hadn't been as good, should we be grateful? I think that whatever country you belong to, um, there are things about which one should be grateful. Right? So that's my point. If we were, if we, if we were in the USSR in the nineteen eighties or whatever, there have been things we should give thanks for. Be grateful that the Soviet army defeated Hitler's. Give thanks in all things. Yeah. I think that Hitler was not averse to slaughtering everybody. So. Slavic. Yeah. So I call to give thanks for the birthday of your nation is like a very basic level. And then to go beyond that, to begin to celebrate the good. It seems like that's what we're trying to do. Seems like another, you know, natural outflow of that. Um, do we as Americans have more to be grateful about our national identity than other people do?

Absolutely. You don't understand that. You don't understand the world. You need to get you need to take a trip to some other part of the world. How about a trip to Africa? You know, I've been there. Malawi, Uganda. Um, man, those are difficult places. I've been to China. I wouldn't want to live there. I've been to Russia. I wouldn't want to live there. I don't think any of us would want to live there. So do we have more to be grateful for? Of course we do. Everybody should be grateful for, you know, in everything. Give thanks. So if I was born in Outer Mongolia, there would be things I'd be grateful for, of course. And we're in a unique time in history in the sense that, you know, we're not under a king. Um, we as citizens have rights and duties to promote a certain vision of the nation, a certain desire of a direction we want to go. We're a part of that whether we want to be or not. And so, um, there is a certain amount of contention for a story, a mythos of who we've been and who we want to be. There will always be competing visions in our country of who we've been or who we want to be, but we have a stake in this. Let me say propagandawar. But that's who we are, who we've been, um, that we ought to make our case for, you know, the direction we want to go as a as a country. Yeah. Who have we been? We were the decisive scale tipping force that put a put an end to the aspirations of imperial Germany. Mhm. We were by far the decisive player in the defeat of Hitler, the defeat of Imperial Japan. We were, without question, the decisive factor in the defeat of Soviet communism. Um, and as far as the modern missions movement, is there a bigger center supporter force for good in the history of the world, Southeast Asia, South America, Africa? Tell me the billions and billions and trillions of dollars now that have been sent in and material and lives to those fields for, for no for for no colonization, you know, no. Uh, and perhaps that even that was perhaps that naive view of missions in some ways, I don't know, but, um, a relentless sending out, um, of, of missionaries under the umbrella of, you know, military protection, you know, the British colonized the world. Uh, Americans have not. Why haven't we? I have a very basic answer to that question. We could have, we could have basically more or less taken over the whole world at the end of World War Two. And we're the only ones who had nuclear weapons. And we had an absolutely massive navy, and we had a huge army. We could have basically taken over the whole world. Why didn't we? Why didn't we? Because we don't want to. Do Americans want to live overseas? No, none of us do. We want to live right where we are. So there's no there's no motivation to take over the world because we're pretty, pretty happy with where we are. And we don't really care about living anywhere else. Everyone else wants to come here. We don't want to go there. Well, from its founding, there's a belief in the nation and not in the not not a globalism. There hasn't been. We've had, you know, recent years had a naivete perhaps about globalism. But America in its history had no had no interest in entering these wars until they absolutely had to. These world wars, you know, there's a reluctantly drawn into them. But then the decisive player right when that when they must. Yeah. Um any other thoughts or anything else you wanted to say about July fourth coming up obviously this weekend, Saturday. Everybody come on out and let's have a you know, let's have a nice time together. Let's have a bit of a celebration together. And we're not taking up the whole day. You got to take care of your evening. And there is a there is a place for patriotism in the Christian life. There's a place for underneath. You know, if we say at the core of our identity, we're in Christ and we're a new creation, we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. We say the same. We are at the same time citizens of an earthly kingdom seeking that kingdom's good. As Jeremiah thirty one says, and we ought to have an ordered

love for our own wife and our own children, our own family, our own church, our own city, our own people, our own nation. There's a certain there's a right place for patriotism and love of your nation, your people, that flows from that right. We Christians have believed that. Well, the apostle Paul says that I have unceasing grief, great sorrow, and anguish for my kinsmen according to the flesh. He has a special attachment, you know, elsewhere, the Apostle Paul speaks of those who are devoid of natural affection. It's it's Strange not to love your own people, not to love your own. The disordered love. Yeah. It's like you're saying. There are. How did you term it? You got your own family. Do you love your family more than other families? Of course you do. It's weird not to. It's strange if you don't love your children more than all the children of the world. So, yeah, ordered affections. And it starts at home, and then it begins to ripple out. It's your home. It's your city, it's your state. It's you know, why is there such rivalry when, you know, the University of Georgia plays the University of Alabama and in football. Well, because, you know, we're here in Georgia. We want our our team, our people. That's not sinful. That's ordered affections. And so our own people, the United States, you cheer for the American soccer team. Why? Because it's American and I'm an American. To not have that natural affection is strange. It's odd, it's unnatural. And it's it's, um, it's almost gnostic. It's almost like there's a, um, lack of understanding that where embodied creatures in a time and a place. And there's an appropriate, appropriate, not an ultimate love. And our ultimate allegiances are all clear to Christ or to his church there forever in heaven. But there's also a rightful connection to our, our, our people in place. There's not a dichotomy between love for humanity and love for my wife. Mhm. She gets she gets special love. Mhm. My children, they get special love. My grandchildren. Is that at. Is that at odds or contrary to having love for humanity? No. No, no. The loves are ordered. And so there's a priority. So are our responsibilities. Yeah. Yes. Who doesn't care for his own family is worse than a Gentile. Right. His own family. Not every family. We do have some responsibility for every family, but not to the same degree, with the same level of interest and the same, uh, with the same obligations and responsibilities. No, it's it's it starts at home. It starts with one's own, and then the ripples go out. But don't make the mistake of confusing the ripples with what starts at home. Yeah. Yeah. Um, any other thoughts or. No, I think I've said plenty. Yeah. Um, as far as, you know, other interesting things that the PCA General Assembly was, you know, debates on the floor around the second commandment, uh, appropriate views of graven images. Um, what else came up? That was interesting debates, but even that debate went the way of the confessional. Interesting. Well, and the discussion of women as deacons was crushed. Yeah. I think that that'll never come up again. I have my hope anyway because it was crushed. I keep wanting to crack the door to the discussion. That's that's that's where the argument is at. Perhaps we should talk about having an ordained deaconesses, which is, you know, the sliver of the crack of the door and that was slammed shut. Um, and perhaps there's, there's more, uh, some of these overtures that were answered in relation to that to, to close the door further weren't brought up. And perhaps that was a mistake, but, um, maybe it's. I don't know what's best. Just not we're not talking about it or, or to to to make the bulwarks stronger. I maybe I misinterpreted that, but I interpreted it as, look, we're sick and tired of talking about this. We've decisively answered this. No. And I think that's the way. Yeah. I think I think there are conservatives on the right who wanted some of those other overtures to come up to, to strengthen the door against that. Uh, but, but because of the way it went in that debate, it was

this question has never even came up. Yeah. Um, and it's always fun to see friends. Yeah. You know, it's a good time to get away as, even as a staff and talk. I could remember their names. Uh, what's bad is that, uh, I'm here, not Ron. Ron. Ron knew everybody's name. He had a place for everybody. And I'm not. I'm not as helpful to you as he was. Yeah. The the the tag team was Ron and Emily. Yeah. Okay. Emily knows everything about everybody. Every name. Ron knew everything about everybody and every name. And so Robin would say, hey, Jim. And I say, hey, Jim. Emily says, hey, you remember Mr. and Mrs. Jones? Oh, yeah. Hey, Jones, how are you doing? And it's me and Alex and Evan. It's. It's hopeless for you there. You guys don't know nothing. No, you don't know nothing, and you don't know nobody. Mhm. We're just. We're just hanging on our coattails. What we're doing over there. Um, well, you watching the World Cup Wednesday? Absolutely. Cheer for America. Good. Well, this has been good because I'm not devoid of natural affection. I love my country. I love my countrymen. I want us to win. Perhaps there are other questions our listeners might like to ask along these lines, and they could be happy to send them, uh, to the address listed in the show notes. I'm getting cocky now. Bring them. Oh, my. This has been into the study, the podcast from the Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah, Georgia. This is Tim Shaw and Terry Johnson. Hoping you found it helpful. Till next time.