2026 Council Minutes

September 30-October 1, 2026
Nashville, Tennessee

I. Call to Order

PMoC Uri Brito called the meeting to order at 9:16am.

II. Exhortation

Given by the PMoC on the health and growth of the CREC with an exhortation to continued faithfulness and joyful obedience.

III. Prayer of Invocation

Given by PMoC *pro tempore* Randy Booth

IV. Roll Call

Anselm – John Dekker
Anselm – Jerry Owen
Athanasius – Rich Lusk
Athanasius – Joe Thacker
Augustine – Dan Nash
Augustine – David Cooper
Bucer – Harold Guptill
Bucer – Ray Barbeito
Hus – Bogumil Jarmulak
Hus – Garry Vanderveen
Knox – Douglas Wilson
Knox – Toby Sumpter
Kuyper – Joshua Appel
Kuyper – Alan Burrow
Tyndale – Bill Smith
Tyndale – Arnie Abens
Wycliffe – Rob Hadding
Wycliffe – Mark Balthrop

Uri Brito – PMoC (Moderator)
Randy Booth - PMoC *pro tempore*

A quorum was established (18 delegates).

V. Adoption of Agenda

(26/09/30:01)

Dekker moved to approve; Jerry Owen seconded.

On behalf of the Governing Documents Review Committee, **John Dekker withdrew** #1-2 and #17 from the committee's recommendations in favor of similar proposals from Hus Presbytery.

Dekker moved that Hus Overtures #2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, and 16 be removed due to lack of support and that Hus Overtures #4-5 be removed due to redundancy with proposals from the Governing Documents Review Committee.

Rob Hadding moved that the Presbytery statements from Anselm in the PMoC's report be "received" instead of "ratified".

Harold Guptill stated that the Schmehl appeal is not concluded in presbytery, so cannot be ratified by Council.

Motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

VI. Consent Agenda

(26/09/30:02)

A. **John Dekker moved that the proposals of the Governing Documents Review Committee (except #1-2 and #17) be adopted** as follows:

#3: **Constitution Art. II.G be amended** to clarify that re-examination of CREC ministers is allowed but not required.

AMENDED to read: "G. If a pastor has already been ordained within the CREC, he ~~may not be~~ is not required to undergo a complete re-examination by another Presbytery."

#4: **Constitution Art. III.N.1 be amended** to clarify that a pastor emeritus may serve as a *pro tempore* elder on a Session.

AMENDED to read: "1. A CREC Session may ask a nearby CREC church Session to have one of its members (or a pastor *emeritus* under its care) serve on its Session as a *Pro Tempore* (for a time) elder. His renewable term, and purpose shall be specified by the Session. The purpose may be enriching its counsel, or also to temporarily supply a plurality of elders. Presiding Ministers should be informed and offer counsel before proceeding."

#5: **Constitution Art. III.N.2 be amended** to require the notification of the Presiding Minister of Presbytery whenever a local Session is reduced to only one elder.

INSERT the following sentence at the end of III.N.2: "Member churches whose Session number is reduced to one local pastor/elder shall inform the Presiding Minister of Presbytery immediately."

#6: **Constitution Art. IV.A be amended** to define a "motion".

A new Article IV.A.8 is enacted to read:

"8. Assemblies express their collective mind by means of approving motions, in which a delegate requests the assembly to take some particular action."

#7: **Constitution Art. IV.A.2 be amended** to clarify the powers of the broader assemblies.

AMENDED to read: "The assemblies shall only deal with ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner and hence their authority ~~includes~~ is restricted to the following powers:"

#8: **Constitution Art. IV.A.2 be amended** to reconcile the list of powers of broader assemblies with those described in the Book of Procedures XIV.

A new Art. IV.A.2.p is enacted to read:

"p. to receive and send delegates to broader assemblies of other denominations (see BOP XIV)."

#9: **Constitution Art. IV.A.7 be amended** to clarify the process for adopting new confessional statements.

INSERT the following sentence at the end of Art. IV.A.7: "Any new memorial or confessional statement must be approved as a draft at a stated Council and adopted at a subsequent stated Council."

#10: **Constitution Art. IV.C.5 be amended** to clarify that a pastor *emeritus* may serve as a Presiding Minister as long as he maintains *emeritus* status.

AMENDED to read: "5. Each Presiding Minister must be concurrently serving as a member of the local session or be a pastor *emeritus*. If a Presiding Minister ceases to serve in such a local office, or loses his *emeritus* status, then his term as Presiding Minister ceases at that time…."

#11: **Constitution Art. IV.D.4.c be amended** to require a Presiding Minister to report the denial of any appeal.

INSERT the following sentence at the end of Art. IV.D.4.c: "Such an action must be reported to the broader assembly for ratification (Article IV.C.9.a)."

#12: **Constitution Art. IV.D.4.a be amended** to allow appeals in case of formal action taken in response to a complaint.

AMENDED to read: "a. Definition: An appeal is an action brought by a person or persons who are or were members of a CREC church (including mission

churches), against whom a formal action has been taken by a local CREC judicatory (a church session or a broader assembly) and who are aggrieved by such action. It may also be a result of a formal action taken by an assembly in response to a complaint (Const. Art. IV.D.5). It constitutes a request to remove jurisdiction from one judicatory to another judicatory."

#13: **Constitution Art. V.B be amended** to allow for *ad hoc* meetings to be conducted online and to specify the length of notice for an *ad hoc* meeting.

AMENDED to read: "B. As provided in Article IV of this Constitution, the Presiding Minister has the authority to call an *ad hoc* meeting of his respective assembly. However, if two thirds of the churches submit a written request to the Presiding Minister, an *ad hoc* presbytery meeting will be called. Two weeks' notice is required for all *ad hoc* meetings. The decision to call for an *ad hoc* meeting of the Presbytery cannot be made at a stated meeting of Presbytery. *Ad hoc* meetings may be conducted online."

#14: **Constitution Art. V.E be amended** to clarify that the provisions apply to a PM *pro tempore* acting in place of the PM.

INSERT the following sentence at the end of Article V.E: "This section also applies to a Presiding Minister *pro tempore* presiding in place of a Presiding Minister."

#15: **Constitution Art. V.L be amended** to define "executive session".

INSERT the following sentence at the end of Art. V.L: "In executive session, the assembly meets in private, the contents of the discussion are treated as confidential, no motions are approved, and no minutes are kept."

#16: **Constitution Art. V.O be repealed and Constitution Art. V.N be amended** to clarify the process for seating visitors at meetings.

AMENDED to read: "N. A simple majority of an assembly may seat delegations of mission churches, candidate churches, other churches, forming churches, or interested groups. Such delegations…"

#18: **Book of Procedures Art. IV.C.2.c be amended** to clarify the meaning of the term "*ex officio*".

AMENDED to read: "c. Upon the particularization of a church, the pastors/elders from the mother church who had been assigned to serve *pro tempore* on the mission church's session shall no longer necessarily be members of the new session. However, ~~should the new church deem it useful, these former session members may continue to serve in an ex-officio capacity for a season~~ they may continue to serve as *pro tempore* elders should the new church deem it useful."

#19: **Book of Procedures Art. IV.C.3.g be deleted** due to redundancy with the provisions for a Candidate Church.

#20: **Constitution Art. II.D be enacted** to clarify the reference to congregational votes, which are mentioned in the CREC Book of Procedures (Art. XI).

Constitution Art. II.D be enacted (and following sections renumbered accordingly) to read: "D. Elders and pastors must be elected or affirmed by the congregation according to the congregation's constitution."

Book of Procedures Article XI. Preface amended to read: "Those called as Pastors and Associate Pastors are affirmed or elected by the congregation in the same process as other elders (see Constitution Article II.D) and are voting members of the session of elders."

#21: **Book of Procedures Article XI. Preface amended** to clarify confusing language regarding Assistant Pastors, who are not called by the congregation.

AMENDED to read: "Those ~~called~~ appointed as Assistant Pastors are ~~called~~ appointed by the session of elders…"

#22: **Constitution Art. III.G be amended** to clarify the process for transferring members between CREC congregations.

INSERT the following sentence at the end of Art. III.G: "The member's new church shall write to the previous church requesting a letter of transfer."

Discussion followed.

Motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:03)

B. PMOC Statements and Decisions
   a. A Statement of Deep Sorrow on the Death of Rev. Dr. Voddie Baucham
   b. A Statement on Council Clarification on Previous Christ Church Report
   c. A Statement of Thanksgiving on the Victory of President Donald J. Trump
   d. PMOC Decision: James Booth vs. Christ the King Church (Belfast, ME)
   e. PMOC Disposition: Donald Owens' Appeal concerning All Saints Church and Bucer Presbytery

Rob Hadding moved to ratify. Harold Guptill seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

VII. Formation of Boniface Presbytery

(26/09/30:4)

Toby Sumpter moved that Council form Boniface Presbytery (Canada) as a full presbytery of the CREC effective at the conclusion of the present Council, with Knox

and Boniface sending two delegates to one another's presbytery meetings for three years, through Council 2029.

David Cooper seconded; Discussed followed.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

VIII. New Business

A. Motions and Overtures from Hus Presbytery

(26/09/30:5)

1. **Garry Vanderveen moved** to add the following language to Constitution Article V.C (Hus Ovt. 14):

   "C. The Council will have a stated meeting every three years. In the year that Council meets, Presbyteries must have a stated meeting at the same place and time. Once a year, the Presiding Minister of Council will meet informally for deliberation with the Presiding Ministers of Presbyteries and Council delegates to address matters common to the churches."

   Toby Sumpter seconded. **The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.**

(26/09/30:6)

2. **Garry Vanderveen moved** that Constitution Art. II.A and III.1 be amended as follows (Hus Ovt. 9):

   Article II.A be AMENDED to read: "A. The CREC affirms that church officers (including deacons) are to be males, in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. The CREC takes no constitutional position on the validity of 2-, 3- or 4- office systems of church polity. In a 2-office system, the offices are Elder and Deacon. A 3-office system distinguishes between Pastor, Elder, and Deacon, while a 4-office system distinguishes between Pastor, Teacher/Doctor, Elder, and Deacon. These documents use the word Pastor or Minister to refer to the man who has primary responsibility for officiating at the Lord's Service.

   Art. III.1 be AMENDED to read: "I. The worship and work of each local congregation is ultimately to be governed by the teaching and godly examples supplied throughout all Scripture. All liturgical roles (i.e., officiating at the Lord's Service, preaching, public reading of Scripture and prayer, administering the sacraments) shall be restricted to males.

   John Dekker seconded and **moved a friendly amendment** that the language of Art. III.1 be amended as follows:

"I. The worship and work of each local congregation is ultimately to be governed by the teaching and godly examples supplied throughout all Scripture. As such, the following liturgical roles shall be restricted to males during Divine Services: officiating the service, preaching, public reading of Scripture, prayer, administering the sacraments, and any other liturgical roles as determined by the local Session."

Garry Vanderveen accepted the friendly amendment.

The amended motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:7)

3. **Garry Vanderveen moved** that BOP Articles III.B and Article IV.C.3.a be amended as follows (Hus Ovt. 1):

"B. Delegates about to become new members shall normally provide to the presbytery a one-page summary of their church (membership, elders, confessional standards, other useful descriptions, etc.). They shall submit their constitution and bylaws to the Presiding Minister of the presbytery no later than 30 days prior to the stated meeting of the presbytery, for inclusion on the agenda of that meeting."

"a. The mission church shall have its own constitution and bylaws, which it will submit to the Presiding Minister no later than 30 days prior to the stated meeting of the presbytery, for inclusion on the agenda of that meeting."

John Dekker seconded and **moved a friendly amendment** so that the text reads:

"a. The mission church shall have its own constitution and bylaws. The sponsor church shall submit the constitution and/or by laws of their new church to the presbytery no later than 45 days prior to the stated meeting of the presbytery, for inclusion on the agenda of that meeting."

Garry Vanderveen accepted the friendly amendment.

The amended motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:8)

4. **Garry Vanderveen moved** that Constitution Article II.B be amended to read (Hus Ovt. 12):

"B. Within the CREC, each elder and pastor must be a member of the church in which he serves. This requirement may be waived on a case-by-case basis by a ~~unanimous~~ three-quarters (¾) vote of the presbytery. If a Pastor is not serving on a session but is engaged in ministerial work (e.g., chaplain, missionary, etc.), his status as an ordained minister may continue to be recognized with the approval of his local session and Presbytery."

John Dekker seconded and **moved a friendly amendment** to change the threshold to 2/3 majority. After discussion, Dekker **withdrew his friendly amendment**.

The original motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:9)

5. **Garry Vanderveen moved** that (Hus Ovt. 17) the Council of the CREC amend the Constitution by removing the text of the Ecumenical Creeds (current Article XI), the Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage (current Article XII), and the Reformed Evangelical Confession (current Article XIII) from the body of the Constitution, and directing that this confessional content be set forth in the Book of Confessions, a primary document of the CREC as recognized in Article X.A, with the Constitution retaining these confessional standards by reference; and that all consequential amendments to cross-references and dependent provisions be made as set forth below.

   Constitution Article III.B: "B. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon in the form found in ~~Article XI of this Constitution~~ the Book of Confessions (1 Tim. 6:12). A CREC local church may use forms of the creeds that differ from the forms found in the CREC ~~Constitution~~ Book of Confessions, provided that the alternative forms 1) differ only in being an alternative translation; and 2) the adopted form is approved at the Presbytery level at the stated meeting immediately following the decision by the local church to adopt an alternative form. Forms of the creeds which have been modernized for spelling and usage are acceptable. Forms which have been altered with regard to doctrinal content are not."

   Constitution Article III.C.8 be amended to read: "8. Reformed Evangelical Confession (see ~~Article XI~~ the Book of Confessions)"

   Constitution Article III.D be amended to read: "D. Each church shall adopt into its statement of faith the Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage adopted by CREC Council on August 26, 2020, and incorporated into the CREC ~~Constitution~~ Book of Confessions."

Constitution Article III.J be amended to read: "When a church joins the CREC, this entire ~~document through Article XII~~ Constitution, together with the confessional standards required by Article III, must be adopted, into that church's constitutional documents, according to the constitutional processes and standards of that church."

Constitution Article VII.A be amended to read: "A. The CREC holds as its foundational confession of faith the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon. These confessions are included in ~~Article XI of this document~~ the Book of Confessions.

Constitution Article VIII.A be amended to read: "A. This Constitution of the CREC~~, excluding the article containing the confessions of faith,~~ may be amended at any time by a three quarters majority at any regularly scheduled meeting of the Church Council, which includes properly scheduled *ad hoc* meetings. The Book of Confessions may not be amended under this Article, but only under the process established in Article VII."

Constitution Article X.A be amended to read: "A. The CREC has three primary documents: the Constitution, the Book of Memorials, and the Book of Confessions. The confessional standards set forth in the Book of Confessions are incorporated by reference into this Constitution and are binding upon the churches as specified in Article III. The secondary documents..."

Removal of Constitution Articles XI, XII, and XIII:
Article XI (The Ecumenical Creeds), Article XII (Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage), and Article XIII (Reformed Evangelical Confession) are hereby removed from the Constitution. The text of these articles, without alteration, shall be placed in the Book of Confessions under the care and publication of the Presiding Minister of Council, in accordance with Article IV.C.8. Upon the removal of these articles, the Constitution shall conclude with Article X.

John Dekker seconded and **moved a friendly amendment** to amend Constitution VII.C & VII.D so as to bring them into harmony with the overall proposal.

"C. Revisions to ~~any portion of these confessions of faith~~ the Book of Confessions must have a first reading at a stated meeting of the Church Council, and may then be brought to a vote at the subsequent stated meeting. Three quarters of the Presbyteries are required to propose revisions to ~~the confession of faith~~ the Book of Confessions. Such proposed revisions will be placed on a list of potential revisions maintained by the Presiding Minister, to await consideration at the appointed time."

"D. Three quarters of the Presbyteries may remove proposed revisions to ~~the confession of faith~~ the Book of Confessions at any time prior to the Council when they are to be voted on. A proposed change to ~~the confession~~ the Book of Confessions requires a three quarters majority in order to pass. ~~This process of revision applies only to the confessional statements, and not to other portions of this constitution.~~"

Garry Vanderveen accepted the friendly amendment.

Douglas Wilson **moved a friendly amendment** clarifying that the approval of ¾ of presbyteries only apply to the amendment of an existing confession: "…any confession in…".

"C. Revisions to the Book of Confessions must have a first reading at a stated meeting of the Church Council, and may then be brought to a vote at the subsequent stated meeting. Three quarters of the Presbyteries are required to propose revisions to **any confession in** the Book of Confessions. Such proposed revisions will be placed on a list of potential revisions maintained by the Presiding Minister, to await consideration at the appointed time."

"D. Three quarters of the Presbyteries may remove proposed revisions to the Book of Confessions at any time prior to the Council when they are to be voted on. A proposed change to **any confession in** the Book of Confessions requires a three quarters majority in order to pass."

John Dekker **accepted the friendly amendment**.

The amended motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:10)

6. **Garry Vanderveen moved** that Hus Overtures 10 and 15 be referred to the first Council Summit meeting next year.

   Toby Sumpter seconded. **The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.**

PMoC called a recess at 10:30am

PMoC called the meeting to order at 10:50am

(26/09/30:11)

David Cooper moved to reconsider Motion 9. Joshua Appel seconded. David Cooper explained that introduction of a new confession needs broader support than what is currently required. Appel spoke in support.

Douglas Wilson spoke against reconsidering the motion as it relates to the proposed New Westminster, which is already in process.

The motion to reconsider CARRIED 16-2-0.

(26/09/30:12)

David Cooper moved that "any confession in" be struck from Constitution Article VII.C and VII.D. Joshua Appel seconded.

> "C. Revisions to the Book of Confessions must have a first reading at a stated meeting of the Church Council, and may then be brought to a vote at the subsequent stated meeting. Three quarters of the Presbyteries are required to propose revisions to ~~any confession in~~ the Book of Confessions. Such proposed revisions will be placed on a list of potential revisions maintained by the Presiding Minister, to await consideration at the appointed time."
>
> "D. Three quarters of the Presbyteries may remove proposed revisions to the Book of Confessions at any time prior to the Council when they are to be voted on. A proposed change to ~~any confession in~~ the Book of Confessions requires a three quarters majority in order to pass."

Douglas Wilson spoke against the motion, arguing that revisions to existing confessions should maintain a higher threshold than adding a new confession.

The motion was DEFEATED 11-7-0.

(NOTE: Amendments to the Constitution require ¾ majority. Forgetting about this higher threshold, it was originally ruled that the motion had carried. This mistake led to the motion being reconsidered unnecessarily in Motions 19-20.)

B. Motions and Overtures from Tyndale Presbytery

(26/09/30:13)

David Cooper moved Tyndale's proposed amendment to Constitution Article III.E.3 (adding a new "d" section) as follows:

> "d. A church that is planted as the result of tensions, disagreements, or differences with a member church may not be sponsored as a mission church while there are unresolved issues with another member church, unless presbytery by a two-thirds vote resolves to discipline or censure the member church, or until the issues are resolved.

Arnie Abens seconded. Discussion followed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the language. Douglas Wilson spoke against the motion.

(26/09/30:14)

Alan Burrow moved to table Motion 13. He withdrew his motion to table.

The main motion (13) was DEFEATED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:15)

John Dekker moved to refer Tyndale's overtures regarding Candidate Churches to the next Council Summit. Arnie Abens seconded.

Motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

C. Motions from Knox Presbytery Regarding Presbytery Formation

(26/09/30:16)

Toby Sumpter moved (Knox Motion 2) that BOP Article VIII.B.1 be revised to read:

"1. A CREC Presbytery, by majority vote at a regularly scheduled meeting, may create a Provisional Presbytery for the purpose of preparing a ~~segment of the Presbytery~~ group of churches for eventual establishment as a separate Presbytery within the CREC. This group may consist of churches from within the parent Presbytery or from multiple Presbyteries, provided there is mutual agreement among all involved Presbyteries. The parent Presbytery should normally be the Presbytery with the most churches in the Provisional Presbytery."

Arnie Abens seconded. Discussion followed. **The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.**

(26/09/30:17)

Toby Sumpter moved (Knox Motion 3) to amend Constitution Article IV.A.1, requiring a minimum of five churches to form a new presbytery rather than the current minimum of two.

"A minimum of ~~two~~ five local churches is necessary to establish a presbytery."

Bogumil Jarmulak seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:18)

Toby Sumpter moved (Knox Motion 4) that the following sentence be added to the end of Constitution Article IX.D:

"When a draft memorial(s), or its supporting paper(s), is submitted to Presbytery, it should also note its exact word count to aid in editorial discussions."

Harold Guptill seconded. **The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.**

PMoC called a recess at 11:45am.

PMoC Brito called the meeting to order at 3:20pm.

(26/09/30:19)

Bogumil Jarmulak moved to reconsider Motion 9 (Constitution VII.C and VII.D**)**. Toby Sumpter seconded.

David Cooper spoke against the motion. Toby Sumpter spoke in favor of the motion.

The motion to reconsider CARRIED 10-8-0.

(26/09/30:20)

Bogumil Jarmulak moved to return to the wording of Constitution VII.C and VII.D adopted in Motion 9 ("any confession in"). Douglas Wilson seconded.

Toby Sumpter offered a friendly amendment: "Revision to the Book of Confessions must have a first reading at a stated meeting of the Church Council approved by a ¾ majority of Council."

Bogumil Jarmulak **accepted the friendly amendment.**

The motion was DEFEATED 11-8-0.

NOTE: The amendment of Constitution VII.C and VII.D (including "any confession in") stands as approved in Motion 9.

D. Motions and Overtures from Knox Presbytery

(26/09/30:21)

Toby Sumpter moved (Knox Motion 6) to amend the Sacramental Cooperation language of the Constitution Preamble and Article III.G.

Harold Guptill seconded. Douglas Wilson spoke in favor of the motion.

<u>Constitution Preamble</u>

CURRENT: "As a Communion, we recognize the ordination of all the ministers of our churches. Additionally, we recognize the baptisms of all the members of our churches, and we receive at the Lord's Table all communicant members of our churches."

AMENDED: "As a Communion, we seek to honor the ordination of all the ministers of our churches, the baptisms of all the members of our churches, and the communicant status of the members of our churches."

For Constitution Article III: Local Congregations

G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation ~~must~~ will ordinarily be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches as included in the Book of Procedures, Article XIII. Sacramental Cooperation.

Alan Burrow spoke against the motion. Jerry Owen spoke in favor of the motion.

The motion was DEFEATED 6-10-2.

(26/09/30:22)

Douglas Wilson moved that proposed revisions regarding sacramental cooperation be referred to the next Council Summit. Harold Guptill seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

E. Motions and Overtures from Kuyper Presbytery

(26/09/30:23)

Joshua Appel moved that the phrases "or accepted by" and "or accepted" be added to BOP Article XIII.A.2 as below, such that the first sentence would now read:

"2. Any credobaptist church in this Communion must accept the validity of baptisms administered in or accepted by another CREC church, even if it would not have performed or accepted that particular baptism. Such a church shall accept that the person is, in fact, baptized, though they might consider the baptism irregular."

Dan Nash seconded. Douglas Wilson spoke in favor but pointed out potential problems.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:24)

Joshua Appel moved that to insert the proposal below into BOP XIII.A.3 [current #3 becomes #4]:

"3. If a paedobaptized member or prospective member of a CREC church which has adopted the London Baptist Confession of Faith or the Reformed Evangelical Confession holds or comes to credobaptist convictions and desires to be baptized upon profession of faith, then, out of respect for the political primacy of the local congregation (Const. III.A), and as an act of mutual submission (BOP XIII.A), the congregation and minister that performs this action shall not be held to be in violation of the Sacramental Cooperation Agreement (BOP XIII). Churches that have

adopted these confessional statements may not require credobaptism of CREC Members for membership or admission to the Lord's Table, and no minister may be required to perform such against their conscience."

Douglas Wilson seconded and spoke in favor. **The motion CARRIED 13-3-2.**

F. Motions and Overtures Regarding the Process for Memorials

(26/09/30:25)

David Cooper moved to amend Constitution Article III.M to read:

"M. When a church joins the CREC, the existing ordination of all its officers is thereby accepted, ~~and does not necessitate a formal examination as with other candidates.~~ Nevertheless, observations and questions concerning elder qualification may occur in the discussion of that church's potential admission. Any elder from a candidate church who wishes to be recognized as an Ordained Minister or Pastor, should have their credentials examined by a Presbytery commission or committee in accordance with the Book of Procedures, (Article XI. E. "Previously Ordained Men entering the CREC") prior to the church being admitted into membership.

Joshua Appel seconded. Douglas Wilson asked clarifying questions.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/09/30:26)

David Cooper moved to amend Constitution Article IX.C to read:

"C. The process for adopting a memorial must involve a careful striving for like-mindedness. This deliberate process will help us guard against various fads and winds of doctrine (Eph 4:14). Any new memorial must be approved as a draft at a stated Council ~~and adopted at a subsequent stated Council~~. After first approval of Council, the draft memorial shall be voted on by each presbytery before the next stated Council. If three-fourths of the presbyteries signify approval of the draft memorial, then it may be put forward to be adopted at a subsequent stated Council."

Alan Burrow seconded. Douglas Wilson spoke against the motion. Toby Sumpter spoke against the motion, arguing that this amendment is unnecessary in light of annual Summit meetings. David Cooper answered objections.

The motion was DEFEATED.

(26/09/30:27)

Rob Hadding moved that Wycliffe's "Questionnaire for Prospective Mission and Candidate Churches" be added to the BoP (exact placement to be chosen at the discretion of the PMoC). David Cooper seconded.

Bogumil Jarmulak **offered a friendly amendment** for the addition of a new #9: "Have you previously sought membership in any other CREC presbytery?"

Rob Hadding **accepted the friendly amendment**.

The amended motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

PMoC called a recess at 4:45pm, to be reconvened at 8:55am.

PMoC reconvened the Council at 9:15am and opened with prayer.

G. Final Consideration of the Memorial on Nations

(26/10/1:28)

Bogumil Jarmulak moved to adopt the Hus Memorial on Nations, which was read for the first time at Council 2023. Friendly amendments have been received gladly to produce this slightly modified proposal.

> "We believe God made all nations from one man, Adam. At Babel God scattered their rebellious unity. But God, by the cross of Christ and His Spirit poured out at Pentecost, is reuniting and reconciling the nations, drawing them into one Church, the Body of Christ. Loving family, nation, and stranger in their order, idolizing or destroying none, we repudiate nationalistic and ethnic hatred, vainglory, and persecution. We seek to unite the nations in the worship of the triune God, sanctifying all peoples, languages, and customs to His glory."

Toby Sumpter seconded. Rob Hadding asked for clarification on the rationale. Douglas Wilson spoke about some of the practical problems present in our churches. Rich Lusk spoke in favor of the need for such a memorial with some clarifying questions. Arnie Abens spoke against addressing this issue through a memorial and the problem of defining terms. Joshua Appel suggested that this issue be addressed through a PMoC statement. Douglas Wilson spoke against the use of a PMoC statement due to the lack of "gate-keeping" effect. Bogumil Jarmulak spoke in favor of the memorial. David Cooper spoke in favor of memorials in general but expressed reluctance about the memorial's vagueness.

The motion CARRIED 14-4-0.

(26/10/1:29)

Toby Sumpter moved that the PMoC form a committee consisting of representatives from Knox, Hus and Boniface to write a position paper on the memorial on nations. Jerry Owen seconded.

David Cooper **offered a friendly amendment** that members from Augustine presbytery be included. Toby Sumpter accepted the friendly amendment.

The amended motion CARRIED unanimously.

H. First Readings of New Proposed Memorials

1. Memorial on Child Communion (Knox)

(26/10/1:30)

Toby Sumpter moved the following proposed memorial for a first reading:

"As elders who hold the keys, we ordinarily welcome baptized children to the Lord's Table, because God has incorporated them into His covenant and congregation through baptism. The covenant promises are theirs in Christ. We believe that in the sacraments God calls us to respond by faith in Christ according to our age and capacity. We affirm that faith is a necessary condition for worthy participation at the Table and that God gives such faith even to small children. Jesus said: 'Let the little children come to me.'"

David Cooper seconded and **offered a friendly amendment** to strike the word "ordinarily". **Toby Sumpter rejected the friendly amendment.**

(26/10/1:31)

David Cooper moved to amend the memorial by striking the word "ordinarily".

"As elders who hold the keys, we ~~ordinarily~~ welcome baptized children to the Lord's Table, because God has incorporated them into His covenant and congregation through baptism. The covenant promises are theirs in Christ. We believe that in the sacraments God calls us to respond by faith in Christ according to our age and capacity. We affirm that faith is a necessary condition for worthy participation at the Table and that God gives such faith even to small children. Jesus said: 'Let the little children come to me.'"

Arnie Abens seconded the amendment. Several other delegates spoke in favor of the amendment. Toby Sumpter spoke against the amendment. Rob Hadding spoke in favor of the amendment.

The motion to amend passed 12-6-0.

John Dekker asked for clarification on the title of the memorial. Jerry Owen asked for clarification about wording in the memorial regarding the language of faith as a necessary condition for participation. John Dekker spoke against the motion.

The amended motion CARRIED 17-1-0.

2. Doctor-Assisted Suicide (Knox)

(26/10/1:32)

Toby Sumpter moved the following proposed memorial for a first reading:

> "We abhor and we hate the pernicious practice of doctor-assisted suicide. Self-murder is a crime against the image of God in man and cannot be sanctified by the inclusion of a doctor in the act of willfully terminating a life. Doctors are for the maintenance and restoration of health to the person, not for the destruction thereof (Ex 23:19). We call on all men and women to repent of and foreswear this bloody monstrosity. We call on all civil governments everywhere to outlaw and to punish this practice, and to support the life-giving nature of the medical calling." [98 Words]

Arnie Abens seconded. Bill Smith asked a clarifying question about a position paper. Arnie Abens spoke about the need for a position paper. Rob Hadding spoke in favor with some suggestions for improvement.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

3. Marriage and Divorce (Knox)

(26/10/1:33)

Toby Sumpter moved the following proposed memorial for a first reading:

> "God's pattern for marriage was established in the creation when He created one man and woman, designed for one another. The divine pattern therefore is one man, one woman, one time. The dislocations introduced by the entry of sin into the world, and the consequent hardness of heart, resulted in the need for legal recognition of divorce, but from the beginning it was not so. The two criteria allowing for a biblical divorce, with the right of the innocent party to remarry, are sexual infidelity and desertion. Desertion need not be physical, as extreme cruelty is a form of abandonment." [100 Words]

Harold Guptill seconded. Toby Sumpter spoke in favor of the motion. Harold Guptill proposed a friendly amendment changing "one time" to "unto death". **Toby Sumpter accepted the friendly amendment.**

Alan Burrow offered a friendly amendment on the last sentence: "Desertion need not be physical, e.g. extremely cruelty is a form of abandonment." **Toby Sumpter accepted the friendly amendment.**

> "God's pattern for marriage was established in the creation when He created one man and woman, designed for one another. The divine pattern therefore is one man, one woman, ~~one time~~ unto death. The dislocations introduced by the entry of sin into the world, and the consequent hardness of heart, resulted in the need for legal recognition of divorce, but from the beginning it was not so. The two criteria allowing for a biblical divorce, with the right of the innocent party to remarry, are sexual infidelity and desertion. Desertion need not be physical, ~~as~~ e.g. extreme cruelty is a form of abandonment."

David Cooper asked for clarification on the conditions for remarriage ("right"). Douglas Wilson explained the reasons for the original language. Arnie Abens spoke in favor of David Cooper's objections. John Dekker spoke against the memorial.

> "God's pattern for marriage was established in the creation when He created one man and woman, designed for one another. The divine pattern therefore is one man, one woman, unto death. The dislocations introduced by the entry of sin into the world, and the consequent hardness of heart, resulted in the need for legal recognition of divorce, but from the beginning it was not so. The two criteria allowing for a biblical divorce, with the right of the innocent party to remarry, are sexual infidelity and desertion. Desertion need not be physical, e.g. extreme cruelty is a form of abandonment."

The amended motion CARRIED 17-1-0.

PMoC called a recess at 10:17am.

PMoC called the meeting to order at 10:30am.

A. Proposals for Book of Resources

(26/10/1:34)

Douglas Wilson moved that Council receive the attached pre-nuptial agreement before presentation for addition to the Book of Resources at the next Council. Jerry Owen seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/10/1:35)

Joshua Appel moved that Council adopt the attached paper "Principles of CREC Polity".

Rob Hadding seconded.

(26/10/1:36)

John Dekker moved a friendly amendment to the main motion that the paper simply be added to the Book of Resources without adopting it ("include the attached paper").

David Cooper seconded. Discussion followed regarding the term "adopt". **Joshua Appel received the amendment.**

The amended motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

(26/10/1:37)

Joshua Appel moved that Council add the paper "Minding the CREC Global Financial Gap" to the Book of Resources.

Arnie Abens seconded and asked about the possibility of updating the data.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

B. New Westminster Confession and Catechism proposal

(26/10/1:38)

Douglas Wilson moved that the New Westminster Confession be accepted as first reading for potential inclusion as one of the confessions that CREC churches might adopt. This would include the requirement that the PMOC appoint a committee of Council, consisting of representatives from at least five presbyteries, charged with presenting all the presbyteries with a clean draft for a second reading a year before Council 2029. The committee will report on their progress at the summit meetings. Whatever draft they present will count as a second reading.

Bogumil Jarmulak seconded. Douglas Wilson spoke in favor of the motion. Randy Booth asked a clarifying question about the use of the term "Westminster", and Douglas Wilson responded.

Bogumil Jarmulak moved a friendly amendment to include the French "Confession of La Rochelle" for a first reading.

PMoC ruled the amendment out of order that should be introduced as a separate motion.

David Cooper spoke against the name of the proposed Confession. Douglas Wilson responded.

John Dekker raised a point of order regarding the motion.

The motion CARRIED 13-5-0.

(26/10/1:39)

Bogumil Jarmulak moved that the addition of the French "Confession of La Rochelle" (1571) to the Book of Confessions be added to the agenda.

Toby Sumpter seconded.

John Dekker raised a **point of order** that the motion is out of order. PMoC asked for clarification on the rationale for the motion. Bogumil Jarmulak explained that a new French-speaking member church has been using the Confession of La Rochelle.

PMoC called a recess at 11:20am for 10 minutes to read the Confession.

PMoC called the meeting to order at 11:30am.

John Dekker spoke against the motion because presbyteries have not had an opportunity to review and discuss the proposed Confession. Bogumil Jarmulak partially agreed and partially disagreed due to the Confession's historical significance.

PMoC ruled the motion to be in order for addition to the agenda.

Douglas Wilson spoke in favor of the motion. Bill Smith spoke in favor of the motion. Arnie Abens spoke against the motion.

The motion CARRIED 17-1-0.

C. Legal Matters related to CREC logo

(26/10/1:40)

Rob Hadding moved that the CREC seek legal counsel to evaluate and recommend measures for protecting our denominational logo from trademark infringement, including potential registration or enforcement actions, and report back by or before the end of 2027.

Alan Burrow seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

D. New Business

(26/10/1:41)

Bogumil Jarmulak moved that the French "Confession of La Rochelle" (1571) receive a first reading for future addition to the Book of Confessions. Toby Sumpter seconded. The reading was waived.

(26/10/1:42)

Arnie Abens **moved a friendly amendment** to call an *ad hoc* meeting for consideration of this confession.

John Dekker raised a **point of order** that an ad hoc meeting cannot be called at a stated meeting. Arnie Abens **withdrew his amendment**.

The main motion CARRIED unanimously.

(26/10/1:43)

Rob Hadding moved that Memorial F be removed from the Book of Memorials due to redundancy with Memorial I.

Rob Hadding withdrew the motion so the matter can be discussed at the next Council Summit.

(26/10/1:44)

Rob Hadding moved that Council formally recognize the many years of faithful service of Pastor Douglas Wilson to the CREC. As an expression of our gratitude for his significant contributions to and on behalf of our denomination, he further moved that the text of Pastor Randy Booth's introduction of Pastor Wilson, delivered prior to his address to Council on September 29, 2026, be entered into the minutes of this Council. Harold Guptill seconded.

The motion CARRIED unanimously. (Douglas Wilson abstained)

(26/10/1:45)

Rob Hadding moved that the incoming PMoC form a committee to consider options for 2029 Council Meeting and report back within 60 days. Toby Sumpter seconded.

The motion CARRIED 17-1-0.

IX. Election of Presiding Minister for 2026-2029

Because Uri Brito is not seeking re-election as PMoC and no nominations had been received beforehand, Rob Hadding nominated Bill Smith for PMoC.

Bogumil Jarmulak seconded. Bill Smith spoke to the nomination.

Bill Smith was unanimously elected as PMoC.

X. Election of Presiding Minister *pro tempore* for 2026-2029

Rob Hadding nominated Uri Brito as PMoC *pro tempore*.

David Cooper seconded. Bill Smith spoke to the nomination.

Uri Brito was unanimously elected as PMoC *pro tempore*.

XI. Good of the Order

David Cooper asked the whole assembly to thank Uri Brito for his tireless service as PMoC. A standing ovation was given.

XII. Adjournment

(26/10/1:46)

Toby Sumpter moved to adjourn at 12:07pm. Harold Guptill seconded.

The motion CARRIED without audible dissent.

Uri Brito closed in prayer and then led in song.

Following the song, the Council delegates laid hands on Uri Brito and prayed for him.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jimmy Gill, assistant to the PMoC

A Statement of Deep Sorrow on the Death of Rev. Dr. Voddie Baucham

Statement from the Presiding Minister of Council

On behalf of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, I extend our deepest sorrow at the passing of Rev. Dr. Voddie Baucham.

Our brother was a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and proclaimed the Gospel with courage, conviction, and joy. He blessed many of our congregations with his fearless teaching on the centrality of Christ, the nurture of covenant families, and the glory of God's grace.

We commend his soul into the everlasting arms of his Redeemer and pray that the God of all comfort would surround his wife and children with peace which surpasses all understanding. May the Lord grant to all who mourn the steadfast hope of the resurrection and the assurance that in Christ, death is swallowed up in victory.

Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Master.

Presiding Minister of Council,
Rev. Dr. Uri Brito

A Statement on Council Clarification on Previous Christ Church Report

Statement from the Presiding Minister of the CREC

In 2015, the session of Christ Church Moscow (CC) requested the formation of a voluntary advisory committee. This body was never constituted as a committee of Council. The advisory committee subsequently submitted a two-part report to CC in 2017. The report was not judicial or binding; it was offered as counsel and advice in response to the request of CC. The second portion of the report exceeded the scope of what had originally been requested. The Council of the CREC acknowledges that this matter was mishandled in two significant respects.

First, the report-entitled Presiding Ministers' Report, under the CREC logo-was erroneously presented in a manner that suggested it reflected the findings of the CREC as a whole. In addition, the initial mission statement of the committee referred to itself as a "Committee of Council." But the committee responsible for the report had not been established by the Council, did not report to the Council, and its conclusions were neither discussed nor ratified by the Council. By failing to make these distinctions explicit at the time, the Council unintentionally allowed the public misunderstanding to arise-and persist-that the committee's conclusions represented the official position of the CREC. This was never the case.

Second, the report was published on the official CREC website, further contributing to the mistaken impression that it carried the formal endorsement of the denomination. This, too, was in error, and the report has since been removed from the site.

The CREC deeply regrets treating the advisory committee's report as authoritative. The Council has sought and received forgiveness from Christ Church Moscow, which was graciously and freely extended.

Presiding Minister of Council,
Rev. Dr. Uriesou Brito

A Statement of Thanksgiving on the Victory of President Donald J. Trump

Statement from the Presiding Minister of Council

The CREC rejoices in the victory of Donald J. Trump as our 47th President!
We believe his victory will provide great consolation to our congregations in the United States. While we will have a voice in the White House who will not persecute or entangle our churches in political and social turmoil, we believe that the Church is fundamentally responsible for pursuing righteousness as ambassadors of hope in this world.

Therefore, we urge CREC congregations and other Bible-believing traditions to rejoice in God's kind providence, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and continue to labor for the good of the city in word and deed. We exhort local churches to pray for our leaders and boldly call our nation to repentance by exhorting the civil magistrates to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Uriesou T. Brito
Presiding Minister of Council (CREC)

PMOC Decision: James Booth vs. Christ the King Church

Belfast, Maine | Submitted for Council ratification

Appeal

Mr. Booth appealed the decision of excommunication from Christ the King Church.

Presbytery action

The presbytery committee ruled that Mr. Booth's appeal was not in order under the Constitution and Book of Procedures. In an email dated February 3, 2026, the Presiding Minister of Council stated that Mr. Booth "made a series of accusations without substantial
supporting evidence and without any witnesses."

Summary of PMOC decision dated February 3, 2026

The appeal did not identify biblically grounded offenses, nor did it allege specific acts or omissions capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed through evidence or witness testimony. As such, it does not qualify as a proper charge and petition under the standards
required for judicial review.

PMOC Disposition: Donald Owens Appeal concerning All Saints Church

Bucer Presbytery | Submitted for Council ratification

Appeal

Mr. Donald Owens sought review of the discipline and excommunication imposed by All Saints Church and sustained within Bucer Presbytery.

Presbytery action

A judicatory committee investigated the matter and ruled in favor of sustaining the excommunication. At its Fall 2025 stated meeting, Bucer Presbytery voted 9-1 to sustain
the judicatory committee's ruling.

Summary of PMOC disposition dated July 5, 2025

After reviewing the record, the Presiding Minister of Council determined that All Saints Church had followed its constitutional procedures with integrity and had repeatedly stated
a path toward restoration through confession and repentance. The PMOC identified four occasions on which that path was communicated: the Session's March 15, 2024 letter; the
March 24, 2024 head-of-household meeting; Rev. Horvath's April 17, 2024 email; and the
April 27, 2024 charges and calls to repentance.

The PMOC concluded that the local church and Bucer Presbytery had followed their governing procedures. He therefore declined the relief Mr. Owens sought, leaving the Presbytery's decision sustaining the excommunication intact, while expressing prayer for
the Owens family and for future restoration.

Proposed Council action

Ratify the PMOC's July 5, 2025 disposition of the Owens appeal as part of the consent agenda.

Questionnaire for
Prospective Mission and Candidate Churches

This questionnaire, or a modified version, is for use when churches and presbyteries are considering applicants for Mission or Candidate churches.

History, Location, Demographics

1. How long has the church been in existence?

2. How many people are in attendance, and in how many households? Please distinguish between actual members and long-time visitors.

3. How many family units are unrelated by blood or marriage?

4. Where is the church located, and what is the population of the city/county?

5. How far is the church from a large population center?

6. Generally describe the church's demographics.

7. What is the financial viability of the church, and how much do you pay the pastor(s)?

8. Is there any history of controversy within your congregation? If yes, please explain.

9. Has your church sought membership in any other CREC presbytery?

Church Government

10. How many officers are in the church, and how long have they been ordained? Please list their names, ages, marital status, and number of children.

11. Were each of the officers ordained in the ritual of laying on of hands?

12. What are the academic credentials of your pastors/teaching elders, and who were they ordained by?

13. Have any of the officers been divorced? If so, please give the circumstances.

14. Have any of the officers had a child that has been excommunicated? If so, please give the circumstances.

15. How does the church handle congregational voting (individual vs. head of household, etc.), and what issues would be brought to the congregation for a vote?

16. What is the church's current confessional standards and has it ever changed confessional standards?

17. What exceptions, if any, does the church take to the confessional standards?

18. What exceptions, if any, do the pastor(s) hold beyond what the church holds?

Liturgy, Sacraments, Music

19. Please describe your order of service (liturgy) and its main elements.

20. What is the church's position on children and the sacraments (paedo vs. credo), and are all of the officers in agreement?

21. How do you distribute the elements of the Lord's Supper, and how often do you celebrate it?

22. What type of music do you use in your worship service (psalms, hymns, praise music)?

Reputation with Outsiders

23. Was your church part of another church in the past and if so, what happened?

24. Are there other churches in your community that might view your church negatively? If yes, please explain.

25. Do you believe your church has a good reputation with the general public/unbelievers? If no, please explain.

Interest in the CREC

26. Describe your interest in being a CREC church. What do your officers like about the CREC and who in the CREC are their biggest influences?

27. Are there any personalities outside of the CREC (on social media and podcasts) that have an influence on your officers or laypeople? Please list.

Distinctives

28. Explain the position of your session on the following topics:

Six-Day Creation

Eschatology

Charismatic gifts

Patriarchy

Head-coverings

Civil government and Nationalism

Kinism and interracial marriage

New Westminster Confession & Catechism

Introduction

We have often heard it said that our generation is not a confession-writing generation. We have declined from a great height. There is a sense in which this is very true, and we must take it on board with all humility. Who is sufficient for these things?

But we must be cautious in another direction also. A generation that is incapable of writing a confessional statement is also a generation that might not be any good at interpreting or understanding the confessional statements that have been handed down to us by others. As every teacher knows, if the student is not able to reproduce the lesson in his own words, then it is likely that the lesson was not really taken on board.

And the fact we are not equipped to write new confessional statements, or edit them, or supplement them, does not make the need for such statements evaporate. We might not have been ready for the invading army, but they invaded regardless, and we need to fight anyhow. It is no complaint against our fathers who drafted the first Westminster to say that they did not anticipate the errors of Kant, Darwin, or Nietzsche. They could not be expected to anticipate and answer the more radical forms of unbelief that have, since their day, metastasized

Our fathers understood their lessons better than we do, but they were living earlier in the semester, and we are grappling with a much greater volume of material. If the claim is that we have not mastered it, that's as may be. We do not claim to be doing a great job with what we are confronting, but it is a task that necessarily must be done.

So this needs to be understood as an adaptation of the Westminster Confession, and not a replacement of it. There really is a Westminsterian stream, and this adaptation is squarely in the middle of that stream. The original was approved in 1646. The Congregationalists modified it into their Savoy Declaration (1658), and the Baptists did the same (1689). A significant American revision was adopted by

the first American General Assembly (1788), and is the version used by the OPC and PCA today. Modern English versions have also been produced (*e.g.* by Douglas Kelly). The Presbyterians of Scotland adopted the original with certain interpretive guidelines. And it is standard at ordination exams at presbytery for certain standard "exceptions" to be waved through. By producing a modern English version of the Confession that also accommodates certain doctrinal distinctives of the CREC, we are, ironically, doing nothing all that distinctive.

Now for an explanation of the structure of this confession, as well as a description of the process that produced it. In calling this the New Westminster Confession, there are two basic things about it that are new.

The first is that entire confession has been edited—sandpapered—to bring it more in line with modern syntax. In a very few places that editing resulted in a substantive alteration—rarely to change the meaning and other times to clarify the meaning.

An example of a change would be in chapter 29, in the addition of the word *willfully*. This would have relevance to the issue of paedocommunion, making room for it.

> "Although willfully ignorant and wicked men may receive the outward elements in this sacrament . . . (WCF 29.8)

An example of clarification would be the addition of the word *ordinary* here.

> ". . . in the space of six ordinary days, evening and morning, and all very good (WCF 4.1).

The second aspect of this confession that is new is the addition of new paragraphs. In order to keep the numeration consistent with the original Westminster (as well as the American version), new paragraphs have been placed in an appropriate place, and then marked with an additional decimal. For example, the original Westminster has a paragraph on the perspicuity of Scripture (WCF 1.7). Two new paragraphs have been added right after this one, and they are

marked as (WCF 1.7.1) and (WCF 1.7.2). This leaves the original WCF 1.8 just as it was, and just where it was.

There is new material on textual criticism and Bible translations (WCF 1.7.1 and 1.7.2). There is an entry on the Creator/creature distinction (WCF 2.3.1), and on the timing of the creation (WCF 4.1.1). The covenant of works is renamed the covenant of creation, and it is made clear that it is a gracious covenant (WCF 7.2). The chapter on law has a new paragraph on the moral obligation arising from natural revelation (WCF 19.5.1), and two paragraphs on the law/grace distinction (WCF 19.7.1 and 19.7.2). The paragraph on sabbath observance is edited to make resting the center of the commandment, and to allow for lawful recreation (WCF 21.8). The chapter on the civil magistrate has three new paragraphs—one on the absurdity of secularism (WCF 23.3.1), the rights of unbelievers in a Christian nation (WCF 23.3.2), and the rights of the unborn (WCF 23.3.3). The chapter on marriage and divorce has three new paragraphs (WCF 24.2.1-3), addressing transgenderism, the meaning of marriage, and various sexual perversions. The chapter on the sacraments provides room for ministerial candidates to administer the Lord's Supper (WCF 27.4). A new paragraph is added to the chapter on the Lord's Supper, opening the door for the communing of baptized children (WCF 29.8.1). A new paragraph makes clear that synods and councils are not meddling with civil affairs when they speak prophetically about basic moral issues (WCF 31.4.1). There are then three new chapters added at the end of the Confession. The first is on the Great Commission and world evangelization, and assumes the truth of a postmillennial understanding of the promises (WCF 34). The second is on common grace, neutrality, and sphere sovereignty (WCF 35). And the last is on what I have sometimes called Chestertonian Calvinism (WCF 36).

In the Shorter Catechism:

Q60 is adjusted so as to keep rest central to the Fourth Commandment.

Q97 is rewritten in order to make clear how child communion is to be approached.

Q103 has an additional sentence related to worship being an instrument relevant to the kingdom coming.

Q3.1 on law and grace

Q4.1 is a new question, on the Creator/creature distinction.

Q10.1 is on the dates for the creation of mankind.

Q14.1 how we know what sin is

Q16.1 on the covenant of creation

There is a new question Q65.1 on the three governments that God Himself established.

Q72.1 addresses newer forms of sexual perversion.

Q89.1 addresses postmillennialism.

Other than these, the New Westminster Confession remains largely what it was, with the editorial changes largely being a matter of syntax.

One advantage of all such alterations and changes is that it eliminates the need for a lot of the standard exceptions that are taken, either by churches, or by men being examined for ordination at presbytery. In addition, if any church wishes to adopt this form of the Confession, but differs with one or more of the additions, it will be easy to state that exception.

I did the initial editorial work on all of this, and requested that the presiding minister of the CREC reserve a spot on the agenda of the next CREC Council to present this confession for a first reading. I then sought input from those close to me. I then submitted the draft to the various sessions in our community of churches on the Palouse, requesting comments and suggestions. In order to adopt a new confession, our constitutional process requires it to be considered across two Council meetings. When a spot on the agenda was secured, I submitted the draft to the presiding ministers of all our presbyteries, requesting comments and suggestions from them. I also submitted it to the men of Knox Presbytery so that the formal request for consideration would come from one of our presbyteries. A motion from Knox to forward this to Council was approved. The idea was to get as many reasonable suggestions incorporated beforehand as possible, so that the first reading at Council would be as close as possible to the final reading.

If this New Westminster were to meet with the final approval of Council, this would simply make this confession *one* of the options that CREC churches could select from as they come into the CREC. No church would need to adopt it, of course, although many might want to. And of course, the churches that submitted this proposal to the CREC would do so.

Douglas Wilson
Benediction Hall, 2026

Editorial Key

Significant Additions
Suggestions by Scott Moonen
Suggested by Nathan Zekveld and Brad Donovan
Stylistic proposals by Joe "AI" Rigney, in order to approximate the syntax of the original.

CHAPTER 1

On the Holy Scripture

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary for salvation. It has therefore pleased the Lord, at various times and in various ways, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will to His church. And after this, for better preserving and propagating the truth, and for the more certain establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit all this entirely to writing. All of which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary, as the former ways of God's revealing His will to His people are now ceased (WCF 1.1).

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, all the books of the Old and New Testaments are now contained, which are these:

In the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Of the New Testament: The gospels according to Matthew**,** Mark, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistles to the Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, The First and Second Epistles of Peter, the First, Second, and Third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, and Revelation.

All of which are given by inspiration of God, and are to be the rule of faith and life (WCF 1.2).

The books commonly called the Apocrypha are not of divine inspiration, and are no part of the canon of Scripture. Therefore they are of no authority in the church of God, and are only to be approved or made use of on the same basis as other human writings (WCF 1.3).

The authority of the Holy Scripture, on account of which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend on the testimony of any man or church, but rather upon God entirely, who is truth itself. He is the Author of Scripture, and it is therefore to be received because it is the Word of God (WCF 1.4).

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. As well, we may be affected by the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full revelation it makes concerning the only way of salvation for man, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection Scripture displays. These all are arguments which evidentally reveal it to be the Word of God, but yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Word is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts (WCF 1.5).

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory—man's salvation, faith, and life—is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. To this nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or by traditions of men.

At the same time we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for a saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.

In addition, there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the church, that are common to human actions and societies. These are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (WCF 1.6).

All things in Scripture are not equally plain in themselves, nor equally clear to everyone. And yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place or other in Scripture, that not only the learned, but also the unlearned, through an appropriate use of ordinary means, may come to a sufficient understanding of them (WCF 1.7).

The appropriate custodian of the text of Scripture is to be the church, confessionally bound, and not the academy or private publishing houses. (WCF 1.7.1)

The Holy Scripture is to be kept and preserved by the Church, which is confessionally bound to the same; and not by the academy, nor by private publishing houses. (WCF 1.7.1).

Textual critics under confessional authority are to labor with the manuscripts that God has providentially preserved through the ages in order to maintain a translation of the Scriptures that is in the common vernacular, that is faithful to the original, that grants standing permission to quote from it freely, and that does not profiteer off the Word of God (WCF 1.7.2)

Textual critics, laboring under the authority of the Church's confession, are to use the manuscripts which God in His providence has preserved through the ages, that they may maintain a translation of the Scriptures in the common tongue, faithful to

the originals, freely quotable by all, and free from any profiteering upon the Word of God. (WCF 1.7.2).

The Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic (the native languages of God's people of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing was commonly known among the nations) were immediately inspired by God. In addition, by His singular care and providence these Scriptures were kept pure through all ages, and are therefore authentical. As such, in all controversies of religion, the church is to appeal to them as the final and ultimate authority.

The people of God have right to, and an interest in, the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them. But because these original languages are not known to all the people of God, they are therefore to be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come. As a result, the Word of God can dwell abundantly in all, that they may worship Him in an acceptable manner and, through patience and comfort in the Scriptures, may have hope (WCF 1.8).

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is to be Scripture itself. Therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture passage, the sense is to be determined by how that passage presents itself to be taken in a natural and literary way, and not by an artificial hermeneutic. It may be searched out and known by other places that speak more clearly. A passage never has more senses than were intended by the author, whether human or divine (WCF 1.9).

The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be nothing other that what the Holy Spirit says, speaking through the Scripture (WCF 1.10).

The Word has divine authority in everything it addresses, and in principle it addresses everything. In no way should the Scriptures be brought to the judgment seat of human reason; rather, we must rationally and submissively study the Word granted to us. Reason was given to us to be the eyes with which we receive God's revelation—from His Word and from nature—and not a light to generate revelation (WCF 1.10.1).

The Word of God has divine authority in all things it addresses, and in principle it speaks to all things. The Scriptures are in no way to be brought before the judgment seat of human reason; but we are to study them rationally and submissively, receiving them as the very Word of the living God. Reason was given unto us to be the eye with which we might see God's revelation, both in His Word and in the works of nature, and not to be a light which generates revelation itself (WCF 1.10.1).

CHAPTER 2

On God, and on the Holy Trinity

There is only one living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and is at the same time most just and terrible in His judgments. He hates all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty (WCF 2.1).

God has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He has made, nor does He derive any glory from them, but only manifests His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the only foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things. This God has most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever He pleases. In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of the creature, such that nothing is contingent or uncertain to Him. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due whatever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them, whether from angels, men, or any other creature (WCF 2.2).

In the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (WCF 2.3).

The Triune God is the one uncreated Creator of all things that exist in heaven and on earth, and there exists a fundamental divide between the Creator and His creation. This one true God is limited by nothing other than His own nature and character (WCF 2.3.1).

The Triune God is the one and only uncreated Creator of all things visible and invisible, whether in heaven or in earth; and there is an infinite and fundamental distinction between the Creator and the creature. This one true God is limited by nothing save His own nature and perfections (WCF 2.3.1).

CHAPTER 3

On God's Eternal Decree

God from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass—yet in such a way as that God is not the author of sin directly, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (WCF 3.1).

Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet He has not decreed any thing because He foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions (WCF 3.2).

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death (WCF 3.3).

These angels and men, predestinated and foreordained in this way, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it can not be either increased or diminished (WCF 3.4).

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him to so choose—and all to the praise of His glorious grace (WCF 3.5).

As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has He also, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means to that end. Therefore those who are elect, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, and are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season They are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any others redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only (WCF 3.6).

The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy as He pleases, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice (WCF 3.7).

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with a special prudence and care, such that men who attend to the will of God revealed in His Word, and who yield obedience to Him, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel (WCF 3.8).

CHAPTER 4

On Creation

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things contained with it, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six ordinary days, evening and morning, and all very good (WCF 4.1).

God spoke, and by the Word of His power, it was. Our science on the nature and time of this creation, and the history of the world since that time, must be determined in full submission to God's revealed Word (WCF 4.1.1).

God spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. Therefore our understanding of the nature and time of creation, and of all the history of the world since that time, must be wholly brought into captivity to the Word of God, and determined by it (WCF 4.1.1).

After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after His own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and the power to fulfill it. And yet there was a possibility of transgressing, as they were left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While they kept this commandment, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures (WCF 4.2).

CHAPTER 5

On Providence

God, the great Creator of all things, upholds, directs disposes, and governs all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest down to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (WCF 5.1).

Although in relation to the decree and foreknowledge of God, who is the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same

providence, He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently (WCF 5.2).

God, in His ordinary providence, makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure (WCF 5.3).

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men. This is not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends. At the same time, as the sinfulness involved proceeds only from the creature, and not from God; who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin (WCF 5.4).

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God—for a season —will often leave His own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, in order to chastise them for their former sins, or to reveal to them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness in their hearts. He does this so that they might be humbled, and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence upon Him for their support, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for various other just and holy purposes (WCF 5.5).

God is a righteous judge, and as for those wicked and ungodly men, He blinds and hardens them for their former sins. From them He not only withholds his grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they previously had. He exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and in all of this, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan. As a result, it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others (WCF 5.6).

As the providence of God in general reaches to all creatures, so also, in a special manner, it takes care of His church, and disposes all things to the good of the church (WCF 5.7).

CHAPTER 6

On the Fall of Man, on Sin, and on the Punishment For It

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This sin God permitted, according to the good pleasure of His wise and holy counsel, having intended to structure it to His own glory (WCF 6.1).

Through this sin they fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body (WCF 6.2).

As the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed to their natural descendants, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature was conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation (WCF 6.3).

From this original corruption, by which we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, all actual transgressions proceed (WCF 6.4).

This corruption of nature, during this life, remains in those who are regenerated. Although it is pardoned and mortified through Christ, yet both it and all the motions of it, are truly and properly sin (WCF 6.5).

Every sin, whether original or actual, is a transgression of the righteous law of God, and is contrary to it. Every sin therefore, in its own nature, brings guilt upon the sinner, by which he is bound over to the wrath of God, and the curse of the law, and is made subject to death, together with all miseries, whether spiritual, temporal, or eternal (WCF 6.6).

CHAPTER 7

On God's Covenant with Man

The distinction between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures owe obedience to Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any blessing from Him as their blessedness and reward, apart from some voluntary condescension on God's part. This condescension He has been pleased to express by way of covenant (WCF 7.1).

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of creation, wherein life was promised to Adam, and through him to his posterity, the condition of this covenant being a perfect and personal obedience, an obedience lived out and made possible by grace through faith alone. Had our first parents obeyed the Lord, one of their first obligations afterwards would have been to give thanks to God for their preservation (WCF 7.2).

By his fall, man made himself incapable of life through that covenant, and so the Lord was pleased to make a second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace. In this covenant, He freely offered life and salvation to sinners through Jesus Christ, requiring from them faith in Him, that they might be saved. He also promised to give His Holy Spirit to all those who were ordained to life, which made them willing and able to believe (WCF 7.3).

This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ, the testator, and which also has reference to our everlasting inheritance, and everything bequeathed in it, and with all things belonging to it (WCF 7.4).

This covenant of grace was differently administered during the time of the Mosaic law and in the time of the gospel. Under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all signifying Christ who was to come. During that time, this was sufficient and efficacious through the operation of the Spirit to instruct and build up the elect through faith in the promised Messiah. By Him they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation, and is called the Old Testament (WCF 7.5).

Under the gospel, now that Christ the substance has been exhibited, the ordinances through which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Although the ordinances are fewer in number, and are administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them the promise is complete. It is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations, whether Jew or Gentile, and is called the New Testament. There are not two covenants of grace, therefore, differing in substance, but one and the same covenant, administered under various dispensations (WCF 7.6).

CHAPTER 8

On Christ the Mediator

It was the pleasure of God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to be the mediator between God and man. He was to be the prophet, priest, and king; the head and Savior of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world. From all eternity, He gave the Lord Jesus a people to be His descendants, and in the course of time to be redeemed by Him, and called, justified, sanctified, and also glorified (WCF 8.1).

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being truly and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, when the fullness of time was come, took upon Himself the nature of a man, with all the essential properties and common infirmities that entailed—but yet without sin. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. He did this such that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures—the Godhead and the manhood—were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man (WCF 8.2).

The Lord Jesus in His human nature, thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure. In Him were all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, with the intent that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and

truth, He might be thoroughly equipped to execute the office of a mediator and surety. He did not take up this office Himself, but was called to it by His Father; who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him the command to execute the same (WCF 8.3).

The Lord Jesus most willingly undertook this office, and in order that He might discharge it, He was born under the law, and He perfectly fulfilled it. He endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, along with most painful sufferings in His body. He was crucified and died; He was buried, and remained under the power of death, but without seeing corruption. On the third day He rose from the dead, with the same body in which He had suffered, and in which He also ascended into heaven. In that body, He sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession for us. And at the end of the world, He shall return to judge both men and angels (WCF 8.4).

By His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, the Lord Jesus has fully satisfied the justice of His Father, an obedience which He through the eternal Spirit offered up to God once for all. Not only did He obtain reconciliation for us, but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father has given to Him (WCF 8.5).

Although the work of redemption was not actually accomplished by Christ until after His incarnation, nevertheless the virtue, efficacy, and benefits of that redemption were communicated to the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world. This was done in and through those promises, types, and sacrifices which revealed Him. They identified and signified the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head, this being the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, one who is yesterday and today the same and forever (WCF 8.6).

In His work of mediation, Christ acts according to both His natures. Each nature does that which is proper to it, but yet because of the unity of the person, what is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature (WCF 8.7).

To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He most certainly and effectually applies and communicates the same. He makes intercession for them, and reveals to them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation. He effectually persuades them by His Spirit to believe and obey, He governs their hearts by His Word and Spirit. He overcomes all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as is most consonant with His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation (WCF 8.8).

CHAPTER 9

On Free Will

God has bestowed on the will of man a natural liberty, one that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil (WCF 9.1).

In his state of innocence, man had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God; but nevertheless mutable, such that he could fall from it (WCF 9.2).

By his fall into a state of sin, man has entirely lost all ability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation, such that so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto (WCF 9.3).

When God converts a sinner and translates Him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good. At the same time, because of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly or undividedly will that which is good, but also wills that which is evil (WCF 9.4).

The will of man is only made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory (WCF 9.5).

CHAPTER 10

On Effectual Calling

All those whom God has predestinated to life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone, and gives to them a heart of flesh, renewing their wills. By His almighty power sets them upon that which is good, effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet in such a way as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace (WCF 10.1).

This effectual call is from God's free and special grace alone, and not from any good thing at all foreseen in man. The man is altogether passive in this work until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered in it and conveyed through it (WCF 10.2).

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where, and how He pleases. It is the same with all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word (WCF 10.3).

Others who are not elect may be called by the ministry of the Word, and they may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved. Still less can other men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatever. However diligent they are to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of whatever religion they do profess, they cannot be saved. To assert and maintain that they may, is a view that is very pernicious, and is to be detested (WCF 10.4).

CHAPTER 11

On Justification

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous. This is not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. It is not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness, but rather by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them. They receive and rest on Him and His righteousness by faith alone, a faith which is not from themselves, but is rather a gift of God (WCF 11.1).

This faith—this receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness—is the solitary instrument of justification. And yet it is never alone in the person who is justified, but is always accompanied with all other saving graces. It is not a dead faith, but works by love (WCF 11.2).

Christ, through His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are thus justified, and He made a proper, real, and full satisfaction of His Father's justice on their behalf. As He was given by the Father for them, and as His obedience and satisfaction was accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is of free grace only. This was so that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God would be glorified in the justification of sinners (WCF 11.3).

From all eternity, God decreed to justify the elect, and in the fullness of time, Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification. Nevertheless, they are not actually justified until the Holy Spirit ~~actually~~ applies Christ to them in due time (WCF 11.4).

God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified. Although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet their sins may cause them to fall under God's Fatherly displeasure, with the result that they do not have the light of His countenance restored to them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance (WCF 11.5).

In all these respects, the justification of believers under the Old Testament was one and the same as the justification of believers under the New Testament (WCF 11.6).

CHAPTER 12

On Adoption

For all those who are justified, God promises, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make them partakers of the grace of adoption. By this grace they are taken into the number of the children of God, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of that relation. They have His name put upon them. They receive the Spirit of adoption. They have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry out, "Abba, Father." They are pitied, protected, provided for, and are chastened by Him as by a father. And yet they are never cast off, but are sealed for the day of redemption. They inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation (WCF 12.1).

CHAPTER 13

On Sanctification

Those who are effectually called and regenerated, having had a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are sanctified even further, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling within them. The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the various lusts contained within it are more and more weakened and mortified. These believers are increasingly quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (WCF 13.1).

This sanctification is operative in the whole man, yet not complete in this life. There still remains some remnants of corruption in every part, from which a continual and irreconcilable war arises, with the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh (WCF 13.2).

In this war, although the remaining corruption may greatly prevail for a time, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the

regenerate part overcomes, such that the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (WCF 13.3).

CHAPTER 14

On Saving Faith

The grace of faith, by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. Ordinarily this is wrought by the ministry of the Word (and also by the administration of the sacraments and prayer), by which this faith is increased and strengthened (WCF 14.1).

By this faith, a Christian believes as true whatever is revealed in the Word, in which the authority of God Himself speaks. He acts according to what each particular passage contains—yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and the life which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace (WCF 14.2).

This faith varies by degree, and can be weak or strong. It may often and in many ways be assailed and weakened, but will still get the victory. This is a faith that in many grows up to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith (WCF 14.3).

CHAPTER 15

On Repentance unto Life

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, a doctrine which is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as the doctrine of faith in Christ (WCF 15.1).

By this truth a sinner, from the sight and sense of his danger, and also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, which are contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and from his understanding of the mercy of God through Christ to those who are penitent, consequently grieves over his sins, and hates them. As a result, he turns from all of them to God, intending and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments (WCF 15.2).

Although repentance be not to be trusted as providing any satisfaction for sin, or to be in any way the cause of the pardon for sin (which is simply an act of God's free grace in Christ), yet it is a necessity for all sinners, such that no one should expect pardon without it (WCF 15.3).

Any sin, no matter how small, deserves damnation, and yet, any sin, no matter how great, cannot bring damnation on those who truly repent (WCF 15.4).

Men must not to content themselves with a general repentance, as it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, repenting specifically (WCF 15.5).

Every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for pardon. When he does this, forsaking of the sin, he shall find mercy. When his sin has scandalized his brother, or the church of Christ, he ought to be willing, through private or public confession, and sorrow over his sin, to declare his repentance to those who were offended. They in their turn are to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him (WCF 15.6).

CHAPTER 16

On Good Works

Good works are only those that God has commanded in His holy Word, and are not those that, apart from the warrant of Scripture, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or with the pretense of good intentions (WCF 16.1).

Such good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. By them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn their profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God. They are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto those good works, such that, having the fruit of holiness, they may attain the end, which is eternal life (WCF 16.2).

Their ability to do good works is not at all from themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. That they might be enabled for this, apart from the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Nevertheless, they are not to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform their duty unless the Spirit moved them. Rather, they ought to be diligent to stir up the grace of God that is in them (WCF 16.3).

Those who attain to the greatest height of obedience which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to do more than God requires, that they fall far short in those duties that they are bound to do. Works of supererogation are therefore impossible (WCF 16.4).

We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon for sin, or eternal life, from the hand of God. This is because of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God. We cannot profit God by our good works, not can we satisfy the debt of our former sins. After we have done all we can, we have only done our duty, and remain unprofitable servants. To the extent they are good, they proceed from His Spirit, and to the extent they are done by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they could not endure the severity of God's judgment (WCF 16.5).

Nevertheless, as the persons of believers are accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in Him. It is not as though they were wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God's sight in this life, but rather that as He looks upon them in His Son, He is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, even though they are accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections (WCF 16.6).

Works done by unregenerate men may in their substance be things which God commands, and be of good use both to themselves and others. Yet because they do not proceed from a heart purified by faith, and are not done in a right manner, according to the Word, nor to a right end, that being the glory of God, they are therefore sinful and cannot please God. Neither can they make a man more fit to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and is displeasing unto God (WCF 16.7).

CHAPTER 17

On the Perseverance of the Saints

Those whom God has accepted in His beloved, those who are effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace. They shall certainly persevere in that state of grace to the end, and be eternally saved (WCF 17.1).

This perseverance of all true saints depends, not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election. This perseverance flows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, and rests upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, as well as the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them. This is due to the nature of the covenant of grace, from which arises the certainty and infallibility of the perseverance (WCF 17.2).

Nevertheless such saints may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining within them, and their neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins. They may even continue for a time in such sin, by which they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit. They come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded. By such backsliding, they may hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves (WCF 17.3).

CHAPTER 18

On the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

Hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions, thinking themselves in the favor of God and in a state of salvation. This hope of theirs shall perish, but those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and who love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Such a hope shall never make them ashamed (WCF 18.1).

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope. Rather, it is an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces concerning which these promises are made, and the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. This Spirit is the earnest and guarantee of our inheritance, by which we are sealed for the day of redemption (WCF 18.2).

This infallible assurance does not belong to the essence of genuine faith. A true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before he becomes a partaker of it. And yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given to him by God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, and by the right use of ordinary means, attain to a true assurance. It is therefore the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, such that his heart may be enlarged. This will result in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, all of which are the proper fruits of such assurance. A true assurance never inclines men to looseness of life (WCF 18.3).

True believers may have their assurance of salvation shaken, diminished, or interrupted in various ways. They might be negligent in preserving it; they might fall into some particular sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; they may experience some sudden or vehement temptation. It may even happen that God withdraws the light of His countenance and allows even believers who

fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light for a time. And yet they are never utterly destitute of that seed of God, that life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this true assurance may in due time be revived. And by these means, in the meantime, they are protected against utter despair (WCF 18.4).

CHAPTER 19

On the Law of God

God gave Adam a law, as a covenant of life, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. He promised life upon the fulfillment of it, and threatened death upon the breach of it, enduing him with the power and ability to keep it (WCF 19.1).

After Adam's fall, the moral law continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness and, as such, was delivered by God on Mount Sinai in Ten Commandments, and written in two tables. The first four commandments contained our duty toward God, and the other six our duty to man (WCF 19.2).

In addition to this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give ceremonial laws to the people of Israel, as an underage church. These laws contained various ordinances in types, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits, and partly holding forth various instructions of moral duties. All such ceremonial laws as such are now abrogated under the New Testament (WCF 19.3).

To the nation of Israel, as a political body, He also gave various judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people. They do not obligate anyone now, except to the extent that the general equity of these laws may require (WCF 19.4).

The moral law is forever binding on all, whether justified persons or not, requiring true obedience. This is not only regarding the substance of the laws, but also with

regard to the authority of God the Creator who gave them. In no way does Christ in the gospel dissolve this obligation, but rather greatly strengthens it (WCF 19.5).

Through the things that have been made in the created order, God has given to all men everywhere an understanding of the basic moral law by means of natural revelation. The obligation to honor the divine majesty as God, and to render thanks to Him, is evident in the creation, that creation including the consciences of men. This understanding, taken alone, is sufficient to render sinful men without excuse, but is not the message of the gospel (WCF 19.5.1).

By the things that are made, God has showed unto all men everywhere, by natural revelation, the works of His law written upon their hearts; so that they are without excuse. The obligation to glorify God as God, and to render thanks unto Him, is manifest both in the creation and in the conscience of man. This knowledge, considered by itself, is sufficient to condemn sinful men, but is not the gospel (WCF 19.5.1).

Although true believers are not under the law as a means of justification or condemnation, it remains of great to use to them, as well as to others. As a rule of life, it informs them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly. It also reveals to them the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives, such that, when they examine themselves in the light of it, they come to further conviction of sin, as well as humiliation for sin, and hatred of it. They also gain a clearer vision of the need they have for Christ, and the perfection of His obedience. It is likewise useful to the regenerate, helping to restrain their corruptions. It forbids sin, and the threatenings of the law serve to show what their sins actually deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them—even though freed from the curse threatened by the law. The promises of the law, in a similar manner, show them God's approval of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon such obedience. This would not be due to them as though they were under a covenant of works. It means that when a man is obedient on the basis of what the law encourages and forbids, and he does good, or refrains from evil on that basis, it is no evidence that he is "under the law," instead of being under grace (WCF 19.6).

None of these uses of the law are contrary to the grace of the gospel, but rather sweetly comply with it. The Spirit of Christ subdues and enables the will of man to do freely and cheerfully that which the will of God requires to be done, as revealed in the law (WCF 19.7).

The grace of God in the gospel does not set aside the law of God; rather, it establishes it. To the one who believes, the law of God is precious, and through faith the law is established and written on his heart. The law stands as God's testimony of His own righteous character; as such, it cannot be altered by anything other than God's express Word. Consequently, the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments, fully expresses the will of God for us. To all who do not believe, the law of God condemns them in their self-righteousness (WCF 19.7.1).

The grace of God in the gospel does not make the law of God void, but establishes it. To the believer the law is precious; and by faith the law is established and written upon his heart. The law stands as God's testimony to His own righteous character, and therefore cannot be altered by anything other than His own express Word. Wherefore the whole Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, is the perfect rule of faith and life. Unto unbelievers the law condemns them in their self-righteousness (WCF 19.7.1).

The Scriptures are not divided. There is a distinction between law and grace, but that distinction lies within the hearts of men, and not within the text of Scripture. To the unregenerate, all of Scripture is to him condemnation and law, including the words of the gospel, which are to him the aroma of death. To the regenerate, all of Scripture is to him grace and peace—the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul (WCF 19.7.2).

The Scriptures are not divided. There is indeed a distinction between law and grace, but this distinction is in the hearts of men, and not in the text of Scripture itself. To the unregenerate man, all the Scripture is law and condemnation, even the gospel itself, which becomes to him the savor of death. But to the regenerate, all the Scripture is grace and peace; for the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul (WCF 19.7.2).

CHAPTER 20

On Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel consists of their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, and the curse of the moral law. It also consists of being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation. In addition, they are given free access to God, and the privilege of yielding obedience to Him, not out of slavish fear, but in a childlike love, and a willing mind. All such benefits were also common to believers under the law; but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged. We are granted freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected, and we have greater boldness of access to the throne of grace. We also have fuller communications of the free Spirit of God than believers under the law ordinarily enjoyed (WCF 20.1).

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from any doctrines and commandments of men that are in any way contrary to His Word, or alongside it in matters of faith or worship. Consequently, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience. To require an implicit faith, or an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, not to mention destroying reason also (WCF 20.2).

Those who, under the name of Christian liberty, indulge in any sin, or cherish any lust, are thereby destroying the purpose of Christian liberty. That purpose is that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives (WCF 20.3).

The powers that God has ordained, and the liberty which Christ has purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but rather mutually to uphold and preserve one another. Therefore, those who, under the name of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, are resisting the ordinance of God. If they publish such opinions, or maintain such practices, that are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, way of life or to the power of godliness, they may be disciplined by the church. If they circulate erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ

has established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church (WCF 20.4).

CHAPTER 21

On Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all. He is good, and does good to all men, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping this true God is instituted by Him alone, and limited by His own revealed will in such a way that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or in any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture (WCF 21.1).

Religious worship is to be given to God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and to Him alone. It is not to be rendered to angels, saints, or any other creature. And since the Fall, it may not be offered without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other than Christ alone (WCF 21.2).

Prayer with thanksgiving is one special part of religious worship, and is by God required of all men. So that it may be accepted, it should be made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Holy Spirit, and according to His will. Such prayer should be offered with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance and, if vocal, in a known tongue (WCF 21.3).

The worship of God on the Lord's Day commences with an authoritative call to worship, a summons which sets apart that time as consecrated to God. As the people of God enter His courts, they begin by confessing their sins, and receiving an assurance of pardon. They then consecrate themselves by confessing their faith, and giving heed to the Word as preached. At the culmination of the service, they partake of the Lord's Supper together in communion with the Lord and one another. At the conclusion of the service, they receive the benediction of the minister, and are commissioned by him to go out into the work of extending the

kingdom. The congregation sings psalms and hymns throughout the service, with the songs fitted with each aspect of the service (WCF 21.3.1).

The public worship of God upon the Lord's Day is to begin with an authoritative call to worship, whereby that time is set apart as holy unto the Lord. The people of God, entering into His presence, are first to confess their sins and receive assurance of pardon; then to consecrate themselves by the confession of their faith and by giving diligent heed to the Word preached. The service is to culminate in the Lord's Supper, received in communion with Christ and with one another. At the end, the minister is to pronounce the benediction, and to commission the congregation to go out to the work of the kingdom. Psalms and hymns are to be sung
throughout the service, fittingly chosen for each part thereof (WCF 21.3.1).

Prayer is to be made for things that are lawful, and for all sorts of men who are alive, or who come to live hereafter. It must not be offered for the dead, or for any who are known to have sinned unto death (WCF 21.4).

The parts of ordinary religious worship of God are: the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, sound preaching, conscionable hearing of the Word in obedience to God with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms and hymns with grace in the heart, the due administration of the sacraments instituted by Christ, worthy receiving of them. On special occasions, worship includes religious oaths and vows, solemn fasting, and thanksgivings upon special occasions. These are, in their appropriate seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner (WCF 21.5).

Under the gospel, neither prayer nor religious worship is annexed to the place where it is offered, or the place where it is directed. God is to be worshiped anywhere in spirit and in truth—as in private families daily, or in private devotions. In public assemblies, worship is to be more solemn, and not carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken, whenever God, by His Word or by His providence, calls us to it (WCF 21.6).

It is part of the law of nature that a due proportion of time is set apart for the worship of God. In His Word, by a positive and perpetual moral commandment, binding all men in all ages, he has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him. From the beginning of the world to the

resurrection of Christ, this day was the last day of the week, From the resurrection of Christ, the day was changed to the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath (WCF 21.7).

This Sabbath is kept holy before the Lord when men refrain from the vocational employments that occupy them for six days, and they rest before the Lord. The works that are permitted on this day are public and private worship, after a due preparing of their hearts. Works of mercy and necessity are also permitted. The commandment does not exclude godly recreation, especially in the context of the fellowship of God's people (WCF 21.8).

CHAPTER 22

On Lawful Oaths and Vows

A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, such that upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calls God to witness what he asserts or promises, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he swears (WCF 22.1).

The name of God is the only name by which men ought to swear, and it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. To swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other name or thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred. And yet, in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the New Testament, as well as under the Old. So when imposed by a lawful authority, a lawful oath ought to be taken in such matters (WCF 22.2).

Whoever takes an oath ought to duly consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and consequently to affirm nothing but what he is fully persuaded to be the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to any obligation that is not good and just. And if he believes it to be good and just, he must be able to perform it, and resolved to do so (WCF 22.3).

An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. It cannot oblige anyone to sin; but with any matter that is not sinful, once taken, it binds to performance. This is the case, even though it is to that man's own hurt. Nor is it to be violated simply because it was made to heretics or infidels (WCF 22.4).

A vow is of a similar nature to a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the same kind of religious care, and should be performed with the same kind of faithfulness (WCF 22.5).

It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone. And so that it may be accepted, it should be made voluntarily, out of faith and conscience of duty, in a manner of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we desire. Therefore we may more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties, or to other things, so far and so long as they befit the occasion (WCF 22.6).

No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God, or in what would hinder them in any duty commanded by the Word. Neither may he vow concerning anything when it is not in his own power, or for the performance of anything when he has no promise or ability given by God. In this respect, monastical vows of a perpetual single life, contrived poverty, and obedience to a monastical rule, are in no way degrees of higher perfection, They are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself, and if a man comes to repentance already so entangled, he is freed by the gospel of Christ (WCF 22.7).

CHAPTER 23

On the Civil Magistrate

God, as the supreme Lord and king of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under Him and over the people, for His own glory and for the public good. To this end, He has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of those who are good, and for the punishment of those who do evil (WCF 23.1).

It is lawful for Christians to accept and fulfill the office of a magistrate when called to it. In the management of this responsibility, because they must especially maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth, so, to that end, they may lawfully wage war upon just and necessary occasions. This they may do under the New Testament (WCF 23.2).

Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, without clear warrant from the Scriptures, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest. This is to be done in such a manner as that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ has appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, prohibit, or hinder, the due exercise of worship or discipline among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, in accordance with their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all Christian people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be allowed, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other denomination whatsoever. And the magistrate must see to it that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies can be held without molestation or disturbance (WCF 23.3).

If the civil government does not recognize the authority of the true and triune God above its own authority, then that government is operating in service of an idol, or is making itself out to be that idol for the people. The pretense of secularism is absurd and cannot be consistently maintained over time (WCF 23.3.1).

If the civil magistrate does not acknowledge the authority of the Triune God as being above his own, then he serves an idol, or makes himself into an idol for the people. The pretense of a secular state is vain, and cannot be consistently maintained (WCF 23.3.1).

~~In a Christian nation,~~ Adherents of non-Christian religions, or those who claim to have no religion at all, are to be secure in their persons and property. Neither are they to be molested on account of their convictions, privately held and privately

expressed. They may be residents in limited numbers, while all public offices and functions are open only to citizens who confess the truth of the Christian faith (WCF 23.3.2).

In a Christian nation, those who profess other religions, or no religion at all, shall be secure in their persons and goods. They shall not be molested for their private convictions, whether held or expressed in private. They may dwell as residents in such numbers as the commonwealth shall judge to be fitting, yet all public offices and trusts shall be committed only to those who openly confess the true Christian faith (WCF 23.3.2).

All human life is created by God in His image, and is therefore invested with a profound dignity. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including unborn babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. The civil magistrate is therefore called by God to defend, protect, and value all human life (WCF 23.3.3).

All human life is created by God in His own image, and is therefore of inestimable worth and dignity in every stage and condition, from the moment of conception until natural death, whether in the unborn, the aged, the weak, or the infirm. The civil magistrate is therefore bound by God to defend and protect all human life (WCF 23.3.3).

It is the duty of Christian people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience's sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, does not render void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their duty of obedience to him. Ecclesiastical persons are not exempted from this responsibility. The pope has no power or jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people. Neither has he any authority to deprive them of their dominions or lives by judging them to be heretics, or through any other pretense (WCF 23.4).

Governments have the right of legitimate taxation, a right circumscribed by the Word of God, and authorized by the consent of tax-paying citizens. Lawful taxation will not destroy the wealth of the citizens. Taxation should be modest,

such that the lawful ministry of the sword, and the ministry of the execution of God's wrath against evil doers may be rightly maintained. Lawful taxation should not be punitive, and should never be used as a tool to oppress the citizenry. Civil governments must honor God's ordinance concerning the scope of their ministry, and as needed return to sane types and levels of taxation (WCF 23.4.1).

The civil magistrate has the right of taxation, which right is limited by the Word of God and grounded in the consent of those who are taxed. Lawful taxes shall not devour the substance of the people, but shall be modest, sufficient for the due administration of justice and the punishment of evildoers. Taxation must not be used as an instrument of oppression or punishment, but governments must honor the ordinance of God concerning the limits of their authority, and return to just and moderate levels of taxation as is fitting (WCF 23.4.1).

CHAPTER 24

On Marriage and Divorce

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time (WCF 24.1).

Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of both husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with covenant children; and for prevention of sexual sin (WCF 24.2).

As the Lord of marriage, God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary sexes together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one's biological sex is therefore a rejection of the image of God within that person (WCF 24.2.1).

As the Lord of marriage, God has wonderfully and immutably created each person as either male or female. These two distinct and complementary sexes together bear the image of God. Therefore, the rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God in that person (WCF 24.2.1).

As set forth in Scripture, the word "marriage" has only one true and fully

appropriate meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union. The command of God is that sexual intimacy is to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to one another, and that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman (WCF 24.2.2).

According to the Scripture, marriage has but one true and proper meaning: the lifelong union of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive covenant. God commands that sexual intimacy shall be only between one man and one woman joined in marriage, and that no sexual activity shall be engaged in outside this bond (WCF 24.2.2).

Any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, the use of pornography, virtual sex, or sexual activity with robots) is sinful and offensive to God (WCF 24.2.3).

All forms of sexual immorality whatever—whether adultery, fornication, homosexual acts, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, the use of pornography, virtual sex, or any other uncleanness—are sinful and abominable in the sight of God (WCF 24.2.3).

It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, those who are able to give their consent with discernment. It is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord, and so those who profess the true reformed religion should not marry infidels, papists, or other idolaters. Neither should the godly be unequally yoked through marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies (WCF 24.3).

Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the Word. Such incestuous marriages can never be made lawful by any law of man, or through the consent of the parties, such that those persons may live together as man and wife (WCF 24.4).

After engagement, any adultery or fornication that is detected before the marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to break the engagement. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue for divorce, and after the divorce to marry someone else, as if the offending party were dead (WCF 24.5).

The corruption of man is such as is apt to study arguments, justifying unduly a putting asunder those whom God has joined together in marriage. But only adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, or comparable levels of covenant breaking, are a sufficient cause sufficient for dissolving the bond of marriage. When divorce is justified, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed, and the persons concerned in it are not to be left to their own wills and discretion in their own case (WCF 24.6).

CHAPTER 25

On the Church

The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the entire number of the elect. This includes those who have lived, are living now, or will live in the future. They will all be gathered into one, under Christ their head, as His spouse, His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (WCF 25.1).

When this elect gathering occurs at the last day, and the bride is presented to Christ, without spot or any other blemish, the invisible catholic church will at last be made visible (WCF 25.1.1).

The visible church, which under the gospel is also catholic or universal—not largely confined to one nation, as before under the law—consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, and their children. It is the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25.2).

The kingdom of God is the rule and realm of the Lord Jesus Christ, the center of which is in the visible church. But that kingdom extends outside the confines of visible church, bringing the authority of Christ to bear on every lawful vocation or endeavor (WCF 25.2.1).

To this catholic and visible church, Christ has given the ministry, oracles, ordinances, and sacraments of God. This is for the gathering and perfecting of the

saints, for this present life to the end of the world. According to His promise, through His presence and Spirit, He makes these means effectual to their appointed end (WCF 25.3).

This catholic church has been sometimes more visible, sometimes less. And particular churches, which are members of the catholic church, can be more or less pure, to the extent the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances and sacraments administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them (WCF 25.4).

The most pure churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error. Some have degenerated to such an extent that they have ceased to be churches of Christ, but have rather become synagogues of Satan. Despite this, there will always be a church on earth, worshiping God according to his will (WCF 25.5).

There is no head of the church other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The pope of Rome is in no sense the head of the church (WCF 25.6).

CHAPTER 26

On the Communion of the Saints

All saints who are united to Jesus Christ their head, by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, whether public or private, as will be conducive to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man (WCF 26.1).

By their profession, saints are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in their shared worship of God, as well as by performing such other spiritual services as will tend to their mutual edification. They should be quick to relieve each other in outward things, according to their respective abilities and needs. As

God offers the opportunity, this communion is to be extended to all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus (WCF 26.2).

This communion which the saints have in Christ does not make them partakers of the substance of the Godhead in any way, or to be equal with Christ in any respect. To affirm such is impious and blasphemous. Nor does their communion as saints, one with another, take away or infringe the title or property which each man has in his goods and possessions (WCF 26.3).

CHAPTER 27

On the Sacraments

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, instituted by God directly, in order to represent Christ and His benefits, to confirm our interest in Him, and also to place a visible distinction between those who belong to the church, and those who belong to the world. The sacraments solemnly engage believers to the service of God through Christ, according to His Word (WCF 27.1).

In every sacrament there is a spiritual relation, a sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified. As a result the names and effects of the one can be attributed to the other (WCF 27.2).

When rightly used, the grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments is not conferred by any power in them. Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend on the piety or intention of the one administering it, but rather upon the work of the Spirit and the word of institution. That word contains, together with scriptural ground authorizing the sacrament, a promised benefit for worthy receivers (WCF 27.3).

There are only two sacraments that Christ our Lord ordained in the gospels. Those two are baptism and the supper of the Lord—neither of which may be ordinarily administered by anyone other than a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained. Under the care of a session of elders, men preparing for the ministry may lawfully

be commissioned to administer the Supper, as well as other church officers in extraordinary circumstances (WCF 27.4).

With regard of the spiritual things signified and exhibited, the sacraments of the Old Testament were essentially the same as those of the New (WCF 27.5).

CHAPTER 28

On Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to provide him with a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. This covenant includes his ingrafting into Christ, regeneration, remission of sins, and of his surrender to God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. This sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church to the end of the world (WCF 28.1).

The outward element to be used in the sacrament is water, by which the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is ordinarily to be done by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called (WCF 28.2).

Baptism is rightly administered when water is poured or sprinkled on the person. Immersion of the person into the water is not necessary, but is also a lawful mode of baptism (WCF 28.3).

Not only those who actually profess faith in Christ and obedience to Him, but the infants of one or both believing parents are also to be baptized (WCF 28.4).

Although it is a great sin to despise or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to it that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated (WCF 28.5).

The efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of time in which it is administered. Yet, nevertheless, by a right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but is really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit, to those the grace belongs to, whether of age or infants. This is done according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time (WCF 28.6).

The sacrament of baptism is only to be administered one time to any one person (WCF 28.7).

CHAPTER 29

On the Lord's Supper

Our Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper. This Supper is to be observed in His church until the end of the world. It serves as a perpetual memorial of His sacrifice of Himself in death, the sealing all the benefits of that death for true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe to Him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with one another, as members of His mystical body (WCF 29.1).

In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor is any real sacrifice made at all for the remission of sins committed by the living or the dead. Rather, it is a commemoration of Christ's offering Himself up on the cross, once for all. The sacrament is a spiritual oblation of all possible praise to God for that sacrifice. Consequently, the popish sacrifice of the Mass, as it is called, is most abominably injurious to the doctrine of Christ's one and only sacrifice, the sole propitiation for all the sins of the elect (WCF 29.2).

In this ordinance, the Lord Jesus has appointed that His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people, pray, and give thanks for the elements of bread and wine. By this, they set the elements apart from a common use to a holy use. They are then to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and to give both to the communicants. They must also commune themselves. They are not to commune anyone who is not at that time present in the congregation (WCF 29.3).

Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a priest, or any other, in a solitary way, is contrary to the nature of the sacrament. It is likewise contrary to the institution of Christ to deny the cup to the people, to worship the elements, to lift them up or carry them around for purposes of adoration, or to set them aside for any pretended religious use (WCF 29.4).

The outward elements of bread and wine in this sacrament, duly set apart for the use ordained by Christ, have a true relation to Him crucified. In a sacramental way only, they may truly be called by the name of the things they represent, meaning, "the body and blood of Christ." However, in their substance and nature, they remain as they were before, truly and only bread and wine (WCF 29.5).

The doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by the consecration of a priest, or in any other way, is to be rejected. It is repugnant to Scripture, and also to common sense and reason. It overthrows the nature of the sacrament, and has been, and continues to be, the cause of manifold superstitions and gross idolatries (WCF 29.6).

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements of this sacrament, receive and feed upon Christ crucified. They do this inwardly and spiritually by faith, really and truly, and yet not carnally or corporally. They receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death. The body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine. Nevertheless, they are as truly and spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses (WCF 29.7).

Although willfully ignorant and wicked men may receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they do not receive the blessing signified by it. By their unworthy coming to the Supper they are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all willfully ignorant and ungodly persons, unfit to enjoy communion with Him, are unworthy of the Lord's Table. As long as they remain such, they cannot, without great sin against Christ, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted to this holy communion (WCF 29.8).

The ignorance that attends infancy and early childhood is not to be equated with such willful and stubborn ignorance, and so any baptized child may be welcomed to the Table, provided their parents are bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, guiding and instructing them in their faith as they partake (WCF 29.8.1).

CHAPTER 30

On Church Censures

The Lord Jesus, as king and head of His church, has appointed a government under the authority of church officers within the church, distinct from the civil magistrate (WCF 30.1).

To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed. By virtue of these keys, they have power respectively to retain or remit sins, to shut the doors of that kingdom against the impenitent, whether by word or censure. They also have authority to open those doors to penitent sinners through the ministry of the gospel, or through absolution from censures, as the occasion shall require (WCF 30.2).

Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming of offending brothers, for deterring others from similar offenses, for purging out leaven which could infect the whole loaf, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and for vindicating the holy profession of the gospel. Godly censures also forestall the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church if they should allow His covenant and its holy seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders (WCF 30.3).

In order to attain these ends more effectively, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and ultimately by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the offense, and the demerit of the person (WCF 30.4).

CHAPTER 31

On Synods and Councils

For the better government of the church, and its further edification, there ought to be those assemblies that are commonly called synods or councils. And it belongs to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ has given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies, and to convene together in them, as often as they shall deem it expedient for the good of the church (WCF 31.1).

It belongs to these synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience. They are to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His church. They are to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to settle those issues. These decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission—not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the dignity of the office by which they are determined, as an ordinance of God, appointed in His Word (WCF 31.2).

All synods or councils since the times of the apostles, whether general or particular, may certainly err, and many have erred. Consequently, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but rather to be used as an aid in both (WCF 31.3).

Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical. They are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in extraordinary cases, or if the civil magistrate requires it in order to receive advice from the church in matters of conscience (WCF 31.4).

Synods and councils are not intermeddling with the affairs of the commonwealth when they speak to the civil magistrate concerning matters which are matters of basic morality, such as abortion and sodomy, which are not just "civil affairs." In such cases, the church is exercising her prophetic office (WCF 31.4.1).

Synods and councils do not intermeddle with civil affairs when they declare to the magistrate the mind of God concerning matters of moral law, such as the shedding

of innocent blood or sodomy; for these are not merely civil matters, but touch the law of God. In such things the Church exercises her prophetic office (WCF 31.4.1).

CHAPTER 32

On the State of Man after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead

After death, the bodies of men return to dust, and see corruption. But their souls, which neither die nor sleep, have been granted an immortal existence, immediately return to the God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, there to await the full redemption of their bodies in the resurrection. The souls of the wicked are cast into Hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the final judgment of the great day. The Scriptures do not acknowledge the existence of Purgatory (WCF 32.1).

At the last day, those who are found alive shall not die, but will be transformed. And all the dead shall be raised up in nothing other than their own bodies, although with different qualities, and these bodies shall be united again with their souls forever (WCF 32.2).

The power of Christ shall raise the bodies of the unjust to dishonor, and by His Spirit He will raise the bodies of the just to honor. The bodies of the just will be conformed to the likeness of His own glorious body (WCF 32.3).

CHAPTER 33

On the Last Judgment

God the Father has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ, to whom He has given all power and judgment. In that day, all the apostate angels will be judged, as also all persons who have lived upon the earth. They shall all appear before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and they will receive in the body according to how they have lived, whether they were good or evil (WCF 33.1).

God's purpose in appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, as well as His justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. In that day, the righteous shall enter into everlasting life, and receive the fullness of joy and refreshing which will come from the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who do not know God, and who refused to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments. They shall be punished with an everlasting destruction, away from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (WCF 33.2)

Christ would have all of us to be persuaded of the certainty of this day of judgment, so as to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their times of adversity. At the same time, He would have the timing of that day unknown to men, so that they might shake off all carnal security, and be ever watchful. This is because they would not know the hour the Lord will come, and thus would always be prepared to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen" (WCF 33.3).

CHAPTER 34

On the Great Commission

The Lord Jesus Christ commanded His followers to disciple all the nations of men, baptizing them, and teaching them obedience to everything that the Lord Jesus taught us. Our central means for accomplishing this task is to be the preaching the gospel of grace, with the result that faithful churches are planted everywhere. In these churches, the Word is to be regularly proclaimed, the sacraments faithfully administered, and loving discipline carefully maintained (WCF 34.1).

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded His Church to disciple all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded. The chief means appointed for this work is the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God, whereby faithful churches are to be planted in every place. In these churches the Word of God is to be faithfully preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and church discipline duly exercised (WCF 34.1).

As the gospel of Christ is proclaimed throughout the world, the result will be the gradual transformation and salvation of the entire world. As a result, prior to Christ's return, the earth will come to be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and the whole earth will be full of His glory (WCF 34.2).

As the gospel of Christ is preached throughout the world, it shall gradually transform and save the nations. The gospel will grow until the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and before the return of Christ, the whole earth shall be filled with His glory (WCF 34.2).

As the Great Commission is progressively fulfilled, this necessarily will create challenges between missionary nations and nations not yet discipled, as well as challenges when it comes to church/state relations within each discipled nation. But the promise that Abraham would inherit the world was not a promise to be fulfilled through law. It will be through the righteousness of faith that the gospel will be preached, churches planted, and nations transformed (WCF 34.3).

The progressive fulfilment of the Great Commission will bring inevitable conflicts both between nations and within nations regarding the relations of Church and State. Yet the promise that Abraham should be heir of the world was not to be fulfilled by the law, but by the righteousness of faith; even so, the gospel shall prevail through the preaching of the Word, the planting of churches, and the transformation of nations (WCF 34.3).

Chapter 35

On Common Grace, Neutrality, and Sphere Sovereignty

The authority of Jesus Christ is total and universal, an authority which is not mediated exclusively through the church. The church has the responsibility to teach and declare the exhaustive authority of Christ through the use of Word and sacrament, but is not the executive of that authority in the other governmental spheres appointed by God (WCF 35.1).

The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is absolute and universal, and is not exercised only through the Church. The Church is called to declare and teach this comprehensive authority of Christ by Word and sacrament, but she is not the executor of that authority in the other spheres which God has ordained (WCF 35.1).

The other two spheres or governments created directly by God are those of the family and the civil magistrate, all three of which must maintain their particular assignments and jurisdictions in obedience to Scripture. The foundation of all three governments is self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, created in the regeneration that comes through the faithful preaching of the gospel (WCF 35. 2).

The other two governments directly ordained of God are the family and the civil magistrate. These three governments—church, family, and state—must each keep their distinct spheres and duties according to the Scriptures. The foundation of all lawful government is self-government, which is the fruit of the Spirit, wrought in the hearts of men by the new birth through the preaching of the gospel (WCF 35.2).

Followers of Christ must therefore be engaged with all aspects of culture—art, architecture, music, literature, engineering, politics, business, and any other lawful vocation or pursuit that was given to us by God in the dominion mandate (WCF 35.3).

Therefore the followers of Christ must engage every lawful aspect of culture—art, architecture, music, literature, science, politics, commerce, and every other vocation given to man in the dominion mandate—under the lordship of Christ (WCF 35.3).

As believers present the gospel to those who remain in rebellious unbelief, there must be no halfway compromise with that unbelief. Every thought, which necessarily includes our teaching, apologetics, and evangelism, is to be made captive to the Word of God, in obedience to Christ, and every tongue is to be invited to glorify the Father in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit (WCF 35.4).

When believers present the gospel to unbelievers, there must be no compromise with their rebellion. Every thought, and therefore all teaching, apologetics, and evangelism, must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, that every tongue may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (WCF 35.4).

As believers pursue the fulfillment of the cultural mandate, they should take care to take full advantage of the blessings of common grace that God bestows on unbelievers (WCF 35.5).

In fulfilling the cultural mandate, believers ought to make wise use of the common grace which God bestows upon all, even upon the unregenerate (WCF 35.5).

Chapter 36

On Wineskins

Our confession of the truths contained within these standards are believed by us to be a system of doctrine derived from holy Scripture, and not at all created by the wit of man. We confess what we believe to be the truths of God (WCF 36.1).

We receive the system of doctrine set forth in this Confession as that which is taught in Holy Scripture, and not as the invention of men. We confess what we believe to be the truth of God (WCF 36.1).

Nevertheless, apart from a true work of grace in the heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit of God, however true they are, such words will serve only as a Song of Moses, as a testimony against anyone who clings to them tenaciously instead of faithfully. The great challenge faced by the heirs of a tradition like ours is to keep the fire burning, and not to be collectors of cold ashes (WCF 36.2).

Nevertheless, apart from a true and effectual work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, these truths, though in themselves most sound, shall be to such a one as but what the Song of Moses was, a witness against him. The great peril of those who inherit

a faithful tradition is that they become keepers of cold ashes rather than keepers of the holy fire (WCF 36.2).

Like wineskins, particular churches, confessions, institutions, histories, and traditions can all grow old. The new covenant never does (WCF 36.3)

Particular churches, confessions, institutions, and traditions, like wineskins, may grow old; but the new covenant abides forever new (WCF 36.3).

The spirit that should characterize a faithful embrace of this confession should therefore be one of regular repentance, of buoyant humility, of relaxed humor, of sunny cynicism, of a farewell to self, of an exultation in the free grace of no condemnation, of release from the burden of anxiety-ridden scruples, and a welcome embrace of joy inexpressible and full of glory (WCF 36.4).

The spirit which ought to accompany a right embracing of this Confession is one of continual repentance, humble confidence, godly cheerfulness, freedom from anxious scruples, and overflowing joy in the free grace of God, wherein is no condemnation (WCF 36.4).

New Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Q. 2. What rule has God given in order to direct how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A. The Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is our only rule for how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duties God requires from man.

Q3.1 Are Scriptures divided between law and grace?

A. No. The division is in the heart of man. To the regenerate heart, the entire Bible is grace. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. To the unregenerate heart, the entire Bible is law. The message of the cross is the aroma of death to them.

Q. 4. Who is God?

A. God is a personal Spirit, infinite and eternal. He is unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Q. 4. Who is God? A. God is the Triune Creator, Ruler, Lawgiver, Empowerer, and Judge of all things in heaven and earth. (Garry V)

Q 4.1 What is the Creator/creature distinction?

A. God is a necessary being, infinite and eternally perfect, and, as such, the propect of His non-existence is an absurdity. All that is not God, that is, the created order, is entirely contingent and came into being only through the will of the Creator. The gulf between the Creator and His creation is infinite.

Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but one God only, the living and true God.

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory.

Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God foreordain whatsoever comes to pass, according to His eternal purpose and the counsel of His will, and all for His own glory.

Q. 8. How does God execute his decrees?

A. God executes His decrees through the works of creation and providence.

Q. 9. What is the work of creation?

A. God created all things from nothing by the word of his power in the space of six ordinary days, and all very good.

Q. 10. How did God create man?

A. God created man, both male and female, after His own image—in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and with dominion over the creatures.

Q10. 1 When did God create mankind?

A. God created mankind, a historical Adam and historical Eve, our first parents, in approximately 4000 B.C.

Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are seen in His governance and preservation of all His creatures, and all their actions, in a most holy, wise, and powerful way.

Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man after he was created?

A. When God had created man, He entered into a covenant of life with him, conditioned upon perfect obedience. Man was forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.

Q. 13. Did our first parents continue in the innocence in which they were created?

A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the innocence in which they were created, by sinning against God.

Q. 14. What is sin?

A. Sin is any lack of conformity to the law of God, or any transgression of it

Q14.1 How do men know what sin is?

Men know what sin is through the revelation of the divine majesty in creation, through the conscience that God has given to each man, through the inspired Scriptures, and through the perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. 15. What was the sin by which our first parents fell from the state of innocence in whch they were created?

A. The sin by which our first parents fell from their state of innocence was in eating the forbidden fruit.

Q. 16. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam was not only for himself, but also for all his posterity. All mankind, therefore, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in that first transgression.

Q16.1 What was the nature of the covenant that Adam broke?

The covenant that God made with Adam in the garden was a covenant of creation, which Adam was to keep by ongoing personal obedience. This covenant was a gracious covenant, and had Adam kept the covenant in obedience, that too would have been grace.

Q. 17. Into what condition did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into condition of sin and misery.

Q. 18. What makes up the sinfulness of that condition into which man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that condition into which man fell consists of the guilt of Adam's first sin, the lack of original righteousness, and the corruption of man's whole nature. This is commonly called original sin; together with all the actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Q. 19. What is the misery of that condition into which man fell?

A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse,

and have been made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of Hell forever.

Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in this condition of sin and misery?

A. Out of his mere good pleasure, God from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, and entered into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of this condition of sin and misery, and to bring them to salvation by a Redeemer.

Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. He, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

Q. 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable

Soul. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

Q. 23. What offices does Christ fill and execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, fills and executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king—both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Q. 24. How does Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executes the office of a prophet by revealing to us, through His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Q. 25. How does Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executes the office of a priest through His once-for-all offering of Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, in order to reconcile us to God, and through making continual intercession for us.

Q. 26. How does Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executes the office of a king by subduing us to Himself, through ruling and defending us, and by restraining and conquering all enemies, both His and ours.

Q. 27. What constituted Christ's humiliation?

A. Christ's humiliation consisted of being born, and in a low condition, born under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, suffering the wrath of God in His cursed death on the cross, and in being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time.

Q. 28. What constituted Christ's exaltation?

A. Christ's exaltation consisted of His resurrection from the dead on the third day, in

His ascension up into Heaven, in being seated at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

Q. 29. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ through the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.

Q. 30. How does the Spirit apply the redemption purchased by Christ to us?

A. The Spirit applies the redemption purchased by Christ to us through union with Christ, granting us a new birth, thereby working repentanace and faith in us, resulting in our effectual calling.

Q. 31. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit which convinces us of our sin and

misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renews our wills. In this call, He persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, as He is freely offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 32. What benefits do the effectually called partake of in this life?

A. In this life, those who are effectually called partake of justification, adoption, and

sanctification, as well as the various benefits which accompany or flow from them.

Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, in which he pardons all our sins and

accepts us as righteous in His sight, solely on the basis of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Q. 34. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is an act of God's free grace in which we are received into the number of the sons of God, and have a right to all the privileges of that sonship.

Q. 35. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, by which we are renewed in the whole

man in the pattern of the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Q. 36. In this life, what are the benefits which accompany or flow from justification,

adoption, and sanctification?

A. In this life, the benefits which accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and

sanctification, are: assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy

Spirit, an increase of grace, and perseverance in these graces to the end.

Q. 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ when they die?

A. At their death, the souls of believers are made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory. Their bodies remain united in Christ, and rest in their graves until the resurrection.

Q. 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A. At the resurrection, believers, raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

Q. 39. What is the duty which God requires of man?

A. The duty which God requires of man is obedience to His revealed will.

Q. 40. What rule of obedience did God at the first reveal to man?

A. The rule of obedience which God at first revealed to man was the moral law.

Q. 41. Where is the moral law faithfully summarized?

A. The moral law is faithfully summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Q. 42. What is the summary of the Ten Commandments?

A. The summary of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves.

Q. 43. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments is found in these words: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Q. 44. What does the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments teaches us that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, we are therefore bound to keep all His commandments.

Q. 45. What is the first commandment?

A. The first commandment is: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

Q. 46. What is required by the first commandment?

A. The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God as the only true

God, and as our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly.

Q. 47. What is forbidden in the first commandment?

A. The first commandment forbids the denying the true God, or not worshiping and glorifying Him as the true God and our God, or through giving to any other the worship and glory which is due to Him alone.

Q. 48. What are we specially taught by these words before us in the first commandment?

A. These words of the first commandment before us teach us that the God who sees all things, takes notice of and is very displeased with the sin of having any other God.

Q. 49. What is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to

them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

Q. 50. What is required by the second commandment?

A. The second commandment requires receiving and observing all such religious worship and ordinances as God has appointed in His Word, and keeping such worship pure and

Entire.

Q. 51. What is forbidden by the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbids worshiping God by means of images, or in any other way not appointed in his Word.

Q. 52. What are the reasons connected to the second commandment?

A. The reasons connected to the second commandment are God's sovereignty over us, His

exclusive claim on us, and the zeal he has for His own worship.

Q. 53. What is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Q. 54. What is required in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment requires a holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works.

Q. 55. What is forbidden in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment forbids the profanation or abuse of anything through which God makes Himself known.

Q. 56. What is the reason connected to the third commandment?

A. The reason connected to the third commandment is this: even if those who break this commandment may escape the punishment of man, yet the Lord our God will not allow them to escape his righteous judgment.

Q. 57. What is the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment is: Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt

thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservent, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day:

wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Q. 58. What is required by the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requires keeping holy before God such set times as He has

appointed in his Word—expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to Himself.

Q. 59. Which day of the seven has God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath. Since the resurrection, the first day of the week is the Christian sabbath, and will be to the end of the world.

Q. 60. How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting on that day, refraining from our ordinary labor that occupies us on the other six days. Works of necessity and mercy are permitted on the Lord's Day, as well as any work associated with the public and private exercises of God's worship.

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment forbids the pursuit of our ordinary vocation on the Lord's Day. It also forbids the omission or careless performance of our duties of worshiping God in the manner in which He has prescribed.

Q. 62. What are the reasons connected to the fourth commandment?

A. The reasons connected to the fourth commandment are: God's allowance of six days of the week for our own vocation, His special ownership of one day in seven, His own example in the creation week, and His blessing of the sabbath day.

Q. 63. What is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is: Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long

upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment specifically requires the honoring of father and mother, as well as preserving the honor of everyone we know in their various positions and relations, whether they be superiors, inferiors, or equals, as well as performing the respective duties we owe them.

Q. 65. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment forbids the dishonoring of father or mother, as well as doing anything against the honor and duty which belongs to everyone we know in their several positions and relations, whether through overt dishonor or neglect.

Q65.1 What are the divinely established governments to which we must be subject.

A. The three governments that God Himself established are the government of the family, the government of the civil state, and the government of the church.

Q. 66. What is the reason connected to the fifth commandment?

A. The reason connected to the fifth commandment is a promise of long life and prosperity (insofar as it serves God's glory and their own good) to all those who keep this commandment.

Q. 67. What is the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment is: Thou shalt not kill.

Q. 68. What is required by the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment requires all lawful endeavors to preserve the lives of others, as well as our own life.

Q. 69. What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment forbids taking the life of our neighbor unjustly, or anything that tends toward the loss of his life. It also forbids the taking of our own life.

Q. 70. What is the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment is: Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Q. 71. What is required by the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbor's

chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior.

Q. 72. What is forbidden by the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment forbids all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.

Q72.1 What else is forbidden by the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment forbids any new forms of unchastity that might be devised by the imaginations of men, including pornography, transgenderism,

sex dolls, or virtual sex, or the mainstreaming of old perversions such as sodomy, lesbianism, pedophilia, or bestiality. The civil magistrate has no authority to sanctify such vile practices under color of matrimony.

Q. 73. What is the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment is: Thou shalt not steal.

Q. 74. What is required in the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment requires the lawful procurance and furtherance of the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.

Q. 75. What is forbidden by the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment forbids whatever may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor's wealth or outward estate.

Q. 76. What is the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment is: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Q. 77. What is required by the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment requires the maintainence and promotion of truth between one man and another, the protection of our own and our neighbor's good name, especially when it comes to witness-bearing.

Q. 78. What is forbidden by the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment forbids whatever is prejudicial to the truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name.

Q. 79. What is the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment is: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not

covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass,

nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

Q. 80. What is required by the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that belongs to him.

Q. 81. What is forbidden by the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment forbids all discontentment with our own condition, envying our neighbor, or grieving over his good, and any and all inordinate motions or affections toward anything that is his.

Q. 82. Is any man able to keep the commandments of God perfectly?

A. No. Since the fall, no mere man has been able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but rather daily breaks them in thought, word, and deed.

Q. 83. Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?

A. No. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of additional aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Q. 84. What does every sin deserve?

A. Every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God, both in this life and in that which is to come.

Q. 85. What does God require of us in order to escape his wrath and curse, due to us

for our sin?

A. In order to escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requires of us repentance unto life, faith in Jesus Christ, and a diligent use of all the outward means by which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to us.

Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, through which we receive and rest upon Him alone for our salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, by which a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,

and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, turns from it. With grief and hatred of his sin, he turns from it to God, with a full and active intention of a new obedience.

Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means by which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to us?

A. The outward and ordinary means by which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to us are, His ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all of which are made effectual for salvation to the elect.

Q. 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an

effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and then building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Q89.1 Is the Word made effectual only to a few?

A. The broad way to destruction was taken by many in the first century, but as the Lord promised, in the generations that followed many came from east and west to sit down in the kingdom. This process will continue until the earth is eventually as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, when the Lord will come and destroy the last enemy, death.

Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?

A. In order for the Word to become effectual to salvation, we must attend to it with diligence, preparation, and prayer. We must receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

Q. 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation—not from any inherent virtue in them, or in the man that administer them—but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of His Spirit in those who by faith receive them.

Q. 92. What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

Q. 93. What are the sacraments of the New Testament?

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are two—baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Q. 94. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament in which washing with water in the name of the Father, and of

the Son, and of the Holy Spirit signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

Q. 95. Who may receive baptism?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to anyone outside the visible church until they profess their faith in Christ, and pledge obedience to Him. But the infants of those who are members of the visible church are to be baptized.

Q. 96. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament in which, through the giving and receiving of bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, His death is manifested and displayed, and worthy receivers made partakers of His body and blood, together with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. These blessings come, not after a corporal or carnal manner, but rather by faith.

Q. 97. What is required in the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?

A. To worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, it is necessary that the recipients humbly receive the Lord's body in a way that enables them to grow up into it, and that according to their capacity, they examine themselves in a way that helps them discern the Lord's body in the body of saints. The sacrament enables them to feed upon Christ by faith, and strengthens their repentance, love, and new obedience—lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Q. 98. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God, for anything agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, along with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His

mercies.

Q. 99. What rule has God given for our direction in prayer?

A. The entire Word of God is useful to direct us in our prayers, but the special rule of direction is the form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

Q. 100. What does the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

A. The preface of the Lord's Prayer—which is, Our Father which art in heaven—teaches us to draw near to God with holy reverence and confidence, as children coming to a father who is able and ready to help us. And it teaches us to pray with and for others.

Q. 101. What do we pray for in the first petition?

A. In the first petition—which is, Hallowed be thy name—we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify Him in all things where He makes Himself known, and that He would dispose all things to His own glory.

Q. 102. What do we pray for in the second petition?

A. In the second petition—which is, Thy kingdom come—we pray that Satan's kingdom be destroyed, that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, that we ourselves and others would be brought into it, and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory would be hastened in its coming.

Q. 103. What do we pray for in the third petition?

A. In the third petition—which is, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven—we pray that by His grace, God would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven. We also pray that as we have glorified His name in Heaven, He would be pleased to glorify His name on earth.

Q. 104. What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

A. In the fourth petition—which is, Give us this day our daily bread—we pray that from God's free grace we might receive a sufficient portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy His blessing along with them.

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition—which is, And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors—we pray that God, for the sake of Christ, would freely pardon all our sins. We are bold enought to ask for this because by His grace we are enabled to forgive others from the heart.

Q. 106. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition—which is, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil—we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin against Him, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

Q. 107. What does the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

A. The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer—which is, For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen—teaches us to take our encouragement in prayer from God alone, and in our prayers to praise Him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to Him. And as a testimony of our desire to be heard, and assurance that we are heard, we say, *Amen*.

The Confession of La Rochelle (1571)

The Seventh National Synod of the Reformed Churches of France convened at La Rochelle in April 1571. An august assembly of notables joined the Huguenot pastors and elders, lending the gathering the title "The Synod of the Princes." Theodore Beza (1519–1605), representing the church of Geneva, was chosen moderator. Also present were Jeanne d'Albret, queen of Navarre (1528–1572), representing the church of Bern, and her son, Henri of Navarre (1553–1610), the future Henri IV, king of France; Louis of Nassau (1538–1574), brother of William of Orange (1533–1584); and Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572), representing the church of France.

The general sociopolitical context of the synod was the rash of civil wars between the Huguenots and the Roman Catholic forces of Queen Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589). The conspiracy of Amboise (1560) was the ostensible flashpoint of the conflicts, but trouble had been brewing for years between the two religious factions. Catherine realized that relentless persecution of the Huguenots only inflamed them to defend themselves, even justifying it via the famous Huguenot "resistance to monarchs" theory. The queen thus proposed a policy of toleration with the Colloquy of Poissy (1561). But strict Roman Catholics torpedoed the colloquy. The Edict of Saint-Germain (1562), however, did provide restricted legal recognition for Huguenot worship. This too was tragically ignored by Francis, Second Duke of Guise (1519–1563), who led the March 1562 Catholic massacre of Huguenots gathered for Bible study at Vasay. The result of this last debacle was civil war, which erupted with a vengeance.

Huguenot forces could not hope to establish any more than beachheads in predominantly Roman Catholic France. La Rochelle, Montauban, and Nîmes became those beachheads. Following the third civil war (1568–1570), V 3, p 306 the Treaty of Saint-Germain (August 1570) granted Protestants the right to worship and established Huguenot fortress towns at the beachheads plus Cognac and La Charité. For two years, an attempt was made to reconcile the Huguenots with the Roman Catholic crown. The Synod of La Rochelle (1571) was an integral part of that attempt. All this would collapse, however, in the horrid St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 23, 1572, in which hundreds of Huguenots were murdered by their countrymen.

Among the items on the synod's docket was the official recognition of the longer recension (forty articles) of the 1559 French Confession. But the theological controversies that troubled other Reformed churches of the day were also on the agenda: (1) the rise of anti-Trinitarianism, especially among the followers of Michael Servetus (1511–1553), Francis David (ca. 1510–1579), and George Biandrata/Blandrata (1516–1588); (2) the theory of Thomas Erastus (1524–1583) that the civil magistrates held the keys of church discipline, not the elders and pastors of the congregation; and (3) the controverted phrase "substance of his body and blood" in article 36 on the Lord's Supper. Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) in particular would weigh in with his objection to the word "substance," ostensibly in "Zwinglian" fashion. Finally, the synod adopted a book of discipline.

Our translation is based on the French text printed in *La confession de foi de 1559, dite de la Rochelle* (1998), as compared with *La Confession de Foi des Églises Réformées en France dite Confession de la Rochelle en Français Moderne* (1963) and "La Confession des Églises Réformées de France" in *Confessions et Catechismes de la Foi Reformee*, ed. by Olivier Fatio (1986), 115–27. For another English translation, but without the full range of proof texts, see *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (2003), 2:375–86.

THE 1559 CONFESSION OF FAITH OF LA ROCHELLE

I. God and His Revelation

1. God

We believe and confess that there is only one God, who is one sole and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable, who can do all things, who is all wise, all good, all just and all merciful.

V 3, p 307 Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 44:6, 8; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 4:24; Ex. 3:15–16; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 1:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Rom. 11:33; Jer. 10:6–7; Rom. 11:33; Luke 1:37; 1 Chron. 29:10–12; Rom. 16:27; Matt. 19:17; Ex. 33:19; Jer. 12:1; Ex. 34:6–7.

2. Revelation

It is this God who has made Himself known to men: First, by His works, as well by their creation as by their preservation and by the manner in which He directs them. Secondly, and still more clearly, by the Word, which at the beginning was revealed by oracle, and afterwards has been drawn up in writing in the books which we call Holy Scripture.

Ps. 19:2; Rom. 1:20; 1 Cor. 12:6; Heb. 1:1; Ps. 19:8; Gen. 15:1, etc.; 2 Peter 1:21; Ex. 24:4; 31:18; Ps. 102:19; Hab. 2:2; Rev. 1:11; Rom. 1:2.

3. Holy Scripture

All Holy Scripture is contained in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as follows:

The Old Testament:

The five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the first and second book of Samuel, the first and second book of Kings, the first and second book of Chronicles, the first book of Ezra, Nehemiah, the book of Esther. Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs or Aphorisms of Solomon, the book of Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon. The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The New Testament:

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. The second book of St. Luke, otherwise called the Acts of the Apostles. The epistles of St. Paul: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon. The epistle to the Hebrews; the epistle of St. James; the first and second epistles of St. Peter; the first, the second, and third epistles of St. John; the epistle of St. Jude; and the Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John.

V 3, p 308 *4. Scripture, the Rule of Faith*

We recognize that these books are canonical and the very certain rule of our faith, not so much by the common agreement and consent of the church, as by the testimony and internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books on which, while they are useful, one cannot base any article of faith.

Pss. 12:7; 19:8–9.

5. The Authority of Scripture

We believe that the Word, which is contained in these books, has God for its source and that it derives its authority from God alone and not from men. This Word is the rule of all truth and contains all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation; it is therefore not permitted for men, or even for angels, to add anything to it, to take away from or to change it. It follows from this that neither antiquity, nor customs, nor great numbers, nor human wisdom, nor judgments, nor decisions, nor laws, nor decrees, nor councils, nor visions, nor miracles can be opposed to this Holy Scripture, but on the contrary all things ought to be examined, ordered, and reformed according to it.

2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:21; John 3:31, 34; 15:15; Deut. 30:15–16, 19–20; John 15:10; Acts 20:27; Rom. 15:4; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Gal. 1:8–9; 3:15; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 John 9–10; Rev. 22:18; Ps. 62:10; Matt. 15:3, 9; Mark 7:7; Acts 5:28; Rom. 3:4; 1 Cor. 3:11; 11:1–2, 23; 15:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Peter 4:11; 1 John 4:1.

In this spirit, we recognize the three creeds, namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, because they conform to the Word of God.

6. The Trinity

This Holy Scripture teaches us that in the sole and simple divine essence that we have confessed there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Father, the first cause, principle, and origin of all things; the Son, His Word and His Eternal Wisdom; the Holy Spirit, His Virtue, His Power, and His Efficacy. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and from the Son. The three persons of the Trinity are not confused but distinct; nevertheless they are not separated, for they possess the same essence, the same eternity, V 3, p 309 the same identical power, and are equal in glory and in majesty. We accept, therefore, on this point, the conclusions of the ancient councils and refuse all sects and heresies that have been rejected by the holy doctors such as St. Hilary, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Cyril.

Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 John 4:13–14; 5:7; Mal. 2:10; John 5:17, 19; Prov. 8:12, 22–31; John 1:1–2; 17:3–5; Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 19:13; Isa. 48:16; 61:1; Matt. 12:28; Luke 1:35; John 15:26; Gal. 4:6; John 8:23, 58; Phil. 2:5; Rev. 1:8; John 14:16–17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:11; John 15:26; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Titus 3:5–6.

7. Creation

We believe that God, in three cooperating persons, has—by His power, His wisdom, and His incomprehensible goodness—created all things, not only the heavens, the earth, and all that is found therein, but also the invisible spirits. The latter (Satan and the demons) rebelled and fell into perdition; the others (the angels) have persevered in obedience. We believe that the former, having sunk into perversity, are the enemies of everything good and consequently of the entire church, and that the latter, having been

preserved by the grace of God, are the servants charged with glorifying His name and serving for the salvation of His elect.

Gen. 1; Job 33:4; Ps. 104; Isa. 40:26; John 1:3, 10; Acts 17:25–27; Heb. 1:2; 3:4; Col. 1:16–17; Ps. 33:6; Luke 8:31; Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Ps. 103:20–21; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; Eph. 6:12; Pss. 34:8; 148:2; Matt. 25:31; Heb. 1:7, 14.

8. The Providence of God

We believe not only that God has created all things, but that He governs and directs them, disposing all that takes place in the world and ruling according to His will. Certainly we do not believe that God is the author of evil or that guilt can be imputed to Him, since, on the contrary, His will is the sovereign and infallible rule of all true justice and righteousness. But God prepares wonderful means to make use of the demons and the ungodly, in such a way that He can change into good the evil that they do and of which they are guilty. Thus, in confessing that nothing takes place outside of the providence of God, we adore with humility the secrets that are hidden from us, without questioning those things that surpass our understanding. On the contrary, we apply to our personal use that which V 3, p 310 Holy Scripture teaches us for our rest and security; for God, to whom all things are subject, takes care of us with a care so paternal that not a hair from our head falls without His will. In doing this, He holds in check the demons and all of our enemies in such a way that they cannot do the least evil without His permission.

Ps. 104; Job 34:14–15; John 5:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 27:20; 1 Kings 22:34; Pss. 75:7–8; 115:3; 139:2–6, 13–18; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 10:5–7; 45:7; Lam. 3:37–38; Matt. 10:29–30; Acts 14:17; 17:26–28; James 4:15; Job 1:22; Ps. 5:5; Hos. 13:9; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 John 2:16; 3:8; Ps. 45:7; 119; Gen. 45:8; 50:20; Job 12:13–25; Acts 2:23–24; 4:28; Rom. 8:28; 9:19–20; 11:33–34; Job 1:21; Pss. 10:14; 37:5; Rom. 5:3–4; 8:28–29; 2 Cor. 4:7–18; 1 Thess. 5:18; James 1:1–3; Matt. 6:25–34; 10:30; Luke 21:18; Gen. 3:15; Job 1:12; 2:6; Isa. 45:1–8.

II. Man and His Sin

9. Original Purity and the Fall of Man

We believe that man, who had been created pure, without the least stain, and conformed to the image of God, fell by his own fault from the grace that he had received. He is thus separated from God, who is the source of all righteousness and all good, to the point that his nature has become entirely corrupted. We believe that man, being blind in his spirit and depraved in his heart, has lost all integrity without possessing any trace. Although he yet has a certain discernment of good and evil, we say nevertheless that the light that exists in him he has changed into darkness when it is a question of seeking God, so that he is not able in the least to draw near by his understanding and his reason. Although man has a will, by which he is prompted to do this or that, we believe that at the same time he is totally a prisoner of sin, so that he has no freedom to do good than that which God gives him.

Gen. 1:26, 31; Eccl. 7:29; Eph. 4:24; Gen. 3:6, 17; Isa. 1:2–4; 59:2; Jer. 2:13, 17, 21–22; Eph. 4:18; Gen. 2:17; 3:19; 6:5; 8:21; John 3:19–20; Rom. 5:12, 18; Eph. 2:1–3; John 8:34, 43–44; Rom. 1:29–32; 3:9–18; 7:5; 1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 1:21; 2:14–15; Job 14:4; 1 Cor. 2:14; Jer. 13:23; Rom. 7:14–20; Ps. 94:11–12; Isa. 26:12; John 1:4–5, 9; 6:44, 65; 8:36; 15:5; Rom. 6:17–18; 8:6–7; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:13.

V 3, p 311 *10. The Inheritance of Sin*

We believe that all the descendants of Adam are infected with this stain of original sin, which is an inherited evil, and not an imitation alone, as the Pelagians have taught, whose errors we condemn. We do not believe that it is necessary to search into how sin has been transmitted from one man to his descendants, for it suffices for us to know that what God gave to Adam was not for him only, but for all his posterity with him, and that hence, in the same person of Adam, we have been stripped of all good and have fallen into extreme spiritual poverty and are under the curse.

Cf. article 9; Ps. 51:7; John 1:4–5; Matt. 15:19; Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:14–24; Rom. 5:12, 18–19.

11. The Condemnation of Sin

We believe also that this blemish of original sin is *sin*, in the proper sense of the word, that it is sufficient for the condemnation of the whole human race, even of little children in their mother's womb, and that God considers it as such. Likewise, we believe that even after baptism original sin is still sin with respect to the guilt, although the condemnation of it has been abolished in the children of God, God not imputing it to them by His most gratuitous kindness. We believe also that original sin is a perversion that is always producing fruits of corruption and of rebellion, so that the most holy men, although they resist it, do not cease to be tainted with many weaknesses and faults while they live in this world.

Rom. 3:9–18; 5:12, 18–19; Eph. 2:3, 5; Ps. 51:7; Isa. 48:8; Rom. 5:14; 7:8, 10, 17–18, 20, 23.

III. Jesus Christ

12. Our Election in Jesus Christ

From this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, we believe that God redeems those who, in His eternal and immutable will, He has chosen by His goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works.

We believe that He leaves the others in this same corruption and condemnation to demonstrate His justice in them, as in the former, He makes all the riches of His mercy to shine. For these are no better than the others until God distinguishes them according to His immutable counsel, V 3, p 312 which He has decreed in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world. Moreover, there is no person who can himself appropriate such a good by his own means, since, by nature, we are not able to have a single good motion or any good disposition of our will or any good thought until God has gone before us and disposed us to it.

Ex. 33:19; Rom. 8:29; 9:15; 1 Sam. 12:22; John 15:16; Rom. 2:11, 23; 11:5–6; Eph. 1:4–6; 2:8–10; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:4–7; 1 John 4:10; Ps. 5:5–7; Ezek. 9:10; 18:4; Rom. 1:18; Gal. 6:7–8; Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:18, 22–23; cf. article 9; Jer. 10:23; Eph. 1:4–5.

13. Our Salvation in Christ

We believe that all that is necessary for our salvation has been offered and communicated to us in Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ, who has been given to us that we may be saved and has been made for us at the same time wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that whoever separates himself from Him renounces the mercy of the Father, in whom we ought to have our sole refuge.

Matt. 1:21; John 14:16; Gal. 1:19–20; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; John 3:16; 1 John 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7–8; Col. 1:13–14; 2:10; Titus 2:14; Acts 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:5.

14. The Divinity and the Humanity of Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, being the wisdom of God and His eternal Son, has put on our flesh, so as to be God and man in one person and, in truth, a man similar to us, capable of suffering in His body and in His soul, nor differing from us except that He is innocent of all defilement. As for His humanity, we believe that the Christ was the authentic seed of Abraham and of David, although He was conceived by the secret power of the Holy Spirit. By doing this, we reject all the heresies that have troubled the church from ancient times, and especially also the diabolic imaginations of Servetus, who attributed to the Lord Jesus a fantastic divinity, in that he said He was the idea and pattern of all things, and the name Son of God was individual or figurative, and, finally, He invented a body of three uncreated elements, thus confusing and destroying the two natures.

John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6–7; Matt. 26:38; Luke 23:46; John 12:27; 19:30; Heb. 2:17–18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; Gen. 22:18; Ps. 132:11; Jer. 33:15; Matt. 1:1; Acts 2:30–31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; 9:5; Gal. 3:16; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14; 7:14; Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:31, 34–35.

V 3, p 313 *15. The Two Natures of Christ*

We believe that in the same person, that is Jesus Christ, the two natures are truly and inseparably joined and united, and nevertheless each of them keeps its specific character, so that in this union of the two natures, the divine nature retains its own property, remains uncreated, infinite, and filling all things; likewise that the human nature remains finite, having its form, its limits, and its own character. Moreover, though Jesus Christ, in rising from the dead, bestowed immortality to His body, nevertheless we believe that He did not strip from it the reality proper to His human nature. We thus consider Christ in His divinity in such a way that we do not despoil Him of His humanity.

Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:35; John 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:5; 3:16; cf. article 7; John 3:31–34; 12:44–45; 14:9–10; Col. 1:19–20; Matt. 26:11; 27:50; Luke 23:46; 24:38–39; Acts 3:21; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:12–24; Phil. 2:6–11; 3:21; John 20:25, 27; Acts 1:2–3.

IV. The Work of Salvation

16. The Death of Christ

We believe that God, in sending His Son into the world, wanted to show His love and His inestimable goodness toward us in delivering Him to death and in raising Him up in order to accomplish all righteousness and to acquire the heavenly life for us.

Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16; 15:13; Rom. 4:25; 8:3, 32–33; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 4:9.

17. Our Reconciliation

We believe that, by the unique sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offered on the cross, we are reconciled with God, in order to be counted righteous before Him and regarded as such. We are not able, in effect, to be pleasing to Him and to participate in His adoption except as He pardons our faults and buries them. We affirm then that Jesus Christ is our whole and perfect purification, that in His death we have a total atonement to acquit us from our crimes and our iniquities, of which we are culpable, and that we are able to be delivered only by this means.

Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 24–28; 10:12, 14, 18; 1 Peter 3:18; Rom. 5:1, 8–9; 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; Col. 2:14; Heb. 5:7–9; Rom. 4:24; 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter V 3, p 314 2:24–25; John 15:3; Rom. 8:2; Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18–19; Isa. 53:5, 12; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 3:23–24; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 1 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 3:8.

18. Our Gratuitous Pardon

We believe that all our righteousness is grounded on the remission of our sins and that our only true happiness is found in this forgiveness, as David says. This is why we reject all other means by which we would think that we might be justified before God and without presuming any virtue or any merit, we hold only to the obedience of Jesus Christ, which has been imputed to us as much as to cover all our sins as that we may find grace and favor before God. In fact, we believe that in separating us from this foundation—the obedience of Jesus Christ—however slightly, we would not be able to find elsewhere any rest, but that we would always be tormented by anxiety since, taken in ourselves, we are worthy to be hated by God and that we will never be at peace with Him unless we are firmly convinced of being loved in Jesus Christ.

Isa. 1:18; 43:25; Jer. 31:4; Ezek. 36:29; John 3:17–18; 5:24; Rom. 3:23–24; 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 1:14; 1 John 2:12; Ps. 32:1–3; cf. article 17; Luke 1:77; Rom. 4:6–8; 8:1–2; 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:29–31; 4:7; Rom. 5:19; Eph. 2:8.

19. Prayer

We believe it is by this means that we have the freedom and the privilege of calling on God with full confidence that He will show himself to be our Father. For we would not have the least access to the Father if we had not been led in to Him by this mediator. In order for [the prayer] to be granted in His name, we must receive our life from Jesus Christ as our head.

Matt. 11:27; John 14:6; Heb. 4:14–16; Pss. 50:15; 145:18; Jer. 29:12–14; Matt. 6:9; 7:11; Luke 11:2; Rom. 5:10; 8:14–17; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19–22; Eph. 2:18; Matt. 28:18; Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:33; Col 3:1; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb. 7:24–25; 1 John 2:1; John 14:13; 16:23–24; cf. article 17; Rom. 8:31–32; 1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 2:20–21; Heb. 2:17–18.

20. Justification by Faith

We believe that God causes us to participate in this righteousness (article 18) by faith alone, since it is said that Jesus Christ has suffered to obtain our salvation, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish. We believe that V 3, p 315 we participate in the righteousness of Jesus Christ because the promises of life, which have been given to us in Him, have been adapted for our use and that we experience the effect when we accept them. For we are convinced—the same mouth of God giving us formal assurance—that we will not be frustrated concerning that which they promise. Thus, the righteousness that we obtain by faith depends on the gratuitous promises by which God declares and attests to us that He loves us.

John 3:15–16, 18; 6:47; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:17; 3:21–28; 4:4–5, 25; 8:1; 10:4; Gal. 2:16; 3:24; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:4–5; John 14:27; 15:11; Rom. 5:1–2; Gal. 2:15–21; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 8:31–39; Eph. 3:16–19; Titus 3:5–7.

21. The Gift of Faith

We believe that we receive the light of faith by the secret grace of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that it is a gratuitous and personal gift that God dispenses to those whom He wishes. The faithful then cannot boast in

themselves; the fact of having been preferred over others obliges them even more. We also believe that faith has not been given only in a temporary way to the elect, to lead them into the good path, but also to make them persevere until the end of their lives. For, since the beginning of this work of grace is incumbent upon God, to complete it is also from Him.

Eph. 1:18; Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13–14; 1 Thess. 1:5; John 15:16; Eph. 2:8; 1 Peter 1:3–4; Rom. 2:29; 12:3; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:9; 1 Peter 1:5–11; 1 Cor. 1:8–9; Isa. 26:12; Luke 17:5; John 6:29; 1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 1:6; 2:13.

22. Our Regeneration

Being enslaved by sin by our corrupt nature, we believe it is by this faith that we are regenerated, so that we may live a new life. In effect, it is in us appropriating the promise that is made to us by the gospel, to know that God has given us His Holy Spirit, that we receive by faith the grace to live a holy life and in the fear of God. Therefore faith not only does not restrain us in the desire for good and holy living but, on the contrary, encourages it, excites it, and necessarily produces good works. Moreover, even though God, in order to accomplish our salvation, regenerates us and renders us capable of doing good, we confess at the same time that the good works that we do under the guidance of His Spirit are not accounted to us for justification or to deserve that God should take us for His children, because V 3, p 316 we would always be tossed about by doubt and anxiety if our consciences did not rest upon the satisfaction by which Jesus Christ has acquitted us.

Cf. articles 9–11; John 8:34, 36; Rom. 6:4–7, 22; Col. 1:13; 2:12–13; 3:9–10, 17; 1 Peter 1:3; John 3:5; 5:24; Acts 15:9; Rom. 8:15; 10:17; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 14:23; 1 Tim. 1:5; Heb. 11:6; Matt. 5:16; 7:7; Luke 1:74–75; John 15:5, 8; Rom. 6:22; 2 Cor. 5:9–10; Gal. 5:6, 19–26; Eph. 2:10; 1 Thess. 4:3, 7; Titus 2:14; 3:8; James 2:14, 18, 22, 26; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:3; 5:18; Deut. 30:6; Phil. 2:13; Luke 17:10; Rom. 4:1–2, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5–7.

23. The Use of the Law and the Prophets

We believe that in the coming of Jesus Christ, all the images and representations of the law have come to an end. However, although the ceremonies of the Old Testament are no longer in use, we believe that we find in the person of Christ—in whom all things have been accomplished—the substance and the reality of that which they represent and signify. Furthermore, we believe that the law and the prophets help us to regulate our lives as well as to be confirmed in the promises of the gospel.

Rom. 10:4; Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:17; Heb. 9:11–14, 24–28; 10:10, 13–18; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rom. 7:12; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19.

24. Rejection of False Doctrines

Since Jesus Christ has been given to us as sole advocate and has commanded us to address the Father directly in His name, and since it is not lawful for us to pray unless we conform to the manner that God has taught us in His Word, we believe that all that men have invented concerning the intercession of the dead saints is an abuse and a trick of Satan to turn men away from the manner of praying rightly. We reject also all other means that men presume to have to redeem themselves before God, because they disparage the sacrifice of the death and passion of Jesus Christ. Finally, we consider purgatory as an error issuing from the same boutique, from which flow also monastic vows, pilgrimages, the prohibition of marriage, and the consumption of certain foods, the ceremonial observation of certain days, oral confession, indulgences, and

all similar things by which they think they will merit grace and salvation. We reject all these things not only because of the false idea of merit that has been attached to them, but also because they are human inventions that impose a yoke upon our consciences.

V 3, p 317 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:24–25; 10:19–22; 1 John 2:1–2; John 16:23–24; Matt. 6:5–13; Luke 11:2–4; John 14:6, 13; Matt. 15:7–11; Acts 10:14–15; Rom. 14:2–3; Gal. 4:9–11; 5:1–4; Col. 2:16–17, 20–23; 1 Tim. 4:1–5; Titus 1:15.

V. The Church: Its Nature

25. The Ministry of Preaching and the Sacraments

Because we know Jesus Christ and all His grace through the gospel, we believe that the order of the church, which has been established by the authority of Christ, should be sacred and inviolable, and that, as a result, the church could not maintain itself without pastors who are responsible for teaching. We believe that the pastors, when they are properly called and faithfully carry out their responsibilities, should be honored and heard with respect, not that God depends on such aids or inferior means, but because it pleases Him to maintain us in a single body by the means of this responsibility and this discipline. Consequently, we condemn visionary spirits who are willing, as far as they are able, to destroy the ministry of the preaching of the Word of God and the sacraments.

Rom. 1:16–17; 10:14–17; Matt. 18:19–20; Luke 12:42–48; Eph. 1:22–23; 3:8–10; Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20; Acts 26:17–18; Rom. 10:14–15; 1 Cor. 3:5–7, 9; 4:1–2; 2 Cor. 5:20.

26. The Unity of the Church

We believe then that no one should seclude themselves and content themselves to be alone, but that all the faithful should fellowship together, guard and maintain the unity of the church, and submit themselves to the common teaching and to the yoke of Jesus Christ, and this everywhere where God will have established a true ecclesiastical order, even though the public authorities and their laws would be opposed to it. We believe that all those who do not submit to this order or exempt themselves or band together privately oppose the ordinance of God.

Pss. 5:8; 22:23; 1 Cor. 12:12–30; Eph. 4:4–16; Dan. 3:17–18; 6:8–10; Acts 4:17, 19; 5:29; 18:13; Heb. 10:25.

27. The True Church

We believe at the same time that it is appropriate to discern carefully and with clear-sightedness what the true church is because there is much abuse V 3, p 318 of this title. According to the Word of God, we say therefore that the true church is the community of the faithful who, with a common accord, desire to follow this Word and the pure religion that depends on it; who depend on it all their life long, increasing and fortifying it without ceasing in the fear of God, according as it is necessary for their progress and to march ever forward. Furthermore, whatever their efforts, they must untiringly have recourse to the remission of their sins. Nevertheless, we do not deny that among the faithful there are hypocrites and reprobates, whose wickedness cannot, however, deprive the church of its legitimate title.

Jer. 7:1–15; Matt. 3:9–10; 7:21–23; John 8:47; 10:27; Acts 17:11–12; Eph. 2:19–22; 4:11–16; 6:10–18; Gal. 5:17–22; 1 Peter 1:2–11; 1 John 3:14–15; Rom. 3:24; 5:6–10; Col. 1:14; 1 Kings 19:18; Matt. 13:24–30, 47–50; Rom. 9:6; 1 Tim. 1:18–20; 2 Tim. 2:18–20.

28. False Churches

Founded on this definition of the true church, we affirm that where the Word of God is not received and where it is not submitted to and wherever there is not proper administration of the sacraments, one cannot say that a true church exists. This is why we condemn the assemblies of the papacy, because the pure truth of God is banished there and the sacraments are corrupted, altered, falsified, or totally annihilated, and where all sorts of superstitions and idolatries are the fashion. We think therefore that all those who unite in such acts and participate in them separate themselves and remove themselves from the body of Jesus Christ. However, because there still remains a small trace of the church in the papacy and because, moreover, the essential reality of baptism exists there—combined with the fact that the efficacy of baptism does not depend on the one who administers it—we confess that those who are baptized there do not need a second baptism. Nevertheless, because of the corruptions found there, one cannot, without defiling oneself, present children there for baptism.

Matt. 10:14–15; John 10:1; 1 Cor. 3:11–13; 10:14; 2 Cor. 6:14–15; 1 John 5:21; Matt. 3:11; 28:19; Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5.

VI. The Church: Its Organization

29. The Ministry

As to the true church, we believe that it should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ, namely, that there should V 3, p 319 be pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that the purity of doctrine may be maintained, that sins may be corrected and curbed, that the poor and all the afflicted may find help for their needs, that the assemblies may be held in the name of God, and that the adults together with the children may be edified.

Acts 6:3–4; 14:23; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8; 2 Tim. 4:1–5; Titus 1:5, 9; Gal. 1:6–9; Matt. 18:15–18; 1 Cor. 5:4–5, 11–12; 2 Thess. 3:14–15.

30. The Equality of Pastors

We believe that all true pastors, in whatever location they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one sole Head, one sole Sovereign and sole universal Bishop, Jesus Christ. For this reason, we believe that no church can assert over any other either any domination or sovereignty.

Matt. 18:2–4; 20:26–27; Luke 22:26; Acts 6:1–6; 2 Cor. 1:24; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:17–21; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18; 1 Peter 2:25.

31. Vocations

We believe that no one may claim, by their own authority, an ecclesiastical position, but this must be done by election, as much as it is possible and God permits. We add this restriction in particular because it has sometimes been necessary—and is the same in our time when the true church no longer exists—that God

raises up men in an extraordinary manner to build anew the church which was in ruin and desolation. But, notwithstanding, we believe that one must always conform oneself to the rule that everyone—pastors, overseers, and deacons—must be certain of being called [by God] to their position.

Acts 1:21–22; 6:3–6; 14:23; Rom. 10:15; 1 Tim. 3:7; Titus 1:5; Heb. 5:4; Jer. 23:21; Matt. 28:18–19; Mark 16:15; John 15:16; Acts 13:2; Gal. 1:15.

32. Union between the Churches

We believe also that it is good and useful that those who are chosen to be superintendents seek together the means with which they ought to work to direct and administer the whole body of the church. However, that should not deviate in anything from what our Lord Jesus Christ has ordained on this point. This does not prevent the fact that there are some particular rules for each place, as the situation requires.

Acts 6:3; 14:23; 15:2, 24–28; 1 Peter 5:1–4; 1 Cor. 14:26, 33, 40.

V 3, p 320 *33. Ecclesiastical Rules and Laws*

However, we reject all human inventions and all laws that men may introduce under the pretext of serving God, by which they would like to bind people's consciences. We approve only that which would contribute to establish concord and what is proper to preserve it, and to maintain each one—from the first to the last—in obedience. We ought then to follow on this point what our Lord has declared as to excommunication, that we approve and confess it to be necessary with all its consequences.

Matt. 15:9; Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 3:11; 7:23; Gal. 5:1; Matt. 18:15–18.

VII. The Sacraments

34. The Sacraments in General

We believe that the sacraments were added to the Word to confirm it more fully for us, in order to serve us as pledges and proofs of the grace of God; on account of our weakness and our ignorance, they concur to succor and aid our faith. We believe that the sacraments are external signs by means of which God acts by the power of His Spirit, so that nothing will be exhibited to us in vain. We are nevertheless persuaded that all the substance and reality of the sacraments is in Jesus Christ, and that if one separates them from Him, they are no more than smoke and illusion.

Gen. 17:9–10; Ex. 12:7, 13; Matt. 26:26–28; 28:19; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; Acts 2:37–38; 22:16; Rom. 4:11; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24–25; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26; John 6:53, 63; 1 Cor. 5:7; Col. 2:11–12, 17.

35. Baptism

We recognize only two sacraments common to every church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism has been given to us as testimony of our adoption, because we have been grafted into the body of Christ in order to be washed and cleansed by His blood, and then renewed by His Spirit to live a holy life. Although we receive baptism only once, we affirm also that the benefits that are presented to us in it extend to the course of our entire life, and even to our death, so that we have a permanent attestation that Jesus Christ will always be our righteousness and our sanctification. Now, although baptism is a sacrament of faith and

repentance, nevertheless, because God receives little children in His church with their parents, we V 3, p 321 say that, by the authority of Jesus Christ, little children born to believers should be baptized.

Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5–6; Matt. 3:11–12; Mark 16:16; Gen. 17:11–12; Matt. 19:14; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14; Col. 2:11–12.

36. The Lord's Supper

We confess that the Lord's Supper brings us the testimony of our unity with Jesus Christ. In effect, Christ not only died and was resurrected once for us, but He also feeds and truly nourishes us with His body and His blood, so that we may be one with Him and that His life may be communicated to us. Now, even though He is in heaven until He comes back to judge the world, we nevertheless believe that He nourishes and enlivens us—by the secret and incomprehensible action of His Spirit—with the substance of His body and His blood. We affirm that this takes place spiritually, not by substituting in effect and for the true reality of the supper by imagination or thought, but because this mystery surpasses our human capacity by its grandeur, and all order of nature; briefly, because it is heavenly, we reckon that it is not able to be grasped except by faith.

Cf. article 34; John 6:56–57; 17:20–23; Eph. 5:30; Mark 16:19; Acts 1:11; 3:21; John 6:63; John 6:35; Eph. 3:17.

37. The Efficacy of the Sacraments

We believe—as we have already said—that in the Lord's Supper as in baptism, God gives to us really and effectively what is represented there. This is why we join to the signs the true possession and joy of that which is presented to us. Thus, all those who bring to the sacred table of Christ a pure faith receive truly—as a vase the water that fills it—that which the signs attest: that the body and blood of Jesus Christ serve no less as nourishment and drink for our souls than bread and wine for our bodies.

John 6:35, 40, 47–51, 53; 1 Cor. 11:23–29.

38. The Necessity of the Sacraments

Thus, we hold on the one hand that the water of baptism, the whole remaining a feeble element, still testifies to us with truth the inward cleansing of our soul by the blood of Jesus Christ and by the efficacy of His Spirit; on the other hand, the bread and wine, which are given to us in the supper, V 3, p 322 truly serve our spiritual nourishment, inasmuch as they show us as to our sight that the body of Christ is our meat, and His blood our drink. Therefore, we disapprove of the Enthusiasts and Sacramentarians who will not receive these signs and these tokens, seeing that Jesus Christ declares, "This is My body, and this cup is My blood."

Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26; John 6:51; 1 Cor. 11:24–29; Matt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24.

VIII. The Public Powers

39. The Necessity of Government

We believe that God wishes to have the world directed by laws and governments, so that there may be some curbs to restrain the disordered appetites of the world. We believe therefore that God has instituted kingdoms, republics, and all sorts of principalities, hereditary or not, and all that belongs to a just state, and

who wishes to be acknowledged their author. From this intent, God has put the sword into the hands of the magistrates to suppress the sins committed not only against the second table of the commandments of God, but also against the first. We must therefore, on account of God, not only support the authorities who exercise the sovereignty of their post but also honor and esteem them from profound respect, considering them as His lieutenants and officers, whom He has established to exercise a legitimate and holy responsibility.

Ex. 18:20–21; Deut. 1:15–17; Prov. 8:15; Rom. 13:1–2; Deut. 16:18–20; Ps. 82:1–4; Jer. 21:12; 22:2–3; Rom. 12:3–4; 1 Kings 15:12; 2 Kings 23:1–27; Rom. 13:1–2; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–14.

40. Obedience Due to the Authorities

We affirm then that we must obey their laws and statutes, pay taxes, duties, and other charges and consent to this obedience from a good and free will—even if they are unbelievers—provided that the absolute sovereignty of God remains intact. Therefore, we condemn those who would reject all hierarchy to establish community and confusion of goods and overthrow the order of justice.

Matt. 17:24–27; Mark 12:17; Acts 4:17–20; 5:29.

(Translated by Martin Klauber; modified by James T. Dennison Jr.)

Honoring Pastor and Mrs. Douglas Wilson

Pastor Randy Booth – September 29, 2026

God's gifts to His church are not scarce, but neither are they casual. From the beginning, He has supplied what His people need: daily bread, ordinary faithfulness, quiet endurance. But in every age, when the hour demands it, God does more. He raises up men—marked men—fitted for the moment, forged for conflict, and sent into the teeth of resistance. Not flatterers, not opportunists, not men angling for applause, but servants of Christ, steeled with conviction, sharpened by opposition, and sustained by a faith that refuses to bend.

And let's be clear, our age is not exempt. We don't live in neutral times, nor do we shepherd a neutral church in a neutral world. The need is not for soft hands and safer words, but for men who see clearly, speak plainly, and stand firmly. Men who will not bow when the pressure mounts, nor trim their message when the cost becomes evident.

Such men are never neat and tidy, and they're never universally admired. God writes straight with crooked sticks. If you're looking for sinless men, you'll not find them in Hebrews 11, and you won't find them in church history. You will find men with scars and rough edges. Men who were called "dangerous," "divisive," and "controversial." Of course they were. So was our Lord. If a man never collides with the spirit of the age, it's not because he has transcended it—it's because he has accommodated it. True leadership draws fire. It provokes, it exposes, and it presses the battle to the point where neutrality is no longer possible.

We're not here to pretend that such men are always right in every word or wise in every moment. They're not. But that's not the standard. The question is not whether they're flawless, but whether they're faithful—whether they say what must be said when others won't say it and do what must be done when others won't do it.

An army can survive without comfort, but it can't survive without courage. It can't advance without men who understand the terrain, who can read the opposition, who can rally the troops and take the hill. And when the hill must be taken, it won't be taken by committees. It will be taken by men with vision, and men who are willing.

The Scriptures give us the pattern. In the days of Nehemiah, the people of God didn't rebuild the walls in safety or ease. They built under threat. They built under mockery. They built with enemies watching and waiting for their failure. And so they built with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other (Neh. 4:17). That's always the way. Build and be ready to fight. Fight and never stop building.

And so, we come to the matter at hand. I rise to honor such a man. A man I have known for over thirty years. A man who has not stood at a safe distance from the battle but has stepped into it—again and again and again (or if you're in Texas, has stepped in it again and again). A man who has taken hits, returned fire, and remained standing. A man who has built where others would have abandoned the field.

He's not merely a pastor, though he is that. Not merely a preacher, though he is that. Not merely a teacher, a writer, a counselor, a debater, an organizer, an innovator, though he is all of these. He is

both competent and apparently tireless. He is a builder with a sword in his hand. He has fought on many fronts—publicly and privately—and has not wearied of the work. He has borne criticism, misrepresentation, and no small measure of hostility. And still, he builds. Still, he teaches. Still, he labors. And, remarkably, he does so with a cheerfulness and gratitude that can't be manufactured and can't be faked. Everyone here has been touched by his work. Directly or indirectly, his fingerprints are on far more than we can imagine. And what we see now is only the beginning—the downstream effects of his labor will outlive all of us.

I have withheld his name until now, not because it's unknown, but because it's unnecessary. You already know of whom I speak. There would be no Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, no Association of Classical Christian Schools, no New Saint Andrews College, and much more besides would simply not exist in their present form—if God had not given this man to His church.

I know of no one who has received more slings and arrows, and I know of no one who has delivered his own share more effectively. And yet, let it be said, this is not a celebration of a man as an end in himself, it's a recognition of the God who gives such men to His church. The God who, in times of drift, raises up men who will not drift, in times of silence, raises up men who will speak, and in times of retreat, raises up men who will advance.

For my part, I gladly confess a personal debt of gratitude. And I know that if I were to ask for others to say the same, the testimony would be overwhelming. I have often said: I thank God that He has given us this man, and I thank God that I'm not him."

On behalf of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, it's my privilege to recognize, honor and commend the years of faithful, costly, and unrelenting labor given to Christ, to His church, and to the world, by the one and only Pastor Douglas Wilson.

And let's be clear, this kind of life is never lived alone. It can't be. God doesn't call a man into this kind of labor and leave him without help equal to it. In His kindness, He gives strength alongside strength, faith alongside faith. And in this case, He has given Nancy; a faithful wife, a wise counselor, a steady and gracious presence through years that have required much. She has shared in the burdens, stood firm in the pressures, and carried the kind of quiet, unseen weight that makes all the visible work possible. And if we rightly give thanks to God for the man, then we must also give thanks for the woman who has stood beside him; faithful in her own calling, steadfast in her own labor, and no less a gift to the church.

So, we thank God—not only for Doug, but for Nancy; not only for a man, but for a marriage—for a shared life poured out in service to Christ and His kingdom. And it's our privilege, and our joy, to honor you both.

Principles of CREC Polity

By Christopher Schlect, Teaching Elder, Trinity Reformed Church (Moscow, ID)

We in the CREC joined ourselves to one another, forming our communion, in order to share in the governance of our churches. While we enjoy personal and fraternal ties through various ways of collaborating, we formally set forth the responsibilities we owe to one another in our governing documents: our confessions, our Constitution, and our Book of Procedures. This paper sets forth some of the principles that underlie our polity as expressed in these formal standards, especially in our Constitution.

A constitution functions within a community in a way similar to how a rulebook relates to the game it describes. Any game needs rules, but few players can easily understand a game by simply reading its rules. Rather, we come to know a game by experiencing it—by watching others play it, or by playing the game ourselves. We learn the game as we go along, and consult the rules as needed. Our CREC Constitution, like a rulebook, provides needed clarity. But also like a rulebook, it is a cumbersome entry point for those who simply want to understand the flow of play. So I offer this paper for those seeking to learn the flow of play of our CREC governance. May it serve the next generation of diligent churchmen in our midst. I have organized it around several key principles that underlie our distinctive polity.

1. The CREC in relation to the universal church

Proposition: The CREC is a catholic, Christian denomination within the Reformed tradition.

We in the CREC affirm that the visible church is "catholic and universal under the gospel" comprising "particular churches, which are members thereof" (WCF 25.2 & 4). The particular churches within our communion are visibly united to this one holy catholic and apostolic church through baptism. We express our catholic unity by confessing the ancient ecumenical confessions and by recognizing one baptism. We live out our catholicity by learning from faithful Christians throughout the ages and from various parts of the world. In addition, we seek out opportunities to collaborate with Christian churches beyond our own communion in various gospel endeavors, working together with them to serve our communities, nations, and the wider world. Thus, we call ourselves a communion of churches, and yet we remain in communion with the church universal. One of our Presiding Ministers, Jack Phelps, expressed the matter this way:

> On the matter of the word, communion, we are using it in the confessional sense. In the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess to believe in "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints…" By this we mean, first that by God's grace we have communion with the Triune God and with each other as we are brought into the church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, signified by baptism. Second, we have communion with all the faithful saints by virtue of confessing that Jesus is Lord of all (Rom 10:9; II Cor 5:17-19; Acts 2:36ff)"[2]

Even as the churches in our communion are united in fellowship to all Christians through baptism, we are also united governmentally to one another by vow. We manifest this governmental unity within our communion in two ways: first, we affirm various confessions that reflect our shared Reformed heritage; and second, we submit ourselves to one another in rule or governance. We express this mutual submission by recognizing one another's members, ordinations, and discipline. Accordingly, these are the main elements of churchly rule that we regulate according to our communion's governing documents. While each of our particular local churches is governed according to its own constitution, our local church constitutions must harmonize with the constitution of our communion, to which all our local churches are also bound. This is how we denominate ourselves as a communion within the one and universal church of Jesus Christ.

2. Local CREC churches in their relation to our broader assemblies

> *Proposition: The CREC is composed of many locally-governed churches that participate in, while being subject to, the broader assemblies of the CREC.*[3]

We in our communion identify two basic *loci* of ecclesiastical authority: local church sessions and broader assemblies.

We believe that Jesus has supplied local churches with the spiritual resources sufficient for administering the word, sacraments, and discipline. Thus our local churches are true churches—that is, they fully particularize the one true church; they are not merely parts or pieces of a larger church.[4] Our local churches are ruled by elders, and every elder across our communion is called chiefly to serve his own home church. These elders are primarily responsible for the care of those individuals with whom they have personal interactions (1 Peter 5:2-5 & Heb. 13:17). What's more, because the

---

[2] Jack Phelps has helpfully exposited the term *Communion* in the name of our denomination: "*A Message to the World Regarding the CREC Name Change,* https://crechurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2011_CREC_Name_Change_Statement.pdf (Accessed March 12, 2025).

[3] Much of the material in this section is adapted directly from a position paper that our communion adopted in 2003: Christopher Schlect, "Between Presbyteries and Council," *Minutes, Seventh Annual CRE Presbytery Meeting, Houston, TX, Octobre 16-17, 2003.*

[4] On this point we respectfully part ways with our high-church Episcopalian friends.

qualifications for elder are best assessed through such interactions (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9), the jurisdictional responsibility for an elder's calling and ordination resides with each local church. Consequently, our elders are members of their local churches, and not of their presbytery nor of council.

While our elders are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of their respective local churches, they do not carry this responsibility in isolation from other churches. The scriptures teach that the proper rule of the church, including relationships of authority and submission, extends beyond particular local churches. Consider how Paul referred to the Christians in ancient Corinth: at one point he addressed them as the Corinthian *church* (singular), and elsewhere, as the Corinthian *churches* (plural) (1 Cor. 1:2 and 14:34). The church of Corinth included the church that met in the house of Aquila and Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19) and another church (singular) that met in Cenchreae, the Corinthian port that served eastern shipping (Rom. 16:1).[5] In ancient Corinth, then, we find a community of believers that was reckoned both as *a church* and as *churches.* Likewise in Ephesus, Paul charged the elders of that city to shepherd not only their own particular congregations, but also "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Indeed, he summoned elders from various Ephesian congregations and instructed them to watch out for one another, thereby indicating that the reach of an elder's ruling oversight extends beyond his own local congregation (Acts 20:28ff.). Also consider Peter, who exhorted the elders of the dispersion—who surely represented various congregations—by addressing them as "a fellow elder" (1 Peter 1:1 & 5:1). Here Peter identified the elders of various local churches as his colleagues. They would not have been "fellow elders" if the business of one church had no connection with the business of another. Finally, we see in Acts 15 that the "apostles and elders" in Jerusalem rendered a decision on a matter

[5] It is erroneous to suppose that, whenever a biblical author mentions an ancient city, he indicates a more or less clearly-defined jurisdiction. The city of Corinth in the first century illustrates the point. In common parlance, the term *Corinth* often included an urban center and two harbors, Lechaion and Cenchreae. These two harbor towns were vital to the city's economic, cultural, and political activity. The city's proximity to these harbors explain why the Romans to made Corinth the capital of the province of Achaia, as it was in Paul's day. In his time, defensive walls connected the urban center to the harbor of Lechaion. But we also encounter writers who deploy the term *Corinth* as synecdoche for the entire Roman province of Achaia. In this expansive sense, *Corinth* signified all the cities of central and southern Greece, including Athens, Delphi, Thebes, Argos, and Sparta. Note that Paul addressed his second letter "to the church of God that is at Corinth, *with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia"* (2 Cor. 1:1). Yet first-century writers could also use the term *Corinth* more narrowly, referring only to the urban center, distinct from Lechaion and Cenchreae, as though each was a discrete community in its own right. Accordingly, Paul mentions Phoebe as a servant of "the church" at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1), which he surely imagined to fall within "the church of God in Corinth" to whom he addressed his epistles. For another witness, see Paul's contemporary, Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.20-22). First-century usage belies the notion that, whenever a biblical writer mentions a city, that city is home to only one organized church, only one ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This faulty supposition reads our modern notions of jurisdiction and "city limits" back into first-century usage, which of course is anachronistic.

that had arisen in Antioch, and yet their findings carried weight in churches beyond just Jerusalem and Antioch. These scriptural examples indicate that elders, though they are called by (and to) their own local churches, they also carry a ruling interest beyond their local congregations. So when an offended person fails to win his brother after two attempts, and he is enjoined to "tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17), what did Christ mean by the church? In its judicial and shepherding capacities, the church entails something broader than a particular local congregation.

It follows that, insofar as rule or governance is concerned, we recognize the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches as both *churches* and *a church*. This is why we labor together in rule and governance, and it informs how we construe the relationships that connect our local churches to our broader assemblies.

With respect to our extra-congregational connections, how shall our elders regard one another? The elders in CREC churches are peers and colleagues. Our offices are not tiered, not divided into higher and lower ranks. While many of our member churches distinguish between different kinds of elder (e.g., some differentiate between ministers and ruling elders, and between ministers and teaching elders), the scriptures warrant no hierarchical distinction among elders insofar as the rule of the church is concerned. This truth bears upon how our local sessions and our broader assemblies relate to one another. Our broader assemblies, like the elders who comprise them, do not outrank local churches. When a church appoints one of its elders to represent them at presbytery, we do not consider this elder to have received a promotion to a higher ecclesiastical office. Such elders, as delegates, are called to a particular set of tasks and responsibilities, yet they remain elders; they have not assumed a new ecclesiastical office. Accordingly, when an elder is appointed to serve as a delegate to presbytery or to council, he takes no new vows, and we do not confer upon him a new office by ordination nor by laying-on of hands.

In Matthew 18, the Lord Jesus outlines a process for addressing offenses and resolving controversies. If private efforts bring no resolution, Jesus says to "tell it to the church" (v. 17). How do we follow this biblical process in the CREC? A private controversy is "told to the church" when the matter is placed into the hands of local elders who act in session and render a decision. If a party appeals their decision to presbytery, and if presbytery's decision is appealed to council, we say in the language of Matthew 18 that the matter is still being "told to the church." Such a matter is not being carried from a "lower church" to a "higher church," nor is it passing from the hands of "lower officials" to "higher officials." Instead, these are steps or phases in an organic process as the matter makes its way through the church.

Governmentally speaking, the members of our local churches are represented in presbytery through the delegates their church appoints to represent them in presbytery. These delegates to presbytery then participate in the appointment of presbytery's delegates to council. Thus, even as every member of a local church submits to our communion's governance, so every member is represented in that governance.

3. The CREC broader assemblies in relation to one another

Proposition: The broader assemblies within the CREC compose one body.

How do our broader assemblies relate to one another? Our presbyteries function as organs within one extra-congregational governing organism. In the preceding section we noted that an elder who is appointed by his local church to serve as a delegate to presbytery has not received a promotion to a new office. The same is true of those appointed as delegates who represent their presbyteries in council. The only material difference between our presbyteries and council lies in the breadth of their representation. All the churches in our communion are represented in council, whereas our presbyteries represent more limited constituencies.

We in the CREC refer to our presbyteries and council as *broader* assemblies rather than *higher* assemblies. Insofar as these assemblies act as courts, they are *broader* courts and not *higher* courts. It is only by reason of its greater ecumenicity that a determination of council carries greater weight than a determination of presbytery. Owing to the natural principle of subsidiarity, referrals and appeals typically move from lesser to greater ecumenicity—that is, from a local church to a regional presbytery, and from a regional presbytery to council. The only appeal from a council decision is to a future gathering of council, for council is the broadest of our broader assemblies.

Our council may hear an appeal without it first being heard in presbytery. While this would be extraordinary, practical and pastoral reasons may warrant it, particularly in matters that affect churches in more than one of our presbyteries. On the other hand, practical considerations (e.g., an overloaded agenda) may motivate council to remand such a case to one of our presbyteries.

The CREC broader assemblies relate to one another differently than our local churches relate to one another. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that *the CREC is a communion of churches; we are not a communion of presbyteries.* Our presbyteries and council ultimately speak with one voice. Because our presbyteries are organs within a single governing organism, an organism composed of broader assemblies, our presbyteries possess no sovereignty on their own. This principle carries a number of practical implications. In the first place, our presbyteries must comply

with council decisions. While a presbytery may respectfully protest or remonstrate with council, urging council to revisit a decision, no presbytery may defy a decision of council. Likewise, council may judiciously and pastorally admonish a wayward presbytery, but council cannot eject an entire presbytery—as a presbytery—from the communion.

As a communion of churches, our local churches—unlike our presbyteries—are complete and self-governing ecclesiastical bodies. Any local CREC church, acting through its session of elders, could conceivably withdraw from our communion and thereby terminate its membership in the CREC. It is also conceivable that a group of disaffected CREC churches could secede at the same time, acting through their respective sessions working in concert with one another. But they could not secede by taking action as a CREC presbytery.[6]

Some have alleged that our CREC polity is inadequate to deal with recalcitrant elders or wayward local sessions. But our constitution does provide mechanisms for these scenarios. First, a CREC broader assembly, following pastoral care and due process, is empowered to sanction a local church's session by ejecting that church from our communion. If faithful members of that church wish to remain within the CREC—that is, they wish to submit themselves to the rule of CREC elders rather than to their local session, a presbytery should act to care for those individuals. The presbytery could either shepherd them into another local church, or plant a CREC mission church in their area that could care for these displaced members.

See the appendix for a graphic representation of how our member churches and our broader assemblies relate to one another.

4. The character of our broader assemblies

Proposition: Our broader assemblies are bodies that are both representative and deliberative.

We believe that the Lord Jesus has entrusted the rule of His church to elders. In the CREC, when elders gather in our broader assemblies, they represent the local churches and presbyteries that appointed them. For this reason, our broader assemblies may not reassign their churchly responsibilities to agencies whose governance lies beyond the ordinary representative structure of the assemblies themselves. Accordingly, our broader assemblies may not hold property, nor may they operate seminaries or establish boards and agencies. Likewise, they may not form standing

[6] This is how the OPC arose out of the PCUSA in 1936, and also how the PCA formed out of the old PCUS in the early 1970s.

committees or standing courts.[7] By such prohibitions we preserve the representative character of our broader assemblies. Boards, agencies, standing committees, and courts are, by design, organisms of government that approach their tasks in a specialized way. Amidst the wide variety of churchly work, such an entity takes up one venture in particular, and devotes its talent and resources to that venture. Such an entity, once founded, begins taking on a life of its own. The individuals who serve on a board, agency, or standing committees, by the routine exercise of their work, naturally develop specialized expertise. Over time they come to operate at a remove from the larger church body that originally formed them—that is, from a broader assembly where elder-delegates have a ruling voice. These boards and agencies tend to drift free from the oversight that is properly vested in the representatives of our member churches. This is why our constitution prohibits our broader assemblies from creating them.

We understand what motivates Christians to create parachurch organizations. Such organizations are able to commit their limited resources to particular tasks, to particular fields of ministry. We acknowledge how unwieldy it can be for a broader assembly to attend to every detail of some narrow matter. Nonetheless we in the CREC do have ways of handling business that requires specialized expertise, business that other communions might reassign to their boards and agencies. For specialized matters, our assemblies are free to appoint committees, and to populate those committees with the talent their assignment calls for, provided that their tasks are limited in scope and duration.

Another motivation that drives some denominations to relegate portions of their work to agencies is that agencies can act promptly when needed. But our broader assemblies can take prompt action in a couple of ways: by acting through their presiding ministers, or through ad hoc meetings, or both. Our assemblies can also convene ad hoc meetings to speedily ratify a presiding minister's action, or to quickly adopt a committee's recommendation. By these mechanisms, our polity empowers broader assemblies to commit personal and specialized attention to matters that call for definite action in a timely manner. These governing mechanisms preserve the representative character of our broader assemblies.

Our broader assemblies are not only representative bodies, they are also deliberative bodies. This is why our assemblies conduct business in orderly meetings—whether in regular meetings or in ad hoc meetings. Meetings allow for deliberation. Even when our assemblies act through their

[7] See *CREC Constitution* IV.A.4.

presiding ministers, such action must be ratified in a meeting of the assembly's delegates. (For more on the presiding ministers, see the next section.) In sum, no final CREC action can be taken apart from a decision made by the gathered delegates in a properly-called assembly meeting, and these meetings are the only venue where final actions are taken. This is why we preserve the deliberative character of these meetings.

Assembly meetings are the proper venues for transacting the business that comes before that assembly. It is only to these meetings that we summon delegates, and it is only in these meetings where each delegate holds privileges of the floor. It is only the proceedings that transpire in these meetings that we regulate with quorum rules, published agendas, proper motions, and voting, and we record such transactions in minutes. While other gatherings and other communication outlets have good uses, these are not proper venues for transacting official business, for these other venues are not necessarily ordered to protect our representation and deliberation.

Many of our elders and delegates in our midst communicate with one another outside our called meetings. By these informal interactions we share news, seek and receive advice, and enjoy fellowship around our common faith and calling. Yet these informal interactions, important as they may be, are no substitute for our stated meetings, for only our meetings must follow the constitution's requirements for representation and deliberation. Our listserv interactions (to take one example) are informal; they are not meeting deliberations. Do we summon our delegates to participate in listserv discussions? Do these discussions follow the protocols of floor deliberation, or the rules related to quorum and voting? No; and for these reasons (and others), we do not transact CREC business on our listserv. Were we to do so, we would undermine the deliberative and representative character of our communion.

Another way we might undermine the deliberative and representative character of our assemblies would be for delegates to commit themselves to a vote before meeting deliberations run their course. Just as each delegate has privileges of the floor, so each delegate shall diligently hear his fellow delegates before finalizing his own resolve on any given matter. Thus it would be improper for a church session, or for a presbytery, to bind its delegate to vote a particular way before sending that delegate to a meeting. Such tactics are out of step with the vow our churches take upon entering the CREC—to "join with us in the rule of the church."[8] In our assembly meetings, each delegate

[8] See *CREC Constitution* III.D.

has a right to be heard before a vote is taken, and all delegates should duly take into account the views of his fellow-delegates before voting.

In the CREC we secure the possibility of meaningful deliberation between local churches and our broader assemblies. We do so through constitutional provisions that govern our assembly meetings. Assemblies (through their presiding ministers) must publish their meeting agendas in advance. This allows time for our churches to consider and discuss an assembly's agenda items within their local sessions, a practice that prepares their delegates to represent them well in the upcoming assembly meeting. In addition, an assembly's agenda can be amended only by a supermajority. While we properly leave most of our procedural rules to our Book of Procedures (see section 6 below), we enshrine these unique procedures in our constitution as a way of protecting the deliberative character of our assemblies.

Just as we ensure deliberation between local churches and broader assemblies, we also ensure crossover deliberation between our presbyteries and council. Our triennial council meetings must convene in conjunction with presbyteries: "In the year that Council meets, Presbyteries must have a stated meeting at the same place and time."[9] This arrangement allows presbyteries to discuss matters that are due to come before council, which better equips their delegates to represent them at council. This arrangement also allows council to refer a matter back to the presbyteries.

5. Our Presiding Ministers in relation to our broader assemblies

> *Proposition: Our Presiding Ministers embody the authority and responsibilities of the broader assemblies they represent, with limitations.*[10]

The CREC invests our broader assemblies with certain prerogatives that we enumerate in our constitution.[11] Typically, our broader assemblies carry out their responsibilities in their regular meetings. Yet we also insist that our broader assemblies carry out their work in a pastoral manner—personally, efficiently, and unencumbered by bureaucracy. To further this aim, we appoint ministers who act on behalf our broader assemblies. By convention we refer to these ministers as *presiding ministers* in order to distinguish their constitutional functions from the local work they do in their home churches.

---

[9] See *CREC Constitution* V.C.

[10] Much of the material in this section is adapted directly from a position paper that our communion received in 2003: Christopher Schlect, "On the Moderator," *Minutes, Seventh Annual CRE Presbytery Meeting, Houston, TX, Octobre 16-17, 2003*.

[11] See *CREC Constitution* IV.A.

In 2008, our communion adopted a new designation for our presiding officers when we replaced the title *moderator* with *minister*.[12] Why the change? We came to recognize that the term *moderator* indicates the kind of work done by a parliamentarian who ensures that a meeting runs smoothly. Thus the term *moderator* did not reflect the churchly, pastoral responsibilities that our presiding officers had always borne. When we renamed the office, we reaffirmed the convictions about these officers that we have always held.

The work of our presiding ministers reflects the abiding relationships that our churches have with one another. We pivoted away from the term *moderator* because a moderator's work is typically ordered to a meeting, and meetings are temporary events that originate when they convene and terminate when they adjourn. But our broader assemblies—and the ecclesiastical ties they embody—remain intact between meetings. Between meetings, the life and work of a broader assembly carries on in the presiding minister of that assembly. This is one reason why our presiding ministers carry many of the prerogatives and responsibilities of the broader assemblies they represent, though within important limits.

Not only are the relationships among our churches ongoing, they are also personal and pastoral in character. We reject the bureaucratic fiction that besets some ecclesiastical bodies who outsource their ongoing operations to secretaries or clerks. To the extent that such functionaries carry on the work of the church, they typically operate as bureaucrats. Bureaucrats are functionaries who maintain systems; thus a bureaucrat's activities are functions of the systems they serve. In bureaucratic arrangements, it is a system (rather than a person) that we credit for successes, and likewise it is a system (rather than a person) that bears responsibility for failures. The witness of history has shown that, whenever a church body consigns its work to bureaucrats, it is possible for that body to act wrongly, and yet leave itself without any capacity to hold individuals personally responsible for that wrongdoing. So it goes wherever churches act through bureaucratic systems rather than through responsible persons. Not so with CREC governance. The delegates to our broader assemblies, and our presiding ministers, are pastoral agents. We entrust them with personal responsibility. Our presiding ministers have discretion to take pastoral action on behalf of the broader assemblies they represent, and those assemblies hold them personally responsible for whatever actions they take.

---

[12] *Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches, Minutes of Church Council Triennial Meeting, October 14-16, Conroe, Texas,* pp. 6-7.

Our presiding ministers are the spokesmen and representatives of the assemblies they serve. While their pastoral work is truly the work of a broader assembly, they are not coequal with the assemblies they represent, but subject to them. Our constitution sets forth both the extent and the limits of their responsibility. For example, a presiding minister can inquire into the spiritual and doctrinal health of a constituent church, which includes calling on a local session of elders for the sake of that church's spiritual health. Also, between meetings of a broader assembly, its presiding minister represents that assembly by "initiating and taking prudent steps in furtherance of an action." However, any such action is provisional, for it requires a subsequent ratification vote of the assembly itself. Moreover, our broader assemblies reserve certain actions for themselves, actions that a presiding minister may not take (e.g., admitting members, adjudicating trials, removing a member church).[13]

Our presiding ministers are true agents of the broader assemblies they represent, but they are not independent agents. Note that they do not act as a separate branch of CREC government. Their office must not be construed as "executive branch" that wields its own power, counterbalancing against the power of a broader assembly—an assembly which, on this false supposition, operates as a separate "legislative branch." Rather, our presiding ministers carry subordinate authority that derives from the broader assemblies they represent.

6. CREC Governing Documents

Proposition: We reserve basic matters of principle and structure for our Constitution, and we relegate procedural particulars to our Book of Procedures.

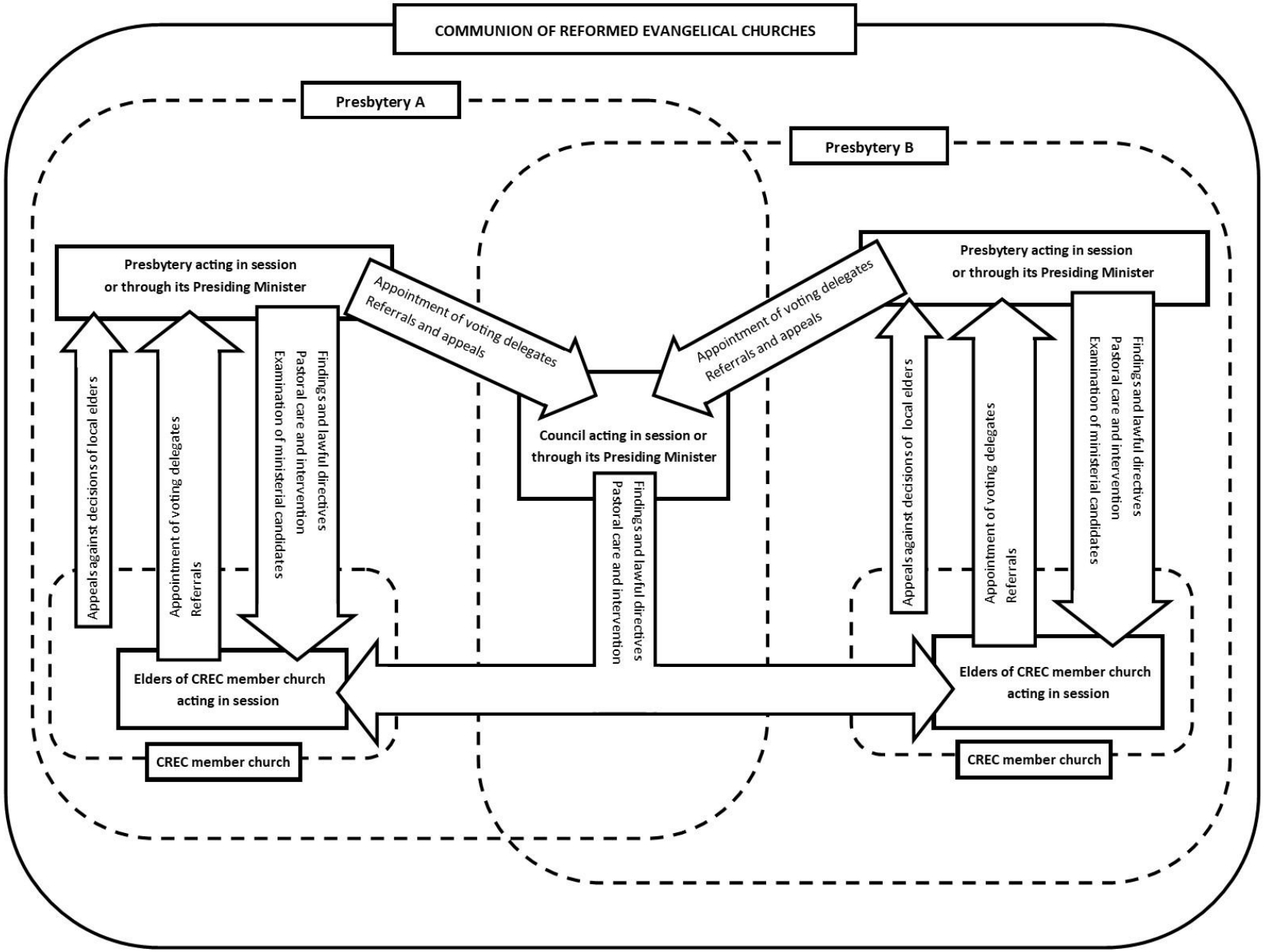
Our communion needs a constitution that makes plain sense. If we allow it to grow unwieldy, we create a situation where good men, men of sound judgement, might find themselves outmaneuvered by shifty ecclesiastical lawyers who subvert principle to procedural details. The more our constitution sprawls, the more it will attract pettifoggers. This concern gave rise to our Book of Procedures.

[13] Our constitution provides that: "The Presiding Minister of Presbytery and Council is also a spokesman and representative, whose authority and responsibilities in that capacity are as follows: First, between me**e**tings of the broader assembly, the Presiding Minister represents the broader assembly by initiating and taking prudent steps in furtherance of an action, which he must report to the broader assembly for ratification. In this way, the Presiding Minister represents the broader assembly for any action empowered to that assembly by this constitution, except for the following…Second, as representative of Presbytery or Council, the Presiding Minister has the authority to encourage and spiritually strengthen the sessions of elders within his broader assembly…" (IV.9, 9a, and 9b).

Twenty years ago (from this writing) we created our Book of Procedures for the express purpose of keeping procedural sprawl out of our constitution. Back then, we looked to other communions, and also to church history, and we came away with warnings that we took to heart. We saw the way bureaucrats can subvert the pastoral rule of the church. (See above.) While we need a constitution for good order, it is possible for a constitution to become so cumbersome that it actually subverts good order.

The well-being of our communion demands governing documents that serve two basic functions. On the one hand, we must define and clarify the basic principles, structures, and offices by which we govern ourselves. And so we identify who has the authority to do what, we define limits to that authority, we draw lines of accountability, and we introduce structures that serve these aims. *These are the function of our constitution.* But we also need governing documents that serve quite another purpose. We need guides and manuals that explain the right way to get things done. We need procedures, steps to follow, methods of carrying out our work. We document these procedures so our officers need not reinvent the wheel each time they act. *This is the function of our Book of Procedures.*

Appendix: Diagram of CREC Governance



Kuyper Presbytery

Minding the CREC Global Financial Gap

ROY ALDEN ATWOOD, PH.D. | PRESIDENT, REFORMED EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
TEACHING ELDER, TRINITY REFORMED CHURCH, MOSCOW, ID

CREC churches worldwide have grown significantly over the past decade, now located in more than a dozen countries. More than two-thirds of those new global churches have significant financial limitations resulting from lower levels of income, weaker national GDPs, and poorer quality of life conditions than their North American counterparts. Their ministries and operations are similar, but their funds and resources are a fraction of their sister CREC churches. This financial disparity becomes most evident when they interface with their North American brothers. Traveling to church leadership meetings (presbyteries, councils, and conferences) and pursuing North American-based pastoral training programs, key to our Communion's governance, fellowship, and growth, are financially challenging to the international churches.



Economic Disparities Between Global CREC Congregations

While economic differences existed early on between CREC U.S. and Canadian churches, they were relatively minor and easily managed. When Eastern Europe congregations joined the Communion, however, the economic gap between CREC churches became so pronounced that some North American churches were compelled to address the problem. They created the "Joint Eastern European Project" (JEEP) to assist their European brothers financially with basic ministry support, travel assistance to meetings in North America, and sending teachers abroad. In recent years, the CREC has expanded farther into Eastern Europe and the "Global South." With that expansion, the economic gap in the CREC has only widened (see chart below).

Countries with CREC Churches	Avg. Monthly Salaries (after taxes, in USD)	Cost of Living Global Rank	Purchasing Power Global Rank	Property Price to Income Ratio
United States	**$4,338**	**13 Moderate**	**6 Very High**	**3.44 Very Low**
Norway	$3,476	8 Very High	18 Very High	8.25 Moderate
Australia	$3,467	15 Moderate	8 Very High	8.04 Moderate
United Kingdom	$3,025	19 Moderate	17 Very High	9.06 Moderate
Canada	$2,715	22 Moderate	24 Very High	10.06 Moderate
Japan	$2,139	44 Low	19 Very High	11.56 Moderate
Czechia	$1,532	54 Low	33 High	13.6 High
Poland	$1,520	67 Low	32 High	11 Moderate
Hungary	$1,059	74 Low	48 Moderate	13.3 High
Bulgaria	$1,006	81 Low	45 Moderate	9.49 Moderate
Russia	$618	132 Very Low	54 Moderate	14.05 High
Ukraine	$448	125 Very Low	64 Low	13.1 High
Brazil	$422	119 Very Low	69 Low	15.04 High
Philippines	$398	109 Very Low	76 Low	21.35 Very High

Source: https://www.numbeo.com

Two Key Challenges for the Global Communion: Travel and Education

The width of this gap becomes clear when global CREC churches engage directly with North American churches. This typically happens at two key points: (1) international travel and (2) pastoral training. First, global CREC-members' travel to North America for presbytery and council meetings is extraordinarily expensive for them. For Americans, round-trip coach airfare between Warsaw and Seattle, for example, costs about a ***week's*** *salary*; for Poles, it is *slightly less than an entire* ***month's*** *salary*; for Filipinos, airfare between Manila and Seattle is the equivalent of ***three months'*** *salary*.

Second, for the global churches, training aspiring pastors at any U.S.-based seminary is impossible without significant financial aid. A 90-credit M.Div. degree at the ***average*** *tuition* rate of the seminaries listed below ($445 per credit) costs $40,000! For an average Polish student, that is *2.2 years'* worth of income; for a Filipino student, it is almost *8.5 years'* salary. Our two CREC-affiliated seminaries (Greyfriars Hall and RES) charge *half the average rate*, yet that still amounts to ***one to four years of annual income*** for Poles and Filipinos, respectively.

Scaling U.S. tuition rates to nationally adjusted salary equivalences (see chart below) illustrate how wide the financial gap can be. Because U.S.-based seminaries must pay their expenses at U.S. rates, the challenge is this: without significant financial aid, global students can't afford U.S.-based pastoral training; by charging global students nationally adjusted tuition rates, U.S.-based seminaries can't admit many global students without risking their own financial health. Minding these gaps is crucial.

Avg. Monthly Salary (after taxes; USD)	 **$4,338**		 **$1,480**	 **$1,520**	 **$398**
SELECT U.S.-BASED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES	**USA** Per Credit-Hour Tuition Rates	Total Tuition (est.) 90-cr M.Div. Degree	**World** Avg. Global Equiv. Per Cr. Tuition	**Poland** National Equiv. Per Cr. Tuition	**Philippines** National Equiv. Per Cr. Tuition
Westminster TS, PA (residential)	$1,230	$110,700	$419	$430	$112
Westminster TS, PA (online)	$650	$58,500	$222	$228	$59
Covenant TS, MO (residential)	$610	$54,900	$208	$214	$56
Knox TS, FL (residential)	$605	$54,450	$206	$212	$56
Reformed TS, MS-FL-NC (residential/online)	$599	$53,910	$204	$210	$55
Westminster Seminary, CA (residential)	$570	$51,300	$194	$200	$52
Erskine TS, SC (residential)	$530	$47,700	$181	$186	$48
Mid-America Ref. Sem., IN (residential)	$290	$26,100	$99	$102	$26
Greyfriars Hall, NSAC, ID (residential)†	**$250**†	**$22,500**	**$85**	**$88**	**$23**
Western Reformed TS, WA (residential)	$245	$22,050	$84	$86	$22
Greenville Presbyterian TS, SC (residential)	$200	$18,000	$68	$70	$18
Reformed Ev. Sem., OR (place-based, online)	**$200**	**$18,000**	**$68**	**$70**	**$18**
Training Leaders Int'l. (visiting instructors) *	$150*	$13,500	$51	$53	$14
Birmingham TS, AL (online)	$100	$9,000	$34	$35	$9

†*Greyfriars Hall*'s published tuition rate is $20,000 per year. GH discounts that rate by $15,000 through a scholarship fund. Students are responsible for the remaining $5,000 in tuition charges. The $250 per credit hour is an estimated rate. GH students are required to attend Christ Church Moscow while enrolled.

**TLI* spends about $4,000 to send one instructor to churches abroad to teach the equivalent of a 3-credit-hour course. The cost to teach one credit (typically paid by sponsoring churches and/or the instructors themselves--not the students) is approximately $1,333. If 15 students participate, the credit hour cost plus administrative support costs per student is about $150. Given TLI's many expense variables, however, this price per TLI credit hour is a rough guess.

Minding the Gap: Recommendations for CREC Churches, Presbyteries, and Seminaries

When North American CREC presbyteries admit new international churches, the Communion-as-a-body assumes covenant responsibility for their new members' health and wellbeing. Part of that responsibility is financial. Assuming global churches have the economic resources and capacities similar to the North American churches is not wise, as the charts above illustrate.

Recommendation 1*: Presbyteries should evaluate the financial resources, capacities, and needs of global churches (and sister North American churches)* ***prior*** *to them joining the CREC.*

Recommendation 2: North American and global CREC churches, presbyteries, and seminaries should specify their mutual commitments and financial expectations in advance, lest they neglect or abdicate those responsibilities or unnecessarily burden others.

Recommendation 3: When presbyteries admit international congregations, whose financial resources are known to be so limited as to restrict their participation at presbytery or council or their access to CREC-affiliated pastoral training, presbyteries (or its individual member congregations) should specify the level(s) of financial assistance they are willing and able to provide for their global brothers.

Recommendation 4: Presbyteries, which admit international congregations and specify a level of financial assistance to their global brothers, should annually review and adjust as necessary: a) the extent of the international need; b) the adequacy of the presbytery's assistance to meet that need; c) presbytery's ability to deliver its assistance (and include in the BOP with PM authority to ensure).

Recommendation 5: Given the wide availability of quality video conferencing and communication technology, presbyteries should limit expensive ecclesiastical events and travel expectations and encourage virtual attendance where and when appropriate to reduce costs for the poorest of our CREC congregations.

Recommendation 6: North American churches, located in one of the wealthiest regions ***in world history,*** should be strongly encouraged to use their giftedness as an opportunity to assist their sister global churches with their greatest financial needs related to travel and pastoral training.

Recommendation 7: So global congregations do not become dependent on external funds or donors, they should regularly encourage a culture of tithing and giving among their members at levels consistent with their congregation's economic health and context. North American churches should help these churches develop resources and capacities that will promote long-term, sustainable financial health and self-sufficiency.

Recommendation 8: As members of a global communion, all CREC congregations should set aside funds for their own travel and for assisting poorer churches as part of their general presbytery support to gather face-to-face for important Communion-wide ecclesiastical meetings.

Recommendation 9: CREC-related seminaries and pastoral training programs should give priority to church-based training which keeps tuition and expenses as low as possible, without compromising quality, and keeps access open to as many global CREC congregations as possible.

Recommendation 10: CREC-related seminaries and pastoral training programs should provide financial assistance (through funded scholarships or unfunded discounts) whenever possible to needy qualified global students.

Recommendation 11: CREC churches should bear an appropriate level of fiscal responsibility for their own students pursuing seminary-level education, and contribute generously to international congregations, as they are able, to assist their students who aspire to the pastorate or church leadership.

Recommendation 12: Presbyteries and councils should periodically evaluate the graduates, programs, and international efforts of CREC-related seminary and training programs, and make commendations and recommendations, as appropriate, to encourage and improve such ministries.