

## Status of *in thesi* Statements

From time to time inquiries are made concerning the status of study committee reports of the General Assembly. Such reports are dealt with in BCO 14-6; 14-7:

- 14-6.** The General Assembly shall have power:
- a. To receive and issue\* all appeals, references, and complaints regularly brought before it from the lower courts; to bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, injuriously affecting the Church; to decide in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline;
  - b. To give its advice and instruction, in conformity with the Constitution, in all cases submitted to it;
  - c. To review the records of the Presbyteries, to take care that the lower courts observe the Constitution; to redress whatever they may have done contrary to order;
  - d. To devise measures for promoting the prosperity and enlargement of the Church;
  - e. To erect new Presbyteries, and unite and divide those which were erected with their consent;
  - f. To institute and superintend the agencies necessary in the general work of evangelization; to appoint ministers of such labors as fall under its jurisdiction;
  - g. To suppress schismatical contentions and disputations, according to the rules provided therefor;
  - h. To receive under its jurisdiction, with the consent of three-fourths (3/4) of the Presbyteries, other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrine and order of this Church; to authorize Presbyteries to exercise similar power in receiving bodies suited to become constituents of those courts, and lying within their geographical bounds respectively;
  - i. To superintend the affairs of the whole Church;
  - j. To correspond with other churches; to unite with other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of this Church, such union to be effected by a mode of procedure defined in *BCO* 26; and
  - k. In general to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care.
- 14-7.** Actions of the General Assembly pursuant to the provision of *BCO* 14-6 such as deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and judicial decisions are to be given due and serious consideration by the Church and its lower courts when deliberating matters related to such action. Judicial decisions shall be binding and conclusive on the parties who are directly involved in the matter being adjudicated, and may be appealed to in subsequent similar cases as to any principle which may have been decided. (See *BCO* 3-5 and 6, and *WCF* 31:3.)

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\* Editor's note: "Issue" means "settling the issue of the case".

Study Committee reports are “deliverances” of an Assembly; the opinion of the majority of the commissioners on a specific subject (*in thesi*) at a particular point in time. Study Committee Reports are *not* amendments to the constitution. The PCA does not have the “authoritative interpretation of the constitution” process of the PCUSA that is tantamount to changing the constitution. Binding changes to the PCA constitution (*The Book of Church Order* and the *Westminster Standards*) may only be made by following the process for amending the constitution specified in BCO 26-2; 26-3.

According to BCO 14-7, church courts are to give deliverances of the General Assembly “due and serious consideration when deliberating matters related to such action.” So when examining candidates or office-bearers, church courts are to give study committee reports proper and serious consideration. Candidates and ordained officers’ views are to be within the parameters of the constitution, recognizing that there may be some allowable differences (*BCO* 21-4). There may be some cases in which a candidate or office-bearer’s views on a given issue may be within the parameters of the constitution as an allowable difference, yet not in agreement with the majority opinion of a particular General Assembly’s Study Committee Report. For example, on the issue of Paedo-communion, the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted the majority report of the Ad Interim Committee on the Question of Paedo-communion which did not approve of Paedo-communion. Those who held to Paedo-communion were notified by the Assembly to notify their sessions or presbyteries (courts of original jurisdiction) if they held to Paedo-communion (*M16GA*, Appendix T, *M17GA*, p. 129). Some deacons, ruling elders and ministers reported their affirmation of Paedo-communion views to their courts of original jurisdiction. Though Paedo-communion may not be constitutionally practiced in the PCA, most Sessions and presbyteries regard holding the Paedo-communion view as an allowable difference since it does not “strike at the vitals of religion” and is not “inimical to the system of doctrine” taught in Scripture and held by the Church (*BCO* 34-7). So on other issues on which there had been *in thesi* statements, each court of original jurisdiction would have to determine each candidate, or ordained officer’s views on an individual basis. No one could be deposed from office without a regular trial (*BCO* 24-7; 34-5).

Interpretations of *The Book of Church Order*, *The Westminster Standards*, “The Rules of Assembly Operation,” “The Operating Manual of the Standing Judicial Commission,” and/or *Robert’s Rules of Order* by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCA or staff members of the Office of the Stated Clerk are for information only and are not authoritative rulings that may only be made by the courts of the Church. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not represent parties in ecclesiastical judicial cases. Parties to potential cases or cases in process are responsible for their own constitutional and procedural knowledge and understanding. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not give legal advice. When legal advice is needed, professional legal counsel should be secured from one familiar with applicable laws and regulations.