



**THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION**  
*of*  
**THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

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**PJC Report, Concurrences, and Minority Materials**  
**Regarding the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest G.9-3A Overture**

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## REPORT OF THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION

On January 30, 2026, the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest overtured the 46<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to amend Section 9-3A of the *Book of Discipline* (the “***PNW 9-3A Overture***”). The Permanent Judicial Commission of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (the “***PJC***”) subsequently examined the proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language and for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, in each case as required by Section G.21-3D.2.a.

The PJC understands the categories “clarity,” “consistency,” and “compatibility” to have particular meanings. *Clarity* asks whether the language of the amendment is sufficiently precise that a reasonably informed reader of the Constitution could determine what the provision requires, permits, or forbids without reference to the debate that produced it.<sup>1</sup> *Consistency* examines whether the amendment employs language in a manner consistent with the vocabulary, terminology, and logic used in the Constitution and within the amendment itself. *Compatibility* asks whether the amendment integrates coherently into the broader constitutional framework without creating conflict with other provisions or with the structure of the Constitution as a whole.

After due consideration, the PJC determined as follows regarding the PNW 9-3A Overture:

Question Presented	PJC Determination
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of clarity of language?	Yes. Vote: 4-3, with one abstention.
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of consistency of language?	No. Vote: 5-3.
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of compatibility with other provisions of the EPC Constitution?	No. Vote: 5-3.

The PJC’s task was limited. We did not determine the wisdom, necessity, or pastoral desirability of the PNW 9-3A Overture, but rather evaluated whether the proposed language is prepared for integration into the Constitution. Our evaluation of the “three-C” criteria helps the General Assembly determine whether an amendment, such as the PNW 9-3A Overture, is constitutionally serviceable in its present form, apart from the merits of the proposal itself.

This constitutes our report and recommendation to the General Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In many instances, constitutional language is designed to confer discretion on church courts. In such cases, a provision does not fail the clarity test merely because it allows a range of outcomes, since the granting of discretion is the very function the text is intended to serve. The clarity concern arises only where the language does not make clear, in the mind of a reasonably informed reader, the scope or object of that discretion.

<sup>2</sup> See G.21-3D.2.b.

## **I. Clarity**

The PJC first considered whether the language of the PNW 9-3A Overture is sufficiently precise that a reasonably informed reader of the Constitution could determine what the provision requires, permits, or forbids.

Some members of the PJC expressed concern that the language of the overture lacks sufficient precision, particularly in its introduction and treatment of categories of sinful desire and in the potential difficulty of consistent application in the examination of candidates for office. The concern was focused on a portion of the overture's operative language, which provides:

Those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections... are disqualified from holding office in Christ's Church.

Questions were raised regarding the meaning and application of the phrases "profess," "persist in," and "identify with." These terms may be understood in different ways by presbyteries, sessions, and nominating committees, especially when applied to matters that are not always outwardly expressed (e.g., does "persist in" require intentional cultivation of inappropriate lust to be exclusionary or would an infrequent, unwanted, and intrusive thought characterizable as same-sex attraction also disqualify). Some PJC members concluded that the variability in the language rises to the level of a failure of clarity under the Constitution's standard.

Although the majority acknowledged these concerns, it determined that the clarity standard does not require exhaustive definition of every term, particularly given that examining candidates has always been an exercise in judgment. The language of the PNW 9-3A Overture, taken as a whole, conveys a sufficiently definite meaning in context to permit such examination by presbyteries and sessions. It directs attention to matters that may be explored through a candidate's words and reputation within the church's existing processes. Our church courts have a history of wisely applying constitutional text that admits of some variability, and there is every reason to continue to trust reasonably informed presbyters in faithfully doing so in the future.<sup>3</sup>

The PNW 9-3A Overture therefore satisfies the requirement of "clarity of language."

## **II. Consistency**

Members of the Commission expressed differing views as to whether the overture's formulation employs language in a manner consistent with the vocabulary, terminology, and logic used in the Constitution and within the amendment itself.

In evaluating whether the proposed language was consistent with the Constitution, the PJC discussed the Westminster Standards extensively. The Standards are not advisory. Every Ruling and Teaching Elder receives and adopts them "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the

<sup>3</sup> If a lower court errs by approving an inappropriate candidate for office, Chapter 14 of the *Book of Discipline* allows a concerned elder with standing the opportunity to file a complaint with a higher court and resolve the matter.

Holy Scriptures,”<sup>4</sup> and they form the doctrinal framework within which all provisions of the Constitution must operate. The *Book of Government* states in Section 23-1B:

No changes may be made to the **Book of Order**, including any of its parts composed of the Book of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Book of Worship, that would be contrary to the **Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms**.

(Bold in original.)

Although some PJC members concluded that the PNW 9-3A Overture appropriately reflects the Standards’ teaching regarding sinful desire and the call to holiness, the majority determined that, in the manner it defines and applies disqualification, the overture does not reflect the Standards’ treatment of indwelling sin and progressive sanctification.

The PJC was united in affirming that sexual desire outside of a faithful marriage between a man and a woman is sinful and that officers of the church must be persons of maturity, holiness, and self-control, consistent with the Standards. At the same time, the Standards recognize that even mature believers continue to experience the remnants of sin, including unwanted and intrusive thoughts or desires arising from remaining corruption, which are to be resisted, repented of, and put to death.

The majority concluded that the overture is not consistent with that structure. By attaching candidate disqualification directly to specified categories of desire, the overture treats those desires as operating outside the framework of progressive sanctification described in the Standards. In effect, its language isolates a category of internal experience and assigns it a different constitutional significance than the Standards themselves assign to the continuing presence of sin in the believer.

Under the Constitution, candidates are examined within a framework that assumes both the requirement of holiness<sup>5</sup> and the persistence of indwelling sin.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, the overture directs the Church to treat certain categories of desire as determinative in themselves, rather than as part of that broader framework of examination and pastoral judgment. The language of the overture is therefore inconsistent with the logic of the Standards.

In addition to requiring the foregoing evaluation regarding the overture’s consistency with the vocabulary, terminology, and logic used in the Constitution, the category of consistency requires the PJC to evaluate whether the language of the proposed amendment is *internally* consistent. The majority found that, if adopted as written, the overture would introduce certain deficiencies in this regard.

<sup>4</sup> G.13-2A.3.

<sup>5</sup> See *Westminster Larger Catechism* 138 & 139.

<sup>6</sup> See *Westminster Confession of Faith* 6.5 & 13.1-2 and *Westminster Larger Catechism* 78 & 79.

In relevant part, G.9-3A currently provides:

A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office.

It is clear from the text that this particular sentence directs congregations as the subject and speaks to the election of Ruling Elders as its objects. The text of the PNW 9-3A Overture, however, would modify the sentence so that it states as follows:

A **presbytery or** congregation preparing to elect persons to **these holy offices shall** carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the **Teaching Elder**, Ruling Elder, **and Deacon**, and be very prayerful in **electing** persons to these offices.

(Bold language reflects additions introduced by overture.) The modifications introduce a second subject (i.e., “a presbytery”) and expand the object to include Teaching Elders and Deacons. This creates tension within the existing structure of G.9-3A. Put simply, presbyteries do not “elect” Ruling Elders or Deacons; congregations do not “elect” Teaching Elders.<sup>7</sup>

For the reasons stated above, the PNW 9-3A Overture fails to satisfy the requirement of “consistency of language.”

### III. Compatibility

In addition to raising consistency concerns, the PNW 9-3A Overture also raises fundamental questions regarding “compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church” (i.e., the Westminster Standards).

The Westminster Standards set forth a coherent doctrine of sin and sanctification that governs the Christian life and therefore the evaluation of those called to office. As reflected in Sections 6.5 and 13.1-3 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and in Questions 78 and 79 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, the Standards teach that corruption remains in the regenerate (i.e., the “born again”) and that sanctification in this life is imperfect. Believers continue to experience the remnants of sin, including sinful desires, even as they are renewed and engaged in an ongoing conflict against the flesh.

At the same time, the Standards are equally clear that such desires are sinful and must be resisted and put to death. *Westminster Larger Catechism* Questions 138 and 139 require chastity in body, mind, and affections and forbid all unclean thoughts and desires.

The Standards therefore hold together two propositions that must not be separated or read to be in conflict with one another. *First*, sinful desires are truly sinful and are to be put to death (i.e., are to be “mortified”). *Second*, the continued presence of such desires does not place the

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that this internal inconsistency of language could be resolved by repositioning elements of the PNW 9-3A Overture in other appropriate sections of the *Book of Government*.

believer outside the state of grace but is part of the ongoing struggle described in the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

The PJC recognizes that the Standards also teach that some sins are more heinous than others.<sup>8</sup> That principle, however, does not alter the structure of the doctrine described above. The distinction among sins speaks to their gravity and aggravations, not to whether the presence of a particular sin is treated as determinative of a believer's standing apart from the broader framework of repentance and sanctification. The Standards do not single out particular categories of indwelling sin and remove them from that framework.

Because the Standards are subscribed by every elder and form part of the Constitution's doctrinal framework, proposed amendments to the Constitution must preserve both truths.

The majority concluded that the overture does not do so. While the overture clearly intends to affirm biblical sexual ethics, the confessional standards acknowledge that believers continue to experience sinful desires. By attaching disqualification directly to specified categories of desire, the overture treats the presence of such desires as determinative of qualification for office. In doing so, it separates those desires from the broader framework of progressive sanctification and assigns them a different significance than the Standards themselves assign to the continuing presence of sin in the believer.

This is not merely a question of emphasis or application. It is a question of doctrinal coherence. The Standards do not isolate particular categories of indwelling sin (e.g., "same-sex attraction") and treat their presence as dispositive. *Westminster Confession of Faith* 13.2 teaches that the corruption of nature remains in every part of the believer in this life, even as it is progressively weakened and put to death. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* expresses the same teaching in similar terms. Question 77 explains that sanctification, though inseparably joined with justification, is not perfect in this life but grows toward perfection. Question 78 further teaches that believers "retain some remnants of sin throughout their whole being" and are "continually plagued with desires of their old sinful nature that are contrary to the spirit."

The issue, therefore, is not whether same-sex attraction is sinful. The Standards plainly teach that it is. The issue is whether the Constitution may treat the presence of such "unnatural" desires or affections, without regard to the believer's repentance and progress in holiness, as determinative of fitness for office. The majority concluded that it may not do so without departing from the system of doctrine set forth in the Standards.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See *Westminster Larger Catechism* Questions 150-152.

<sup>9</sup> It is clear to the PJC majority that any candidate for office who, for example, indulges in or acts upon lust (including by using pornography) has much growth in grace and perfection in holiness yet to achieve before he or she would be suitable for ordination. But an ordaining court *may* reach a different conclusion in the case of an otherwise qualified candidate who infrequently experiences an unwanted and intrusive thought that he or she recognizes as sinful, hates, repents of, and works to put to death. The presence of such a desire is always contrary to the spirit, but is not in every case, as a matter of constitutional law, determinative of fitness for office. As *Westminster Confession of Faith* 13.2 teaches, "a continual and irreconcilable war goes on in every believer," as "[t]he old nature tries to get its way in opposition to the Spirit, and the Spirit fights to assert its authority over the flesh." This is no less true for the ordained than it is for the non-ordained.

For these reasons, the majority concluded that the overture does not satisfy the requirement of “compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution.”

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Permanent Judicial Commission has great respect for the concerns that gave rise to the PNW 9-3A Overture, which are rooted in a desire for biblical fidelity and holiness in Christ’s church. Nevertheless, for the reasons stated above, we conclude that, although the overture satisfies the requirement of clarity of language, it does not satisfy the requirements of consistency of language and compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution, including the Westminster Standards.

Certain aspects of the overture’s drafting could perhaps be addressed through amendment. However, the principal concerns identified by the Permanent Judicial Commission do not arise solely from matters of terminology or placement, but from the manner in which the overture defines and applies disqualification in relation to the doctrine of sin and sanctification reflected in the Westminster Standards. Those concerns are not resolved by modification of particular provisions, but go to the structure and operation of the proposal itself.

The Permanent Judicial Commission respectfully and prayerfully reports its findings to the 46<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and recommends that it consider them in deciding whether to accept or decline the PNW 9-3A Overture.



## CONCURRING WITH THE REPORT OF THE PJC

I concur with the report of the majority of the Permanent Judicial Commission in its findings as to the PNW overture. We have come to the correct decision as to this particular overture.

However, I believe that we have not sufficiently guarded rights which are guaranteed to individual believers and the lower courts in our Book of Government, nor have we given weight to a provision in the Westminster Confession which helps us understand the proper interpretation of Scripture. Presbyterian government is not modeled after our civil government, which has become weighted in the Federal authority and little authority resides with the states. The application of the provisions in our EPC constitution would preserve authority in the presbyteries and appropriately limit the authority of the General Assembly. Specifically:

1. Liberty of Conscience/ Christian Freedom. Section 2-3 of the Book of Government states that the Scriptures are the ultimate rule of faith and practice, and that the Church may create no laws that will bind the conscience as to the interpretation of Scripture.

Sections 25-1 and 25-2 of the Book of Government together also guarantee in perpetuity that the Church may make no law to bind the conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture, and that no person may be rejected for ordination because of matters of conscience, except for stated reasons not at issue here.

Similarly, Section 20-2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith states “God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any way contrary to his word in matters of faith or worship.”

In my view, the approval of the PNW overture would bind the consciences of presbyteries which disagree with the overture in violation of these guaranteed rights of liberty of conscience, and the EPC is obligated to guard against such infringements.

2. The Right of the Presbytery to Ordain to Office. Sections 19-4B (2) and (3) of the Book of Government acknowledge the right of the presbytery to examine, ordain and install candidates and pastors. Section 10-2 of the Book of Government states that the right of calling to office may never be taken away for non-Scriptural reasons. Does the PNW overture state a Scriptural reason to appropriately limit the presbytery’s right of ordination? We look next to the Westminster Confession to see what a Scriptural and non-Scriptural reason to limit ordination would be.

3. The Westminster Standard for the Interpretation of Scripture. Our understanding of the rights of liberty of conscience in interpretation of Scripture, also referred to as Christian freedom, and the right of calling by the presbytery is enhanced by Section 1-6 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which provides that God’s purpose as to his glory, our salvation and our lives is “either explicitly stated in the Bible or may be deduced as inevitably and logically following from it. Nothing is at any time to be added to the Bible...”

As I understand WCF Section 1-6, the believer is bound to observe both (a) that which is explicitly stated in Scripture and (b) that which is not explicitly stated but is deduced inevitably and logically from that which is stated. Conversely, the believer is free to interpret Scripture according to his or her conscience when that standard is not met.

The question presented by the PNW overture is whether a person who experiences same-sex attraction but is chaste, does not affirm homosexuality as appropriate for Christians and otherwise mature in faith is disqualified to serve as an officer of the church. Whether the PNW proposal overture meets the Confession's standard for that which is Biblical and therefore can be required to be held in unity has not been addressed in sufficient depth.

These provisions of our Constitutional documents may not be easily harmonized. For the sake of our denomination going forward, and regardless of the adoption or non-adoption of the PNW overture, we need to give attention to the question of the priority of the liberties guaranteed by the EPC and proposed amendments to our constitutional documents.

We also should consider whether Section 1-6 of the Westminster Confession provides us with a working definition of what separates an "essential of the faith," as to which we should join in unity, as over against a non-essential as to which we have freedom.

I concur that the work of the PJC has produced the right result as to the PNW overture, but there are additional questions which deserve the attention of the Permanent Judicial Commission and the EPC at the appropriate time, which I believe to be as early as possible after we have a final determination on the PNW overture.

Soli Deo Gloria

Thomas C. Werner

38<sup>th</sup> Moderator of the EPC

## MINORITY REPORT OF THE PJC

### On the Constitutionality of the PNW Overture

The undersigned, a minority of the Permanent Judicial Commission, not agreeing with the majority, desire to express their views regarding the PJC's 3-C analysis of the PNW Overture. The minority hereby recommends amendment of the majority report to include the analysis stated below, with the amended recommendations that the General Assembly accept the PNW Overture as having satisfied the criteria of clarity and consistency of language, and compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

#### Report:

The PJC is charged with conducting an analysis of any proposed amendments to the EPC's constitution per B.O.G. 21-3(D)(2)(a):

“[T]he Permanent Judicial Commission [ ] shall examine the proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language and for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.”

The first question is therefore whether the language of the proposed amendment is clear and consistent. The second question is whether the proposed amendment is compatible with the other provisions of the constitution.

The PJC majority found that the language was sufficiently “clear” but fell short on the standards of “consistency” and “conformity.” This Minority Report is being offered because the PJC majority appears to have applied a stricter standard of analysis in reviewing the PNW Overture than it has in assessing other overtures, and because upon reasonable analysis the PNW overture is neither inconsistent with the Westminster Standards, nor is it incompatible with the current EPC Book of Government and should be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration as satisfying the 3-Cs of clarity and consistency of language, and conformity with the constitution.

The PJC separated “clarity and consistency of language” into two categories, and engaged in an extensive exegetical analysis of “consistency” beyond a review of whether the language is in fact internally consistent. We respectfully believe this analysis goes beyond the constitutional charge of B.O.G. 21-3(D)(2)(a). While the in-depth analysis reflected in the PJC Report was done in good faith with honest intent, we are concerned that this strayed too far into the merits of the debate on whether to adopt the PNW overture, as opposed to an analysis of language.

Four separate presbyteries have approved the exact same overture language, and a fifth presbytery has approved an overture similar in language and approach. This compels a degree of deference and respect, and in strongly suggests that five Presbyteries have found that the proposed standards pass constitutional muster.

To be certain, the PJC analysis on this overture was more detailed than any other 3-C analysis than any of our members have ever seen before. This was done in good faith, but, again, may have strayed too far into a debate on the merits of the overture.

A stricter standard of analysis was applied to the constitutional conformity element because the PNW overture was viewed as a disqualifying standard for ordination, rather than an affirmative guideline. However, in our view, nothing in the EPC Book of Government, Westminster Confession, or Scriptures compels such a difference in ordination standards. The majority's concerns over the PNW overture potentially infringing on the Westminster doctrine of progressive sanctification and indwelling sin pertain, in our opinion, to questions of salvation and not ordination.

The PNW overture satisfies the 3-C analysis. The language is clear and consistent, readily understandable by any reasonable measure of interpretation.

## **1. Clarity and Consistency of Language**

Is the language of the PNW Overture for 9-3A clear and consistent?

The proposed amendment uses language throughout the three sentences of the proposal which are internally consistent. The majority takes issue not with this, but with the proposed use of three words in particular: “profess,” “persist” and “identify.” These are all words used in the everyday vocabulary of the reasonable Presbyterian.

### **a. The Simple Part:**

There is no lack of clarity or consistency in changing “should” to “shall” in several instances in the overture. There is no lack of clarity or consistency in changing “this office” to “these offices.” There is no lack of clarity or consistency in adding “Presbytery” to the entity “preparing to elect persons to this office” or to naming the other two offices by name, those being “Teaching Elder” and “Deacon.” In fact, this makes 9-3 more consistent with the three “offices to the church” defined in 9-1. The current 9-3 cites to scriptural passages outlining the criteria for several levels of offices in the church, but the last sentence of the current 9-3 seems only to give guidance to congregations for Ruling Elders. However, the other sections of Chapter 9, and the title and citations of 9-3 suggest the criteria apply to all three offices to the church. By pluralizing and naming the three at the end, the PNW overture is actually clearer than the current version and is more consistent with the other provisions in chapter 9.

### **b. The Substantive Part:**

The question is whether the two sentences in the middle of the overture, the “substantive part” are clear and consistent. While the provision must be read in the whole, for examination purposes it can be broken into two sentences. (We highlight the two sentences separately, but keep the clauses together).

**i. The first sentence.**

**Therefore, persons eligible for church office shall conform in heart, mind, and conduct to God’s design for human sexuality, embracing with gratitude the calling of either chastity in singleness or fidelity within marriage between one man and one woman.** Those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections, contrary to God’s created order and condemned by Scripture as against nature, are disqualified from holding office in Christ’s Church.

The first sentence is language of guidance. This provision is intended to guide the ordaining body in the same manner as the current language does, requiring the ordaining body find the candidate to be “above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things.” Here, “*conforming in heart, mind, and conduct*” is no less clear than “*being above reproach, sound in faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things.*” The overture here proposes that the constitution include additional clarity on what we expect of our ordained leaders with respect to human sexuality. This *adds* clarity.

As to the concern that this includes terms which are not defined in the constitution, none of the current terms are defined in the constitution. So it would be improper to burden this overture with a definitional standard not applicable to the current constitution.

There is an element of subjective interpretation in the current guiding language, and there is an element of subjective interpretation in the proposed language. The subjectivity does not render it unclear but rather gives additional language upon which to evaluate a candidate for ordination.

The term “heart, mind, and conduct” is not unclear. Conduct is crystal clear. Mind is crystal clear – it relates to the intellectual assent of the candidate to God’s order. “Heart” is equally clear, although tougher to measure from the outside. What is in our hearts is our inner emotional state. That’s simple and clear. Certainly, the ordaining body may never be certain what is *actually* in the candidate’s heart or mind, but we do presuppose a degree of integrity on the part of the candidate. But that uncertainty does not render this provision unclear.

**ii. The Second Sentence**

Therefore, persons eligible for church office shall conform in heart, mind, and conduct to God’s design for human sexuality, embracing with gratitude the calling of either chastity in singleness or fidelity within marriage between one man and one woman. **Those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections, contrary to God’s created order and condemned by Scripture as against nature, are disqualified from holding office in Christ’s Church.**

To “profess” is perfectly clear. If a candidate advocates for homosexual lifestyles he is professing it. To “identify” is perfectly clear. Sexual identity is now part of the common

vernacular. It is used in everyday speech, on government forms, on job applications, and in medical journals. It refers to persons who find their self-conception defined by a particular characteristic (such as homosexuality, or same sex attraction), or imagined reality, such as identifying as a different gender than their biological gender. It is quite easy to find out if someone identifies as something other than what appears on the surface – just ask them. “How do you identify?” is a common question these days. Again, the candidate may not give full disclosure, but we should be able to presuppose integrity of candidates for ordination.

“Persist in” gets its own paragraph here because there has been much discussion about what persist means in this context. Here, in this context, persist clearly means “more than fleeting” and “continual and on-going despite resistance.” The dictionary definition includes “to remain unchanged” and “to go on resolutely or stubbornly in spite of opposition.” This is not unclear but differentiates between an occasional intrusive inappropriate sexual thought and one that is more continual.

The PJC did not find that the phrase “*unnatural desires or affections, contrary to God’s created order and condemned by Scripture as against nature*” is unclear, so it will not be addressed here, other than to say, if we do not understand this, then we cannot understand it in the context of conduct either.

### **c. The (mis-)Perceived Problem of Progressive Sanctification:**

The PJC majority found that the PNW Overture was inconsistent with the concept of progressive sanctification. We respectfully disagree. The PNW Overture does not dispute the presence of the remnants of indwelling sin; it sets a threshold standard of maturity for the candidate to be qualified for ordination. The standard is not “100% free from temptations” but draws a line where the candidate professes, persists in, or identifies with the unnatural sexual desires or affections. If the candidate is still struggling with the sinful temptation, that is different from the scenario where the candidate feels he has overcome the temptation sufficiently to no longer identify with it, and no longer sees it as persistently plaguing his daily walk. A persistent temptation is different from an occasional intrusive thought. A fleeting or momentary thought is different from a persistent longing. The mature Christian who has experienced sufficient progressive sanctification is no longer plagued by persistent longings to sin. In this sense, the PNW Overture actually reinforces the concept of progressive sanctification and demands that the ordinand attain a certain degree of maturity before being qualified for office to be a leader within our church. Consequently, we do not believe the PNW Overture is inconsistent with the Westminster Standards.

## **2. Compatibility**

Is this provision compatible with other portions of the constitution? By definition an amendment to the constitution *changes* the constitution, so in this context compatibility does not mean perfect conformity. It means “is it in harmony” or at least “is it not out of harmony” with the constitution.

***Is the addition of a requirement for ordination candidates compatible with the current constitution?*** Yes. The current constitution does place minimum standards upon candidates both in Chapter 9 and elsewhere. The most prominent example is for Teaching Elders, where the EPC requires a certain level of education in 11-2G. (Arguably, all of Chapter 11 sets standards for ordination of Teaching Elder. B.O.G. 12-2 sets criteria that are not even found in scripture (e.g. competency in the original language of scripture). Therefore, the EPC's current constitution does set denomination-wide base-line standards. If the GA can set a base-line on education, it can set a baseline on issues relating to human sexuality.

Nothing in the PNW Overture disputes Westminster Confessional concepts of salvation, sanctification, or indwelling sin. It simply sets a threshold of maturity for the ordained leaders of the church with respect to sexual desires and behavior. If progressive sanctification means anything, it means that the Christian will progressively overcome sinful thoughts, desires, and actions. The PNW Overture recognizes this and is therefore not inconsistent or incompatible with the Westminster Confession of Faith or the EPC Book of Order.

**Does the PNW Overture contradict the right of a presbytery to ordain?** No. It sets criteria, as it does for other standards. The Presbytery is still responsible for examining and ensuring the individual meets the criteria. The PNW overture does no more violence to the concept of presbytery-led-ordination than the Ad Interim Committee's proposed changes to the constitution, which proposes an addition which asserts that "Officers must conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity (see Westminster Larger Catechism Q & A 138-139; D. 1-10) in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct." WLC 139 precludes "unnatural desires." Substantively, this is really no different than the PNW Overture.

### **3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, upon examination, we believe that the PNW Overture is clear, consistent, and compatible, and should pass the 3-C examination, and should be commended to the General Assembly for due consideration with the blessing of the PJC.

Submitted In Faith,

Forrest Norman, RE Presbytery of the Alleghenies  
Gordon Miller, RE New River Presbytery  
Don Flater, RE Rivers and Lakes Presbytery

## CONCURRING WITH THE MINORITY REPORT

I respectfully join with my colleague(s) in the submission of a minority report. While I join in the Minority Report's findings that the PNW overture meets the 3 c requirements of B.O.G. 21-(D)(2)(a), I wish to address an important issue the current Permanent Judicial Commission and all future Commissions need to address.

When the Commission addresses a constitutional amendment for the purpose of doing a clarity, consistency, and compatibility test, the 3 c's, the Commission in many respects acts as a court of law. Constitutional amendments deserve a careful review. In this capacity, it acts somewhat like a Supreme Court. For the sake of this discussion, I'll refer to it as the Court Function.

Once this Court Function is completed, the B.O.G. gives the Commission options as to how to proceed. B.O.G. 21-(D)(2)(b). The Commission is required to report its findings along with its recommendations. It then "may include an amended version of any proposed constitutional changes as well as advice to accept or decline the proposals referred to the Commission." I'll refer to this as the Ministerial Function. Operating in the Ministerial Function, the Commission has the right to amend, to correct or "fix" an overture. (Note: The author recognizes the provision reads "may" and not "shall".)

Both functions should normally be in play when an overture is considered. For example, if it appears the 3 c test may fail, the PJC has the right to take steps to correct the part(s) that may have failed. Simple issues may involve rather minor corrections that could quickly be addressed. Others may be more complicated requiring communication with the Presbytery offering the overture. Nothing in our Constitution prevents this. It is my position that the Ministerial Function should always be considered unless a very clear constitutional violation would be allowed by doing so. This is in keeping with the ethos of the E.P.C.

If only the Legal Function is considered, the danger exists that the Commission may review overtures as if a cross-examination is being conducted, or drafting skills are being tested. A Ministerial Function would ask if an overture works or can be made to work. The Ministerial Function is clearly contemplated by our B.O.G. Proponents of overtures are our brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe it to be in the best interest of our beloved EPC for all Permanent Judicial Commissions to consider both functions so that overtures can be heard by the entire General Assembly. The Permanent Judicial Commission should not be the place where overtures go to die.

Nothing in my opinion is meant to suggest or imply that the Commission did not consider both functions.

Respectfully submitted,

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34<sup>th</sup> Moderator of the EPC

Ruling Elder