

Majority Report to retain Overture 7

Rationale to retain Overture 7.

Grounds

Together with the minority report we also thank the Lord for the unity of our committee both in our discussions and meetings and in nearly every recommendation we made. In these reports we come to the point where we will labor to articulate our differences and the reasoning used to arrive at differing conclusions so that Presbytery may have clarity and orderliness on the question before her. The signers here voted to retain Overture 7.¹ This report will follow the same structure as the minority report so that presbytery can hear the differing perspectives on the same issues.

First, we acknowledge with the minority report that there is considerable overlap with Overtures 7, 16, and 23 and that Overture 23 is nearly identical with Overture 7.² The reason to retain Overture 7 is therefore not primarily to ensure that the substance of the matter comes before the Assembly, but it is to record our voice in agreement with these other overtures that overlap so much in substance and wording. This voice of agreement lends to the weight of these overtures as it comes with the agreement of 3 presbyteries. In addition to this, since we have already passed Overture 7 the request to withdraw Overture 7 would be a vote of no confidence against and disagreement with Overture 7. In so doing we would be the lone presbytery at this point to signal such a disagreement.

Second, we acknowledge with the minority that the process of passing Overture 7 at the 17th stated meeting is an inferior process to the one we are currently using. We appreciate the changes made to ensure careful deliberation and collaboration on future overtures. Yet the process followed at the 17th meeting was not out of order at the time and therefore should not be anachronistically ruled out of order now.

Third, we do not believe that the substance of Overture 7 contradicts the GA study committee report (AIC report). We agree with the statement from the AIC report, ‘we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term [“gay”].’³ It is our understanding that in saying this the AIC is giving very helpful advice for how we conduct ourselves with other Christians who may not be as nuanced or mature in Christ as could be hoped. We do not believe that this position is in contradiction to having a different standard for those who hold office.⁴ Indeed in the very next sentence the AIC report goes on to say, “Our burden is that we do not justify our sin struggles by affixing them to our identity as Christians. Churches should be gentle, patient, and intentional with believers who call themselves “gay Christians,” encouraging them, as part of the process of sanctification, to leave behind identification language rooted in sinful desires, to live chaste lives, to refrain from entering into temptation, and to mortify their sinful desires.”⁵ This is a description of the shepherding that should be afforded to our members and outreach acquaintances as we prayerfully seek the expansion of the kingdom more fully into their lives. This is not a description of the standard to which we should hold our officers as they lead the sheep under their care.

The minority report goes on to cite page 30 line 32-33, 36-39. Here is the full paragraph in context with emphasis added:

Given this conclusion, how should we respond to fellow believers in our churches who may use such language? First, we ought not start from the assumption that they are being unfaithful or living in active

¹ While we record the number of votes in favor of the majority opinion at four the fifth signature here is the chairman of this overtures committee (thus a non-voting member) and author of this report (thus a signator).

² These overtures are available at <https://pcaga.org/resources/#overtures>.

³ ‘Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality’ (available at <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/>) p 12, line 14.

⁴ WLC 150,151; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9

⁵ ‘Report,’ p 12, lines 15-19.

rebellion to God. Rather, in the context of established relationships, *pastors and leaders in the church ought to ask questions and seek to understand each individual's story*. Why do they use that language? Have they thought through the relative benefits and dangers? Noting the range of possible meanings of terms like gay and gay Christian, we would do well to seek understanding before imparting advice. In practical and plain terms, the issue of terminology is more likely a matter for shepherding in wisdom, and not in and of itself grounds for discipline.⁶

Again, we agree with the AIC here and differ with the minority report's application of this to officers. In this context we believe that the distinction between leaders and followers is clear. This pastoral advice is not advice about relaxing the standard to which we hold office bearers who are particularly held accountable for their words.⁷

Fourth and finally, Overture 7 provides a significant and needed contribution as distinct from the new overture. Whereas the new overture only addresses the examination of character in the ordination process with the sin of homosexuality listed, Overture 7 addresses a standard with singular focus on this one sin for all who hold office both current and under examination. We should have this kind of focus on the sin and on the office as WLC 150 and 151 point out "all sins are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others. Sins receive their aggravations from the person offending; if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others."⁸ There is grave potential for damage to be done to the body of Christ by the failure of her officers. For this reason office bearers must not only be loved and shepherded, but also held accountable in such a way that the church guards herself from injury done by those officers through their moral and doctrinal failure.

Respectfully submitted,

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TE Alex Mark
TE Michael Bauer
RE David Walters, Jr.
RE Richard Wylly

⁶ 'Report,' p 30, lines 31-39.

⁷ James 3:1

⁸ WLC 150,151.

Minority Report to Request the Withdrawal of Overture 7

Move to request the withdrawal of the overture relating to BCO 17 adopted at the 17th stated meeting, labeled Overture 7.

Grounds

We thank the Lord for the unity of our committee on the substance of the theological, ethical, and ecclesiastic questions we studied. Moreover, we thank him for the unity we enjoyed on nearly every recommendation we made. Yet on the question of Lowcountry Presbytery's previous overture, the signers here voted against the recommendation to retain it. While we share the same fundamental concerns as the rest of the committee with phrases such as 'gay Christian,' we believe that the overture adopted by the Lowcountry Presbytery at its 17th Stated Meeting (labeled Overture 7 for the General Assembly) ought to be withdrawn for three reasons.

First, the same concern is addressed in other overtures. The particular phrases in question will still be considered at the General Assembly regardless of our action since Overtures 16 and 23 offer similar proposals.¹ In fact, Overture 23 is nearly identical to what we submitted. Therefore, those especially concerned that those phrases be considered by the Assembly can enjoy a free conscience with regard to withdrawing Overture 7.

Second, we passed this overture with little opportunity to reflect. While not out of order, the process of submission and review was inconsistent with the deliberative nature of Presbyterian government. Without giving time for reflection, especially in constitutional questions, Overture 7 should be withdrawn on principle of Presbyterian conduct.

Third, the substance of the overture contradicts the study committee report. The 'Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality' had not been published when we adopted the overture, and reflection on that report has made plain the deficiencies of our overture. As the study committee report clearly explains, phrases such as 'gay Christian' pose a significant problem.² Yet the report consistently warns against the general approach that Overture 7 takes. In the same statement that warns us away from those problematic phrases, the report goes on to say that 'we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term ["gay"].'³ In its lengthier pastoral discussion of those using self-descriptions such as 'gay Christian,' the report says we 'ought not start from the assumption that they are being unfaithful or living in active rebellion to God.'⁴ Then it concludes that discussion with the following:

Noting the range of possible meanings of terms like *gay* and *gay Christian*, we would do well to seek understanding before imparting advice. In practical and plain terms, the

¹ These overtures are available at <https://pcaga.org/resources/#overtures>.

² 'Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality' (available at <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/>), p 12, lines 3-10. Emphasis added.

³ 'Report,' p 12, line 14.

⁴ 'Report,' p 30, lines 32-33.

issue of terminology is more likely a matter for shepherding in wisdom, and not in and of itself grounds for discipline.⁵

While not directly addressing the issue of officers, the report consistently commends a different, more discerning approach to the deliberations of church courts. It certainly assumes widespread recognition by church leadership that such self-descriptions are unwise and cause confusion; yet, Overture 7 may be read to imply that the training and examination of potential officers could not begin until any such candidate or nominee already arrived at the same conclusion. Moreover, Overture 7 would demand such immediate agreement upon every existing church officer when it takes effect.

Given that other overtures cover the same questions, that our process of adoption was significantly flawed, and that our overture disagrees with the study report, we believe it is the wisest course to request that Overture 7 be withdrawn.

Humbly submitted,
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TE John Mark Patrick

⁵ 'Report,' p 30, lines 36-39