

Form of Subscription Revision Committee II

A. *Materials*

1. Form of Subscription Revision Committee II Report, pp. 448-61
2. Overtures 9-14, 62.
3. Calvin College Supplement (section IV; Recommendation G)

B. *Privilege of the floor*: Rev. James C. Dekker, chair; Rev. Michael Borgert, reporter; and Rev. Mark A. Davies, committee member

C. *Observations*

The advisory committee held conversations with members of the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II. The results of the conversations have led to the presentation of the following revised document. Representatives of the study committee have expressed agreement with these recommendations. The revisions were made in response to Synod 2011's request to address certain concerns. The Form of Subscription Revision Committee II has rescinded its request for time for a presentation to synod.

D. *Recommendations*

1. That synod adopt the following Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church and commend it to the churches as a means to encourage ongoing, vital engagement of officebearers with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions:

Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church

We, [the undersigned], believe the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God's creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

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.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

—Adopted

2. That synod adopt the following changes to Church Order Articles 5 and 83 and Church Order Supplement, Article 5 to reflect the adoption of the Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church.

Article 5

All officebearers, on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5

Supplement, Article 5

[The text of the Covenant for Officebearers will be inserted here.]

Guidelines and Regulations re Gravamina

Synod declares that gravamina fall into at least two basic types:

1. A *confessional-difficulty gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions, and
 2. A *confessional-revision gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber makes a specific recommendation for revision of the confessions.
- A. Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant for Officebearers:
1. The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God.
 2. The signatory does not by affirming the confessions declare that these doctrines are all stated in the best possible manner, or that the standards of our church cover all that the Scriptures teach on the matters confessed. Nor does

the signatory declare that every teaching of the Scriptures is set forth in our confessions, or that every heresy is rejected and refuted by them.

3. A signatory is bound only to those doctrines that are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines, nor to the theological deductions that some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for oneself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in.

B. Regulations concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a confessional-difficulty gravamen:

1. Ministers (whether missionaries, professors, or others not serving congregations as pastors), elders, or deacons shall submit their "difficulties" to their councils for examination and judgment. Should a council decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter, it may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of Church Order Article 28-b.
2. In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church, since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed.

C. Regulations concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a confessional-revision gravamen:

1. The basic assumption of the church in requiring affirmation of the Covenant for Officebearers is that the doctrines contained in the confessions of the church fully agree with the Word of God. The burden of proof, therefore, rests upon the signatory who calls upon the church to justify or revise its confessions.
2. Ministers (including missionaries, professors, or others not serving congregations as pastors), elders, or deacons shall submit their gravamina calling for revision of the confessions to their councils for examination and judgment. Should the council decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter,

classis may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of Church Order Article 28-b.

3. If the gravamen is adopted by the council and the classis as its own, it becomes an overture to the broader assemblies, and therefore it is open for discussion in the whole church.
4. If the gravamen is rejected by the classis, it may be appealed to synod; and when the constituted synod declares the matter to be legally before it for action, all the signers of the Covenant for Officebearers shall be free to discuss it together with the whole church until adjudicated by synod.
5. Since the subscriber has the right of appeal from the judgment of a council to classis and from classis to synod, the mere fact that the matter is being appealed shall not be a reason for suspending or otherwise disciplining an officebearer, provided other provisions of the Church Order are observed.
6. A revision of the confessions shall not be adopted by synod until the whole church membership has had adequate opportunity to consider it.

Article 83

Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

—Adopted

3. That synod dismiss the committee with deep gratitude for the heartfelt gift to the denomination, reflecting their ardent love for the church and its confessions.

—Adopted

4. That synod declare this to be its response to Overtures 9-14 and 62, and to Recommendation G in the Calvin College Supplemental Report.

—Adopted

(The report of Advisory Committee 8 is continued in Article 59.)

ARTICLE 54

The afternoon session is adjourned at 5:00 p.m. Mrs. Susie Silversmith (ethnic adviser) leads in closing prayer.