

OVERTURE 33, from TE Benjamin Inman

(to OC, AC)

“Erect *Ad Interim* Committee on the Book *Jesus Calling*”

The book *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, authored by now-deceased PCA church member Sarah Young, is one of the most influential published Christian works of the present century. Regardless of the author's intentions, as documented below, the book contains and promotes ostensibly grave errors and has been firmly rejected by influential public figures within, and theologically akin to, the PCA. The following proposed overture would establish an *ad interim* committee to document the PCA's historical relationship to the book, demonstrate whether the book constitutes a violation of the Second Commandment, and bring recommendations for any warranted actions of repentance by the PCA.

Whereas, communion with the living and true God is mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” (John 1:18); and

Whereas, while the apostle John's instruction about true saving faith dwells on three preeminent marks—confession of the incarnate Christ, sincere love of fellow Christians and the earnest repudiation of sin—his final, summary exhortation is the pithy, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21); and

Whereas, the church of Jesus Christ does not have jurisdiction to judge outsiders (1 Corinthians 5:12), yet the most publicly disruptive event of Paul's ministry in Acts erupted from the Gospel's efficacious debunking of idolatry: “And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.” (Acts 19:26); and

Whereas, opposition to idolatry is entailed by the sixth vow of every PCA teaching elder, Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account? (*BCO* 21-5); and

Whereas, PCA courts have a responsibility regarding not only our system of doctrine but also any matter which “strikes at the vitals of religion” (*BCO* 19-2.f, 21-4.g, 34-5); and

Whereas, PCA presbyteries specifically hold authority “to condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the church” (*BCO* 13-9.f); and

Whereas, it is the task of the General Assembly, “to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care” (*BCO* 14-6.k); and

Whereas, the PCA has a responsibility within its jurisdiction to discipline and so restrain the promulgation of opinions or practices harmful to the peace and purity of the church, per “. . . for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship,

1 or conversation; or to the power of godliness . . . they may lawfully be called to account, and
 2 proceeded against by the censures of the Church.” (WCF XX.iv); and

3
 4 **Whereas**, the PCA’s subordinate standards stipulate among the sins forbidden by the Second
 5 Commandment: “. . . all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and anywise approving,
 6 any religious worship not instituted by God himself; . . . ; the making any representation of
 7 God, of all or of any of the three persons, . . . inwardly in our mind, . . . in any kind of image
 8 or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; . . . though
 9 under the title of . . . devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever . . .” (Larger
 10 Catechism 109); and

11
 12 **Whereas**, the book “*Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*” has provoked on-going
 13 criticism among evangelical believers for the last 15 years or more, and wider attention¹; and

14
 15 **Whereas**, leaders respected across the spectrum of the PCA have publicly criticized and
 16 warned against the book: Kathy Keller of Redeemer NYC in “The Redeemer Report,”² Justin
 17 Taylor on The Gospel Coalition website,³ Tim Challies in his regular writing ministry,⁴ and
 18 Michael Horton on The White Horse Inn website;⁵ and

19
 20 **Whereas**, according to the author’s own account in the original Introduction of the first
 21 editions, the text consists of messages from Jesus produced in a fashion similar to the occult
 22 practice of automatic writing;⁶ and

23
 24 **Whereas**, the advertising for the book describes it accurately as, “Written as if Jesus Himself
 25 is speaking directly to you, *Jesus Calling* invites you to experience peace in the presence of
 26 the Savior who is always with you;”⁷ and

27
 28 **Whereas**, the book consists of 365 daily readings cast as the words of Jesus Christ directly
 29 addressing the reader, and is published specifically to provide benefits obtained by the worship
 30 of Christ: “In many parts of the world, Christians seem to be searching for a deeper experience
 31 of Jesus’ Presence and Peace. The messages that follow address that felt need,”⁸ and

32
 33 **Whereas**, by design, *Jesus Calling* is an idol, 1) because the text is a tool for experiencing a
 34 mental image—not a picture but an articulate and counterfeit personality—of the risen Lord
 35 Jesus Christ, and 2) because the image is used for the purposes of purported communion with
 36 the true risen Lord Jesus; and

¹ [New York Times, 2013](#)

² <https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/jesus-calling-by-sarah-young-a-review>

³ [Citing Michael Horton. Citing Kathy Keller.](#)

⁴ [“Ten Serious Problems with Jesus Calling.”](#)

⁵ Horton’s piece is available in full [here](#).

⁶ For an attentive overview of the original Introduction and comparison with the revised version in subsequent editions, see the [post](#) from Ruth Graham at *The Daily Beast*.

⁷ <https://www.jesuscalling.com/books/jesus-calling/>

⁸ For readers without a copy of *Jesus Calling*, this quote and further analysis by Tim Challies can be found [here](#).

1 **Whereas**, *Jesus Calling* is enormously influential: having sold 45 million units⁹ (which makes
2 the author the bestselling Christian writer of all time), having been translated into 35
3 languages,¹⁰ and having launched a brand with social media presence, merchandising,¹¹ a
4 television series¹² and a version marketed for use with children;¹³ and
5

6 **Whereas**, it is public knowledge that the author before, during and after both the production
7 and publication of *Jesus Calling* was a member of the PCA and a career missionary with
8 Mission To The World;¹⁴ and
9

10 **Whereas** the publisher Thomas Nelson (owned by HarperCollins) is not under the jurisdiction
11 of the PCA, and the author's passing in August 2023 has carried her above the jurisdiction of
12 the PCA; and
13

14 **Whereas**, because *Jesus Calling* was published in 2004, it is unreasonable to bring a
15 complaint to or against any court of the PCA on this matter, as "The passage of time since the
16 alleged offense makes fair adjudication unachievable," especially given the likelihood that
17 "degradation of evidence and memory may have occurred in the intervening period" (*BCO*
18 32-20); and
19

20 **Whereas**, based on the facts here cited, it is plausibly arguable that the PCA failed to uphold
21 its standards in pastoral care and discipline and stands as the one ecclesiastical authority at
22 fault in the promulgation of the single most influential, particular and concrete tool of idol
23 worship among American evangelicals.
24

25 **Whereas**, in the recent past the PCA, by action of the General Assembly, has confessed and
26 corporately repented in solidarity with our distant fathers for the sins endemic to American
27 Chattel Slavery and our much nearer fathers for sins of racism during the period of the
28 American Civil Rights Movement; and
29

30 **Whereas**, these previous actions of corporate repentance require an abiding concern for how
31 similar corruptions may well continue among us despite opinions and anecdotes to the
32 contrary; and
33

34 **Whereas**, Larger Catechism 110, to which there is no common exception in the PCA, gives
35 us specific and grave reasons to give serious consideration to the possibility of corporate sin
36 in this matter: ". . . besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal
37 for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a
38 spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and
39 threatening to punish them unto divers generations . . ."; and

⁹ [Publishers Weekly July 7, 2023](#)

¹⁰ [Obituary](#) in *ByFaith*

¹¹ [Publisher's Weekly](#)

¹² [Thomasnelson.com blog](#)

¹³ <https://www.jesuscalling.com/books/jesus-calling-365-devotions-for-kids/>

¹⁴ See [Christianity Today](#) and [ByFaith](#).

1 **Whereas**, pastoral fidelity within the jurisdiction of the PCA, and filial loyalty to professing
2 Christians beyond the PCA, as well as evangelistic compassion for those outside Christ must
3 reckon with the practical dangers of idolatry: “Those who make them become like them; so
4 do all who trust in them” (Psalm 115:8); and
5

6 **Whereas**, the PCA’s sister churches in the membership of NAPARC have a particular interest
7 in this matter, per the commitment to, “Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention,
8 and propagation of the Reformed faith.”;¹⁵ and
9

10 **Whereas**, the guilt which may be plausibly argued would likely suggest shame for particular
11 agencies of the General Assembly and persons significant and honored in their endeavors; and
12

13 **Whereas**, the guilt which may be plausibly argued ought to be demonstrated or dismissed in
14 a fashion free from any appearance of institutional modesty; and
15

16 **Whereas** vindication from anything shameful most rightly satisfies the conscience when
17 received from a party not directly involved in the matter under scrutiny; and
18

19 **Whereas** the General Assembly’s Theological Examining Committee (*BCO* 14-1,14) is both
20 the smallest and arguably most independent of the standing committees; and
21

22 **Whereas**, the pithiness of the apostle John’s, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols,”
23 presumes a simplicity that may challenge us; and
24

25 **Whereas**, questions required by the PCA’s relationship to *Jesus Calling*, may ultimately serve
26 “in order that [our] earnestness for [Christ] might be revealed to [us] in the sight of God” (2
27 Corinthians 7:12); and
28

29 **Whereas**, the seriousness of this matter is matched by the unflinching grace of the living and
30 true God who instructs forthrightly: “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined
31 so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32); and
32

33 **Whereas**, the passing of an overture by the General assembly does not entail endorsement of
34 the “whereas” statements, and unanimity on all the preceding points is not necessary;
35

36 **Therefore be it resolved that** the General Assembly erect an *Ad Interim* Committee tasked
37 to return a report to the next convened General Assembly:

- 38 1. Documenting the PCA’s historical relationship to the book, *Jesus Calling*.
- 39 2. Demonstrating whether the book constitutes a violation of the Second
40 Commandment according to our Subordinate Standards as proved from
41 Scripture.
- 42 3. Bringing recommendations for any warranted actions of repentance by the
43 PCA.
44

¹⁵ [CONSTITUTION of the NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL, IV.4.](#)

1 **Therefore be it further resolved that** the General Assembly’s Theological Examining
2 Committee be empowered as a commission to populate the *ad interim* committee with four
3 (4) Teaching Elders and five (5) Ruling Elders (including from their own number if they so
4 decide).

5
6 **Therefore be it further resolved that** the committee be encouraged to make judicious use of
7 video-conferencing and to seek assistance from TE Wayne Sparkman of the PCA Historical
8 Center, and the budget not exceed \$10,000 to be funded by gifts to the AC designated for this
9 purpose.

10
11 Submitted to Eastern Carolina Presbytery by TE Benjamin T. Inman.
12 Rejected by Eastern Carolina Presbytery at its stated meeting on April 20, 2023
13 Attested by /s/ RE Daniel J. Prins, Stated Clerk, Eastern Carolina