

21st General Assembly, 1993, 21-56, III, p. 145-48

RE-AFFIRMATION

In response to an Overture from a group of PCA teaching and ruling elders expressing concerns that the PCA was straying from the original purpose as expressed in the "Message To All Churches" (1973), the 21st General Assembly adopted the following:

21. That Overture 29 from Westminster Presbytery and Communication 3 be answered in the affirmative by spreading the Memorial on the minutes, and by answering the Memorial as follows: *Adopted*

Response of the 21st Assembly to Overture 29 and Communication 3

The Twenty-first General Assembly expresses its thanks for the concern expressed by Westminster Presbytery in Overture 29 and the Memorialists of Communication 3, and commends to all presbyters the calling to be concerned and watchful for the continued Biblical fidelity of the PCA. The Assembly gladly takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to its Constitutional documents, and to its founding "Message to all the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the World." The Assembly encourages all presbyters to participate faithfully and diligently, with forbearance and love, within the courts of the church, to see these affirmations and commitments upheld for the building up of the church and the glory of its Lord.

With regard to the specific areas of concern as raised in the Overture/Communication:

"A. The Inerrancy and Sufficiency of Scripture."

With regard to this matter, the Assembly affirms its satisfaction with the Biblical fidelity of the statement of doctrine as found in its Constitution, its confidence in the procedures of the *BCO* to protect and preserve that doctrine, and its gratitude for the consistent pronouncements and decisions of previous Assemblies. The Assembly reminds all presbyters of the responsibility to uphold the provisions of the Constitution of the PCA, and of the right of any who are unsatisfied with the actions of a Session or Presbytery to seek correction through the complaint process (*BCO* 43). The Assembly warns, however, that apart from that process, general allegations concerning the failure of its courts are damaging to the peace and reputation of the church, contribute little

to the solution of the alleged deficiencies, and may betray a lack of confidence in the practical effectiveness of Biblical Presbyterianism.

“B. The Delegation of Responsibilities Given to the Church Courts to Other Bodies.”

The Assembly reminds presbyters of the abiding necessity of perfecting the judicial procedures of the PCA, as experience leads the church to recognize more appropriate means to apply Biblical principles. As that process continues, the Assembly urges temperance in the statement of dissatisfaction with the current system by those seeking change, and charity and patience toward those who attempt to persuade the church of needed reforms through the appropriate Constitutional processes.

“C. Looseness in Practice Regarding Subscription.”

The Assembly affirms its confidence in the subscription vows as formally sufficient to protect the doctrinal fidelity of the offices of the church. The Assembly reminds all presbyters that the proper forum for the correction of inadequate practice with regard to subscription is, in the first instance, the Session or Presbytery, as the case may be, and then, if further correction is needed, through the review of the higher courts.

“D. The Drift from the Original Concept of Committees Serving the Assembly to Board-type Agencies.”

The Assembly gladly takes this occasion to affirm its fundamental “Principles of Organization”:

The Church is responsible for carrying out the Great Commission. The initiative for carrying out the Great Commission belongs to the Church at every Court level, and the Assembly is responsible to encourage and promote the fulfillment of this mission by the various courts. The work of the Church as set forth in the Great Commission is one work, being implemented at the General Assembly level through equally essential committees...It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to evaluate needs and resources, and to act on priorities for the most effective fulfillment of the Great Commission...The Assembly’s committees are to serve and not to direct any Church Judicatories. They are not to establish policy, but rather execute policy established by the General Assembly (BCO 14-1).

The Assembly recommends that any specific corrections required in the implementation of its principles be brought to the attention of the persons or committees in question, or to the Assembly's attention through an overture recommending for its consideration whatever specific corrective actions are thought appropriate. Further, the Assembly, while acknowledging that its Committees of Commissioners and Permanent Committees are not without imperfection, and thus in

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need of ever increasing diligence in their Constitutionally appointed tasks, nevertheless commends these Committees for the measure of accomplishment that has marked their faithful labors, and continues to express confidence in the committee structure as that which is best suited to the needs of the Church.

“E. The Efforts to Deny the Ecclesiastical Authority of Higher Courts over Lower Courts.”

The Assembly affirms that “the Bible and the Bible alone” is the authority for the principles of our structure. Yet the Assembly would not deny the right, nor criticize the efforts, of any presbyter seeking to implement his conception of those principles (so far as they are consistent with the third ordination vow) according to his ability to persuade the church, through the deliberations of its courts, that his conception is Scriptural. Further, the Assembly reminds presbyters that “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word...” (*Confession of Faith*, I.6).

“F. The Move Toward Congregationalism within Congregations.”

The Assembly commends to all presbyters the responsibility to uphold the provisions of the *Book of Church Order*, in fidelity to the third and fourth ordination vows, and for the orderliness and edification of the church. Concerning any Constitutional deficiencies among our congregations, the Assembly directs all presbyters and courts to their respective responsibilities with regard to the interpretation, application and enforcement of the Constitution, and in particular to the safeguards provided in the process of General Review and Control and Complaint (*BCO 40* and *43*).

“G. The Flagrant Abandonment of the Regulative Principle of Worship.”

The Assembly gladly takes this opportunity to affirm the teaching of its Constitutional Standards with regard to worship as expressed in *Confession of Faith*, I.6 and XXI.1 (cf. II.2 and XVI.1); *Larger Catechism*, qq. 108 and 109; and *Shorter Catechism*, qq. 50 and 51. Nevertheless the Assembly reminds all presbyters that the affirmation of the principle that practices in worship must be warranted by Scripture does not, of itself, determine what practices are so warranted, nor does it exempt the appropriate courts of the church from honest debate concerning that matter, nor does it relieve presbyters of the duty to charitably bear with brethren who may differ concerning what is so warranted, within the bounds of our Constitutional Standards. As above, the Assembly reminds presbyters that alleged violations of the Standards should be brought before the Church according to the process established for that end (e.g. *BCO 40* and *43*).

In conclusion, the Assembly encourages all to join in the prayer of our concerned brethren, that “God may help us all to come to a unity of mind, so that we may be able to walk together in peace and joy.” To that end the Assembly exhorts all presbyters to “pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). Some of our dear brothers have expressed these genuine concerns from their love of God and their desire to assure that in all ways, we conform to practices originally covenanted. Service to the Lord demands no less of us.