

1 **OVERTURE 42** from the Northern California Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Restore the Reference to the Westminster Standards at the end of *BCO* 29-1”
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4 **Be it resolved** that the Fifty-Third General Assembly direct the Stated Clerk to restore the
5 phrase “as interpreted in these Standards” to the end of the final sentence of *BCO* 29-1, so that
6 it again reads as in the original version, as follows (underlining for additions):
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8 **29-1.** An offense, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the doctrines or
9 practice of a Church member professing faith in Christ which is contrary to the Word of
10 God. The *Confession of Faith* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* of the
11 Westminster Assembly, together with the formularies of government, discipline, and
12 worship are accepted by the Presbyterian Church in America as standard expositions of
13 the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice. Nothing, therefore, ought
14 to be considered by any court as an offense, or admitted as a matter of accusation, which
15 cannot be proved to be such from Scripture as interpreted in these Standards.
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17 **Rationale:**
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- 19 1. In the original 1973 PCA Book of Church Order, the paragraph currently numbered as
20 *BCO* 29-1 reads exactly as written above.
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- 22 2. TE Per Almquist in his new book *Our Bond of Union: A Commentary on the Book of*
23 *Church Order of the Presbyterian Church of America* (2025) remarks that “[n]either
24 this author nor the PCA Historical Center has been able to locate any action by the
25 General Assembly to remove that phrase” (p.247).
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- 27 3. The missing phrase was first adopted by the Presbyterian Church in 1879, and it was
28 extensively discussed in F.P. Ramsay, *An Exposition of the Form of Government and*
29 *the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Presbyterian
30 Committee of Publication, 1898), pp. 177–180.
31
- 32 4. The late TE Morton Smith in his classic book *Commentary on the PCA Book of Church*
33 *Order* (6th ed., 2007) expounds upon this topic as follows:
34 The *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* are the agreed upon
35 formularies as to what the Presbyterian Church believes the Scripture
36 teaches. These then become the particular guide to the courts of how
37 an offense is to be judged. If the Church were to find a member out of
38 accord with Scripture on a point not covered by the Standards, she is
39 free to amend her Standards so as to include this matter as one of
40 offense. Until she does so, however, she restrains herself by this
41 definition of an offense to handle only those matters contrary to the
42 Scripture and to our Standards. This is not at all to suggest that the
43 Standards are on a par with the Scripture, but it is to indicate what being
44 a constitutional church means. By adopting a constitution, the church
45 sets the limits of her judicial process. She also sets the standards by

1 which an offense is to be judged. It is the Scripture as understood by
2 the Church in her constitutional standards. (pp.291–292)

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4 TE Smith thus signifies the importance of interpreting Scripture via the Westminster
5 Standards for the purpose of judicial process as an essential feature of being a
6 constitutional church in obedience to Christ alone.

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8 5. Our brothers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) have a similar provision in
9 their *Book of Discipline*: “An offense which is serious enough to warrant a trial is...
10 (3) an offense in the area of doctrine for the ordained officer which would constitute a
11 violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system of
12 doctrine is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms” (OPC *BCO*, *Book of*
13 *Discipline* Chapter III, Section 7.b).
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15 6. Without the missing phrase, an officer or member of the PCA could be charged with
16 an offense based solely upon contested readings of Scripture, such as drinking alcohol
17 (Ephesians 5:18) or serving in the military (Exodus 20:13), even though the Standards
18 (e.g., *WLC* 136) do not define such actions as offenses.
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20 7. Despite the lack of any verified action to remove the missing phrase, it does not appear
21 in our modern editions of *BCO* 29-1.
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23 8. Ratification by the Presbyteries should not be required in order to restore language to
24 *The Book of Church Order* that was never properly removed. However, if CCB deems
25 ratification by the Presbyteries to be required, then the Presbytery would welcome
26 such an amendment by the Overtures Committee.
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29 *Adopted by the Northern California Presbytery at its stated meeting, February 6, 2026.*
30 *A Northern California Overture Commission was authorized to perfect and re-file if it deems*
31 *necessary.*

32 *Attested by TE John Kong, Stated Clerk*