

7th General Assembly, 1979, 7-49, III, 22, p. 115.

THEONOMY

22. The definition of and recommendations regarding theonomy:
- a. That since the term "theonomy" in its simplest definition means "God's Law", the General Assembly affirms the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 19, and *Larger Catechism*, Question 93-150, as a broad but adequate definition of theonomy.
 - b. That no further study on the subject of theonomy be undertaken at the General Assembly level at this time, but that individual Christians, sessions, and presbyteries having particular interest be encouraged to study the subject in a spirit of love, kindness, and patience.
 - c. That the General Assembly affirm that no particular view of the application of the judicial law for today should be made a basis for orthodoxy or excluded as heresy in so far as this is in accord with paragraph "a" above.
 - d. That the General Assembly encourage pastors and sessions to instruct their people in the law of God and its application in a manner consistent with out confessional standards.

Adopted

1983, 11-36, III, 29, pp. 96 – 97.

CONSTITUTIONAL INQUIRY ON WCF 19-4

29. That the following interim advice of the SCJB in response to Reference 2 from Gulf Coast Presbytery (p. 50f), dated October 16, 1982, be ratified:

QUESTION 1: 'Is the Presbytery denied the right to examine a man and to judge him to be in error or heretical on the basis of Chapter 19 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and particularly on the basis of Chapter 19, paragraph 4?'

ANSWER: No. The judicial decision of the Tenth General Assembly did not deny this right of the Presbytery. Such a judgment should be supported by specific evidence so that the error or heresy might be demonstrated and proved. It should be noted that both judicial decisions and *in thesi* statements are alike in that they are interpretations of God's Word made by a court of the Church. While they do not supersede the Constitution, they must be submitted to unless they contradict the Constitution and the Word.

QUESTION 2: 'Are all views defining themselves by the term 'theonomy' excluded as a basis for examination for licensure or ordination?'

ANSWER: The Statement of the Seventh General Assembly notes that theonomy has a varying definitions. 'There is no single well-defined school of thought known as 'Theonomy'. The term simply means 'God's Law'. Great

difficulties arise in defining the term in our present theological climate because it has been used in a great variety of ways by thinkers as liberal as Paul Tillich and as conservative as Herman Ridderbos.' (*M7GA*, p. 194). Neither the Statement of the Seventh General Assembly on 'theonomy' nor the judicial decision of the Tenth General Assembly eliminated views of 'theonomy' from theological examinations. No view of the application of the judicial law contrary to *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 19, paragraph 4, is acceptable.

QUESTION 3: 'Are all views of the applicability of God's judicial law for today to be regarded as acceptable in the Presbyterian Church in America?'

ANSWER: All views of the application of the judicial law not contrary to *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 19, paragraph 4, are to be regarded as acceptable within the Presbyterian Church in America.

QUESTION 4: 'How is the directive that Gulf Coast is 'to give direct guidance to Mr. Fell concerning any deficiencies of theology in reference to specific Biblical and confessional matters prior to his examination for ordination' to be related to current procedures prescribed in the BCO concerning examination for ordination?'

ANSWER: The judicial decision of the Tenth General Assembly was not intended to add to the normal procedures, but simply to remind the Presbytery of its ordinary responsibilities of candidate oversight (see *BCO* 18-1, 18-4, and *M9GA*, p. 142 -- Only the one year of licensure requirement of the new procedures has been exempted for candidates or seminarians already in process.

QUESTION 5: 'Are the penal sanctions of the judicial laws of the Old Testament, such as those found in Deuteronomy 13, part of the general equity and, therefore, are they to be applied today as they were to the State of Israel, assuming the government as a righteous government according to the truth of God?'

ANSWER: All laws of the Old Testament were equitable for the era for which they were designed. But great care must be taken to determine precisely how they apply to the present era. In the case of Deuteronomy 13, in which the state is directed to execute any individual who attempts in private to lead someone to worship another god, and to annihilate all members of a community that worship another god, it is the interpretation of the Eleventh General Assembly that the legislation applies to the distinctive era in which Israel was established by specific divine revelation as His theocratic nation, and should not be enforced by the state in the present era. *Adopted*

Since there are differences of opinion with regard to the application and 'general equity' of the various penal sanctions, this declaration shall not be used by the courts of the Church to bind the conscience of elders in the PCA. *Adopted*

NOTE: See also Judicial Cases number 16 and 86 in *PCA Digest, Part III JUDICIAL CASES*