

1 **OVERTURE 53** from Northwest Georgia Presbytery (to OC)
2 "Leading by Example in Repentance First"

3
4 **Whereas**, previous General Assemblies have attempted to provide sweeping, well-meaning,
5 and general statements of repentance for the odious sin of racism; and

6
7 **Whereas**, the 2015 General Assembly requested that courts and presbyters study the issue
8 and make suitable steps toward meaningful repentance; and

9
10 **Whereas**, a helpful article "Confessing Sin One Church Officer at a Time," published in
11 *Old Life* (March 17, 2016; see Attachment) advocated a courageous and authentic
12 manner of leading by example first (John 15:20; Phil. 2:3-4) and avoiding a focus on
13 the sins of others (Mt. 7:3); and

14
15 **Whereas**, all the church should be aware of this sincere, gospel-centered practical
16 alternative below, especially since it may not have been widely publicized; and

17
18 **Whereas**, our existing constitution affords prompt, sincere, and responsible action in this
19 area, which needs no additional implementing mechanism other than sincere
20 repentance; and

21
22 **Whereas**, *BCO* 38-1 (below), which provides for true and meaningful repentance as a "case
23 without process," might well be put to good and proper use, and widely so, in this
24 time;

25
26 *BCO* 38-1. When any person shall come forward and make his offense
27 known to the court, a full statement of the facts shall be recorded and
28 judgment rendered without process. In handling a confession of guilt, it is
29 essential that the person intends to confess and permit the court to render
30 judgment without process. Statements made by him in the presence of the
31 court must not be taken as a basis of a judgment without process except by
32 his consent. In the event a confession is intended, a full statement of the
33 facts should be approved by the accused, and by the court, before the court
34 proceeds to a judgment. The accused has the right of complaint against
35 the judgment.

36 And,

37
38 **Whereas**, particular repentance and particular courts and relevant contrition can have more
39 moral and relational impact than other proposed measures;

40
41 *BCO* 31-2. It is the duty of all church Sessions and Presbyteries to
42 exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall with due
43 diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory
44 explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This

1 duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by
2 injurious reports shall ask an investigation.

3
4 If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong
5 presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the court shall institute
6 process, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to
7 conduct the case. This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except
8 that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of
9 the same congregation with the accused.

10 And,

11
12 **Whereas**, no godly assembly wishes to discourage leading by example first; and

13
14 **Whereas**, repentance and confession are personal acts of the individual sinner; and pastors
15 and elders should be the first and chief repenters; and

16
17 **Whereas**, availing the procedures in *BCO* 31-2 and 38-1 do not exclude additional, future
18 measures if necessary—it primarily establishes a purposeful priority, which should
19 be exercised first, and we call on future measures to report on how these two *BCO*
20 provisions were implemented, first; and

21
22 **Whereas**, acting in accord with these provisions could be generous, authentic, powerful,
23 public, extensive, renewing, evangelistic, and bring sincere repentance, forgiveness,
24 and reconciliation;

25
26 **Therefore, be it resolved** that all overtures presented to the Forty-Fourth General Assembly
27 calling for confession and repentance be returned to their courts of original
28 jurisdiction to be handled according to the potent and readily available provisions of
29 *BCO* 31-2 and 38-1.

30
31 *Adopted by the Northwest Georgia Presbytery at its stated meeting, May 3, 2016*

32 *Attested by /s/ TE Gregory A. King, stated clerk*

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Attachment

Confessing Sin One Church Officer at a Time

Published in *Old Life*, March 17, 2016

The following from Pastor Jonathan Inman (PCA) is a call for his communion to confess its sin of racism by the book — that is, by the *Book of Church Order*. (Pastor Inman originally submitted this to *by Faith* magazine but the editors decided against its publication.)

GA Commissioners: Please Lead by Example

To my Fellow Commissioners to the 44th General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in America,

Brothers,

Among the various items of business we have before us this summer, several presbyteries have requested the General Assembly confess and repent of sins past and present. Further, we are being asked to encourage our member congregations and presbyteries to do the same in their local communities. I am writing to urge all who support these overtures, and especially those presbyters who plan to be in Mobile in June, to lead others by example in confessing and repenting of your sin as individuals before your courts of original jurisdiction in keeping with the provisions of *BCO* 38-1.

I agreed with last year's momentous decision to refer the matter to this year's Assembly. A year later, it's not as though the issues giving rise to this initiative have gone away or abated, and the opportunity for folks to think through the issues and consider how best to address them is welcome. But now it is time to act.

By "act" I don't mean wordsmithing by committee, perfecting language few will read and fewer still will take as pious advice. Nor do I mean huffing and puffing at microphone 6, bewailing our own or others' failings, or castigating – if only by implication – those who disagree with us. Nor do I mean we should do much more than we did last year – that is, refer the matter – except in a different direction, with more determined purpose, and with a more realistic expectation of effectual results.

I would like for this year's Assembly to answer all the related overtures by sending them back to the courts from which they originated to be dealt with according to our rules of discipline. Fully a third of our *BCO* is devoted to how our courts should deal with our members' sin, and one section in particular, *BCO* 38-1, spells out how our courts should receive confessions of sin. I do not begrudge anyone's earnest attempts to deal honestly and graciously with the sins of God's people. I am calling upon the officers of the PCA to do so in a fashion to which we've all agreed.

If you think you have sinned, and not just a little, or in some ordinary fashion, but in an especially heinous sort of way, then 38-1 is totally the way to go. Serious sins, public sins,

1 sins perpetrated by officers of the church – if ever there were occasion for serious, public
2 and official confession and judgment, wouldn't this be it? And all without the rigmarole of
3 process!

4
5 Leaders in the church who believe they have so sinned – whether covenantally or
6 generationally, jointly or severally – should lead by example by formally confessing their
7 sins before their sessions and presbyteries, and asking for judgment to be rendered. Failure
8 to do so suggests a lack of seriousness, either in their estimate of their sin, or their
9 commitment to their ordination engagements.

10
11 No need to wait for the Assembly to give you permission; you've already agreed to this
12 when you were ordained. There's plenty of time between now and GA to get the ball rolling.
13 And if you come to Mobile prepared, having discharged your conscience in conformity to
14 the provisions of our constitution, it is reasonable for you to expect that others who share
15 your concerns will have done the same.

16
17 Would you like the entire denomination to deal seriously with the substance of the issues
18 presented in these overtures? Then have our elders, teaching and ruling, humble themselves
19 to confess and seek discipline for their acknowledged sin before their brethren to whom they
20 have promised submission. Have their sessions and presbyteries determine what is a full
21 statement of the facts, render judgment, and mete out any censures. Far from superfluous
22 procedures, these basic responsibilities executed by the courts would provide the blueprint
23 for precisely the sort of appropriate responses on the part of the presbyteries and
24 congregations called for by the overtures.

25
26 Whether you are for or against this or that sentiment in this or that version of these
27 overtures, the best way forward would be for living men to lead the way, exemplifying how
28 very concerned we are for Christ's honor and our neighbors' well-being.

29
30 And yet, if you personally vote to support some version of these overtures at this year's
31 assembly in Mobile, and if I see you next summer in Greensboro and you somehow haven't
32 yet invoked 38-1 for yourself, I might be willing to meet you at a lunch counter downtown
33 and let you try to explain why you didn't.