

1 **PARTIAL REPORT OF THE AD-INTERIM COMMITTEE ON**
2 **CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM**
3 **TO THE FIFTY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY**
4 **OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**
5

6 The 52nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America met in June 2025 in
7 Chattanooga, Tennessee, where it answered Overture 47, from Great Lakes Presbytery, in the
8 affirmative, which resolved

9 “that the 52nd PCA General Assembly erect and convene an Ad Interim Study
10 Committee on Christian Nationalism (*RAO* 9-1), to study the relationship
11 between Christian Nationalism, Ethno-Nationalism, and related teachings.
12 Further, the committee shall advise on whether these teachings and
13 formulations are in conformity with the system of doctrine taught in the
14 *Westminster Standards* or where they may diverge from the system of doctrine.
15

16 Further, the committee shall write a report that gives pastoral guidance when
17 addressing congregations, new members, and future officers of the PCA.”
18 (*M52GA*, 2025, p.114)
19

20 The Moderator appointed the following to serve on the Ad Interim Committee:
21

22 **TE Dr. David Strain**, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS— Mississippi
23 Valley Presbytery, *Chair*

24 **TE Dr. Drew Martin**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological
25 Seminary—Central Carolina Presbytery

26 **TE Dr. James Wood**, Associate Professor of Religion and Theology at Redeemer
27 University— Eastern Canada Presbytery
28

29 **RE Steve Dowling**, Interim Coordinator at Mission to North America— Southeast Alabama
30 Presbytery

31 **RE Paul McNulty**, President Emeritus at Grove City College— Lowcountry Presbytery

32 **RE Lance Kinzer**, Heartland Presbytery

33 **RE Dr. Jay D. Green**, Tennessee Valley Presbytery
34

35 The following also assisted the Committee in an advisory capacity:
36

37 **TE Dr. Scott Swain**, President at Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando and James
38 Woodrow Hassell Professor of Systematic Theology — Central Florida Presbytery

39 **TE Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters**, James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of New Testament and
40 Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson— Presbytery of the Mississippi
41 Valley

42 **Dr. Allen C. Guelzo**, Professor of Humanities at The University of Florida
43

CONTENTS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

1. Preamble(page 3)
2. Recommendations to the 53rd General Assembly(page 5)
3. Pastoral Letter(page 6)
4. Affirmations and Denials(page 9)
5. Constitutional and Pastoral Guidance(page 15)
6. Conclusion(page 43)

PREAMBLE

1
2
3 The conversation surrounding Christian Nationalism can be heated; the proliferation of new
4 articles has not stopped, and the term itself is difficult to define. To produce a report of
5 reasonable brevity, we have not attempted to adjudicate every debate concerning scriptural
6 validity, historical precedent, and confessional fidelity that surrounds the term Christian
7 Nationalism. Furthermore, taking our mandate from Overture 47 as adopted by the 52nd
8 General Assembly, the Committee did not believe it to be our task to prepare an alternative
9 political theology on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in America. Instead, in an effort to
10 serve the church in a timely fashion while our work continues, we have labored to do two
11 things in this *Partial Report*:

12
13 **First**, Overture 47, as adopted by the 52nd General Assembly, required us to provide pastoral
14 guidance to elders “when addressing congregations, new members, and future officers of the
15 PCA.” This we have attempted to do throughout the report, but two sections seek to address
16 this need more directly. The *Pastoral Letter* is offered to the church as an attempt to provide
17 both godly counsel and to model the kind of language and approach that officers and courts
18 of the church might take in engaging with people who have embraced problematic aspects of
19 Christian Nationalism. The *Affirmations and Denials* seek to summarize what we consider to
20 be the scope and range of scripturally and constitutionally acceptable opinion(s) in a way that
21 we trust will be useful and clarifying to the church.

22
23 **Second**, the Committee was asked to advise “on whether these teachings and formulations
24 are in conformity with the system of doctrine taught in the *Westminster Standards* or where
25 they may diverge from the system of doctrine” (*M52GA*, 2025, p.114). The Committee has
26 worked to offer guidance on what it considers the legitimate diversity of opinion permitted to
27 officers in the PCA by our Constitution. It is our hope that this report will inform the thinking
28 of the courts of the church as they seek to identify the confessional boundaries for officers
29 and officer candidates. In particular, we offer our advice on the compatibility of the political
30 theology of the original 1646 edition of the *Westminster Standards* with the 1788 revisions—
31 the latter of which are the subordinate standards of the PCA. It is beyond the authority of the
32 Ad Interim Committee to declare any view of these matters constitutional or unconstitutional.
33 That is for the courts of the church to determine. Nevertheless, in what follows, we seek to
34 assist the church in making those determinations.

35
36 While the *Partial Report* is written in a pastoral tone, seeking to provide clear advice to the
37 church, uncluttered by academic apparatus, it should be noted that the Committee intends to
38 provide appendices that will provide robust exegetical, historical and contemporary analysis
39 of the central issues under discussion. It is our expectation that these appendices will provide
40 important additional data to explain and support the advice offered in this *Partial Report*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism respectfully recommends the following actions to the 53rd General Assembly:

1. That the Assembly make the “Partial Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism” available to all Sessions, Presbyteries, and interested parties for their consideration and use.
2. That the Assembly extend the remit of the Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism for a further year, to report to the 54th General Assembly.

PASTORAL LETTER

1
2
3 Brothers and sisters in Christ,
4

5 Greetings in the name of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We write to you in
6 accordance with the mandate given by the 52nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church
7 in America that required the Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism to provide
8 “pastoral guidance when addressing congregations, new members, and future officers of the
9 PCA” (*M52GA*, 2025, p. 115).
10

11 First, we wish to communicate our gratitude to God for a growing renewal of interest in
12 Christian political theology. The Presbyterian Church in America is deeply committed to the
13 doctrine of the spiritual mission of the church as it is expressed in her Constitution (*WCF* 23:3,
14 31:1; *BCO* Preliminary Principles 1, 8). The church and the state are both institutions created
15 by God, each with its distinct calling and sphere of responsibility. The church is not called to
16 direct the affairs of the state, nor the state the affairs of the Church. Nevertheless, with
17 Scripture and our church’s Constitution (Rom. 13:1-2; Luke 3:14; *WCF* 23:2), we affirm and
18 celebrate the rights and responsibilities of Christian citizens to engage in political and civic
19 life, including holding high public office.
20

21 Civic engagement at every level is a good and honorable thing, worthy of the best efforts of
22 conscientious Christians. The spiritual mission of the church must not be understood to
23 preclude the duty of Christian citizens to apply the teaching of Holy Scripture to political life
24 (as to every sphere of life), or to deny the responsibility of the elders of the church to teach
25 everything the Word of God has to say about the duties of Christian citizens in society.
26 Teaching the people of God everything the Bible says about life in the civil sphere, including
27 the nature, purposes and limits of politics, belongs to the work of making disciples of all
28 nations. Enthusiasm for Reformed political theology and a renewed willingness to implement
29 its insights in concrete ways in contemporary life is no threat to the welfare of the church or
30 the cause of Jesus Christ.
31

32 Second, although the renewed interest in political theology is commendable, we cannot help
33 but be alarmed by the intemperate and unclean speech adopted by some of those who call
34 themselves Christian Nationalists. We wish to remind the officers and members of the
35 Presbyterian Church in America that whatever form our political theology may take, and
36 however urgent the perceived problems and crises facing the nation may be, nothing can
37 justify ungodliness in speech, or in conduct. It is sometimes suggested that there is a crisis of
38 masculinity in contemporary America and that much that ails our society in both church and
39 state is a result of the pervasive feminization of our culture. Indeed, we regard with dismay a
40 widespread confusion—if not the complete rejection—in many sections of our society of the
41 basic biblical binary that identifies humanity in the image of God as immutably male and
42 female. Yet whatever solutions Christians may offer to these challenges, whether real or
43 perceived, crass language, unclean speech, and disdain for the good name of our neighbors
44 must not be excused. The Bible tells us to avoid irreverent babble (2 Tim. 2:16) and foolish,
45 ignorant controversies (v. 23). The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to

1 everyone (v. 24), and when correction is necessary, it should be carried out with gentleness
2 (v. 25). It is true that our Savior was never a weakling or a coward. It is also true that from the
3 heart of the sinless Savior there arose at times a just and holy anger (John 2:14; Matt. 21:12;
4 John 11:33,38). Yet we dare not imply that such observations about our Lord Jesus Christ can
5 validate in us cruelty, belittling and disrespectful speech, or contempt for those with whom
6 we may differ, however profoundly that difference may be felt. We would do well to
7 remember the *Westminster Larger Catechism's* exposition of the ninth commandment which
8 requires:

9
10 “the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good
11 name of our neighbor, as well as our own: appearing and standing for the truth;
12 and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and
13 only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things
14 whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and
15 rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities;
16 freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a
17 ready receiving of good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report,
18 concerning them; discouraging tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and
19 care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of
20 lawful promises; study and practising of whatsoever things are true, honest,
21 lovely, and of good report.” (*WLC* 144)

22
23 This is an admirable summary of the duties to which our Lord calls us in all our speech and
24 in every engagement, even with those who are hostile to the cause of Jesus Christ. Let us hold
25 ourselves and one another to this standard, whatever our political stance may be.

26
27 Thirdly, we wish to warn the members and officers of the Presbyterian Church in America of
28 some expressions of what is called Christian Nationalism that embrace forms of antisemitism,
29 race realism, and Kinism.¹ Under the guise of conservative Christian political discourse, some
30 advocate for the segregation of different ethnicities and cultures, and believe that the Bible
31 teaches a view of “nations” that treats cultural and ethnic pluralism as contrary to biblical
32 teaching.² The PCA has repeatedly and unequivocally declared its repudiation of these views
33 as incompatible with biblical Christianity, and the courts of the church are urged to ensure
34 that no place in their ranks be given to them.

35
36 Finally, we desire to call the Presbyterian Church in America back to its principal task. Our
37 mission is to bring the good news about Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Let us
38 rededicate ourselves to the praise of his Name, the spread of his gospel, and the conformity of
39 our lives and churches to his perfect likeness. These are the ends for which Christ, the King

¹ For a helpful discussion of race realism and Kinism, see the *Special Moderator's Committee on Kinism and Race Realism*, produced for the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church (Available online at: <https://app.box.com/s/8xttgbn6z2cli57bn58g4w7ukebl4g01>, Reference to the Synod Minutes forthcoming)

² By “cultural and ethnic pluralism” we mean to affirm that nations may legitimately embrace a wide variety of peoples, languages, cultures, and ethnicities. We do not, however, affirm “philosophical pluralism” which requires the affirmation of all, even opposing, ideological points of view.

1 and Head of the church, has established the Presbyterian Church in America. We believe that
2 the development of a thoroughly scriptural and Reformed political theology must not distract
3 from but rather serve these ends.

4

5 In our judgment, the greatest need of the church is for spiritual renewal. Let us bow before
6 our God in heartfelt grief and repentance for our worldliness and many divisions and seek a
7 fresh endowment of the Holy Spirit to bless the ministry of the means of grace. While the
8 issues involved in the debates around Christian Nationalism are important, we believe that it
9 will be when the church unites in persistent prayer and goes forth in courageous gospel witness
10 that Christ's kingdom will advance in our generation.

11

12 In the years to come, may we resolve together to seek God's face, cry out for his mercy, repent
13 of our sin, and go with renewed determination to make disciples of all nations, in the name of
14 the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

15

16 Amen.

AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS

1
2
3 **1. We affirm** that civil authority is ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-7), and that civil
4 government has a legitimate role in preserving justice, restraining evil, and promoting the
5 conditions necessary for human flourishing. Political order is part of God’s providential
6 care for human societies.

7
8 Nevertheless, **we deny** that civil government can accomplish the redemptive work that
9 belongs to Christ alone. The church—not the nation—is the primary community through
10 which Christ manifests his reign in the present age. Civil government remains provisional,
11 penultimate, and subject to divine judgment.

12
13 **2. We affirm** that Christians are called to participate responsibly in political life (*WCF* 23.2).
14 Faithful political engagement—including voting, public service, advocacy, and other
15 forms of civic participation—is a legitimate expression of Christian love for neighbor and
16 concern for the common good. Christians may rightly seek political arrangements that
17 better reflect justice, truth, and moral order.

18
19 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the Christian call to political engagement can ever excuse
20 faithful Christians from their obligations to charitably esteem their neighbors and study
21 and practice whatever is true, honest, lovely, and of good report (*WLC* 144). **We further**
22 **deny** that Christian political engagement ever permits prejudicing the truth, scoffing,
23 reviling, rash or harsh words, or partial censoring, especially by those in positions of
24 authority (*WLC* 129-130; 145; 151).

25
26 **3. We affirm** the right of the institutional church to address civil government on all matters
27 to which the Holy Scriptures speak. This it may do by way of humble petition in cases
28 extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, when asked by the
29 magistrate to do so (*WCF* 31.4). **We further affirm** that the church is duty bound as part
30 of its public witness to speak on matters of biblical morality and Christian obedience, even
31 when doing so touches upon current debates in the contemporary political landscape.

32
33 Nevertheless, **we deny** that it is the responsibility of the institutional church to intermeddle
34 in civil or political affairs (*WCF* 31:4). **We further deny** that the church has the right or
35 the power to bind consciences— on political matters, as on any other subject— without
36 the express warrant of the Word of God (*WCF* 20:2).

37
38 **4. We affirm** that the historic Reformed tradition encompasses a spectrum of permissible
39 positions with respect to the relationship between church and state. We welcome the
40 renewal of interest in Reformed political theology and believe that the work of historical
41 and contemporary theological reflection on this subject is an important part of the
42 Church’s ongoing witness.

43
44 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the *Westminster Standards*, as modified and adopted by the
45 General Assembly of 1788, embraced by the PCA as its subordinate standard in 1973, and

1 interpreted by its *Book of Church Order*, allow for the establishment of the church by the
 2 state (*BCO* Preliminary Principle 1). We further deny that the Constitution of the PCA
 3 allows the civil magistrate to favor in law any denomination of Christians above the rest,
 4 has the right to call synods, ensure orthodoxy in the church, or to order worship. (*WCF*
 5 23.3, amending 1646 *WCF* 23.3; *WCF* 31, omitting 1646 *WCF* 31.2.)
 6

- 7 **5. We affirm** that the civil magistrate must maintain piety, justice, and peace according to
 8 the wholesome laws of each commonwealth (*WCF* 23.2) and protect the church as a
 9 nursing father (*WCF* 23.3). We further acknowledge that within American
 10 Presbyterianism there have been a variety of permissible interpretations of these
 11 principles, some affirming a stronger, some a weaker role for the magistrate in the
 12 maintenance of Christianity in the public square.
 13

14 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the civil magistrate’s responsibility toward religion entitles
 15 him to override the protections that the *Confession* explicitly affirms— namely, that he
 16 may suffer any person either upon pretense of religion or infidelity, to offer any indignity,
 17 violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever but is bound to protect the person
 18 and good name of every person under his care without distinction, and take order that all
 19 religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance (*WCF*
 20 23.3). Whatever latitude may exist regarding the magistrate's posture toward false religion,
 21 it does not extend to the persecution of persons, the coercion of conscience, the
 22 molestation of peaceable religious assembly, or exclusion from public office.
 23

- 24 **6. We affirm** that the civil magistrate, in accordance with the limits of his office, must seek
 25 to honor the moral law in the prosecution of his duties, according to the dictates of
 26 prudence and the needs of each particular society. **We further affirm** that the *Westminster*
 27 *Standards*, as received by the PCA, permit a range of possible approaches to the way the
 28 civil magistrate may honor the moral law in the prosecution of his civic duty.
 29

30 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the obedience that the civil magistrate must render to the moral
 31 law must lead the magistrate to require citizens of civil society to engage in legally
 32 mandated acts of Christian worship. **We further deny** the right of the Christian magistrate
 33 to engage in persecution, suppression, or the disenfranchisement of citizens on the basis
 34 of religion (see the language of *WCF* 23.3 quoted above).
 35

- 36 **7. We affirm** that God created of one man all humanity in his image. In his providence, he
 37 has ordered humanity into distinct families, peoples, and nations, appointing their times
 38 and places, and shaping them through distinct histories, languages, and customs. This he
 39 has done without undermining the fundamental unity of the human race or the equal
 40 dignity of all people (Gen. 1:27; 10; Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26). **We further affirm** that the
 41 natural bonds of kinship and peoplehood are recognized in Scripture, and that Christians
 42 may rightly love their own families, communities, and cultural inheritances as gifts of
 43 God’s providential care (1 Tim. 5:8; Ps. 33:12; Rom. 9:3-5). Yet it is part of the glory of
 44 the gospel that it binds believers into a transnational communion under Christ (Gal. 3:28;

1 Phil. 3:20) gathering sinners saved by grace, from every tribe and language and nation,
2 and making of them fellow citizens and coheirs of the kingdom of heaven (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

3
4 Nevertheless, **we deny** that race, ethnicity, or biological descent establish intrinsic moral
5 hierarchies, or confer superior spiritual worth, political legitimacy, or ecclesiastical
6 authority. We reject kinism and all theological and political systems that treat racial
7 hierarchy or separation as in any way permissible. Such views contradict the biblical
8 doctrine of the unity of humanity, the universality of sin, and the impartial justice of God
9 (Rom. 2:6-11; James 2:1-9). **We further deny** that love for one's own people or heritage
10 justifies contempt for, exclusion of, or injustice toward others. Christians are commanded
11 to love their neighbors and to honor the dignity of all people as those created in God's
12 image (Lev. 19:33-34; Matt. 22:37-39; James 2:8-9).

13
14 **8. We affirm** the historic Augustinian concept of ordered loves (*ordo amoris*). Christians
15 cannot love all people equally, to the same degree, and in the same way, at all times. Even
16 Jesus' relationship to John, the beloved disciple, was more intimate than his relationship
17 with the others in the apostolic band. Following our Lord's example, it is our Christian
18 duty to order our loves rightly, shaped by the proximity of human relationships, and
19 always in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture (e.g. Luke 10:25-37; Gal. 6:10;
20 1 Tim. 5:8).

21
22 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the *ordo amoris* provides a warrant for the preferential
23 treatment of one's own ethnic group ahead of any other. **We further deny** the assumption
24 that our natural preferences are the same as rightly ordered loves, or that race or ethnicity
25 may, in any way, function as a moral norm directing or defining love for neighbor.

26
27 **9. We affirm** that God created human beings as embodied, sexually differentiated creatures
28 (male or female) and established ordered relationships in family, church, and society.
29 Scripture teaches distinct yet complementary roles for men and women in the home and
30 church, and healthy societies depend upon the formation of men and women capable of
31 faithful service, responsibility, and self-sacrifice.

32
33 Nevertheless, **we deny** that cultural anxieties or social change justify profane speech or
34 contempt for women. Affirming complementarity does not preclude women's
35 participation in education, civic life, or public service. Political authority must remain
36 accountable to justice and be exercised for the good of all.

37
38 **10. We affirm** that Jesus Christ is King and Lord over all things, including ideas, values,
39 institutions, and people. **We further affirm** that those outside the covenant experience
40 God's goodness, provision, and joy (Acts 14:16-17), and God's restraint of evil in the
41 world has allowed even pagan rulers—otherwise hostile to God's moral order—to
42 administer relative justice (Gen. 20:6; Rom. 13:1-4).

1 **We deny** that rejecting the label “Christian Nationalism” means one is in favor of a hostile,
 2 secularist, anti-Christian Nationalism. There are other ways to affirm the influence of
 3 Christian ideas and Christian individuals on our civic life.

4
 5 **11. We affirm** that in God’s providence, liberal political orders—of the kind that have shaped
 6 America—have secured genuine goods, including protections for religious liberty,
 7 limitations on arbitrary political power, recognition of human dignity, and the expansion
 8 of certain civil and political rights. Christians should not embrace reactionary alternatives
 9 that sacrifice justice, liberty, or charity. Indeed, citizens of the United States are bound by
 10 Holy Scripture to give thanks to Almighty God for the common grace liberties and
 11 blessings of civil society, and to work for the preservation and further cultivation of those
 12 blessings according to their several callings.

13
 14 Nevertheless, **we deny** that the Western liberal traditions are beyond critique, especially
 15 in their more radical and individualistic forms. In some cases, liberal philosophies have
 16 severed freedom from its moral and theological foundations. Detached from biblical
 17 anthropology and ordered communal life, such forms of liberalism can devolve into an
 18 ethic of expressive individualism that weakens family, church, and social cohesion. Many
 19 of the cultural developments of the past century—including the separation of sex from
 20 gender, sexual licentiousness, the erosion of marriage, and the fragmentation of communal
 21 life—are deeply lamentable and have caused untold damage to the fabric of society,
 22 having normalized patterns of sin that should cause all Christians to grieve.

23
 24 **12. We affirm** that God has called his people to bear courageous witness to Christ’s
 25 lordship—a call that does not change with the changing cultural context. His lordship is
 26 relevant to every sphere of life, which is why questions of political theology matter. We
 27 **further affirm** that the mission of the institutional church is to make disciples of all
 28 nations, by proclaiming the good news of Christ and administering the means of grace.
 29 The spread of the gospel, the progress of the kingdom of Christ in the world, and the
 30 building of the church in every nation depends upon the blessing of the Spirit of God on
 31 the ministry of the Word and the faithful, often costly, testimony of God’s people. It does
 32 not require the assistance of the civil magistrate. Indeed, in many places around the world
 33 our brothers and sisters in Christ suffer injustice and persecution at the hands of tyrannous
 34 civil magistrates, yet there the gospel flourishes nonetheless. Christ will build his church,
 35 and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

36
 37 **We deny** that political solutions alone, whatever their merits, can address the deepest
 38 needs of our society or ensure the survival and progress of Christian values, institutions,
 39 or churches. Even so, as we engage in political activity, theological faithfulness requires
 40 love for neighbor, zeal for the salvation of the lost, and a growing desire for the glory of
 41 God in the discipleship of the nations—and no political program can bear that fruit apart
 42 from the Spirit’s blessing on the ministry of the Word.

43
 44 Put not your trust in princes, in whom there is no salvation. Some trust in chariots, some
 45 in horses, but let us trust in the name of the LORD our God (Ps. 146:3; 20:7).

1 damaged the *Standards* (and thus that the 1646 version got the matter right). Our tradition has
 2 not been uniform, and there is room for some difference of opinion.

3 4 **II. Historical Summary**

5
6 To understand the PCA's constitutional position on matters related to Christian Nationalism,
 7 we need to understand the history of the *Westminster Confession's* teaching on the civil
 8 magistrate. The PCA does not subscribe to the *Westminster Confession* as originally drafted
 9 in 1646. It subscribes to the American revision of 1788. The differences between these two
 10 documents bearing on the doctrine of the civil magistrate are substantial, and any honest
 11 engagement with questions of Christian Nationalism in the PCA has to recognize that as a
 12 foundational matter.

13 14 **A. The 1646 Original Version of the *WCF***

15
16 The Westminster Assembly met in London from 1643 to 1653 and produced its *Confession of*
 17 *Faith* under the authority of the English Parliament and in the context of the English Civil
 18 War. The Divines who composed the *Confession* were, with few exceptions, committed to a
 19 vision of church-state relations in which the civil magistrate bore significant responsibility for
 20 the purity and welfare of the church. This wasn't the peculiar view of the Westminster
 21 Assembly but the mainstream position of the Reformed tradition in the sixteenth and
 22 seventeenth centuries. Calvin in Geneva, Knox in Scotland, the Puritans in New England, and
 23 the Continental Reformed all held, in various formulations, that the Christian magistrate had
 24 a duty not merely to maintain civil order but to promote and protect true religion.

25
26 The 1646 *Confession* set forth its view on the Civil Magistrate in Chapter 23. Section 3 of that
 27 chapter says that:

28
29 The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word
 30 and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath
 31 authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in
 32 the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies
 33 and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and
 34 discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled,
 35 administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to
 36 call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted
 37 in them be according to the mind of God.

38
39 Several features of the paragraph deserve careful attention. First, it distinguished between the
 40 powers of the magistrate and the powers of the church. The magistrate was not to administer
 41 the Word and sacraments or exercise the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Second,
 42 while the *Confession* did not assert that the church was subject to state control in spiritual
 43 matters as Erastus understood it, the magistrate was nonetheless recognized as having broad
 44 responsibility for the external welfare of the church. He was to suppress blasphemies and
 45 heresies, reform corruptions in worship and discipline, and even call ecclesiastical synods.

1 This was a vision of the magistrate as “nursing father” to the church (drawing on Isaiah 49:23),
2 possessed of genuine authority “*circa sacra*” (around or about sacred things), even if he did
3 not have authority “*in sacris*” (in sacred things).
4

5 Two other sections of the 1646 *Confession* correlate. Chapter 20, Section 4 (“Of Christian
6 Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience”) states that those who publish opinions or maintain
7 practices “contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity,” or who
8 are “destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church,”
9 may lawfully be proceeded against by the censures of the church and “by the power of the
10 civil magistrate.” Chapter 31, Section 2, similarly affirmed the magistrate’s power to call a
11 synod “when matters of faith or controversies about doctrine are in debate.”
12

13 The Westminster provisions of 1646 envisioned a close partnership between civil and
14 ecclesiastical authorities, reflecting one approach within the broader Reformed tradition.
15 While figures such as Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, and Gillespie endorsed similar models in
16 certain contexts, Reformed thinkers and churches held a range of views, and the relationship
17 between civil and ecclesiastical authority was shaped by local and historical circumstances.
18

19 **A. A Shifting Consensus** 20

21 The Presbyterian churches in the American colonies developed in a context obviously
22 different from that of England and Scotland. While several of the original colonies had
23 established churches, the American experience was characterized by far greater religious
24 diversity than existed in any single European nation. By the mid-eighteenth century, many
25 American Presbyterians had grown uncomfortable with the *Confession*’s teaching on the civil
26 magistrate. This was driven by many factors, not the least of which was preferential treatment
27 of denominations. In Virginia, for example, the Anglican church was tightly integrated with
28 the State, including legal provisions for the support of ministers and the maintenance of land
29 grants for them. In Vermont, the Congregational church was the officially established and tax-
30 supported denomination until 1818.
31

32 This tension found early expression in the Adopting Act of 1729, when the Synod of
33 Philadelphia adopted the *Westminster Standards* as its doctrinal standard even while noting
34 specific reservations about Chapters 20 and 23. The Synod declared unanimously that it did
35 “**not** receive those Articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil Magistrate hath a
36 controlling Power over Synods with Respect to the Exercise of their ministerial Authority; or
37 power to persecute any for their Religion.” This action is historically significant because it
38 shows that, even before the American Revolution, Presbyterian leaders in America recognized
39 that the *Confession*’s teaching on the civil magistrate was problematic in their context.
40

41 The American Revolution and the founding of the United States added pressure. Two years
42 later, in 1788, as Presbyterians organized their first General Assembly, they undertook a
43 careful revision of the *Westminster Standards*’ teaching on the civil magistrate. Specific
44 revisions touched four sections of the *Standards*: the first three were *WCF* 20.4, 23.3, and 31.2
45 (renumbered 31.3 in the American edition), and the fourth was *WLC* 109.

1
2 **B. The New Constitutional Framework**
3

4 The most significant revision was to Chapter 23, Section 3, which was almost entirely
5 rewritten. The 1788 American text reads as follows:
6

7 Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word
8 and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the
9 least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil
10 magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving the
11 preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner
12 that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and
13 unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions,
14 without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular
15 government and discipline in His Church, no law of any commonwealth should
16 interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary
17 members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession
18 and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good
19 name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be
20 suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity,
21 violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order,
22 that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or
23 disturbance.
24

25 The differences between the 1646 and 1788 texts are considerable. Where the original directed
26 the magistrate to suppress blasphemies and heresies, the revision prohibited him from
27 interfering “in the least” in matters of faith. Where the original authorized the magistrate to
28 reform corruptions in worship and discipline, the revision insisted that no commonwealth law
29 should “interfere with, let, or hinder” the exercise of church government. Where the original
30 authorized the magistrate to call synods and oversee their proceedings, the revision removed
31 that authority. The revised text added the language of “nursing father,” indicating that the
32 magistrate’s role was to protect the church from interference rather than to direct or reform
33 the church.
34

35 Corresponding changes were made to *WCF* 20.4, which removed the reference to proceeding
36 against erring persons “by the power of the civil magistrate.” *WCF* 31.2 (American 31.3) was
37 rewritten to eliminate the magistrate’s power to call synods. And *WLC* 109 removed
38 “tolerating a false religion” from the list of sins forbidden by the Second Commandment,
39 though it retained language about “disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship” and
40 “removing it.”
41

42 The changes to *WCF* 20.4 merit our attention in some detail. The 1646 text read, in relevant
43 part, that those who publish opinions contrary to the known principles of Christianity “may
44 lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the Church, and by
45 the power of the civil Magistrate.” The 1788 revision removed the final clause, so that the text

1 then (and does now) read simply that such persons “may lawfully be called to account, and
2 proceeded against, by the censures of the Church.” This change is significant because it
3 removes the civil magistrate entirely from the process of ecclesiastical censure. Under the
4 1646 text, the state could enforce religious orthodoxy alongside the church, but under the 1788
5 text, matters of doctrine and religious opinion became the exclusive province of the church.
6

7 The revision to *WCF* 31 reinforces the separation. The 1646 text stated that “it belongeth to
8 synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith” and then added: “As
9 magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise
10 with, about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers
11 of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon
12 delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies.”
13

14 The 1788 revision eliminated the magistrate’s power to call synods entirely and replaced it
15 with a simple affirmation of the church’s inherent right to assemble, subsequently reading that
16 “It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and
17 cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public
18 worship of God, and government of his Church.” The revision then added a new Section 4
19 stating simply that “All synods or councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or
20 particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith,
21 or practice; but to be used as a help in both.”
22

23 The cumulative effect of the revisions was to change the magistrate’s relationship with the
24 church from that of an active custodian to one of impartial protector. The original had carefully
25 distinguished spiritual and state functions but had charged the magistrate with assuring the
26 doctrinal purity of the church and suppressing false religions. In the 1788 version, the
27 custodial role was eliminated entirely. The church alone was held to be the arbiter of its own
28 doctrine, worship, and discipline without any expectation of the civil magistrate’s oversight
29 or intervention.
30

31 One additional detail should be mentioned. While the American revisions clearly moved the
32 *Standards* in the direction of greater religious liberty and church-state separation, they did not
33 produce a fully secularized document. Several provisions of the unrevised portions of the
34 *Standards* continue to assume a positive relationship between Christianity and civil
35 government. *WCF* 23.2 states, for example, that magistrates are to “maintain piety, justice,
36 and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.” The *Larger Catechism*,
37 in its treatment of the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer (*WLC* 191), prays that the church
38 may be “countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate.” And *WLC* 108, in treating sins
39 against the Second Commandment, still includes reference to “all neglect, contempt of,
40 hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.”
41

42 These unreformed provisions have led some to argue that the American revision was either
43 incomplete or internally inconsistent. If the American Presbyterians truly intended to create a
44 thoroughgoing separation between church and state, they ask, then why did they leave
45 provisions that seem to assume a magistrate who actively promotes the Christian religion?

1 This is a fair question, and it has been advanced frequently by proponents of Christian
 2 Nationalism. One possible answer is that the American revisers did not intend a complete
 3 separation of church and state in the modern sense but rather sought to eliminate the specific
 4 powers of the magistrate that they found objectionable (e.g., suppressing heresies, calling
 5 synods, or reforming the church) while retaining the general principle that the magistrate
 6 should govern in a manner consistent with Christian piety. Another possible answer is that the
 7 revision was indeed incomplete and that the unreformed provisions should be read in light of
 8 the clear direction of the revisions. The Committee does not attempt to resolve this question
 9 definitively, but we do note that the existence of these provisions creates legitimate space
 10 within the PCA’s constitutional framework for a range of views on the magistrate’s positive
 11 relationship to religion.

12
 13 One commentator, for example, has argued in a recent analysis that the two versions of *WCF*
 14 23.3 represent genuinely different and irreconcilable views of the civil magistrate. He asserts
 15 that this isn’t merely a difference of emphasis or application, but that the documents make
 16 contradictory demands upon the magistrate. The 1646 text instructs the magistrate to suppress
 17 heresies, but the 1788 text forbids the magistrate from interfering in matters of faith. One
 18 cannot consistently affirm both propositions, he contends, and his conclusion is that American
 19 Presbyterians of 1788 were not supplementing the original text—they were replacing it with
 20 a substantively different vision of church/state relations.

21
 22 This reading has been contested. Others argue that the two versions aren’t contradictory but
 23 only different applications of the same shared principles to dissimilar political contexts. On
 24 that reading, both versions affirm the magistrate’s duty to promote true religion, differing
 25 primarily in their assessment of the means available to the magistrate in a religiously
 26 pluralistic society. They point to provisions within the *American Standards* that retain clear
 27 and robust language about the magistrate’s religious duties to support the argument, focusing
 28 on things like the *WCF* 23.1 statement that magistrates are ordained “for His (God’s) own
 29 glory” and must “maintain piety, justice, and peace,” and the *WLC* 191 petition that the church
 30 be “countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate.”

31
 32 The Committee acknowledges the seriousness and good faith of both readings. However, for
 33 the purpose of constitutional analysis, a couple of points need to be clear. Whatever the
 34 relationship between the two versions, the PCA has adopted the 1788 American revision as
 35 its constitutional standard. Officers in the PCA do not vow to uphold the 1646 text. Second,
 36 the American Presbyterians who adopted the 1788 revision understood themselves to be
 37 making a substantive change. The historical record—from the Adopting Act of 1729 through
 38 the formal revisions of 1788—consistently shows that American Presbyterians believed the
 39 original *Confession* gave too much authority to the civil magistrate in matters of religion, and
 40 they intentionally revised it to correct what they regarded as an error. Third, regardless of
 41 which scholarly reading one finds most persuasive, the practical implications for PCA officers
 42 are the same: they are bound to the text of the 1788 revision, and their subscription to it has
 43 constitutional force.

1 **III. The Constitution and Levels of Accountability**
2

3 The PCA’s constitutional framework creates different levels of doctrinal accountability for
4 different categories of people within the church. Understanding these distinctions is essential
5 for pastoral guidance on Christian Nationalism, because the constitutional implications vary
6 significantly depending on whether one is speaking of a visitor, a communicant member, or
7 an ordained officer.
8

9 **A. Visitors and Attendees**
10

11 Visitors and regular attendees who have not joined a PCA church have no formal
12 constitutional obligation to its standards. They haven’t taken membership vows, and they’re
13 not subject to the discipline of the Session. This is not a deficiency in our polity. Instead, it
14 reflects the nature of the visible church. The doors of the church must generally be open to
15 any (and all) to hear the Word preached and to observe the worship of God. Unless the peace
16 and purity of the church are otherwise threatened, this general posture of openness and
17 welcome extends to include visitors who hold views on church/state relations that differ from
18 the PCA’s constitutional position.
19

20 The PCA affirms that church membership and participation are not limited by one’s political
21 stance. Individuals who hold to the 1646 *Westminster Confession’s* view of the civil
22 magistrate, those who support a modest Christian influence on government, those who
23 advocate for a confessional Christian state, and even those whose views are uncertain or
24 internally inconsistent should all be welcomed to worship, hear the gospel, and receive
25 pastoral care. The Committee recognizes this freedom for political diversity while also
26 acknowledging that certain positions remain morally unacceptable.
27

28 Pastors and Sessions should be alert to the possibility that visitors who hold strong convictions
29 about Christian Nationalism may also hold views on other matters that require pastoral
30 attention. Some expressions of Christian Nationalism are intertwined with views on ethnicity,
31 race, and national identity that are inconsistent with the biblical teaching that God has made
32 from one man every nation of mankind (Acts 17:26) and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor
33 Greek (Gal. 3:28). The 52nd General Assembly’s adoption of a statement condemning “any
34 theological or political teaching which posits a superiority of race or ethnic identity born of
35 immutable human characteristics” provides clear guidance on this point. Pastors should be
36 prepared to engage with both grace and truth, welcoming all to the fellowship of the church
37 while faithfully teaching the whole counsel of God.
38

39 **B. Communing Members**
40

41 The membership vows taken by communicant members of PCA churches are found in *BCO*
42 57-5. These vows address fundamental matters of Christian faith and life, beginning with the
43 acknowledgment of personal sin, trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, commitment to obey
44 Christ and submit to the government of the church, and support for the church. Notably,

1 membership vows do not require affirmation of the *Westminster Standards*. That requirement
 2 applies to church officers, not to members generally.

3
 4 The membership vows are as follows:

- 5
 6 (1) Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly
 7 deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
 8 (2) Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of
 9 sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is
 10 offered in the Gospel?
 11 (3) Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the
 12 Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of
 13 Christ?
 14 (4) Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best
 15 of your ability?
 16 (5) Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church,
 17 and promise to study its purity and peace?
 18

19 The fifth vow is particularly relevant to the work of this Committee. A member who submits
 20 to the government and discipline of the church and promises to study its purity and peace is
 21 obligating himself to support the ordered life of the congregation, including its constitutional
 22 commitments. This does not mean that members must agree with every proposition in the
 23 *Westminster Standards*. It does mean that members should conduct themselves in a manner
 24 that promotes (rather than undermines) the peace and purity of the gathered saints.
 25

26 There are obvious implications found in the fifth vow for members who hold views associated
 27 with Christian Nationalism. It matters what view is held, and it matters more how the view is
 28 expressed. A member who personally believes that the view of the civil magistrate taught in
 29 the 1646 version of the *Westminster Confession* is preferable to the 1788 revision holds a view
 30 that is (in itself) neither contrary to Christian faith nor inconsistent with membership vows.
 31 Such a member is in the company of many faithful Presbyterians throughout history, as well
 32 as of those in contemporary communions like the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
 33 (ARPC) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), whose versions
 34 of the *Westminster Standards* retain more of the original language on the civil magistrate.
 35 These denominations are considered orthodox by the PCA, which maintains ecumenical
 36 fellowship with them through the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council
 37 (NAPARC).
 38

39 Even so, a member who aggressively promotes views that create division in the congregation,
 40 who disparages the PCA's constitutional commitments, who uses Christian Nationalist
 41 ideology to justify ethnic partiality or hostility toward fellow members, or who prioritizes
 42 political agitation at a level that undermines the ministry of the Word and sacraments risks
 43 engaging in behaviors that violate the fifth membership vow. Under these circumstances, the
 44 Session's responsibility is to shepherd such members with patience and clarity, distinguishing

1 between honest intellectual disagreement on political theology and behavior that genuinely
2 threatens the peace and purity of the church.

3
4 It's equally important to note that members who are troubled by Christian Nationalist ideas in
5 the culture and who want their church to take a strong stand against any form of Christian
6 Nationalism must also be shepherded with care. The peace and purity of the church can be
7 disrupted along multiple axes. A Session that treats every expression of interest in historic
8 Reformed political theology as a threat is as pastorally deficient as one that ignores genuine
9 problems. The goal is not to police political opinions but to maintain a congregation where
10 the gospel is central, where Christ's lordship over all of life is acknowledged, and where
11 Christians of varying political convictions can worship together in unity.

12 13 **C. Ordained Officers**

14
15 The constitutional standard for ordained officers is significantly more demanding than for
16 communicant members. PCA officers, whether they are Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, or
17 Deacons, all take ordination vows that include the following (*BCO* 21-5 for Teaching Elders;
18 24-6 for Ruling Elders and Deacons):

19
20 Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms
21 of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy
22 Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out
23 of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on
24 your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery [or Session] the change
25 which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination
26 vow?

27
28 This vow is at the heart of what it means to be a confessional church. Officers do not merely
29 affirm that the *Westminster Standards* contain some true doctrines; they "receive and adopt"
30 the *Standards* as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. The PCA operates
31 under what is commonly called "good faith subscription," which was formalized by the 30th
32 General Assembly and codified in *BCO* 21-4.f. This framework permits officers to hold stated
33 differences from the *Standards*, provided that the Presbytery (or Session, for Ruling Elders
34 and Deacons) examines those differences and determines that they are not hostile to the system
35 of doctrine.

36
37 The fundamental constitutional question, then, becomes whether or not a PCA officer can hold
38 to the view of the civil magistrate taught in the 1646 version of the *Westminster Confession*,
39 or to some form of Christian Nationalism that advocates for a more robust role for the
40 magistrate in religious matters, without stating a difference with the PCA's constitutional
41 *Standards*.

42
43 We note that the precise adjudication of what qualifies as a stated difference with our
44 *Standards*, and of how to classify such differences, belongs to the courts of the church alone
45 and is beyond the purview of this Committee. Nevertheless, we have been tasked by the 52nd

1 General Assembly to provide direction and counsel to the church on the question of the
 2 constitutionality of these matters. Therefore, absent any other details or qualifications, it is the
 3 opinion of this Committee that a PCA officer cannot hold to the view of the civil magistrate
 4 taught in the 1646 version of the *Westminster Confession*, or to any form of Christian
 5 Nationalism that envisages a more robust role for the magistrate in religious matters than is
 6 specifically enumerated in the text of the 1788 revisions without taking a stated exception to
 7 our *Standards*.

8
 9 The PCA’s constitutional text is the 1788 American revision. An officer who believes that the
 10 civil magistrate has the duty to suppress heresies, reform corruptions in worship, or call
 11 ecclesiastical synods, holds a view that is directly contrary to the text of *WCF* 23.3 as adopted
 12 by the PCA. The magistrate may not “in the least, interfere in matters of faith.” In the judgment
 13 of the Ad Interim Committee, such an officer is out of accord with the *Standards* on this point
 14 and should declare that difference to his Presbytery or Session.

15
 16 Whether such a difference is tolerable under “good faith subscription” is a determination that
 17 must be made by the examining body. *BCO* 21-4.f directs that the Presbytery shall “determine
 18 if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and,
 19 as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession*
 20 *of Faith and Catechisms*.” The Committee offers what follows to assist Presbyteries and
 21 Sessions in making such a determination.

22 23 **IV. Analyzing Specific Positions Under the PCA Constitution**

24
 25 As stated above, “Christian Nationalism” is not a single, unified position. The contemporary
 26 debate instead spans a wide spectrum of views on the relationship between Christianity and
 27 civil government. This section analyzes several distinct positions and their relationship to the
 28 PCA’s constitutional standards.

29 30 **A. The “General Influence” Position**

31
 32 Some who use the language associated with Christian Nationalism mean nothing more by it
 33 than the conviction that Christians should seek to influence civil society, that natural law and
 34 biblical moral principles should inform legislation, and that Christian piety (per *WCF* 23.2) is
 35 best promoted and protected when the civil magistrate promotes and protects the free exercise
 36 of all religions. This position is entirely consistent with the PCA’s constitutional standards. In
 37 support, consider that *WCF* 23.1-2 affirms that God has ordained the civil magistrate “for His
 38 own glory, and the public good,” and that it is the duty of people “to pray for magistrates, to
 39 honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to
 40 be subject to their authority, for conscience’ sake.” *WCF* 23.2 states that it is lawful for
 41 Christians “to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto.” The
 42 *Confession* assumes that Christians will be engaged in civil life—sometimes robustly, by
 43 serving in office, for example—and that they will bring their convictions to bear on public
 44 questions.

1 In the opinion of this Committee, a PCA officer who advocates for Christian engagement in
2 the public square, who votes and advocates according to Christian moral principles, who
3 encourages fellow believers to participate in civic life, and who insists that the state has no
4 right to prohibit the free exercise of religion is not in tension with the PCA’s *Standards*. This
5 position requires no stated exception.
6

7 **B. The “Nursing Father” Position**
8

9 The “Nursing Father” position doesn’t ask whether Christians can participate in the political
10 sphere. It assumes that but asks (and answers) the fundamentally different question of whether
11 the *Standards* as revised in 1788 envision a magistrate positively disposed toward Christianity
12 or one that is entirely neutral. This position holds that the 1788 revision purposefully retained
13 the language of “nursing fathers” from Isaiah 49:23 as it is applied to civil magistrates, saying
14 that “as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common
15 Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest.” This
16 language, they argue, affirms a positive (and not merely neutral) relationship between the
17 magistrate and the church. The magistrate is called to protect the church and not merely to
18 tolerate it.
19

20 Thus, some advocates of Christian Nationalism point to the 1788 revision as evidence that it
21 envisions a magistrate who is actively supportive of the Christian religion, provided he does
22 not favor one denomination over another. This reading should be understood in context. The
23 American Presbyterians who drafted the 1788 *Confession* did not envision a strictly secular
24 state; they assumed a society in which civil authorities recognized accountability to God and
25 were expected to govern according to principles in harmony with Christian moral order.
26

27 At the same time, the revisions reflected a deliberate narrowing of the magistrate’s authority
28 *circa sacra*. They removed powers that earlier formulations had assigned to civil authorities
29 (such as suppressing heresy, calling synods, or enforcing doctrinal conformity) while
30 affirming the magistrate’s duty to protect the free exercise of religion, including liberty of
31 conscience and the ability of Christians to worship freely. The magistrate was explicitly
32 denied the right to govern doctrine, worship, or discipline; preserving a clear distinction
33 between protection and governance. This approach drew on a mature Reformed engagement
34 with the limits of civil power, shaped by seventeenth and eighteenth-century debates over
35 Erastianism, Covenanter opposition to state interference, and insights from thinkers like John
36 Witherspoon, while leaving room for legitimate diversity in interpretation and application.
37

38 A PCA officer who holds the position that the civil magistrate has a duty to protect the church
39 and to foster an environment favorable to Christianity, without preferring any particular
40 denomination or interfering in the internal governance of churches, may or may not be
41 affirming the meaning of the 1788 *Confession*. There is no inherent problem with the “nursing
42 father” language; officers who choose to use this older language in a context where it may be
43 misunderstood should be transparent, however, about the precise nature of their views in order
44 that examining bodies may determine whether they are in accord with the meaning of the 1788

1 *Confession*. In the opinion of the Committee, this position would not normally require a stated
 2 exception.

3 4 **C. The Establishment Position (*WCF 1646 Position*)**

5
6 Some who identify as Christian Nationalists advocate for a return to the establishment
 7 principle as articulated in the 1646 *Westminster Confession*. This position holds that the civil
 8 magistrate has a duty to establish true religion in law, to suppress heresies and blasphemies,
 9 to reform the church when it falls into corruption, and to call ecclesiastical synods when
 10 necessary. This is the position held by many of the original Westminster Divines, by the
 11 Scottish Covenanters, and by such branches of the Presbyterian tradition such as the Reformed
 12 Presbyterian Church of North America (as stated with examples above).

13
14 As a matter of historical Reformed theology, this position has deep and respectable roots. It
 15 would be both historically dishonest and pastorally harmful to suggest that the establishment
 16 principle is heterodox, given that it was the dominant view of the Reformed tradition for more
 17 than two centuries and was held by some of the greatest theologians of the church.

18
19 Even so, the position is directly contrary to the text of the 1788 American revision of *WCF*
 20 23.3, which the PCA has adopted as its constitutional standard. The 1788 text explicitly states
 21 that the magistrate may not “in the least, interfere in matters of faith” and must protect all
 22 denominations “without giving the preference” to any above the rest. In the opinion of the
 23 Committee, a PCA officer who holds to the establishment principle as articulated in the 1646
 24 text is out of accord with the PCA’s *Standards* and must declare this difference to his
 25 examining body.

26
27 Whether the difference is tolerable under “good faith subscription” is a judgment that the
 28 courts of the church must make with due consideration. This Committee has opined that the
 29 1788 revision was a deeply considered revision of the Confession’s teaching on a significant
 30 doctrinal point but asserts here that there may be some variance of views regarding
 31 establishment that are not considered to strike at the vitals of religion and may therefore be
 32 acceptable to Presbyteries. These may touch on fundamental questions of religious liberty, the
 33 spirituality of the church, and the nature of Christ’s kingship. We also note again that the 1646
 34 position is held by some sister denominations in NAPARC (the North American Presbyterian
 35 and Reformed Council) and is not considered a barrier to inter-church cooperation at the
 36 denominational level. Presbyteries should weigh these considerations carefully and exercise
 37 their judgment with both fidelity to the *Standards* and charity toward brothers who hold a
 38 historic position.

39 40 **D. Theonomy and Theonomic Reconstruction**

41
42 Theonomic Reconstruction seeks to advance Old Testament civil law as the basis of
 43 contemporary civil government. The PCA hasn’t been entirely silent on this issue and has not
 44 condemned all theonomic positions as erroneous. In fact, the PCA has actually endorsed some

1 theonomic definitions. The minutes of the 7th General Assembly (1979), for example, have
2 this on page 115:

3
4 THEONOMY, Item 22. The definition of and recommendations regarding
5 theonomy.

6 **a.** That since the term "theonomy" in its simplest definition means "God's
7 Law", the General Assembly affirms the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,
8 Chapter 19, and Larger Catechism, Question 93-150, as a broad but adequate
9 definition of theonomy.

10 **b.** That no further study on the subject of theonomy be undertaken at the
11 General Assembly level at this time, but that individual Christians, sessions,
12 and presbyteries having particular interest be encouraged to study the subject
13 in a spirit of love, kindness, and patience.

14 **c.** That the General Assembly affirm that no particular view of the application
15 of the judicial law for today should be made a basis for orthodoxy or excluded
16 as heresy in so far as this is in accord with paragraph "a" above.

17 **d.** That the General Assembly encourage pastors and sessions to instruct their
18 people in the law of God and its application in a manner consistent with our
19 confessional Standards.
20

21 There was then a follow-up constitutional inquiry at the 11th General Assembly (1983), arising
22 from Gulf Coast Presbytery's questions about a specific candidate for ordination. That inquiry
23 produced three key clarifications. The first was that no view of theonomy is categorically
24 excluded from examination. The second was that no view of the judicial law contrary to *WCF*
25 19.4 is acceptable, and the third was that all views not contrary to *WCF* 19.4 are acceptable.
26 The 11th General Assembly also stated explicitly that the penal sanctions of Deuteronomy 13
27 applied to Israel's distinctive theocratic era and should not be enforced by modern states.
28

29 This is instructive for the present discussion because it establishes some boundaries for
30 evaluating proposals to align civil government with biblical law. The 7th General Assembly's
31 declaration is that the PCA distinguishes between affirming the abiding moral relevance of
32 God's law, which is confessionally required, and advocating for the direct imposition of Old
33 Testament civil and penal codes on modern states, which is forbidden. The Assembly's
34 endorsement of "theonomy" in its simplest sense as essentially synonymous with the
35 *Westminster Standards'* own teaching on God's law shows that the church supports the
36 conviction that God's moral law remains authoritative and ought to inform the Christian's
37 understanding of justice. At the same time, in the opinion of the Committee, the 11th General
38 Assembly's explicit rejection of applying Deuteronomy 13's penal sanctions to modern civil
39 government draws a clear constitutional line.
40

41 A candidate or officer who affirms that God's moral law provides general equity principles
42 relevant to civil justice operates well within confessional bounds. A candidate who argues that
43 the state should enforce the specific penal sanctions of the Mosaic judicial code (like capital
44 punishment for idolatry, blasphemy, or heresy) has, in our judgment, crossed a boundary that
45 the General Assembly has already established.

1
 2 This distinction maps directly onto the spectrum of Christian Nationalist positions. As opined
 3 above, those who argue that civil government should acknowledge God's moral authority and
 4 govern justly in light of natural and revealed law remain within the pale of confessional
 5 orthodoxy, while those who advocate for a reconstructed civil order built on the detailed
 6 judicial legislation of the Old Testament stand on the wrong side of a line the PCA drew over
 7 forty years ago. Presbyteries examining candidates who hold to Theonomic Reconstruction or
 8 Christian Nationalist views should therefore apply the test the General Assembly has already
 9 provided: does the candidate's position comport with the teaching of *WCF* 19.4, that the
 10 judicial laws of Israel "expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other
 11 now, further than the general equity thereof may require"? If so, the view is permissible. If the
 12 candidate insists that specific Mosaic civil penalties retain binding authority over modern
 13 nations, the position falls outside the confessional standard, not because of a novel
 14 determination, but because the PCA has already spoken to this question with considerable
 15 clarity.

16
 17 In short, the PCA has ruled that the *Confession's* language about "general equity"
 18 acknowledges that the principles underlying the Old Testament judicial laws may have
 19 continuing application, but it rejects the position that those laws are binding in their specific
 20 provisions upon modern states. The Committee believes therefore that a PCA officer who
 21 holds that Old Testament civil law is normative for modern states in its specific provisions (as
 22 opposed to its general equity) is out of accord with *WCF* 19.4 and should declare this
 23 difference to the relevant church court.

24 25 **E. Ethno-Nationalism and Racial Partiality**

26
 27 Some contemporary expressions of Christian Nationalism are intertwined with views about
 28 ethnic or racial identity. This conflation is such a serious concern that the 52nd General
 29 Assembly issued a statement condemning "any theological or political teaching which posits
 30 a superiority of race or ethnic identity born of immutable human characteristics," providing
 31 clear denominational guidance on the issue. The PCA also addressed racial reconciliation in
 32 a 2002 pastoral letter, a 2004 statement, a 2016 overture on racial reconciliation, and a 2018
 33 report on race.

34
 35 These actions apart, the Bible (and following Scripture, the *Standards*) are clear that God
 36 "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts
 37 17:26, cited in the *Larger Catechism's* treatment of the duties of the Sixth Commandment).
 38 The gospel proclaims that in Christ, ethnic divisions are transcended, saying, "There is neither
 39 Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one
 40 in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). It is the view of the Committee that any form of Christian
 41 Nationalism that elevates ethnic or racial identity to a position of theological significance, that
 42 treats ethnic homogeneity as a positive good to be pursued through civil law, or that justifies
 43 discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or race is inconsistent with the PCA's constitutional
 44 *Standards* and with Scripture.

1 The Committee wishes to distinguish carefully, however, between Ethno-Nationalism and the
2 fact that cultural and linguistic differences exist within the body of Christ. The PCA itself
3 maintains Korean-language Presbyteries, reflecting the practical reality that worship and
4 fellowship may be enriched when conducted in a shared language. We note, in this connection,
5 that the Director of MNA’s Korean-American Ministries is always careful to insist that these
6 are “PCA Korean language Presbyteries” and not “Korean Presbyteries”, in order to illustrate
7 that the existence of such structures does not imply ethnic superiority or exclusion. Instead, it
8 reflects the church’s mission to reach all people in their own languages and cultural settings.
9 Pastors and Sessions should be alert to the difference between healthy cultural expression in
10 church life and ideological commitments that elevate ethnicity to a position of theological or
11 political supremacy.

12 13 **V. The Spirituality of the Church Doctrine and Political Engagement**

14
15 Any discussion of the PCA Constitution and Christian Nationalism must address the doctrine
16 of the spirituality of the church. This doctrine, historically associated with the Southern
17 Presbyterian tradition and articulated by Thornwell (and others), holds that the church, as an
18 institution, is a spiritual body with a spiritual mission and should not pronounce on matters
19 outside its spiritual jurisdiction. The doctrine is reflected in *BCO* 3-4, which states:

20
21 The power which Christ has committed to His Church is not vested in the
22 special officers alone, but in the whole body. The Holy Scriptures are the only
23 rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may make laws to bind the
24 conscience. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, since the
25 Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and manners.

26
27 And *BCO* 3-2 further states:

28
29 This power, as exercised by the church, is exclusively spiritual; that of the Holy
30 Scripture in all questions of doctrine and duty.

31
32 The spirituality of the church doctrine has implications that lead in at least two directions. In
33 one, it urges that the institutional church ought not to make pronouncements on specific
34 questions of political arrangement or policy that go beyond the clear teaching of Scripture and
35 the *Standards*. For example, the church as church does not endorse candidates, propose
36 legislation, or advocate for specific forms of government. In the other, the doctrine does not
37 mean that Scripture has nothing to say about civil government, or that the church may not
38 teach what Scripture teaches about the duties of magistrates, the foundations of justice, or the
39 moral principles that should govern civil society. *WCF* 23 is itself a confession about civil
40 government, and teaching it is well within the church’s spiritual jurisdiction.

41
42 The spirituality of the church doctrine also does not prohibit individual Christians, including
43 ordained officers, from engaging in political life in their capacity as citizens. An elder who
44 runs for office, advocates for legislation consistent with Christian moral principles, or
45 participates in political organizations is not necessarily violating the doctrine of the spirituality

1 of the church as found in the Constitution of the PCA. Instead, he is exercising his calling as
 2 a citizen. The distinction to make is that between the institutional church acting as church
 3 (which is limited to its spiritual jurisdiction), and individual Christians acting as citizens
 4 (which is not so limited).

5
 6 Some proponents of Christian Nationalism have argued that the doctrine of the spirituality of
 7 the church has been misapplied in the PCA to create a false separation between faith and
 8 public life, and that it has sometimes been invoked to silence prophetic witness on issues
 9 where Scripture speaks clearly. This criticism is not without merit. The doctrine has at times
 10 been used as a pretext for the church’s failure to address clear moral evils, like the institution
 11 of slavery and its aftermath. The abuse of a doctrine, though, does not invalidate the doctrine
 12 itself or its proper use. Correctly understood, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church
 13 protects both the church from politicization, and the state from ecclesiastical overreach. It is
 14 a constitutional principle that serves the PCA well and should not be discarded in the name of
 15 greater political engagement.

16 **A. Two Kingdoms Theology**

17
 18
 19 Related to—but distinct from—the spirituality of the church doctrine is the Two Kingdoms
 20 theology espoused by some in the Reformed tradition who draw on the thought of Augustine,
 21 Luther, and Calvin to distinguish between the spiritual kingdom of Christ (governed by the
 22 Word and Spirit through the church) and the civil or common kingdom (governed by God’s
 23 providence through natural law and common grace). In this view, the church’s mission is
 24 fundamentally spiritual, and the civil realm operates according to principles of natural law
 25 that are accessible to believers and unbelievers alike.

26
 27 Beyond the 1788 revision’s careful distinction between the church’s spiritual jurisdiction and
 28 the magistrate’s civil authority, the PCA’s constitutional position is not tied to any single
 29 formulation of the relation between church and state. Critics sometimes argue that
 30 emphasizing this distinction portrays the civil sphere as neutral and underplays Christ’s
 31 lordship over all of life. Within the Reformed tradition, this remains a matter of theological
 32 discussion rather than settled consensus. What the PCA’s *Standards* make clear is that the
 33 institutional church and the civil magistrate operate within distinct jurisdictions, that the
 34 magistrate may not interfere in matters of faith, and that civil authorities retain responsibility
 35 for piety, justice, public order, and the protection of religious liberty.

36
 37 In the judgment of the Committee, PCA officers may hold a range of positions on the
 38 relationship between natural law and revealed law in the civil sphere, on the extent to which
 39 the magistrate is bound by the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, and on
 40 the degree to which Old Testament models of civil governance provide guidance for
 41 contemporary societies. The *Standards* themselves assume that the magistrate rules under God
 42 and is accountable to God (*WCF* 23.1), that the magistrate’s purpose includes maintaining
 43 piety as well as justice and peace (*WCF* 23.2), and that Christians may and should participate
 44 in civil government (*WCF* 23.2). The Committee opines that these affirmations are consistent

1 with a range of positions on the specific mechanisms by which Christian convictions should
2 be brought to bear on civil law.

3 4 **B. Relationship Between *WCF* 19.4 and the Civil Magistrate**

5
6 An important but sometimes overlooked provision in the PCA’s constitutional *Standards* is
7 *WCF* 19.4, which addresses the judicial laws given to Israel as a political entity. The
8 *Confession* states that:

9
10 To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired
11 together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than
12 the general equity thereof may require.

13
14 This provision is significant for the Christian Nationalism debate because it directly addresses
15 the question of how Old Testament civil law relates to the modern nation-state. The
16 *Confession* makes three affirmations: first, that the judicial laws were given to Israel as a
17 political entity and not merely as a spiritual community; second, that these laws have expired
18 and do not bind other nations; and third, that the underlying moral principles (i.e., the “general
19 equity”) of these laws may have continuing application.

20
21 The phrase “general equity” has been the subject of debate. Some writers interpret it narrowly,
22 holding that only the most fundamental moral principles underlying the judicial laws have
23 continuing relevance. Others interpret it more broadly, arguing that the civil laws of Israel,
24 while not binding in their specific form, provide substantial guidance for modern legislation.
25 It is the view of the Committee that both readings can be held within the PCA, provided the
26 officer affirms that the judicial laws have “expired” and do not “oblige any other now” in their
27 specific provisions. However, the Committee concludes that an officer who holds that the
28 Mosaic judicial laws are directly binding on modern states is at variance with *WCF* 19.4 and
29 must declare this as a difference to the *Standards* of the church.

30
31 This provision also illustrates the important constitutional principle that the PCA’s *Standards*
32 themselves provide the resources to address many of the questions raised by Christian
33 Nationalism. Officers and members who invest time in studying the *Standards* will find that
34 the Westminster divines and their American revisers gave considerable thought to questions
35 of civil government, religious liberty, the relationship between the moral law and civil law,
36 and the proper limits of magisterial authority. The answers they provided may not satisfy
37 everyone, but they represent a carefully considered constitutional framework that deserves
38 sustained engagement.

39 40 **VI. The 1788 Revision as a Point of Historical Demarcation**

41
42 The Committee wishes to call particular attention to a point of historical and theological
43 significance that is often overlooked in contemporary debates about Christian Nationalism.
44 The 1788 revision of the *Westminster Confession* represents a genuine turning point in
45 Reformed thought on church-state relations. Before 1788, the establishment principle was the

1 majority position (as stated above). After 1788, at least within American Presbyterianism, a
 2 new consensus emerged that rejected significant elements of the establishment principle in
 3 favor of a more robust commitment to religious liberty and the voluntary principle in religion.
 4

5 This historical observation has important pastoral implications. When we encounter Christians
 6 today who advocate for a closer relationship between church and state—whether they call
 7 themselves Christian Nationalists, theocrats, establishmentarians, or simply concerned
 8 citizens who want to see Christian values reflected in law—we have to remember that many
 9 of these positions were held by the theological giants of our own tradition. The Westminster
 10 Divines themselves held views on the civil magistrate that no PCA officer could affirm
 11 without exception today. John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, and George Gillespie
 12 all held positions that are, in important respects, at variance with the PCA’s 1788
 13 constitutional *Standard*.
 14

15 This does not mean that the 1788 revision was wrong. It is beyond the scope of the task
 16 entrusted to this Committee to adjudicate between the theological merits of 1646 and 1788.
 17 But it does mean that pastors and Sessions must exercise considerable pastoral sensitivity
 18 when engaging with people who hold pre-1788 convictions on church and state. People
 19 holding such convictions cannot be dismissed as novelty-seekers or political extremists. They
 20 are frequently serious thinkers who have done careful historical and theological study,
 21 concluding that the older position is more faithful to Scripture.
 22

23 The pastoral challenge is to honor the historic Reformed tradition’s breadth on this question
 24 while maintaining the integrity of the PCA’s constitutional commitments. Again, in the
 25 opinion of the Committee, an officer who holds to the 1646 position should declare his
 26 difference honestly and submit to the judgment of his examining body. A member who holds
 27 such a view should be welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ whose political theology
 28 differs from the denomination’s constitutional *Standard* but not from the bounds of orthodoxy.
 29 A visitor who is exploring these questions should find in our churches a place where honest
 30 inquiry is encouraged and where the full scope of the Reformed tradition is acknowledged,
 31 even as the PCA’s own constitutional commitments are clearly taught.
 32

33 **VII. Pastoral Guidance for Sessions and Presbyteries**

34
 35 Based on the foregoing assessment, the Committee offers the following pastoral guidance to
 36 Sessions and Presbyteries as they engage with questions related to Christian Nationalism.
 37

38 **A. For Sessions Regarding Visitors and Attendees**

- 39
 40 1. Welcome all visitors regardless of their political theology. The church’s
 41 doors should be open to anyone who wants to hear the gospel. Political
 42 convictions, including those related to Christian Nationalism, are generally
 43 not an adequate basis for excluding a person from attending worship or
 44 participating in the life of the congregation unless the activities become
 45 divisive or disruptive.

2. Be prepared to engage visitors' questions about church-state relations with theological substance. It appears that many people drawn to Christian Nationalism are reacting to genuine cultural crises and seeking a historically grounded Christian response. Elders should be able to articulate what the *Standards*, as confessed by the PCA, teach on these matters, and should be familiar with the broader Reformed tradition's engagement with these questions.
3. Become capable of distinguishing between various expressions of Christian Nationalism. Don't assume that a visitor who expresses interest in (or even sympathy for) Christian Nationalism holds extreme or objectionable views. Ask questions, listen carefully, and engage with the specific arguments the person makes rather than adopting labels or stereotypes.
4. Be alert to views that cross the line from legitimate political theology into ethnic partiality, racial superiority, or the idolatrous conflation of nation and kingdom. Address them directly and biblically, but pastorally.

B. For Sessions Regarding Members

1. Remember that membership vows don't require agreement with the *Westminster Standards* on the civil magistrate or on any other specific doctrine. Members are held only to a standard of Christian faith and life—not to confessional subscription.
2. Shepherd members who hold strong views on Christian Nationalism (whether they're for it or against it) with patience and objectivity. The peace and purity of the church are best served when Sessions refuse to allow political theology to become a litmus test for fellowship.
3. Address behavior and not just opinions. A member who holds the 1646 view of the magistrate but worships faithfully, supports the church, and lives peaceably with fellow members should not be subject to marginalization or judicial discipline. Even so, a member who disrupts the peace and unity of the congregation, refuses to submit to lawful authority, or promotes divisive ideologies within the church requires wise and forthright correction.
4. Teach the PCA's *Standards* on the civil magistrate as part of regular instruction. Many members are simply unfamiliar with what the *Confession* has to say on these matters; after all, it was the elders of the PCA themselves who requested the advice of this Committee for that apparent reason. Regular, faithful teaching of the *Standards*, including the

1 historical context of the 1788 revision, will equip members to think clearly
 2 about the relationship between their faith and their civic responsibilities.
 3

4 **C. For Courts Regarding Officers** 5

- 6 1. Examine candidates thoroughly on their views regarding the civil magistrate
 7 and church-state relations. In the current cultural moment, these questions
 8 aren't merely academic. They bear on how an officer will teach, counsel,
 9 and lead. Presbyteries should ask candidates directly about their views on
 10 *WCF* 23 and its correlations and should not allow candidates to avoid the
 11 question.
 12
- 13 2. Require candidates who hold to the 1646 view of the civil magistrate, or to
 14 any form of Christian Nationalism that entails the magistrate's authority to
 15 suppress heresies, reform the church, or interfere in matters of faith, to
 16 declare this as a stated difference from the *Standards*. The 1788 text is the
 17 PCA's constitutional *Standard*, and honesty about one's relationship to that
 18 text is essential to the integrity of the subscription process.
 19
- 20 3. Evaluate declared differences with charity as well as rigor. The question
 21 isn't whether the 1646 position is historically respectable or whether it has
 22 been held by godly men, but whether it's consistent with the system of
 23 doctrine that PCA officers have vowed to uphold. Presbyteries are called to
 24 exercise their judgment on this question as they are on most others,
 25 recognizing that reasonable men may disagree on some issues.
 26
- 27 4. Do not conflate all forms of Christian Nationalism with the establishment
 28 principle. An officer who believes that Christians should seek to influence
 29 civil law according to natural law and biblical moral principles is not in
 30 tension with the *Standards*. An officer who advocates for the magistrate's
 31 duty to suppress heresies is in tension with the *Standards*. Presbyteries must
 32 make fine distinctions and should resist the temptation to treat "Christian
 33 Nationalism" as a single proposition that can be accepted or rejected.
 34
- 35 5. Be vigilant with respect to views that incorporate ethnic partiality or racial
 36 superiority. The 52nd General Assembly's condemnation of such teaching
 37 provides clear guidance establishing our agreement that these views are not
 38 merely a stated difference from the *Standards*; they're contrary to Scripture
 39 and to the gospel itself. A candidate who holds such views is not qualified
 40 for office in the PCA
 41
- 42 6. Recognize the distinction between a man's fitness for office in the PCA and
 43 his standing as a Christian. A Presbytery or Session that determines that a
 44 candidate's views on the civil magistrate are incompatible with subscription
 45 to the PCA's *Standards* is not making a judgment about the man's salvation,

1 his orthodoxy, or his fitness for ministry in other Reformed communions. It
2 is making a judgment about his fitness to serve as an officer in a
3 denomination that has adopted a particular constitutional standard on these
4 questions. This distinction should be communicated clearly and graciously
5 to both the candidate and the wider church. Just as the PCA would not ordain
6 a man who holds to consubstantiation, even though a respected reformer
7 like Martin Luther held to it, so the PCA may determine that a man's views
8 on the magistrate, while historically respectable, are incompatible with the
9 specific biblical and theological commitments necessary for PCA officers.

10 **D. Advice for Navigating Conversations About Christian Nationalism**

11
12
13 The Committee recognizes that conversations about Christian Nationalism can become heated
14 and sometimes deeply personal. Political convictions aren't always and only intellectual
15 positions; they can be intertwined with a person's sense of identity, community, and purpose.
16 Pastors and elders who engage in these conversations should keep these principles in mind:

17
18 First, listen before responding. A lot of people drawn to Christian Nationalism are responding
19 to genuine cultural crises like the marginalization of Christian moral convictions in public life,
20 the aggressive promotion of ideologies that are hostile to the Christian faith, and the sense that
21 the church has retreated from the public square at precisely the moment when its voice is most
22 needed. These concerns are legitimate even if one disagrees with the proposed solutions. An
23 elder who dismisses these concerns out of hand will be losing an opportunity to shepherd.

24
25 Second, don't be tempted to treat all political disagreement as a spiritual problem. A member
26 who holds views associated with Christian Nationalism is not necessarily in spiritual danger
27 any more than a member who holds strongly progressive political views. The court's concern
28 should be with how political convictions affect a person's walk with Christ, relationships
29 within the body, and participation in the life of the congregation—not with the political
30 convictions themselves.

31
32 Third, point people to the richness of the Reformed tradition. Many who are attracted to
33 Christian Nationalism are hungry for a theology that takes Christ's lordship over all of life
34 seriously. This includes government and politics. The Reformed tradition has myriad
35 resources on the subject, so elders who can connect people to these resources will find that
36 many of the legitimate concerns driving interest in Christian Nationalism can be addressed
37 within the framework of historic Reformed theology without the excesses or dangers that
38 sometimes accompany our immediate circumstances.

39
40 Fourth, keep the gospel central. In every political era, there can be the temptation on all sides
41 to allow political convictions to overshadow the ministry of the Word and sacraments. The
42 church's primary mission is not to reform civil government but to proclaim the good news of
43 Jesus Christ, to make disciples of all nations, and to administer the means of grace. A church
44 that loses sight of this mission in pursuit of the political influence emanating from either pole
45 is adrift. The PCA's constitutional *Standards*, with their careful distinction between the

1 spiritual jurisdiction of the church and the civil jurisdiction of the magistrate, provide a
2 framework for maintaining this priority.

3 4 **VIII. Conclusions**

5
6 This section of the report has sought to provide a thorough, fair, and constitutionally grounded
7 analysis of the relationship between the PCA’s Constitution and the various positions held
8 under the heading of “Christian Nationalism.” Based on this analysis, the Committee offers
9 the following conclusions:

- 10
11 1. The PCA’s constitutional standard on the civil magistrate is the 1788 American
12 revision of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. This revision represents a
13 substantive change from the 1646 original, particularly with respect to the
14 magistrate’s authority in matters of religion. Officers in the PCA are bound to the
15 1788 text by their ordination vows.
- 16
17 2. The 1646 *Westminster Confession’s* view of the civil magistrate, including the
18 establishment principle, is a historic and honored position within the Reformed
19 tradition. It was held by many Reformed theologians and churches from the
20 sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It is currently held by some sister
21 denominations within NAPARC. While at variance with the PCA’s constitutional
22 standard, it’s not heterodox, sub-Christian, or outside the bounds of the Reformed
23 tradition.
- 24
25 3. “Christian Nationalism” isn’t a single position and shouldn’t be treated like one.
26 The spectrum of views bearing the label ranges from positions that are fully
27 consistent with the PCA’s constitutional standards to positions that are clearly in
28 tension with them. Pastoral wisdom requires careful attention to what a person
29 actually believes, not to the label they use or the label others apply to them.
- 30
31 4. Any form of Christian Nationalism that incorporates ethnic partiality, racial
32 superiority, or the idolatrous conflation of national identity with the kingdom of
33 God is contrary to Scripture, to the *Westminster Standards*, and to the gospel. The
34 PCA has spoken clearly and repeatedly on this point, and Sessions and Presbyteries
35 should enforce these *Standards* with conviction.
- 36
37 5. PCA officers who hold to the establishment principle or to other positions that
38 entail the civil magistrate’s authority in matters of faith must declare these as stated
39 differences from the *Standards*. Presbyteries and Sessions must evaluate these
40 differences in accordance with the “Good Faith Subscription” framework in *BCO*
41 21-4.
- 42
43 6. PCA members aren’t required to subscribe to the *Westminster Standards*, and their
44 membership can’t be conditioned upon agreement with the PCA’s constitutional
45 position on the civil magistrate. Members who hold to the 1646 position, or to

- 1 other views associated with Christian Nationalism, are welcome as brothers and
2 sisters in Christ, provided they live peaceably within the congregation and submit
3 to its government and discipline.
4
- 5 7. Visitors are welcome regardless of their political theology. The church’s mission
6 is to proclaim the gospel to all people, and no one should be turned away from our
7 doors because of their views on church-state relations.
8
- 9 8. The spiritual nature of the church’s mission, properly understood, protects both the
10 church from politicization and the state from ecclesiastical overreach. It does not
11 prohibit individual Christians from engaging in political life or from bringing their
12 convictions to bear on public questions. Sessions and presbyteries should teach
13 this doctrine and resist both the temptation to weaponize it against prophetic
14 witness and the temptation to abandon it in pursuit of political influence.
15
- 16 9. Pastors and Sessions should invest in thorough, regular teaching of the PCA’s
17 *Standards* on the civil magistrate, religious liberty, and the relationship between
18 church and state. In a time of cultural ferment and political polarization, the
19 church’s greatest asset is a congregation equipped with deep theological resources
20 for engaging these questions with wisdom, conviction, and charity.
21
- 22 10. The PCA should approach this entire discussion with humility, recognizing that
23 our own tradition has evolved significantly on these questions and that Christians
24 of good faith continue to disagree. The unity of the church is not founded on
25 political agreement but on our common confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. Our
26 constitutional standards provide a framework for navigating disagreement with
27 integrity, and our calling is to use that framework faithfully as we seek to be a
28 denomination that is both confessionally faithful and pastorally wise.

CONCLUSION

1
2
3 The *Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism* was appointed by the 52nd General
4 Assembly in response to the requests of Teaching and Ruling Elders and local churches who
5 expressed an urgent need for assistance in discerning the biblical fidelity, confessional
6 consistency, and missiological utility of Christian Nationalism.

7
8 The Committee determined that it was beyond the scope of our responsibility to engage with
9 every issue presented by the current debate on this topic, much less to attempt to produce a
10 comprehensive political theology on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in America. Instead,
11 with our focus on the pastoral needs of the denomination, we resolved to identify what, in our
12 judgment, represented the permissible boundaries of confessional commitment according to
13 our Constitution.

14
15 While this is only a *Partial Report*, nevertheless, the *Pastoral Letter*, the *Affirmations and*
16 *Denials*, and the *Constitutional and Pastoral Guidance* sections reflect the considered
17 conclusions of the whole Committee, having worked diligently to come to agreement around
18 these important points. The Committee wishes to commend these conclusions to the
19 Presbyterian Church in America, in the conviction that they reflect the historic theological
20 consensus of our tradition and will continue to promote the peace and purity of the church.

21
22 The Committee has worked diligently to produce supporting appendices that we believe will
23 provide vital supporting information and serve as a helpful resource to the church.
24 Nevertheless, despite our best efforts, these appendices remain incomplete, and the Committee
25 did not wish to provide the Assembly with unsatisfactory work. It is our hope that the
26 Assembly will find useful the partial material provided here, which forms what will be the
27 heart of our *Report*, and extend some grace to the Committee as we work to bring the
28 remaining work to a satisfactory conclusion.

29
30 We offer this *Partial Report* to our denomination, and to the broader family of churches of
31 which the Presbyterian Church in America is a member, with the earnest prayer that by it the
32 Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, might be honored, his servants edified,
33 and his kingdom advanced.