

Hamilton, September 30th, 2024

To: All Canadian and American Reformed Church Councils

From: Blessings Christian Church, Hamilton

Re: Overture regarding amendment of questions in the forms for Baptism and Public Profession of Faith.

Dear Brothers,

Blessings Church is in the unusual situation of distributing to all the churches an overture that we have submitted to GS 2022. In doing this, we direct your attention to the Acts of General Synod (GS) 2022 Art 78. But first, let us share some background.

In 2022, Blessings Christian Church (BCC) submitted an appeal to GS. In this appeal, BCC addressed a decision of Regional Synod East (RSE) 2020 concerning a proposal (overture) BCC had presented to Classis Central Ontario (CCO). CCO had adopted the proposal and forwarded it to RSE 2020 with the request that it be sent to GS 2022, with the intent that the proposal be adopted and implemented. RSE declined the request. We are thankful that GS 2022 sustained our appeal against the decision of RSE. Attached to the appeal was a request that if the appeal were sustained, GS would consider the proposal.

Although GS 2022 sustained the appeal, it decided not to address the overture embedded in the appeal based on procedural grounds. As grounds for the decision not to address the content of the overture, GS 2022 ruled that:

It is not possible for GS 2022 to adopt the overture since all the churches have not had the opportunity to interact with the overture through submissions to GS 2022. Since this overture has already been considered by a Regional Synod, a church can take over this exact same overture and submit it directly to GS 2025, at least six months prior to the synod, also distributing it to all the churches, analogous to Synod Guidelines I.F (Article 78 Grounds 4.3).

We have acted on this directive, following the advice from GS 2022, and submitted the overture to General Synod Aldergrove 2025 for consideration. We are also distributing a copy to all the churches, analogous to Synod Guidelines I.F. Please find attached a copy of our overture for your consideration and interaction.





With Fraternal greetings from Blessings Christian Church

greg kamstra

Greg Kamstra
Clerk of Council



Classis Central Ontario June 5, 2020

Overture to the 2022 General Synod to amend the questions in the liturgical forms for Baptism and Profession of Faith

June 5, 2020

To: Regional Synod East November 2020

I. Background

Having been mandated by Synod 1977 to modernize the language of the liturgical forms¹, *The Committee on Translation and Revision of the Confessional and Liturgical Forms* (the Committee) proposed to Synod 1980 that the phrase “the articles of the Christian faith” be replaced with the more familiar nomenclature of “the Apostles’ Creed” in the questions in the *Form for the Baptism of Infants*, the *Form for the Baptism of Adults*, as well as for the *Form for Public Profession of Faith*.²

Here a challenging narrative begins. Synod 1980 replaced the expression “articles of the Christian faith” with “the creeds” and not with “Apostles’ Creed” as the Committee had recommended.³ Without a *recommendation* from the Liturgical Committee, therefore, or a *request* from a church or a *record* of how the decision was made or a *rationale* for why it was made, Synod made a substantial revision to a key question in three important liturgical forms.

Far from rectifying the error of the previous synod, Synod Cloverdale (1983) repeated the procedural misstep. In response to a query from Mr. W. Vanderkamp, this synod decided, without a *recommendation* from the Liturgical Committee or a *request* from a church, to revise the language once more—namely, from “creeds” to “confessions.”⁴ The ground for this decision was to avoid “misunderstanding” and the “misunderstanding,” though nowhere explained in the Acts, is presumably

¹ The mandate was “to revise the Liturgical Forms and to update the language, especially the Form for the Holy Supper and the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage” (*Acts of Synod* [1977] Art.60: Recommendation 4).

² See Report of the *Committee on Translation and Revision of Confessional and Liturgical Forms*, among the materials of the 1980 Synod, available at canrc.org/documents/8565 (accessed May 9, 2020).

³ *Acts of Synod* (1980) Art.129:C10. The only statement about this in the Acts is: “Consistency should be maintained with respect to ‘summarized in the Creeds.’” The reader is left scratching his or her head to identify possible antecedents to the term “consistency.”

⁴ See Appendix A. This procedural malfunctions at these synods was flagged by virtually every appellant. “The current formulation has reached the floor of synod not by proposal of one or more churches” (Moes et al. [1986] Appendix B); “Neither the Acts of 1980 or 1983 or 1986 give any reason or grounds as to why the specific reference to the Apostles’ Creed was changed to more general reference to all the creed/confessions . . . We can therefore only conclude that it was done without proper study by any committee, and without the requested input of the churches” (Langley [1989] Appendix D); “Synod 1980 did give any ground for bringing about change in the first place . . . we are never given any indication as to why the original wording had to be altered . . . The decisions of our synods seems (sic) to have been rather poorly considered and impulsive” (Surrey [1989] Appendix E); Langley expressed concern regarding “decisions made by a number of Synods which were not substantiated by proper grounds and considerations” (Langley [1992] Appendix H); Abbotsford claims the change “was illegally dealt with by previous Synods (Abbotsford [1982] Appendix H).

that creeds might be understood as “creeds” and not “confessions.”⁵ But why should “creeds” be understood as “confessions”? *Ecumenical* creeds are distinct from *Reformed* confessions in multiple ways, among which are: the former demonstrates what we have in common with *all* churches; the latter demonstrates how we are different from *some* churches.

Synod 1983’s revision prompted a substantive appeal to Synod 1986 by B. Moes, P. Roukema, D. Vanderboom, and W. Vanderkamp.⁶ Synod 1986 denied this appeal by claiming, without considerations, that “articles of the Christian faith” does not exclude “further confession given in ‘The Three Forms of Unity.’”⁷ “It is evident,” synod also alleged, “that the meaning of the forms is not changed by the linguistic revision which was made.”⁸

The Langley and Surrey churches, with significant new argumentation for consideration, requested Synod 1989 to reject Synod 1983’s revision and return to the older wording of “articles of the Christian faith” or “Apostles’ Creed.”⁹ Synod 1989 decided to deny these requests with a brief consideration—namely “the historical character of the expression ‘summarized in the Articles of the Christian Faith’ has been considered in Synod 1986.”¹⁰

The Langley church again wrote to Synod 1992 to appeal in part the decision of Synod 1983 on the grounds that it was an unsubstantiated decision. Synod denied its appeal by reiterating the claims of previous synods that the modification in terminology was simply a “linguistic change.”¹¹ The Abbotsford church also appealed Synod 1992 to reverse the decision of Synod 1983 on the grounds that the revision was never dealt with at the minor assemblies. Synod denied its appeal on the grounds that since it involved the Book of Praise it was a matter for the churches in common.¹²

Affirming the conviction of the late Jelle Faber that the decisions of Synods 1980 and 1983 on this matter “were wrong decisions” (and we would add 1986, 1989, and 1992), Blessings Christian Church requested Synod 2019 to revise the decision of Synod 1983 by returning to the original language of the questions in the liturgical forms.¹³

Mindful that this decision was made more than 30 years prior, that all the churches would be affected by such a revision, and to give ample opportunity for all churches to interact meaningfully,

⁵ “In order to avoid misunderstanding, the word ‘creeds’ in the second question should be replaced by ‘confessions’” (*Acts of Synod* [1983] Art.145:C4a8; cf. Art.145:C4b4 and Art.145:C4c3).

⁶ See Appendix B. This appeal and others, available for perusal in the Archives, include extensive quotations in Dutch which have been translated by Freda Oosterhoff with minor edits by Bill DeJong. Mr. Bert Moes and his wife appealed the decision again to synod 1989 (see Appendix F).

⁷ See Appendix C.

⁸ *Acts of Synod* (1986) Art.44:C3. Subsequent synods addressed the allegation of procedural impropriety by claiming again and again that the change was merely *linguistic* and one in which the *meaning* was not altered (cf. *Acts of Synod* [1989] Art.161:C1 and *Acts of Synod* [1992] Art.121:3A and Art.122:3C). But if this were so, why were subsequent synods so insistent on retaining the revisions?

⁹ See Appendices D and E.

¹⁰ *Acts of Synod* (1989) Art.161:C3; See Appendix G. Synod never grappled with (a) the ecclesiastical literature of Dathenus, VanderHeyden, Schilders, and Elzevier, (b) the decision of the National Synod of ‘s Gravenhage 1586, (c) the 1969 Telder Controversy, (d) synod Arnhem 1981, (e) GKN Synod Utrecht (1923), which rejected a proposal to include a reference to “the confessions” in the question in the Form for Public Profession of Faith, etc.

¹¹ See Appendix H.

¹² See Appendix H.

¹³ See Jelle Faber, “Letter to the Editor,” *Clarion* 44:17 (1995) 386.

Synod 2019 advised Blessings to present its request for revision by way of an overture, following “the ecclesiastical route.”¹⁴ The instruction ironically validated Blessings’ concern: In response to her request to revise a synodical decision on account of the impropriety of rendering a judgment without the knowledge of the churches, synod instructed Blessings to present an overture with which the churches would have sufficient time to interact.

II. Overture

Classis Central Ontario overtures the 2020 Regional Synod East to overture the 2022 General Synod to amend the questions in the liturgical Forms for the Baptism of Infants and Adults as well as the Form for the Public Profession of Faith by replacing the term “confessions” with “Apostles’ Creed.”¹⁵

III. Grounds

A. Restoring Severed Connection between the Apostles’ Creed and Triune Baptism

By replacing the term “confessions” with “Apostles’ Creed” in the questions of the liturgical forms for baptism, synod restores the severed connection between the Creed and baptism.¹⁶ Throughout most of church history, including the time of the Protestant Reformation, candidates for adult baptism, as well as parents or sponsors presenting children for infant baptism, would affirm the Apostles’ Creed.¹⁷ According to Christ’s command in Matthew 28:18-20 individuals must be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and by way of affirming the Apostles’ Creed faith in this Triune God would thereby be professed.¹⁸ The significance of this in relation to the liturgical forms did not escape Cornelis Trimp:

In the middle (of the question) stands the striking reference to the summary of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures in the *Apostles’ Creed*. This is a direct reference to the ancient-Christian practice to have the person receiving the baptism confess *the faith in the Triune God*. The

¹⁴ *Acts of Synod* (2019) Art.64:4.1-4. Synod argued that the 1983 synodical decision to revise the form had been “settled and binding” for over thirty years, overlooking the appeals the decision generated from a variety of individuals and churches at four successive synods (1983, 1986, 1989, 1992).

¹⁵ In some sense, Blessings is endorsing and re-presenting the recommendation, which synod 1980 dismissed, of the *Committee on Translation and Revision of Confessional and Liturgical Forms* (of Gijsbertus VanDooren, Clarence Stam, and Jelle Faber) to use the phrase, “Apostles’ Creed” in the questions of the liturgical forms.

¹⁶ This important matter, raised by the Langley and Surrey churches, was ignored by Synod 1989 and therefore never addressed.

¹⁷ “There would appear to be scholarly agreement that *The Apostles’ Creed* and its antecedent, *The Old Roman Creed*, took their start from the questions—three in number, corresponding to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the baptismal command of Christ . . . Even when infant baptism had become the normal practice and the candidates for baptism were therefore no longer able to respond in person to the credal questions or to recite the creed in their own name but did so through their parents or godparents or sponsors or the witnessing congregation, the creed, which for the West meant *The Apostles’ Creed* and for the East *The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, was a prescribed element in the administration of the sacrament of baptism” (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003] 179).

¹⁸ “This reference to the Apostles’ Creed was deemed fitting because of the manner in which this Creed confessed the church’s faith in the Triune God in relation to the sacrament of baptism” (Langley [1989] Appendix D); “Reference was made to the Apostles’ Creed in the baptismal form because, as is well known, the Apostles’ Creed was originally a baptismal creed” (Surrey [1989] Appendix E).

Apostles' Creed came into being and grew as a baptismal confession . . . We therefore have here a precious heritage from the ancient-Christian liturgy!¹⁹

When a previous synod replaced "articles of the Christian Faith" in the questions of the liturgical forms with "confessions" this "precious heritage" of connecting Triune baptism and the Apostles' Creed was severed. By returning to the language of "Apostles' Creed," this connection would be renewed.

B. Restoring Severed Connection between the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Day 7

By replacing the term "confessions" with "Apostles' Creed" in the questions of the liturgical forms (especially for the Public Profession of Faith and for the Baptism of Adults), synod restores the severed connection between the creed and the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7:22.²⁰ What a Christian must believe is: "All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith [i.e., the Apostles' Creed] teach us in a summary." The connection between the vows a member makes in affirming the questions in the liturgical forms and the Catechism is important because the Catechism rightly underscores that the content of faith is precisely what God *promises*. When a young person professes faith (or when an adult is to be baptized), in other words, he or she is not primarily affirming impersonal *theological formulations*, but acknowledging and embracing personal *divine promises*. The primary author of the Catechism, Zacharius Ursinus captured this sentiment well:

The decrees of men, however, are uncertain, inasmuch as every man is deceitful and false. God alone is true, and his word is truth. As it is, therefore, not proper for Christians to frame or construct for themselves the matter or contents of faith, so it is not proper for them to embrace what has been conceived and delivered by others. Christians must receive and believe the gospel alone, as it is said: "Repent and believe the gospel." "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (Mark 1:15; 1 Cor. 2:5) The sum and substance of the gospel, or of those things which are to be believed, is the Apostles' Creed, which we here subjoin."²¹

One might object by alleging that the words of the Apostles' Creed are themselves "the decrees of men." Ursinus himself ably demonstrates how this Creed should be distinguished in this regard from other confessions:

But although other confessions were formed, the Apostles' Creed greatly surpasses all others in importance and authority, and that for the following reasons:

1. Because almost the whole of it is expressed in the very language of Scriptures.
2. Because it is of the greatest antiquity and was first delivered to the church by apostolic men, either by the apostles themselves, or by their disciples and hearers, and has been regularly transmitted down to the present time.

¹⁹ C. Trimp, *De Gemeente en haar Liturgie: een Leesboek voor Kerkgangers* (Kampen: Van der Berg, 1983) 188. "This question contains an explicit reference to the doctrine of the church, which is a very old element in the administration of baptism. In Calvin's Geneva, the Apostles' Creed was read at this point as summary of the doctrine of the church and as early-Christian baptismal symbol. Something similar used to take place in the Palatinate" (C. Trimp, *Formulieren en Gebeden* [Kampen: Van der Berg, 1978] 43). It was for this reason that Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, prompted by Jelle Faber, introduced in connection with the liturgical administration of baptism the singing of the Apostles' Creed.

²⁰ The current formulation, certain appellants indicated, "conflicts with Question and Answer 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism" (Moes et al. [1986] Appendix B) and denies "the catholic link with the church of all ages (cf. Lord's Day 7)" (Surrey [1989] Appendix F). No synod ever gave serious consideration to the specific value of "the articles of the Christian faith" as the summary of what is *promised* in the gospel.

²¹ Zacharius Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Williard (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, [no date]) 116; emphasis added.

3. Because it is the basis and type of all other Creeds which have been formed by the consent of the whole church, and approved of by synods, for the purpose of preventing and refuting the perversions and corruptions of heretics, by explaining more fully the meaning of the Apostles' Creed.²²

C. Correctly Identifying the Apostles' Creed as the Referent for "Articles of the Christian Faith" (in the original liturgical Forms)

By replacing the term "confessions" with "Apostles' Creed" in the questions of the liturgical forms, synod corrects the historical inaccuracy implicit in the current formulation (and explicit in how it has been defended). It was repeatedly argued by past synods that "articles of the Christian faith" is essentially synonymous with "confessions."²³ Synod Winnipeg (1989), for example, affirmed that "the historical formulation 'summarized in the Articles of the Christian Faith' should not be taken in a restrictive sense as if it pertains only to the Apostles' Creed and excludes the other confessions."²⁴ Especially N.H. Gootjes has, since these synods in the 1980s, provided ample documentation for the historical impropriety of identifying "the articles of the Christian faith" with "the confessions." Gootjes indicates:

Both the Heidelberg Catechism and our Form for Baptism have their origin in Germany in the Palatinate in 1563. By this time, the Belgic Confession existed only in a French version among the churches in Belgium. It is unlikely that the theologians of the Palatinate would know about this confession, let alone recognize it. Even more problematic is the Canons of Dort, which was made at the Synod of Dort in 1619. How could the brothers in the Palatinate refer to a confession which would be made more than 40 years later?²⁵

Gootjes's conclusion is salient: "As churches, we have adopted the Three Forms of Unity . . . The expression 'articles of the Christian faith,' however, does not refer to the Three Forms of Unity. It refers to the Apostles' Creed."²⁶

D. Clarifying the Nature of Member Vows or Profession

By replacing the term "confessions" with "Apostles' Creed" in the questions of the liturgical forms, synod clarifies the precise profession one makes in answering such questions affirmatively. The present language of "confessions" wrongly implies that one pledges allegiance, as one who fully understands

²² Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 118. Cf. Harm Bouwman, the church polity expert, who had taught at the Theological School in Kampen, wrote in reference to the questions in the Form for Public Profession of Faith, "On purpose we spoke not of the *Reformed faith* and of the *Reformed Church*, but of the *Christian faith* and the *Christian Church*, because the Reformed Church will, not least with respect to the sacraments, not separate itself from the Christian Church, but wishes to preserve her unity. The main points of the Christian doctrine wherein the youth of the congregation are taught, are, according to the classical expression, with respect to faith, commandment and prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the law of the Lord, and the Lord's Prayer. In the catechetical instruction these three parts of the doctrine, explained further in the catechism, are taught. And it is the heart of the confession of faith therein to persevere and to lead a Christian life" (Harm Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* [Kampen: Kok, 1934] 2:383–84; italics added, BDJ).

²³ "It is evident that the meaning of the forms is not changed by the linguistic revision which was made" (*Acts of Synod* [1986] Art.44:C3; cf. *Acts of Synod* [1989] Art.161:C1 and *Acts of Synod* [1992] Art.121:3A and Art.122:3C).

²⁴ *Acts of Synod* (1989) Art.161:C4.

²⁵ N.H. Gootjes, "The Articles of the Christian Faith" *Clarion* 48:5 (1999) 105

²⁶ Gootjes, "Articles of the Christian Faith," 106.

them, to all the impersonal formulations of the confession rather than to the promises of the triune God.²⁷ Not insignificantly, the GKN Synod Utrecht (1923) explicitly rejected a proposal to replace “articles of the Christian faith” in the questions of the liturgical forms with “confessions” (*belijdenschriften*).²⁸ The synodical report in which this rejection is recommended offered convincing grounds: “Precisely the character of this confession as the acceptance of one’s baptism implies that those who make this confession are generally young, so that the formulation of the *personal element* in no case may be of such a nature that only more mature believers would be in a position to respond.”²⁹

The replacement of “articles of the Christian faith” with “confessions” has, in fact, birthed an error in Canadian Reformed churches that became widespread in what was dubbed “confessional membership.”³⁰ The term first appears in the Acts of Synod 1989.³¹ References remain relatively infrequent in the subsequent Synod (1992) but by the time of Synod 1995 the term appears twenty-eight (28) times.³² This suggests that this alleged mere “linguistic revision” of using the terminology of “confessions” significantly altered the course of Canadian Reformed church history.³³

It was subsequently argued by, for instance, Synod Burlington-Waterdown (1986) that the qualifying phrase “as taught here in this Christian Church” means “one gives allegiance to all the confessions of the church.”³⁴ There are multiple problems with this claim. First, with the exception of an earlier version of the Form for the Baptism of Adults, the question in the liturgical forms does not say “as taught here” but “*and* taught here.”³⁵ Secondly, the terminology of “allegiance” misrepresents the

²⁷ Already the very first appeal queried whether it was problematic to suggest that young people, when professing their faith, were pledging adherence to all the statements in the confessions: “It is questionable whether every believer must, or even is able to give allegiance to ALL formulations used in the confessions in order to be admitted to the sacraments” (Moes et al. [1986] See Appendix B).

²⁸ *Acts Synode* (1923) Art.126. GKN Synod Arnhem (1981) replaced “articles of the Christian faith” with “Apostles’ Creed” (*Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis*) (*Acts Synode*, Art.56:4). “Synod 1986 had dealt with the formulation used in the Dutch sister churches but did not agree that there is any real discrepancy in confessional practice” (*Acts of Synod* [1989] Art.161:C6).

²⁹ See *Rapport inzake het concipieeren van Belijdenis-Vragen* (1923); emphasis added. Attention is drawn to this report by the Surrey Church (Surrey [1989] Appendix E). Neither Synod Burlington-Waterdown (1986) nor Synod Winnipeg (1989) ever interacted with the rationale of GKN Synod 1923 for explicitly rejecting “confessions” in favor of “articles of the Christian faith.” Moreover, Synod Burlington-Waterdown (1986) alleged that Synod Cloverdale (1983) judged that the formulation “the Creeds as taught here in this Christian Church” meant “the confessions as they are taught here in this Christian Church” (*Acts of Synod* [1986] Art.144:C2). Nowhere in the *Acts of Synod* (1983), however, are these words found or is this argument made.

³⁰ Jelle Faber described this terminology as “new and debatable words” (“Letter to the Editor,” *Clarion* 44:17 [1995] 386).

³¹ Art.94:E1,5c and Appendix 2. Not insignificantly, early discussions about the differences between the Canadian Reformed and the OPC are strikingly void of references to different views of membership. See, for e.g., the Report of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (dated October 13, 1976) in the *Acts of Synod* (1980), p.194.

³² See especially *Acts of Synod* (1995) Art.106.

³³ Jelle Faber stated candidly that “the change was also not a linguistic revision only, as later synods asserted. The rather vague expression ‘the confessions’ entails *another concept and conveys another idea* than ‘the Apostles’ Creed’” (“Letter to the Editor,” *Clarion* 44:17 [1995] 386; emphasis added).

³⁴ *Acts of Synod* (1986) Art.144:C2. Synod Winnipeg (1989) affirms this interpretation: “A contextual reading of the original wording (. . . “taught here in this Christian church . . . to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation . . .”) shows that the present formulation is not a material change” (*Acts of Synod* [1989] Art.161:C5).

³⁵ The two clauses—“summarized in the articles of the Christian faith” and “taught here in this Christian Church”—modify “the doctrine” (See Appendix I).

nature of the affirmation: believers do not give allegiance to the confessions, not even to the Apostles' Creed, but embrace the promises of God, signified and sealed in baptism. Thirdly, the expression "and taught here in this Christian church," does not, in spite of the interpretation of several synods, imply adherence to the Reformed confessions. If it did, it would imply that there is little to no difference between the doctrinal affirmations of any given member of the church and any given office-bearer—an implication some, in fact, explicitly affirm.³⁶

N.H. Gootjes argues from a historical standpoint that to demand of parents in the time of the Reformation a level of doctrinal commitment that exceeds the Apostles' Creed "certainly would have been overburdening" them. He writes,

We may conclude that the Reformed confessions were not directly mentioned in the second question of the Form for baptism. The confessions function in the background. They determine the preaching and the teaching in the Reformed churches. The parents, however, had to state that the doctrine – contained in Scripture – and in the Apostles' Creed – and taught in this Christian church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. To ask more would certainly have been overburdening parents of the 16th Century.³⁷

Furthermore, Gootjes clarifies that "taught here in this Christian church" implied an affirmation not of adherence to the confessions, but acceptance of Reformed teaching and preaching.

The word [i.e., "taught,"] must refer to the preaching and catechetical instruction of the church. The parents who presented their child for baptism had to declare that the preaching and teaching in this church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. This teaching obviously had to be in agreement with the confessions, the Three Forms of Unity. But the parents declared no more than that they accepted the Reformed teaching and preaching. They had to submit to that, without resisting it. They also had to promise to train their children in it.³⁸

The Canadian Reformed churches are confessional churches and should remain so. Officebearers in the Canadian Reformed churches subscribe to the Reformed confessions and should continue to do so. The Scriptures, as faithfully summarized in the Reformed confessions, must be preached and taught without apology. Members of local Canadian Reformed churches, even those who dispute some confessional affirmations, must accept Reformed teaching and preaching (so as to remain teachable and not promote contrary teaching).

E. Providing Consistency in Practice with Neighboring "Sister" Churches

By replacing the term "confessions" with "Apostles' Creed" in the questions of the liturgical forms, synod can align the membership vows within the Canadian Reformed churches with those of

³⁶ Of the OPC practice, for e.g., of receiving into membership at times those who oppose infant baptism, some have protested on the grounds that this introduces a clergy/laity distinction by "asking more of the office bearers than of the other members" (*Acts of Synod* [1992] Art.72, 3b3). Cf. Synod 1989 which records that Smithers similarly does not want to make a distinction between "clergy and laity" (*Acts of Synod* [1989] Art 161:B6c). It is important, rather, to affirm that more is asked of office-bearers than of other members, not least in terms of the level of doctrinal commitment and the nature of confessional subscription. In this connection Cornelis Van Dam argues of those faithful individuals who "are not able to comprehend all the doctrines of salvation" that "it would be wrong to deny such individuals membership in the church" (Van Dam, "OPC and Canadian Reformed—What Now?" *Clarion* 43:25 [1994] 602).

³⁷ N.H. Gootjes, "Once More: Articles and Confessions" *Clarion* 48:25 (1999) 591.

³⁸ Gootjes, "Once More: Articles and Confessions," *Clarion* 48:25 (1999) 591

neighbouring sister churches with whom we permit membership transfers.³⁹ The two “denominations” with whom we are now closest, geographically and perhaps also theologically, are the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In the United Reformed Churches in North America a candidate for profession of faith is asked: “Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?”⁴⁰ In her *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (4.B2), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church requires ministers to ask those publicly professing their faith: “Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?”⁴¹

On behalf of Classis Central Ontario June 5, 2020,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Clarence J. VanderVelde', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde (clerk at that time)

³⁹ This issue was raised by several appeals. The revision “introduces tension and endangers inter-church relations” (Moes et al. [1986] Appendix B); “this reference is still used by our sister churches in the Netherlands” (Langley [1989] Appendix D); the original wording “agrees with the present usage in our Dutch sister churches” (Surrey [1989] Appendix E).

⁴⁰ This question is little different from what was asked in the GKN in the 1980s and in the Canadian Reformed Churches prior to 1983.

⁴¹ Cornelis Van Dam, reflecting on this question in the Directory and OPC practice, indicates that “those coming from outside to join the OPC do not always have a full grasp of all the doctrines taught in the confessions and therefore, those who may still have questions, but are willing to be instructed, are admitted into the church” and this is not so different from the practice of Canadian Reformed churches who also at times tolerate deviations from (what follows are G.I. Williamson’s words, quoted approvingly) “strict adherence to the confessions on the part of communicant church members” (Van Dam, “OPC and Canadian Reformed—What Now?” (*Clarion* 43:25 (1994) 601,602). Ralph Boersema corroborates this claim: “In the Canadian Reformed Church in which I grew up, for many years we had a member who did not believe in infant baptism and who did not have his children baptized as infants. Did that mean that our consistory had given up the binding of the church to the Reformed confessions? No, none other than the Three Forms of Unity were ever taught in our church” (Boersema, “Letter the Editor,” *Clarion* 38:9 [1989] 205).

Appendix A

Letter to Synod 1983 from W. Vanderkamp

Dear Brethern,

In the revised liturgical forms for baptism and confession of faith Synod 1980 has proposed to change adherence to “the articles of the Christian faith” into “the creeds.” According to Reverend Geertsema this has to be understood as adherence to the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity. May I kindly ask you to inform me whether his interpretation is the correct one, and if that is the case why this is not clearly expressed? For nowhere in my Book of Praise I can find these Doctrinal Standards designated as “Creeds.”

Thanking you in anticipation, and with all due regards

Yours in Christ

W. Vanderkamp

Appendix B

APPEAL TO GENERAL SYNOD 1986

RE: The Wording of the New Forms for Baptism and Public Profession of Faith

Esteemed brothers,

After having perused the new Liturgical Forms for Public Profession of Faith and Holy Baptism we would like to express our concern about the deletion of the words "Articles of the Christian Faith".

Formerly question one of the Form for Public Profession read:

First: Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith and which is taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

The second question in the Form of Baptism has the same wording. These questions have been changed as follows:

Question **one** of the Form for Public Profession reads:

"First, do you wholeheartedly agree with the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here ... "

Question **two** of the Form for Baptism reads:

"Second, do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here ... "

This change is:

A. In conflict with the Confession

Ground:

1. It conflicts with Question and Answer 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism which teaches that a Christian must believe "all that is promised us in the gospel which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach in a summary". Answer 23 goes on to explain that these articles are, in fact, none other than the articles of the Apostles' Creed. No mention is being made of additional confessions. Ursinus in his commentary on question and answer 23 states

But although other confessions were formed the Apostles' Creed greatly surpasses all others in importance and authority, and that for the following reasons:

- 1) Because almost the whole of it is expressed in the very language of Scriptures.
- 2) Because it is of the greatest antiquity and was first delivered to the church by apostolic men, either by the apostles themselves, or by their disciples and hearers, and has been regularly transmitted down to the present time.
- 3) Because it is the basis and type of all other Creeds which have been formed by the consent of the whole church and approved of by synods, for the purpose of preventing and refuting the perversions and

corruptions of heretics, by explaining more fully the meaning of the Apostles' Creed."

(The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism
T.B. Bucher Publishing, Cincinnati, 1851 p. 118)

B. In conflict with accepted Reformed practice

Grounds:

1. It conflicts with the original intent of the question as formulated by the Synod of Utrecht, 1923. This synod rejected the Dutch equivalent of our present formulation. (Acts of Synod, 1923; Art. 136)

After rejecting the wording "Do you declare that you ... the doctrine that is contained in the Old and New Testament and expressed in the confessions (belijdenisschriften) of the Reformed Churches...", Synod 1923 declared in favour of:

First : Do you declare that you accept the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught here in the Christian church, as the true and complete doctrine of salvation; and do you promise that by God's grace you will remain steadfast in the confession thereof in life and death?

A direct translation of these words has been in use in the Canadian Reformed Churches from the beginning until synod 1983 brought this use to an abrupt end.

2. The late Dr. H. Bouwman, professor in church polity [kerkrecht] at the Theological Seminary in Kampen, in his well - known work *Reformed Church Polity [Gereformeerde Kerkrecht]* emphasizes the necessity of maintaining the words "articles of the Christian faith", instead of making reference to the Three forms of Unity:

On purpose we spoke not of the Reformed faith and of the Reformed Church, but of the Christian faith and the Christian Church, because the Reformed Church will, also with respect to the sacraments, not separate itself from the Christian Church, but wishes to preserve her unity. The main points of the Christian doctrine wherein the youth of the congregation are taught, are, according to the classical expression, with respect to faith, commandment and prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the law of the LORD, and the Lords Prayer. In the catechetic instruction these three parts of the doctrine, explained further in the catechism, are taught. And it is the heart of the confession of faith therein to persevere and to lead a Christian life." (Dr. H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, J.H. Kok, Kampen, 1921, pp. 382- 383)

3. It introduces tension and endangers inter-church relations, especially with the Dutch sister churches, since the Church-book of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland] contains a formulation which echoes Ursinus and the decision of the Synod Utrecht 1923.

The first question in the Dutch Form for Public Profession of Faith reads:

First, do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, which is summarized in the Apostles' Creed and taught here in the Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation (This formulation refers to Rm. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:15; Acts 2:42 and Matth 24 :13 - Acts Synod Arnhem 1981, p. 424).

Since attestations are issued on the basis of one's public profession of faith and walk of life, it is inconsistent to admit members of the Dutch sister churches unless they declare agreement with what the new formulation asks of members of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

4. a) It is not in line with the mandate given to the Committee for revision of the Liturgical Forms which reads:

to examine and to make use of the report of the Committee for Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms which was submitted to General Synod Coaldale 1977.

To appoint a committee to revise the Liturgical Forms and to update the language... (Acts Synod 1977, Coaldale. Art. 60, sub 3c and 4.)

No mention is made of changing the meaning of the existing forms.

b) The current formulation has reached the floor of Synod not by proposal of one or more churches, but by way of a committee report.

C. In conflict with reality

Ground:

It is questionable whether every believer must, or even is able to give allegiance to **ALL** formulations used in the confessions in order to be admitted to the sacraments.

2nd ...over against all sorts of wrong ideas that one sometimes meets, it is well to make clear that the public confession of faith is not just an expression of general agreement, but a very personal thing of each individual.

Thereby we have to remark immediately that precisely the character of this confession as the acceptance of one's baptism implies that those who make this confession are generally young, so that the formulation of the personal element in no case may be of such a nature that only more mature believers would be in a position to respond; it is more the need than the possession, more the desire than the certainty that must therein be clearly expressed. (Report regarding the drafting of questions for the confession of faith, the revision of the liturgy and the review and expansion of the collection of 'Eenige Gezangen,' by the Deputies ad hoc, to the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, to meet at Utrecht in the year 1923.)

On the basis of the above mentioned statements we request Synod 1986 to rescind the current formulation and to return to the original wording.

February 17, 1986

Respectfully submitted and wishing the Synod the guidance of the Spirit.

B Moes, P Roukema, D Vanderboom, W Vanderkamp

Appendix C

Synod 1986's response to appeal from Moes et al.

Article 144

Letter re Form for Public Profession of Faith and Baptism

Committee 4 presents:

A. MATERIAL, Agenda, VIII, B, 3 Letter from br. B. Moes c.s. re:

Forms for Public Profession of Faith and Baptism.

B. OBSERVATIONS

1. The brs. note that in the previous edition of the Forms for Public Profession of Faith in the first question and in the Form for Baptism in the second question the formulation was, "... the articles of the Christian faith and which is taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation" and that the General Synod of 1983 decided that the formulation of this question in these forms be "summarized in the confessions and taught here" They request this synod to "rescind the current formulation and to return to the original wording."
2. These brs. contend that the present formulation is "in conflict with the confessions" in that "it conflicts with question and answer 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism which teaches that a Christian must believe 'all that is promised us in the gospel which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach in a summary.' Answer 23 goes on to explain that these articles are, in fact, none other than the articles of the Apostles' Creed. "No mention is made of additional confessions."
3. These brs. contend that the present formulation is "in conflict with accepted reformed practice." They refer to the General Synod of Utrecht of 1923, and the formulation of the General Synod of Arnhem of 1981. From this they conclude that "since attestations are issued on the basis of one's public profession of faith and walk of life, it is inconsistent to admit members of the Dutch sister-churches unless they declare agreement with what the new formulation asks of members of the Canadian Reformed Churches."
4. The brs. question the procedure by which the General Synod of 1983 made a change in formulation from the committee report which used the word "creed" instead of "confession" to the present formulation without request from any of the churches. They state that "no mention is made of changing the meaning of the existing forms."
5. The brs. contend that the present formulation is "in conflict with reality" because "it is questionable whether every believer must, or even is able to give allegiance to ALL formulations used in the confessions in order to be admitted to the sacraments."
6. Synod of 1983 observed (Acts, Art. 145, 8) that "brother W. VanderKamp requests synod to inform him whether the interpretation of the word 'creeds' in the questions found in the forms for baptism and for the public profession of faith includes the Three Forms of Unity." This synod considered (under Consideration B, 4) that "in the fourth question on page 121 (sic), the wording should be as follows: '... the Word of God summarized in the confessions and taught

here in this Christian church” and it considered under number 5 (p. 107) that “the use of the word ‘confessions’ instead of ‘creeds’ in the questions of the Forms for Baptism and Public Profession of Faith answers the question posed by brother W. VanderKamp.”

C. CONSIDERATION

1. The brs. are incorrect in suggesting that the present formulation is in conflict with the confessions because when we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A22, **Q.** “What, then, must a Christian believe? a (sic) **A.** All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary” it does not suggest that this basic summary excludes the further confession given in the “Three Forms of Unity.”
2. It is historically correct that the formulation “articles of the Christian faith” has been used. However, by removing this phrase from its context, the brs. overlook that the questions asked never excluded the allegiance to all the confessions which are maintained by the Canadian Reformed Churches. The statement “... as is taught here in this Christian Church” means one gives allegiance to all the confessions of the church. Synod of 1983 has already judged that the formulation, “the Creeds as taught here in this Christian Church,” means “the confessions as they are taught here in this Christian Church” (See Observation 6).
3. The brs. are correct in stating that the Committee for Liturgical Forms [w]as given the mandate by the General Synod of 1977 to “update the language” and therefore the General Synod of 1983 had no right to change the meaning of the forms. But from the above consideration “2”, it is evident that the meaning of the forms is not changed by the linguistic revision which was made.
4. Although the Dutch sister-churches have a different formulation “... Summarized in the Apostles’ Creed, and taught here in this Christian Church” the meaning is not different, as is evident from the above consideration 2. The formulation adopted by the General Synod of 1983 does therefore not introduce “tension and endangers Inter-Church relations”
5. The brs. do not prove that the present formulation is “in conflict with reality” nor that it is impossible for anyone to keep the Scriptural command (Romans 10:9,10; Rev. 2:26) and “wholeheartedly believe (agree with) the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church.”** This quotation is taken from the Form for the Public Profession of Faith. The same formulation is used in the Form for Adult Baptism, except that instead of the word “believe,” the word “agree with” is used. In the Form for Infant Baptism the formulation, “Do you confess the doctrine ...” is used.

D. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide not to grant the request of the Brs. B. Moes, P. Roukema, D. VanderBoom, and W. VanderKamp.

The recommendation is ADOPTED.

Appendix D

Letter from Langley to Synod 1989

Esteemed brethren,

The Council of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley hereby comes to you with a request regarding a change that has been made in the wording of the various forms. In the question found in the Forms for Profession of Faith, and infant and Adult Baptism, General Synod 1980 change the expression “the articles of the Christian faith” into “summarized in the creeds” and General Synod 1983 changed it from “summarized in the creeds” into “summarized in the confessions”.

Our request is that Synod 1989 return to the old wording “the articles of the Christian faith” or else to the synonymous wording “summarized in the Apostles’ Creed.”

Our request is based on the following grounds:

- a) For more than 400 years our Reformed churches have made reference to the Apostles’ Creed in the second question of the Form for Infant and Adult Baptism. It goes all the way back to the addition of Peter Dathenus of 1566;
- b) This reference to the Apostles’ Creed was deemed fitting because of the manner in which this Creed confessed the church’s faith in the Triune God in relation to the sacrament of baptism;
- c) this reference is still used by our sister churches in the Netherlands;
- d) The retention of this reference was recommended to General Synod 1980 in the Report of the Committee on the Revision of the Forms and Prayers;
- e) Neither the Acts of 1980 or 1983 or 1986 give any reason or grounds as to why the specific reference to the Apostles’ Creed was changed to more general reference to all the creed/confessions;
- f) the basic rule governing the translations and revisions of the Creeds, Forms and Prayers for the complete Book of Praise in our churches has been that these translations should be accurate and that any recommendations for change be only considered after proper study has been made, and after the churches have been allowed to study the recommended changes and the reasons for making them;
- g) No Synod has until now supplied the churches with proper grounds for this change. We can therefore only conclude that it was done without proper study by any committee, and without the requested input of the churches.

On the basis of the above, the Council of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley recommends that the general Synod 1989 return to the old, long-established reference to the Apostles’ Creed or to the recommendation of the report to Synod 1980 “summarized in the Apostles’ Creed.” [**end quote**]

(The church at Langley continued in its appeal to make suggestions to the Synod about how the churches might better clarify or safe guard the place of the confessions in the Church.)

Appendix E

Letter from Surrey to Synod 1989

The Church at Surrey wrote:

To: General Synod 1989
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Re: Acts Synod Smithville 1980, Articles 129 and 130
Acts Synod Cloverdale 1983, Article 145
Acts Synod Burlington 1986, Article 144

Dear brothers:

The Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey, BC has some concerns regarding the second question of the Form for Baptism of Infants, the fourth question of the Form for the Baptism Adults in the first question of the Form for Public Profession of Faith and hereby asks Synod 1989 to bring us back to the historic Reformed phrasing on this matter.

Let it be immediately clear at the outset that the church at Surrey does not for one moment wish to reject the notion that not just office bearers but all members of the church are bound to agree with that Three Forms of Unity. We have no problem with the remark of Synod Burlington 1986 (Article 144, C, 2) that "the questions asked never excluded the allegiance to all the confessions which are maintained by the Canadian Reformed Churches".

One can show in various ways that this has always been the historic position of the Reformed church. H. Bavink writes, for instance, "within the church the confession has authority as an accord of community, as the expression of the faith of the congregation..." (Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Kampen: Bos, 1906 p 73); likewise Turretin says of the confessions of the church, "their true authority is to be found in the fact that they are binding on those who are liable to them in the forum of the outward fellowship, because written by the Churches or in the name of the Churches, by which the individual members in the outward communion are bound, 1 Cor. 14 : 32 (the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets)." (Institutio, 1701 as quoted by Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, Baker, 1978, p. 687).

Similarly, one also finds that there are a number of instances in which the questions make direct references to a Reformed confession. For instance, in Batavia in the 17th century those who would do profession of faith were to promise: "In feeling, disposition, and faith, in everything according to the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the Christian reformed religion." (in de Neederlandsche Confessie en de Paltz catechism vernaet" (As quoted in J.F. Munneke, Het Historisch Fundament der Kerk, Oosterbaan, 1972, p. 27). Similarly, B. Wielenga points out how in the church of a Lasco only the children of parents who had professed the Reformed confession could be baptized (Ons Doopsformulier, Kok, 1906, p.303). Also, from the report about this matter submitted to Synod 1923, it is clear that prior to that time, some churches made explicit reference to the "Confessions of the Reformed Churches" in the questions asked of candidates for profession of faith (in fact an amendment to this effect was even proposed at this synod), and there is nothing in the report or the acts of this synod which would suggest that this reference was left out in the final version because such candidates were not bound to such confessions. One can think also of the many parents in the time of the Secession who felt that they could not have their children baptized in the unfaithful churches; surely, if regular members were bound only to the Apostle's Creed it is difficult to imagine why they would feel forced to take this course of action,

but it is precisely because they understood the phrase "as is taught here in this Christian church" as referring to a necessary faithfulness to all the confessions that they sought to have their children baptized in churches that yet maintained the firm basis of 1618. Moreover, one can also refer to events surrounding the Union of 1892. When discussions were taking place regarding this union, the churches of the Secession made the request that "“No persons may be acknowledged as members of the united churches, “except those who express agreement with the Reformed Confession and Church Order and who wish to live accordingly.” (H. Bouma, *De Vereniging van 1892*, Vuurbaak, 1967, p.132). Hence, as J. Kamphuis points out, “When the union had been accomplished, this rule, therefore, continued to be valid as a legal rule (*rechtsregel*) that is binding for everyone within the Reformed Churches.” (*Om de Heiligheid der Gemeente*, VandenBerg, 1982, p. 104).

Nevertheless, the consistory of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey is convinced that the decisions of our recent synods to change the traditional wording, " ... and in the articles of the Christian faith", to "summarized in the creeds" (1980), and then to "summarized in the confessions" (1983) are regrettable and so requests Synod Winnipeg 1989 to as yet adopt the recommendation of the Committee on Translation and Revision of Confessional and Liturgical Forms which advised Synod 1980 to adopt the wording "summarized in the Apostles' Creed" in each instance .

The grounds for making this request are as follows.

1. The decisions of our synods in this matter are somewhat inconsequent. If it is true as synod 1986 mentions that "the questions asked never excluded allegiance to all the confessions which are maintained by the Canadian Reformed Churches", and we believe it is, then one can only wonder: why did Synod 1980 and 1983 change the wording in the first place?
2. Our synods have not considered the historical background of these questions. While it is true that instances can be found in which explicit references to the Reformed confessions are made, it is also true that such cases are few and far between. When one goes back to the Reformation era, one finds that while various wordings of the question existed, they were all very similar to the version which we had prior to 1980; the liturgical book of Petrus Dathenus (1566) uses the phrase “and summarized in the Articles of the Christian faith”; another such book used in the southern Netherlands and prepared under the direction of VanderHeyden in 1580 reads “and summarized in our Articles of the Christian faith”. In 1591 and 1611 R. Schilders put out versions which both read “and summarized in the Articles of the Christian faith", and it was this version that was adopted by the National Synod of 's Gravenhage (1586); likewise an edition by L. Elzevier of Leiden read, "and summarized in the Articles of the Christian faith" (R.H. Bremmer, "De Tweede Doopvraag", [The Second Baptism Question] *Opbouw*, pp. 84-5). From all this you see that our earlier version of the question was the one that is historically correct. Hence, surely only very weighty reasons should cause us to alter it.
3. Our synods have not considered the catholic nature of the original wording. In the discussions that have taken place, our synods seem to have completely overlooked that it was with a view to the catholicity of the church that this question was worded as it was. Reference was made to the Apostles' Creed in the baptismal form because, as is well known, the Apostles' Creed was originally a baptismal creed, professed by catechumens in the early church at their baptism. As such this reference is surely still today to be regarded as valuable, since it expresses the unity that we have today with the early church and the church of all ages and places. In this regard, we would draw synod's attention to the appropriate words of Dr. C. Trimp:

In the middle (of the question) stands the striking reference to the summary of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures in the Apostles' Creed. This is a direct reference to the ancient-Christian practice to have the person receiving the

baptism to confess the faith in the Triune God. The Apostles' Creed came into being and grew as a baptismal confession.... We therefore have here a precious heritage from the ancient-Christian liturgy!" (De Gemeente en haar Liturgie: een Leesboek voor Kerkgangers, [The Congregation and Her Liturgy: A Handbook for Church Members.] Vandenberg, 1983, p.188).

4. Synod 1980 did not give any ground for bringing about change in the first place. It is rather striking that in all the discussions that have taken place at various synods about this matter, we are never given any indication as to why the original wording had to be altered. The only possible motive that we can find is in the enigmatic phrase that appears in the Acts of Synod 1980: "Consistency should be maintained with respect to 'summarized in the Creeds'; here it is totally unclear as to with what this is meant to be consistent. Likewise, there is no reason given whatsoever for not accepting the considered advice of the synod committee which suggested adopting the wording "summarized in the Apostles' Creed."

5. The decisions of our synods seems to have been rather poorly considered and impulsive. When one takes note of the careful and well-researched manner in which the church has often considered what exactly the liturgical forms should say (consider for instance the synod of 1923 which appointed a committee which surveyed the various practices and then suggested to said synod what should be asked in the questions, (*Rapport inzake het concipieeren van Belijdenis-Vragen [Report on the Draft Profession of Faith Questions]* Utrecht, 1923"), then one not only wonders how Synod 1980 could so swiftly and without giving any grounds change the accepted wording, but one is also amazed that in response to a letter of one brother who made a false distinction between the word creed and confession, Synod 1983 again changed the question! Because "Brother W. VanderKamp requests Synod to inform him whether the interpretation of the word 'creeds' in the questions found in the Forms for baptism and for the public profession of faith includes the Three Forms of Unity", Synod decided that "In order to avoid misunderstanding, the word 'creeds' in the second question should be replaced by 'confessions'." This decision was indeed poorly-considered and rather impulsive. Synod did not "avoid misunderstanding" at all. For if Synod 1983 has, as it seems, accepted the understanding of this brother and many others that "creeds" refers to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, whereas "confessions" refers to the Three Forms of Unity, then what exactly are those who answer the question now acknowledging? Only their allegiance to the Three Forms of Unity? Is a reference to the three earlier creeds then excluded? Then surely the present wording *is* uncatholic! Would synod 1983 then not have acted in a much wiser fashion if it had simply gone back to the original wording or to the wording proposed by the Committee which advised synod 1980, and if it had reminded this brother that the total question has always been understood as referring to all of our confessional documents?

Also in another way, one sees here something of the impulsive nature of the actions of Synod 1980. It is striking that while in 1892 the Reformed churches had agreed that all members were required to agree with the Reformed confessions, yet the 1923 synod did not consider it *necessary* to change the historic formulation of the question in order to underline this fact even though a proposal to do so was placed on its table. Moreover, even though in 1969 some erroneously tried to defend B. Telder by saying that he was bound only to the Apostles' Creed and since his errors did not touch on any point in the Apostles' Creed, he had to be regarded as faithful (C. G. Bos, *Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis [Dutch Church History]* na 1945, Vuurbaak, 1980, p. 122), yet also Synod Arnhem 1979-80 Did not consider it necessary either to deviate from the historic formulation but adopted the wording "summarized in the Apostles' Creed" (Acta, p. 424). But meanwhile, without giving us any reason whatsoever, Synod 1980 deviates from the historic formulation and in response to one brother who asks a question Synod 1983 makes yet another alteration!

Thus, the consistory of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey requests Synod 1989 to bring back the historic formulation in the matter at hand that is, to either rescind the decisions of former synods and cause our liturgical forms to read once again "contained... in the articles of the Christian faith" , or adopt the recommendation of the 1980 Committee "summarized in the Apostles' Creed". The consistory of Surrey would recommend the latter because it agrees with the present usage in our Dutch sister churches as shown above, and because it shows more clearly what exactly the articles of the Christian faith are and the catholic link with the church of all ages (cf. Lord's Day 7).

We thank the delegates of synod for their consideration of these matters and wish them God ' s blessing and wisdom in all their deliberations.

For the consistory

Rev GH Visscher C DeJong

Appendix F

Letter from Mr. (Bert) and Mrs Moes to Synod 1989

Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Winnipeg, 1989

Esteemed brethren:

The current forms for public profession of faith and infant baptism contain a phrase which historically has never been used within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Formerly, the first question asked at public profession of faith read: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession in life and death"? Presently, the question reads: "Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions, and taught here in this Christian Church? ... " Similarly, the second question asked at infant baptism used to read: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?" This too, has been changed and now reads: "Do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?"

We believe that this is a departure from accepted historical practice and request Synod to return to the old wording, which was used by the Canadian Reformed Churches from their inception until synods Smithville (1980) and Cloverdale (1983) brought this to an abrupt end. We make this request on the following ground.

HISTORICALLY THE PHRASE "ARTICLES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH" REFERS TO THE APOSTLES' CREED. THIS IS EVIDENT FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES.

A. The Dutch Psalter of Petrus Dathenus (1566)

Our present form for the administration of infant baptism is a translation of the one found in this psalter. This book also contained a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism which explained the phrase "Articles of the Christian faith" as referring to the Apostles' Creed. (cf Lord's Day 7)

B. Synod of Utrecht (1923)

While it is true that this synod's decisions are only binding for the Dutch churches, it correctly understood that the phrase "articles of the Christian faith" does not refer to the Three Forms of Unity. In fact this synod rejected an attempt to have the words changed to "confessions of the Reformed churches." (Acts of Synod Utrecht-1923-Art 136)

C. The Committee on Translation and Revision of Confessional and Liturgical Forms

The reporters for this committee, Rev. Van Dooren and Rev. Stam, proposed that Synod Smithville (1980) adopt the words "Apostles' Creed" to replace the old wording of "Articles of the Christian faith".

D. Synod of Arnhem (1981) -

This synod of our Dutch sister churches also changed the words "Articles of the Christian faith" to "Apostles' Creed." Thus, they too, maintained the historical meaning of the phrase as explained in the Heidelberg Catechism. (Acts of Synod Arnhem-1981-page 424)

God be with you as you decide upon this matter. Yours in Christ, Brother L Moes Sister W Moes

Appendix G

Response of Synod (Winnipeg) 1989

Article 161

Committee III, IV presents:

Agenda Items VIII, B, 3, a – f

A. MATERIAL

1. Letter from the Church at Burlington, ON, (Ebenezer) re Acts General Synod Burlington-West 1986, Art. 144 re Form for the Public Profession of Faith and the Form for Baptism.
2. Letter from the Church at Surrey, BC, re Acts Smithville 1980 (Art. 129, 130), Cloverdale 1983 (Art. 145), Burlington-West 1986 (Art. 144), re same.
3. Letter from the Church at Lower Sackville, NS, re same
4. Letter from br. and sr. L. Moes, Langley, BC, re same
5. Letter from the Church at Smithers, BC, re same
6. Letter from the Church at Langley, BC, re same

B. OBSERVATIONS

1. The Church at Burlington-East requests General Synod to restore the original formulation in the Form for Public Profession of Faith (1st question) and the Form for Baptism (2nd question)

Grounds:

- a. This change is not just a “linguistic revision”
 - b. The words “Articles of the Christian faith” are historical words and are also used in L.D. 7, Q.A. 22. Therefore no Synod may change this formulation without adducing any ground.
2. The Church at Surrey requests to bring back the historic formulation.

Grounds:

- a. The decisions of our Synods in this matter are somewhat “inconsequent”, “poorly considered and impulsive.”
 - b. Our Synods have not considered the historical background of these questions.
 - c. Our Synods have not considered the catholic nature of the original wording.
 - d. Synod 1980 did not give any ground for bringing about change in the first place.
3. Br. and sr. L. Moes request the same on the ground that “historically the phrase ‘articles of the Christian faith’ refers to the Apostles’ Creed”.
 4. The Church at Langley requests to return to the old wording “the Articles of the Christian faith”.

Grounds:

- a. The historical origin of the expression
- b. The relation between the Apostles’ Creed and the Sacrament of Baptism

- c. Our sister churches in The Netherlands still use this expression
 - d. A report which served at Synod 1980 recommended retention of this expression
 - e. The Acts of 1980, 1983, 1986 give no grounds for the change.
 - f. The basic rule is that change be considered only after proper study
5. The Church at Sackville requests Synod not to accede to the request of Surrey.

Grounds:

- a. A change would remove clarity and re-introduce a measure of ambiguity
 - b. "There is no difference in meaning between creed and confession"
 - c. "it would impoverish the churches by clinging to the past while ignoring present realities." "The present formulation in the Book of Praise does not in any way deny the unity with the church of all ages"
6. The Church at Smithers urges Synod to maintain the present formulation.

Grounds:

- a. "It states more accurately what persons, making profession of faith in the Canadian Reformed Churches, are subscribing to"
- b. the expression "taught here in this Christian Church" is clarified when connected to the word "confessions"
- c. by maintaining the present formulation "we remove all thought of making an unwarranted distinction between clergy and laity"
- d. the current expression maintains our Catholic character
- e. the "confessions" include the "creeds".

7. Both the Church at Burlington-East and Surrey state, "We have no problem with the remark of Synod Burlington 1986 (Article 144, C, 2) that 'the questions asked never excluded the allegiance to all the confessions which are maintained by the Canadian Reformed Churches'".

The Church at Langley states, "The 'doctrine' of the Canadian Reformed Churches has always been based on the Bible and summarized in the six creeds/confessions that we have officially adopted".

C. CONSIDERATIONS

1. The references to "linguistic revision" and to L.D. 7 Q.A. 22 (see above, Observation I, 1, 2) have been considered by Synod 1986 (Art 144, C, 1 and 2).
2. Synod 1980 and 1983 may not have given grounds for this specific revision, but to consider the previous Synods' decisions for this reason as "inconsequential" and "poorly considered and impulsive" is an overstatement. Synod 1983 responded to a specific question with a clear answer, "in order to avoid misunderstanding ..." (Acts 1983, Art. 145 Cons. C 4 A 8).
3. The historical character of the expression "summarized in the Articles of the Christian Faith" has been considered in Synod 1986 (Acts, Art. 144, C, 2). The appellants do not offer any new grounds on this point.
4. The Churches at Burlington-East and Surrey correctly note that the historical formulation "summarized in the Articles of the Christian Faith" should not be taken in a restrictive sense as if it pertains only to the Apostles' Creed and excludes the other Confessions (Synod 1986, Acts, Art. 144, C, 1; see above, Observation VII)

5. A contextual reading of the original wording (“... taught here in this Christian church ... to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation ...”) shows that the present formulation is not a material change which is in conflict with the spirit of catholicity (see above, Observation II, 3).

6. Synod 1986 has dealt with the formulation used in the Dutch sister-churches but did not agree that there is any real discrepancy in confessional practice (Synod 1986, Acts, Art. 144, C, 4; see above, Observation IV, 3).

7. The appellants have not demonstrated any compelling reasons to return to the original wording.

D. RECOMMENDATION:

Synod decide not to accede to the requests of the churches of Burlington East, Surrey, Langley and br. and sr. L. Moes.

ADOPTED

APPENDIX H

Synod (1992) Lincoln

ARTICLE 121

Letter from the Church at Langley, BC re Synodical Decisions

Committee III presents: Agenda item VIII D4

The following motion is made and defeated:

To add to Consideration D: according to Art. 31 C.O., a decision is considered settled and binding when agreed upon by majority vote unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

I. MATERIAL

Letter from church of Langley, BC re synodical decisions e.g. Acts Winnipeg 1989 Art. 161, 91 & 108.

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The church at Langley, BC expresses its concern with regard to decisions made by a number of Synods which were not substantiated by proper grounds and considerations.
- B. By way of this letter they appeal two particular synodical decisions and at the same time warn against a wrong synodical procedure which they say is becoming more and more common at our broadest assembly.
- C. The first example the church at Langley, BC uses to demonstrate what they call improper decision making is found in the Acts of Synod 1989 Art. 161. They argue that there were never any grounds or compelling reasons given to change the statements of the forms for baptism and public profession of faith from “summarized in the articles of the Christian faith” to “summarized in the confessions.”
- D. The second example concerns Acts 1989 Art. 108. The church at Langley, BC refers to the fact that consideration D.3 of the aforementioned article did not give any reason explaining why Synod 1983 changed the formulation of the answer for the ordination of elders and deacons “I do” to “I do with all my heart” when answering the appeal of br. J. VanderMeulen. The church at Langley points out that Synod 1983 did not publish any reason for this change.
- E. The church at Langley, BC requests “those who propose or make the changes to our Confessions, Forms or Church Order have the duty to supply the grounds or the ‘compelling reasons’ for doing so.” It also requests “Seeing that in the case of Art. 108 and 161, Acts 1989 this was not done...to declare these changes null and void and to return to the original wording.” 83

III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The Committee for Liturgical Forms was given the mandate by General Synod 1977 (Article 60, Recommendation 4) to “update the language” of the forms. This indicates linguistic changes, and not changes in meaning. The example of a change in wording in the forms for baptism and

public profession of faith from “summarized in the articles of the Christian faith” to “summarized in the confessions,” as raised by the church at Langley, BC, was judged by General Synod 1989 to be a linguistic change and not one in meaning (Article 161 C1; compare Acts of Synod 1986, Article 144 C1,2,3).

- B. As to the second example, the church at Langley, BC is not correct that no grounds were given when the wording of the answer to the questions in the Form for the Ordination was changed from “I do” to “I do with all my heart.” Even though Synod 1983 did not provide reasons for the change in the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Synod 1980 did so when it revised the Form for Ordination/Installation of Ministers of the Word. It was argued that since the first question asked of those ordained to office reads “Do you feel in your hearts that God Himself ... has called you to these offices?” this should be reflected in the answer given, “I do with all my heart.” (see Acts of Synod 1980, Art.139 C.4).
- C. In his letter br. VanderMeulen asked Synod 1989 to give scriptural reasons for the addition “with all my heart.” The addition of the words “with all my heart” do not change the meaning of the answer given by the elders and deacons. It is not always possible or necessary to give scriptural grounds for a linguistic change. General Synod 1989 was correct when it answered the appellant that General Synod 1983 did not need to give any special scriptural reasons for this addition (Acts 1989, Art. 108 D.3).
- D. Synod agrees with the principle that decisions of broader assemblies should be based on proper grounds and considerations. However, the two examples cited by the church at Langley were not made without grounds.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. that the examples given by the church of Langley, BC do not support the contention that Synods have made decisions without giving proper grounds and considerations.

B. not to accede to the church at Langley’s request to declare the particular changes to which they refer “null and void.”

ADOPTED

Rev. J. Visscher and elder P. VanderPol abstain from voting in accordance with Art. 32 C.O.

ARTICLE 122 Appeal of the Church at Abbotsford, BC re Acts General Synod Winnipeg 1989

Committee III presents: Agenda item VIII D17

I. MATERIAL

Letter from the church at Abbotsford, BC re Acts General Synod 1989, Article 161.

II. OBSERVATION

The church at Abbotsford, BC claims that “changing ‘Apostles Creed’ to ‘confession’ in the second question in the form for Baptism and in the form for Public 84 Profession of Faith was illegally dealt with by previous Synods.” The ground adduced is “that the change in the above named forms has never been dealt with by any minor assembly, as per what is required in the last paragraph of Church Order Article 30.”

III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The church at Abbotsford, BC is mistaken when it states that the forms for Baptism and Public Profession of Faith used to speak of the “Apostles’ Creed.” In fact, these forms spoke of “articles of the Christian faith.”
- B. The church at Abbotsford, BC wrongly concludes that this change in the wording of the forms is a matter of the minor assembly since the forms in our Book of Praise are a matter of the churches in common.
- C. General Synod 1977 mandated the Committee for Liturgical Forms to update the language of the forms in the Book of Praise. Subsequent Synods have maintained that the resulting change from “articles of the Christian faith” to “confessions” was a linguistic revision. This is not a matter which has to be initiated at the minor assembly.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide not to accede to the request of the church at Abbotsford, BC.

ADOPTED

APPENDIX I

1. The *Form for the Baptism of Infants* in use in the churches **prior to 1980** read in the address to the parents, in the second question:

Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

The *Form for the Baptism of Infants* as **proposed by synod 1980** read in the address to the parents, in the second question:

Do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and the New Testament, summarized in the Creeds and taught here in this Christian Church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

After the provisional revision was submitted to the churches **Synod 1983 adopted** the following for the *Form for the Baptism of Infants* in the second question:

Do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

2. The *Form for the Baptism of Adults* in use in the churches **prior to 1980** read in the address to the person to be baptized, in the fourth question:

Do you assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God...?

The *Form for the Baptism of Adults* as **proposed by synod 1980** read in the address to the person to be baptized, in the fourth question:

Do you wholeheartedly agree with the doctrine of the Word of God as summarized in the Creeds and taught in this Christian Church?

Synod 1983 adopted the following for the *Form for the Baptism of Adults* in the fourth question:

Do you wholeheartedly agree with the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the Confessions and taught here in this Christian Church?

3. The *Form for the Public Profession of Faith* in use in the churches **prior to 1980** read in the address to the person professing their faith, in the first question:

Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

The *Form for the Public Profession of Faith* as **proposed by synod 1980** read in the address to the person professing their faith, in the first question:

Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Word of God, summarized in the Creeds and taught in this Christian Church?

Synod 1983 adopted the following in the *Form for the Public Profession of Faith*, in the first question:

Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the Confessions and taught here in this Christian Church?