

Report of Forms and Confessions Committee

Introduction

This report marks the end of twelve years of work by this synodical committee charged with revising the liturgical forms used by our denomination and sourcing new translations of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort. The purpose of this final report is to provide a record of what the committee has been doing over these four inter-synodical periods and to update the synod on what we have done in during the last three years.

Before I do so I want to thank the other committee members who have persevered cheerfully on this committee, especially Dr Sally Davey who has served for this entire period and Mr Ed Havelaar, Rev Andrew Nugteren and Rev Robert van Wichen who have served for the past six years. Each one of these people has contributed significantly to this project and all have brought their unique gifts and contribution to the task. I can speak for all the committee in saying we have enjoyed the work and each one of us has benefited from this close study of our forms and confessions. As the convenor it has been a pleasure for me to serve on this committee with the other members. We also want to thank Rev Leo de Vos who came onto this committee in the last inter-synodical period to assist especially with the baptism forms. We have appreciated your contribution. Our thanks also to Rev Bruce Hoyt who has provided much helpful feedback on the liturgical forms, assisted with proof-reading and given us advice on layout.

This has not only been a long project but one that has required much careful and detailed attention to theology, words, syntax and grammar. It is our desire and prayer that the final result will serve the churches well in aiding our worship and in holding fast our doctrine for many decades to come, for the building up of the church to the glory of God.

Background

Synod 2002 decided to appoint a committee to update the language of our liturgical forms and assess any available language-updated versions of the Belgic and Westminster Confessions and the Canons of Dort. (Art 95). The following people were appointed: Rev John Haverland (convenor), Rev Paul Archbald, Rev John Rogers, Dr Sally Davey (adjunct). Our work on the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort was done by making a comparison of the edition we currently use with the newer editions that have been adopted by the Christian Reformed Church of America and the Canadian Reformed Churches. The committee recommended that we adopt the new translations of these two confessions completed by the Canadian Reformed Churches. Regarding the liturgical forms the committee made no substantial changes to the content or doctrine contained in any of the forms but confined the revision to more modern vocabulary at a few points, modified syntax and shorter sentences, and changed all the Scriptures references to the New International Version 1984 edition.

Synod 2005 made the following decisions: (Arts 119, 120 and 125)

- To approve the revision of the forms presented by the committee for provisional use.
- To appoint a committee to update the range of liturgical forms available for use in worship services.
- To reappoint the committee and charge it to continue its study of the Canadian Reformed Churches' translations of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort, interacting with the churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches and bring final recommendations to the next Synod.
- That our churches continue to use our current edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

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- That committee continue to search out and to evaluate updated versions of the WCF in consultation with our sister churches.

The following members were appointed to this committee: Rev John Haverland (convenor), Rev Paul Archbald, Dr. Sally Davey and Rev Peter Kloosterman.

Synod 2008 made the following decisions: (Art 106 and 109)

- That this committee be reappointed to continue its work of updating the range of liturgical forms available for use in worship services, paying particular attention to the work being done by the URC.
- That this committee provide sample forms for marriages and funerals as guidance for pastors.
- That this committee continue its study of the Canadian Reformed Churches translations of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort, interacting with the churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches and bring final recommendations to the next Synod.
- To approve the Modern English Study Version (MESV) of the WCF for study and use in our churches until the next synod.
- That the MESV does not have constitutional authority in our churches.

The following members were appointed to this committee: Rev John Haverland (convenor), Dr. Sally Davey, Mr Ed Havelaar, Revs Andrew Nugteren and Robert van Wichen.

Synod 2011 to 2014: Here we want to supply some further detail as to the process of our work so as to preserve a record of what we have done and why.

Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort

The Canadian Reformed committee responsible for the *Book of Praise* revised the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort so that all the Scripture quotations are from the NIV. We carefully reviewed these updated confessions comparing their new translations with our present English version and with the new translation of the Christian Reformed Church of America. While greatly appreciating the work done by the Canadian Reformed Churches we considered a few changes should be made. Between 2008 and 2011 we presented these to our churches for feedback and then incorporated most of these in the new translation.

Synod 2011 decided that the Canadian Reformed Churches translation of the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort be adopted by our churches, with the changes made by the committee, and that occasional footnotes be used in the creeds and confessions to clarify the meaning of words that are commonly misunderstood.

Westminster Confession of Faith and MESV

The Modern English Study Version (MESV) had its roots in an initiative by the 1971 synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America which proposed that the language of the confession be modernized without changing its meaning. A joint committee of the RPCNA, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Synod, and the OPC worked on this project for several years, completing a version of the confession in 1980. In 1989 the Committee on Christian Education of the OPC sent copies of this version to all ministers and sessions of their denomination for study and comments. In the light of comments received this version was carefully reviewed and revised. In 1991 this revision was sent to the ministers and sessions of the OPC, and in response to their suggestions the version was further refined. This work was completed in 1993, approved by the Committee on Christian Education, and authorized for publication by the OPC General Assembly. The MESV does not have any constitutional authority in the OPC and it not intended to take the place of the 1647 WCF in its form adopted by the OPC in 1956.

The RCNZ Synod 2011 decided to retain the Westminster Confession of Faith as our confessional standard to which all office-bearers must subscribe and to allow the MESV in the preaching and

teaching of our churches. Synod also decided that both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the MESV be printed in the final publication.

Ecumenical Creeds and the Lord's Prayer

The committee proposed a traditional version of the Lord's Prayer and an updated language version. Synod approved both of these for inclusion in the final book containing the forms and confessions.

Minor changes made to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds were approved including the addition of a footnote in each creed.

Form for Marriage and Funerals

Synod decided to endorse the marriage and funeral forms as guidance for pastors in conducting a marriage or a funeral.

Liturgical Forms

Revising all our liturgical forms and seeking to extend their range has been a large task and one we have sought to do carefully. Each form went through many revisions by the committee. As we completed each set of forms (between 2008 and 2011) we distributed them to the sessions for feedback. Quite a number of sessions responded with very helpful comments which we sought to incorporate.

During Synod 2011 the advisory committee recommended other minor changes and many of these were adopted by the synod. All the proposed forms as amended were approved for provisional use in our churches, with the exception of the Forms for the Baptism of the Children of Believers.

Synod asked the committee to forward all the provisionally approved forms to the sessions and to reconsider the baptism forms in the light of feedback received at Synod and then circulate these revised forms to the churches. The synod outlined a process by which the sessions and the presbyteries would evaluate the baptism forms. If all the Presbyteries concurred with the revisions then the baptism forms would be deemed to be provisionally approved for use in our churches (Acts of Synod 2011, Art 132). Synod also charged the committee to arrange for the publication of all the provisionally approved forms as finally modified by the committee.

During the past inter-synodical period the committee received further feedback from various sessions on details in the forms and made further revisions, sometimes inter-acting with a particular session. We have also carefully checked to see that all the changes agreed to by the synod have been incorporated into the forms and confessions, and have proof read all the documents a number of times. During the first part of 2014 Mr Ed Havelaar has been doing the layout in preparation for final publication. All this has been time-consuming work.

The Final Format of a Book of Form and Confessions

In our report to Synod 2011 we expressed our preference to have the approved forms and confessions in the back of *Sing to the Lord* so that everything would be in one book. We recognised, however, that this might make the book too large and unwieldy, in which case we recommended that the forms and confessions be printed in a separate book.

Our uncertainty was reflected in the discussions and decisions of synod 2011. At first synod decided to include the forms and confessions in the new hymnal (Art 48). On the last day of synod this decision was reconsidered and synod decided to include the provisionally approved liturgical forms in a supplementary booklet and to include the confessions in the new hymnal (Art 121).

As the *Sing to the Lord* committee came to the completion of its work our Forms and Confessions committee consulted with their convenor, Rev John Rogers, about the final shape of both books. Both committees agreed that to combine the confessions into *Sing to the Lord* would make the book too large and heavy and the two convenors of the two committees, Revs John Rogers and

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John Haverland, proposed that the Forms and Confessions be published in a separate book, and this was endorsed by the Synodical Interim Committee.

As I write this report in early June 2014 our committee is getting close to completing the layout and proof reading of this book containing *The Creeds, Confessions and Liturgical Forms of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*. We hope, Lord willing, to have an electronic copy of the book to the churches within the next month.

Mrs Elrike Hoyt, a member of the *Sing to the Lord* committee, has kindly agreed to guide and assist us through the process of publication. We don't know how long this process will take but we hope, Lord willing, to have the books available by the end of this year. We will give you an update at the synod in September.

Recommendations:

1. *That the Creeds, Confessions and Liturgical Forms as presented by the committee be approved.*
2. *That the committee be discharged.*

Rev John A Haverland

Convenor