

CREC Book of Resources (unofficial)

Revision History

Adopted at Council 2021

Revised at Council 2023

Contents

Introduction

On Ministerial Training

On Christian Education

On Creation

On Terrorism

On Homosexuality

On Worship

On Abortion

On The Critical Social Justice Movement and the CREC

On Authority, Submission, and Equality in the Godhead

Report of the Sacramental Cooperation Committee

Introduction

Excerpted from the CREC Constitution, Article X

The CREC has three primary documents: the Constitution, the Book of Memorials, and the Book of Confessions. The secondary documents are our Book of Procedures and our Book of Resources. The status of Resources is that they are commended for consideration, interaction, edification, training, and study. They do not necessarily represent the official position of the CREC. To be included in the Book of Resources, a two-thirds vote of Council is required.

On Ministerial Training

previously in the CREC Book of Memorials

added at Council on October 28, 2021

We believe that ministerial training is best conducted under the oversight of a local session, and should include an intense apprenticeship in a local body to test and develop the gifts, skills, knowledge, and spiritual qualifications of the candidate. At the same time, it is very difficult for many local congregations, with limited resources, to provide a candidate with a form of theological training that upholds high academic standards, equips the candidate in original languages, and so forth. Thus, we see a place for churches to send men to seminaries, while still overseeing and facilitating their training in other ways. In an ideal scenario, seminaries would function as educational extensions of the Church, and seminary learning would be integrated into a comprehensive program of ministerial apprenticeship.

On Christian Education

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

All things are to be considered and conducted under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, including education, and especially the education of our covenant children. God has not charged the state to educate children but has explicitly commanded parents to bring up their children in the education and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4, Deut. 6:7). Given the importance of the task (Ps. 127:3–5, Deut. 6:7–9), and the impossibility of neutrality in education (Prov. 1:7, Matt. 12:30, Luke 6:40, Col. 2:1–10, 2 Cor. 10:3–5), we do heartily affirm the necessity of educating our children in a manner that is explicitly Christian in content and rigor. Government schools tend to be, by decree and design, explicitly godless, and therefore normally should not be considered a legitimate means of inculcating true faith, holy living and a decidedly Christian world-view in the children of Christian parents. Therefore, we strongly encourage Christian parents to seek alternative ways of educating their children, whether by means of Christian schools or homeschooling. In cases where Christian education is an impossibility, parents must be active and diligent in overseeing the education of their children.

Parents who do not fully understand the indispensability of Christian education should be warmly received into membership. However, the leaders of Christ's church must thoroughly understand and plainly teach the divine imperative to disciple our children, the divine prohibition of rendering unto Caesar those who bear God's image (Matt. 22:20–21), the divine warning to those who cause their little ones to stumble (Matt. 18:6) and the divine promises to those who raise their children in faith (Deut. 7:9, Ps. 102:5–7, Ps. 103:17–18, Prov. 22:6, Luke 1:48–50, Acts 2:39).

On Creation

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

The doctrine of creation lies at the heart of Christian living, deeply embedded within our assumptions about worship, knowledge, faith, celebration, beauty, and redemption. In recent decades, many conservative evangelicals have been moved by the science of the day to oppose the historic view of creation in six sequential days of common length, several millennia in the past. Instead, they hold that the bare ideas of creation presented in Genesis have little to do with the actualities of creation. Falsely pitting poetry and symbolism against history, they distort the text of Scripture and divorce ideas from the created order in ancient Gnostic fashion.

Science is a legitimate and noble pursuit, as an aspect of the creation mandate (Gen. 1:26–28), and Christians should not be fearful or ungrateful for advances in scientific knowledge and technology. Indeed, the best scientific developments have been the fruit of an essentially Christian worldview. Advances in medicine, transportation, communication, computers, etc. are God's good gifts. We therefore encourage the cultivation of the scientific enterprise on the basis of fully biblical principles. Science and the gospel are not inherently antagonistic.

On Terrorism

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

A. Introduction

Terrorism is an unrighteous use of violence that has demanded increasing worldwide attention since the bombing of the World Trade Centers in New York City on September 11, 2001. While even just uses of violence use terror (generically understood) to break the will of the opposition, terrorism involves deliberate acts of violence or threats of such violence against those innocent of wrongdoing. Its brutality is aimed at governments, social or ethnic groups, but especially at civilians. Throughout history it has been employed by labor organizers, political parties, political dissidents, Islamic jihadists, and even state governments.

B. Assessment

All uses of violence must have the establishment of true justice as their aim and the fear of the Lord as their guiding light. Terrorism has neither. It intentionally targets the innocent to accentuate fear and manipulate change; in addition, it is frequently employed to advance the cause of false religions. But the Living God defends the innocent (Exod 23:7; Deut 19:10; Ps 82:1-4; Prov 17:15; Matt 27:4), hates those who love violence (Ps 5:5-6; 10:1-18; 11:5; Prov 6:16-17), and opposes those who labor to establish the worship of false gods (Deut 32:15-22; Ps 78:58-59; Jer 5:7-9). Terrorism, therefore, is unjust and its practitioners shall face the wrath and curse of Almighty God in this life and the next (Gen 9:6; Ps 55:23; Prov 28:17; Is 59:1-8).

At the same time, we affirm that God is active in these events for His glory and honor (Acts 2:22-24; 4:24-30). God is the Lord of history and nothing happens apart from His knowledge and determination (Dan 4:34-35; Eph 1:11). Therefore, God is actively involved even when terrorists strike (Gen 50:19; Isa 45:5-7; Amos 3:6; cf. Prov 16:4), without Himself being responsible for their wickedness (Jas 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5). That God is active in these events does not mean that all victims of terrorism are under the direct judgment of God; sometimes God allows innocent people to suffer at the hands of the wicked (cf. Gen 31:36-42; Ps 10:6-8; Job). Yet God often uses wicked men and nations, including terrorists, to judge those who rebel against Him while always holding the wicked themselves accountable for their wickedness (cf. Isa 10:12-19; 14:24-27; Ezek 21; Hab 1-2). God is sovereign over even unjust uses of violence.

C. Response

Given the wicked nature of terrorism, it is good and right for nations to respond to terrorist attacks by using military force to bring terrorists to justice. This would include securing national borders as well as making war on those nations, organizations, or tribes that finance and harbor such terrorists.

Furthermore, it is lawful for believing Christians to participate in such military responses. However:

1. It is neither lawful nor honorable for women to be mustered for combat service (Deu 14:21b; 22:5). It is the duty of men—not women—to protect their homelands and nations (Num 1:3; Jer 51:30). Christian fathers must protect their daughters from being seduced or coerced into such a circumstance, and the Church must support them as they do.

2. It is not lawful to respond to terrorist attacks in the name of false gods or with a proud and arrogant spirit (Ps 18:31-34; 144; Isa 10:5-19). God summons all to pay homage to Him because Jesus is the Lord of all nations (Ps 72:11; Matt 28:18-20; Rev 1:5; 1 Tim 2:5) and is the only way to God (John 5:22-23; 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5). No nation is independent of God's authority (Ps 94:20; Rev 11:15) or free from the requirements of His law (Ps 67:3-4; 72:1-4; Isa 42:4; 1 Tim 1:8-11).
3. It is not lawful to utilize any and all means in the pursuit of terrorists. Military responses to terrorism must themselves uphold righteousness and justice. This would prohibit using military force to spread even the true faith by force of arms (2 Cor 10:3-6) as well as using such force to confiscate others' land or resources unjustly (Exod 17:8-9; 20:15; Prov 22:28; Ezek 22:27; Heb 11:34). Just uses of violence are defensive in nature, defending life, liberty, and property against an aggressor.

D. Conclusion

Therefore, mindful of God's judgments (2 Cor 5:9-11; Rev 18:8; 19:1-5, 11), the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches urges our leaders and peoples to fear God, to honor His Christ, to confess our sins, and to seek His favor in order that all peoples may be delivered from the scourge of terrorism (Ps 2:10-12; 110).

On Homosexuality

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

Courage, Clarity, and Charity: A Phoenix Declaration January 2003

As Christian ministers standing in the stream of historic Christianity and rooted in the Evangelical heritage, we believe it is time to speak with courage, clarity, and charity to the issue of homosexuality that is besetting the Church at large. Confessing the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God (Isaiah 40:8; Luke 4:31–32; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21), we believe that God has spoken clearly and sufficiently to the issue of human sexuality. In accordance with this belief, we must state that homosexuality in its varied forms, whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, is out of accord with God’s design for human sexuality and is sinful, therefore, in the eyes of God (Genesis 1:27–28; 2:18–25; 19:1–28; Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Matthew 19:4–6; Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:8–10; 2 Peter 2:6–8). The only remedy for this, and all other sin, is found in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11). As ministers of this glorious gospel of God’s grace, who are striving after faithfulness to God and His Word, we state the following as a call to the Church to return to faithfulness in a spirit of repentance.

Courage

In our time, many who are recognized as clergy are calling for and promoting a revision of the historic Christian understanding of God’s Word concerning homosexuality. This teaching is out of accord with the Bible and leads the flock of Christ astray. Such teaching arrogantly overturns God’s holy standard dealing with human sexuality. Love for Christ and His Church compels us to speak truthfully about that which is false. Courage is needed to refute those who would call evil good and good evil. The example and teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles show clearly that false teachers are to be exposed and refuted so that the Church is protected (Acts 20:28–31; Romans 16:17–18; Titus 1:9; 2 Peter 2:1–3). In an age that tolerates everything but the truth, courage is needed to speak the truth in love in an uncompromising manner.

Clarity

The Bible provides a clear and consistent teaching in opposition to homosexuality. Modern attempts to subvert this clear teaching are without substance. The Word of God must not be held prisoner to alien philosophical or cultural agendas. If allowed to speak with its own authority, the Biblical teaching is seen to be utterly opposed to homosexuality and its attendant practices.

Furthermore, the historic testimony of Christian interpretation is in perfect harmony with this position. Contrary to popularized agendas, the Bible and those who have officially taught Christianity throughout the ages have recognized the sinfulness of homosexuality. The interpretations of such teachers as Athenagorus, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Lactantius, Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Augustine are unanimous. The modern attempt to revise the Biblical teaching, claiming Biblical and interpretive support, is a theological and moral novelty.

Charity

Love for neighbor compels us to remind those who are caught in the depths of sin that God in His holiness will not be mocked—He will bring judgment against sin. It is not an act of oppression or hate to point out the Divine condemnation of homosexuality. Rather, it is an act of kindness. We are opposed to the ill-treatment that many people in favor of homosexuality have experienced; yet we deny that our disagreement and presentation of the Bible's teaching with regard to this subject constitutes ill treatment, hatred, or bigotry. In speaking the truth about the nature of homosexuality and God's opposition to it, we simultaneously hold forth the message of God's grace. God can and does forgive those who forsake the sin of homosexuality. God can and does bring freedom from bondage and cleansing of conscience to those who turn to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Romans 3:21–26; 6:1–14; Ephesians 2:1–10; 1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 10:19–22). It is false compassion to accept and affirm those who are unrepentant in homosexuality. Charity demands that we speak the truth about God's holiness and His gospel.

On Worship

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

- A. We believe that Lord's Day worship is our highest privilege, our greatest duty, and our deepest joy.¹ God has created us for just this purpose: to worship Him, and to be transformed by Him as we worship.²
- B. We believe that in worship the people of God are engaged by the Spirit and drawn into the Father's presence as living sacrifices in union with the Risen Christ.³ In Lord's Day worship, God renews His covenant relationship with His people by serving them and them serving Him.⁴ He draws near to us to draw us near to Him.⁵
- C. We believe that in Lord's Day worship, we are gathered together in the presence of the living God among a glorious assembly consisting of angels, the church militant on earth, and the church triumphant in heaven.⁶
- D. We believe that each week in worship, through the Lord's service to us and our service to Him, our Triune Creator and Redeemer gives us the covenant gifts of glory, knowledge, and life, in and through the assurance of our forgiveness, the preaching of the Word, and the partaking of the Lord's Supper.⁷ While bestowing these gifts upon us in worship, at the same time, He graciously accepts our praise and thanksgiving of Him.⁸ In re-orienting us around His covenant,⁹ He empowers and calls us to live in terms of His new creation.¹⁰
- E. We believe that God uses our worship to change us and the world.¹¹ We are transformed by the grace of God's presence,¹² and leave worship with a renewed sense of, and commitment to, mission,¹³ discipleship,¹⁴ and community.¹⁵ Biblical worship results in changed lives, Spirit-empowerment, and impacts the world for Christ. Furthermore, God is pleased to hear and answer our prayers, particularly those that ascend in the Lord's Day worship of the Church.¹⁶ He hears our prayers for the nations and in answering us makes manifest His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁷

1 Ex. 20:8–11, Heb. 4:9; Heb. 10:25, Deut. 26:10, Ps. 29:2, Ps. 27:4, Ps. 65:4, Ps. 73:25; Heb. 4:16.

2 Is. 43:21; 1Cor. 6:20; Rev. 4:11; Rom. 12:1–2; Jn. 4:23.

3 Lam. 3:41; Ps. 25:1; 28:2; Eph. 2:12–22, Rom. 12:1–2; Heb. 12:18–25; Heb. 8:5; Rev. 4:1.

4 Is. 66:20–22, Lk. 22:19; Lev. 1–5.

5 Deut. 4:7; Rev. 3:20, Ex. 24:12; 2 Cor. 6:16b-18; Heb. 10:19 with Heb. 9:11,12.

6 Rev. 9–12, Heb. 12:22–24, Eph. 2:6.

7 Rom. 3:23; 8:30; Jn. 17:22; Rom. 1:21–23; Jn. 17:17; Jn. 17:2,3; Ro. 2:7–10; 1Jn. 2:20, 27; Ps. 115, Rev. 21:11, Jn. 6:53–58, 1Pet. 1:23

8 Ps. 51:17, Ez. 20:40–41.

9 Ps. 50:5; Mt. 26:28; Heb 8:6; 12:24.

10 Mt. 28:16–20; Jn. 20:19–23.

11 Ps. 22:25–27; Gen. 22:9–18.

12 Rom. 12:1–2; 2Cor. 3:18.

13 Mt. 28:19a.

14 Mt. 28:19b, 20a.

15 Is. 55:12; Rom. 15:13–14; Mt. 28:20b.

16 1Kg. 8:26–53; Mt. 18:19–20; Rev. 8:3–6.

17 Mt. 9:38; Mt. 6:9–10.

F. We believe that worship should be informed and governed by the Bible in its entirety.¹⁸ In constructing our liturgies, we are to pay particular attention to those portions of God's Word that are specifically given to inform us of what God desires in worship. These portions include, but are not limited to, descriptions of patriarchal worship, Levitical worship,¹⁹ and Tabernacle of David worship,²⁰ which all point toward the glorious advent of Jesus Christ, whose self-offering and victorious resurrection accomplished our salvation.²¹ This final work of our Savior provides the basis for the resultant transformation of worship spoken of by the Apostles in the New Covenant.²² We are, of course, prohibited from returning to the practices of animal sacrifices, for this would deny our faith in the perfect and complete sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

G. We believe that these portions of the Bible give us a divine pattern and sequence of worship,²³ and provide us a detailed understanding of the benefits of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.²⁴ These benefits include purification from our sins,²⁵ transformation of our persons,²⁶ acceptance of our work and tribute,²⁷ and peace with God and men.²⁸ Through Biblical worship, the Lord assures us of the forgiveness of our sins,²⁹ the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of renewal in our lives,³⁰ the requirement and acceptability of

18 2Tim 3:16–17; Is. 8:20; Ex. 20:4–6; Heb. 8:5.

19 Lev. 1–7.

20 1Chr. 16:1 ff; 1Chr. 25; 2Sam. 6; 2Chr. 15:14–15; 23:18; 29:25–30; 35:15; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:45–46; Acts 15:16,17.

21 Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 1:5; Heb. 9:11–14.

22 Acts 15:16–17; Heb. 7:12; Heb. 8:5; 10:19–22; 9:23, 24.

23 Lev. 9:22.

24 Jn. 1:29.

25 Lev. 4,5; Heb. 9:26; 10:12.

26 Lev 1; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 4:16; Gal. 6:15.

27 Lev. 2; Eccl. 9:7.

28 Lev. 3; Rom. 5:1.

29 Lev. 4–5; Col. 1:14.

30 Lev. 1; Rom. 12:1–2.

vocation,³¹ and the promise of the increase and maturation of Christian community.³²

- H. We believe that these portions of the Bible also teach us that each of these glorious aspects of worship are to be set in the context of beautiful music that is maturing in both voice and instrument, to the praise of Christ the King.³³
- I. We believe that the proper implementation in love of the above requires a practical understanding of all that Scripture teaches, including an understanding of lesser and greater matters, Christian forbearance with our brothers, liberty in worship which is not self-willed, an avoidance of an over-scrupulous zeal, and a desire to maintain a Biblical catholicity as we build on the work of the historic church.³⁴

31 Lev. 2; 2Thes. 3:10–12; Rom. 15:27; 1Cor. 9:13–14.

32 Lev. 3; 1Cor. 10:17; Eph. 4:11–13; Jn. 17:20.

33 1Chr. 15:16; 25:6,7; Ps. 98:4–6; 144:9; 150; Rev. 5:8; 14:2–3; 15:2–3.

34 Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:2.

On Abortion

*previously in the CREC Book of Memorials
added at Council on October 28, 2021*

The God revealed in Holy Scripture sides with the weak and powerless (Dt. 10:18) and sets Himself against those who would harm or take advantage of the widow, the orphan or the alien (Ex. 22:22; Dt. 27:19). He is the Father of the fatherless (Ps. 68:5) and those who love Him are called to imitate Him (Jas. 1:27).

Throughout Scripture, unborn babies are regarded as immature human beings, and therefore true bearers of God's image (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 127:3-5) and objects of His loving care whose personhood begins at conception, not at implantation or at some later point. From the twin boys struggling in Rebekah's womb to the unborn John the Baptist who leaped for joy at the approach of his unborn Savior, God clearly regards the unborn as His handiwork (Ps. 139:13-16; Is. 44:2). Babies in the womb are persons with legal standing (Ex. 21:22-25), covenant status (Ps. 22:10), continuity of personhood (Judg. 13:2-5; Ps. 51:5), and the ability to offer true worship (Lk. 1:41-44). Jesus himself demonstrated great love and concern for small children (Mt. 19:13) and pronounced dire consequences for those who would mistreat them (Lk. 17:2). To love children is to imitate God.

Because unborn humans bear the image of God and are innocent of criminal wrongdoing, the act of abortion is murder (Dt. 5:17). Murder is a Satanic assault on the image of God (Gen. 3:15, 9:6) and results in a corporate guilt which defiles the land when justice is not pursued on behalf of the innocent (Dt. 21:1-9; 2 Ki 24:3-4). Abortion not only murders the unborn child but wreaks spiritual and emotional devastation on all involved (1 Jn 3:15), searing their consciences (1 Tim. 4:1-2; Eph. 4:17-24) and tearing the fabric of love that unites parents to their children (Is. 49:15). Until very recently, the Christian Church has strongly and uniformly opposed abortion. The Didache, a first century summary of Christian ethics, explicitly prohibits abortion and infanticide. And the early Church was known throughout the Roman Empire for its rescue and adoption of unwanted infants abandoned and left to die of exposure.

Therefore, we oppose taking unborn human life by any means including the various types of abortive procedures, the use of the so-called morning after pill, or the use of abortifacients. This includes aborting babies that are the result of rape and incest, those that have been deemed non-viable, and those whose race, sex or physical and/or mental capabilities are not to the parents' liking. Even in those rare circumstances when a pregnancy causes an immediate threat to the life of a mother, the calling of fathers, mothers, and doctors is to do all they can to preserve life not take it. In such circumstances, when parents and doctors are doing all they can to preserve life, the role of the Church is to be pastoral and instructive, not disciplinary.

Further, we oppose all local and national entities that promote and provide abortion services. At the same time, we praise those organizations that promote the cause of the unborn and that provide support and services for men and women who are grappling with the challenges and decisions attendant to unplanned

and/or unwanted pregnancies or who are suffering from the guilt of having taken an innocent human life (1 John 3:18; Ro. 12:15). Additionally, we applaud the people and organizations laboring to expose the wickedness and extent of the abortion industry (Eph. 5:11).

While applauding most efforts to protect the unborn, we abhor the violence of anti-abortion vigilantes who are willing to destroy property and even to take life in their attempt to oppose this sin. We eschew the weapons of the flesh, wielding instead with the weapons of the Spirit (2 Cor. 10:4): Gospel preaching (2 Tim. 3:2-3), psalm-singing/corporate worship (Ps. 29; 2 Chron. 20:20-22), prayer (Mat. 5:44, Eph. 6:18), apologetic discussion (1 Pet. 3:15-16; 2 Cor. 10:5-6), as well as peaceful protest and civil disobedience (Ex. 1:17; Dan. 3:16-18, 6:10).

In conclusion, we oppose the sin of abortion for love's sake: love for God, love for His image in the unborn and their parents, and love for the nations languishing under the curse of this heinous sin (Rom 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Dt. 21:1-9). We pray for wisdom to engage our unbelieving culture winsomely, resolutely and decisively. And we pray for grace to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:14-15) to our brothers and sisters in other churches and denominations currently thinking through, or rethinking, what God has revealed about the value of human life before and after birth (Ps. 139:1-16).

The Critical Social Justice Movement and the CREC

added at Council on October 28, 2021

In recent years, the so-called Critical Social Justice movement and its ideological underpinnings in Critical Theory have gained increasing prominence in the public square, in particular with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The Critical Social Justice Movement (hereafter CSJ) claims to be committed to addressing injustices in our society, and many Christians and churches have begun to speak its language and embrace its tenets. We believe this is a serious mistake, and the aim of this short statement is briefly to explain why.

This statement does not attempt to expound CSJ in detail, much less to articulate a comprehensive critique. Our aims are simply to summarize in the broadest possible terms the intellectual history and nature of the ideology, to describe some of its present effects, and to state briefly our position on the issues it raises. Anyone wanting to discuss in more detail the CREC's position on any of these matters is encouraged to contact their nearest CREC Church.

CSJ traces its intellectual roots back at least as far as the 19th century and Karl Marx's theories of class warfare. Marxism portrayed all of life as a conflict between the oppressive bourgeoisie and the oppressed workers, and sought to awaken the workers to their oppressed status, encouraging them to rise up and overthrow their wealthy bourgeoisie overlords. In the middle of the 20th century, philosophers of the Frankfurt School began to apply Marx's theories of class conflict in other domains. For example, they claimed that all of life is a conflict between oppressive white and oppressed black people, and sought to awaken black people to their oppressed status and encourage them to rise up against their white oppressors. This Marxist analysis was replicated in other spheres, eventually giving birth to Critical Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and so on. The uprising of "the oppressed" envisaged by the Frankfurt School would not be altogether peaceful. Herbert Marcuse, one of their most prominent representatives, argued that physical violence, though theoretically wrong on ethical grounds, is justifiable when practiced by "the oppressed" (in Marcuse's view, those on the political left) against "the oppressors" (in Marcuse's view, political conservatives).

These ideas were further sharpened in the later 20th century by postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault, who insisted that all claims to truth are in fact merely disguised tools of political power, instruments of manipulation wielded by dominant groups in an attempt to keep the oppressed in their place. The proper aim of all discourse is not to uncover the truth, but rather to expose how this manipulation is being done. Around the same time, legal scholar Derrick Bell combined many of these themes, insisting famously that racism is the ordinary state of society, and that even the attempts by some whites to promote black welfare are motivated by cynical self-interest. He coined the term "Critical Race Theory" to refer to this philosophical framework. His student Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term "intersectionality" to highlight the fact that many people exist at the "intersection" of two or more of these oppressed groups (black women, for example, or disabled transgender people), further intensifying

their oppressed status.

The contemporary Social Justice movement is the natural product of all these ideas. It defines all people by their membership of one or more “oppressed” or “oppressor” groups; insists that every white person is racist, every man is sexist, every straight person is anti-gay, and so on; and demands that oppressors apologize for their (and in some cases their forebears’) prejudice, while at the same time paradoxically maintaining that all such apologies are motivated by cynical self-interest and cannot in any case expiate the guilt of the accused. It encourages ceaseless activism in every sphere of life, with the result that the mission of every organization is effectively rendered subservient to its overarching aims. It refuses to engage in any kind of reasoned discussion, since all claims to truth are merely tools of manipulation and all claims of innocence merely prove the speaker’s guilt. Ultimately, the Social Justice movement legitimates physical violence against people and property in the pursuit of its goals.

Most contemporary Social Justice activists appear to be unaware of this history and the true aims of the movement, and their involvement is arguably more naive than malicious. Many have been recruited through social media, which fosters the rapid spread of new ideas without generally encouraging the careful thought necessary to assess them rigorously. Others have been pressured into compliance by administrative mechanisms and compulsory training programs in academic, government, and commercial sectors, which impose CSJ’s vision for social change via speech codes, hiring practices, community guidelines, and so on. Many have been deceived by CSJ’s professed desire to pursue ideals such as “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion,” which appear superficially laudable, but which have in fact been redefined by CSJ so that they function as linguistic Trojan Horses for toxic ideological content.

The CREC is determined to resist the ideology of CSJ and the activism it produces. It is not that we deny there is injustice in our society. Quite the contrary. Clearly, there is a history of racism in the Western world and beyond, and such prejudice – along with sexism, xenophobia, and ungodly discrimination of every kind – tragically persists today in many contexts. We stand against all such sins, provided that the definitions and boundaries of such sins are established by Scripture alone, and not from the lexicons of Critical Theory. The problem with CSJ is not its claim that there is injustice in our world, but rather its inaccurate portrayal of the history of this injustice, its catastrophically mistaken philosophical analysis, its flawed diagnosis of the present situation, and its proposed solutions which will, to the extent that they are implemented, merely make the situation incalculably worse.

We are committed to tackling the injustices in our society not by embracing CSJ’s vision of social transformation, but by seeking to shape our lives by the teaching of Scripture as individuals and Churches. We recognize that temptations to sin lurk within the heart of every one of us, and that these may include the sins of malice, prejudice, and vainglory, whether racial, sexual, tribal, or national. We are committed to lives of ongoing repentance from these and all our sins. We seek the forgiveness that is found in Christ and the renewal of God’s Spirit, so that we may be reconciled with our Heavenly Father and with one another within the body of Christ. We long to see a world in which justice prevails in every corner of society, and we are

convinced that this will take place as the Spirit of God works in and through the Church, and as we all take responsibility for living day by day as faithful disciples of Christ. We invite you to join us.

On Authority, Order, and Equality within the Godhead: Affirmations and Denials

added at Council on October 28, 2021

Preamble: Statement of Intent

In light of the recurring debate over the “eternal subordination of the Son,” it was our desire to make a statement that all *orthodox* believers on both sides of this discussion could affirm. While acknowledging that great care must be taken when it comes to our choices of words in all discussions of the Trinity, we do not want unnecessary division on the basis of *mere* terminological differences. This calls for a delicate balance, which Michael Ward describes quite well: “Lewis accepted the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds with their insistence on the co-eternity of the Son with the Father, but believed that the essential equality of divine being among the Persons of the Trinity was not incompatible with an ordering, even a kind of hierarchy, therein. Obviously, Christ was subject to the Father as man; but Lewis also thought he was to the Father as God. This position is distinguishable from the heresy of subordinationism; its *locus classicus* is 1 Cor. 15:27-28”^[i] We submit the statement below to the candid evaluation of all those who love the truth of orthodoxy, the purity of the faith, and the peace of the church.

A Digest of Our Statement

1

We affirm, without qualification, the truths we have inherited from our Fathers in the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, and as confirmed and reaffirmed in the Reformed standards.

We deny that the high mystery of the Trinity means that we cannot discuss it in edifying ways, conducive to true worship and as an encouragement to righteous living.

2

We affirm the utter simplicity of God.

We deny that God is in any way a composite Being. He is not an aggregation of His attributes, and He is not the sum total of three beings.

3

We affirm that the Father is the ultimate and infinite Speaker (Gen. 1:3), that the Son is the ultimate and infinite Word (John 1:1-2), and the Holy Spirit is the ultimate and infinite Interpreter (1 Cor. 2:10).

We deny that the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, are in any way an indication of inferiority in the one begotten or in the one proceeding.

4

We *affirm* that, even as Scripture reveals to us the names of *Father* and *Son*, so God has placed real meaning in those words, and our mortal relations, such as earthly fathers and sons, are analogical but real reflections of the eternal Father and Son.

We *deny* that creaturely realities of finitude, mortality, or sin invalidate the archetypal nature of the Trinity with respect to man, or the capacity and responsibility for us to learn fatherhood and sonship from their immutable archetypes in the Holy Trinity.

5

We *affirm* that even as God is the Father of the Son, and the Author of all being, so there is real authority (*auctoritas*) within the Godhead.

We *deny* that the authority of the Father and the “responses” of the Son and Spirit are according to essence, divinity, rank, or station, but rather that they are according to eternal origin, generation, procession, operation, and order.

6

We *affirm* that in His incarnate state, the Son in His humanity submitted to the will of His Father in Heaven.

We *deny* that scriptural statements concerning the submission of Christ in His humanity can be transferred without qualification to the relations of the persons internally within the Godhead.

7

We *affirm* that the Son and Spirit in their respective missions reveal the authority and order of God the Father from all eternity.

We *deny* that within the Godhead this authority and obedience contained any tension, distance, conflict, friction, or resistance whatsoever.

8

We *affirm* that when God speaks a command, the Son *is* Himself the very Command that is spoken.

We *deny* that the asymmetry affirmed in this statement in any way contradicts or threatens the doctrine of divine simplicity or the Godhead’s single will.

9

We *affirm* that the unified will of God is in no way in contradiction with the dispositions of the persons toward the Father, or with their distinct yet inseparable operations in the cosmos.

We *deny* that this is in any way a contradiction, while confessing that it is a high mystery.

10

All statements regarding the eternal God, and above all those truths regarding His triune nature, are a mere knife’s edge away from heresy. Yet we speak, not that we may try to explain the unfathomable, but lest we be

completely silent, as Augustine said, remembering that while the secret things belong to the Lord, those things that are revealed belong to us and to our children (Deut. 29:29).

Our Statement in Full

1

We affirm that God's wisdom is unsearchable (Rom. 11:33), and that He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). His ways are not ours, and His thoughts are not ours (Is. 55:8). The doctrine of the Trinity should therefore be handled by us with all due humility, and this is particularly the case when reasoning by extension to or from that doctrine. Such humility should check us from any rash speculations, as well as from hasty accusations. *We affirm*, without qualification, the truths we have inherited from our Fathers in the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, and as confirmed and reaffirmed in the Reformed standards.

We deny that the high mystery of the Trinity means that we cannot discuss it in edifying ways, conducive to true worship and as an encouragement to righteous living. We therefore insist that the doctrine of the Trinity is not an irrelevant doctrine when it comes to a practical Christian life—we worship the *eternal* Father, after all, from whom lesser and temporal fatherhoods derive their name (Eph. 3:15). The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to all rightly-ordered Christian living, and particularly to our worship. In our Christian discipleship, we are called to imitate things that we cannot really duplicate (John 17:21; Eph. 5:25), and we accept our responsibility to do so.

2

We affirm the utter simplicity of God. The fact of His triune majesty does not negate the truth that our God is in fact one God (Dt. 6:4). The one true God is infinite, omnipotent, utterly and inexhaustibly sovereign, without shadow of turning, variation, or change, without body, parts or passions, all-sufficient, all-knowing, and without any contingency whatever.

We deny that God is in any way a composite Being. He is not an aggregation of His attributes, and He is not the sum total of three beings. He is not a large version of anything we might conceive or experience. What we know about God is what He reveals to us, not what we project into His place. Every earthly illustration or analogy of the Trinity taken from human experience is, if pressed inappropriately, simply the illustration of some heresy or other. But because our knowledge of God *is* analogical, it is necessary to use such illustrations, and possible to do so responsibly.

3

We affirm that the Father is the ultimate and infinite Speaker (Gen. 1:3), that the Son is the ultimate and infinite Word (John 1:1-2), and the Holy Spirit is the ultimate and infinite Interpreter (1 Cor. 2:10). And the Speaker, the Spoken, and the Interpreter are all one truth, the one true God. And so there is only one will within the Godhead, not three competing wills or three agreeing wills. As Father, Son, and Spirit mutually indwell each other, so also each glorifies the other in accordance with the love they share for each other.

We deny that the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from

the Father and the Son, are in any way an indication of inferiority in the one begotten or in the one proceeding. All that is begotten by God in this way *is* God, and all that proceeds in this way from God is God. At the same time, the revealed names of *Father* and *Son* bring with them some indication of authority and order within the Godhead, as addressed below.

4

We *affirm* that, even as Scripture reveals to us the names of *Father* and *Son*, so God has placed real meaning in those words, and our mortal relations, such as earthly fathers and sons, are analogical but real reflections of the eternal Father and Son. In God the Father Almighty resides all authority, dignity, dominion, might, majesty, and honor. He is the Origin of all that is, including the Son and Spirit. He is the Monarch of all Being, and the First Principle without Principle. Solely His is the property of Fatherhood within the Trinity, so that in God, the name Father signifies not only relation, but indeed His very Person. As Father, He is the Origin or *Auctor* of the Son and Spirit, and so it is necessary for Him to be the Teacher and Sender of the Son and Spirit.

We *deny* that creaturely realities of finitude, mortality, or sin invalidate the archetypal nature of the Trinity with respect to man, or the capacity and responsibility for us to learn fatherhood and sonship from their immutable archetypes in the Trinity. In descending from His loftiness to communicate with men, God speaks as with a lisp, as Calvin says, accommodating His eternal realities to our weakness, yet revealing through His Word such truths as are necessary and edifying for us. That we cannot understand or map all aspects of the Trinity onto those of human experience is sure; yet to use this to deny the truths that *are revealed* is impudence and an affront to the Father's gracious condescending revelation.

5

We *affirm* that even as God is the Father of the Son, and the author of all being, so there is real authority (*auctoritas*) within the Godhead. This authority is the pattern for all authority delegated by the Father to men, yet intra-Trinitarian authority differs from this insofar as the Son and Spirit are uncreated, and share with the Father all power, might, divinity, and equality. This authority is therefore the asymmetrical authority of the Father with respect to the unique paternity He possesses: it is the dignity of authorship, the preeminence of principle, the distinction of generation, and His own, peculiar, and unshared honor of Fatherhood.

We *deny* that the authority of the Father and the "responses" of the Son and Spirit are according to essence, divinity, rank, or station, but affirm rather that they are according to eternal origin, generation, procession, operation, and order. Even as the Son and Spirit are of one substance with the Father, there are no gradations of divinity, rank, or dignity among them; yet as they are "of the Father," so they are not *of themselves*, but Son is *of the Father*, very God of very God, and the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son. By affirming this we in no way deny the equality of the Son and Spirit, but rather join them in magnifying the original sovereignty of the Father.

6

We *affirm* that in His incarnate state, the Son in His humanity submitted to the will of His Father in Heaven. The Incarnate Christ learned obedience through the things that He suffered (Heb. 5:8), and was obedient even to the

point of death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). For example, Christ in His humanity has God for His head in some way analogous to how a man has Christ for his head, and woman has man for her head (1 Cor. 11:3).

We deny that scriptural statements concerning the submission of Christ in His humanity can be transferred without qualification to the relations of the persons internally within the Godhead. Texts that display the obedience of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be simply applied to the eternal Son as though they were talking about the same thing, or addressing the same issue. For example, the Incarnate Son, Christ in His humanity, was sent to Jerusalem to die (Matt. 26:39; Phil. 2:8), and He obeyed His Father as He went. This is not the same thing as the eternal Son being sent into the world, but is still analogous to it.

7

We affirm that the Son and Spirit in their respective missions reveal the authority and order of God the Father from all eternity. The Son has nothing but what is begotten and received from the Father; even as the Son has received all honor and glory from the Father (John 8:54), so all that the Son receives is to the honor of Him who begat Him before all worlds. So also the Spirit speaks nothing but what He has heard from the Father and the Son, and so all honor given to Him redounds first to the glory of the Father from whom He principally proceeds, and then to the Son, who for us men and our salvation sent Him as the Lord and Giver of Life.

We further affirm that prior to the Incarnation, and independent of it, the eternal Son was sent into the world (John 3:17; 10:36; 17:18) which He created. Even as it would be unfitting and impious for the Father to be sent, and as the Son always does what pleases the Father, so the eternal Son received and carried out the will of His Father.

We deny that within the Godhead this authority and obedience contained any tension, distance, conflict, friction, or resistance whatsoever. The relations of the persons within the Godhead are always and *necessarily* harmonious.

8

We affirm that authority as it exists within the Godhead cannot be fully imagined by us, and must not be understood as though the Father were barking orders, and the Son were obeying them as a subordinate. Rather, in fear and trembling we remember (as Augustine reminded us) that when God speaks a command, the Son *is* Himself the very Command that is spoken. Insofar as His will is indissolubly one with the Father's, the Father's command is also the Son's command, yet insofar as the Father is the Origin, it is first, principally, and authoritatively the Father's command.

We deny that the asymmetry affirmed in this statement in any way contradicts or threatens the doctrine of divine simplicity or the Godhead's single will. We acknowledge it is impossible to fully conceive of one unified will issuing in the economic works, order, or subordination of the distinct persons of the Trinity, but since this is how Scripture speaks, we must be content with the revealed mystery. We also cannot comprehend how the reciprocity of the Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father, can be a function of one will. And yet our salvation depends upon this being so.

9

We *affirm* that the unified will of God is in no way in contradiction with the dispositions of the persons toward the Father, or with their distinct yet inseparable operations in the cosmos. God the Father as Sender and God the Son as Sent and God the Spirit as Enabler act as one, so that when the Son came into the world and obeyed the Father, He was acting in a way absolutely fitting to the eternal relation between Him and the Father. In obeying the Father and always doing what He sees His Father do (John 5:19), Jesus acts in a way consonant with the eternal relation between them, in which the Son's will is also the Father's, even as He received it from the Father.

We *deny* that this is in any way a contradiction, while confessing that it is a high mystery. The will of the Father and the will of the Son are the same will, and so the authority of the Father results necessarily in a relation wherein the Son and Spirit delight to magnify the Father's authorship, regency, dignity, and prerogative. Such authority is unseen by men in its perfection, yet is the archetype and pattern for the authority, power, and dominion the Father has distributed among men, even in this world wherein we see "through a glass, darkly."

All statements regarding the eternal God, and above all those truths regarding His triune nature, are a mere knife's edge away from heresy. Yet we speak, not that we may try to explain the unfathomable, but lest we be completely silent, as Augustine said, remembering that while the secret things belong to the Lord, those things that are revealed belong to us and to our children (Deut. 29:29). With firm reliance on Holy Scripture, then, and in accord with the holy fathers of our faith, we magnify and exalt the Holy Trinity: the Father in His authority, the Son in His nativity, and the Spirit in His communion—authority and response, order and equality, in perfect and ultimate harmony. "Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

[i] Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 135.

Report of the Sacramental Cooperation Committee

added at Council on August 7, 2023

The Committee on Sacramental Cooperation was formed by PMoC Virgil Hurt in October of 2022.

Committee Members: Michael Foster, Rob Hadding (Chair), Jon Herr, Rich Lusk, Toby Sumpter, and Gabe Wetmore

Scope of Work as Directed by PM Hurt –

1. To study the current and likely future situation within the CREC regarding sacramental differences and cooperation, and report the same to 2023 Council.
2. To explore the need to update CREC governing documents to clarify sacramental cooperation between churches, and to propose, if necessary, changes to existing governing documents.
3. PMOC recommends the committee make any changes to our documents as small as possible while still being clear about the intent.

Introduction:

This committee was charged with examining the question of sacramental cooperation between churches with a specific focus on paedocommunion. That is, are all CREC churches obligated to honor the baptisms and communicant status of all other CREC churches when visiting or transferring membership? Our current constitutional language seems ambiguous on this question. It is also clear that, while paedocommunion is the almost universal practice within the CREC, differences of opinion exist on the requirements for all churches to receive visiting worshipers or transferring members to the Lord's Supper and into membership respectively. Thus, our committee considered matters of CREC history, our constitutional language, the current situation of our Communion, our commitment to Reformed catholicity, and we have developed a series of solutions for Council to consider.

Historical Considerations

The CREC (originally the CRE – the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals) began with three churches in the mid- to late-90s. The founding churches were not unified on the issues of paedobaptism and paedocommunion but, as Brett Baker recalls, “It was more about being

has guided and continues to be the heart of the CREC's pursuit of Reformed catholicity. The CREC has been broadly Reformed since its inception, allowing a variety of Reformed Confessions of Faith as the primary expression of respective churches' statements of faith. From the original CRE Constitution Article II on Local Congregations:2

F. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith at least one of the following:

1. Westminster Confession of Faith (1647);
2. American Westminster Confession of Faith (1788);
3. The Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession [1561], Heidelberg Catechism [1563], Canons of Dort [1619]);
4. The London Baptist Confession (1689)
5. The Savoy Declaration (1658);
6. The Reformed Evangelical Confession.

The current constitution expands this list to include The Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism as discrete confessions, separate from the Three Forms of Unity, and added are the Second Helvetic Confession and the 39 Articles of Christian Religion.

Included in the list of acceptable confessions, then and now, is The London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). From the beginning there has been room for non-paedobaptist – and, necessarily, non-paedocommunion – churches as full members in the CREC (CRE). This may indicate that, all things being equal, Baptists qua Baptists were welcomed into fellowship from the beginning. However, a note in the CREC Founding “Fathers” Reflections explains that there was an understanding from the beginning...

that all baptized members of a CRE church must be received by any other CRE church.

This would include London Baptist Confession churches receiving the baptism (sprinkling), without requiring immersion, and receiving into membership baptized children (including infants and young children). As baptized members of the church, they would be entitled to all the benefits of church membership, including communion.

CREC Founding “Fathers” Reflections – Douglas Wilson, Brett Baker, Gene Helsel, Randy Booth. Attached to 1

this report as Appendix A.

Constitution of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals, Ratified November 6, 1997, amended in Presbytery 2

January 30, 1998.

2

38

Likewise, if a Baptist family transferred their membership from a London Baptist

Confession church to a Paedobaptist CRE church, that church would not require the children to be baptized. Baptist churches were not required to perform infant baptisms, but must accommodate Paedobaptist families in obtaining such baptisms. Paedobaptist churches were not required to perform immersion baptism, but must accommodate Baptist families in obtaining such baptisms.

These provisions applied only to membership transfers between CRE churches. Each local church was free to have its own standards and practices for visitors and new members from outside the CRE.³

As of this writing, the committee knows of no church in the CREC which subscribes to the London Baptist Confession of Faith, and only one member church and one mission church that do not practice paedocommunion (although those churches do commune young children who are able to answer basic questions regarding faith in Christ).

The Constitutional Language

The pertinent language of the CREC Constitution reads:⁴

Article III. Local Congregations

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedo-baptism and paedo-communion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to

CREC Founding "Fathers" Reflections – Douglas Wilson, Brett Baker, Gene Helsel, Randy Booth – attached, 3

Appendix A.

CREC Constitution, Revision as of April 6, 2022. 4

3

39

adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them.

There is an apparent discrepancy in Article III.G. In the first sentence, receiving other members in good standing is not optional: "All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation

must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between churches” (emphasis added). In the second sentence of that same section, however, there is acknowledgment that differences between congregations may occur, particularly in how membership is reckoned. When this happens, it says, churches ought to exercise charity and good faith in receiving these members, making reasonable efforts to include them as full participants in the life of the church. We note that “receiving” and “including” may be interpreted as two different things: their reception as members and their inclusion as participants. Thus the full expectation of how this should play out is unclear.

Article III.H specifically addresses potential difficulties related to membership, paedobaptism, and paedocommunion, urging pastoral sensitivity. This section stops short of requiring churches to practice paedobaptism or paedocommunion, but again calls on churches to do all within their power to accommodate those who do. Despite the preference for paedocommunion exhibited throughout the majority of CREC churches, it is notable that this article is the only place in all of the governing documents that paedocommunion is mentioned. The virtual silence of our documents on the topic highlights the ambiguity of these articles, and places them at the crux of the issue.

Although the language of these two sections may be technically ambiguous, the intention is that churches are expected to work out differences in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. However, this ethos, as laudable as it is, becomes more difficult to depend upon as the CREC grows. As the CREC becomes an increasingly attractive option for Reformed churches of different stripes, we will doubtless encounter situations in which the current question becomes a significant factor. In such cases simply relying on a shared understanding of the “spirit” of the documents is inadequate. Greater clarity in the constitutional language is necessary.

Our Current Situation

If there are currently no churches who subscribe to the London Baptist Confession of Faith, and only one church and one mission church that do not practice paedocommunion, why is there such concern over our requirements? Are we trying to solve a problem that does not exist? While the

4

40

current conversation is dealing largely with hypothetical situations, there is ample reason to believe that the CREC is becoming increasingly attractive to churches with other affiliations who may see the CREC as a possible denominational home. This is owing to several factors:

- Several CREC ministers have found success in the public sphere commenting on current ecclesiastical and cultural matters and are calling on people, particularly men, to rethink a lot of their assumptions. Douglas Wilson; the Fight, Laugh, Feast conferences; Cross Politic; Kuyperian Commentary; and others have earned a hearing with

Christians across the spectrum, giving the CREC new and broader exposure.

- The majority response among CREC churches to the Covid lockdowns was to remain open and continue worshipping, sometimes under great pressure to do otherwise. Many CREC churches saw considerable growth during the shutdown period as the profile of the denomination was elevated.
- The CREC's general posture against and resistance to cultural pressures such as wokeness, and the LGBTQ+ agenda.
- The CREC's commitment to Reformed catholicity.

Ministers and other church leaders from diverse Reformed backgrounds are investigating the CREC, finding it to be more hospitable than their current denominational situation. This has led to many inquiries by individuals and churches regarding affiliation with the CREC, and a large percentage of those are from contexts in which paedobaptism and/or paedocommunion are not the norm. It is therefore foreseeable that we will have churches pursue membership in the CREC which have different sacramental commitments than most current CREC churches on the basis of our openness to a broad range of Reformed confessions of faith. Because the governing documents are either ambiguous or are inconsistently interpreted, the potential for disagreement and conflict over how we receive one another's members as visitors or transfers may arise. As it stands now, the majority expectation is that all CREC churches receive all baptized members of CREC churches at the Lord's Supper and as transferring members. In a recent survey of Elders in the CREC, we posed two questions:⁵

1. Do you believe a communing member of your church – of any age and who is in good standing – should be accepted to the table of any CREC church while visiting?

Yes: 94.21%; No: 5.79%

Survey Monkey survey conducted by the Sacramental Cooperation Committee and posted on the CREC Presbyters 5

email list from March 6, 2023 – March 18, 2023. Total respondents: 121. Question 1: Yes, 114; No, 7.

Question 2:

Yes, 110; No, 11.

5

41

2. If a communing member of your church – of any age and who is in good standing – is transferred to another CREC church, should the receiving church honor and accept their communing status when receiving them?

Yes: 90.91%; No: 9.09%

This survey reveals something about the expectations of most of our churches: the vast majority responded in the affirmative to these two questions. It is not unanimous, however, and that bears

some attention. The email thread connected to the survey on the CREC Presbyters email list included a range of opinions in support of and expressing concerns over requiring baptistic and credocommunion churches to practice against their church's confession and conscience. These perspectives will be discussed below, but it is important to note that paedocommunion as such is not central to most of the comments. That is, where there is disagreement, it is not chiefly over whether paedocommunion is right or not (as noted above, paedocommunion is the nearly unanimous conviction and practice among our churches), but on questions of denominational identity, unity, and trajectory. In the same way, the work of this committee has not been theological: that is, we did not work to defend or object to paedocommunion per se. From the beginning, the CREC has been a novel experiment. What other denomination allows for multiple confessions and polities at the local level, while still expecting full cooperation at the presbytery and council levels? The CREC was founded not in order to have complete sacramental purity and agreement, but as a place where Reformed Christians of various sorts could come together and be committed to truth in precisely those areas where other Reformed denominations had compromised (e.g., covenant family life, Christian education, six-day creation). Openness to confessional Baptists and non-paedocommunion Presbyterians is evidence of this.

But it is also true that paedocommunion has been an important element of the CREC's identity from its earliest days. Even if a church did not share the conviction, there was agreement that the communicant status of all baptized members was to be acknowledged, and all baptized persons from CREC churches would be granted access to the table by all other CREC churches, disciplinary action notwithstanding. So, while it has not been required that all CREC churches adopt paedocommunion into their primary beliefs and practices, it has at least been an implicit understanding and expectation that all churches would honor the communicant status of all baptized persons from all other CREC churches regardless of age.

We recognize that there is an interplay between governing documents and those documents' interpreters. It is both the case that perfect documents can be misinterpreted and misapplied by

6

42

fallen men, and that well-intentioned men can go astray through ambiguous documents. Getting our constitution "just right" will not make us unassailable, nor will simply trusting our leaders to make decisions without clear constitutional requirements: the two go hand-in-hand.

The tension of having confessional diversity on one hand, and some kind of sacramental unity or cooperation on the other hand, is the challenge before us. The current constitutional language 6 reflects an attempt to make the tension bearable by encouraging each to accommodate the other. For instance, the CREC accommodates a Reformed, Baptist church, by receiving them into the denomination, affording them all the benefits of membership; and in turn, the Reformed, Baptist

church accommodates the CREC by submitting to Presbyterian polity and receiving members from other CREC churches it would otherwise not ordinarily receive. This appeal to accommodation and charity, however, leaves the actual requirements and expectations with regard to sacramental cooperation ambiguous. Accommodation and charity can mean different things to different people.

Reformed Catholicity

Reformed catholicity is highly valued as constituent to the CREC's identity, a fact made obvious by the array of Reformed confessions of faith to which member churches may subscribe. But it is also evident that there are barriers to true catholicity. We want to be as broad as we can be, but we also want to preserve without compromise those doctrinal positions and practices that are equally fundamental to our identity. How do we hold broad commitments in concord with narrower ones? In the current conversation, the tension is resolved by either requiring or not requiring all CREC churches to recognize and honor the communicant status of any member in good standing of another CREC church, discipline notwithstanding.

Arguments in favor of the requirement to do so are based on:

1. The understanding and practice of the CREC from the beginning. To deviate from that would go against our denominational tradition.
2. The understanding of the connection between the Sacraments and Church Discipline. To deny a person access to the Lord's Supper who has already been granted communicant status is, in effect, an act of discipline.

It should be noted that the tension that exists in our governing documents has been acknowledged from the early 60 days of the denomination. Several men—including Douglas Wilson, Randy Booth, and Steve Wilkins—have observed that at some point we would require an enduring solution.

7

43

3. The desire to see our real, spiritual unity as churches truly worked out in practice. Unity of sacramental practice among CREC churches is a (but not the only) basis of our unity as a Communion, but cultural issues of our day, important as they may be, are not. Paul says that our unity is not only demonstrated at the Lord's Table, but also that our coming to the same table and partaking of the same bread and wine is formative of our unity (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Similarly for baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). We cannot claim to have complete unity as a communion if we refuse to accept the baptismal and communicant status conferred by other CREC churches. To say a person is not validly

baptized, or that they are not welcome to the Table, is to say they are not united with us.

4. The commitment to broad catholicity. This position best expresses and preserves catholicity by including not only those we fully agree with, but also those who differ from us at various points. It is the exclusion of each others' members on the basis of doctrinal differences that inhibits catholicity.

Arguments against the requirement to do so are based on:

1. The breadth of allowable confessions. The CREC has always allowed a range of Reformed confessions and does not require any exception to their respective confessions on the point of the sacraments.

2. The understanding of local sessions as the final authority. To insist that a church go against its own constitution, confession, or conscience is to impose an unreasonable burden, and undermines the authority and responsibility of the local session to fence the Table.

3. The desire to protect local congregations from disunity. To require a church to accommodate sacramental practices contrary to its own confession sews visible division and potentially discord within the local congregation.

4. The desire to be a "big tent." If we draw the line to membership in the CREC at this point, we risk making ourselves unattractive as a denominational home to many churches who are aligned with us on the vast majority of our other distinctives, not least our positions on cultural issues. This could result in curtailing our growth and effectiveness in the culture war.

While both of these positions have merit, at bottom they represent paradigmatic differences that run deep enough to make clarification necessary.

8

44

Solutions

Potential solutions to the problem are as complex as the question itself. Our committee members represent the full spectrum of the CREC on these issues by design, and as such, we discussed each angle and viewpoint in our meetings. We agree that clarification is needed, but do not all agree on the best way forward, nor the extent to which clarity is needed. This responsibility will fall to the Council to prayerfully set the direction for all of us. The variation already visible within a committee of six presbyters is further evidence that a growing denomination may only continue to see more of the same.

We find ourselves with six possible solutions. While there are diverse opinions as to which option might be the best solution, we all agree that these represent the options before Council. Our suggestions for each of these possible solutions are as follows:⁷

1. Maintain the status quo

Our committee is in agreement that we should clarify and address the ambiguities in our constitution, and we do not recommend this solution. Leaving things as they are would be unwise for the future of the CREC for all of the reasons detailed in the report above.

2. Make moderate modifications to Articles III.G and III.H to clarify our current position
Articles III.G and III.H shall read as follows:

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them, at the very least, receiving the membership and communicant status of individuals as previously

Please refer to Appendix B of this document for a more detailed comparison of the differences of language

7

between the current wording and that of these solutions.

9

45

conferred by their fellow CREC elders. Any churches that have been previously received into CREC membership who explicitly took exception to this requirement, the CREC hereby grandfathers in.

Rationale:

This solution seeks to recognize the practice of the CREC as received, clarifying the original intention of the language of Articles III.G and III.H, while carving out space for exceptions which have already been allowed. It also seeks to retain as much of the original language as possible, not charting a new course, but clarifying what many see as the original course. The bold letters in the new wording of Article III.H above are simply to highlight one significant point of this clarification.

3. State that sacramental cooperation is desirable, but not required

Amend Article III.H as follows:

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them. Although we

encourage and hope for sacramental cooperation throughout all CREC churches, individual local church sessions would maintain the freedom to administer the sacraments according to their conscience, constitution, and confessional understanding.

Rationale:

This approach is consistent with the CREC's broad catholicity as demonstrated by allowing various Protestant confessions, some of which take an explicitly credobaptist and/or credocommunion position, as a local congregation's doctrinal standards (Article III.C). It also reflects our belief that the local congregation has primacy in the structure of biblical church government (Article III.A). Church Discipline is central to church governance, and the administration of the sacraments is central to Church Discipline. If we allow credo-confessions and stress the primacy of local church government, it then follows that a local session should be allowed to administer those sacraments according to their stated doctrinal standards.

10

46

Further, if the CREC takes a position that closes off the possibility of committed credobaptist and credocommunion churches who desire to remain true to their confession, conscience, and constitutions, we may well be limiting our growth potential as a denomination and, therefore, limiting our reach and impact in the culture.

4. Re-word Constitution Articles III.G & III.H to clarify our robust expectation of sacramental cooperation

Articles III.G and III.H shall read as follows:

G. The CREC is a unified communion of churches with various confessional differences. While we allow a variety of views and practices related to the sacraments (e.g. paedobaptism and credobaptism, paedocommunion and credocommunion), we seek mutual submission to one another (Eph. 5:21). Therefore, all CREC churches agree to recognize the sacramental actions of other CREC churches by accepting the baptismal and communicant status of their members, regardless of any confessional differences between the churches.

1. All members in good standing of a CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church, with their baptismal and communicant status intact, even if the receiving church would not have conferred that status themselves. This applies to both visiting and transferring families from other CREC churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity

and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

2. Any credobaptist church in this Communion must accept the validity of the baptisms of other CREC churches, even if they would not have performed that baptism themselves. They may think that a person (e.g. an infant) ought not to have been baptized, or ought to have been baptized by a different mode (e.g. immersion), but they agree to accept that the person is, in fact, baptized, though they might consider it irregular.

3. Any paedobaptist and credocommunion church (defined as having both communicant and non-communicant members, where non-communicants become communicants after the session accepts their profession of faith as credible), shall agree to accept the communicant status conferred by other CREC churches upon their members. Thus, if a family from a paedocommunion CREC church (defined

11

47

as regarding all baptized members as communicants) visits a credocommunion CREC church, they shall be welcomed to the table as communicants, even if the receiving church would not have conferred communicant status on the member in the same way. Likewise, credocommunion churches shall agree to accept transfers of members in good standing from other CREC churches, and will honor and accept the communicant status they held in their sister church, regardless of age or mental capacity, by transferring them as communicant members.

H. While members in good standing of a CREC church must be received by transfer to another CREC church, with their baptismal and communicant status intact, regardless of confessional differences, once they have transferred, the receiving church is not under obligation to admit any children subsequently born to them in the manner of their former church. After their transfer, any new admissions to baptism and the Lord's Supper shall be done at the discretion of the receiving CREC session, according to their normal practice. Credobaptist CREC churches are strongly encouraged to allow paedobaptist member families to have their children baptized at a paedobaptist CREC church and to subsequently recognize that baptism, although this constitution does not require that they do so.

Rationale:

Given the committee report on the ambiguity in these articles as they stand, this solution seeks to clarify the CREC's expectations of churches regarding their members. One of the ambiguous portions of the current articles relates to the language of "practice." Churches are told that they must "receive" any member of another CREC church (III.G), but they "do not have to adopt or practice such variations" as paedobaptism or paedocommunion

(III.H). Rather, they must “do all within their power to accommodate them.”

This solution preferences and clarifies the generally-accepted expectation of receiving one another's members, but also seeks to clarify the meaning of the word “practice.” In the wording of the current constitution, the expectation might be that a credocommunion church would need to receive the baptisms and communicant statuses of any visiting or transferring CREC members, but would this mean that they are “practicing” paedocommunion?

This solution assumes that there are two ways communicant status is conferred by a church to its members: either by baptism (the paedocommunion view) or by credible profession of faith (the credocommunion view). Thus the Lord's Supper, on either view, is not the moment at which one becomes a communicant member. Rather, it is a

12

48

sacramental moment at which one is recognized as already being a communicant member. The practice of credocommunion is fundamentally about how one becomes a communicant. As such, allowing a very young communicant member from another CREC church to partake of the Lord's Supper would not be “practicing” paedocommunion, properly speaking. A credocommunion church would only “practice” paedocommunion if they began conferring new communicant status on members at baptism.

According to this rationale, this solution would not be asking credocommunion churches to “practice” paedocommunion. That is, they would not be asked to confer communicant status in any way other than they already do. Rather, they would simply be asked to act in deference to their brothers in the CREC who have already conferred that status, by recognizing that status. Nothing about their normal practice of conferring new communicant status by valid profession of faith would need to change.

Paedobaptist and paedocommunion churches in the CREC regularly make exceptions in deference to credobaptist members (and perhaps less often for credocommunion members). For example, they allow parents to put off the baptism of their children until later, contrary to their paedobaptist confessions. This solution asks credobaptist and credocommunion churches to make similar exceptions in deference to sister CREC churches in the matters of baptism and communicant status.

One objection made on the elder's list, and discussed in our committee, was that a proposal such as this would undermine the authority of a local session and force them to do something against their will. While seeking to preserve this local church authority according to Article III.A, this solution does not force anything upon a local session, any more than the CREC constitution in general forces anything upon a local session.

Churches join the CREC, and submit to its governing documents, of their own volition and without compulsion. When they do so, they not only agree to abide by the CREC constitution, they agree to adopt the CREC constitution through article VII into their own constitution (see Article III.K). The governing documents of the CREC require many different things of our churches, but churches voluntarily agree to abide by those requirements. And they agree to abide by those requirements at all times, not only at those times when the local session's own ideals directly align with them.

Finally, it is important that whatever this Communion requires of member churches be spelled out clearly. Member churches, and churches seeking future membership in this Communion, should know exactly what is expected of them. Our requirements for receiving members from other CREC churches should be clear and unambiguous, not left

13

49

open to a multitude of interpretations. This solution seeks to spell these things out clearly in our governing documents.

5. Form new presbyteries and/or a sister denomination which allow for difference in sacramental practice

The CREC shall explore the addition of two additional presbyteries: the "Machen" Presbytery (to facilitate credocommunion churches) and the "Spurgeon" Presbytery (to facilitate Baptist churches). Alternatively, the CREC shall aid in the establishment of new "sister" Communions which preference these sacramental views.

Rationale

One of the best features of the CREC is its commitment to Reformed catholicity. This is seen in our flexibility on many issues, including polity and the breadth of Reformed confessions we include. We are attempting a unique experiment in ecclesiology: a denomination that seeks to maximize accommodation in areas where faithful and godly Christians differ, while zealously guarding orthodoxy and orthopraxy. While we are committed to Reformed catholicity, there are certain distinctives within the CREC that most very much want to preserve, including paedocommunion. Paedocommunion is understood by many as an exception to every Reformed confession, and yet has become a crucial piece of the CREC's identity. Many are in the CREC today precisely because they no longer fit other Reformed denominations due to their paedocommunion convictions. Is there a way to preserve paedocommunion, while still growing the CREC alongside other like-minded Christians who are credocommunionists or baptistic? While acknowledging that no one denomination can be fully catholic in today's world given the widespread fractures within the church, we should still seek to maximize our catholic reach as much as reasonably and practically possible.

It is certainly true that sacramental unity is vital to our Communion. This is why the

CREC has generally pushed for all churches in our denomination to recognize the sacramental status of members in other CREC churches, even when there are different convictions about who should receive the sacraments. Biblically, the sacraments play a key role in the unity of the church as tangible markers of the covenant community. But the sacraments are not the only ground of our unity. In Ephesians 4, Paul speaks of one faith (that is, shared confessional content), one Lord (Christ's authority under which the faith is lived out), and one baptism (the sacramental doorway and boundary of the covenant). We know that there are faithful churches and congregations with whom we

14

50

disagree on the sacraments, and on the other hand many that practice paedobaptism or paedocommunion but have become synagogues of Satan. Because of these two competing realities, agreement on the sacraments is not a sufficient basis for identifying fellow believers. Unfortunately, in today's messy ecclesiastical situation, catholicity is more complex than that.

What kind of unity might be possible with those who agree with us on most everything except for the sacraments? The perceived requirement that any incoming church practice paedocommunion with visitors and transfers has sometimes kept churches that do not believe in paedocommunion away from the CREC. While this preserves paedocommunion in the CREC (a good and necessary goal), it comes at the cost of potential growth and even broader catholicity. If the only kinds of credocommunion and Baptist churches we allow into the CREC are ones that are willing to recognize paedobaptism or paedocommunion as valid alternatives, we will never really have any substantial number of non-paedocommunion churches. Our claim to "include" credocommunionists and Baptists will not be fully credible.

We are faced with competing visions for the CREC's future. On the one hand, we could be the paedocommunion denomination in Reformed Christendom. This is simple, clear, and gives us a sharply defined identity. But while catholicity should generally include recognizing the sacramental actions of other churches and accommodating them as much as possible (per our current constitutional language), true catholicity also means recognizing that there are faithful, God-fearing Christians who have different convictions in these areas and we must respect their practices even as we disagree with them. That is the tension: it is really a tension between these two aspects of catholicity. We have to make a choice between sacramental consistency and sacramental catholicity. A strong case could be made for going in either direction. But is it possible to have the best of both worlds?

One possible way forward that both preserves paedocommunion's privileged place in the

CREC and opens the door to a genuine catholicity with non-paedocommunion churches that are otherwise like-minded is the formation of confessional presbyteries for credocommunionists and Baptists, in which these types of churches would be free to practice their convictions in sacramental matters.

This pathway has several advantages. By creating a clear distinction between paedocommunion presbyteries and the new presbyteries, paedocommunion is protected,

15

51

while these new confessional presbyteries would have the liberty to practice the sacraments according to their conscience. At the same time, this solution would allow the CREC to practice an even broader form of “Reformed catholicity” than we do today. These presbyteries would allow the CREC to grow alongside churches that are otherwise a good fit but do not practice paedocommunion.

Another similar alternative would be to assist in the formation of sister denominations that share core convictions with the CREC but differ in sacramental convictions and practices. This would allow for close fraternal relations among the denominations, while maintaining the distinctives of each.

Either of these options seems to be fully consistent with the founding vision of the CREC, and advances a Reformed view of Christian doctrine and life.

6. Remove the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith from the Book of Confessions, and further, explicitly become a paedocommunion denomination

Removing the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith from the list of allowable confessions of CREC churches would remove the ambiguity surrounding our identity as a communion on the issue of the inclusion of covenant children in baptism, and would be a relatively straightforward move, unlikely to affect many current CREC churches.

It is significant that the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, obviously modeled on and in many areas identical to the Westminster Confession of Faith, demonstrates both unity and disunity with Westminster. Where these documents vary, most notably in the areas of church polity and the sacraments (“ordinances” in the LBCF), there is no doubt that the Baptists were making clear that while there was a great deal of overlap of doctrine, the remaining differences were not inconsequential, and were significant barriers to full fellowship.

Explicitly becoming a paedocommunion denomination, however, would require more amendment of our existing documents. Our committee does not recommend this solution, and therefore suggests no particular wording. There would be more complications to discuss should the Council decide to pursue this direction, and these complications are outside the purview of our committee’s task. If a 1689 Baptist church is willing to join

with us, submitting to our documents as amended, our committee believes that we should eagerly receive them.

16

52

Conclusion

Our aim as we did this work was, at least to some degree, to have the conversation on behalf of the Communion. We worked to represent all of the views well, and to consider the implications of each. Committee members argued earnestly for their positions, and it was no mere academic exercise.

Despite the obvious disagreements within our committee, however, one thing at least was certain: the good natured and brotherly attitude so distinct within the CREC is alive and well. Our discussions and debates were robust, but also congenial. And our prayer is that the work put forth here would serve the CREC well, by aiding us in protecting the good work that has already been done so that these brotherly discussions may continue for the good of the Communion and the Kingdom.

In sum, paedocommunion has been long taken for granted as one of the dominant practices of the CREC, but our catholicity has also left us vulnerable to ambiguities and inconsistencies within our governing documents, or between our documents and our practice. In response to PM Hurt's direction, we have explored and summarized our past, present, and future situation with regards to sacramental cooperation. And though we could not settle on one single path forward, we have outlined six possible solutions. It is worth pointing out that solution #5 may be explored along with any of the other proposed solutions.

The question before the Council now is, "What kind of denomination do we want to be?" The sacramental cooperation question is not a mere matter of practicality, but our response to it will chart a significant course for our future which will extend into the next generation of our denominational life, and perhaps beyond. We encourage Council to treat this with care, seeking the best for our Communion, whether or not it is the easiest solution.

17

53

Appendix A - CREC Founding "Fathers" Reflections

Douglas Wilson, Brett Baker, Gene Helsel, Randy Booth

These are some recollections of what was going on back in the "olden days," when the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals (CRE), was getting started (1996-1997).

Three churches adopted the first constitution:

- Community Evangelical Fellowship (CEF), Moscow, ID (Douglas Wilson)
- Eastside Evangelical Fellowship, (EEF) Bellevue, WA (Brett Baker)
- Wenatchee Evangelical Fellowship, (WEF) Wenatchee, WA (Gene Helsel)

The first presbytery meeting was held in 1998, and a fourth church was added to the confederation:

- Grace Covenant Church, (GCC) Texarkana, AR (Randy Booth)

Prior to this time (1993-1995), pastors Wilson and Booth were moving from Baptist to Paedobaptist positions, each writing books (To a Thousand Generations and Children of the Promise). CEF, Moscow ended up with a “cooperative agreement” between Baptist and Paedobaptists, which enabled them to avoid a church split. This “cooperative agreement” remains in place today. Texarkana Reformed Baptist Church did split over the issue and GCC, Texarkana was formed. At this point there was a recognition that God was doing something in several churches and that there was a need for those churches to have a safe place to land and to work through the necessary transitions. This also included the paedo-communion issue. Places like the PCA and OPC did not offer a place for churches like ours.

Eastside Evangelical Fellowship began in 1993 as a baptistic church, when CEF invited them to be a sister church, and the next year, WEF joined in the same way. Years later, in 2000, EEF commenced a study in earnest of baptism among the elders, which lasted four years. All but one of the elders had become persuaded of the Paedo position. This elder began the study as Credo and became more convinced of his position at the end of the study, so EEF adopted a cooperation agreement and continues with that even today.

Brett recalls that, “given the various places our three churches were in our understanding of the covenant before forming the CRE, we had to begin with cooperation. And I think we were close enough as friends that we would have started the CRE regardless. It was more about being together than agreeing on every point—so we committed to making the union work.”

Gene Helsel offers this account of CEF coming into the CRE:

November 1995 – February of 1996

18

54

The session (Gene) petitioned the elders at CEF to oversee the work in Wenatchee in a “mother/daughter” relationship. After some deliberation, CEF graciously agreed to do so.

May 2, 1996

WEF (with a few exceptions) adopted the Westminster Statement of Faith 1647 as its own.

June 20, 1996

The first version of WEF’s constitution was adopted by the eldership of the church.

March of 1997

WEF conducted intense but charitable debates at its weekly Men's Forums regarding the doctrine of baptism. Every man was welcome to attend the meetings, but the only ones who were allowed to debate were those who had:

- 1) Read a book and a pamphlet on paedobaptism
- 2) Read a book and a pamphlet on credobaptism
- 3) Written a paper defending the position that they did not personally hold to.

The meetings were well attended, lively and profitable.

November 6, 1997

WEF, in concord with EEF and CEF, ratified the constitution of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals and adopted it into its own constitution.

From the first CRE Constitution Article II. Local Congregations:

F. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith at least one of the following:

1. Westminster Confession of Faith (1647);
2. American Westminster Confession of Faith (1788);
3. The Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession [1561], Heidelberg Catechism [1563], Canons of Dort [1619]);
4. The London Baptist Confession (1689);
5. The Savoy Declaration (1658);
6. The Reformed Evangelical Confession (see Article XII).

G. Controversies within a local congregation regarding matters arising from differences between our various confessions will not be adjudicated beyond the local church level.

All churches agree to work cheerfully and carefully in their study of doctrinal differences, and to strive for like-mindedness with one another (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16).

H. Inclusion in the CRE presupposes honest subscription by the eldership to whatever confessions are adopted, with any exceptions carefully noted prior to affiliation (Ex. 20:16; Col. 3:9). If a difference of conviction arises after a church has become affiliated, then the presbytery must be notified before the adoption of confessional or creedal exceptions by the local congregation which depart from, or may be at odds with, CRE standards.

19

55

I. All members in good standing in a local CRE congregation must be received by any other CRE church regardless of confessional differences between the churches.

All CRE churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g., individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

In the transfer of members from one CRE church to another, differences arising from

issues such as membership, paedo-baptism and paedo-communion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them.

It was the understanding, from the beginning, that all baptized members of a CRE church must be received by any other CRE church. This would include a London Baptist Confession church receiving the baptism (sprinkling), without requiring immersion, and receiving into membership baptized children (including infants and young children). As baptized members of the church, they would be entitled to the all the benefits of church membership, including communion. Likewise, if a Baptist family transferred their membership from a London Baptist Confession church to a Paedobaptist CRE church, that church could not require the children to be baptized. Baptist churches were not required to perform infant baptisms, but must accommodate Paedobaptist families in obtaining such baptisms. Paedobaptist churches were not required to perform immersion baptism, but must accommodate Baptist families in obtaining such baptisms. These provisions applied only to membership transfers between CRE churches. Each local church was free to have its own standards and practices for visitors and new members from outside the CRE.

20

56

Appendix B - Constitutional Language Comparisons

For the ease of the Council delegates in considering the various solutions offered above, this appendix provides language comparisons between the existing Constitution Articles III.G and III.H and some of the suggested revisions. Words struck-through are discarded current language, normal words are existing language, words in bold are new additions.

Current language:

Article III

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedo-baptism and paedo-communion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them.

Solution #2 revises these articles as follows:

Article III

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them, at the very least, receiving the membership and communicant status of individuals as previously

21

57

conferred by their fellow CREC elders. Any churches that have been previously received into CREC membership who explicitly took exception to this requirement, the CREC hereby grandfathers in.

Solution #3 revises these articles as follows:

Article III

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them. Although we encourage and hope for sacramental cooperation throughout all CREC churches, individual local church sessions would maintain the freedom to administer the sacraments according to their stated confessional standards.

Solution #4 revises these articles as follows:

Article III

G. The CREC is a unified communion of churches with various confessional differences. While we allow a variety of views and practices related to the sacraments (e.g. paedobaptism and credobaptism, paedocommunion and credocommunion), we seek mutual submission to one another (Eph. 5:21).

Therefore, all CREC churches agree to recognize the sacramental actions of other CREC churches by accepting the baptismal and communicant status of their members, regardless of any confessional differences between the churches.

1. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church with their baptismal and communicant status intact,

22

58

even if the receiving church would not have conferred that status themselves.

This applies to both visiting and transferring families from other CREC churches, regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.

2. Any credobaptist church in this Communion must accept the validity of the baptisms of other CREC churches, even if they would not have performed that baptism themselves. They may think that a person (e.g. an infant) ought not to have been baptized, or ought to have been baptized by a different mode (e.g. immersion), but they agree to accept that the person is, in fact, baptized, though they might consider it irregular.

3. Any credocommunion church (defined as having both communicant and non-communicant members, where non-communicants become communicants after the session accepts their profession of faith as credible), shall agree to accept the communicant status conferred by other CREC churches upon their members. Thus, if a family from a paedocommunion CREC church (defined as regarding all baptized members as communicants) visits a credocommunion CREC church, they shall be welcomed to the table as communicants, even if the receiving church would not have conferred communicant status on the member in the same way. Likewise, credocommunion churches shall agree to accept transfers of members in good standing from other CREC churches, and will honor and accept the communicant status they held in their sister church, regardless of age or mental capacity, by transferring them as communicant members.

H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them. While members in good standing of a CREC church must be received by transfer to another CREC

church, with their baptismal and communicant status intact, regardless of confessional differences, once they have transferred, the receiving church is not under obligation to admit any children subsequently born to them in the manner of their former church. After their transfer, any new admissions to baptism and the Lord's Supper shall be done at the discretion of the receiving CREC session, according to their normal practice. Credobaptist CREC churches are strongly encouraged to allow paedobaptist member families to have their children baptized

23

59

at a paedobaptist CREC church and to subsequently recognize that baptism, although this constitution does not require that they do so.

Final reference notes on the language in these solutions:

- Solution #2 retains all of the current language, but expands the end of III.H to clarify our expectations.
- Solution #3 retains all of the current language, but adds one clarifying statement to the end of III.H.
- Solution #4 is the largest re-write, but it 1) retains most of the current III.G, adding larger clarifying statements explaining how things would work practically in the churches; and 2) strikes and re-writes all of current III.H. Despite there being a lot of new language, the

flow of thought in the current articles is maintained (though expanded), and III.H is re-written to preserve the historic “sense” of the article, if not the exact words.

[1] CREC Founding “Fathers” Reflections – Douglas Wilson, Brett Baker, Gene Helsel, Randy Booth. Attached as

an appendix to this report.

[2] Constitution of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals, Ratified November 6, 1997, amended in Presbytery January 30, 1998.

[3] CREC Founding “Fathers” Reflections – Douglas Wilson, Brett Baker, Gene Helsel, Randy Booth – attached.

[4] CREC Constitution, Revision as of April 6, 2022.

[5] Survey Monkey survey conducted by the Sacramental Cooperation Committee from March 6, 2023 – March 18,

2023. Total respondents: 121 – Question 1: Yes, 114; No, 7. Question 2: Yes, 110; No, 11.

[6] It should be noted that the tension that exists in our governing documents has been acknowledged from the early

days of the denomination, and that at some point it would require an enduring solution.

24

60