

Position Statements

Over time, the Christian Reformed Church has stated its position on a variety of contemporary topics. The following are summaries of the denomination's doctrinal and ethical positions as stated over the years by synod.

This material is meant to offer clear and concise descriptions of the positions of the CRCNA. For full reports and exact statements of the denomination's position on a particular issue, the reader should look to the references provided. The material is updated after each annual synod.

Synod 1973 appointed the Committee on Synodical Decisions and the Confessions. Its mandate involved two tasks: (1) to compile materials for a publication containing pertinent synodical decisions on doctrinal and ethical matters and (2) to present a clear statement as to how such synodical decisions are related to the confessions. The committee reported to Synod 1975, which approved the original version of the material in this section and adopted the following recommendations of the study committee regarding the relationship of synodical decisions to the confessions:

- The Reformed confessions are subordinate to Scripture, are accepted as a true interpretation of this Word, and are binding on all officebearers and confessing members of the church.
- Synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters are subordinate to the confessions and are "considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order" (Art. 29). All officebearers and members are expected to abide by these decisions.
- The confessions and synodical pronouncements differ in their extent of jurisdiction, in their nature of authority, in their distinction of purposes, in the measure of agreement expected, and in their use and function.
- The use and function of the synodical decisions (i.e., interpretation of the confessions, pronouncements beyond the confessions, adjudication of a particular issue, testimony, guidelines for further study or action, or pastoral advice) are explicitly or implicitly indicated by the wording of the particular decision itself.

For the full report of the 1975 committee and synod's response to it, see *Acts of Synod 1975*, pages 44-45 and 595-604.

Foreword

This compilation of statements is the church's response to a variety of ethical and doctrinal issues over the years but does not contain the complete teachings of the Christian Reformed Church. The CRC is a confessional church in the Calvinist and Reformed tradition and subscribes to the ancient creeds of the church (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed) as well as to the Reformation confessions (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort). Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context. In addition, synod approved the Belhar Confession as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration within the faith life of the CRC. These creeds and confessional and other significant documents can be accessed from the CRC website (www.crcna.org).

Since 1975 the Christian Reformed Church has updated this document containing the doctrinal and ethical decisions of the church. The statements are updated annually to reflect any new synodical decisions. You may access a specific position or download the full version in PDF format for study.

We present this collection of the church's decisions with the expectation that they will be instructive for our members and provide a helpful guide for all who want to know more about the CRC. It is our prayer that God will bless the varied uses of this collection.

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Abortion

Position

Because the CRC believes that all human beings are imagebearers of God, it affirms the unique value of all human life. Mindful of the sixth commandment—"You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13)—the church condemns the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death. The church affirms that an induced abortion is an allowable option only when the life of the mother-to-be is genuinely threatened by the continuation of the pregnancy.

The church calls believers to show Christian compassion and to offer support to those experiencing unwanted pregnancies as well as to those who have undergone abortions. Further, it calls believers to speak out against the atrocity of abortion, to promote action and legislation that reflect the teaching of Scripture regarding the sanctity of human life, and to reject all violence against those who perpetrate abortion.

See also **Life Issues**.

History

The Christian Reformed Church took its official stand on abortion in 1972 in response to overtures and a study committee appointed in 1971. Its synod has dealt with the issue of abortion several times since then. It endorsed the Human Life Amendment in 1976 and urged the churches to do all in their power to protect and promote the sanctity of human life. Synod defeated an overture to designate an annual Sanctity of Human Life Sunday because it was hesitant to add to the number of special Sundays. However, in 1981 and in 1995 it did encourage the churches to give continued attention to this important issue and to use the anniversary date of the United States Supreme Court decision on abortion in the most effective way possible.

In 1996, in response to concern about a Calvin College professor whose position on abortion did not agree with the official position of the CRC, synod noted that synodical decisions do not preclude faculty discussion, debate, or disagreement with the substance of the position taken. Synod reaffirmed its position on abortion in 1997 and condemned the practice of partial-birth abortion. Synod 1998 urged the churches to continue to oppose the atrocity of abortion, to minister to those who do not choose abortion as well as to those who suffer from its aftermath, and to reject all violence against those who perpetrate abortion. Synod 1999 considered an overture to study abortion and pregnancy-related issues along with an overture regarding ethical and theological issues in bioscience, and in response synod appointed a study committee "to examine the biblical/theological/ethical issues raised by the increasing capabilities and recent discoveries in bioscience and genetic engineering" (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 578). Synod 2010 received an overture regarding advocacy of the denominational position opposing abortion and adopted a recommendation "to instruct the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) to boldly advocate for the church's position against abortion, and to help equip churches to promote the sanctity of human life" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 883).

References

- Acts of Synod 1971*, pp. 48, 651, 667, 672
- Acts of Synod 1972*, pp. 63-64, 479-84
- Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 63-64, 667-68
- Acts of Synod 1981*, pp. 61, 593

Acts of Synod 1988, p. 528
Agenda for Synod 1990, p. 478
Acts of Synod 1990, p. 596
Agenda for Synod 1993, p. 283
Acts of Synod 1993, p. 515
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 525-27
Acts of Synod 1995, p. 659
Agenda for Synod 1996, pp. 313-16
Acts of Synod 1996, p. 528
Agenda for Synod 1997, pp. 443-46
Acts of Synod 1997, pp. 604-7
Agenda for Synod 1998, pp. 208-10
Acts of Synod 1998, pp. 401, 432, 442-43
Agenda for Synod 1999, p. 389
Acts of Synod 1999, pp. 578, 625, 637
Agenda for Synod 2010, p. 661-62
Acts of Synod 2010, p. 883

Abuse

Position

Abuse is a sin against the biblical directives that govern human actions and relationships. It is striking evidence of the misery that pervades human life as the result of sin. The failure of men and women and of adults and children to relate to each other in a biblically healthy, affirming manner is the root cause of abuse.

Church councils should publicly acknowledge that the sin of abuse exists even in churches and should take positive steps to make their congregations safe for all persons. They should support efforts to address abuse promptly so that the abused and the abusers may experience the healing power of God's grace, should become aware of the laws and procedures applicable in their areas, and should create continuing-education opportunities for church leaders to become informed and sensitive about abuse issues. They should also adopt procedures to deal immediately and decisively with situations in which a person in a position of authority or influence in the church is alleged to have committed abuse. Synod has encouraged all classes of the CRC to establish Abuse Response Teams (also known as Safe Church Teams).

History

Abuse prevention guidelines were reviewed and revised by various synods and adopted by Synod 1997. In 1994 synod established an Abuse-Prevention Committee, to which a director was appointed. In July 1999 the committee was made accountable to the Board of Trustees and became known as the Office of Abuse Prevention until 2009, when its name changed to reflect its work more comprehensively as the Safe Church Ministry. Synods 2000 and 2001 encouraged all classes to establish Abuse Response Teams. Synod 2002 adopted a policy of zero tolerance in cases of abuse and drafted a resolution expressing empathy with the Roman Catholic Church over its struggle with and the need for healing from abuse. In 2004 the CRC adopted guidelines for handling allegations of abuse against a church leader, and revised procedures were adopted in 2005. The role of advocate established in 2005 was expanded in 2009 to include facilitation of restorative justice measures and equitable remedies for victims. Synod 2010 renamed this position to claimant advocate (Safe Church Trained). For information on restorative justice, see a report on the topic adopted by Synod 2005 (www.crcna.org/SynodResources). Synod 2009 also approved the development of regional advisory panels to enhance accessibility, training, and networking for advocates and abuse victims. Synod 2006 called for the appointment of a task force to consider how the denomination ought to be responding to consequences of sexual abuse. The Abuse Victims Task Force reported its recommendations to Synod 2008, which referred the report back for refinement on some issues needing clarification. After distributing a refined report to the churches, the task force reported to Synod 2010, which adopted all of the task force's recommendations. In summary, synod agreed to

1. urge councils to
 - provide for pastoral care needs in situations of abuse, ensuring that such needs receive immediate attention, drawing on the resources of neighboring congregations, if necessary.
 - develop a plan for providing financial assistance for counseling, when needed, and to follow restorative justice guidelines for restitution in sustained allegations of abuse by a church leader.
 - engage in yearly review of policies and training on abuse prevention and guidelines.
2. reaffirm support and application of restorative justice principles, encouraging churches to do the same and inviting the use of pilot projects to be coordinated by the Safe Church Ministry.

3. urge the development of accessible educational resources and a clear handbook for council members to use in responding to allegations and situations of abuse.

Synod 2010 also issued a declaration confessing that the CRC has "not always justly and compassionately helped those who have been sexually abused" and has "not always justly or adequately disciplined church leaders who have been abusers" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 867).

In 2014 synod adopted a revision of the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) that takes into account the CRC-adopted statements on abuse prevention and restorative justice.

Synod 2015 received an overture requesting that Church Order Supplement, Article 84 be changed "to include address of sexual abuse," and, in response, synod instructed the Board of Trustees "to ask Safe Church Ministry, in concert with other denominational entities" to review and recommend changes, if needed, to Church Order Articles 82-84 and their Supplements regarding suspension, deposition, resignation, and reinstatement to office "in cases of sexual misconduct and sexual abuse" (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 644). In response to its mandate, the committee reported to Synod 2016, recommending various changes after considering imbalance and misuse of power, definitions of terms, and gradations in severity and victim impact, and after consulting with legal experts and with other denominations and agencies regarding their policies (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 675-76, 683-85, 699-717). Synod responded by adopting changes to Supplement, Articles 82-84; a new Supplement, Article 83; and changes to Supplement, Article 84. In connection with these changes, synod also adopted a new Supplement, Article 14-e. (See *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 863-66.)

References

- Agenda for Synod 1989*, pp. 309-10
Acts of Synod 1989, pp. 548-49
Agenda for Synod 1992, pp. 138, 313-58, 482-85
Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 560-61, 567, 671-77, 709, 731
Agenda for Synod 1993, pp. 23, 27, 55, 65, 286-87
Acts of Synod 1993, pp. 544-45, 579
Agenda for Synod 1994, pp. 32, 34, 48-49, 146-54, 191-97
Acts of Synod 1994, pp. 466, 517-18, 527-28
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 178-81, 555-65
Acts of Synod 1995, pp. 672-74, 678, 767, 779-88
Agenda for Synod 1996, pp. 161-62, 322-24
Acts of Synod 1996, pp. 374-81, 562-72, 578-79, 634-42
Agenda for Synod 1997, pp. 187-88, 195-207, 466-79
Acts of Synod 1997, pp. 674-86
Agenda for Synod 1998, pp. 139, 238-40
Acts of Synod 1998, p. 401
Agenda for Synod 1999, pp. 157-58, 453, 466-67
Acts of Synod 1999, pp. 554-55
Agenda for Synod 2000, pp. 32, 36, 523
Acts of Synod 2000, pp. 619-20, 684
Agenda for Synod 2001, pp. 36, 77-78
Acts of Synod 2001, p. 524
Agenda for Synod 2002, pp. 35-36, 47-49, 393

Acts of Synod 2002, pp. 538, 543
Agenda for Synod 2003, pp. 37, 51-53
Acts of Synod 2003, p. 682
Agenda for Synod 2004, pp. 39-40, 56-58
Acts of Synod 2004, p. 551
Agenda for Synod 2005, pp. 35, 54-60, 529-65
Acts of Synod 2005, pp. 761-62, 775-77
Agenda for Synod 2006, pp. 30, 70-73
Acts of Synod 2006, p. 642
Agenda for Synod 2007, pp. 33, 130-32
Acts of Synod 2007, p. 581
Agenda for Synod 2008, pp. 31, 35, 49-51, 324, 329-61
Acts of Synod 2008, pp. 457, 480-81
Agenda for Synod 2009, p. 86
Acts of Synod 2009, pp. 586-87
Agenda for Synod 2010, pp. 475-509, 707-708, 717
Acts of Synod 2010, pp. 862-67, 870
Agenda for Synod 2014, pp. 30, 72-84
Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 569-70
Agenda for Synod 2015, pp. 436-40
Acts of Synod 2015, pp. 644-45
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 675-76, 683-85, 699-717
Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 863-66

Alcohol

Position

Scripture teaches that beverages containing alcohol can be a blessing or a source of evil. Those who drink alcohol must consider its effects on themselves and on others. Abstinence from alcohol may be an appropriate moral response in particular situations, but it is not demanded by Scripture and therefore should not be demanded by the church.

According to Scripture, all Christians must avoid drunkenness. Though abstinence from alcohol is a morally creditable choice, those who, in their freedom in Christ, choose to use alcohol moderately are not to be condemned. The church should provide pastoral care and guidance for alcoholic church members and their families, including intervention and discipline when necessary. In light of what has been learned about the risks involved in the use of beverages containing alcohol, congregations were asked to examine the traditional practice of using wine in the sacrament of holy communion (Lord's Supper). Many churches choose to use grape juice out of deference to worshipers who may struggle with alcohol.

History

Synod 1984 appointed a study committee to provide pastoral guidelines regarding the use and abuse of and addiction to alcohol and other drugs in response to three overtures from Classes Grand Rapids North, Red Mesa, and Rocky Mountain. Its report was adopted by Synod 1986 and recommended to the churches. Included in the report are guidelines for the responsible use of alcohol, intervention with alcoholics, prevention of alcohol abuse, and discipline of clergy and church employees who struggle with alcohol use. An appendix titled "Similarities and Differences Between Alcoholism and Addiction to Other Drugs" was approved in 1987.

References

- Acts of Synod 1861*, p. 186
- Acts of Synod 1865*, p. 53
- Acts of Synod 1866*, p. 74
- Acts of Synod 1902*, p. 58
- Acts of Synod 1916*, p. 49
- Acts of Synod 1934*, pp. 77-78
- Acts of Synod 1942*, p. 87
- Acts of Synod 1962*, pp. 107, 494-95
- Acts of Synod 1963*, pp. 87-88, 446-47
- Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 425-27, 651-52
- Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 462, 805, 826
- Acts of Synod 1986*, pp. 371-421, 668-71
- Acts of Synod 1987*, pp. 371-84, 580-81

Baptism

Position

The sacrament of baptism reminds and assures us that “as surely as water washes away dirt from the body, so certainly [Christ’s] blood and his Spirit wash away . . . all [our] sins” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 69). And because “infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant and are his people,” they, “no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin” and thus “by baptism . . . should be received into the Christian church. . . . This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 74).

In the Christian Reformed Church, baptism is performed by an ordained minister of the Word or commissioned pastor. The usual method of baptism is by the sprinkling of water on the forehead of the person to be baptized, but other methods (such as immersion) may also be used. The CRC employs infant baptism (for children of believing parents) as well as adult baptism (for adults who join but have not previously been baptized in a Christian church); an adult who is baptized is also called upon to make a public profession of his or her faith in Christ.

History

The latest guidelines and forms for baptism in the CRC were approved by Synods 1994 and 2013. In response to an overture, Synod 2000 appointed a committee to study baptism regarding questions that arise about infant baptism as a result of the CRC’s efforts to become more multiethnic and evangelical. Because excellent studies on this subject already exist, synod proposed first that such resources be made more accessible and well-known as an aid to discussions about baptism. Synod 2011 endorsed a document presented by its study committee on faith formation (appointed in 2007), titled “Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith,” as “a guiding document for the work of denominational agencies and congregations in the area of faith formation” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 829). In 2011 synod also affirmed a “principle regarding infant dedication to guide the continuing work of the committee” (p. 831). Synod 2012 reaffirmed that principle and commended to the churches a report titled “Infant Dedication and the Christian Reformed Church,” submitted by the committee, which completed its work in 2013. The baptism form approved by Synod 2013 is closely based on a form adopted in 1994 for use in the Reformed Church in America.

In response to recommendations by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, based on dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, Synod 2011 approved a “Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism,” encouraged CRC congregations to use the language of a common “Certificate of Baptism” in all future baptismal certificates, and received “These Living Waters” as an ecumenical document on baptism, recommending it “to the churches for further study and reflection” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 822).

References

- Agenda for Synod 1994*, pp. 166-77
- Acts of Synod 1994*, pp. 493-94
- Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 502-6
- Acts of Synod 2000*, pp. 709-10
- Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 344-45, 350-440, 550-69, 612-21
- Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 822, 829, 831-32
- Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 422-40
- Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 772, 774-75

Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 319, 321, 323, 327-28, 333-39
Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 552-53

Bible: Authority

Position

Scripture, the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ, addresses us with full divine authority in its total extent and in all its parts, and therefore the CRC speaks of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God. The authority of Scripture is inseparable from the historical reality of the events recorded in it. Interpreted historical events are presented in Scripture not simply as isolated events but for their revelational meaning. Scripture is self-authenticating; it is not dependent on the findings of science, but these findings may lead to a better understanding of Scripture and must be developed within a Christian community faithful to the authority of Scripture.

Biblical studies must be done carefully, with emphasis on what Scripture itself says and without the use of interpretive methods that exclude or question the event character or revelational intent of biblical history and thereby compromise the full authority of the Word of God. Freedom of interpretation within the bounds of Scripture and of the creeds is to be respected. The authority of Scripture is to be believed and confessed as an article of faith and is to be consistently applied and practiced in the life and ministry of the church.

History

The issue of biblical authority was raised because of theological unrest in the Netherlands in 1969 and the influence of that unrest on the CRC. The initial overtures on this subject, to Synod 1969, were concerned about CRC seminarians going to study at the Free University of Amsterdam, where professors were teaching new methods of interpreting Scripture, especially the first chapters of Genesis. Synod 1968 denied the overtures to look into the matter because they concerned teachings of men from another denomination. However, the following year, synod agreed that the issue was also affecting the CRC and therefore commissioned a study committee. In 1971 the report of that study committee was referred to the churches and to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. In 1972 seven recommendations from the report were adopted, and the report was published for further study under the title "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority." Objections to the report in subsequent years were not sustained by synod.

References

- Acts of Synod 1968*, pp. 93-95, 574-77, 584, 588
- Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 101, 501-4
- Acts of Synod 1970*, pp. 53, 240
- Acts of Synod 1971*, pp. 102-3, 106, 128, 459-95, 664-65
- Acts of Synod 1972*, pp. 66-69, 493-546, 627-28, 641, 644-47
- Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 33-34, 46, 717, 731-33
- Acts of Synod 1974*, pp. 105, 644-45
- Acts of Synod 1977*, pp. 98-101, 682-84, 699

Bible: Inspiration and Infallibility

Position

Holy Scripture in its entirety is the written Word of God, inspired by God to be our rule of faith and practice. This inspiration is organic, extending to the ideas and the words of Scripture, and is so unique that Scripture alone is the Word of God. The human authors of Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit so that their writing, reflecting their own personalities, language, and style, communicates infallibly God's self-revelation. Belief in the inspiration of Scripture, required by Scripture itself and by our Lord and his apostles, is indispensable to Christian faith. The infallibility of Scripture is inferred from inspiration, and the inspiration of Scripture secures its infallibility.

History

The CRC affirmed its belief in the inspiration of Scripture in 1959 in response to a study report from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Because of a controversy over the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture in 1959, which involved students and faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary, synod appointed a committee to study the relationship between these issues. Its report was adopted in 1961.

References

Acts of Synod 1959, pp. 63-64, 65-71, 73-74, 250-51, 563-76
Acts of Synod 1960, pp. 24, 71, 240, 458, 463
Acts of Synod 1961, pp. 76-79, 100-1, 253-328, 546, 563-65

Birth Control

Position

Synod 2003 declared that a married couple's decision whether or not to use birth control is a private, disputable matter. The church urges married couples to consider the size of their families prayerfully and encourages them to be motivated by a desire to glorify God and further his kingdom in their family planning.

See also **Life Issues**.

History

In response to an overture from Classis Grand Rapids East, Synod 1934 appointed a committee to study the issue of birth control in view of its widespread practice and the concern of church members regarding the Lord's will in this matter. In an era of birthrate decline, Synod 1936 appointed a special committee that wrote the "Birth Control Testimony," which synod adopted. It called married church members to fulfill one of the purposes of marriage, which is to beget children. It also testified against the "growing evil of selfish birth restriction" and "indiscriminate dissemination of contraceptive information." In 1971 three individuals overtured synod to reconsider the church's position on birth control in light of the concern about overpopulation, the possibility of governmental population control, the use of birth-control devices, and the need for a clear witness to the world. Synod defeated a recommendation to appoint a committee to study the matter but urged those with special competence in these subject areas to serve the church with published articles showing a biblical perspective.

In later years, practice regarding birth control changed considerably. Synod 1999 considered an overture to study abortion and pregnancy-related issues along with an overture regarding ethical and theological issues in bioscience; in response synod appointed a study committee "to examine the biblical/theological/ethical issues raised by the increasing capabilities and recent discoveries in bioscience and genetic engineering" (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 578). In response to an overture presented in 2003 (and in contrast to the decision made in 1936), synod declared "that a married couple's decision whether or not to use birth control to prevent the conception of a baby is a private, disputable matter," urged that married couples "consider the size of their families prayerfully before God," and encouraged couples "in their family planning, to be motivated by a desire to glorify God and to further his kingdom and not by selfish reasons or fear of the future" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 648).

References

- Acts of Synod 1906*, pp. 52-53
- Acts of Synod 1930*, p. 140
- Acts of Synod 1934*, pp. 125-27
- Acts of Synod 1936*, pp. 12, 136-38
- Acts of Synod 1971*, pp. 55, 132, 643-46
- Agenda for Synod 1999*, p. 389
- Acts of Synod 1999*, pp. 578, 625
- Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 430-32
- Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 644-48

Capital Punishment

Position

The CRC has declared that modern states are not obligated by Scripture, creed, or principle to institute and practice capital punishment. It does, however, recognize that Scripture acknowledges the right of modern states to institute and practice capital punishment if it is exercised with utmost restraint.

A study report adopted by Synod 1981 states that "capital punishment should . . . pertain . . . only to those exceptional instances . . . as are called forth by a substantial threat to the foundation and structure of a free and responsible democratic society, and thus to the safety and welfare of the people" and that the administration of justice should be surrounded "with such safeguards as will tend maximally to preserve and enhance life." The report concluded, "Given that human life is sacred, that the magistrate is fallible, that time for repentance is desirable, and that imprisonment will normally satisfy the demand for justice . . . it is not desirable that capital punishment be routinely inflicted upon persons guilty of murder in the first degree. Only under exceptional circumstances should the state resort to capital punishment" (*Acts of Synod 1981*, pp. 72-73, 489-91).

History

In the 1970s the issue of capital punishment was under a great deal of discussion in both the secular and religious worlds. The CRC began to study the issue formally in 1976 and adopted the recommendations of a study committee report in 1981. That report remains the most current study of capital punishment in the CRC, and its recommendations have not been challenged or altered in subsequent years.

References

Acts of Synod 1976, pp. 105-6, 668-74

Acts of Synod 1979, pp. 45-46, 137, 468-508

Acts of Synod 1981, pp. 72-73, 448-91

Christian Education

Position

The CRC as a covenantal community is committed to Christian schools as the social agent that can make Christian education effective in the totality of life. The church instructs its youth in the fundamentals of the Christian faith by teaching from the creeds and confessions as part of its church education programs. Though the CRC does not own and operate Christian day schools, it affirms that Christian school education is a communal as well as a parental responsibility. Churches and groups of churches are therefore encouraged to provide congregational support so that the church's children can be educated in a way that acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ in all subject areas. After adopting a report on Christian day school education in 2005, synod recommended that church members be involved in establishing and maintaining Christian schools that teach the biblical, Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation.

History

The CRC has supported the establishment and growth of Christian schools since the beginning of its history. In 1870, 1881, 1892, and 1898, synod made special declarations to that effect. Synod 1955 adopted a study committee report on the principles of Christian education. Synod 1971 broadened the scope of ecclesiastical endorsement from Christian day schools to Christian education from elementary school through institutions of higher learning.

Churches and groups of churches are encouraged "to develop and promote plans for congregational support so that all the church's children have an opportunity to receive an education where the lordship of Jesus Christ is acknowledged" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 626-27). In 2005 synod adopted a report on Christian day school education (*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 352-481, 765-75; see www.crcna.org/SynodResouces) and recommends that churches "diligently encourage . . . [their] members . . . to establish and maintain . . . good Christian schools in which the biblical, Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation is clearly taught."

References

- Acts of Synod 1870*, p. 132
- Acts of Synod 1881*, p. 17
- Acts of Synod 1892*, p. 12
- Acts of Synod 1898*, pp. 24-25
- Acts of Synod 1951*, p. 44
- Acts of Synod 1953*, pp. 147, 507-9
- Acts of Synod 1955*, pp. 48, 193-200
- Acts of Synod 1971*, p. 126
- Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 525
- Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 314-97
- Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 618-20, 626-31, 704
- Agenda for Synod 2005*, pp. 352-481
- Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 765-75

Church and State

Position

The state is instituted by God and is endowed with power so that it may promote, within the limits of its authority, the maintenance of human life and its development in agreement with God's law. The state is called to protect the church with all the means given to it by God in order that freedom of conscience to serve God be guaranteed and anti-Christian powers which threaten the church be resisted and prevented.

The church recognizes and honors the state for its God-given power and service, faithfully proclaims the gospel to all in the state, and prays for all people, including those who are in authority, so that all may lead quiet and peaceable lives (1 Tim. 2:1-2). The state should not assume the right and power of the only King of the church, Jesus Christ, and should recognize that the church owes allegiance and responsibility to him alone.

History

The discussion of this topic in the CRC centered on questions raised about Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, which deals with the civil government. In 1943 a committee was assigned to study the matter. Its proposals were first sent to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which in 1949 adopted a declaration concerning the relationship of church and state. This declaration was approved by the CRC in 1958 as was a revision of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. (The previous English translation was judged unbiblical because it asserted that it is the duty of the state to see to it that the Word of the gospel is preached everywhere.)

References

Acts of Synod 1938, pp. 16-20

Acts of Synod 1943, pp. 107-14, 415-51

Acts of Synod 1946, pp. 38, 398-428

Acts of Synod 1947, pp. 83-85

Acts of Synod 1952, p. 68

Acts of Synod 1954, pp. 49-50

Acts of Synod 1958, pp. 28-31, 174-80

Acts of Synod 1963, pp. 36, 466-67

Acts of Synod 1964, p. 71

See also Belgic Confession, Article 36; and the 2008 version of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, Articles 52-54.

Common Grace

Position

In 1924 the CRC articulated its position regarding God's general favor to all creatures. This common favor is referred to as "common grace" to distinguish it from God's "special (saving) grace." The essence of the position is contained in the following points:

- In addition to the saving grace of God, shown only to those who are elected to eternal life, there is also a certain favor, or grace, of God shown to his creatures in general.
- Since the fall, human life in society remains possible because God, through his Spirit, restrains the power of sin.
- God, without renewing the heart, so influences human beings that, though incapable of doing any saving good, they are able to do civil good.

History

These three points regarding common grace were adopted by the CRC in 1924. Controversy on this subject led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Church in 1924. In 1959, when asked to set aside these points by a group from that denomination desiring to rejoin the CRC (the De Wolf group), synod refused. These points, therefore, still stand as the position of the CRC. Synod 1924 also warned against an over-emphasis on the doctrine of common grace, deciding that there was more danger of conformity to the world than of flight from the world.

References

Acts of Synod 1924, pp. 113-50

Acts of Synod 1926, pp. 108-31

Acts of Synod 1959, pp. 23, 110-16, 417-24

Acts of Synod 1960, pp. 113-15

Acts of Synod 1961, pp. 68-70, 561

Creation and Science

Position

All of life, including scientific endeavor, must be lived in obedience to God and in subjection to his Word. Therefore we encourage Christian scholarship that integrates faith and learning. The church does not impose an authorized interpretation of specific passages in Scripture; nor does it canonize certain scientific hypotheses. Instead, it insists that all theological interpretations and all scientific theories be subject to Scripture and the confessions.

Humanity is created in the image of God; all theorizing that minimizes this fact and all theories of evolution that deny the creative activity of God are rejected.

History

The CRC first dealt with this issue in relation to statements made by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) in 1949. After the CRC objected to some of these statements in 1953, the RES restudied the issue and amended its statements in 1958. In 1966 synod received overtures to study the issues of creation and evolution and appointed a committee to suggest the membership and mandate of such a study commission. Synod 1967 decided the study was not necessary and left further research into the matter to the faith community.

That research led to some difficult times at Calvin College and Seminary. In 1983 the seminary reported on discussions held with one professor regarding his views on the topic. In 1988 the Calvin College Board of Trustees reported to synod on its dealings with three professors whose positions on this matter had been criticized in the church and in the media. Synod also received thirty-two overtures about the issue. Synod 1988 affirmed the college board's decision and appointed a study committee on creation and science. The committee reported in 1991, when a large number of overtures were also brought to synod objecting to the report.

Synod 1991 adopted six declarations regarding creation and science. It intensively debated the matter of evolutionary forebears of human beings. In Declaration F of that decision, synod stated that the espousal of theories that posit the reality of evolutionary forebears of the human race is ruled out by Scripture and the Reformed confessions, but it also added a note that this declaration is not meant to limit further investigation and discussion on the topic. In response to an overture in 2010, synod noted that Declaration F "appears contradictory and confusing" and declared that it "no longer be part of the CRCNA's official position statement on creation and science" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 875). The remaining declarations (A-E) constitute the position of the CRC as summarized in the above position statement.

In response to requests by Synods 2011 and 2012, Calvin College provided a report to Synod 2014 titled *Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* summarizing "the college's commitments and practices at the intersection of confessional commitments, academic freedom, and controversial issues such as human origins" (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 137). Synod 2014 also received an overture requesting a study of recent theologies regarding the Genesis accounts of creation and the fall into sin. Though it did not accede to the overture's recommendations, synod instructed the CRC's Board of Trustees "to encourage Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, in concert with other CRC-related institutions of higher education," to organize open conversations and supply a list of resources on the relationship of science and theology, "especially as they relate to the doctrines of creation, the fall, original sin, and the atonement" (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 567). A committee of faculty members from both the college and seminary, formed in 2014, met for a discussion with representatives

from Dordt College in 2015. Prior to Synod 2016, Prof. Loren Haarsma of Calvin College led a session on “Creation, Evolution, Design, and Human Origins,” and Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary submitted to Synod 2016 a list of “Resources on the Relationship of Science and Theology” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 152-53, 766, 768-74; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848).

References

- Acts of Synod 1951*, pp. 45, 101
Acts of Synod 1953, pp. 123-24, 181-82
Acts of Synod 1954, p. 82
Acts of Synod 1959, pp. 81, 251-56
Acts of Synod 1966, pp. 75-78, 95, 103-4, 546-50, 552
Acts of Synod 1967, pp. 76-77, 335-38
Acts of Synod 1983, pp. 521-23, 644-46
Acts of Synod 1988, pp. 385-87, 436-64, 591-99, 637-38
Agenda for Synod 1989, pp. 35, 320-44, 347-48
Acts of Synod 1989, pp. 391, 399, 519-20
Agenda for Synod 1990, pp. 27-28, 456-57
Acts of Synod 1990, pp. 622, 717
Agenda for Synod 1991, pp. 362-433, 482-96, 502-7
Acts of Synod 1991, pp. 636-44, 762-68, 773-77, 815
Agenda for Synod 1992, pp. 486-88
Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 638-39
Agenda for Synod 1994, pp. 276-79
Acts of Synod 1994, pp. 451, 522, 524
Agenda for Synod 2010, pp. 697-700
Acts of Synod 2010, pp. 872-75
Agenda for Synod 2014, pp. 132, 136-76, 408-20
Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 542, 566-67
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 152-53, 766, 768-74
Acts of Synod 2016, p. 848

Creation Care

Position

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," says Psalm 24:1, and just as God placed human beings "in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15), so the Lord calls us, the crown of his creation (Ps. 8:5), to be stewards of his natural world. As a church we "affirm a commitment to work vigorously to protect and heal the creation for the glory of the Creator, as we wait for the restoration of the creation to wholeness" (*Agenda for Synod 2010*, p. 46). "We lament that our abuse of creation has brought lasting damage to the world we have been given: polluting streams and soil, poisoning the air, altering the climate, and damaging the earth. We commit ourselves to honor all God's creatures and to protect them from abuse and extinction, for our world belongs to God" (*Our World Belongs to God*, para. 51). We uphold "biblical principles of responsible dominion, care, and stewardship of creation," recognizing that our continually growing knowledge about God's world should "guide us in our love of God and neighbors, including care for the creation"; "even when scientific uncertainties are taken into account," we are compelled to address "human-induced climate change" as "an ethical, social justice, and religious issue"; we are therefore called to be "voices for justice and public examples in the effort to live sustainably within our God-given resources, to promote stewardship in our own communities and our nations," and to "examine energy choices" in our daily life and work "from a perspective of stewardship, challenging ourselves to use less energy and to use it more wisely" while seeking "justice for the poor and vulnerable among us and for future generations" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 803-805).

History

In response to concerns about stewardship of the world in which we live, Synod 2008 called for a webpage that would offer "up-to-date and effective resources" regarding ecological and environmental awareness consistent with "the Denominational Ministries Plan and its call to practice justice and mercy and exercise stewardship of God's resources" (*Acts of Synod 2008*, pp. 460-61).

Synod 2010 received a report and recommendations regarding creation care in the CRC and recognized "the Micah Network Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change as speaking to its concern for and responsibility toward creation" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 871). Synod also called for assembly of a task force "to identify a biblical and Reformed perspective on creation stewardship," including a discussion of climate change (p. 871). The task force submitted its report to Synod 2012, and synod adopted numerous related recommendations and commended the report "to the churches as a guide for prayer and discussion, and for direct action and advocacy when and where appropriate" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 805).

References

- Agenda for Synod 2008*, pp. 227-30, 269-74
- Acts of Synod 2008*, pp. 458-61
- Agenda for Synod 2010*, pp. 30, 46-51
- Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 870-72
- Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 287-411
- Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 802-807

Dance

Position

The human capability and inclination to dance are rooted in creation, not in the fall. Dance is a valid expression of God's image displayed through the artistic sensitivity and sociability of his creatures. Along with every other created human capability, however, dance suffers from our fallen and sinful condition. As a result, Christians are not to reject dance but to redeem it, realizing that some forms of dancing are more difficult to redeem than others.

History

In the late 1970s Calvin College decided to allow social dancing on its campus as a wholesome recreational activity. Its request for synod's response led to a study entitled "Dance and the Christian Life," which was commissioned in 1978, recommended to the churches for study in 1980, and brought to Synod 1982. That synod reaffirmed the position of 1966 on the relationship of the Christian to the world and on the exercise of Christian liberty. It also adopted recommendations regarding dance as a cultural expression, Christian evaluation of dance forms, and guidelines regarding dance for Christian institutions. The Liturgical Committee of CRC Publications was asked to study the use of liturgical dance in worship, and it reported on that matter in 1985. Synod received the report as information and referred it to the churches but withheld action regarding the implementation of liturgical dance.

References

- Acts of Synod 1971*, pp. 139, 609-23
- Acts of Synod 1977*, pp. 97, 210-11, 214-24
- Acts of Synod 1978*, pp. 106-7, 129, 167-71, 650, 652, 655
- Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 79-81, 103, 448-66
- Acts of Synod 1982*, pp. 86-91, 556-75
- Acts of Synod 1983*, pp. 39, 499-500, 673
- Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 198-99, 437-38, 594, 631, 656
- Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 242-57, 638-39, 785-87

Disabilities

Position

The church pledges to be a caring community, recognizing the needs and gifts of people with physical, emotional, sensory, and intellectual disabilities. Through ministries such as the Office of Disability Concerns (crcna.org/disability), in collaboration with Friendship Ministries (Friendship.org) and the Disability Concerns office of the Reformed Church in America (rca.org/disability-awareness), the CRC urges all churches and members to work toward eliminating physical and architectural barriers, attitudinal barriers that make persons with disabilities feel unwelcome, and communication barriers in sight, sound, and understanding. Using the theme “Everybody Belongs. Everybody Serves,” all churches, classes, and educational institutions are encouraged to sponsor events celebrating a Disability Week each year in October. Each classis is encouraged to identify at least one person to serve as a regional disability advocate, and each church is encouraged to adopt a church policy on disability and to appoint at least one member as a church disability advocate.

History

In 1977 Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, decided to phase out its inpatient care for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, following a national trend from institutional to residential care. This action created a hardship for a number of Christian Reformed families, and in 1978 Classis Rocky Mountain overtured synod to appoint a committee to study the issue; the resulting committee completed a study and then served until 1986 as a service committee of synod, at which time it became a standing committee. Since 1987 that committee has been known as Disability Concerns.

In 1985 synod adopted A Resolution on Disabilities, which continues to represent the CRC's position. Synod 1993 recommended full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act in all portions of the CRC in the United States and Canada. Synod 2000 encouraged all classes “to establish a network of disability-concerns consultants and congregational contacts to work in cooperation with the office of Disability Concerns.” Recent summaries of questionnaire results and progress reports are included in the *Agenda for Synod 2006* (pp. 77-80) and the *Agenda for Synod 2008* (pp. 54-57). Synod 2009 adopted a request by Disability Concerns to encourage churchwide celebrations of an annual Disability Week each October. Synod 2011 declared that future meetings of synod will provide reasonable accommodations as recommended by the Office of Disability Concerns for “all participants, including but not limited to people with known hearing impairments, sight impairments, and mobility impairments” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 817).

In 2013 synod adopted a recommendation to “encourage all Christian Reformed churches to adopt a church policy on disability and to appoint at least one person in the congregation to serve as a church disability advocate” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 612-13). In 2014 the Office of Disability Concerns updated its mandate in collaboration with the Disability Concerns office of the Reformed Church in America, and Synod 2014 approved a recommendation to encourage inclusion of and engagement with children and youth who have disabilities “as an important part of congregational ministries and denominational youth ministry programs” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 557). Synod 2016 approved a recommendation to “[1] encourage Christian Reformed classes to identify at least one person to serve as a regional disability advocate, and [2] encourage each classis to invite their regional advocate to report to classis at least once per year” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 832-33).

References

Acts of Synod 1978, pp. 61-62, 129, 648-50
Acts of Synod 1979, pp. 78-80, 662-78
Acts of Synod 1980, pp. 37, 214-15
Acts of Synod 1981, pp. 51-52, 114, 532-46
Acts of Synod 1982, pp. 57, 593-95
Acts of Synod 1985, pp. 348-52, 490, 702-703, 825
Agenda for Synod 1986, pp. 276-81
Acts of Synod 1986, pp. 627-28, 713
Agenda for Synod 1987, pp. 140-46
Acts of Synod 1987, pp. 553-56
Agenda for Synod 1992, pp. 133-42
Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 621-23
Agenda for Synod 1993, pp. 168-74
Acts of Synod 1993, pp. 381-405, 539, 542-43
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 187-90
Acts of Synod 1995, pp. 677-78
Agenda for Synod 2000, pp. 66-68, 70-72
Acts of Synod 2000, p. 620
Agenda for Synod 2006, pp. 77-80
Agenda for Synod 2008, pp. 54-57
Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 44, 91-92
Acts of Synod 2009, pp. 587-88
Acts of Synod 2011, pp. 703, 714-15, 817-18
Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 44-45, 193
Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 612-13
Agenda for Synod 2014, pp. 36-37, 85-87
Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 557-59
Acts of Synod 2015, p. 671
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 39-40, 47-48
Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 832-33

Diversity
See Race Relations

Divorce and Remarriage

Position

Marriage is an institution created by God. It is a covenant relationship established by mutual vows between a man and a woman united by God. Permanent unity in marriage is possible in Christ and is demanded of Christ's disciples who are married. Marriages should not be dissolved; divorce is contrary to God's will. However, by persistent and unrepented sin, people can separate what God has joined together. Scripture acknowledges that certain actions and attitudes that occur in a sinful world and conflict with God's will can destroy a marriage relationship.

Since failure to keep the marriage covenant is sin, the church must exercise a ministry of reconciliation and call marriage partners to confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewed obedience. The church must minister with special concern to those involved in the traumatic experience of divorce, speaking with clarity where sinful conduct is overt and apparent and exercising formal discipline when there is disdain for biblical teaching and when repentance is beyond hope. The church must be a place of acceptance and support for those who have been divorced and for their children.

The church should neither issue a clear prohibition against remarriage nor attempt to list with legal precision the circumstances under which remarriage does not conflict with biblical teaching. The church must apply biblical principles to concrete situations in the light of its best understanding of what happened in a particular divorce and what is being planned for a particular remarriage.

History

The subject of divorce was dealt with in the context of marriage and divorce. For a concise history of these matters see the entry Marriage.

References

- Acts of Synod 1908*, pp. 31, 39, 42
- Acts of Synod 1947*, pp. 17, 47, 65-69, 77-80, 238-45
- Acts of Synod 1952*, pp. 20-23, 123-52
- Acts of Synod 1956*, pp. 15-17, 55-59, 117-19, 285-327, 379-80
- Acts of Synod 1957*, pp. 87-90, 93-95, 105-7, 335-47
- Acts of Synod 1968*, pp. 60-61, 577-78
- Acts of Synod 1971*, pp. 112, 148, 632-40
- Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 58-59, 108, 595-607, 744-45
- Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 104, 488-514
- Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 38-39, 85, 104, 458-96
- Acts of Synod 1977*, pp. 134-37, 149, 510-48, 681-82, 691-94, 697-99
- Acts of Synod 1979*, pp. 45, 137, 467
- Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 40-41, 467-85, 592
- Acts of Synod 1981*, pp. 62, 614-17
- Acts of Synod 1983*, pp. 671-72
- Agenda for Synod 1994*, p. 239
- Acts of Synod 1994*, p. 485

Ecumenicity

Position

The church is called to testify to what it already is - spiritually one in Christ - and to what it should become - visibly one in Christ. Church unity is therefore both a gift and a goal. The local church and the worldwide church are to be one body and are to strive for the unity that still eludes them. The church carries out its ecumenical task because the fragmentation of the body of Christ is contrary to his will. But uniformity is not essential for church unity. Various local, regional, and national churches will differ widely in history, tradition, custom, language, way of life, and mode of thinking. The unity of the church allows for diversity in worship, confessional formulas, and church order.

On the way to achieving unity, major differences in the perception of biblical truth need to be discussed and, if possible, resolved. God can be trusted to teach all who engage in ecumenical dialogue and thereby will unite us through a common understanding of his truth. In the search for unity we may not compromise the biblical message and, at the same time, guard against the presumption of possessing the truth in all of its fullness. Churches ought to seek healing for past wounds by overcoming differences with those who are closest to them. The Christian Reformed Church in North America gives high priority to relations with other Reformed churches but also wishes to engage churches of other traditions such as non-Reformed Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and Orthodox churches. Revisions of the ecumenical charter of the CRC adopted by Synods 2006 and 2010 make provision for these differing forms of relationship and reflect the present ecumenical stance of the CRC as part of the body of Christ worldwide. In addition, the church's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee engages in interfaith dialogue "to foster better understanding between people of differing faiths living in a pluralistic society" (*Agenda for Synod 2010*, p. 448).

History

In 1944 the CRC synod adopted twelve propositions on ecumenicity. Forty years later the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) addressed the need for a new ecumenical charter through an ad hoc committee that reported to Synod 1985. After the proposed ecumenical charter was sent to the churches for response, Synod 1987 amended and adopted it. This ecumenical charter contained in detail the principles that are summarized in the position stated above. In 1996 the IRC reported that it was again reviewing the ecumenical charter. In 1997 an overture from Classis Grand Rapids East asking for a new strategy for ecumenical work was referred by synod to the IRC. Synod adopted a new ecumenical charter in 2000 and revisions in 2006 and 2010.

In 2009 synod agreed with a proposal by the IRC to change its name to the Ecumenical Relations Committee. In 2010 synod agreed with a further recommendation that the committee would be more accurately named the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC). Also, in response to a request from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa to Reformed churches throughout the world, Synod 2009 voted to introduce and promote study of the Belhar Confession (which calls for faithfulness in unity, justice, and reconciliation) in preparation for consideration of a proposal to Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. In 2012 synod adopted the Belhar as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration and recommended it to the churches "for study and for incorporation of its themes into their discipling and liturgical ministries" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 767). In 2013 the EIRC noted that ecumenical partners have expressed interest in the Ecumenical Faith Declaration concept, and synod encouraged continued discussion toward identifying criteria that would help define this new category of church documentation. In 2014 the EIRC provided an update on this discussion after hosting a conference of ecumenical partners, and synod instructed the

EIRC “to continue its assessment of the place of the Belhar Confession in the life and ministry of the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 565). In 2015 the EIRC expressed concern that in the ecumenical community most of the CRC’s ecumenical partners did not find the category of Ecumenical Faith Declaration helpful in their context Synod 2015 took note of “the problematic nature” of this category (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 543, 545, 636), and Synod 2016 directed the EIRC to “report on the confusion” over this matter “as identified by our ecumenical partners” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 913). Synod also proposed “that Synod 2017 recategorize the Belhar Confession” as a contemporary testimony in the CRC (*Acts 2016*, p. 913). In the meantime, at the EIRC’s request, synod has further encouraged the congregations of the CRC to study and incorporate the themes of the Belhar Confession “into their discipling and liturgical ministries” (*Acts 2015*, p. 636).

In light of revisions approved by Synod 2010 to the ecumenical charter of the CRC, revisions to Church Order Articles 49 and 50 were also adopted by Synod 2010. That year synod also approved additions to the EIRC mandate “to reflect the responsibility for interfaith dialogue” (*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 827-28).

In response to recommendations by the EIRC, based on dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, Synod 2011 approved a “Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism,” encouraged CRC congregations to use the language of a common “Certificate of Baptism” in all future baptismal certificates, and received “These Living Waters” and “This Bread of Life” as ecumenical documents on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, respectively, recommending them “to the churches for further study and reflection” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 822). In addition, Synod 2011 requested its publishing agency, Faith Alive Christian Resources, to “explore with the educational and publishing agencies of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ the possibility of jointly preparing educational materials on the documents produced by the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue on the sacraments” (p. 823).

In other action, Synod 2011 adopted a combined CRC/RCA translation of the three Reformed standards (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) for use in both the CRC and the Reformed Church in America (*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 853-54). In addition, Synod 2011 met in a joint session with General Synod 2011 of the RCA, in which representatives of both denominations described collaborative work in ministry in the CRC and RCA and affirmed a “Resolution for the Common Translation of the Three Reformed Standards” (pp. 882-83). In 2014 the synods of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America met simultaneously in Pella, Iowa, and held joint sessions at which they celebrated their collaborative efforts in ministry in recent years and adopted a joint resolution of cooperation and fellowship to formally recognize their cooperative ventures.

References

- Acts of Synod 1944*, pp. 83-85, 330-67
- Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 201, 237-41, 728-29
- Agenda for Synod 1986*, p. 194
- Acts of Synod 1986*, p. 613
- Agenda for Synod 1987*, pp. 156-57, 170-75, 451-52
- Acts of Synod 1987*, pp. 587-90
- Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 387
- Agenda for Synod 1997*, pp. 232, 479-80
- Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 637
- Agenda for Synod 1998*, p. 181

Acts of Synod 1998, p. 377
Agenda for Synod 2000, pp. 202, 245-53
Acts of Synod 2000, pp. 670-71
Agenda for Synod 2006, pp. 290-304
Acts of Synod 2006, p. 714
Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 242, 248-52, 269-313
Acts of Synod 2009, pp. 577, 589, 604-607
Agenda for Synod 2010, pp. 421-23, 429-50
Acts of Synod 2010, pp. 826-28
Agenda for Synod 2011, pp. 27-28, 179-298, 344-46, 350-510
Acts of Synod 2011, pp. 822-23, 848-54, 882-83
Agenda for Synod 2012, pp. 232-56
Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 765-67
Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 223-28
Agenda for Synod 2014, pp. 261-67, 269-75, 278-86
Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 502-505, 564-65
Acts of Synod 2015, pp. 543, 545, 636
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 324-25
Acts of Synod 2016, p. 912-13

Eschatology

Position

Although the Christian Reformed Church is generally amillennialist in its eschatology and especially in its interpretation of the book of Revelation, its assemblies have never made a specific pronouncement to that effect. In response to a theological challenge to its underlying eschatology, the synod of the CRC adopted the following succinct statements in 1920, which implicitly reject dispensationalism and some facets of premillennialism:

- . . . according to our creeds there is not the least bit of doubt in regard to
1. The unity of the church of all ages, [ancient] Israel not excluded. The church of all ages is one in essence.
 2. The kingship of Christ. Christ is not only head of the church as an organic unity but also king of his church in the juridical sense of the word.

History

Synod dealt with an eschatological matter in 1918 and 1920 that became known as the Bultema Case and that resulted in the deposition of Rev. Harry Bultema. Rev. Bultema had authored a book titled *Maranatha*, in which he tried to graft premillennialism into Reformed theology. In response to overtures about the Bultema case, synod declared his views to be contrary to the confessions of the church. The particular views were that the church did not exist until after Christ and that Christ was King not of the church but of Israel. Synod 1918 affirmed that "the church of all ages is essentially one," "Israel not excluded," and that Christ is "emphatically King of His Church." Although Bultema's consistory (First CRC of Muskegon) refused to discipline him, the classis deposed him in 1919. Legal battles over church property ensued. In 1920 representatives of Bultema's church and groups in Grand Rapids, Grand Haven, Holland, Moline, and Chicago met to form a new denomination, the Berean Reformed Church.

Synod never commissioned a study on this subject. However, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) did have a study committee on eschatology that reported in 1972. Synod 1974 recommended the study committee's report to the CRC churches for study. Synod 1975 found the RES study insufficient but decided not to ask the RES for a more detailed study.

References

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Acts of Synod 1920, pp. 73-74, 96-97

Acts of Synod 1975, pp. 20, 467-70

Acts of the RES, 1963, pp. 34-36, 66-91

Acts of the RES, 1972, pp. 128-45

Beets, Henry. *The Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1923*, pp. 116-18 Kromminga, John. *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy, 1949*

Euthanasia

Position

Synod has made no official statement on euthanasia. However, in its position on abortion, the church condemned “the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death” (*Acts of Synod 1972*, p. 64). A report on end of life issues presented in 2000 provides guidance on thinking through a biblical position on euthanasia and end of life issues (see www.crcna.org/SynodResources).

See also **Life Issues**.

History

In 1997 Classis Chatham requested the appointment of a committee to study the issue of euthanasia. Since the Committee for Contact with Government of the Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada was already working on a study dealing with end-of-life issues, synod asked it to adapt that study for presentation to a future synod. Its report on "responsibility and community at the end of life" was presented to Synod 2000, and many of its pastoral and public policy recommendations were adopted. The churches were reminded of their responsibilities toward families, members, the health-care community, and public policy.

References

Agenda for Synod 1997, pp. 442-43

Acts of Synod 1997, p. 608

Agenda for Synod 1998, pp. 24-25

Agenda for Synod 2000, pp. 425-48

Acts of Synod 2000, pp. 685-86, 706-9, 724

Film Arts

Position

Film is a legitimate cultural medium to be used by Christians in the fulfillment of the cultural mandate. They must exercise responsible, Spirit-guided, and enlightened discrimination in the use of film arts, rejecting the message of products that sanction sin. The church must educate its members in the discriminate use of film arts, engage in constructive critique of the film arts, and may certainly work to produce Christian films, videos, and television.

See also **Worldly Amusements**.

History

The CRCNA made its first official declaration on the topic of film arts in a warning against movie-theater attendance in 1928. In 1949 synod decided to study the issue again, and in 1951 it clarified previous declarations. In response to an overture in 1964, synod appointed a committee to study the matter of the church and film. Two years later synod adopted declarations on "The Church and the Film Arts," which became the position of the CRCNA. The film arts were then considered a legitimate cultural medium to be used with discernment by Christians.

References

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- Acts of Synod 1928*, pp. 86-89
- Acts of Synod 1932*, pp. 36-37
- Acts of Synod 1940*, pp. 95-98, 186-97
- Acts of Synod 1944*, pp. 30-32, 368-69
- Acts of Synod 1949*, pp. 47, 51-55
- Acts of Synod 1950*, pp. 19, 148
- Acts of Synod 1951*, pp. 62, 65-66, 126-69
- Acts of Synod 1964*, pp. 83, 133, 452-67, 481-82
- Acts of Synod 1965*, pp. 19, 116
- Acts of Synod 1966*, pp. 32-36, 316-61

Gambling

Position

Pastors and church councils are urged to expose all destructive influences on people's lives that seek to trivialize or render irrelevant the providence of God. They must also caution against the impact of materialism, take decisive action to combat the evil of gambling, and minister compassionately to persons addicted to or victimized by lotteries.

History

In 1990 Classis Illiana overtured synod to adopt a statement on gambling. Synod responded by appointing a study committee to consider the issue. When that committee reported in 1992, almost all of its recommendations were adopted. Synod 1992 withheld action on Classis Illiana's request that its 1990 statement on gambling be referred to the churches for study and reflection.

References

Agenda for Synod 1990, pp. 452-56

Acts of Synod 1990, pp. 609-13, 629, 653, 706, 717

Agenda for Synod 1991, pp. 213-14

Acts of Synod 1991, p. 827

Agenda for Synod 1992, pp. 257-68

Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 559-60, 639-40, 655-57

Agenda for Synod 1993, p. 65

Homosexuality

Position

Homosexuality is a condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world. Persons of same-sex attraction should not be denied community acceptance solely because of their sexual orientation and should be wholeheartedly received by the church and given loving support and encouragement. Christian homosexuals, like all Christians, are called to discipleship, holy obedience, and the use of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. Opportunities to serve within the offices and the life of the congregation should be afforded to them as to heterosexual Christians.

Homosexuality (that is, explicit homosexual practice), however, is incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture. The church affirms that it must exercise the same compassion for homosexuals in their sins as it exercises for all other sinners. The church should do everything in its power to help persons with homosexual orientation and give them support toward healing and wholeness. A synodical report titled Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members is available at www.crcna.org/SynodResources.

History

Homosexuality: a condition of personal identity in which a person is sexually oriented toward persons of the same sex.

Homosexual: a person who has erotic attractions for members of the same sex and who may or may not actually engage in homosexuality.

Homosexuality: explicit and overt homosexual practice.

Since 1973 the matter of homosexuality has come up repeatedly at synod through overtures from the churches and in ecumenical relations with other denominations. Synod has consistently sustained the 1973 position in spite of pressure from within and outside the denomination. Synod 1999 reviewed the report of its Committee to Give Direction about and for Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members. The report was sent to the churches for responses. Synod 2002 received a final form of the report and adopted it with some alterations.

In 2013 synod received two overtures requesting guidance on applying the CRC's position in light of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada (since 2005) and in many U.S. states, and synod responded by appointing a study committee to report to Synod 2016. (In the meantime the United States legalized same-sex marriage nationwide on June 26, 2015.) The Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage submitted a majority report and a minority report to Synod 2016, and synod decided to receive the reports as information and to recommend the pastoral guidance of the minority report in keeping with earlier synodical decisions. Synod 2016 further decided "to place a reference to the pastoral guidance of the minority report as a new Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c," and to "appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 917-19). The new committee is scheduled to present a written summary of their work by February 1, 2019, and a final report to Synod 2021 (*Acts 2016*, p. 927).

In deciding not to approve a counseling agency for the CRC's list of causes recommended for offerings, Synod 2016 reiterated a significant caution regarding therapies such as conversion/reparative therapy,

as noted in the majority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage, because such therapies have been found to be ineffective and, in some forms, to cause psychological and spiritual harm (see *Agenda 2016*, p. 403; *Acts 2016*, pp. 929-30).

References

- Acts of Synod 1970*, pp. 120-21, 540
Acts of Synod 1971, pp. 16, 541
Acts of Synod 1972, pp. 17, 396
Acts of Synod 1973, pp. 50-53, 609-33
Acts of Synod 1974, pp. 78-79, 633-34
Acts of Synod 1977, pp. 16, 680
Acts of Synod 1981, p. 66
Acts of Synod 1983, pp. 147-48, 150, 153, 480-82, 497, 502-3, 575, 677-80
Agenda for Synod 1992, p. 157
Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 566-67, 617
Agenda for Synod 1993, pp. 206-7, 279-80
Acts of Synod 1993, pp. 367-68, 411-13, 420-21, 504-5, 544
Agenda for Synod 1994, pp. 271-76, 278-79
Acts of Synod 1994, pp. 447-50, 459-60, 522, 524
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 221-22, 233-37, 528-29
Acts of Synod 1995, pp. 597-98, 614-15, 701
Agenda for Synod 1996, pp. 283-91, 309-10
Acts of Synod 1996, pp. 382-83, 394, 404-5, 572-74, 582
Agenda for Synod 1997, pp. 31, 230-31
Acts of Synod 1997, pp. 554-57, 622-23
Agenda for Synod 1999, pp. 237-79
Acts of Synod 1999, pp. 601-3
Agenda for Synod 2002, pp. 313-51
Acts of Synod 2002, pp. 483-84
Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 418-20
Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 640-41
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 361-443
Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 914-21, 926-27, 929-30

Justice

(see also **Race Relations**)

Position

The CRC's Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action is a ministry that deals with many social justice issues: restorative justice, racism, abortion, HIV/AIDS, poverty in North America, world hunger, war and peace, religious persecution, refugees, marginalization of immigrant workers, and more. In Canada, the CRC's Committee for Contact with the Government deals with similar advocacy issues. For more information, see www.crcna.org/justice and a report on restorative justice adopted by Synod 2005 (www.crcna.org/SynodResources).

See also **Disabilities**.

History

Social justice ministry in the CRC developed in response to world hunger reports adopted by Synods 1979 and 1993. A world hunger and social justice coordinator was appointed in 1994, and the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action became established in 2000. A similar advocacy ministry in Canada has operated as the Committee for Contact with the Government in social-justice advocacy since 1968.

In response to overtures regarding the Jubilee 2000 campaign seeking debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries, Synod 1999 adopted a "Resolution on International Debt" to encourage social justice and hunger action and the implementation of educational and discussion activities in conjunction with the work of Bread for the World, Citizens for Public Justice (Canada), the Center for Public Justice (U.S.), Jubilee 2000, and other compatible organizations and efforts such as the Micah Challenge (2004). Along with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action has also helped the church develop awareness and measures in working against the challenges of HIV/AIDS.

In 2009, in response to a request from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa to Reformed churches throughout the world, synod voted to introduce and promote study of the Belhar Confession (which calls for faithfulness in unity, justice, and reconciliation) in preparation for consideration of a proposal to Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). Synod 2012 adopted the Belhar as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration and recommended it to the churches "for study and for incorporation of its themes into their discipling and liturgical ministries" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 767). In 2016 synod received an overture proposing again that the Belhar Confession be adopted as a fourth confession of the CRCNA, and the request was denied on the basis that the overture did not present "sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration" of the matter, as required by Church Order Article 31. At the request of the advisory committee dealing with the matter, however, Synod 2016 agreed to make "a substantive response," including a denouncement of "racialized violence, systemic racism, and ethnic strife evident in North American society," expressions of grief and lament in "solidarity with those who have been brutalized by these sinful actions," and recognition that "locating the Belhar Confession in the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category" has met with dissatisfaction and confusion (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 904, 909-13). In addition, synod directed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to "report on the confusion with the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category as identified by our ecumenical partners," and synod proposed "that Synod 2017 recategorize the Belhar Confession" as a contemporary testimony in the CRC (*Acts 2016*, p. 913).

Synod 2010 received an overture regarding advocacy of the denominational position opposing abortion and adopted a recommendation "to instruct the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) to boldly advocate for the church's position against abortion, and to help equip churches to promote the sanctity of human life" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 883).

Synod 2010 also received and adopted a study report on the migration of workers, highlighting the great need for mercy, compassion, advocacy, and justice in ministering to and for workers and refugees from other countries. In light of this, synod urged that "the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, together with the Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government . . . engage in policy development and advocacy strategies that will lead to immigration reform and the enactment of fair, just, and equitable laws regarding those without status in Canada and the United States" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 878).

In addition, Synod 2010 requested a review of the mandates of OSJ and the Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government; Synod 2011 approved revised mandates for these ministries.

Synod 2013 received an overture asking for a study of religious persecution and religious liberty, and synod responded by appointing a study committee to report to Synod 2016. In 2016 synod received and accepted the report of the Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty, and synod adopted recommendations to pursue organized prayer efforts for people suffering religious persecution and to continue communications with the churches about persecution faced by Christians as well as by people of other faiths.

In 2014 synod adopted a revision of the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) that takes into account the CRC-adopted statements on abuse prevention and restorative justice.

In June 2012 synod adopted a recommendation to authorize a task force to study the fifteenth-century European Doctrine of Discovery and its effects on Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada. Later that year the Board of Trustees initiated a Doctrine of Discovery Task Force, which would eventually submit a report of its findings in 2016. In the years leading up to the completion of that report, the Office of Race Relations, the Office of Social Justice, and Aboriginal Ministries (Canada) collaborated to provide CRC constituents with the Blanket Exercise, a workshop that helps participants enter into and understand "Native Peoples' experience of inequality" in their treatment by European settlers in the United States and Canada (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 640). Synod 2015 encouraged classes and congregations throughout the CRC to engage in the Blanket Exercise prior to Synod 2016, and synodical delegates participated in the workshop during Synod 2016. In response to the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force report, Synod 2016 declared the fifteenth-century Doctrine of Discovery a heresy that helped to "shape Western culture and led to great injustices" while missionary efforts, by the grace of God, aimed to extend love and the gospel message to Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 922). Synod lamented "mistakes that caused pain" in residential schools such as Rehoboth Christian School, and synod affirmed actions toward confession and reconciliation, celebrating "the current culture at the Rehoboth Christian School, the Zuni Christian Mission School, and our Urban Aboriginal Ministries" as well as "stories of renewal, transformation, grace, and cultural exchange as together God's people remain committed to mutual learning, encouragement, and healing" (*Acts 2016*, p. 923). Synod 2016 also affirmed ongoing actions by the CRC in Canada toward justice and reconciliation in response to calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). In addition, synod directed the executive director of the CRC to work with agencies and ministry

offices to walk alongside, listen to, lament with, and weep with Indigenous parties who have been oppressed and marginalized “in a culture of discrimination,” and to consider developing an annual Day of Justice to be observed throughout the denomination (*Acts 2016*, p. 923).

References

- Agenda for Synod 1979*, pp. 29, 82-84, 418
Acts of Synod 1979, pp. 610-41
Agenda for Synod 1993, pp. 128-29, 138-55
Acts of Synod 1993, pp. 540-41
Agenda for Synod 1994, pp. 355-56
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 44-45
Agenda for Synod 1996, pp. 40-41
Acts of Synod 1996, p. 557
Agenda for Synod 1999, pp. 219-20, 425-32, 487-88, 492-95
Acts of Synod 1999, p. 573
Agenda for Synod 2000, pp. 33, 76-79
Acts of Synod 2000, p. 621
Agenda for Synod 2001, pp. 86-88
Agenda for Synod 2002, pp. 61-62
Agenda for Synod 2003, pp. 83-84
Agenda for Synod 2004, pp. 48, 68-70, 233, 489-91
Acts of Synod 2004, p. 555
Agenda for Synod 2005, pp. 70-72, 529-65
Acts of Synod 2005, pp. 726, 743, 761-62, 778
Agenda for Synod 2006, pp. 85-87
Acts of Synod 2006, pp. 642-43
Agenda for Synod 2007, pp. 34, 145-47
Acts of Synod 2007, pp. 581-82
Agenda for Synod 2008, pp. 38, 61-63
Acts of Synod 2008, pp. 457, 510-11
Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 249-51, 269-313
Acts of Synod 2009, pp. 604-607
Agenda for Synod 2010, pp. 535-85, 661-62
Acts of Synod 2010, pp. 875-79, 883
Agenda for Synod 2011, pp. 35, 73-76
Acts of Synod 2011, p. 817
Agenda for Synod 2012, pp. 232-56
Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 765-67
Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 415-16
Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 569, 641-42
Agenda for Synod 2014, pp. 30, 72-84
Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 569-70
Acts of Synod 2015, pp. 463, 472, 640
Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 32-33, 324-25, 444-74, 475-543, 575-79
Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 862-63, 904-14, 922-23

Labor Unions

Position

Church membership and membership in a labor union are compatible as long as the union does not warrant or champion sin in its regular activities. Church members should discontinue membership in any unions whose common practices are clearly in conflict with the principles of the Word of God. Christian conscience cannot condone membership in a union if it continues in sinful practices in spite of protests against them. Membership in unions which have engaged in sinful practices does not of itself make one liable to ecclesiastical censure, but if church members themselves are guilty of acts contrary to the Word of God, the usual means of discipline should be applied. Churches should be aware of the practices of labor organizations in their communities and vigorously emphasize the scriptural principles regarding the relation of the Christian to the world and the organizations of the world.

History

The CRC has dealt with the issue of labor unions several times in its history. From the 1880s to the 1940s the following matters were discussed: whether church members ought to be members of labor organizations, whether members of a union are responsible for its decisions and acts, and which labor unions were appropriate for church members. In 1904, 1928, 1930, and 1943, synod reasserted its basic position with regard to unions. In 1934, 1936, and 1943, synod recommended the Christian Labor Organization for moral and financial support. Synod 1965 adopted resolutions of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod regarding Christian organizations. This discussion went beyond labor organizations to include social and political organizations.

References

Acts of Synod 1916, pp. 38-39

Acts of Synod 1942, pp. 132, 361-86

Acts of Synod 1943, pp. 102-3, 381-403

Acts of Synod 1964, pp. 74-76, 326-28

Acts of Synod 1965, pp. 118-21, 187-92

Language for God

Position

The endorsement or use of contemporary inclusive language for God (both gender-egalitarian and gender-neutral) is unacceptable to the CRC. Its guidelines for the use of gendered language for God are based on the norm of Scripture and on the principle that Christians ought to speak of God in the way that Scripture speaks of God. According to the guidelines, the standard biblical names, titles, and designations for God should be used. Since there are no feminine names or pronouns applied to God in Scripture, they should not be used in this way today. Secondary language for God, such as figures of speech, may use feminine images of God but must retain the biblical meaning of such language.

History

This issue was first raised in the CRC in 1991 by the publishing agency of the church, which formulated a policy for use of language about God in its publications. When informed of this policy, synod asked CRC Publications to clarify and amplify its guidelines. The following year the guidelines were rewritten and adopted by synod, but in subsequent years synod was overtured to strengthen the guidelines and declare naming God with feminine nouns and pronouns to be contrary to Scripture. At first synod responded by reinforcing the 1992 editorial guidelines, but it eventually found them inadequate in the face of the larger issue of feminine language for God and therefore appointed a study committee in 1994. In spite of overtures asking for further study of the issue, Synod 1997 adopted the recommendations of the study committee, which articulate the current stand on the issue. At Synod 2011 the matter of language for God came up for discussion regarding a proposal to adopt a joint translation of the Reformed confessions for use in both the CRC and the Reformed Church in America. Finding no disagreement with the principles endorsed in 1997, however, synod approved the 2011 joint translation of the three Reformed standards.

References

- Acts of Synod 1991*, pp. 579-82, 785-87
- Agenda for Synod 1992*, pp. 48-50, 485
- Acts of Synod 1992*, pp. 615-16
- Agenda for Synod 1993*, pp. 319-20
- Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 601
- Agenda for Synod 1994*, pp. 254-67
- Acts of Synod 1994*, pp. 496-97, 504-5
- Agenda for Synod 1995*, pp. 411-12
- Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 690-91
- Agenda for Synod 1997*, pp. 265-372, 439-42, 496
- Acts of Synod 1997*, pp. 552-53, 559, 687-94
- Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 851-54

Life Issues

Position

Synod 2003 adopted the following guidelines for pastoral advice concerning life issues (see *Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 632-35, 639, 643-44; see also www.crcna.org/SynodResources):

- We must not recommend rules that bind the conscience in disputable matters. To do so would violate personal Christian liberty. Instead, we should prescribe only where God's will is clear. Scripture is clear that every human being is created in the image of God and is precious to God.
- Procreation should be kept within the context of the male-female, two parent, covenantal relationship of marriage.
- Although it is fitting for married couples to want to have children, and it is a blessing to have children, there are limits to the lengths to which couples may go in order to have children. Infertility is a result of the fall, and we may attempt to reverse this but only through morally acceptable means.
- While Scripture does not explicitly teach what moral protection the unimplanted human embryo deserves, it is clear implicitly that as a unique human life it warrants significant human protection.
- Recognizing the horrific nature of rape and the complex circumstances facing a rape victim, she is not necessarily morally culpable if she takes a morning-after pill. The focus of ministry in such circumstances should be on the compassionate care for the woman.

Synod also encouraged members "to engage governmental agencies regarding the pursuit of policies" consistent with these guidelines.

See also **Abortion, Euthanasia**.

History

In response to overtures about abortion and pregnancy related issues as well as ethical and theological issues in bioscience and genetic engineering, Synod 1999 appointed a study committee "to examine the biblical/theological/ethical issues raised by the increasing capabilities and recent discoveries in bioscience and genetic engineering" (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 578). The committee submitted its report to Synod 2003, which adopted the preceding guidelines for pastoral advice concerning life issues. Synod recommended the committee's report to the churches for study and reflection (see www.crcna.org/SynodResouces) and encouraged members "to engage governmental agencies regarding the pursuit of policies that are consistent with the guiding precepts adopted by synod and outlined in the report" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 644).

References

Agenda for Synod 1999, pp. 389-90

Acts of Synod 1999, pp. 578, 625, 637

Acts of Synod 2000, p. 734

Agenda for Synod 2003, pp. 275-313

Acts of Synod 2003, pp. 632-35, 639, 643-44

Lodge and Church Membership

Position

There is an irreconcilable conflict between the teachings and practices of the lodge and those of biblical Christianity; therefore simultaneous membership in the lodge and in the church of Jesus Christ is incompatible with and contrary to Scripture.

History

From its beginning the CRC has held a strong position against lodge membership. In fact, it was one of the issues that caused the CRC to separate from the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1900 a report on lodge membership was adopted; another was adopted in 1977.

References

Acts of Synod 1900, pp. 96-101

Acts of Synod 1958, pp. 67-68, 416-22

Acts of Synod 1974, pp. 58-60, 504-67

Acts of Synod 1975, pp. 101, 547-69

Acts of Synod 1977, pp. 102-6, 575-96

Lord's Day

Position

The position of the church with respect to keeping the Lord's Day holy is based on the fourth commandment and on the observance of the Sabbath day by the Jewish people, which was translated to Sunday observance by the church from the time of the apostles. The CRC believes that Sunday must be so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all work except that which charity and necessity require and that we refrain from recreation that interferes with worship. The faith and practice of CRC members have been shaped by Q. and A. 103 of the Heidelberg Catechism regarding the fourth commandment:

103 Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First,

that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained,
and that, especially on the festive day of rest,
I diligently attend the assembly of God's people
to learn what God's Word teaches,
to participate in the sacraments,
to pray to God publicly,
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.

Second,
that every day of my life
I rest from my evil ways,
let the Lord work in me through his Spirit,
and so begin in this life
the eternal Sabbath.

History

The CRC dealt with observance of the Lord's Day repeatedly in its early history, usually in regard to Sunday labor. The basic position was adopted in 1881 and reaffirmed in 1926 and 1940. In 1974 the churches were encouraged to guard the celebration of the Lord's Day against the onslaught of secularization.

References

Acts of Synod 1857-1880, pp. 65, 66, 74, 111, 153, 189

Acts of Synod 1881, p. 19

Acts of Synod 1882, p. 12

Acts of Synod 1888, p. 23

Acts of Synod 1892, p. 24

Acts of Synod 1894, p. 58

Acts of Synod 1926, pp. 185-92

Acts of Synod 1936, p. 62

Acts of Synod 1938, pp. 34-35, 129

Acts of Synod 1939, pp. 77-78

Acts of Synod 1940, pp. 102-3

Acts of Synod 1941, p. 31

Acts of Synod 1942, pp. 133-40

Acts of Synod 1957, p. 105

Acts of Synod 1959, p. 61

Acts of Synod 1970, pp. 26, 347-48

Acts of Synod 1974, p. 32

Lord's Supper

Position

Along with baptism, the Lord's Supper (holy communion) is a sacrament in the CRC. "All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Supper" (Church Order, Article 59-a), to receive the nourishment and refreshment of the bread and cup of the Lord "as sure signs" in remembrance of Christ's body and blood poured out for us in his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 75-82).

Synod 1995 adopted a report regarding children at the Lord's Supper (see www.crcna.org/SynodResources). Synod also appointed a study committee on faith formation in 2007 to report findings and make recommendations on Lord's Supper participation and public profession of faith at subsequent synods. Synod 2011 adopted the Faith Formation Committee's report and recommendations providing guidelines for "the participation of baptized children at the Lord's Supper and the practice of public profession of faith for use in the churches" (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 831).

Synod 2006 adopted a report by the CRC Interchurch Relations Committee on the Lord's Supper and the Roman Catholic Mass (see www.crcna.org/SynodResources), stating that the closing three paragraphs of Q. and A. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism "do not accurately reflect the official teaching and practice of today's Roman Catholic Church and are no longer confessionally binding on members of the CRC."

History

Admission to the Lord's Supper has been discussed often in the CRC. The CRC maintains that a person be a "confessing member" of a Christian church in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. Especially with regard to children at the Lord's table, committees have reported to Synods 1986, 1988, and 1995. Synod 1995 revised Article 59 of the CRC Church Order to reflect a difference between "confessing members" who are children and "confessing members who have reached the age of 18 and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church" (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 762). Prior to that time, the Church Order presumed that baptized members who made public profession of faith were also old enough to understand and commit to the teachings of the church's creeds and confessions.

The matter of children at the Lord's Supper came to synod again by way of an overture in 2006, and synod proposed changes to the Church Order that would allow "admission of all baptized members to the Lord's Supper on the basis of their full membership in the covenant community" (*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 730); Synod 2007, however, did not adopt those proposed changes. Synod 2006 also called for a task force to be appointed to, among other things, evaluate the impact, implementation, challenges, and joys of the 1995 decision and propose ways in which professing and communicant children can be disciplined toward greater spiritual growth. In 2007 that task force presented its work, and synod established a Faith Formation Committee to study various aspects of participation in the Lord's Supper and public profession of faith, by means of discussion with and information gathering from Christian Reformed congregations and agencies involved in faith formation, and to report annually to synod for the subsequent five years. Synod 2011 adopted the Faith Formation Committee's report "Children at the Table" as fulfillment of the committee's mandate to formulate "a clear statement about the participation of baptized children at the Lord's Supper and the practice of public profession of faith for use in the churches" (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 831). Synods 2011 and 2012 also adopted related changes to the Church Order and its Supplements (*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 829-30; *Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 771-72). Synod 2013 received and approved recommendations from its Faith Formation Committee to make

use of “A Primer for Welcoming Children to the Lord’s Supper and the Role of Public Profession of Faith” and to use related new products developed by Faith Alive Christian Resources in 2013 for welcoming and preparing children to participate in the Lord’s Supper.

In 2006 synod also adopted a report on The Lord’s Supper and the Roman Catholic Mass and declared the latter three paragraphs of Q. and A. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism to be “no longer confessionally binding” (see www.crcna.org/SynodResources). In response to recommendations by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, based on dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and other Reformed denominations, Synod 2011 received “This Bread of Life” as an ecumenical document on the Lord’s Supper, recommending it “to the churches for further study and reflection” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 822).

References

- Agenda for Synod 1986*, pp. 346-70, 478
Acts of Synod 1986, pp. 617-20
Agenda for Synod 1988, pp. 260-316
Acts of Synod 1988, pp. 557-560
Agenda for Synod 1995, pp. 265-303
Acts of Synod 1995, pp. 712-21, 762-63
Agenda for Synod 2006, pp. 270-71, 274-76, 526-30
Acts of Synod 2006, pp. 666-70, 710-11, 713-14, 727-31
Agenda for Synod 2007, pp. 26, 43-63
Acts of Synod 2007, pp. 621, 653-57, 659
Agenda for Synod 2008, pp. 231-42
Acts of Synod 2008, pp. 454, 473, 517, 529
Agenda for Synod 2011, pp. 344-46, 440-510, 571-612
Acts of Synod 2011, pp. 822, 829-31
Agenda for Synod 2012, pp. 420-23
Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 771-72
Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 318-23, 327, 329-31
Acts of Synod 2013, p. 552

Marriage

Position

Marriage is an institution created by God. It is a covenant relationship established by mutual vows between a man and a woman united by God. Permanent unity in marriage is possible in Christ and is demanded of Christ's disciples who are married.

See also **Divorce and Remarriage**.

History

Marital matters were dealt with by the CRC numerous times in its history. Some of the struggles were over whether the Bible provides any grounds for divorce, whether remarried people are committing adultery, how to treat the membership of divorced and remarried persons, and what counsel to give persons experiencing marital problems, divorce, and remarriage. The long-standing position of the CRC from 1908 on was that people who remarry after an unbiblical divorce are living in continual adultery. That position was elaborated on in 1947 but was not changed until 1956. That year synod stated that there was no scriptural evidence to support the thesis regarding continual adultery. In 1968 synod decided that such matters are primarily the responsibility of the church consistory and that they should involve the classis only on appeal, instead of in every instance, as was previously the case.

Recent decisions on marital matters grew out of the 1971 appointment of a synodical study committee to draw up new counseling guidelines for pastors and consistories in regard to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Synod 1973 did not accept that committee's report but commissioned a new committee, whose report was referred to the churches by Synod 1975. Synod 1977 could not agree on this report largely because of conflicting opinions on whether or not there are biblical grounds for divorce.

Another study committee was assigned to reexamine and set forth the biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage and to formulate pastoral guidelines with respect to divorce and remarriage. This third study committee reported to Synod 1980, which accepted the report's biblical teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage and adopted the report's Guidelines for the Ministry of the Church. This report is summarized in the church's position stated above. Later overtures and appeals regarding the guidelines have not been sustained by synod.

Synod 2013 received two overtures requesting guidance on applying the CRC's position in light of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada (since 2005) and in many U.S. states, and synod responded by appointing a study committee to report to Synod 2016. (In the meantime the United States legalized same-sex marriage nationwide on June 26, 2015.) In response to the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage, Synod 2016 received the committee's majority report and minority report as information and decided to "appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 919). Synod also decided "to place a reference to the pastoral guidance of the minority report as a new Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c" (*Acts 2016*, p. 918). The new Supplement, Article 69-c states that "the pastoral guidance . . . recommended in the minority report . . . represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God."

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Pentecostalism

Position

The whole church and every member must live in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ so that believers' lives, individually and communally, may always show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christ, through his Spirit, sovereignly distributes his gifts to the body of believers when and where he wills, and he empowers the members of the church in every age with whatever gifts he judges necessary for the building up of his body. Individual congregations should provide within their communal fellowship for the free exercise of all genuine gifts of the Spirit so long as all things are done for edification and in good order, and churches should provide full opportunity for kingdom service in ministries appropriate to the gifts received by their members.

Churches should be alert to errors and excesses involved in the exercise of claimed "charismatic" gifts, such as tongue speaking, faith healing, and exorcism. Churches should accept in love and patience those members who claim to have been baptized with the Holy Spirit as a "second blessing" distinct from and received after conversion and should deal firmly with them in a pastoral way to correct them in their belief. According to biblical teaching, a believer receives baptism in or with the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion.

Persons involved in neo-Pentecostalism are urged to remember that all believers have received the Holy Spirit and that all religious experience is to be judged by God's written Word, through which the church must discern the leading of the Spirit. Further, gifts of the Spirit must be confirmed by the presence of the fruit of the Spirit and must be used for the good of the whole body of Christ.

Church members who believe the "second blessing" teaching are disqualified from holding office, but not everyone who claims to have certain charismatic experiences is by that fact alone disqualified. The Spirit-filled church must judge what gifts of the Spirit may or should be employed in the exercise of the offices.

After considering lengthy study reports on Third Wave Pentecostalism in 2007 and 2009, Synod 2009 adopted the following counsel to churches:

- a. Gratefully accept all the ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests his work in this movement for God's glory, notably in demonstrating the present reality of the spiritual gifts (charismata) recorded in Scripture and of being filled with the Holy Spirit in different ways and on multiple occasions.
- b. Beware of any tendency to make dramatic emotional or miraculous experiences the center of the Christian life, to underplay the foundational value of the fruit of the Spirit in sanctification, to restrict the things of the Spirit to charismatic phenomena, or to minimize the positive way God uses suffering for our good.
- c. Acknowledge the gift of prophecy today, subject to the overriding authority of Scripture and the discernment of the Christian body.
- d. Beware of any claim to prophecy that goes beyond Scripture, that does not respect the authority of the church leadership, or that fosters dissension rather than loving edification.
- e. Be fervent in prayer and expect God to do great things as a result. Think of prayer as a dialogue, not a monologue, and be attentive to what God is saying as you pray.
- f. Accept with gratitude that God continues to give physical and emotional healing in response to prayer, both through his gift of medical science, and through medically inexplicable ways. At the

same time, accept that when God, in his sovereignty, does not heal, he manifests his love in and through suffering and death. Such present healing points us to the complete healing Christ accomplished and will bring to fullness at his return.

- g. Beware of misuses associated with healing ministries, since they detract from God's glory and hold potential for doing great damage. Avoid healing techniques that fail to recognize the multifaceted nature of the brokenness and the context of specific suffering.
- h. Acknowledge the reality of the believer's warfare against his or her sinful nature, temptations of the world, and demonic powers. With discernment and caution, be willing to engage in scripturally sound deliverance ministry against demonic powers in the authority and name of Jesus Christ.
- i. Affirm that the apostolic office, which belongs to the foundational period of the church, gave rise to the canonical writings of the New Testament. Reject all claims of contemporary leaders to this apostolic office.

History

Because of the influence of neo-Pentecostalism on the CRC and its officebearers and especially in response to two overtures in 1971 and the denial of candidacy to a seminarian in 1970, Synod 1971 appointed a committee to study the teachings and practices associated with this movement in the light of biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit. Synod 1973 adopted several statements that are summarized in the position stated above. At the same time that synod acknowledged a painful lack of assurance of salvation and a lack of overt displays of joy and power among the members of the CRC, it also firmly rejected some teachings and practices of the neo-Pentecostal movement, including the second blessing of baptism by the Holy Spirit. Synod 1974 adopted guidelines for officebearers in regard to this subject.

In response to an overture regarding Third Wave Pentecostalism, Synod 2004 appointed a committee to study this issue. The committee reported to Synod 2007, and synod sent the report back for revision. A reconstituted study committee reported to Synod 2009, and synod adopted the counsel outlined above.

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Pornography

Position

The church has urged all members who use pornographic material to arouse sexual desire to recognize that doing so is a sin. Churches are urged to teach their members the biblical perspective on human sexuality and encourage them to become involved with decency organizations, working to stem the tide of pornography. Such involvement includes prayer for those involved in pornography, education regarding the impact of pornography on society, withholding patronage from establishments supporting pornography, and holding forth biblical standards for sexuality in the public debate over pornography.

History

In 1987 Classis Grandville overtured synod to take a position against pornography. Synod referred the matter back to the classis, asking it to further research and revise its suggested statement. In 1988 the overture containing the revised statement on pornography and a resolution concerning that issue was adopted by synod.

In 2012 Classis Eastern Canada overtured synod to “take an active stance against pornography,” stating that since 1988 “very little has been done on a denominational level to address this issue and assist the churches in providing healing, while pornographic material has become much more readily available with advances in technology” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 477). In response, synod adopted several recommendations urging congregations to address the damage being done through use of pornography today and to “promote a biblically healthy view of human sexuality,” and instructing the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church to “develop and implement a plan to assist churches” in this endeavor toward awareness, understanding, confession, and healing (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 758-59).

Synod 2016 adopted a description (updated from 2004) in the Church Order Supplement, citing “participation in pornography” as an example of ungodly conduct (see Church Order Supplement, Article 84; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 716).

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Race Relations

(see also Justice)

Position

God created the world rich in diversity and yet unified in himself. God's mission for the world, though temporarily broken by sin, is for the reconciliation and uniting of all things. That mission is and has always been racially and ethnically inclusive. Through the Holy Spirit, God gives power to the church to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture. The church is God's strategic agent for embodying, proclaiming, and promoting the unity and diversity of the new creation in all aspects of society in this world. For Christians, to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people. To ignore the calling to turn this principle into practice is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

The whole church is called to pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons and to ensure their equitable representation and meaningful participation in leadership and influence at all levels of denominational life. Congregations are called to articulate the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God, to evaluate their life and ministry with regard to it, to develop diversity by all appropriate models and strategies, to witness publicly against racism in defense of all people as imagebearers of God, and to promote interracial and cross-cultural relationships.

The CRC's Office of Race Relations is mandated to "initiate and provide effective and collaborative training" for the purpose of dismantling racism in all its forms (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 558). Along with sponsoring youth events, scholarships, multiethnic conferences for pastors, Women of the Nations events, and All Nations Heritage celebrations, the Office of Race Relations has developed an acclaimed antiracism training curriculum for use in North America and around the world.

History

The CRC began to deal with the matter of race relations in 1957 in connection with the issue of segregation. Two years later it adopted a set of declarations from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), which became its stand on race relations. These declarations were affirmed and others were added in 1968, 1969, and 1977. The Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions began to design and implement programs regarding racism through a new Race Commission.

During the 1960s and 1970s the church dealt with the issue at home as it struggled through a race-related case regarding Timothy Christian School in Cicero, Illinois, and abroad as it held discussions with the Reformed Churches in South Africa regarding its policy of apartheid. Building on the work of the Home Missions Board, Synod 1971 established the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR). It became a standing committee in 1981, appointed its first director in 1986, and in 1995 became known as the Office of Race Relations.

Synod 1992 formed a Committee to Study a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God at the request of the Multiethnic Conference, a biennial meeting of multiethnic church leaders which developed in the 1980s out of Calvin Seminary's orientation program for such leaders. Synod adopted the recommendations of that report, "God's Diverse and Unified Family," in 1996, and it serves as the current position of the CRC on race relations. In response to joint meetings with the Multiethnic Conference in 1998, synod appointed a committee to develop strategies that will continue to move the church toward becoming a more diverse and unified family of God. The agencies and institutions of the

CRC have begun an intensive initiative in antiracism and have committed to involving all staff in antiracism efforts.

To better represent ethnic minority communities in the CRC, Synod 1995 approved the position of ethnic adviser to synod, and in 1996 synod welcomed its first ethnic advisers to participate in synodical deliberations. Synod 2000 reaffirmed the position, and Synod 2005 adopted a recommendation to “continue the position of ethnic adviser as long as the number of ethnic minority delegates is fewer than twenty-five, after which time it shall be discontinued” (*Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 756). At Synod 2014, because the number of ethnic minority delegates was twenty-eight, the position of ethnic adviser was discontinued; but then before synod adjourned, it also adopted a motion to “reinstate the practice of including ethnic advisers at synod” in case the number of ethnic minority delegates might drop below twenty-five in future years (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 576). As stated in guidelines approved two days earlier with a report about synodical advisers, ethnic advisers “are representative voices of ethnic minority communities in the membership of the CRC that are not adequately represented in the delegations by the classes” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 537).

Synod 2004 received and approved a statement of vision and a revised mandate for the Office of Race Relations, paving the way for Race Relations to “initiate and provide effective and collaborative training” for the purpose of dismantling racism in all its forms (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 558). In addition to sponsoring a first-time Women of the Nations event in 2005 and an urban conference for senior high teens in spring 2006, Race Relations developed a curriculum for antiracism training, Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR), piloted in September 2006 and receiving highly positive feedback. In 2008 the Office of Race Relations planned to expand DORR training into Latin and South America, the Caribbean, and Africa. In Canada the training is known as Widening the Circle.

Synod 2009 called for “an ethnically inclusive group to develop a statement of vision and strategy for increasing multiethnic representation within the leadership of the denomination and to report to Synod 2010” (*Acts of Synod 2009*, 589). While a group was formed and work had begun, the group did not have a report ready for Synod 2010. In response, Synod 2010 adopted motions to “re-affirm its commitment to ethnic diversity in the CRC” and to call for a yearly report “on the status of denominational efforts to address issues of ethnic diversity and racial justice” (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 884). Synod 2011 received a report from the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group, affirmed its direction, adopted several of its recommendations, and appointed an expanded task force to review the original group’s work and address additional concerns, requesting a revised report by September 30, 2012 (*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 858-61, 866-68).

In response to an overture from Classis Lake Erie, Synod 2012 called the denomination to “continued repentance” of “personal and institutional racism and other forms of discrimination” and to review “material raising our understanding of racism,” including the Facing Racism video (distributed to all churches in 2011) available through the Office of Race Relations for education and small group programs. Synod also reiterated its 2010 instruction to the Board of Trustees to submit a yearly report on the denomination’s progress in attaining goals for diversity in line with those stated in “God’s Diverse and Unified Family” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 757-58).

Synod 2013 received the report of the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group II, adopting significant recommendations for recruitment, training, equal opportunity action, job descriptions, the nomination process for denominational leadership, and the role of the Office of Race Relations. To implement these decisions, synod approved a two-year budget allocation from existing funds and instructed the executive

director “to develop a comprehensive strategy and organizational alignment that addresses all of the multicultural and ethnic minority concerns that need to be considered” in order to bring us closer to the goal of “more closely reflecting the diverse communities we inhabit and the visions expressed in the book of Revelation” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 632). A Diversity in Leadership Planning implementation team assembled by the executive director provided a status update on its work in the *Agenda for Synod 2014* (pp. 45-52). In 2014 a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) was created to implement the DLPG directives of Synod 2013, and the DIWG submitted a progress report to Synod 2015 and a final report of its work to Synod 2016. In response, Synod 2016 adopted the DIWG’s various recommendations to ensure that all CRC diversity and related initiatives continue. These include ongoing “training and communications on the issues of race and diversity” throughout the CRC, annual diversity reports from each agency and ministry, “procedures to ensure diversity in hiring and promoting” employees, and other measures. A team called “the Collaborative for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) will continue the work completed by the DIWG and meet as needed to monitor overall progress toward achieving the plan and concepts” outlined in the final report (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 828-29).

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Religious Persecution and Liberty
See Justice

War

Position

All wars are the result of sin, and although God may use war in his judgment on nations, it is his purpose to make all wars to cease. Christians are called to do all in their power to promote peace and understanding between nations and the resolution of differences without recourse to war, but they must also at times perform the solemn duty of defending their nations against aggressors. A just war is one in which the object is not to destroy or annihilate but to deter the lawless and overpower the enemy state in order to assign it to its rightful place in the family of nations. Its goal is to establish a lasting peace on the foundation of justice and a stable and righteous political order, in which human society can flourish.

The church must warn against glorification of war for its own sake, but pacifism that causes people to refuse to bear arms under any conditions is also unacceptable. Conscientious objection is discouraged except among those who believe that a given war is unjust and therefore cannot morally justify their participation in that war, being convinced of their duty to obey God rather than humans. The church must extend Christian love and concern to those who take up arms and to those who choose selective conscientious objection. Such choices must be made in the context of the Christian community and must be subject to the due process of law and even to the penalty of the law which has been conscientiously broken.

Synod 2006 adopted a comprehensive report by the synodical Committee to Study War and Peace (see *Agenda for Synod 2006*, pp. 381-452; *Acts of Synod 2006*, pp. 670-77; www.crcna.org/SynodResources) urging the “agencies and members of the CRC to promote and actively engage in international initiatives for building peace with justice” (p. 672). Synod also urges the CRC to call for government procedures “wherein those who object to selective conflicts on the basis of just-war criteria are honorably discharged” (p. 674).

History

The CRC formed its position on war in the 1930s, when the threat of the Second World War loomed and pacifism was a controversial issue. The basic statement adopted by Synod 1939 has not changed, but it has been affirmed, supplemented, and nuanced to fit more recent situations such as the Vietnam conflict and the Cold War. The issues of conscientious objection, amnesty, and nuclear disarmament became important in the 1970s and 1980s and were dealt with by the synods of 1977 and 1982. For a comprehensive Study of War and Peace adopted by the CRC, see *Acts of Synod 2006*, pp. 381-452, 670-77; www.crcna.org/SynodResources.

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Women in Ecclesiastical Office

Position

All congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America may allow women to serve in the office of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. The CRC recognizes that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God (for the biblical-theological argumentation undergirding the CRC's approach to this issue, see *Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 355-73; www.crcna.org/SynodResources).

Classes may also, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to their classis. All duly elected and ordained officebearers—men and women—may be delegated to synod, but officebearers will not be asked to participate against their convictions on this matter.

History

The CRC began to deal with this issue in 1970, when synod appointed a committee to examine the practice of excluding women from the various ordained offices in the church in response to discussions in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), of which the CRC was a member (the RES subsequently became the Reformed Ecumenical Council, which in 2010 became part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches). This first study committee reported to Synod 1973, concluding that excluding women from ecclesiastical office cannot be defended on biblical grounds, but synod decided to appoint another committee to study the matter. The second study committee on the same topic came to the same conclusion in 1975, but, judging that the church was not ready for women in office, synod appointed two more committees—one to help the churches make all possible use of women's gifts and another to study hermeneutical principles and apply them to relevant Scripture passages. The first committee was given an expanded mandate in 1977 and was renamed the Service Committee for the Use of Members' Gifts. The second committee reported in 1978 and recommended that women be ordained as deacons. Synod agreed, provided that the work of deacons be distinguished from that of elders.

Synod 1979 deferred ratification of the change in the Church Order required for women to be deacons as well as implementation of that decision and instead appointed another committee to study the whole issue. Synod 1981 received the report of the study committee, which recommended that women be ordained as deacons, but synod again decided to defer the decision of 1978 and appointed another committee to study the issue of the headship of men over women in marriage and its implications for the church. The headship study committee reported in 1984 and made the same recommendation that synod had passed six years earlier—that women be ordained as deacons provided their work is distinguished from that of elders. Synod agreed and finally ratified the necessary change in the Church Order.

Synod 1985 declared that the headship principle prohibits women from being elders and ministers, disallowed the use of adjunct elders, and appointed a committee to study the authority and function of elders and deacons. Synod 1987 distinguished between a church's consistory (elders), diaconate (deacons), and council (both elders and deacons); decided that deacons may not be delegated to classis meetings; and appointed yet another committee to study the headship principle. Synod 1989 instructed some churches that were ordaining women as elders to cease doing so and declared that unordained adjunct positions are allowable for women.

In 1990 the second headship study committee recommended that all the offices—elder, minister, and evangelist (now commissioned pastor)—be open to women, after finding that the headship principle does not transfer from marriage to the church. Synod agreed and opened all the offices to women but deferred implementation and ratification of the necessary Church Order change until 1992. Synod 1991 appointed a small ad hoc committee to gather biblical grounds for the decision of 1990. That committee reported in 1992, but synod decided against ratification. Synod 1992 did encourage the church to use the gifts of women, in teaching, expounding the Word of God, and providing pastoral care, all under the supervision of the elders.

Synod 1993 decided to revise the 1992 decision by allowing local churches the option of ordaining women as elders, ministers, and evangelists (now commissioned pastors). It also decided to delete the word male from Article 3 of the Church Order, which gives the requirements for elders, ministers, and evangelists (now commissioned pastors), but left it to Synod 1994 to decide on the advisability of ratification. Synod 1994 did not ratify the change but maintained the original language of the Church Order, claiming that the clear teaching of Scripture prohibits women from holding those offices. It instructed all churches that had ordained women as elders to release them. It also appointed a committee to clarify the meaning of "expounding the Word of God" from the decision of Synod 1992.

Synod 1995 recognized that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, and decided to give classes the option of declaring the word male in Church Order Article 3 inoperative, thereby allowing their churches to ordain women to all the offices. Synod 1995 also passed a set of regulations to be in effect until 2000 that restricted women from serving as delegates to synod or as synodical deputies or to be appointed by synodical agencies to ordained positions. The regulations also prevented any synodical delegates, synodical deputies, or seminary board members from being required to vote, against their consciences, on women candidates or nominees. Synod also decided that, in classes that do not declare the word male inoperative, churches may still choose to ordain women as elders. Synod 1995 also received the report of the committee on expounding but did not alter the 1992 decision. Subsequent synods did not accede to overtures attempting to change the 1995 decision due to Synod 1995's plan to revisit the issue in five years. Synod 2000 extended the church's position on women in office for another five years, to 2005. Women were first approved as candidates for the ministry of the Word in the CRC at Synod 1996. By 2000, eighteen of the forty-seven classes had declared the word male inoperative in Church Order Article 3-a, thereby opening the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist (now commissioned pastor) to women in those classes.

In 2000, synod also approved the appointment of women advisers to synod, and in 2001 synod adopted guidelines for women advisers and included those in the Rules for Synodical Procedure. Synod 2005 approved revisions to the Church Order Supplement regarding examination of ministerial candidates at classis meetings and delegation of women officebearers to synod (see *Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 758-60) and decided that the issue would be revisited when more than half of the classes had declared the word male in Church Order Article 3-a inoperative. Such was the case the following year, so Synod 2006 proposed and Synod 2007 decided to delete the word male from Church Order Article 3-a and to make related changes in the Church Order Supplement. Synod 2007 also stated that "all duly elected and ordained officebearers may be delegated to synod," noting that "officebearers shall not be asked to participate against their convictions" (*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 610-12). Further, Synod 2007 decided that classes "may, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers not be delegated to classis." Given the inclusion of women serving as delegates, Synod 2008 approved the discontinuance of women advisers to synod.

In 2010 two churches requested permission to transfer from their current classes to join a classis outside of their geographical area that agrees with their position not to seat women delegates at classis or synod meetings. Synod 2010 decided not to accede to those requests, on the grounds that "a classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches" (Church Order Art. 39) and that synod already permits delegates to "record their protest" on this matter while participating "in an assembly where women officebearers are present" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 890-91). Synod 2013 received overtures regarding the same two churches and requesting that synod create a new classis "in which churches whose convictions do not allow" women in office could serve together "in harmony rather than . . . 'in protest'" (*Agenda for Synod 2013*, pp. 399, 405). Synod did not accede to those overtures, mainly on the principle that a classis should not be formed on the basis of "theological affinity," but it granted those churches "the option to move to the classis in closest proximity that is willing to receive them and which they are willing to join" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 619).

In response to an overture in 2015 synod reinstated "the practice of including women advisers to synod in a way that parallels the guidelines established for ethnic advisers to synod . . . including that twenty-five women delegates be set as the minimum representation for synod to achieve the goal of gender diversity" (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 673).

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Worldly Amusements

Position

God gave humanity the cultural mandate to develop the potentials of creation and dedicate them to the glory of God. Christians must learn to discern God's will in every area of human life in regard to what is good and evil, avoid the worldliness of loving temporal or sinful things instead of God, and call society to the obedience of Christ. Christians must be spiritually separate from the world even while enjoying things that the Bible neither commands nor forbids. In such matters, believers must exercise Christian liberty guided by a Spirit-enlightened conscience, submit prayerfully to God's Word and Spirit, and appreciate the pastoral guidance of the officebearers of the church.

See also **Dance, Film Arts**.

History

The CRC made its first official declaration on the topic of "worldly amusements" in 1928. Synod said that these doctrinal and ethical principles should guide believers in their relation to the world and its amusements: the honor of God, the welfare of humanity, spiritual separation from the world, and the exercise of Christian liberty. It also urgently warned members against the amusements of theater attendance, dancing, and card playing. In 1949 synod decided to study the issue again, and in 1951 it clarified previous declarations.

Synod 1966 adopted a report titled "The Church and the Film Arts," which states the official position of the CRC: The art of film is considered a legitimate cultural medium to be used with discernment by Christians. In the late 1970s Calvin College decided to allow social dancing by students on its campus. Its request for synod's support and/or response led to the study "Dance and the Christian Life," which was commissioned in 1978, recommended to the churches for study in 1980, and brought to Synod 1982. That year synod reaffirmed the position of 1966 on the relationship of the Christian to the world and on the exercise of Christian liberty. It also adopted recommendations regarding dance as a cultural expression, Christian evaluation of dance forms, and guidelines for Christian institutions. The Liturgical Committee of CRC Publications was asked to study the use of liturgical dance in worship, and it reported on that matter in 1985. Synod received the report as information and referred it to the churches but withheld action regarding the implementation of liturgical dance.

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Worship

Position

The following description serves as the common biblical basis for Christian worship: Worship is an ascription of worth, adoration, and praise to God; includes confession of sin and surrender to the true God; is a God-initiated engagement of God and the worshiper, as well as a corporate engagement among the worshipers; strengthens and is strengthened by the Christian community and its shared memory; and reflects the mighty redemptive acts of God.

When God's people worship with pure hearts and in authentic community, effective evangelism is a natural result. The basic pattern for Christian worship includes gathering as a covenant community, proclamation of the Word, celebration of the Lord's Supper, and going to serve in the world. Authentic worship has an intrinsically sacramental character and is enriched by the diverse backgrounds of participating believers.

History

Synod 1964 appointed a liturgical committee to review liturgical literature in the light of history, theological content, and contemporary needs and to study liturgical practices in the churches in the light of Reformed principles and synodical decisions. The committee's report came to synod in 1968 and was recommended to the churches for study and consideration. This report encapsulates the basic understanding of Reformed worship in the CRC.

Thirty years later, in 1994, CRC Publications asked synod to commission a new report in light of the many changes in synodical decisions as well as in worship practices in the churches over three decades. The new committee built on the biblical-theological framework of the 1968 report, using the report as the starting point for its reflections. The committee came to Synod 1997 with a report titled "Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture," which analyzes contemporary cultural forces at work in the church and reflects theologically on those changes with a view to helping church leaders make decisions about worship that are biblically and theologically informed and culturally discerning. In 2011 the denomination's publishing agency, Faith Alive Christian Resources, presented a proposal for a standing CRC Worship Committee on grounds that the CRC needs to provide leadership and resources "in the crucial area of worship" and that "there is no designated agency or office to support that ministry in the CRC" (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 176-77, 181). Synod 2011 referred the tasks presented in that proposal to its Faith Formation Committee to consider how those tasks might be fulfilled (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 855). In 2013 the Faith Formation Committee reported that it had many fruitful conversations about this matter with Faith Alive, the executive director, and the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (appointed by Synod 2011), and the conversation will continue as that task force proceeds with its work (scheduled to conclude in 2015).

In 2015 a Liturgical Forms Committee formed in response to requests for various liturgical forms that would help represent current ministry contexts. By way of the Board of Trustees, the committee submitted thirteen new forms to Synod 2016, and synod approved the forms with some textual revisions (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 38, 46-47, 75-119; *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 898-903). To locate all current forms, visit crcna.org and search "liturgical forms."

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