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2
3 **COMPLAINT OF TE JAMES JONES, ET.AL.**
4 **VS.**
5 **LOUISIANA PRESBYTERY**
6 **SJC 2007-8**
7

8 TE James Jones brought this complaint pursuant to *BCO* 43-1 against the judgment of Louisiana
9 Presbytery in declaring that TE Steve Wilkins' teaching gave "no strong presumption of guilt"
10 by being out of accord with the Constitution of the PCA. Mr. Jones was joined in his complaint
11 by RE Taylor Mayes, TE Paul Lipe, RE R. Ellis Smith, RE Albert Christman, RE Troy Richards,
12 and RE Walter Huffman, all of Louisiana Presbytery. The review and decision of the SJC panel
13 follows.
14

15 **I. SUMMARY OF THE FACTS**
16

- 17 1. On April 9, 2005, Louisiana Presbytery (LAP) received a preliminary study report from its
18 own study committee on Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology (FV/AAT), and in
19 particular the teachings of TE Steve Wilkins. The preliminary report was received and
20 adopted by LAP (ROC 2006-2; p. 11). At its April 9, 2005 stated meeting, LAP appointed
21 a study committee to examine TE Steve Wilkins concerning his Federal Vision theology
22 and teachings (ROC 2006-2; pp. 21-23).
23
- 24 2. On July 6, 2005, the LAP FV/AAT study committee examined TE Wilkins by telephone
25 interview and via emails (ROC 2006-2; pp. 21-23).
26
- 27 3. At the stated meeting of LAP on July 16, 2005, the FVAAT study committee reported its
28 investigation of TE Wilkins. The LAP adopted the final report of the study committee,
29 "Louisiana Presbytery Report on Federal Vision Theology." (ROC 2006-2, pp. 6-9) LAP
30 exonerated TE Wilkins finding him "to be within the bounds of the *Confession* at this
31 time," and declaring him to be "publicly exonerated by Louisiana Presbytery and declared
32 to be faithful to the *Confessional Standards* of the PCA." (ROC 2006-2; p. 9)
33
- 34 4. On January 28, 2006, the PCA Stated Clerk's office received a Memorial from Central
35 Carolina Presbytery (CCP). After several pages of "whereas" the Memorial requested the
36 following:
37

38 Therefore, be it resolved that the Central Carolina Presbytery of the PCA sends this
39 Memorial to the SJC of the PCA to assume original jurisdiction over the investigation
40 of TE Steven Wilkins' teaching, in order to preserve the PCA's commitment to sound
41 doctrine, protect our reputation for faithfulness to God's Word, and secure peace
42 within our denomination.
43

44 Additionally, in the event the SJC declines to accept original jurisdiction over the
45 investigation of TE Steven Wilkins' teaching, then the CCP hereby petitions the SJC
46 to cite Louisiana Presbytery to appear per *BCO* 40-5 and SJC Manual 16. (ROC
47 2006-2; pp. 17-20).
48

- 1 5. In its March 2-3, 2006 stated meeting, the SJC declined the request from CCP to assume
2 original jurisdiction, but found the second part of the CCP Memorial in order and cited
3 LAP to appear at the October 2006 SJC meeting, in accordance with *BCO* 40-5. A three-
4 man committee of the SJC was appointed to help the SJC prepare for that meeting.
5
- 6 6. On April 3, 2006, the SJC cited LAP to appear before it at its October 2006 stated meeting
7 in Atlanta, Georgia. LAP appointed TE Howard Davis as its representative.
8
- 9 7. On behalf of the LAP, TE Howard Davis filed an objection to the SJC's citation on August
10 15, 2006. His objections were four-fold:
 - 11 a. Materials were sent to the SJC that were not submitted by the LAP.
 - 12 b. SJC members must not consider materials other than the relevant documents
13 attendant to the CCP Memorial.
 - 14 c. CCP did not request an investigation of LAP by the SJC.
 - 15 d. In handling the Memorial, the SJC may handle only "matters of process,
16 procedure or proceedings."
17
- 18 8. The SJC committee presented to the SJC a proposed "report of the Ad Hoc committee of
19 SJC case 2006-2" on September 27, 2006. In that report the committee answered TE
20 Davis' objections and set forth a proposed set of guidelines for questioning the LAP
21 representative at the October meeting of the SJC.
22
- 23 9. On October 19, 2006 at its stated meeting, the SJC met with LAP representative, TE H.
24 Davis, at the Old Peachtree PCA church in Duluth, GA. In that meeting the SJC denied TE
25 Davis' objections and specified the following amends (vote 17-0).
26

27 That, as Louisiana Presbytery has not completed an adequate examination of TE
28 Wilkins' views, the SJC hereby finds that the matters be redressed (*BCO* 40-5, para.
29 2, clause 1; cf., SJCM 16.9(a); *BCO* 14-6, a-b) by the following:

- 30 a. That LAP, as a court, examine TE Wilkins on the specific concerns raised
31 by the CCP Memorial and matters raised herein; that this examination be
32 conducted in the light of the theology and concepts of the *WCF* and *Larger*
33 and *Shorter Catechism*, which are "standard expositions of the teachings of
34 Scripture in relation to both faith and practice" (*BCO* 29-1, 39-3); and that
35 this examination be conducted after Presbytery has made itself familiar with
36 all writings referenced by the CCP Memorial as well as pertinent published
37 materials containing TE Wilkins' views on matters raised herein.
- 38 b. That this examination be recorded, and in light of the seriousness of the
39 issues, that the examination should be transcribed, and that the Presbytery
40 and any committee charged to help Presbytery prepare for the examination
41 keep full and accurate records and minutes.
- 42 c. That LAP formally determine whether TE Wilkins has changed his views on
43 the areas specified in the Memorial since his ordination (*BCO* 21-5, vow 2).
- 44 d. That Presbytery adopt formal responses to the specific concerns raised in the
45 Memorial, with rationale and evidence for those responses.
- 46 e. That Presbytery specifically note any area of TE Wilkins' views or his
47 choice of terms to explain his views that are inconsistent with *The*
48 *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* (*BCO*

1 29-1, 39-3) and how it will require TE Wilkins to redress those
2 inconsistencies (*BCO* 21-5, vow 4).

- 3 f. That these directives be accomplished and reported to the SJC no later than
4 February 16, 2007, for final review.
5

6 Finally, the SJC reminds LAP that, should it find that it cannot comply with the
7 stipulations of this redress, it may request by Reference (*BCO* 41-3) that the GA
8 assume jurisdiction in the matter.
9

10 10. On December 8, 2006, TE Steve Wilkins provided to LAP a written response to questions
11 about his teachings and the FV/AAT (ROC 2007-8; pp. 31-66), in addition to a written list
12 of his exceptions to *The Westminster Standards* (ROC 2007-8; p. 14). The written
13 questions were put to him by members of LAP and gathered by TE Davis, chairman of the
14 Examinations and Candidates Committee. (ROC 13).
15

16 11. On December 9, 2006, at a called meeting LAP re-examined TE Steve Wilkins, in an oral
17 exam, at Pineville PCA Church, Pineville, LA (ROC 2007-9; pp. 67-186). This was a *BCO*
18 31-2 investigation of allegations. During this meeting, but prior to the exam, a motion was
19 made by TE James Jones to refer the investigation/examination of TE Wilkins to the
20 General Assembly and the SJC. The motion was defeated. The LAP Examinations and
21 Candidates Committee was tasked to prepare a report based on the exam, which was to be
22 submitted for final approval at their stated meeting six weeks later.
23

24 12. On January 20, 2007, at its stated meeting, LAP exonerated TE Wilkins for a second time,
25 stating that it “finds no strong presumption of guilt in any of the charges contained therein
26 and exercises its prerogative not to institute process regarding those allegations.” (ROC
27 2007-8; p. 15) LAP adopted, as grounds for its decision, the 37 pages of TE Wilkins’
28 written responses (ROC 31-66) and the 119 page transcript of his oral investigation (ROC
29 67-186).
30

31 13. On February 1, 2007, LAP requested an extension to the SJC’s February 16 deadline to
32 provide a rationale for its decision of January 20 to exonerate TE Wilkins, with a revised
33 due date of April 28, 2007. This request was granted. The response was timely received
34 and included in the ROC. (ROC 2007-08; p.187-206)
35

36 14. On February 15, 2007, TE James Jones filed a complaint with LAP stating that LAP erred
37 in exonerating TE Wilkins. His complaint voiced three concerns (summarized below):
38

- 39 a. The deep division in LAP over TE Wilkins examination (13 to sustain; 8 to not
40 sustain) reflected the need to refer the matter to the General Assembly.
41 b. In the examination, TE Wilkins redefined biblical and *Confessional* terms before
42 giving his assent to the teachings of Scripture and *The Westminster Standards*.
43 TE Wilkins maintains that the *Bible* and *The Westminster Standards* teach
44 differing doctrines.
45 c. In his examination, TE Wilkins displayed serious variances with *The Westminster*
46 *Standards* in the areas of election, perseverance and apostasy, the doctrine of the
47 visible/invisible church, assurance and baptism (ROC 2007-8; p.16).
48

- 1 15. On February 20, 2007, TE Howard Davis filed a dissent with LAP concerning its
2 exoneration of TE Wilkins (ROC 2007-08; p.17).
3
- 4 16. On April 21, 2007, at its stated meeting, LAP denied the Complaint of TE Jones and
5 appointed TE Mark Duncan as its representative, although the Complaint to the GA of TE
6 Jones is dated May 1 and received by the SJC on May 7 (ROC pp. 01, 16).
7
- 8 a. LAP also adopted a 20-page “Rationale for Louisiana Presbytery’s Decision
9 Regarding the Vindication of TE Steven Wilkins” as “reflecting the basis of a
10 majority of Presbyters who found no strong presumption of guilt of TE Steve
11 Wilkins being out of accord with the Confessional standards” and instructed it be
12 sent to the SJC. (ROC 16 & 187-206).
13
- 14 b. At this same meeting, LAP appointed TE Mark Duncan to respond to the dissent
15 of TE Howard Davis. This response is included in the ROC, pages 24-30.
- 16 17. On May 7, 2007, TE James Jones filed his complaint with the Stated Clerk of General
17 Assembly and the SJC. Added to that complaint were the names of RE Taylor Mayes, TE
18 Paul Lipe, RE Ellis Smith, RE Albert Christian, RE Troy Richards and RE Walter Huffman
19 (ROC 2007-8; pp. 1-4).
20
- 21 18. On May 22, 2007, TE Mark Duncan, on behalf of LAP, responded to the dissent of TE
22 Howard Davis. LAP answered the dissent in the negative, stating that “the conclusion of
23 the matter is that the Louisiana Presbytery continues to see no strong presumption of guilt
24 that TE Steve Wilkins is in violation of his ordination vow concerning fidelity to *The*
25 *Westminster Standards.*” (ROC 2007-8; pp. 24-30)
26
- 27 19. On July 5, 2007, the SJC assigned a panel to adjudicate the complaint of TE Jones, et al.,
28 designated now as SJC case 2007-8.
29
- 30 20. On July 17, 2007, the SJC panel for case 2007-8 met for the first time via telephone
31 conference. The constituting meeting elected RE Tom Leopard as chairman, RE Steve
32 O’Ban as secretary, and directed TE Mike Ross to prepare a summary of the facts. TE
33 Steve Meyerhoff attended the conference as an alternate.
34
- 35 21. On July 23, 2007, the Panel Chairman notified the Parties and Panel Members by e-mail
36 that a hearing was scheduled for 10:00 AM, EDT at the Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel in
37 Atlanta, GA on Monday, September 10, 2007, and informed the Parties of their rights
38 under SJCM 11. The Parties and Panel members acknowledged by e-mail their receipt of
39 said notice.
40

41 **II. Statement of the Issues**

42

43 1) Did Louisiana Presbytery fail to apply the correct Constitutional standard when it
44 sought to determine whether TE Wilkins “may differ with *The Confession of Faith and*
45 *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions?” (*BCO* 21-4, *RAO* 16-3(e)(5))

46 2) Does the record support a probable finding that Louisiana Presbytery erred, and
47 thereby violated *BCO* 13-9.f, 40-4, and 40-5, when it failed to find a strong presumption of guilt
48 that some of the views of TE Steve Wilkins were out of conformity with the Constitutional
49 standards?

1
2 **III. Judgment**
3

4 1) Yes.

5 2) Yes.

6 Therefore the complaint is sustained; Presbytery's action of April 21, 2007, to deny the
7 complaint of TE Jones is annulled (*BCO* 43-10); and the Memorial from Central Carolina
8 Presbytery remains before the Standing Judicial Commission. [See the judgment in 2006-2 for
9 additional amends.]
10

11 **IV. Reasoning and Opinion**
12

13 It is the opinion of the Standing Judicial Commission that Louisiana Presbytery (LAP)
14 erred in two crucial and related ways. First, it failed to apply the proper Constitutional standard
15 for dealing with TE Wilkins' differences. Second, it apparently failed adequately to guard the
16 Church from "erroneous opinions that injure the peace or purity of the Church." (*BCO* 13-9(f))

17 Presbytery's respondent argues in his supplemental brief that "Pastor Wilkins has served
18 Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church and Louisiana Presbytery faithfully for over 20 years. LAP
19 is in the unique position of judging Wilkins' views regarding the so called 'Federal Vision' in the
20 context of all of TE Wilkins' work." We agree that Presbytery is in a unique position to judge
21 TE Wilkins' views and work. However, *BCO* 39-3(4) reminds us that "higher court[s]...have the
22 power and obligation of judicial review, which cannot be satisfied by always deferring to the
23 findings of a lower court. Therefore, a higher court should not consider itself obliged to exhibit
24 the same deference to a lower court when the issues being reviewed involve the interpretation of
25 the Constitution of the Church. Regarding such issues, the higher court has the duty and
26 authority to interpret and apply the Constitution of the Church according to its best abilities and
27 understanding, regardless of the opinion of the lower court."

28 It is precisely such issues of Constitutional interpretation that are at stake in this case.
29 The issues in this case do not involve issues of fact (*BCO* 39-2) or issues of judgment (*BCO* 39-
30 3), either of which would require this court to exercise great deference toward the actions and
31 decisions of the Louisiana Presbytery. Instead, the critical issues in this case involve the proper
32 understanding of what it means to have a "difference" with the standards of our Constitution
33 (*BCO* 21-4, *RAO* 16-3(e)(5)), how to apply that meaning of "difference" in the examination of a
34 presbytery member's views, whether the LAP has properly applied that meaning, and whether
35 the circumstances presented in this matter give rise to a strong presumption of guilt that LAP has
36 failed to uphold the standards of our Constitution. We find the answer to each of these questions
37 to be "yes."
38

39 Judgment 1

40 In this matter, LAP's examinations of TE Wilkins and its defense of those examinations
41 have focused on whether TE Wilkins has or takes "exceptions" to the Constitution in his
42 teaching and preaching. In testimony before the LAP, TE Wilkins identified five "exceptions or
43 reservations" he has held since his ordination and brought these to the attention of the
44 Presbytery. Beyond these five areas, TE Wilkins repeatedly asserted that he did not consider any
45 of his views to be out of accord with the standards. Further, in his testimony he affirmed various
46 propositions of *The Westminster Confession* and asserted that he did not deny them.

47 Based primarily upon these assertions in his testimony, Presbytery's brief repeatedly
48 asserts that TE Wilkins claims no further exceptions, does not overtly deny or expressly
49 contradict the teaching of the confession and, therefore, cannot be found to be in violation of its

1 teaching (See, e.g. Preliminary Brief at I.1 and I.6). Similarly, the Presbytery’s answer to the
2 dissent of a presbyter to LAP’s decision not to bring process against TE Wilkins asserted that TE
3 Wilkins does not *contradict or deny* the teachings of the Confession. The standard adopted by
4 LAP suggests that an “exception” only occurs where the stated position of the party being
5 examined denies or contradicts the teaching of the Constitution. That standard is not in keeping
6 with our Constitution (see *BCO* 21-4 and *RAO* 16-3(e)(5)).

7 Further, the Presbytery argues once that party has asserted that his views are not out of
8 accord with the Constitutional standards, it is the responsibility of other parties to refute that
9 assertion – not the duty of the Presbytery to independently ascertain whether the party being
10 examined is correct. (Brief at I.3 – “CCP did not provide convincing evidence that TE Wilkins is
11 out of accord....”). Again, this is not the standard of presbytery review required by our
12 Constitution.

13 Presbyteries are to determine whether a candidate or member has any *differences* with the
14 teaching of the Constitution. A difference does not require overt contradiction or denial. It can
15 arise when a member “quibbles” with the sufficiency of the exegesis underlying the proposition
16 of the Constitution. It may occur when a member redefines terms specifically defined in our
17 Constitutional standards. It can arise when a party describes the Constitution as “incomplete,
18 misleading, or inaccurate.” It occurs whenever a position is asserted that “differs” with the
19 authoritative exposition stated in our Constitutional standards.

20 Once a difference has been stated, or statements suggesting a difference exists are made,
21 the Presbytery has an affirmative duty to explore that difference and to decide whether the
22 difference is merely semantic, whether it is more than semantic but “not out of accord with any
23 fundamental of our system of doctrine”, or whether the stated difference is “out of accord” and
24 “hostile to our system” or strikes “at the vitals of religion.” (*RAO* 16-3(e)(5)). Louisiana
25 Presbytery, in its examinations of TE Wilkins, in its brief for this matter, and in its response to
26 the dissent filed against the actions complained of here, consistently failed to implement this
27 process as to differences raised by TE Wilkins’ statements in this matter.

28 In the brief of LAP, Presbytery’s representative states that “TE Wilkins teaches that *at*
29 *least in some sense* covenant members can be forgiven of sins and yet lose that forgiveness.”
30 (Brief at 4, emphasis in the original). The representative acknowledges TE Wilkins, “questions
31 the *usefulness* of the terminology “invisible” [with reference to the church].” (Brief at 6,
32 emphasis in the original). The Presbytery’s response to a dissent to its actions in this matter
33 states that, “TE Wilkins has affirmed that in some sense covenant members can have a ‘living
34 and vital’ relationship with God that can be lost....” (ROC at 1). Further, “in Wilkins’ teaching,
35 he affirms *The Confession* while at the same time maintaining that Scripture often uses the
36 language of salvation in a broader sense than does *The Confession* ... attempting to be faithful to
37 how the Bible describes the members of the visible covenant community.” (ROC at 3).

38 In each of these instances, *presbytery’s own description of TE Wilkins’ statements*
39 *established that TE Wilkins did state differences with The Confession. Presbytery was required*
40 *to investigate these differences and classify them under RAO 16-3(e)(5).* Rather than complying
41 with this affirmative responsibility, LAP asserted that TE Wilkins does not deny or contradict
42 teachings of the Constitutional standards and concluded that the standards have not been
43 violated. That conclusion was in error for two specific reasons:

44 First, as already discussed, it applies a non-Constitutional standard as to what constitutes
45 a “difference” – concluding that a difference only exists where the party being examined
46 contradicts or denies specific propositions of the Constitution. Our Constitution does not require
47 a party to directly deny or contradict a proposition before a “difference” exists. Disagreements
48 with wording, questions of arguments that exegesis allows for other meanings all constitute

1 differences. Where such differences arise, the Presbytery must evaluate them according to RAO
2 16-3(e)(5).

3 Second, that duty to evaluate the difference rests squarely on the shoulders of the
4 Presbytery. It may not defer to the examined party's claim that his view is not in conflict with
5 the Constitution; Presbytery must make that determination on its own. It may not transfer the
6 duty to prove that the difference contradicts the standards to third parties – such as those who
7 raise the question with it. Where a difference has been brought to light, the Presbytery is obliged
8 to consider and evaluate the difference against the Constitution itself.

9 Concerning this duty to evaluate differences, our *Book of Church Order* contemplates
10 specific situations where the duty arises for a presbytery – at the beginning of a member's
11 relationship with the presbytery (transfer, *BCO* 13-6 or candidacy/ordination, e.g. *BCO* 21-4),
12 when a member brings issues to his presbytery's attention of his own accord (*BCO* 21-5,
13 Ordination Vow 2), or when the matter is brought to the attention of the court from the outside
14 (*BCO* 31-2, 40-5, etc.). However, that duty is an ongoing responsibility of the presbytery. (*BCO*
15 13-9(f)). In whatever manner a difference comes to the attention of the presbytery, the
16 presbytery bears the burden and responsibility of investigation, discernment and judgment as to
17 the view of its member. (*BCO* 13-9, 13-11, and RAO 16-3(e)(5)). No other party has a "burden
18 of proof" to overcome before the presbytery is required to undertake its responsibilities to
19 evaluate the differences brought out. Where the presbytery fails in this duty, as in the matter
20 presently before us, it is the responsibility of the higher court to call it to account for the failure.

21 22 Judgment 2

23 *BCO* 13-9.f gives presbyteries the power and responsibility to "condemn erroneous
24 opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church." Further, *BCO* 40-4 states, "Courts may
25 sometimes entirely neglect to perform their duty, by which neglect heretical opinions or corrupt
26 practices may be allowed to gain ground." The record is clear that TE Wilkins expressed views
27 that differ at key points from the Constitutional standards. Given the nature of those apparent
28 differences, it is the conclusion of the Standing Judicial Commission that there is a strong
29 presumption from the record that Louisiana Presbytery did, in fact, neglect its duty to "condemn
30 erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church" when it found on January 20,
31 2007, "no strong presumption of guilt in any of the charges contained [in the Memorial from
32 Central Carolina Presbytery] and exercise[d] its prerogative not to institute process regarding
33 those allegations;" and when it acted on April 21, 2007, to deny the complaint of TE James
34 Jones, specifying as grounds "the written exam of TE Wilkins and his transcribed oral exam on
35 December 9, 2006, and the supporting rationale adopted by Presbytery this day...."

36 The following are examples of areas in which the stated views of TE Wilkins differ from
37 the Constitutional Standards and do so in ways that fairly raise questions as to whether the views
38 are hostile to the fundamentals of the system of doctrine.

39 40 Concerning election:

41 TE Wilkins, in his written questions for Presbytery, maintains that the *Confession*
42 uses the term election decretively, whereas the Bible uses the term covenantally. He notes
43 that "Paul and Peter do not appear to use the terms 'elect' and 'chosen' to apply
44 exclusively to those who were chosen to eternal salvation (i.e., in *The Westminster*
45 *Confession* sense). He then references certain Scripture passages to support this view, the
46 same Scripture passages used by the *WCF* to support 'decretal' election. In doing this, he
47 is asserting a difference between *The Standards'* view of election and that of Scripture.
48 This may rise to a level that strikes at the fundamentals of the system of doctrine. (ROC
49 37-38) (Cf. *WCF* 3.5-6)

1 He states that “Paul seems to be viewing those who are in the church as the elect.
2 And saying, you need to persevere there, don’t ever depart from Jesus, or you’re not
3 going to be one of the elect anymore because where you find the elect is the visible
4 church.” (ROC 110) This statement was part of his response to the question posed to him
5 regarding his written statement in the *Federal Vision* to the effect, “that the elect are
6 faithful in Jesus Christ, if they later reject the Savior they are no longer elect, they are cut
7 off from the Elect One and thus lose their elect standing.” (ROC 109) (Cf. *WLC* 64 and
8 65; 79)

9 Moreover, TE Wilkins holds that “those who are members of the body of the
10 Elect One [i.e. Christ] are viewed as ‘elect’ themselves.” (ROC 38) He often notes that
11 Scripture appears to use the word elect of those in the visible body of Christ. This appears
12 to stand in contradiction to *WLC* Q.64, that the elect are members of the invisible church.
13

14 Concerning Perseverance and Apostasy:

15 TE Wilkins holds that “when the Confession says that these non-elect people
16 ‘never truly come unto Christ,’ it means that they do not receive Christ with a faith that
17 perseveres unto final salvation.” (ROC 34) But this is not what *The Confession* says. It
18 says, they ‘never truly come unto Christ,’ not that they do not receive Christ with a
19 persevering faith (*WLC* 68).

20 TE Wilkins says that apostates are not saved “because they fail to persevere and
21 fall short of receiving the fullness of redemption as it is described in *WCF* 10-18.” This
22 statement appears to differ with the *Confession* which says that while they “may have
23 some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore
24 cannot be saved.” (*WLC* 168).
25

26 Concerning Visible/Invisible Church

27 TE Wilkins claims that “the invisible Church does not yet exist though it is surely
28 foreordained by God and will surely and certainly exist at the last day...” He also claims
29 “It seems better to speak of the ‘invisible’ church simply as the ‘eschatological church’ –
30 i.e., the church in its perfection as it will exist at the last day.” (ROC, p. 39b)

31 Speaking of the invisible church, TE Wilkins states that “if the invisible church
32 consists of the whole number of the elect, then it cannot itself exist except in the mind of
33 God, I mean God knows who’s going to come, but it can’t exist as an entity until that
34 whole number is brought together. ... it exists, but it exists in the form of the visible
35 church now...” (ROC, p. 124)

36 TE Wilkins’ statements appear to differ materially with *The Confession* that states
37 that the universal church which is invisible is also *presently* gathered under Christ as the
38 Head. (*WCF* XXV.I)
39

40 Concerning Baptism:

41 In his written answers to LAP, TE Steve Wilkins wrote the following:

42 “When I say ‘everyone who has been baptized is a Christian,’ I am speaking of
43 the objective covenantal reality – i.e., the one baptized has been baptized into the name of
44 the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and thus bears the name of the Triune God and has been
45 brought into covenant union with Christ by the power of the Spirit as Paul says in I Cor.
46 12:13. Paul doesn’t seem to view this as something true only for some of the baptised
47 [sic] but rather this is true for all (note v. 27 ‘Now you are the body of Christ, *and*
48 *members individually.*’)” (ROC, p. 63)

1 “Thus, baptism is a ‘sign’ in that by this means the Holy Spirit transfers the
2 baptized from union with the old Adam into Christ Jesus (The *Confession’s* scriptural
3 proofs cite Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:5 at this point), transferring him into Christ, the ‘new
4 creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, it is a sign and seal of regeneration (the proofs cite John
5 3:5; Titus 3:5 to prove this point). By the Spirit we are ‘given up unto God’ – i.e., bound
6 to walk in ‘newness of life’ (repenting of our sins, trusting and obeying the Savior all our
7 days).” (ROC, p. 56)

8 TE Wilkins’ statements in this written report are consistent with the quotations of
9 his views in the Memorial of Central Carolina Presbytery to the Standing Judicial
10 Commission, as follows:

11 “If someone has been baptized, he is in covenant with God.”

12 “Covenant is union with Christ.”

13 “Being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ.”

14 “Those who are in covenant have all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly
15 places.” (ROC, Memorial of CCP, p. 19).

16 Yet, the *WCF* 28.6 on the “efficacy of baptism” says that “the grace promised is
17 not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, *to such (whether*
18 *of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto*, according to the counsel of God’s own
19 will, in his appointed time.” TE Wilkins’ views appear to differ materially from the
20 teaching of the *WCF* on baptism.

21
22 Given the nature of these and other issues on which TE Wilkins appears to have
23 expressed differences from the positions of *The Westminster Standards*, and given the action of
24 Presbytery to find no strong presumption of guilt with regard to the issues raised in the
25 Memorial, and given the action of Presbytery to deny the complaint of TE Jones (and noting the
26 supporting rationale for that denial); and given Presbytery’s failure to explain how they
27 concluded TE Wilkins’ views are consistent with *The Westminster Standards* and do not strike at
28 the fundamentals of the system of doctrine (*BCO* 21-4) Presbytery has given the appearance that
29 it has failed to “condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church”
30 and, by this neglect may have allowed heretical opinions to gain ground.

31 In sum, it is the opinion of the Standing Judicial Commission that Louisiana Presbytery
32 erred in its interpretation of the proper standards and procedures for dealing with TE Wilkins’
33 expressed differences from *The Westminster* documents, which, as *BCO* 29-1 and 39-3 both note
34 are “accepted by the Presbyterian Church in America as standard expositions of the teachings of
35 Scripture in relation to both faith and practice.” Moreover, there is at least a strong presumption
36 that Presbytery erred in failing to condemn the views in question. Indeed, Presbytery’s citation,
37 without any *caveats* whatsoever, of the written and oral examinations of TE Wilkins as part of its
38 grounds for denying the complaint of TE Jones gives the appearance that Presbytery is
39 supportive of views such as those noted above, and it reinforces the concern that Presbytery has
40 failed to meet its Constitutional obligations as noted above. It is for these reasons that the
41 complaint is sustained and the judgment noted above is entered.

42
43 This opinion was written by TE Howell Burkhalter, TE Paul Fowler, TE Stephen Clark, TE
44 Dewey Roberts, RE Frederick Neikirk, RE Steven O’Ban and RE Tom Leopard
45 October 19, 2007