

CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES I

Chair: Ms. Julie Ann Walden
Reporter: Rev. Carl J. Leep

I. Response to Overture 6: Follow Christ in the Way of Peace, Doing Justice, and Bringing Reconciliation to the Peoples of Israel and Palestine

A. *Materials*: Overture 6, pp. 482-88

B. *Recommendations*

1. That synod grant Dr. Darren Roorda, Canadian ministries director, the privilege of the floor while Overture 6 is discussed.
2. That synod encourage the work of addressing peace in the Middle East already being done, acknowledging the awareness of injustice, and commend with thanks the work being done.
3. That synod (with the COD) recognize and encourage our staff and churches to continue to strive for increased partnership that seeks a third way between mainline and evangelical approaches and fosters increased reconciliation on all sides.
4. That synod not accede to Overture 6.

Grounds:

- a. The overture positively acknowledges the existing types of work of CRCNA in connection with peace in the Middle East.
 - b. In light of the larger concern about distinguishing and addressing matters of politics and justice, there is a need to clarify the role of the church in ecclesiastical matters from the local church to classis and to synod.
5. That receive this as our response to Overture 6.

II. Response to Overture 7: Declare Kinism Teaching as Heresy

A. *Materials*: Overture 7, pp. 489-505

B. *Recommendations*

1. That synod accede to Overture 7, sections IX, A-D.

Ground: Kinist theology and practice is neither biblical nor Reformed. Rather, Kinism is a twisting of Reformed doctrine. The Bible makes clear that God's ideal is a family of every tribe and nation being considered equal in every way. Kinist principles and praxis distort this truth.

2. That synod not accede to Overture 7, section IX, E.

Grounds:

- a. Because Kinist teaching is the substantial focus of Overture 7, the recommendations most relevant to ruling on the overture are those dealing with the confessional status of Kinist teaching contained in section IX, A-D.
- b. Without sources cited in Overture 7, recommendation E that refers to “our beloved Reformed theological tradition,” we cannot lament over Reformed sources that have not been referenced in this recommendation.
- c. While Overture 7, recommendation E states that Reformed theology has been “used” to support Kinist teaching, we understand that Reformed theology has been “misused” to support Kinist teaching.

3. Preface

Our advisory committee humbly acknowledges that, while the label *heresy* is easy to use, it has proven far more difficult to actually define and apply. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) has given a helpful warning for all: “it is highly important that people should go to work with the greatest caution when it comes to declaring anything heretical.”

As an advisory committee, we think the definition given in the 1984 decision on apartheid is too broad. That definition reads as follows - “By ‘heresy’ (heretical) we mean a theological view or doctrine that is in conflict with the teachings of Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed Confessions.” This definition seems too broad for a denomination that is committed to ecumenical relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. It seems to our committee that every heresy is a theological error; but it is not true that every theological error is a heresy. As such, we do not consider our Baptist brothers and sisters who disagree with our Reformed confessions on baptism to be heretics. Therefore, we desire clarity and precision regarding the definition of *heresy*.

Recommendation

That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to address the proper and ongoing definition and application of the word “heresy” by using one of its regular committees and/or an *ad hoc* committee and then have the Council of Delegates report back to the CRCNA Synod 2020. This committee would be best comprised of members of the appropriate agencies, especially Calvin Theological Seminary.

Grounds:

- a. Overture 7 of CRCNA Synod 2019 links to a 1984 synodical report on apartheid in South Africa. That report defines heresy as follows - “By ‘heresy’ we mean a theological view or doctrine that is in conflict with the teachings of Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed Confessions” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 604). Our advisory committee deems this definition too broad, especially for a denomination that prides itself on our ecumenical involvement with other believers.
- b. The use of *heresy* in Overture 7 is unclear in the context of the 1984 synodical use of *heresy*. The clarity and precision of Overture 7 would be greatly strengthened by a well-researched definition of how the church has historically defined heresy.
- c. A more precise and clear definition of heresy and its use will benefit future work of the CRCNA in its ecclesiastical assemblies.

Mandate

That synod direct the committee appointed to research, determine, and define heresy and its application. This committee would be mandated to provide a precise and clear definition of heresy and its appropriate use. This mandate would help future discussions in the assemblies of the CRCNA when determining what heresy is and what heresy is not.

Composition

That the committee include at least a professor of theology from Calvin Theological Seminary, a professor of church history, an expert in CRCNA church polity, a minister of the Word, and other individuals the Council of Delegates deems appropriate.

4. That synod declare this as its response to Overture 7.

III. Response to Overtures 8 and 25

A. Materials

1. Overture 8, pp. 505-509
2. Overture 25, Agenda Supplement

B. Recommendations

1. That synod not accede to Overture 8 (pp. 505-508).

Grounds:

- a. The first of two concerns expressed in Overture 8 (p. 507) fails to consider that Synod 2012 made an observation rather than an “assertion”—“Synod 2012 . . . also recognized a near-consensus . . . that climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 803).
 - b. The Synod 2012 report is noted by Overture 8 (in referring to many suggestions within the report) as laudable, and has fostered good work through the CRC that we would not want to slow down.
2. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to do historical research on synodical decisions and defining rationale for making those decisions in dealing with political and/or justice matters to report by using one of its regular committees and/or an *ad hoc* group and then have the Council of Delegates to report back to synod in 2020.

Grounds:

- a. Differing political understandings of justice continue to come before Synod, along with the question of what ecclesiastical matters are appropriate to be enacted at the levels of synod, classis, and local councils. In 2019 synod received three overtures (Overtures 6, 8, and 25) that indicate a lack of clarity and consistency on how to apply Church Order Article 28-a.

- b. Both Overtures 8 and 25 reference Church Order 28-a as support for their opposing overtures.
- d. Overture 25 from Classis Grand Rapids East (Agenda for Synod Supplement 2019, p. 2), observes: "Little historical precedent has been set by Synod for how to properly interpret the meaning of 'ecclesiastical', and no Church Order supplements exist to offer further guidance."
- e. Synod makes decisions on various matters and then gives guidance by decision precedent. However, those decision precedents are not readily available in a useful form to guide local council, classes and synod itself.
- f. One of the roles of synod is to instruct and give guidance on matters of Church Order. This is one area that needs further elucidation to better serve our churches.

Task Definition:

The task should focus on historical research on both the praxis and rationale that have guided past synod decisions on political and/or justice matters. The key consideration, per the Advisory Committee comments of Synod 2019, is to fully answer: "What is an ecclesiastical matter and what is the rationale for determining it?" In addition, the report should be written so as to guide future synods. The task should include matters such as, but not limited to:

1. Exploring what "ecclesiastical matters" meant when it first appeared in the Church Order.
2. Doing historical research on past synodical decisions with political and/or justice overtones and identifying the rationale/criteria by which they were determined to be (or not to be) ecclesiastical matters.
3. Discerning from the original intent of the Church Order, as well as the acts of previous synods, how "ecclesiastical matters" should be defined moving forward.
4. Further matters:
 - a. The manner in which political and/or justice matters came before synod: for example, by a person(s), a council, a classis, a synodical study committee, task force, or appointed committee.
 - b. How synod decides what matters are 'ecclesiastical' and therefore permitted to be addressed by the assemblies. Why are some taken up by churches/classis/synods? And others are not.
 - c. The extent to which past synodical actions/decisions might set a precedent that should guide future synodical consideration of which political/justice matters fall within the scope of "ecclesiastical matters."
 - e. Whether the findings could lead to or serve as a supplement to Article 28 on ecclesiastical matters.
3. That synod declare this to be its response to Overtures 8 and 25.