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COMMITTEE ON THE BELGIC CONFESSION AND CANONS OF DORDT


Report to the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches to be convened at Cloverdale November 1, 1983.

1. The Committee on Translation and Revision of Confession and Liturgical Forms appointed by Synod Coaldale 1977 presented a report dated June 1979 to Synod Smithville 1980. In that report the committee explained the basis and method of a new translation and made some remarks about changes in the content of the Belgic Confession (article 1, 4, 9, 10 and 15). The present committee, appointed by Synod Smithville 1980, continued to work on the same basis. It requests Synod Cloverdale to include the above mentioned report in the Appendices to its Acts in order to facilitate the study of the material. The committee repeats the remark of the previous committee that it will be proper to inform the sister churches abroad of the slight emendations in articles 1, 4, 9, 10, 15, 36 and 37.
2. In accordance with Article 123, I, D 2a, 3a-k of the Acts (Smithville 1980) the present committee considered the emendations suggested by Synod 1980 as far as articles I - XXIII of the Belgic Confession are concerned. See for the result the enclosed revised copy of these articles.*
3. In agreement with Article 123 I, D 2b the committee continued and completed the translation and revision of the articles XXIV - XXXVII of the Belgic Confession, as enclosed. The committee left out the twenty words between brackets, deleted by Synod 1905 of 'De Gereformeerde Kerken' in the Netherlands, and the marginal note concerning these words, since these twenty words do not belong to the received text of the Confession anymore. Therefore they should not be printed either between brackets but left out completely.
4. In accordance with Article 128 D, 3b this committee, in cooperation with the committee on Prayers and Forms appointed a language sub-committee consisting of the brothers Rev. R. Aasman, W. Horsman and N. VanDooren, with the mandate to examine the creeds with regard to vocabulary, style, punctuation and readability. The brothers who were willing to do so scrutinized the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt, and their work was in turn checked by the committee.
5. In agreement with Article 123 II, D 3 the committee completed the translation and revision of the Rejection of Errors, added to the Canons of Dordt, as enclosed. Since at the time of completion the convening date of Synod was only seven months away, the Refutation was not submitted anymore to the language sub-committee.
6. The committee recommends that Synod appoint Dr. W. Helder of Hamilton as language scrutineer of the Refutation of Errors, added to the Canons of Dordt, and as editor of the text of the Creeds.

7. The remarks of the Advisory Committee of Synod Smithville 1980 regarding the newly translated text of the Canons were not passed on to the Committee as adopted by Synod according to Article 123 II, D 2 of the Acts. These remarks could for that reason not be considered by the committee.
8. As the mandate of the Committee was restricted to the translation and revision of the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt, the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds remain yet to be translated into modern English.
9. The Committee mentions gratefully Miss Teresa Bouwman, Mrs. Wieke Faber, Mrs. Theresa Heemskerk, and Mrs. Annette Nobel for their assistance in the typing, multiplication and preparation for distribution of the material.
10. The Committee received a request of the deputies Church Book of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia to remain informed as to the progress of the work of the Committee. This request was granted by passing on the completed material.

Respectively submitted,

J. Faber
G. VanDooren
C. VanDam
L. Selles (convener)


Hamilton, Ontario
April 18, 1983

Secretary

* The copy concerned was directly forwarded to Synod.

P.S. In the draft of Art. XXV of the C.O.F. the word 'let' in the 4th line should be 'Yet'.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSLATION AND REVISION OF CONFSSIONAL AND
LITURGICAL FORMS

THREE FORMS OF UNITY: THE CONFESSION OF FAITH. (Belgic Confession)

Introductory Remarks

A. The Committee took as basis for a new translation De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften In Authentieke Teksten. Met Inleiding en Tekstvergelijkingen door J. M. Bakhuizen van den Brink, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976).

It gives the authentic French text, established by the Synod of Dordrecht 1619, the Latin text from the Acts of this National Synod, and the authentic Dutch text, also accepted by the Synod itself. We compared the new Dutch texts, nl. the text of the interdenominational Committee-Dankbaar and the text provisionally adopted by the Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978 of our sister churches in the Netherlands. Both texts are published in the Acts of this Synod, pp 271-307.

B. Our method, therefore, differed fundamentally from the method accepted by the Belgic Confession Translation Committee of the Christian Reformed Church (see Report 33, 1979 Agenda for Synod, pp 360-430).

This Committee recommended a.o. the following:

That Synod authorize the Belgic Confession Translation Committee to use the 1559/61 de Bres version of the Belgic Confession as the textus receptus for the new English translation.

Grounds:

1. It is the earliest version available.
2. It was written in times more akin to our own vis-a-vis church-state relationships than were the later revisions.
3. Its theological nuances are, in general, preferable to those in the later revisions.

Over against this recommendation our Committee is of the opinion that the textus receptus is the authorized French and Dutch texts of Dordt 1619.

Grounds:

1. Not the earliest version available is the textus receptus. The situation of the text of a creed or confession (eg. The Apostles' Creed) is different from the text of Holy Scripture. The churches have revised their confessions. As far as the Belgic Confession is concerned, a revision took place already at the Synod of May 1566 in Antwerp. This ~~revised~~ version found its counterpart in the Dutch text of 1583. The following important revision of the French and Dutch texts happened at the Synod of Dordt 1619. Not the original, personal version of De Bres is the authentic text, but the text established by the churches in the Synod of Dordt.
2. If we return to the personal, original text of De Bres, we lose the important, officially made (eg. the addition of "almighty" in art. 1, the enumeration of the sixty-six Bible Books in art. 4, etc.) The change in art. 22, made

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at the Synod of Dordt, in order to underline the substitutionary significance of Christ's active obedience, would be undone.

3. While the main revision already was made by the Synod of 1566, the difference in church-state relationships was not great. The whole interpretation by the Chr. Ref. Committee of the differences between the editions of 1561, 1566 and 1619 is debatable.
4. The Committee of the Chr. Ref. Church states that we should not "try to 'patch up' either the statements of De Bres or the Revision. For by definition a creed, written at a certain time, is an historical document. In our view it should not be rewritten or revised but only translated, at most, by later generations!(p.429)"
This statement shows that the Reformed concept^{of} binding to an authentic text of the confession established by a General Synod, is abandoned.
Acceptance of De Bres' original version by the Chr. Ref. Committee is nothing but acceptance of an historical document, without strict ecclesiastical binding in the present. Also for this reason we reject the method of the Chr. Ref. Committee.

C. It may be clear that our Committee did not literally follow the mandate "to submit a text of the Belgic Confession..... in which such changes have been made in the text that a faithful rendering of the original is obtained and in which all quotations from Holy Writ are given in a correct and up-to-date translation". (Acts Coaldale 1977, Art. 60, p.28). For "the original" we read "the authentic texts", nl. the French and Dutch texts of the Synod of Dordrecht 1619.

D. The Committee would like to draw your attention to the following details of our revision:

1. We chose as title: "TRUE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES CONTAINING THE SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND OF THE ETERNAL SALVATION OF SOULS". In references it will be mentioned as "Belgic Confession" or "Confession of Faith".
2. Bible passages are presented in the R.S.V., unless some other translation was preferable. Scripture references are added in margin. The Committee has confined itself to the texts mentioned or quoted in the confession itself. If the churches would like to add more Scripture references in margin, the General Synod 1980 should be overtured.
3. As far as changes in the content are concerned, the Committee proposes the following:
 - a. To change the beginning of art. 1 in order to take away the expression "one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." The majority of the Committee felt that this formulation can give rise to the wrong idea that we call the LORD "God" in our own initiative. One member was of the opinion that the present text expresses well what the believers, taking into account the limitations of human language and mind, can say about God whose nature is inexpressible. The Committee proposes to read: "We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there

is only one God, who is a simple and spiritual Being; He is eternal,...."

- b. To add in art. 4 "Lamentations" and not to count the letter to the Hebrews among the Pauline epistles anymore. This is done in accordance with newer Bible translations.
- c. To delete in art. 9 the reference to 1 John 5:7 (A.V.), because of the testimony of the manuscripts (see newer Bible translations).
- d. To replace in art. 10 the Scripture proofs for the eternity of the Son of God, nl. Micah 5:2 and Heb. 7:3, by John 8:58 and John 17:5.

The Committee shares the opinion that the first mentioned texts are no valid Scripture proofs for the truth concerned.

For the Committee,

H. M. Ohmann,

J. Faber, Reporters.

June 1979.

