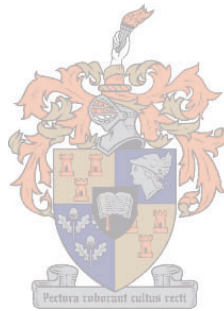


***Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: A Church Juridical Inquiry  
into the Sacramental Liturgies of the Christian Reformed  
Church in North America***

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**Dissertation approved for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Church  
Polity) in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University**

**PROMOTOR**

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**DECEMBER 2019**

## **Declaration**

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Ryan Lee Faber

December 2019

## Abstract

The dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* assumes a relationship between the church's rule of prayer and its rule of faith. Prescriptively, the church's rule of faith, the confessions to which it subscribes, should determine the church's rule of prayer. Descriptively, the way the church worships shapes the faith of the church, what the church actually believes. This dissertation inquires from a church juridical perspective into the sacramental liturgies of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA): What does the celebration of the sacraments in the CRCNA teach? Does the CRCNA's celebration of the sacraments accord with the denomination's official teaching?

This dissertation first establishes the authority of synod to adopt liturgical formularies and explores the church orderly requirement that those formularies be used for the church's administration of the sacraments. It then examines the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for baptism, profession of faith, and the Lord's Supper as adopted and adapted by its synods. It demonstrates that the CRCNA's historic understanding of baptism as primarily the sign and seal of God's actions, evident in the denomination's debates about the *doopledenstelsel*, the baptism of the children of baptized persons who had not yet made a public profession of faith, and the baptism of adopted children, gave way to an increasing emphasis on the promises made by the parents who present their children for baptism in the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1976 and 1994. The formulary adopted by the Synod of 2013 is a hopeful sign that the denomination is returning to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view of covenant holiness found in its confessions.

Ambivalence about the status of baptized children within the church, evident in the denomination's discussion of the discipline of baptized children, was caused in part by the development of a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith. The formularies adopted by the Synods of 1932 and 1976 created the impression, contra the church's *lex credendi*, that a person is received into the church by profession of faith, not by baptism. Ambiguity about the essential meaning of public profession of faith is observed in the denomination's discussion of paedocommunion. This dissertation concludes that the CRCNA should reconsider the necessity of public profession of faith and its church orderly distinction between baptized members and professing members.

Finally, the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper are evaluated in light of the theology of the Lord's Supper contained in the confessions to which the CRCNA sub-

scribes. The denomination's historic sacramental practice is judged to be Zwinglian (memorialist) contra the Calvinist theology of its confessions. The formularies adopted by the Synods of 1964, 1981, 1994, and 2016 are evaluated. The contribution of the later formularies to the denomination's acceptance of paedocommunion is considered. The 2016 formulary is a hopeful sign that one day the Lord's Supper will be experienced by all in the CRCNA as "a "spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits." (Belgic Confession, Art. 35)

## Opsomming

Die dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* veronderstel 'n verband tussen die kerk se reël van gebed (*lex orandi*) en die geloofsreël (*lex credendi*) van die kerk. Voorskriftelik moet die kerk se geloofsreël, die belydenisskrifte wat die kerk onderteken, die kerk se reël van gebed bepaal. Hoe die kerk aanbid, vorm die geloof van die kerk. Dit het te doen met dit wat die kerk eintlik glo. Hierdie proefskrif ondersoek vanuit 'n kerk juridiese perspektief die sakramentele liturgieë van die Christelike Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord-Amerika (CRCNA): Wat leer die viering van die sakramente in die CRCNA? Stem die viering van die sakramente van die CRCNA ooreen met die amptelike leer van die denominasie?

Hierdie proefskrif bepaal eerstens die gesag van die sinode om liturgiese formules aan te neem en ondersoek die kerkregtelike vereiste dat daardie liturgieë vir die bediening van die sakramente van die kerk gebruik moet word. Daarna word die liturgiese formules van die CRCNA vir die doop, belydenis van geloof en die Nagmaal ondersoek, asook soos dit deur die sinode goedgekeur en geamendeer is. Uit die sinodale debatte van die denominasie blyk dit dat die CRCNA se historiese begrip van die doop as die teken en seël van God se handeling oor die dooplidmaatstelsel, of die doop van die kinders van gedoopte persone wat nog nie 'n openbare belydenis van geloof gemaak het nie, en die doop van aangenome kinders, plek gemaak het vir 'n toenemende klem in die liturgieë wat deur die Sinodes van 1976 en 1994 aanvaar is, op die beloftes wat deur die ouers gemaak word wat hul kinders vir die doop aanbied. Die liturgieë wat deur die Sinode van 2013 aangeneem is, is 'n hoopvolle teken dat die denominasie terug keer na die leerstelling van voorveronderstelde wedergeboorte en die innerlike heiligheidsbeskouing van die verbond wat in die belydenisskrifte gevind word.

Uit die bespreking van die denominasie oor die dissipline van gedoopte kinders, blyk dit dat die ambivalensie oor die status van gedoopte kinders in die kerk, deels veroorsaak is deur die ontwikkeling van 'n liturgiese formule vir openbare belydenis van geloof. Dié formule wat deur die Sinodes van 1932 en 1976 aanvaar was, wek die indruk, in teenstelling met die kerk se *lex credendi*, dat 'n persoon in die kerk opgeneem word deur middel van die aflegging van die belydenis van geloof en nie deur die doop nie. Dubbelsinnigheid oor die wesenlike betekenis van openbare geloofsbelydenis word waargeneem in die denominasie se bespreking van *paedocommunion* (kindernagmaal). Hierdie proefskrif kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die CRCNA die noodsaaklikheid van openbare geloofsbelydenis en die kerkregtelike onderskeid tussen gedoopte lidmate en belydende lidmate in herooring moet neem.

Laastens word die liturgiese formules van die CRCNA vir die Nagmaal geëvalueer aan die hand van die teologie van die Nagmaal soos vervat in die belydenisskrifte wat die CRCNA onderskryf. Die denominasie se historiese sakramentele praktyk word as Zwingliaans beskou in teenstelling met die Calvinistiese teologie wat kenmerkend is aan die denominasie se belydenisskrifte. Die liturgieë wat deur die Sinodes van 1964, 1981, 1994 en 2016 aangeneem is, word gevolglik in die dissertasie geëvalueer. Die rol wat die liturgieë tot die denominasie se aanvaarding van die *paedocommunion* word geëvalueer. Die liturgieë van 2016 is 'n hoopvolle teken dat die Nagmaal in die toekoms deur almal in die CRCNA ervaar sal word as " 'n 'geestelike tafel waar Christus homself aan ons met al sy voordele kommunikeer.' (Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis, art. 35)

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge those who assisted in the research required to write this dissertation. The staff of the Pella Public Library (Pella, Iowa) filled countless inter-library loan requests. Mr. Paul Fields, Theological Librarian at the Hekman Library (Grand Rapids, Michigan), and Mr. José Augusto Abissamra Figueiredo, graduate student at Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, Michigan), assisted in obtaining materials from the CRCNA archives housed at Heritage Hall and from many non-circulated CRCNA-related periodicals held at the Hekman Library.

The congregation and leadership of Faith Christian Reformed Church (Pella, Iowa), where I served as a pastor while undertaking this project, were supportive and encouraging. A special word of thanks is due to Mr. & Mrs. Bob & Lois Vermeer, members of Faith Church, for their financial support of my studies at Stellenbosch University.

It was a joy to be supervised in this work by Professor Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel. From our first consultation, which provided essential clarity for the direction of this project, through her consistent encouragement throughout my research and writing, to her genuine joy at this dissertation's completion, she has been a gift.

Gratitude is also due to Dr. Sidney Griedanus, professor emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, Michigan), Rev. Doug Barnes, pastor of Covenant Reformed Church (Pella, Iowa), and Ms. Mary Baak, a retired schoolteacher and member of Faith Church (Pella, Iowa), who assisted with proofreading. Their keen eyes for detail and English grammar greatly improved my writing. Any remaining errors remain mine alone.

My deepest gratitude is due to my family, my wife Jody and our children, who endured months of an often-distracted husband and father as I worked on this project. Thank you for allowing me the time and space necessary to complete this dissertation. It is to our children, God's covenant children - Evan, Graeme, Torin, Bronwyn, Gwennyth, Quinn<sup>†</sup>, Saeryn, Findley<sup>†</sup>, and Norah - that this work is dedicated in the firm belief that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain them, and in the fervent hope that we will one day share together in the feast in the kingdom of our God.

## Abbreviations

BC	Belgic Confession
CD	Canons of Dort
CGKN	<i>Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland</i>
CO	Church Order
CRCNA	Christian Reformed Church in North America
DCO	Dortian Church Order
FFC	Faith Formation Committee
GKN	<i>Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland</i>
HC	Heidelberg Catechism
NHK	<i>Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk</i>
PsH	<i>Psalter Hymnal</i>
RCA	Reformed Church in America
RCO	Revised Church Order of 1965
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith



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## Chapter 1 ~ Introduction

### 1.1 ~ Motivation for Study

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) traces its roots to the *Afscheiding van 1834*, a secession from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. In the 1840s members of *Afscheiding* congregations emigrated to North America, establishing the Holland colony in western Michigan and forming a classis, Classis Holland. In 1850 the classis joined the existing Reformed Church in America (RCA), a church located primarily in the eastern United States that traces its roots to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (New York today) in the early seventeenth century and the establishment of a Dutch Reformed congregation there in 1628.

Seven years later, however, in the Secession of 1857, four congregations seceded from Classis Holland and the RCA to form the CRCNA. Those who seceded were “stern Dortians who withdrew and formed the CRCNA to maintain their revered religious tradition.” (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:2) They spoke of returning to “the standpoint we had when we left the Netherlands,” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242) by which they meant

God’s Word set forth doctrinally in the confessional standards of the historical Reformed church in the Netherlands and structurally in the CO adopted at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Where this doctrine was taught and maintained and where this polity was consistent and vigorously practiced, the secessionists were confident that the true church of Christ was present. (Zwaanstra, 1991:8-9)

The CRCNA is a confessional church. The Dortian church order (DCO), which it inherited from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1850, required that “ministers of the Word ... subscribe to the Confession of Faith of the Netherlands churches.”<sup>1</sup> (Art. LIII; p. 170) The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) adopted a form for this subscription in which office bearers declare that they

heartily believe and are persuaded that all of the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed churches in the

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<sup>1</sup> This was revised in 1914 to read “the three Reformed standards.” (Art. 53; p. 97) The Revised Church Order of 1965 (RCO) required that “All office bearers ... shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Form of Subscription.” (Art. 5; p. 125)

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the church orders adopted by the earliest Dutch Reformed synods including the DCO in this dissertation are from Biesterveld & Kuyper (1982). Page numbers refer to De Ridder’s translation. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the 1914 CO and the RCO in this dissertation are from De Ridder (1982).

Netherlands, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1619, agree in everything with the Word of God. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:188)

If someone comes to “have any thought or feeling against the aforesaid doctrine, or any point of it,” they promise to “first reveal the same to the consistory, classis, and synod to be examined by the same.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:188)

The Synod of 1998 received two overtures regarding Heidelberg Catechism (HC), Q&A 80, which deals with the Roman Catholic Mass.<sup>2</sup> Classis Lake Erie asked synod “to remove Q&A 80 from the text of the HC as confessed by the CRCNA.” (Agenda, 1998:235) Classis Kalamazoo countered that synod should not accede to the overture from Classis Lake Erie, which Classis Kalamazoo described as “misleading” because it only cited “dialogue between Roman Catholics in North America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on the subject of justification.” Classis Kalamazoo maintained that “what is pertinent is ... what the official teaching and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church states.” (Acts, 1998:312) The Synod of 1998 responded by directing “the Interchurch Relations Committee to make an attempt to dialogue with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church to clarify the official doctrine of that church concerning the Mass.” (Acts, 1998:427)

The Synod of 2002 received a report from the Interchurch Relations Committee as “fulfillment of the mandate given by the Synod of 1998,” and submitted “the report to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops requesting their agreement that the report gives an accurate presentation of official Roman Catholic teaching regarding the sacrament of the Eucharist.” (Acts, 2002:488) The Interchurch Relations Committee said that, “if this report accurately portrays Roman Catholic teaching, significant changes in the HC may be warranted.” (Agenda, 2002:293) The Synod of 2002 asked the committee, “on the basis of the response received from the Roman Catholic bishops ... to advise a future synod about any further action that may be needed regarding Q&A 80.” (Acts,

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<sup>2</sup> “Q. How does the Lord’s Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord’s Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which he himself finished on the cross once for all. It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ, who with his very body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father where he wants us to worship him. But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.” (HC Q&A 80)

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort in this dissertation are taken from *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confession*. 1988. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications.

2002:488) The committee informed the Synod of 2003 that “both conferences affirm that the report ‘is accurate in its presentation of official Roman Catholic teaching.’” The committee hoped to present the Synod of 2004 with requisite changes to the HC. (Agenda, 2003:239)

In its report to the Synod of 2004, however, the committee noted that Q&A 80 does not refer to what the Roman Catholic Church teaches, that is, official Roman Catholic teaching, but to what the Mass teaches. The committee “struggled to discern whether Q&A 80 was written in response to official Roman Catholic teaching, to the practice of Roman Catholics in sixteenth-century Europe, or to a combination of both.” (Agenda, 2004:299) The committee concluded that it was both and argued that Q&A 80 “must be regarded as wrong ... *if* [Q&A 80] is taken as describing and evaluating official Roman Catholic teaching,” (Agenda, 2004:301, emphasis original) but that as a “description and evaluation of what is taught or communicated to certain people by a certain way of conducting the Mass, [it] may yet apply” in places where the Mass is not celebrated in accordance with official Roman Catholic teaching. (Agenda, 2004:303)

The committee recommended that the following footnote be appended to Q&A 80: “The Synod of 2004 concluded that the Mass, when celebrated in accordance with official Roman Catholic teaching, neither denies the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ nor constitutes idolatry.” (Agenda, 2004:306) But, because in places where the Mass is not celebrated in accordance with official Roman Catholic teaching, “Q&A 80 has offered, and will continue to offer, a needed warning against teachings, attitudes, and practices related to the Eucharist,” the committee recommended that “Q&A 80 be retained but printed in a smaller font.”<sup>3</sup> (Agenda, 2004:305)

The CRCNA’s discussion of Q&A 80 raises important self-reflective questions regarding the practice of the Lord’s Supper in the CRCNA. What does the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and, more broadly, the sacraments in general, in the CRCNA teach? Does the CRCNA’s celebration of the sacraments accord with the official teaching of the CRCNA, specifically as that teaching is expressed in the confessional standards to which the CRCNA subscribes? Those questions constitute the problem to which this dissertation attends.

## 1.2 ~ *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

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<sup>3</sup> The Synod of 2006 decided to bracket the final three sentences of Q&A 80 “to indicate that they 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 CRCNA.” (Acts, 2006:711) See Venema (2013) for a critique of these decisions.

This dissertation assumes a relationship between the way the church worships and what the church believes - as its title, *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*, implies. That relationship and dictum require further definition. Wainwright (1980:218-219) observes that “it is a fairly rare occurrence for the theme of *lex orandi, lex credendi* to be treated by a Protestant writer.” He attributes this rarity to “the use which Roman Catholic theologians have made of past and present liturgical practice in order to justify doctrinal positions and developments which Protestants have considered unacceptable.”<sup>4</sup>

*Lex orandi, lex credendi* is a “modern conflation” (Spinks, 1991:165) of a statement found in a fifth-century letter attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, who wrote: *Ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*, loosely translated by De Letter (1963:183) as “let the rule of prayer lay down the rule of faith.”<sup>5</sup> Its modern conflation “is frequently invoked to express a dependence of theology and belief upon worship.”<sup>6</sup> Some liturgical theologians, such as Kavanagh (1984), have argued that “worship is the locus of *theologica prima*, and it is from this experience that *theologica secunda*,” doctrinal propositions and confessional statements, “is derived.” (Spinks, 1991:165)

But, as the historical research of De Clerck, (1994) Irwin, (1994) and Marshall (1995) demonstrates, that usage of the dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* “establishes for liturgy a doctrinal authority that [Prosper] would never have recognized.” (Marshall, 1995:139) “The fact is that Prosper used liturgical text and practice as one final effort among many to illustrate his point, not as a theological source in the first instance.” (Marshall, 1995:141) Indeed, Prosper’s appeal to *lex supplicandi* is the eighth and final “official pronouncement of the apostolic see on divine grace and free will” recounted in his letter. (De Letter, 1963:178-185)

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<sup>4</sup> “In controversy with Protestantism, the Council of Trent quoted the liturgy in support of the doctrine of a growth in justifying grace after the initial act of justification... The strength of the dual establishment of doctrine, by both liturgy and magisterium, was stressed.” “In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the definitions of two special Roman dogmas of Mary’s immaculate conception and her bodily assumption were preceded, accompanied and retrospectively justified by appeal to the worship practice of the (Roman Catholic) church.” (Wainwright, 1980:236, 238)

<sup>5</sup> For the full text of Prosper’s letter, see De Letter. (1963:178-185)

<sup>6</sup> Irwin (1994:6) writes about “a kind of textual fundamentalism that plagued some nineteenth-century author’s use of liturgical prayers as ‘proof-texts’ for doctrine.”

Furthermore, De Clerck argues that the *lex supplicandi* to which Prosper appeals is the biblical instruction that “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people,”<sup>7</sup> (1 Tim. 2:1, NIV<sup>8</sup>) not the prayers of the church. The specific prayers to which Prosper refers are the church’s obedient response to this command, which, for Prosper, takes precedence. Irwin (1994:6) argues, “in its original setting [Prosper’s dictum] means the liturgy manifests the Church’s faith.” “The liturgical formulas have value as a theological argument insofar as they are founded on Scripture and attested by tradition.”<sup>9</sup> (De Clerck, 1994:192)

De Clerck (1994) describes *lex orandi, lex credendi* as “an equivocal adage.” Indeed, as Wainwright (1980:218) observes: “From the grammatical point of view it is equally possible to reverse subject and predicate and so take the tag as meaning that the rule of faith is the norm for prayer: what is believed governs what may and should be prayed.” This dissertation assumes that reading of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which Wainwright (1980:219) describes as “characteristic of Protestantism.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, this dissertation considers the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes, the Belgic Confession (BC), Heidelberg Catechism (HC), and Canons of Dort (CD), to be its *lex credendi*. They establish what is believed, and the church’s liturgical formularies should accord with and may be judged by them.

However, “the relationship of the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* is more continuous and dialectic than is sometimes assumed.” (Irwin, 1994:16) Bradshaw (1998:191) describes *lex orandi, lex credendi* as “always a two-way street.” Wainwright (1980:218) writes about the “interplay which in fact takes place between worship and doctrine in Christian practice: worship influences doctrine, and doctrine worship.” Prescriptively, the church’s rule of faith, its *lex credendi*, should determine its rule of prayer, *lex orandi*. But descriptively, the church’s rule of prayer, its *lex orandi*, shapes the faith of the church, its functional theology or what it actually believes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Prosper’s text is a rejection of semi-Pelagianism. 1 Timothy 2:1-6 was a key passage in this fifth-century debate about grace. Semi-Pelagians appealed to God’s desire that all people be saved; (1 Tim. 2:4) Augustinians, such as Prosper, appealed to the instruction to pray for all people: “If we pray that unbelievers be converted, that is solid proof that conversion depends on God.” (De Clerck, 1994:185)

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are from the *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. 2011. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>9</sup> “Prosper appeals to universal liturgical practice not because it is the only source, or even the first source, for theological reflection, but because it is a reliable source that demonstrates the broad apostolic Christian faith.” (Moore-Keish, 2008:66)

<sup>10</sup> “Roman Catholicism characteristically appeals to existing liturgical practice for proof in matters of doctrine... Protestantism characteristically emphasizes the primacy of doctrine over liturgy.” (Wainwright, 1980:251)

<sup>11</sup> For the sake of clarity, this dissertation distinguishes between the faith of the church and its *lex credendi*. The faith of the church refers to the beliefs with and by which the church functions, its functional theology. These



Accordingly, changes in the church's liturgical formularies can change the faith of the church. This dissertation explores how changes in the CRCNA's liturgical formularies have influenced the church's understandings of baptism, profession of faith, and the admission of baptized children to the Lord's Supper. It argues that the 1976 and 1994 formularies for baptism, which increasingly emphasized the promises made by the parents who present their children for baptism rather than God's actions signed and sealed in the sacrament, and the development of a distinct liturgical formulary for public profession of faith resulted in a diminished understanding of baptism in the CRCNA and ambivalence about the standing of baptized children in the church. This dissertation also argues that changes in the liturgical formularies with which the CRCNA celebrates the Lord's Supper, specifically those approved by the Synods of 1981 and 1994, contributed to admission of baptized children to the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA.

Prosper's letter deals only with *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. However, as Wainwright (1980:244-245) notes in his discussion of the ancient dictum: There are "connections between ritual and way of life;" there is "a relationship between liturgy and ethics." Indeed, "the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* remain incomplete without a corresponding *lex bene operandi*." (Wainwright, 1995:99) Accordingly, some scholars - most notably the South African Smit (1997:263n6; 2007:430-431; 2018:40) - have expanded the ancient dictum to include *lex (con)vivendi* (the rule of life [together]).<sup>12</sup> "The ways Christians worship, the ways they believe and the ways they live together, as faith-community but also in and with the wider community, are, no, ought to be closely related, ought to influence one another, ought to be 'laws,' prescriptions, rules for one another."<sup>13</sup> (Smit:1997:263n6) The implications of the *lex orandi*, the sacramental liturgies, into which this dissertation inquires for the church's *lex vivendi* is an important consideration. However, it lies beyond the problem to which this dissertation attends.

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beliefs may or may not accord with the church's official teachings, the confessional standards to which it subscribes, for which this dissertation reserves the term *lex credendi*. This is the difference between what the Mass teaches (functional theology) and what the Roman Catholic Church teaches or the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (*lex credendi*). This dissertation applies the same distinction to what the liturgical formularies teach (functional theology or the faith of the church) and what the confessions teach (*lex credendi*) in the CRCNA.

<sup>12</sup> Smit (1997:263n6) cites Jörn K.P. 1988. *Lex orandi - lex credendi - lex convivendi*, in *Der Lebensbezug des Gottesdienstes: Studien zu seinem kirchlichen und kulturellen Kontext*. München: Chr. Kaiser. 12-22. as the source of this phrase.

<sup>13</sup> For other important South African contributions to this discussion, see Muller (2006), Cilliers (2009), and Naudé (2015:31-40). Cilliers (2009:513) argues that "how we pray is intrinsically connected with how we confess and how we live, also as a community." Worship "is not an abstraction from real life, but rather articulates metaphorically that this life is indeed to be viewed from a radically different perspective," that is, *lex orandi* shapes a particular *lex vivendi*. (Cilliers, 2009:518) Muller (2006:650-654) attends specifically to the sacraments' potential to shape a *lex vivendi*.

### 1.3 ~ Problem Statement & Research Questions

This dissertation examines the development of the liturgical formularies for baptism, profession of faith, and the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA to evaluate how well the church's sacramental liturgies, its *lex orandi*, conforms to its *lex credendi*, the confessions to which it subscribes, and to evaluate how the church's sacramental liturgies have influenced the faith of the church, particularly its understandings of baptism, profession of faith, and the admission of baptized children to the Lord's Supper.

The confessions to which the CRCNA subscribe acknowledge only two sacraments instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord's Supper. (HC Q&A 68; BC Art. 33) Public profession of faith is not a sacrament, but a pastoral rite of the church that has been closely associated with both sacraments. It has been viewed as a baptized person's obedient response to God's call to them in their baptism,<sup>14</sup> and historically it was the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper. Because of its relationship to the sacraments and its influence on the denomination's understanding of the sacraments, an inquiry into the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA is incomplete unless it also attends to the liturgical formularies for public profession of faith.

The CRCNA has historically required that the sacraments be administered with the use of a synodical approved liturgical formulary. (CO Art. 55) Only recently has the denomination allowed for the adaptation of these formularies, but within the parameters of synodical approved guidelines. This raises several research questions to which this church juridical inquiry attends:

- a. Does synod have the authority to establish an order of worship and liturgical formularies for the denomination?
- b. What is the standing of the liturgical formularies in the CRCNA? What authority do they have?
- c. What is the relationship between the liturgical formularies and the confessional standards?

The prescriptive and descriptive understandings of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* assumed by this dissertation lead to the following research questions:

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<sup>14</sup> "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore we are by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto a new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in him, and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life." (PsH, 1934:83)

- d. Do the sacramental practices of the CRCNA as prescribed in its liturgical formularies conform to official CRCNA teaching as articulated in the confessional standards to which the church subscribes?
- e. If these formularies do not conform to official CRCNA teaching, what understanding of the sacraments do they teach?
- f. As the CRCNA has considered welcoming baptized children to the Lord's Supper, what role have the church's liturgical formularies had in the CRCNA's discussions and recent decisions to welcome baptized children to the Lord's Supper?

#### 1.4 ~ Contribution of this Study

Very little scholarly work has been done on the development of the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA. Polman's (1980) dissertation, *Church Music & Liturgy in the Christian Reformed Church in North America*, focuses on church music, primarily the loss of psalm singing in the CRCNA, and on the worship service as a whole, not on the liturgical formularies for the sacraments. Polman only discusses the Lord's Supper insofar as he advocates for weekly celebrations; his dissertation makes no mention of baptism. Curiously, Van Marion's (1998) dissertation, *The Significance of Baptism as Taught Specifically in the Providence Christian Reformed Church and Generally in the Christian Reformed Church in North America*, does not interact with the liturgical formularies for baptism, though it does discuss baptism in the context of the worship service and space.

Only a few commentaries can be found on the Dortian baptismal formulary, including Borduin's (1935) *Form of Baptism Explained* and Wielenga's (2016) influential *Ons Doopsformulier*, only recently available in English translation. Meeter's (1998) dissertation examines the RCA's first official English translation of the Netherlands Liturgy, which the CRCNA adopted in 1912, but no scholarly work has been done on the liturgical formularies adopted by later CRCNA synods. The CRCNA lacks a study comparable to Dorn's (2007) fine study of *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, which explores the development of that denomination's liturgical formularies.

There has also been little scholarly work done in the area of church polity in the CRCNA. Each generation has been served by a commentary on the CO, including Van Dellen & Monsma's (1949, 1967) works, which were recently replaced by De Moor's (2010). But only one scholarly dissertation has been written on polity in the CRCNA, De Moor's (1986) Th.D. study of the controversies surrounding ecclesiastical office in the CRCNA. Van Oene's (1973) Th.M. thesis, which compares and contrasts the polity of the CRCNA with that of the

Canadian Reformed Churches, which embraced the *Doleantie* ecclesiology resisted by the CRCNA, provides a helpful analysis of CRCNA polity. But Boonstra's (1982) D.Min. thesis, which focuses on a single issue, the ordination of women, within a single congregation, Washington, D.C, is of limited value.

Most standard work on the history of the CRCNA, including D.H. Kromminga (1943), Beets (1946), John Kromminga (1949), and Schoolland (1958), predate the adoption of revised and additional liturgical formularies in the CRCNA. Schaap's (1998) more recent history of the CRCNA, *Our Family Album*, does not say anything about liturgical changes in the CRCNA. Hoezee's (2006) *Grace Through Every Generation*, commissioned by the denomination's sesquicentennial committee, includes a chapter on The Changing Face of Worship. The chapter focuses on the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* and the influence of the megachurch movement on worship in the CRCNA. It erroneously regards the Liturgical Committee's 1968 report as the fulfillment of its work (Hoezee, 2006:109) and says nothing about the liturgical formularies subsequently produced by the committee. There is, thus, an obvious gap in the existing research that this dissertation addresses.

This dissertation helps the CRCNA and other Reformed denominations that utilize the Netherlands Liturgy and/or liturgical formularies similar to those adopted by later synods of the CRCNA to evaluate those formularies and their impact on the faith of the church, and encourages them to consider future revisions to their sacramental practices and liturgical formularies that will better align their *lex orandi* with their *lex credendi*.

## 1.5 ~ Methodology

This dissertation is a church juridical inquiry into the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA; that is, it attends to the ecclesiastical processes whereby the liturgical formularies have been adopted and amended. The church orderly provisions that grant synod the authority to adopt liturgical formularies and that require the use of the liturgical formularies in congregational worship are addressed and analyzed with a historical methodology. Their development is traced from the earliest Dutch Reformed synods through the adoption of the RCO to the CO's current provisions. The same methodology is used to address and analyze the liturgical formularies of the CRCNA.

Accordingly, the synodical record - including overtures to synod, reports of synodical study committees, and the deliberations and decisions of synod where these church orderly provisions and liturgical formularies are discussed, amended, and/or adopted - constitute the primary source for this study. Synodical discussion of these formularies includes controversies

regarding the sacraments that were adjudicated by synod and in which either arguments or the adjudication referred to the liturgical formularies.

The synodical record is frequently illumined by contemporaneous discussions in various church-related periodicals, especially *The Banner*, an official publication of the CRCNA; *The Reformed Journal*, later known as *Perspectives*; and the *Torch and Trumpet*, later known as *The Outlook*, which have also been consulted. Important secondary sources in this research included historical surveys of the CRCNA, commentaries on and studies of the Netherlands Liturgy and the CO, and the writings of Calvin Seminary professors whose views were influential within the denomination. The major works of other theologians who have significantly influenced the CRCNA, including Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Berkhof, and Berkouwer, have also been consulted.

## 1.6 ~ Structure of the Study

Chapter one offers the motivation for this study, articulates the understanding of *lex orandi, lex credendi* assumed by this study, defines the research problem and questions addressed in this study, proposes the contribution of this study, and explains the methodology used in this study.

Chapter two provides the historical background of the CRCNA and its sacramental liturgy, attending to the Dortian tradition, specifically the CO and sacramental liturgies adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), to which those who founded the CRCNA were committed. It also considers to the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1850 from which the CRCNA was born.

Chapter three addresses the extent of synodical authority over the worship life of the church, attending to the uniform order of worship debate (1916-1932), which denied synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship for the denomination, and the RCO, which codified the synodical model of polity in the CRCNA, explicitly granting synod the authority - even the mandate - to adopt liturgical formularies for the sacraments. Chapter three also considers the authority of these formularies, as well as their relationship to the confessional standards to which the church subscribes.

Chapter four considers the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the administration of baptism, attending to theological issues related to the administration of the sacrament that have been adjudicated by synod, considering specifically the role of the liturgical formularies in that adjudication. Four issues are considered: the *doopledenstelsel*, the baptism of the children of a baptized person who have not yet made a public profession of faith, the baptism of adopted

children, the discipline of baptized members, and the theology of presumptive regeneration. Chapter four also examines to the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the sacrament of baptism, considering especially the understanding of baptism and covenant holiness contained therein. A significant shift in emphasis from God's actions signed and sealed in baptism to the promises made by the parents who present their children for baptism is observed in the 1976 and 1994 formularies. The formulary adopted by the Synod of 2013 is a hopeful sign that the church is returning to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view of covenant holiness found in its confessions.

Chapter five considers the practice of public profession of faith. The Netherlands Liturgy, which the CRCNA inherited from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1850, did not include a liturgical formulary for this rite. The CRCNA's first liturgical formulary was adopted by the Synod of 1932. This chapter considers the practice of profession of faith in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands from its first synods through the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), and the practice of profession of faith in the CRCNA from the denomination's founding in 1857 to the decision of the Synod of 1920 to draft the denomination's first liturgical formulary for public profession of faith. It also considers the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1932 and 1976, attending specifically to the understandings of baptism and profession of faith that they reflect. Finally, this chapter explores to the CRCNA's discussion of paedocommunion, in which ambiguity about the essential meaning of profession of faith became evident. Different understandings of profession of faith are found in the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1995, 2013, and 2016.

Chapter six considers the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, examining the CRCNA's *lex credendi*, the theology of the Lord's Supper contained in the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes, and then evaluating the CRCNA's *lex orandi*, its sacramental practice, specifically the frequency with which the sacrament is celebrated and the liturgical formularies prescribed for those celebrations, in light of the church's *lex credendi*. The denomination's historic sacramental practice is judged to be Zwinglian contra the Calvinist theology of its confessions. Attention is also given to the influence of the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1964, 1981, 1994, and 2016 on the denomination's discussion of paedocommunion, arguing that the later formularies encourage the inclusion of children at the Lord's Supper.

Chapter seven summaries this study's findings and offers twelve conclusions that address this dissertation's research questions and that recommend changes to the CRCNA's sacramental practice, including a recovery of the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, attention to the discipline of baptized members, and reconsideration of the necessity of public profession

of faith and the church orderly distinction between baptized members and professing members, consistent with this study's findings on the consistency, or lack thereof, of the church's *lex orandi* with its *lex credendi*.

## Chapter 2 ~ Historical Background of the CRCNA and Its Sacramental Liturgies

### 2.1 ~ Introduction

The CRCNA was born of two nineteenth-century secessions on two different continents within 25 years of each other: the *Afscheiding van 1834* in the Netherlands and the Secession of 1857 in the United States. Those who seceded from the RCA<sup>1</sup> in 1857 had also participated in the *Afscheiding van 1834*, having only recently emigrated from the Netherlands to North America in 1847 and later.

In its 1857 letter of secession, the consistory of Polkton wrote of returning to “the standpoint we had when we left the Netherlands,” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242) that is, the standpoint of the *Afscheiding van 1834*. Zwaanstra (1991:8-9) explains that standpoint:

Most crucial for understanding the seceders’ thought and action was the meaning of “our standpoint.” The specific content of this term was God’s Word, set forth doctrinally in the confessional standards of the historical Reformed church in the Netherlands and structurally in the CO adopted at the Synod of Dort. Where this doctrine was taught and maintained and where this polity was consistently and vigorously practiced, the secessionists were confident that the true church of Christ was present. Where, however, there was any deviation from this position or standpoint in doctrine, polity and practice, they tended to doubt the real presence of Christ’s church... Only by separation and return could they be confident that they stood within the unity of the true church, which for all practical purposes to them was synonymous with the historic Reformed church of the Netherlands.

Among the confessional standards to which the seceders subscribed was the BC, which “believes and confesses one single catholic or universal church.” (Art. 27) The seceders understood this one single catholic or universal church to be “a historically existing community of true Christian believers dispersed throughout the world,” (Zwaanstra, 1991:49) that is, a visible

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<sup>1</sup> This denomination traces its roots to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (New York today) in the early seventeenth century and the establishment of a Dutch Reformed congregation there in 1628. Initially Dutch Reformed congregations in North America belonged to the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, under the auspices of Classis Amsterdam. With the Act of Union of 1771, the North American congregations became independent of Classis Amsterdam and the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. In 1819 the North American church was incorporated as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, though it was also known and frequently referred to as the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1867 it adopted its present name, the Reformed Church of America. See De Jong (1978) for a history of the denomination’s first two hundred years in North America. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, though occasional anachronistic, the denomination’s present name is used throughout this dissertation.



church.<sup>2</sup> Not only are “all people ... obliged to join and unite with it,” but “it is [also] the duty of all believers, according to God’s Word to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it.” (BC Art. 28) To fulfill their duty to separate from what is not the church and to join with what is the church, Christians “ought to discern diligently and very carefully by the Word of God, what is the true church - for all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of ‘the church.’” (BC Art. 29)

Among the seceders in 1857, Rev. Van Den Bosch’s letter most clearly expresses this concern to remain within the unity of the true church. He wrote to Classis Holland, “By this I notify that I can hold no ecclesiastical communion with you, for the reason that I cannot hold all of you who have joined the Dutch Reformed Church [RCA] to be the true church of Jesus Christ, and consequently I renounce all fellowship with you and declare myself no longer to belong to you.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943: 240)

As Zwaanstra (1991:9) notes, for those who seceded in 1857 the true church “for all practical purposes to them was synonymous with the historic Reformed church of the Netherlands.”<sup>3</sup> Having also participated in the *Afscheiding van 1834*, they considered the *Afscheiding*

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<sup>2</sup> Although modern commentators suggest that when the Confession describes the “one single catholic or universal church” as “a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers,” it refers to the invisible church, but that when it enumerates the marks the true church, it “subtly shifts to a notion of the visible church,” (Plantinga, 1981:104) it is doubtful whether Guido de Bres, author of the BC, intended such a distinction. From a historical perspective, Zwaanstra (1991:49) asserts that “neither the Reformed confession nor the ancient creeds have an article affirming an invisible church. ... The Reformed confessions neither anticipate nor affirm ecclesiastical pluriformity or denominationalism.”

The seceders of 1834 and 1857 certainly did not understand the Reformed confessions as teaching or affirming ecclesiastical pluriformity. Van Eyck (1950:101) is correct in his judgment that in its 1857 letter of secession the consistory of Graafschaap “denied the pluriformity of the Churches, and therefore seceded and excommunicated all denominations, and set herself up as the only Church.”

<sup>3</sup> While all of the founding fathers of the Holland colony and organizers of Classis Holland were from the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands, not all participated in the Secession of 1857. Those who remained with the RCA were equally concerned to join with the true church, which was also synonymous to them with the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands. They simply disagreed with the seceders’ judgment that the RCA was no longer the true church. This is evident in the case of Rev. Klyn of Grand Rapids.

On 8 April 1857, Rev. Klyn submitted a letter of secession to Classis Holland, (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:240-241) but at the 9 September 1857 meeting of Classis Holland, Rev. Klyn repented of his earlier secession and was received again as a minister in the classis. When he was received by the classis, the president asked Rev. Klyn “whether he [was] convinced that the body which calls itself the Dutch Reformed Church really must be acknowledged to be such.” Rev. Klyn “replied to this, that he formerly already cherished this conviction, was shaken therein by the acceptance of unfavorable rumors, but now anew sees that this body rests upon the foundations laid by the Synod of 1618 and 1619, at Dordrecht.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:254)

Church in the Netherlands<sup>4</sup> to be the continuation of the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands, and, accordingly, consistent with their duty according to BC Art. 28, they sought to join with the true church, that is, the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands. In its letter of secession to Classis Holland, the consistory of Graafschaap spoke not only of “separating ourselves from your denomination, together with all Protestant denominations, with which we thoughtlessly become connected upon our arrival in America,” but also of “uniting ourselves with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:241-242) Similarly, the consistory of Polkton said that it was returning “to the standpoint we had when we left the Netherlands, in order thus again to be in connection with the church of the Netherlands.”<sup>5</sup> (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242)

The church in the Netherlands with which the seceders of 1857 hoped to join was itself the product of a secession, the *Afscheiding van 1834*. Like the Secession of 1857, the *Afscheiding van 1834* was a secession and return, a secession from the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) and a return to the historic Reformed Church in the Netherlands, defined by adherence to the doctrine, polity, and liturgical practice of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). As is explicitly expressed in the consistory of Ulrum’s declaration of secession in 1834, the seceders believed that the NHK had deviated from the Dortian tradition:

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<sup>4</sup> Following the *Afscheiding van 1834*, various congregations that had participated in the *Afscheiding* had organized themselves as a denomination, which identified itself with various names. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the denomination will be referred to as the *Afscheiding* Church throughout this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Those who seceded were evidently serious about uniting with the church in the Netherlands from which they had come. See van’t Spijker (1983:365-371) for a detailed history of the interaction between the fledgling CRCNA and the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands from 1857-1892.

On 29 April 1857, Revs. H. Klyn and K. Van Den Bosch, the only ordained ministers among the seceders, sent a letter to the church in the Netherlands informing them of their withdrawal and asking for recognition and affiliation. (Beets, 1946:61) While the letter was read at the synod of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands, no specific action was taken and no official recognition was granted. (Zwaanstra, 1973:5)

Three years later, Van Den Bosch again appealed to the church in the Netherlands for recognition, but the Synod of 1860 “would not go beyond a simple, formal recognition that it recognized all churches holding Reformed doctrine and government,” including the RCA from which the CRCNA had seceded. (Zwaanstra, 1973:6) When the CRCNA finally sent an official delegation to the synod in the Netherlands in 1872, they were seated “only after considerable debate and with the expressed declaration of synod that it refused to judge the merits of the 1857 secession.” (Schaap, 1998:177)

The refusal of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands to judge the merits of the Secession of 1857 is understandable given that emigrants from the *Afscheiding* Church to North America were on both sides of the Secession of 1857. Most notable among those who stayed in the RCA was Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, who was the first candidate for ministry ordained by the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands.

The 1866 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands seated Van Raalte as an advisory delegate. When asked about the Secession of 1857, Van Raalte’s response that it was due to certain negative elements and that he hoped with God’s blessing that these misguided and schismatic people could yet be brought back into the fold did not help the CRCNA’s case for recognition. (Sheeres, 2006:140)

It has now become plain that the Netherlands Reformed Church [NHK] is not the true but the false church, according to God's word and Article 29 of our Confession. For this reason, the undersigned hereby declare that they, in accordance with the office of all believers, (Article 28) separate themselves from those who are not of the church and therefore will have no more fellowship with the Netherlands Reformed Church [NHK] until it returns to the true service of the Lord.

They declare at the same time their willingness to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members and to unite themselves with every gathering founded on God's infallible word, in whatever place God has so united them. Hereby we testify that in all things we hold to God's holy word and to our old forms of unity in all things founded on that word, namely, the BC, the HC, and the CD; we order our public religious services according to the ancient ecclesiastical liturgy; and with respect to divine service and government, for the present we hold to the CO instituted by the aforementioned Synod of Dordrecht. (Kamps, 2014:246)

Swierenga & Bruins (1999:2) accurately describe those who founded the CRCNA as “stern Dortians who withdrew and formed the Christian Reformed Church to maintain their revered heritage,” that is, the doctrine, polity, and liturgical practice of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).<sup>6</sup> In providing historical background for understanding the CRCNA and its sacramental liturgies, this chapter will thus first explore that “revered heritage,” attending specifically to the CO and the sacramental liturgies adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Second, this chapter will briefly examine the history of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands after the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Of particular concern will be the reorganization of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands as the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* under William I in 1816, to which the *Afscheiding van 1834* was a response.

Third, this chapter will examine the *Afscheiding van 1834*, which was a secession “from a church which had departed from the Reformed heritage in its life rather than in its doctrine.” (Kromminga, 1949:31) Accordingly, attention will be given to that departure in life, specifically in the matters of polity and liturgical practice that concern this church juridical inquiry. Attention will also be given to internal debates within the *Afscheiding* Church regarding the *doopledenstelsel*, that is, the baptism of children of non-professing members, and CO. Ministers and members of the *Afscheiding* Church who emigrated from the Netherlands to the United

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<sup>6</sup> John Kromminga (1949:39) offers a similar assessment of the CRCNA: “We find, then, that the Christian Reformed Church was composed of people who desired, above all else, to be orthodox. In their case the term ‘orthodoxy’ must be interpreted as an adherence, in letter and spirit, to the Reformed confessional standards and polity.”

States in 1847 and later would take the former debate with them to North America. The later debate within the CRCNA will be considered in chapter 4.

Fourth, this chapter will briefly examine the emigration in 1847 of ministers and members of the *Afscheiding* Church from the Netherlands to the United States; the establishment of the Holland colony in West Michigan; the Union of 1850 in which the immigrant churches, organized together as Classis Holland, joined the RCA; and the Secession of 1857 in which four congregations of Classis Holland seceded from the RCA and established the CRCNA.

## 2.2 ~ The Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

The Synod of Dort, which included twenty-eight representatives from foreign churches, convened on 13 November 1618. It is best-known for the theological controversy it adjudicated concerning the controversial teachings of Jacob Arminius.<sup>7</sup> On 23 April 1619, the Synod of Dort adopted five points, the Canons of Dort, countering the points proposed to the States of Holland and Friesland in 1610 by the Remonstrants, adherents of Arminius' teaching. The international delegates remained through the synod's 154th session, held on 9 May 1619. After the international delegates' departure, the synod continued to meet as a national synod of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands from 13 May 1619 through 27 May 1619, approving the CO, formula of subscription, and sacramental liturgies inherited by the CRCNA through the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857. Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry are those *post-acta* decisions.

### 2.2.1 ~ Church Order

Contra Swierenga & Bruins, (1999:8) the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) did not promulgate "a new church order." Rather, the CO adopted by the Synod of Dort, the DCO, was based on decisions made by previous synods, including the Synod of Emden (1571), the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), the Synod of Dordrecht (1578), the Synod of Middelburg (1581) and the Synod of 's Gravenhage (1586), and thus represents the culmination of developments in church polity over five decades.<sup>8</sup> (van den Broeke, 2011:15) This survey of the development

<sup>7</sup> The Synod of Dort dealt with the teachings, not the person, of Arminius. Arminius, who had taught theology at the University of Leiden, died in 1609. See De Jong (1968) for a helpful introduction to the theological controversy adjudicated at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> In the first session after the international delegates' departure, on the morning of 13 May 1619, the articles of the CO adopted by the last National Synod, 's Gravenhage (1586), were read. In the afternoon session of that same day, the articles of the CO were "in substance approved by all of the delegated ministers and elders from every province," although "some delegates explained that in their provinces they had adopted certain special

of the DCO will focus on its provisions most germane to this church juridical inquiry, particularly provisions regarding sacramental liturgies, their authority and use, and provisions related to the authority of the broader assemblies.

Although it was not an official ecclesiastical assembly because its members had not been delegated by their respective churches,<sup>9</sup> the Convent of Wesel (1568) did agree “on certain points, which everyone should observe in the church over which he is placed, until something better and more complete has been ordered after the calling of a synod.” (DeRidder, 1983:38) Particularly noteworthy for this church juridical inquiry is the Convent’s decision that “for singing in the church, the use of the psalms as rendered by Peter Datheen shall be maintained in all the Dutch churches so that nothing less fitting and less edifying is introduced because of the variety of versions.” (Chapter II, paragraph 31; p. 28) As Meeter (1998:9) notes: “While there was at Wesel no specific decision for or against any available Reformed liturgy,<sup>10</sup> the decision for Datheen’s Psalter and Catechism was, ipso facto, a decision for his Liturgy since it was included in the same book.”

Although it was technically a provincial synod, composed primarily of delegates from South Holland and Zeeland, the only provinces liberated from Spanish rule at that time, the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) was “for all practical purposes a national synod of the Netherlands churches,” because “delegates were acknowledged from all churches able to send delegates.” Later synods would recognize the validity of its decisions, (De Ridder, 1983:51) and “its CO has always been included in the church manuals as being equal with the church regulations of the other national synods.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:14) “This synod has sometimes been called ‘the liturgical synod’ because of the nature and influence of its decisions with respect to worship.” (De Ridder, 1983:51)

It was at this synod, the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), that the first specific decisions were made regarding the available Reformed liturgies. The provincial synod stipulated that “all ministers shall use the same form for public, congregational prayers,” specifically

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articles of CO by authority of the same provinces,” but these special articles, “in substance agreed with” the articles approved by the Synod of Dort. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:176)

<sup>9</sup> The principle that broader assemblies can only be constituted by office bearers delegated by a minor assembly would play a role in both the *Afscheiding van 1834*, which responded to the Reorganization of 1816 that replaced classical and synodical assemblies with boards whose members were appointed by the king, not delegated by the churches, and the Secession of 1857, especially among those who would defend the secession on the grounds that the Union of 1850 was illegitimate because Wyckhoff mistook a meeting with ecclesiastical leaders with an official ecclesiastical assembly.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to Datheen’s liturgy some churches used Utenhove’s edition of Micron’s *Christian Ordinances*, which had been published in Emden in 1554. (Nichols, 1968:81)

the prayers “contained in the Catechism.” (Article XLIII; p. 67) It also required that “the form of the questions for baptism shall be maintained as they are found in the back of the Catechism.” (Article LXIII; p. 71)

Given that the Convent of Wesel had endorsed the HC for use within the Dutch-speaking churches (Chapter III, paragraph 2; p. 29), a decision affirmed by the first national synod of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands meeting in exile in Emden in 1571, (Paragraph 5; p. 43) and that the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), endorsing the decision of Wesel, stipulated that “only the Psalms set into poetry by Datheen shall be used,” (Article XLIII; p.67) the Catechism to which the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) referred must be Datheen’s translation of the HC, which was printed with his Psalter, and, accordingly, the prayers and baptismal liturgy to which the provincial synod referred must also be those of Datheen. These decisions of the provincial synod were affirmed by the Synod of Dordrecht (1578), the first national synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands to meet on Dutch soil, at which “Datheen’s Psalter, Catechism, and Form for Holy Baptism were all made mandatory among the Dutch congregations.” (Meeter, 1998:13)

Regarding the use of the liturgical formulary for baptism, the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), deeming it “a source of danger for every minister to have his own special exhortation before the sacrament of baptism,” decided that “there shall be one exhortation, summarized and prepared by the ministers.” (Article LXVI; p. 71) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) declared it “more advisable and safer that all ministers follow the prescribed form for the institution and observance of Holy Baptism than to leave each one free to use his own formulation.” (Chapter IV, Article X; p. 93) The Synod of Middelburg (1581) not only deemed it more advisable and safer, but made it obligatory that “in baptism the minister shall use the form for the institution and practice of baptism that has been prepared for that purpose.” (Article XLI; p. 115) The Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) affirmed this rule, (Article LII; p. 150) and it is contained within the DCO. (Article LVIII; p. 171)

While the early church orders appear to grant more latitude with regard to the Lord’s Supper, providing that “each church shall administer the Lord’s Supper in such a manner as it judges best contributes to edification,” the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), although it did not refer to any specific liturgical formulary for the Lord’s Supper, did decide

that during the breaking of the bread of the Lord’s Supper the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 shall be used: ‘The bread that we break, etc.’ with the

addition,<sup>11</sup> ‘Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of Jesus Christ was broken unto a complete remission of all our sins.’ And with the dispensing of the cups, ‘The cup of thanksgiving, etc.’ ‘Take, all of you drink of it, remember and believe that the precious blood of Jesus Christ was shed unto the remission of all our sins.’ (Article LXXVII; p. 73)

The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578), (Chapter IV, Article XVIII; p. 94) and the Synod of Middelburg (1581) (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:124) also mandated the use of the *Londonse aenhangsel* (appendix). The Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) stipulated that “the form for the Lord’s Supper, together with the prayers pertaining to it, shall be read in front of the table.” (Article LV; p. 150) The DCO contains the same stipulation. (Article LXII; p. 171)

That the national synods adopted such church orderly requirements mandating the use of specific sacramental liturgies in the worship of local congregation assumes that the national synod possesses a measure of authority over the local congregation. The next chapter will consider how that assumption has been challenged in the CRCNA, particularly when synod attempted to mandate the use of a uniform order of worship for all congregations. Given these later challenges to synodical authority in the CRCNA, it is important to consider how these early synods of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands viewed the authority of the broader assemblies, especially the national synod, in relation to the local consistory.

The first Reformed CO, adopted by the Synod of Paris (1559), stipulated that “No church may assume primacy or domination over another.” (De Ridder, 1983:44) The BC says the same regarding ministers: “As for ministers of the Word, they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they may be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.” (Art. 31) The first article of the CO adopted by the Synod of Emden (1571), the first national synod of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, echoes both the Synod of Paris and the BC: “No church shall lord it over another church, no minister of the Word, no elder or deacon shall lord it over another, but each shall guard himself against all suspicion and enticement to lord it over others.” (Paragraph 1; p. 43)

Although this provision would be placed near the end, rather than the beginning, of later church orders, none of the early national synods of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands omitted it, and it is included in the DCO. (Article LXXXIV; p. 175) These provisions

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<sup>11</sup> This addition, the *Londonse aenhangsel* (London appendix), originated in the liturgy of John à Lasco, and was expanded by Martin Micron in his *Christian Ordinances*. (Meeter, 1998:255) Chapter 6 will critique its Zwinglian theology. (See pp. 246-247 below.)

were originally written to define Protestant principles over against Roman hierarchy, particularly the primacy of the Bishop of Rome; they do not circumscribe the authority of the broader assemblies.<sup>12</sup> That is, they speak only of the relationship between office bearers and between local congregations; they do not speak about the relationship between minor assemblies, particularly the local consistory, and the broader assemblies. The first national synod to speak explicitly about the authority of the broader assemblies, the Synod of Middelburg (1581), said that “the classis has the same authority over the consistory that the particular synod has over the classis and the general synod has over the particular.”<sup>13</sup> (Article XXVII; p. 113) The Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) affirmed this provision, (Article XXXIII; p. 146) and it is included in the DCO. (Article XXXVI; p. 167)

The Synod of Emden (1571) also stipulated that delegates to broader assemblies, specifically the provincial synods, “shall not present any other things than those which could not be completed in the consistorial and classical meetings, or such things that concern all of the churches of the province.” (Chapter III, paragraph 1; p. 56)<sup>14</sup> All subsequent church orders would contain this stipulation, though not the reason for it, and it is included in the DCO. (Article XXX; p. 166)

It is noteworthy, however, that the rule was not originally adopted by the Synod of Emden (1571) for reasons of principle. That is, it was not adopted, as Biesterveld & Kuyper (1982:12) maintain, because the local consistory “is the only ruling authority in the church,” and because “the authority of the higher assemblies is always less than that of the consistory

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<sup>12</sup> Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:336) argue that this article “cannot be isolated from other articles of our church order regarding our major assemblies.” “Such an erroneous isolation” of this article “might easily lead one to conclude that in the Reformed system classes and synod can only advise and that these bodies cannot take authoritative decisions. Nothing could, however, be further from the truth.”

<sup>13</sup> How the synod understood this authority can be inferred from its responses to the following “particular questions considered in the general synod, held at Middelburg.” When asked, “Whether the larger churches should submit themselves to the decisions of the synod and classis, as well as the small churches, and regulate themselves according to them?” the synod answered, “All churches, large as well as small, are equally subject to the classis, as the classis to the particular synod, and the particular synod to the general.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:131) That is, the minor assemblies should submit to the decisions of the broader assemblies and regulate themselves according to those decisions.

When asked, “Whether a classis has the right to rescind a decision of a previous classis made contrary to a decision of the national synod,” the synod answered, “It not only has the right but also the duty to do so.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:133) That is, the minor assemblies are subject to the decisions of the broader assemblies, and where the decisions of the assemblies differ, the decision of the broader assembly takes precedence, and the decision of the minor assembly should be rescinded or revised to align with the decision of the broader assembly.

<sup>14</sup> A similar rule was adopted with regard to the general synod: Delegates were to bring “testimonies and credentials and orders concerning doctrine, church government, and special matters which could not be carried out or completed in the provincial meetings, or which concern and affect all the churches.” (Chapter IV; p. 58)



because they are only allowed to deal with matters that could not be resolved in the lower assemblies.”

The Synod of Emden did not explicitly prohibit broader assemblies from dealing with matters that could be resolved in the minor assemblies. What it explicitly disallowed was delegates from minor assemblies bringing to the broader assemblies matters that could be resolved by the lower assemblies, but not because the broader assemblies lacked the authority to deal with such matters. Instead, the Synod of Emden (1571) offered this practical reason for its rule: “so that the provincial meetings are not lengthened with unnecessary problems.” (Chapter III, paragraph 1; p. 56)

It is also noteworthy, contra Biesterveld & Kuyper, that the Synod of Emden (1571) did not limit the general or national synod’s authority to only matters that could not be resolved in the lower assemblies, but included within its mandate matters “concerning doctrine, church government, and special matters which concern and affect all the churches.” (Chapter IV; p. 58) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) would add “ceremonies” and “liturgies.” (Chapter II, Article XXIX; p. 88) Although it does not explicitly specify what those matters might be, the DCO also allows broader assemblies to deal with “that which concerns the churches of the major assemblies in common.” (Article XXX; p. 166)

On 27 May 1619, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) approved a letter to the States General, asking the States General “to approve and to order that the CO as reviewed in this synod and expanded in some points for greater edification and peace should be uniformly maintained everywhere in the churches of the lands, as much as possible,” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:196-197) but that the States General never did.<sup>15</sup> In the end, the DCO was only accepted unequivocally by the province of Overijssel. The provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland also accepted the DCO, albeit with their own caveats and restrictions.<sup>16</sup> (van den Broeke, 2011:16) “Friesland operated under an order of 1586, Zeeland under another one of 1591, and Groningen under yet another of 1595. Drenthe had drafted its own in 1633.” (ten Zythoff, 1987:35)

Thus, it is a mistake to assert, as Sheeres (2006:xx-xxi) does, that all parts of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands “always adhered to the CO established by the Synod of Dort.” Nevertheless, these various church orders, all built upon the sixteenth-century synodical

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<sup>15</sup> See van Lieburg (2014:125-126) for a history of the failed reception of the DCO.

<sup>16</sup> The restrictions in Utrecht related to the calling of ministers; in Gelderland they dealt with the classical assemblies.

decisions outlined above, did not differ in principle from the DCO.<sup>17</sup> So, while the DCO may not have been formally accepted everywhere, its spirit was active in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. (van den Broeke, 2011:16)

Furthermore, because no national synod was convened for two centuries after the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), the DCO “became an icon,” (van den Broeke, 2011:16) viewed by many “as divinely inspired and the final word on all issues,” (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:8) including those who participated in the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, from which the CRCNA inherited a church orderly tradition that granted broader assemblies a measure of authority over the local congregation, including, inter alia, mandating the use of specific sacramental liturgies. What were those liturgies? Whence did they come?

### 2.2.2 ~ Sacramental Liturgies

One of the final decisions of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), made on 28 May 1619, the day before the synod adjourned, was that

the Netherlands Liturgy in which are included the public prayers, and the forms for administering the sacraments, the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons, and the solemnization of marriage be reviewed by the revisers of the condensed minutes or by the clerk of this synod, and having been reviewed shall be added to the public editions.<sup>18</sup> (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:200)

This liturgy, the Netherlands Liturgy, which the CRCNA would inherit through the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, is essentially the liturgy of Peter Datheen, first published in 1566 for his Dutch refugee congregation in Frankenthal,<sup>19</sup> which was, in turn, “for the most part, nothing but a Dutch translation of a German original, the so-called Palatinate liturgy.”<sup>20</sup> (Hageman, 1973:112)

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<sup>17</sup> “On the juridical level there were only provincial church orders, but they shared the essentials of Reformed church polity.” (van Lieberg, 2014:128)

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Meeter’s (1998:18) claim that “this decision meant that the Liturgy had not only full approbation but public authority, an authority equal to that of the other ‘public documents’ of the Church, namely, the BC, the HC, and the CD” has been contested in the CRCNA. Chapter 3 will consider the standing of the liturgical formularies, that is, what authority they have in the CRCNA, as well as the relationship between the liturgical formularies and the confessional standards in the CRCNA.

<sup>19</sup> Anyone who reads the “forms and prayers” included in Datheen’s psalter “will realize that he is looking at the first Dutch version of what are the oldest parts of our liturgy.” (Mast, 1998:95)

In addition to the liturgical formularies, Datheen’s psalter also included a collection of prayers, which are beyond the scope of this church juridical inquiry of sacramental liturgies. See Meeter (1998:5-7) for an analysis of the relationship between Datheen’s prayers and those of the Palatinate liturgy.

<sup>20</sup> See Thompson (1963) for an English translation of the Palatinate liturgy.

Datheen's main project appears to have been providing his congregation with a psalter. Given that the Genevan Psalter was the source for his metrical psalms, Meeter (1998:8) assumes that Datheen modeled his entire psalter after the Genevan Psalter, which usually included Calvin's Form of the Church Prayers and Catechism. But Datheen, serving a Dutch refugee congregation in Frankenthal, used neither Calvin's Form of the Church Prayers nor the Genevan Catechism. Frankenthal was part of the Palatinate, and "as a refugee minister, Datheen would doubtless have felt obligated to give the elector's catechism [and liturgy] every chance." (Hageman, 1973:111) Thus, Datheen's psalter included the HC and the Palatinate liturgy, rather than Genevan Catechism and Calvin's Form of the Church Prayers.

Although the Reformation was firmly established in the Palatinate when Frederick III succeeded Otto Henry as Elector in 1559, the church was seriously divided. Matters came to a head later that year when, during a communion service in the Cathedral Church of the Holy Ghost, the bishop, a high Lutheran, snatched the chalice from a young deacon, because he, the bishop, judged the deacon unworthy of administering the sacrament because the deacon was a Zwinglian. In response, Frederick dismissed both the bishop and the deacon and, "to avoid the old dispute and bring harmony to the church, in 1562 Frederick appointed a theological commission to draft a new confession of faith and a new liturgy for the Palatinate." (Rowe, 1996:55) Frederick's theological commission produced the HC and the Palatinate Liturgy.

The Palatinate Liturgy "was itself based upon four other liturgies: the Lutheran Pfalz liturgy, 1557, the German editions of à Lasco and Micron, and the *Liturgia Sacra* of Poullain." (Spinks, 1984:136) Hageman (1973:118) describes the Lutheran church that produced the Pfalz liturgy as "something of a maverick. Strongly Lutheran in its doctrine, it was almost as strongly Reformed in its liturgy." Its liturgy for the Lord's Supper, of which the authors of the Palatinate liturgy "made very generous use," was "largely didactic in tone."

The liturgies of à Lasco, Micron, and Poullain all originated in the so-called Stranger Churches of England. In 1550 Edward VI placed a variety of Protestant refugee churches under the superintendency of John à Lasco and granted them a charter which permitted

the aforementioned superintendent and ministers and their successors freely and quietly to practice, enjoy, use and exercise their own rites, ceremonies and their own peculiar ecclesiastical discipline, notwithstanding that they do not conform with the rites and ceremonies used in our Kingdom, without impeachment, disturbance or vexation of them or any of them. (Spinks, 1984:98)

Among these refugee churches was a French Reformed congregation pastored by Poullain, who had been Calvin's successor as minister of the French congregation in Strasbourg. Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra* was "nothing more than the same liturgy which Calvin had drafted for use of the congregation in Strasbourg." (Mast, 1998:97) German translations of Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra* were published in 1554 and 1555 and would have been available to the theological commission appointed by Frederick III. Thus, it is more likely that the Calvinistic elements of the Palatinate liturgy, such as its lengthy fencing of the table, came from Poullain, rather than Calvin's Genevan service, which was not published in German until 1563, the same year that the Palatinate Liturgy was published. (Hageman, 1973:117)

The Stranger Churches also included a Dutch congregation, "the first Dutch Protestant congregation in the world,"<sup>21</sup> (Hageman, 1973:112) pastored by à Lasco himself, "a committed Zwinglian."<sup>22</sup> (Mast, 1998:98) When à Lasco's liturgy, *Forma ac ratio*, was first published in 1555, its liturgical section was of such an extreme length that one wonders whether it was ever used in the congregation.<sup>23</sup> (Mast, 1998:98) Perhaps à Lasco used a shorter, handwritten copy during his ministry in London, which he later expanded for publication. (Nichols, 1968:75; Spinks, 1984:100)

Micron's *Christian Ordinance*, which "appears to be a Dutch abridgment of à Lasco's *Forma ac ratio*,"<sup>24</sup> (Spinks, 1984:101) may reflect the liturgy as it was actually used in the London congregation.<sup>25</sup> When Edward VI died and his Catholic sister Mary ascended the English throne and the Dutch church in London fled, first to Denmark, then to Emden, and finally settling in Frankenthal in the Palatinate, it was Micron's liturgy that they took with them.

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<sup>21</sup> Hageman (1973:112) uses the term Protestant intentionally, "because the Reformed character of this congregation was not entirely clear at the outset." The four thousand Dutch people who fled the Spanish terror and organized this congregation include not only Calvinists, but also Mennonites and Lutherans.

<sup>22</sup> à Lasco's Zwinglianism, "the notion that the only value in the Supper is in making us remember the atoning death of Christ on Calvary," (Mast, 1998:113) is especially evident in the words of distribution used in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper, which present the elements as means by which the death of Christ is commemorated: "Take, eat and remember that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was for us given to death on the beam of the cross for the remission of all our sins." "Take, drink and remember that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out on the beam of the cross for the remission of all our sins." (Spinks, 1984:108) The formula is expanded in Micron's *Christian Ordinances*: "Take, eat, remember and believe..." (Spinks, 1984:112)

<sup>23</sup> See Spinks (1984:157-176) for an English translation of à Lasco's *Forma ac ratio*.

<sup>24</sup> While the exact relationship between Micron's work and that of à Lasco is difficult to establish - particularly because Micron's work was first published in 1554, a year before the first publication of à Lasco's *Forma ac ratio* - the two works are clearly related. "In his dedication to Sigsmund of Poland, à Lasco mentioned that Micron had translated his work into Dutch, and Micron acknowledged his debt to à Lasco." (Spinks, 1984:101)

<sup>25</sup> The full title of Micron's work is "Christian Ordinances of the Netherlands congregation of Christ which was established in London in 1550 by the Christian prince, King Edward VI; faithfully collected and published by M. Micron with the consent of the elders and deacons of the congregation of Christ in London; for the comfort and profit of all believers." (Hageman, 1973:115)

(Spinks, 1984:98; Mast, 1998:99-100) While some Dutch Reformed congregations may have used Micron's liturgy for a time, it would eventually be displaced by Datheen's.

It would be this liturgy - Datheen's liturgy, the Netherlands Liturgy, with its "blending of Zwinglian and Calvinist themes" from Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra* and Micron's *Christian Ordinances* - that the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) would finally adopt and that the CRCNA would inherit from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857.

To this liturgy, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) added a liturgical formulary for the baptism of adults. Neither the Palatinate liturgy nor the liturgy of Datheen included such a formulary. An influx of non-baptized adults, children of Anabaptist parents, made such a formulary necessary. (DeRidder, 1983:80) The Provincial Synod of South Holland produced the first such formulary in 1603. The Provincial Synod of Zeeland produced another in 1611. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) "blended these two forms into one." (Meeter, 1998:233) Contra the Anabaptist insistence on "believer's baptism," and in keeping with covenantal theology, the formulary approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) "follows closely the traditional form for infant baptism." (Diephouse, Kromminga, & Polman, 1988:838)

### 2.3 ~ The Reorganization of 1816

The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was the high-water mark for the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, establishing its CO, formula of subscription, and sacramental liturgies. D.H. Kromminga (1943:43) characterizes the subsequent two centuries as a "period of deterioration," largely because, although the DCO called for triennial meetings of the general or national synod, none was convened for more than two centuries. The absence of national synods virtually guaranteed the erosion of orthodoxy as major theological questions were left unanswered.<sup>26</sup> (Schaap, 1998:64) Only the States General could convene a national synod which could have settled these questions, but that it refused to do, instead mandating tolerance and mutual forbearance. D.H. Kromminga (1943:68) notes: "Toleration could be understood and applied in quite diverse meanings and ways; its meaning and application widened gradually, and the government stood by to see to it that the churches learned to practice tolerance."

Thus, by the time of the French Revolution and the establishment of the Batavian Republic in 1795, "little remained of the energy of the early years and the era of the Synod of Dort." (Blei, 2006:47) "The doctrines of Dort had been forgotten, if not held in contempt." (ten

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<sup>26</sup> "A directive or an authoritative word from synod was no longer uttered, indeed could no longer be spoken." (Blei, 2006:38) As a result, "in several doctrinal disputes no universal solution could be reached" and "many doctrinal differences remained unreconciled." (Kromminga, 1943:43)

Zythoff, 1987:104) If the absence of national synods caused an erosion in the orthodoxy of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, the French Revolution and the establishment of the Batavian Republic caused an erosion of its institutional life.

The Revolution's commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity required the separation of church and state, which left no room for a privileged church as the Reformed Church in the Netherlands had been. On 18 July 1796, the National Convention decreed the separation of church and state. As a result, the Reformed Church lost its privileged position, exclusive rights to ecclesiastical property, and control over the schools. (Kromminga, 1943:72) The Constitution of 1798 stipulated that "each church body is responsible for the maintenance of its religion, it ministers and clergy," ending government support for clergy salaries. Furthermore, it was determined that all Reformed church buildings not built with the church's own funds, which would have been all Reformed church buildings built before 1780, would be handed over to the local authorities to be redistributed to the largest local church body. While the Reformed church retained its property in locations where it was the largest local church body, it was obligated to pay other local church bodies a proportion of the building's assessed value. (Blei, 2006:50-52)

On 30 March 1814, when William of Orange returned from England to ascend the Dutch throne as William I, he inherited a decimated national church. Heideman (2015:9) maintains that William I "took his responsibility to promote true religion seriously," and D.H. Kromminga (1943:74) allows that he had "a sincere desire to help, but he understood the church too little to be able to do so without working havoc." William I reorganized the Reformed Church in the Netherlands as the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*.<sup>27</sup>

On 7 January 1816, a new church order, the *Algemeen Reglement*, was enacted by royal decree. While the DCO allowed the articles of the CO "to be altered, added to or diminished," "if the welfare of the churches demands," it stated that any alteration, addition or diminution could only be "ordered by the General or National Synod." (Article LXXXVI; p. 175) Though the government considered convening a national synod, it deemed that too cumbersome and, instead, appointed a special commission consisting of eleven ministers. (Blei, 2006:55)

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<sup>27</sup> "The reorganized church was presented with a new name. It was no longer to be known by the old fashioned name *Gereformeerde*. Henceforth it was to use the contemporary up-to-date word *Hervormd*." (Heideman, 2015:11) The name *Gereformeerde* would be reclaimed by the *Afscheiding van 1834* in an attempt to demonstrate their continuity with the Reformed Church of the Netherlands and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

Although the *Algemeen Reglement* did not replace the DCO, because, as noted above, the DCO was neither approved by the States General nor adopted by every provincial synod,<sup>28</sup> those who participated in the *Afscheiding van 1834* certainly saw the *Algemeen Reglement* as an unauthorized revision or replacement of the DCO, because it had not been ordered by a general or national synod, as the DCO required. While thirty-six classes and eight provincial synods accepted, or at least did not object, to the reorganization, eight classes did object,<sup>29</sup> primarily because the *Algemeen Reglement* were introduced without involvement by the church itself, that is, its official ecclesiastical assemblies. (ten Zythoff, 1987:37)

The government only responded to the objections of Classis Amsterdam, assuring it that the government had no intention of changing the doctrine of the church, only its administrative structure. (ten Zythoff, 1987:37) But these changes to the administrative structure of the church were very significant. While old names, such as classis and synod, were retained, they no longer were the ecclesiastical assemblies envisioned by the DCO, that is, assemblies constituted by office-bearers delegated by their respective consistories, classes, or provincial synods. Instead they became boards that functioned as small directorates in the particular jurisdiction: classical, provincial, and, on the national level, the synodical. Board members were not delegated by churches, but named by the king. (Blei, 2006:57)

The first synod of the reorganized church met in July 1816. In his opening address, a government official, speaking in the name of the king, reminded the synod that it need not trouble itself with theological debates, because it was “not called to decide doctrinal differences, but to administer the church.” Though the *Algemeen Reglement* did include “the maintenance of doctrine” among the tasks of synod, the task was left undefined. (Blei, 2006:57-58)

While the synod did not alter the confessional base of the church, that is, the BC, the HC, and the CD, it made “an apparently insignificant but really very serious change” in the formula of subscription. (Beets, 1946:28) A royal decree, signed on 30 July 1816, made the new formula mandatory for all candidates for admission to ministry in the Reformed church. It read:

We, the undersigned, admitted to the public office of preaching in the Netherlands Reformed Church by the executive of the provincial synod of

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<sup>28</sup> Historians loyal to the NHK note that the *Algemeen Reglement*, not the DCO, was the first CO that was applicable for the church in the whole of the Netherlands. (Blei, 2006:55; van den Broek, 2011:11)

<sup>29</sup> Pieters (1943:11) suggests that the reorganization of 1816 “aroused but little protest,” because “most of the clergy were only too glad to get their salaries again and were not disposed to bite the hand that fed them.” Additionally, old names, such as classis and synod, were maintained, though they were no longer the ecclesiastical assemblies envisioned by the DCO. Schaap (1998:69) suggests that “by the time the consequences of the new order were clear, the radical reorganization was permanent.”

\_\_\_\_\_, declare sincerely herewith that in teaching and in practice we have very much at heart the interests of both Christianity in general and the Reformed denomination in particular; that we in good faith accept and sincerely believe the doctrine which, according to God's Holy Word, is contained in the accepted forms of unity of the Netherlands Reformed Church. (ten Zythoff, 1987:43)

In the formula of subscription adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), subscribers declared that they

heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1619, agree in everything with the Word of God. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:188)

The new formula no longer said, as had the formula adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), that all of the articles and points of doctrine "agree in everything with the Word of God." Instead, the new formula speaks of doctrine "according to" or "in agreement with" (Kamps, 2014:15) God's Holy Word. That language is ambiguous. What does according to, or in agreement with, God's Holy Word mean? It could be interpreted, consistent with the formula of subscription adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), to mean that one subscribes to this doctrine because it agrees with God's Word.<sup>30</sup> But the language of the revised formula of subscription could also be interpreted to mean that one subscribes to the doctrine contained in the accepted forms of unity insofar as it agrees with the Word of God.

"Hard-pressed by petitions and addresses, the synod successfully sidestepped choosing between the two." (ten Zythoff, 1987:45) In 1834 it laid aside several addresses asking to remove the uncertainty, choosing instead to "send a pastoral letter in which particularly young ministers were admonished to exercise care in avoiding everything which might bring suspicion on their confession and gospel preaching." (Kromminga, 1943:84)

If one accepts the latter interpretation, that one subscribes to the doctrine of the accepted forms "insofar as" said doctrine agrees with God's Holy Word, subscription essentially becomes meaningless, especially if it is left to the subscriber's own judgment how far the doctrine of the accepted forms agrees with God's Word. The "insofar as" interpretation "allowed

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<sup>30</sup> That the CRCNA inherited the Dortian formula of subscription, which subscribes to the doctrines of the confessions because they agree with the Word of God, justifies this dissertation's theological critique of the CRCNA's sacramental liturgies in light of its confessional standards.



ministers freedom to hold opinions that were radically different from the confessional statements which had been adopted two hundred years earlier,” (Heideman, 2015:11) and “meant liberty to preach as one pleased.” (Beets, 1946:29) In his Address to my Fellow Reformed Believers,<sup>31</sup> published anonymously in 1827, court preacher Dirk Molenaar contended that if synod had used insofar as, the change they intended would have been obvious. “Instead of doing their work straightforwardly and honestly,” Molenaar (in Kamps, 2014:19) accused them of “subtly and craftily undermining official church doctrine.”

Additionally, while the formula of subscription adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) explicitly named the church’s confessional standards, the revised formula refers to the “accepted forms of unity of the Netherlands Reformed Church” without clarifying which confessions constitute the accepted forms of unity.<sup>32</sup> The ambiguity allowed some to sign the formula of subscription while rejecting the CD. Again, although “the synod was pressed repeatedly for a clear description of what precisely was meant by ‘the doctrine of the Reformed Church’” and the accepted forms, it “refused steadfastly to express itself on the matter.” After all, it was not called on to decide doctrinal differences, but to administer the church. (Blei, 2006:59)

Even so, the synod’s bias against the CD was evident in its decision regarding the examination of candidates for ministry:

Examination in the Canons appears to us even more useless after the disputes which, in the course of more than two centuries, come to naught; the diligence to defend the one or the other opinion has completely cooled off; and the denomination of the Remonstrants has declared that it neither adheres to those articles<sup>33</sup> nor is willing that it be judged by them. (ten Zythoff, 1987:44)

The synod’s bias against the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was also evident in its decision to commemorate the Protestant Reformation in 1817, but its refusal to commemorate the Synod

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<sup>31</sup> D.H. Kromminga (1943:80) calls Molenaar’s pamphlet a program for the *Afscheiding van 1834*. Along with his objection to the ambiguous wording in the revised formula of subscription, Molenaar also objected to its failure to explicitly mention the Canons of Dort and the synod’s consideration of the liturgical writings as mere aids for inexperienced ministers.

<sup>32</sup> While most provinces accepted all three Forms of Unity, that is, the BC, the HC, and the CD, the province of Friesland had always excluded the CD. (ten Zythoff, 1987:44) The French-speaking province of Walloon accepted the BC and the CD, but not the HC, using the Genevan Catechism instead. (Heideman, 2015:63) The first national synod in the Netherlands in Emden (1571) already “deemed it fitting that in the French speaking congregations the form of the Genevan Catechism and in the Nederduits speaking congregations the form of the Heidelberg should be used.” (Article 5; p. 43)

<sup>33</sup> The articles to which the synod here refers are presumably the points proposed by the Remonstrants to the States of Holland and Friesland in 1610, which the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) rejected when it adopted the CD.

of Dort (1618-1619) in 1819. That refusal led Nicholas Schotsman, characterized by D.H. Kromminga (1943:80) as, at that time, “the only persistent defender of the Forms of Unity,” to publish the two sermons he preached in Leiden on 9 May and 16 May 1819, commemorating the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). (ten Zythoff, 1987:61-62)

Such was the state of the NHK at the time of the *Afscheiding van 1834*. The *Afscheiding van 1834* was a secession “from a church which had departed from the Reformed heritage in its life rather than in its doctrine.” (Kromminga, 1949:31) The Reorganization of 1816 was not a departure in doctrine, because it did not alter the church’s confessional standards. Changes to the authority of the confessions, particularly in the formula of subscription, were not the only departure in life to which the *Afscheiding van 1834* objected. Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry are the response of the *Afscheiding van 1834* to other departures in life, particularly with regard to polity and sacramental liturgies.

#### 2.4 ~ The *Afscheiding van 1834*

The *Afscheiding van 1834* began on 13 October 1834 when the Reformed Church in Ulrum declared that “they in accordance with the office of all believers separate themselves from those who are not of the church and therefore will have no more fellowship with the Netherlands Reformed Church.” Ulrum’s declaration noted “the extremely unjust and ungodly suspension of [their] pastor and teacher who was loved and respected everywhere” and concluded with a commitment to “continue to recognize our unjustly suspended preacher as our lawfully called and ordained pastor and teacher.” (Kamps, 2014:245-246)

Rev. Hendrick De Cock was the “pastor and teacher who was loved and respected everywhere” to which Ulrum’s declaration refers. At the time of De Cock’s installation as the pastor of the Reformed Church in Ulrum on 29 October 1829, De Cock was ignorant of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the CD. His study did not even have a copy of the State Bible. (ten Zythoff, 1987:110-111)

Pastoral interactions with a sixty-five-year-old local farmer, Klaas Kuipenga, a baptized non-communicant member, led De Cock to reconsider his convictions. De Cock was “unable to convince Kuipenga that education was gradually making him perfect in God’s sight. Instead, Kuipenga insisted, ‘Should I be required to contribute a mere whisper to my salvation, I would be forever lost.’” (ten Zythoff, 1987:110) A neighboring pastor lent De Cock a copy of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and a member of the congregation lend him a copy of the CD. De Cock began to agree with Kuipenga, and “in order to move forward in the faith, he began to lead his congregation back to Dort.” (Heideman, 2015:14)

“News of new power in De Cock’s preaching soon brought about a great increase in church attendance, with the result that the church building in Ulrum had to be enlarged.” (Heideman, 2015:14) Many of those who came to hear De Cock preach, though members of the Reformed Church, were not members of the Ulrum congregation. Under the parish system by which the Reformed Church was organized, because they did not live in Ulrum, they were not, nor could they become, members of the Ulrum congregation; they could only be members of the congregation in the parish in which they lived.

One Sunday in April 1833, after hearing De Cock preach on the marks for the true church,<sup>34</sup> Arend Jan Schoonoort asked De Cock to administer the sacrament of baptism to his three-year old son. When De Cock asked Schoonoort why the child had not yet been baptized, for the DCO required that baptism be administered “as soon as the administration can take place,” (Article LVI, p. 170) and why Schoonoort did not ask his own pastor, Rev. Meijer-Brouwer, to administer the sacrament, Schoonoort told De Cock that he could not in good conscience answer the second question in the Form for Baptism, which asks: “Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?” Schoonoort certainly believed the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the articles of the Christian faith to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation. He did not, however, believe that this doctrine was taught in the congregation (Uithuizen) of which he was a member, or, more specifically preached from its pulpit by its current pastor, Rev. Meijer-Brouwer.<sup>35</sup> (Sheeres, 2006:21; Kamps, 2014:159)

In a letter to Rev. Molenaar, author of the Address to my Fellow Reformed Believers, about Schoonoort’s request, De Cock wrote:

My response to him then, which is still my position and choice, was that his request was reasonable and well founded, and that I hoped to be authorized by the consistory to act according to the Lord’s will and command, and to that

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<sup>34</sup> “The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church.” (BC Art. 29)

<sup>35</sup> History would repeat itself in the CRCNA. The consistory of Grand Rapids sought advice from the classical assembly, at the time the fledgling denomination’s broadest assembly, at its 2-3 September 1868 meeting regarding the censure of Maarten Louwerse, who refused to present his child for baptism, claiming that he could not answer the second question of the baptismal form because he objected to the pastor’s preaching. (Sheeres, 2013:203n248, 528)

end I hoped to consult with the Lord and with the consistory, as I have done. The result was that all the consistory members judged the matter to be reasonable and lawful, but two were hesitant because of the significance and consequences of the issue. Wherefore we found it advisable after all the members left the matter to my judgement, to seek your most worthy opinion. (Kamps, 2014:254)

Molenaar responded that he “would have great difficulty baptizing a child from another congregation,” but that this was “not because one may not do such a thing,” for there was nothing in the new regulations to prohibit such a practice,<sup>36</sup> “but because one must proceed cautiously regarding his neighboring ministers (though they err), and avoid the appearance of all evil.” Molenaar suggested that De Cock could administer the baptism in Uithuizen during an exchange of pulpits with Rev. Meijer-Brouwer. (Kamps, 2014:258) Because no prohibition existed, on 29 September 1833, contra Molenaar’s advice, De Cock baptized Schoonoort’s son and the child’s name was entered into the baptismal registry of the Reformed Church in Ulrum. Shortly thereafter, fifteen more children of parents who were members of other congregations were baptized by De Cock in Ulrum. (Sheeres, 2006:22)

In November 1833, De Cock’s pamphlet, *Defense of the True Reformed Doctrine and of the True Reformed Believers. Attacked and Exposed by Two So-called Reformed Pastors, or the Sheepfold of Christ Attacked by Two Wolves and Defended by H. De Cock, Reformed Pastor at Ulrum*, was published.<sup>37</sup> Later that month, on 18 November 1833, Rev. A.P.A. Du-Cloux filed a complaint with the classical board of Middelstrum against De Cock for administering baptism to two children from his congregation. When a committee of the classis visited De Cock and asked him if he had administered and intended to continue administering the sacrament of baptism to children of parents who were not members of his congregation, De

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<sup>36</sup> In 1824 the synodical board decided to issue a directive on baptisms administered in congregations other than the congregation in which the parents were members. This directive required that, before baptism was administered, the parents present a letter from the consistory of the congregation of which they were members, stating that the consistory did not object to the baptism. The final form of this directive, however, was not mailed to the churches until 1842 and was not in force at the time. (ten Zythoff, 1987:178n162)

<sup>37</sup> See Kamps (2014:319-366) for an English translation of De Cock’s pamphlet. The two “so-called Reformed pastors” against whom De Cock wrote were Rev. Meijer-Brouwers, Arend Schoonoort’s pastor in Uithuizen, and Rev. Benthem-Reddingius. Earlier that year, in March 1833, Meijer-Brouwer had published two sermons, *Necessary Warnings and Beneficial Advice to my Congregation*, against preachers like De Cock who preached total depravity and total inability, doctrines contained in the CD. (Sheeres, 2006:19) D.H. Kromminga (1943:82) and De Jong & Kloosterman (1984:24) contend that it was only after having a serious discussion with Meijer-Brouwer at a classical gathering, and after Meijer-Brouwer challenged De Cock to respond in print, that De Cock took up his pen. After De Cock’s suspension, his congregation wrote a letter to the classical board arguing that it was unjust for them to punish De Cock for writing against Meijer-Brouwer, while Meijer-Brouwer had not been punished for writing against De Cock. (Sheeres, 2006:24)

Cock answered, “Yes, unless there is a CO rule that forbids me from doing so.” When a second complaint was lodged with the classis on 18 December 1833, De Cock was summoned to appear before a committee of the classis, which asked him if he was catechizing members of other congregations and if he had authored the brochure against Meijer-Brouwer and Benthem-Reddingius. Again De Cock answered in the affirmative. (Sheeres, 2006:23)

The classical board suspended him with pay for six months for “baptizing children of other congregations, writing against two worthy ministers, and sowing seeds of discord in the church.” (De Jong & Kloosterman, 1984:25) The first and last charges were later dropped; De Cock was then only suspended for his writing against Meijer-Brouwer and Benthem-Reddingius. Six months later, on 28 May 1834, when De Cock continued to refuse to recant his writings, the classical board deposed him.<sup>38</sup> Although, in the end, De Cock was not deposed for baptizing children whose parents were members of other congregations, that practice is significant for this church juridical inquiry because the question of who may present a child for baptism would soon divide the *Afscheiding* Church.

Hendrik P. Scholte<sup>39</sup> was “apparently somewhat suspicious that De Cock was careless about whose baby he was baptizing.” (Oostendorp, 1964:50) Oostendorp (1964:49) suggests that if De Cock “had waited for the advice of Scholte and followed it, he would not have baptized children from other congregations.” Scholte wrote to De Cock:

It seems to me that if one can no longer have his child baptized in a congregation, he can also no longer remain member there, but must ask for his membership certificate and present it where God’s Word is purely preached and the Sacraments are celebrated according to the institution of Christ. (Oostendorp, 1964:50)

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<sup>38</sup> De Cock was deposed on 28 May 1834, but the Reformed Church in Ulrum did not declare its secession from the NHK until 13 October 1834 after they had exhausted their avenues for appeal. In its declaration of secession, Ulrum claims that:

Several most reasonable proposals were made, both by our pastor and teacher and by the rest of the overseers of the congregation. More than once, an investigation and a judgment on the basis of and according to God’s Word was requested. But it was all in vain.

Classical, provincial, and synodical boards of the church refused the most reasonable request and instead demanded repentance and sorrow without showing wrongdoing from God’s Holy Word, as well as unqualified submission to synodical regulations and prescriptions without showing that these are founded on God’s Word in every respect. (Kamps, 2014:245-246)

<sup>39</sup> One biographer of Scholte suggests that Scholte was “the driving force” of the *Afscheiding van 1834*. (Heideman, 2015:xxvi) Another writes of Scholte and De Cock: “So heavily were these two to lean upon each other that the *Afscheiding* is unthinkable without both and no one can quite say who inspired the other more.” (Oostendorp, 1964:48)

If De Cock was, at least in Scholte's opinion, "careless" about whose child he baptized, Scholte was rigid. Whereas De Cock was initially suspended for baptizing children of parents who were members of another congregation, the classical board under which Scholte served stepped in when he refused to baptize the child of a man whose Christian commitment Scholte doubted. When a neighboring pastor administered the sacrament, the consistory refused to enter the child's name into their baptismal registry. (De Jong & Kloosterman, 1984:28) Differing opinions on whether the children of non-professing members may be baptized would divide the *Afscheiding* Church. Those who emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in 1847 and later brought different practices with them to the CRCNA.<sup>40</sup>

Scholte, minister of the Reformed Churches in Doeveren and Genderen, objected to changes in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper;<sup>41</sup> he refused to read the questions prescribed for the preparatory service.<sup>42</sup> The synod's decision of 11 July 1817 introduced these four questions to the denomination as a whole, but the liturgical practice itself was not entirely new. Congregations in the provinces of Groningen and Friesland had prepared for the Lord's Supper according to this custom at least since 1659.<sup>43</sup> (ten Zythoff, 1987:54) Even earlier, in the Palatinate, whence came the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), such questions were also part of the preparatory service.<sup>44</sup>

It was not, however, for these objections that Scholte was disciplined, because in the reorganized church "the liturgical writings lost their authoritative force, being considered as

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<sup>40</sup> Discussions within and decisions by the CRCNA regarding the *doopledenstelsel* will be considered in chapter 4. (See pp. 90-99 below.)

<sup>41</sup> Another *Afscheiding* minister, Rev. Johannes Van Rees, also refused to use the synod's prescribed questions in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper. His influence in the *Afscheiding* Church is negligible, however, as the first synod of the *Afscheiding* Church (1836) dismissed him from his office because of a sexual offense. (Heideman, 2015:33, 67)

<sup>42</sup> See ten Zythoff (1987:54) for the full text of the questions adopted by the synod of 1817.

<sup>43</sup> See ten Zythoff (1987:156n56) for the questions used in the northern provinces. ten Zythoff (1987:54) observes: "There are very definite differences between the questions adopted at the synod and those used in the northern provinces. The doctrine of salvation as it was expressed in the first question was no longer equated with Scripture, but was said to be contained in Scripture. Furthermore, the doctrines of man's total depravity and the perseverance of the saints were stated in less dramatic terms."

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Rowe (1996:57-58) describes the Palatinate liturgy: "On Saturday afternoon before communion Sundays a preparatory service was required.... After preaching a sermon 'on the true understanding of the sacrament,' the minister left the pulpit and stood in front of the table. Young people wishing to be admitted to the sacrament were required to stand with the minister before the Holy Table and to recite the Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer and to answer questions from the catechism concerning the Lord's Supper. A general congregational examination then followed based on the three-fold structure of the HC (sin, redemption, duty) requiring the people's assent by the words, 'We do' and 'It is.'"

mere aids for inexperienced ministers.” (Kromminga, 1949:17) Instead the classical board suspended Scholte for preaching in a congregation other than his own - Ulrum, the congregation that De Cock had served, on 12 October 1834, just days before Ulrum’s declaration of secession - without the consent of the classical supervisor. (ten Zythoff, 1987:129) Scholte did not appeal his suspension, of which he was informed on 29 October 1834, choosing instead to withdraw from the NHK. On 1 November 1834, the consistories of Doeveren and Genderen declared their secession from the NHK.<sup>45</sup>

Like Scholte, Anthony Brummelkamp, minister of the Reformed Church in Hattem, also refused to baptize the children of non-professing members, but it was his refusal to announce hymns which led his deposition from ministry.<sup>46</sup> When his classical board asked him about his objection to the hymns, Brummelkamp’s answer was judged “insulting to those who had collected the hymns,” and for that insult, he was suspended from office on 7 October 1835. He made no appeal and withdrew from the NHK on 22 October 1835. (Schaap, 1996:97; ten Zythoff, 1987:129)

Rev. Van Velzen, minister of the Reformed Church in Drogeham also refused to announce the hymns. When his classical board demanded a pledge of obedience to the new regulations, Van Velzen, “in a rather clever play on the church’s revised Form of Subscription,” offered to pledge obedience “insofar as” the regulations conformed to the confessions. (Schaap, 1996:97) When the classis suspended Van Velzen from office on 11 December 1835, he replied that he considered the NHK to be a false church and was thus withdrawing from it. (ten Zythoff, 1987:130)

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<sup>45</sup> Unlike Ulrum’s declaration, this declaration did not refer to the BC nor did it accuse the NHK of being a false church. Instead, in it the consistories “declared that [they] would no longer live under such a government or hold ecclesiastical fellowships with such as submit to it.” (Oostendorp, 1964:62-63) This may reflect Scholte’s increasingly congregational polity, which would cause Scholte’s eventual ouster from the *Afscheiding* Church, and which anticipates the *Doleantie* ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper, which will be considered in the next chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Both the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857 objected to hymns that had been introduced contrary to the DCO, which required that “only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the 12 Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, Simeon shall be sung.” (Article LXIX; p. 172) It was not, however, the Reorganization of 1816 that introduced into the Reformed Church in the Netherlands the hymns to which the *Afscheiding van 1834* objected. The hymnbook had been introduced nine years earlier, in 1807, but with limited success, largely because of the loyalty to the DCO. (ten Zythoff, 1987:51)

Whereas use of the hymns had been optional in 1807, the *Algemeen Reglement* required their use. (Schaap, 1996:97) According to Pieters (1943:11): “Many of the churches, which previously sang only the psalms did not like the hymns and people refused to sing them. When hymns were announced from the pulpit they would put on their caps to indicate that they were not joining in the worship for the duration of the hymn singing. Or they would march out of the church and remain outside until the hymn was finished. Some of the ministers defied the rule and refused to give out any of the hymns.”

Candidate Albertus C. Van Raalte, although he sustained his classical examinations for ordination on 6 May 1835, was asked to pledge obedience to the new regulations. When, on 5 August 1835, after considering the request and reviewing the regulations, he refused - saying, as Van Velzen had, that he could only commit to obey the regulations “insofar as” they agreed with the confessions - the board refused to admit him to ministry in the NHK. (Kromminga, 1943:83) Van Raalte would become the first person ordained by the *Afscheiding* Church, sustaining his examination at its first synod in 1836.

That first synod met from 2 March to 12 March 1836 in Amsterdam. Almost immediately two issues - the *doopledenstelsel*, that is, the baptism of children of non-professing members, and the CO - came to the fore. Both are of interest to this church juridical inquiry, and both will be considered here.

#### **2.4.1 ~ The *Doopledenstelsel***

Heideman (2015:67-68) calls it “one of the most contentious matters” at the 1836 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church: the question of whether it was permissible to baptize the children of baptized persons who had not yet made a profession of faith and therefore were not admitted to the Lord’s Supper. The contrasting views of De Cock, who baptized such children, and Scholte, who did not, threatened to break the unity of the *Afscheiding* Church at its first synod.

As noted above, Scholte suspected De Cock of being careless about whose child he baptized. Concerned that in many cases the non-professing parents who presented their children for baptism seldom, if ever, attended church, Scholte refused to baptize the children of parents whom he believed unable to truthfully answer the questions in the baptismal liturgy, which required that the parents be Christians. Scholte believed that “the church included only such as manifested their faith in Christ by their profession and walk, together with their children.” But the children of those who refused to make a profession of faith were, by that fact, excluded from the sacrament. (Kromminga, 1943:96)

De Cock disagreed. He would baptize the children of non-professing members “if the parents attended faithfully the worship services and were otherwise godly in their walk.”<sup>47</sup> (Kamps, 2014:215) The non-professing members who presented their children to De Cock for baptism were likely not “stubborn despisers of God’s Word and of public worship,” as some

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<sup>47</sup> Similarly, until 1898 the CRCNA allowed non-professing members who attended adult catechism class to present their children for baptism. This so-called “baptismal system” of church membership was codified in the General Regulations adopted by the Synod of 1881. (See p. 95 below.)



who presented their children to Scholte for baptism may have been. (De Jong & Kloosterman, 1984:28) In the northern provinces, where De Cock ministered, a form of experiential pietism, the result of the *Nadere Reformatie* (or Further Reformation), was prevalent. This experiential pietism prevented people from making profession of faith.

The *Nadere Reformatie* was strongly committed to the Canons of Dort, particularly the doctrine of election, which teaches that only those elect or chosen by God from all eternity are saved. The question naturally arises whether and how one can be certain that one is among God's elect. The Canons themselves provide this answer:

Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. (I/12)

The *Nadere Reformatie* emphasized the fruits or marks of election, counseling people not to partake of the Lord's Supper unless they “could claim certain carefully described evidences of true belief.”<sup>48</sup> (ten Zythoff, 1987:55) Consequently, those who could not yet claim those evidences, who had not yet received an assurance of their election, though orthodox in belief, would not presume to make profession of faith or to partake of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, however, they did not want their children to remain unbaptized.

De Cock willingly baptized the children of such parents, apparently undisturbed by “the puzzling question, how men and women who claimed that they were not qualified to make confession of faith could consistently affirm all that was asked of them at the baptism of their children,” since those questions essentially ask for a confession of faith - (Kromminga, 1943:95-96) something Scholte himself noted in a letter to De Cock. (Oostendorp, 1964:104)

The 1836 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church unanimously adopted the following statement, “intended to be sufficiently open to accommodate the baptismal practices of De Cock and Scholte within the church:” (Heideman, 2015:70)

All members of the Church of Christ are obliged to have the sign and seal of baptism administered to their children, in accord with the Holy Scriptures and on the Standards of Unity in our church, because the children with their parents are included in the covenant of God, and the promises of the Lord hold true not only for believers but also for their seed. (Heideman, 2015:70)

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<sup>48</sup> Klaas Kuipenga, who played such pivotal role in De Cock's own conversion to the doctrines of Dort, certainly displayed this kind of experiential piety.

It is especially the word “seed,” rather than “children,” which accommodated De Cock’s practice. Appealing to Genesis 17:7, where God promises to establish his covenant as an everlasting covenant between himself and Abraham and Abraham’s descendants for the generations to come, De Cock believed that the church is in covenant with God through many generations.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the children of non-professing members could still be regarded as members of the covenant on the grounds of having believing forebears. (Kamps, 2014:211) Scholte, on the other hand, believed that “when a Christian generation cuts itself off from the covenant, its children should not be baptized, as long as the parents do not return to the faith.” (Heideman, 2015:78)

The statement adopted by the 1836 synod did not end the debate about the *doopledensetsel* within the *Afscheiding* Church. The first issue of 1837 of *De Reformatie* - a magazine that Scholte edited, which claimed to be the voice of the *Afscheiding* Church, speaking not only to, but also for, the church - included an article by J.A. Smeedes, an elder of the congregation in Assen, regarding infant baptism. “The article could be read as an attack on the baptismal practice of De Cock and others who baptized children of non-confessing parents.” (Heideman, 2015:70) Scholte clearly believed that the statement adopted by the 1836 synod could only be interpreted to prohibit the practice of baptizing the children of members who had not made a profession of faith.

Smeedes’ article and De Cock’s response, his Short Explanation of Infant Baptism, guaranteed that the issue would again be one of the most contentious issues at the next synod of the *Afscheiding* Church. D.H. Kromminga (1943:96) suggests that “the urgency of this issue” was one of the reasons why the church’s next synod was convened early, in Utrecht on 28 September 1837.

The 1837 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church adopted a multi-point statement which, though preferring the position of Scholte, did not rule out De Cock’s position completely. It said:

1. All who make public confession of faith and walk in conformity therewith must with their children be acknowledged as members of the church of Christ.
2. Confession of faith consists in the agreement from the heart that is made public by acknowledgment with the mouth of all the chief articles of the

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<sup>49</sup> In his Short Explanation of Infant Baptism, De Cock included among “the children of the congregation” who ought to be baptized “not only those born to believing parents, but also those who have sprung from attendance in her lap, and whom the church, according to all pleasing powers, has taken under her care in her house.” (Oosten-dorp, 1964:105)

Christian religion. The walk of faith consists in forsaking the world and leading a life in agreement with God's commandments and in submission to the eternal king Jesus Christ.

3. Although there are hypocrites who are mixed in among the good, and it therefore is necessary and beneficial for each one to examine himself and to regard others; nevertheless, no one may be suspected of hypocrisy who makes this confession and leads a life of obedience.
4. The aforementioned confessors and their children must be continually acknowledged as members of the church, until they are cut off from the church because of their doctrine or walk.
5. As long as someone is not cut off from the congregation, he has the right to receive the signs and seals of the covenant of grace for himself and his seed; unless, however, the council of the church has placed him under censure for a time. The understanding, however, is that the censure has reference indeed to his person, but not to his seed. (Kamps, 2014:209)

When the synod finally agreed to these points, its president, Rev. Van Velzen, "declared that in the debate, the differences were not so great as had first appeared." (Heideman, 2015:78) Even so, differences continued to exist within the *Afscheiding* Church<sup>50</sup> and its descendants, including the CRCNA, into the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup>

#### 2.4.2 ~ Church Order

The second issue that came to the fore at the first synod of the *Afscheiding* Church that is of interest to this church juridical inquiry is the question of CO. In its declaration of secession from the NHK, the consistory of Ulrum said that "with respect to divine service and government, for the present we hold to the CO instituted by the aforementioned Synod of Dordrecht," (Kamps, 2014:246) that is, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Similarly, in their declaration of secession from the NHK, the consistories of Doeveren and Genderen said that "our God-appointed overseers and elders shall for the time being hold themselves to the CO of the Synod of Dort, held in the years 1618-1619." (Oostendorp, 1964:63) The words "for the present" in Ulrum's declaration and "for the time being" in the declaration of Doeveren and Genderen, which suggest that these commitments to the DCO were temporary or interim, occasioned the debate in which De Cock and Scholte would again take opposing positions.

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<sup>50</sup> Within ten years, in 1846, on the eve of Scholte's and Van Raalte's emigration from the Netherlands to the United States, the synod of the *Afscheiding* Church reversed course and explicitly approved the practice of De Cock, who had died in 1842. (Heideman, 2015:80)

<sup>51</sup> D.H. Kromminga (1943:96) suggests that "the difference in baptismal practice was destined to have for many years a great influence on the CRCNA."

In its first session, the first synod of the *Afscheiding* Church in 1836 declared its commitment to the historic Reformed confessions, that is, the BC, the HC, and the CD, as fully agreeing with the Word of God, but made no mention of the DCO. The question of CO did not arise until the synod's third session, when "delegates quickly learned that their feelings about the CO were at great variance with each other." (Heideman, 2015:103)

The DCO contained certain provisions, particularly regarding the relationship of church and state and the right of patronage,<sup>52</sup> that had become dead letters. There may have been agreement on the need to revise or update the CO, but there was no agreement on the extent to which it should be updated. Consistent with the declarations of secession, the 1836 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church decided that the DCO would be followed "for the time being," and that the decision regarding CO would be made at the next synod.

But Scholte "muddled this issue up by the haste with which he attempted a revision of his own," (Kromminga, 1943:94) presenting his own draft of a new CO (the Regulations for the Congregation of Utrecht) to the churches in South Holland, Utrecht, North Holland, North Brabant, and a section of Gelderland in the spring of 1837, before the next synod of the *Afscheiding* Church met. (Heideman, 2015:94) Scholte's CO was a significant anticipation of the *Doleantie* ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper.<sup>53</sup> Scholte's CO "avoided hierarchical relationships between consistories, classes, and synods,"<sup>54</sup> focusing almost exclusively on the local congregation and its consistory. (Heideman, 2015:104) The approval of Scholte's CO by seventeen classes prior to the meeting of the 1837 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church presented a real challenge to the church. (Kromminga, 1943:95)

De Cock and others, including Van Velzen, who would preside at the 1837 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church, considered Scholte's CO a serious deviation from the tradition of Dort,

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<sup>52</sup> The DCO includes provisions that gave the civil authorities the right to interfere in the calling of ministers and the government of the church. The DCO did not allow a minister to be called "without good correspondence with the Christian authorities of the respective place." (Article IV; p. 161) A minister could not be installed without "having been approved by the magistrate of the respective place." (Article V; p. 162) Similarly, a minister could not leave a congregation without "the approval of the magistrate." (Article X; p. 163) It also allowed that "the magistrates of the respective place, if they wish, may have one or two of their number, who are members of the church, meet with the consistory to listen and to deliberate concerning matters that take place." (Article XXXVII; p. 167)

<sup>53</sup> Kuyper's ecclesiology, its impact on the CRCNA, and especially its relevance to questions concerning the authority of broader assemblies, particularly the synod, especially in matters of liturgy and worship, will be considered in the next chapter.

<sup>54</sup> As Kuyper would be, "Scholte was fearful of synodical authority and wanted each consistory to ratify the decisions of synod." (Kamps, 2014:221; see also Oostendorp, 1964:117) In 1838, Scholte published two articles in *De Reformatie* explaining why he could not accept the DCO, particularly because of the supervisory authority it gave the broader assemblies, that is, classes and provincial and national synods. (Heideman, 2015:110)

one that they could not accept because they believed that “any deviation from the original set forth by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) would negate their ability to say they were not seceding, but returning to the original church and its documents.” (Sheeres, 2006:58n17)

Accordingly, at the 1837 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church Van Velzen, proposed that the delegates consider the DCO article by article and make any necessary revisions. This the synod did, creating the Utrecht CO, named for the city in which the 1837 Synod had met, in which forty-two articles for the DCO were revised, eight eliminated, and thirty-six adopted without change. (Heideman, 2015:109-110) Seventeen classes, however, had already adopted Scholte’s CO. None of the provincial synods to which Scholte had presented his CO adopted the Utrecht CO. On the back page of his copy of the Utrecht CO, Scholte wrote, “This CO was accepted only in Friesland.” (Oostendorp, 1964:110)

Van Velzen’s preface to the synodical minutes, written as president of synod, set off another storm of protest. Consistent with the final article of the DCO, which explicitly prohibits individual congregations, classes, and provincial synods from altering, adding to, or diminishing the CO and requires that they diligently seek to maintain the articles of CO “until it is otherwise ordered by the general or national synod” (Article LXXXVI; p. 175) - thereby giving the general synod the final authority in matters of CO - Van Velzen presented the Utrecht CO as the CO for the *Afscheiding* Church, having been adopted by the general synod, and maintained that everyone was obligated to act according to it.

The 1840 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church, to which the provincial synods of South Holland, Utrecht, North Holland, North Brabant, and Gelderland did not send delegates, “under the urging of Scholte,” (Heideman, 2015:125n74) laid the Utrecht CO aside, declaring that the DCO “was the only rule for the government, discipline and service of the congregations,” (Heideman, 2015:125) except for the right of patronage.

The synod dispatched a commission “to meet with the consistory in Utrecht and Scholte to admonish them to admit the irregularity of their actions and to accept the DCO as it was now accepted in this meeting of the synod.” (Heideman, 2015:140) After Scholte refused to meet with the commission, the synod deposed him. The 1843 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church tried to reconcile with Scholte, but he refused its demands that he use the liturgical formularies for sacraments and abide by the DCO. No further attempts were made to bring Scholte back into the fold of the *Afscheiding* Church. (Heideman, 2015:187; Oostendorp, 1964:128)

## 2.5 ~ The Union of 1850 and the Secession of 1857

In 1847 Van Raalte and Scholte led migrations “in groups of believers, and not simply as individuals,” (Beets, 1946:49) from the Netherlands to the United States. Scholte’s group settled in Pella, Iowa; Van Raalte’s group established the Holland colony in West Michigan. This section will attend primarily to the latter group among whom the Secession of 1857, which established the CRCNA, occurred.<sup>55</sup>

Contrary to the popular histories told in the places Scholte and Van Raalte settled, those who emigrated from the Netherlands in 1847 did not immigrate to the United States for the sake of religious freedom.<sup>56</sup> On 7 October 1840 William I - who, in the years immediately following the *Afscheiding van 1834*, had restricted the *Afscheiding* Church’s freedom of assembly - abdicated. With the ascent of his son William II, whatever persecution the *Afscheiding* Church experience ended. (Pieters, 1943:13-14)

Even so, as Sheeres (2006:64) notes, “on the matter of Christian education for their children, the Seceders still met stiff resistance from the government.” Van Raalte, in a letter to Brummelkamp written shortly after Van Raalte’s arrival in the United States, spoke about the *Afscheiding* Church enjoying “limited freedom” in the Netherlands, “but in the education of their children no freedom at all.” (Sheeres, 2004:34) A Batavian-era law, the Law for Primary School Attendance and Education in the Batavian Republic (1806), remained in effect. It resulted in “the progressive dechristianization of the schools” in the Netherlands that “aroused grave concern” among members of the *Afscheiding* Church. (Kromminga, 1949:22) Van Raalte included this among the motivations for the migration in a letter to believers in America: “to have our children enjoy education in Christian schools.” (Beets, 1946:49)

Van Raalte wrote that letter, To the Faithful in the United States of America, in June 1846. Schaap (1998:127) characterizes it as “an unabashed appeal for the Reformed people in America for assistance to Dutch immigrants leaving the pathetic conditions in the Netherlands

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<sup>55</sup> Scholte never joined another denomination after his deposition by the 1840 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church. In a letter to A.A.V. Schuyt dated 14 May 1847, Scholte wrote that he was not inclined to join the RCA “because I could not accept the synodical system.” (in van’t Spijker, 1983:365n9) In 1856, a group left Scholte’s congregation, united with another small congregation committed to the DCO, and established a RCA congregation in Pella. (Heideman, 2015:241) In 1866, a group seceded from that RCA congregation and established a CRCNA congregation, citing reasons similar to those given in the Secession of 1857 in West Michigan. (Sheeres, 2006:148)

<sup>56</sup> As an example of such popular histories, Heideman (2015:xxix) quotes John Wesselink’s narrative of the settlement of Pella, written for the town’s centennial in 1947: “The reason for their emigration from the fatherland to this wild and unoccupied country was not the search for gold . . . nor for some other worldly benefit. They came to find freedom to worship God according to His word.” Wesselink was pastor of First Reformed Church (RCA) in Pella from 1913-1925 and served as president of Central College, an RCA-affiliated college in Pella, from 1925-1934.

for the glorious opportunities promised by a new life in a New World.” Rev. Isaac Wyckhoff, a RCA minister who would be instrumental in the Union of 1850, published an English translation of Van Raalte’s letter in the 15 October 1846 edition of the *Christian Intelligencer*, the magazine of the RCA. He and Rev. Thomas DeWitt, pastor of the Collegiate Church (RCA) in New York City, welcomed Van Raalte when he arrived in America. Nearly all of those who immigrated to West Michigan in 1847 and later arrived by way of New York City, where they were welcomed by and exposed to the RCA, the church with which they would unite in 1850 and from which some would secede in 1857.

John Kromminga (1949:24) suggests that it was “as early as possible” that the consistories from the four organized congregations of the Holland colony — Holland, pastored by Van Raalte; Zeeland, pastored by Rev. Vander Muelen; Vriesland, pastored by Rev. Ypma; and Graafschaap, at the time a pastorally-vacant congregation — gathered together in a home in Zeeland, Michigan to form a classis, Classis Holland. At that 23 April 1848 meeting, the confessional standards - that is, the HC, the BC, and the CD, as well as the CO, presumably the DCO - were “taken up for discussion.” According to the minutes, “All present declared themselves to be in complete harmony therewith, and were of the opinion that we should make use of these in the ministry, in the same manner as our fathers have described in the preface to the *Kerkelijk Handboekje*.”<sup>57</sup> The classis also accepted “the entire *Kerkelijk Handboekje* with all the church orders therein contained,” declaring “that the church government therein has our perfect assent, and comprehends the government of the Reformed Church.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:22-23)

John Kromminga (1949:26) argues that from the classis’ declarations on doctrine and discipline - that is, its agreement with the confessional standards and its acceptance of the *Kerkelijk Handboekje* of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands - “it is evident that the settlers did not think of their departure from Holland as an ecclesiastical break from the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands.” If that was the case, however — if, as D.H. Kromminga (1943:102) writes, “the classis had these formulas by virtue of the fact that it had come from the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands,” why were they taken up for discussion? What was the nature and purpose of this discussion of these documents?

D.H. Kromminga (1943:102) suggests that it “could mean no more than assent” to these documents, which was in fact what happened, “or the preparation of an overture to procure

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<sup>57</sup> A compilation of old church orders from the Convent of Wesel (1568) to the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) “prepared by order of the Synod of 1840 by a committee consisting of Brummelkamp, Van Raalte, and Van Velzen.” (Kromminga, 1943:102)

such alternate as might be deemed necessary by the Dutch synod.” If Classis Holland still considered itself an integral part of the *Afscheiding* Church, as John Kromminga suggests, the Dutch synod to whom it would appeal would have been the synod of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands. There is, however, no evidence that Classis Holland sought recognition by or affiliation with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands, as the congregations which seceded from the classis in 1857 would.<sup>58</sup>

While van den Broeke (2011:55) does not believe that it was Van Raalte’s purpose to institute an independent classis, he raises an important question: “One can wonder why Van Raalte did not think before he immigrated about an ecclesiastical connection with the Seceder Church in the Netherlands, comparable to the Classis of Amsterdam that had the supervision of colonial congregations worldwide during previous centuries.” The classis minutes do not mention any relationship with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands until its 11 April 1855 meeting, five years after the Union of 1850, in which the classis became an integral part of the RCA. At that meeting, “upon motion from Rev. Klyn, it was thought well, as far as possible, to place the classis in connection with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands by correspondence.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:170)

At its second meeting, on 27 September 1848, the classis was “informed that an invitation had been received from the Dutch Church, or the Old Holland church [that is, the RCA], to attend their synodical assemblies.” While the classis acknowledged that they and the RCA “should seek greater intercourse with each other and that it is a requirement of love to exercise fellowship,” it also said that “at this moment it is difficult to do so, because of the pressure of local business and the difficulties connected with a new settlement.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:26-27)

On 4 June 1849, Rev. Wyckhoff visited the Holland colony and met with representatives of the colony’s churches. While this was not a duly constituted classis meeting, because

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<sup>58</sup> John Kromminga (1949:26) cites the continuation in office of those who had served as ministers, elders, and deacons in the Netherlands as further evidence that the churches of the Holland colony did not think of their departure from the Netherlands as an ecclesiastical break from the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands.

Contra Kromminga, however, is the circumstance of Scholte’s preaching in churches in the Holland colony in 1856. When the 8 October 1856 session of classis took up the question whether Scholte should be allowed to preach in the churches, Rev. Van Den Bosch, who would participate in the Secession of 1857, judged that it should not be allowed because Scholte had been deposed from ministry by the 1840 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church. If there was no ecclesiastical break with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands, the churches in West Michigan would honor that discipline. Others, however, saw no objection to Scholte preaching in churches within the Holland colony, “inasmuch as Rev. Scholte has never yet been suspended by any general assembly,” indicated that they did not consider the 1840 Synod of the *Afscheiding* Church to be their general synod, meaning that they did consider their departure from the Netherlands to include an ecclesiastical break from the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands. (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:224)



those present had not been formally delegated by their respective consistories, it is evident from Wyckhoff's subsequent report to the RCA that he thought that it was. He reported:

At the classical meeting it was soon made known that the brethren were a little afraid of entering into ecclesiastical connection with us, although they believe in the union of brethren, and sign for Christian sympathy and association. They have so felt to the quick the galling chains of ecclesiastical domination, and have seen with sorrow how exact organization, according to human rules, leads to formality on the one hand, and to oppression of tender conscience on the other that they hardly know what to say. I protested, of course, that it is furthest from our thought to bring them into bondage, or to exercise ecclesiastical tyranny over them. And I stated that they would be perfectly free, at any time they found an ecclesiastical connection opposed to their religious prosperity and enjoyment, to bid us a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again.<sup>59</sup> (Beets, 1946:56-57)

Rather than integrate the Dutch-speaking congregations of Classis Holland into the RCA's existing English-speaking Classis Michigan, the RCA decided to receive Classis Holland into the RCA as a classis. Van Raalte's attendance at the 1850 meeting of the RCA's Particular Synod of Albany, reported to the 30 October 1850 meeting of Classis Holland, (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:38-39) cemented the union. That Classis Holland recognized themselves to be part of the RCA is evident from the following article in the minutes of that 30 October 1850 meeting: Regarding a discipline case referred to the classis by a consistory, "Rev. Van Raalte proposes that this matter be referred to the Particular Synod (of Albany) and that their judgment be asked for; which proposal was approved by the entire assembly." (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:42)

Nevertheless, John Kromminga (1949:31) rightly refers to "the scanty knowledge which the settlers had of the RCA at the time of the union." For example, at the April 1851 meeting of Classis Holland, after the classis' reception into the RCA, in response to an inquiry from an elder from Zeeland asking if the DCO had been adopted, classis' response did not refer to the RCA,<sup>60</sup> but rather expressed approval for "the standpoint to which the seceding church

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<sup>59</sup> Beets (1946:57) characterizes this final comment as "a practical, typical American way of surmounting the obstacle encountered, although not according to Reformed principles of church government." It would prove significant in the Secession of 1857, being included in the consistory of Graafschaap's grounds for secession: "In the report of Rev. Wyckoff he gives us liberty to walk in this ecclesiastical path." (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242)

<sup>60</sup> In 1792 the General Synod of the RCA decided that "the DCO would be maintained after all, but it would be accompanied by some 'explanatory articles'" which "explain in what manner the said rules [the DCO] are executed, consistent with the local circumstances of said church [the RCA]." (Meeter, 1993:40, 97)

in the Netherlands went back, when she set aside her own CO and adopted the *Kerkelijk Handboekje*.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:46)

Certainly, in terms of CO, it appears that, although formally part of the RCA, the ecclesiastical life of the churches in Classis Holland reflected the practices of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands more than the practices of the RCA. It appears that this was also true in terms of sacramental liturgies. The classis’ minutes contain no reaction or response to Van Raalte’s report on the 1854 General Synod of the RCA regarding “the revision of our liturgical forms,” including the addition of a funeral form,<sup>61</sup> (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:150) or his report on the 1856 General Synod where “the most important item was the revision of the forms of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>62</sup> (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:221-222)

When serious doubts about the wisdom of the Union of 1850 were raised, it was not the doctrine of the RCA but practices, not within the classis but within the denomination, that were subject to criticism, especially those that were perceived to violate the DCO. In its letter to the 8 April 1857 session of Classis Holland, the consistory of Graafschaap gave these reasons for its secession:<sup>63</sup>

1. The collection of 800 hymns, introduced contrary to the DCO.<sup>64</sup>
2. Inviting men of all religious views to the Lord’s Supper, excepting Roman Catholics.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Given the DCO’s stipulation that “where funeral sermons are not held, they shall not be introduced; and where they already have been accepted, diligence must be exercised to do away with them by the most appropriate means,” (Article LXV; p.172) it is surprising that the classical minutes register no objection. Those who seceded from the RCA in Pella, where Scholte had settled, and organized a CRCNA congregation in 1866 listed among their objections to the RCA “the bringing of corpses into the church for the purpose of holding funeral services.” (Sheeres, 2006: 149)

<sup>62</sup> Van Raalte noted that the revised forms could be read in the *Christian Intelligencer*, the official magazine of the RCA, which, as an English language publication, was not accessible to many within the Dutch-speaking classis. Presumably the Dutch-speaking churches of Classis Holland continued to use the liturgical forms approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) as printed in their Dutch *Psalmboek*. The lingual difference between the Dutch-speaking Classis Holland and the primarily, if not exclusively, English-speaking RCA may explain the lack of reaction or response in Classis Holland to the revision of liturgical forms.

<sup>63</sup> Of the four letters of secession from Graafschaap, Grand Rapids, Noordeloos, and Polkton, submitted to the 8 April 1857 meeting of Classis Holland, only the letter from Graafschaap provided reasons for the secession. Rev. Van Den Bosch of Noordeloos wrote that he was seceding “on account of the abominable and church-destroying heresy and sins which are rampant among you, which, if the Lord will and we live, I shall present to the next meeting of Classis.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:240) There is, however, no evidence that he ever presented those heresies and sins to any subsequent classis meeting.

<sup>64</sup> The DCO stipulated that “in the churches, only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the 12 Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon shall be sung.” (Article LXIX; p. 172)

<sup>65</sup> The DCO stipulated that “only those shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper who, according to the usage of the churches which they join, have made confession of the Reformed religion, together with having testimony of a godly walk, without which also those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.” (Article LXI; p. 171)

3. Neglecting to preach the HC regularly<sup>66</sup>, to hold catechetical classes, and to do house visitation.<sup>67</sup>
4. That no religious books are circulated without the consent of other denominations.
5. And what grieves our hearts most in all of this is that there are members among you who regard our secession in the Netherlands as not strictly necessary, or think that it was untimely.
6. In the report of Rev. Wyckhoff he gives us liberty to walk in this ecclesiastical path. (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242)

Those who seceded from the RCA in 1850<sup>68</sup> spoke of returning “to the standpoint we had when we left the Netherlands” and expressed a desire to unite themselves again with the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands. (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:241-242) Beets (1946:61) suggests that those who seceded from the RCA on 8 April 1857 held their first classis meeting in Grand Rapids on 29 April 1857, at which they “recorded the reasons for their return, and ratified as their Standards, subject to the Word of God as supreme law, the BC, the HC, and CD, its liturgy, and CO.”<sup>69</sup>

As Swierenga & Bruins (1999:1) note: “The 1857 seceders were convinced that they were remaining true to the principles of 1834.” Swierenga & Bruins (1999:2) rightly characterize the seceders of 1857, like those who participated in the *Afscheiding van 1834*, especially in the northern provinces of the Netherlands,<sup>70</sup> as “stern Dortians who withdrew and formed

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The requirement that only those who have made a confession of the Reformed religion was understood to exclude Christians of denominations that did not subscribe to the Reformed confessions.

<sup>66</sup> The DCO required that ministers “briefly explain the sum of Christian doctrine contained in the HC in such a way that it may be finished annually.” (Article LXVIII; p. 172)

<sup>67</sup> The DCO included in the office of elder “according to the circumstance of the time and place to conduct family visiting for the edification of the congregation insofar as this can be done before and after the Lord’s Supper, especially to comfort members of the congregation, to teach, and also to exhort others to profess the Christian religion.” (Article XXIII; p. 165)

<sup>68</sup> The Secession of 1857 included approximately ten percent of the members of Classis Holland, (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:1) half of whom came from a single congregation, Graafschaap. (Schaap, 1998:157)

<sup>69</sup> Despite the lack of extant minutes of this meeting, Beets (1946:61) cites the letter Van Den Bosch and Klyn sent to the *Afscheiding* Church, signed by Klyn as president and Van Den Bosch as secretary, as evidence that it happened. Though the minutes could have been lost when Klyn returned to the RCA in September 1857, as Beets suggests, it was more likely that Van Den Bosch, who served as secretary, recorded and maintained the minutes. Based on extant records, John Kromminga (1949:34) argues that the seceders “held their first classical meeting on 7 October 1857” and that “this was the actual origin of the CRCNA.”

<sup>70</sup> Swierenga & Bruins (1999:102) suggested that the northern party of the *Afscheiding van 1834* most strongly “defended the doctrine, liturgy and polity of Dort as biblically grounded.” (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:33) They also note the strong influence of the northern party in the early decades of the CRCNA: “Of the 114 clerics ordained in the CRCNA from 1857 to 1900, every one of them had been associated with the Seceder denomination in the Netherlands and three-quarters (88) originated from the northern provinces.”

the CRCNA to maintain their revered religious tradition,” specifically the doctrine, polity, and liturgical practices of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Oostendorp’s (1964:49) assessment of the *Afscheiding van 1834*, that it “was more a conservation than a creation,” is also true of the Secession of 1857.<sup>71</sup>

From the *Afscheiding van 1834* and Secession of 1850, “the CRCNA inherited a confessional Reformed orthodoxy and a strict pattern of Reformed government and discipline.” (Zwaanstra, 1991:110) That pattern of government and discipline, including worship and sacramental liturgies, remained virtually unchanged for the first half-century of the denomination’s existence. It was not until the second decade of the twentieth-century, when the CRCNA faced the issue of Americanization, that questions were raised about its worship life. Those questions and the discussions that ensued will be considered in the next chapter.

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<sup>71</sup> Zwaanstra (1991:2) offers a similar assessment of the *Afscheiding van 1834* that is equally applicable to the Secession of 1857: “Neither the secession nor the newly organized church were intended to introduce or secure some new, radical idea, as has often been true of separatist movements. Their purpose was rather to return to and defend the historical Reformed position” as defined by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

## Chapter 3 ~ Uniformity in Worship in the CRCNA

### 3.1 ~ Introduction

The *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1850, which birthed the CRCNA, were both conservative movements; both sought to conserve a specific tradition, namely the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). John Kromminga (1949:39) characterizes those who established the CRCNA as “people who desired, above all else to be ‘orthodox,’” which they understood as “adherence, in letter and spirit, to the Reformed confessional standards and polity.”

In the first half-century of the CRCNA’s history (1857-1916), this “preservation of orthodoxy was aided greatly by a high degree of isolation from its American environment.” (Kromminga, 1949:91) Those of the *Afscheiding van 1834* who immigrated to North America had a “fortress mentality,”<sup>1</sup> which “gave rise to the ‘motto’ of the CRCNA: ‘In isolation is our strength.’” (Swierenga, 2002:66) As with many aspects of its life, for its first sixty years worship in the CRCNA was unchanged and unquestioned. Only in 1916, when the church faced the issue of Americanization,<sup>2</sup> did a call come to consider the church’s worship.

Beginning with that call, this chapter will consider uniformity of worship in the CRCNA. In so doing, it will examine to the question of synodical authority: does synod have the authority to establish an order of worship and liturgical formularies for the denomination? The adoption of a uniform order of worship by the Synod of 1928 set off a firestorm of protest within the CRCNA. This chapter will attend particularly to the formal objections that were raised, which questioned the authority of synod to adopt a uniform order of worship, and to the decisions of the Synod of 1930 in response. Many of these formal objections reflect the influence of *Doleantie*<sup>3</sup> ecclesiology, to which this chapter will also attend. Contra *Doleantie* ecclesiology, the CRCNA’s Revised Church Order of 1965 (RCO), which this chapter will also consider, grants synod significant authority over the worship life of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Zwaanstra (1973:24) describes the homogenous, self-sufficient communities in which immigrants who established the CRCNA lived as “‘little Netherlands’ in the Holland colonies of rural America.”

<sup>2</sup> See Schaap (1998:210-233) for a brief history of the CRCNA’s struggle with Americanization. See Zwaanstra (1973) for a comprehensive analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The *Doleantie* was secession movement from the NHK in 1886 under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. In 1892, the churches of the *Doleantie* united with the *Afscheiding* Church to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN). See Bouma (1995) for a comprehensive history of the Union of 1892. While the GKN, established in 1892, is younger than the CRCNA, established in 1857, because the CRCNA considers the GKN the continuation of the historic Reformed Church in the Netherlands, of which it considers itself a child, the CRCNA has historically referred to the GKN as its “mother church.” (Nauta, 1983:298) See Zwaanstra (1991:87-91) for later deterioration of the relationship between the CRCNA and GKN.

Neither the Synod of 1930 nor the RCO grant synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship, but both affirm the authority of synod to adopt liturgical formularies and to require their use in the administration of sacraments and other rites. The requirement that sacraments be administered with the use of prescribed liturgical formularies, or adaptations of them that conform to synodical guidelines, raises questions about the standing of the liturgical formularies: What authority do they have? What is the relationship between the liturgical formularies and the confessional standards? This chapter's final section will address those questions. Attention will be given to the church orderly requirement that liturgical formularies be used, the difference between a recommended model service and a prescribed liturgical formulary, and the permission granted by synods in the 1990s to adapt the liturgical formularies.

### 3.2 ~ Uniform Order of Worship (1916-1932)

The Synod of 1916 received an overture from Classis Illinois<sup>4</sup> asking synod to “express the desirability of introducing a uniform order of services in our American-speaking churches, in which the congregation takes a more active part.”<sup>5</sup> Although the advisory committee<sup>6</sup> acknowledged that adopting a uniform order of worship was desirable for the unity of the church, it advised synod not to consider the overture because the overture only referred to American-speaking congregations. If a uniform order of services was desirable for the American-speaking congregations, it must also be desirable for the Dutch- and German-speaking congregations. Adopting a uniform order of services for only the American-speaking congregations would disrupt the unity of the church. However, the advisory committee judged that the issue was certainly worthy of synodical attention, and thus advised that synod “appointed

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<sup>4</sup> The overture originated with the Third Roseland Christian Reformed Church, (De Jong: 2007:36) which First and Second Roseland Christian Reformed churches jointly organized in 1907 as an all-English congregation. See Swierenga (2002:295-349) for a brief history of the Roseland churches.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike the denomination's Dutch-speaking congregations, in which “the pastor led all of the service, including a solo reading of the Creed,” (Boonstra, 1998:4) American-speaking congregations took a more active part in the worship services, reciting the Creed and Lord's Prayer in unison and participating in responsive readings of Scripture. It is evident from the appointed committee's report to the Synod of 1918 that “in which” was understood to refer to the desired order of service, not simply to the American-speaking churches. The committee wrote: “The Synod of 1916 instructed us to report to the following Synod a comprehensive report concerning guidance with respect to instituting in our worship services an order of liturgical items wherein the congregation would take a more active part.” (Acts, 1918:152) How well such congregational participation was achieved is unclear. Fifty years later another liturgical study committee asked regarding Christian Reformed worship “whether the people themselves have been given a fair opportunity to participate in their response, or whether the clerical domination of the liturgy has been too great.” (Acts, 1968:155)

<sup>6</sup> An advisory committee is a committee composed exclusively of synodical delegates and faculty advisors, appointed by synod to facilitate the work of synod. Advisory committees serve only for the duration of the synod.

a committee to study this matter,<sup>7</sup> and report to the next synod with a well-rounded report,” which the Synod of 1916 did. (Acts, 1916:30)

In its report to the Synod of 1918, the study committee claimed that it “can hardly be disputed by anyone that improvement is needed in our order of worship.” (Acts, 1918:152) It advised synod to appoint “a larger committee to serve synod with elaborate proposals for improvement of our liturgical services,” (Acts, 1918:156) which the Synod of 1918 did by adding four more members to the original study committee. (Acts, 1918:55, 92)

Along with a proposed order of worship, the enlarged study committee presented the Synod of 1920 with a strong statement on synodical authority and the necessity of a uniform order of worship. Denominational unity not only requires a common confession and CO, it also requires a common liturgy, which, if it is to be common to all, cannot be left to the discretion of the local churches, but is properly within the jurisdiction of synod, whose decisions are binding on all.<sup>8</sup> The committee wrote:

Inasmuch as the Church in this dispensation, because of the limitations of time and place, cannot exist except as a group of local churches, it behooves her to express and reveal as much as possible her oneness as the body of Christ. She can and should do this, beside through her broader assemblies of classes and synods and her common doctrinal standards and CO, by means of a common liturgy, so that each church in its mode of public worship at once reveals itself as one of our churches. Such liturgical unity in all our churches, the Holland-speaking as well as the American-speaking, is therefore a matter of principle, and it may consequently not be left to the discretion of the individual consistories to determine upon the mode of public worship as they see fit.<sup>9</sup> It is a matter which belongs to the jurisdiction of the synod, whose lawful

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<sup>7</sup> A study committee is a committee appointed by synod to study and to report concerning matters that concern the whole denomination. Its mandate is given by synod, and it serves until it has fulfilled its mandate to the satisfaction of synod, which then releases the committee with thanks.

<sup>8</sup> Proponents of the uniform order of worship frequently appealed to 1914 CO Art. 31, which, speaking of greater assemblies, says that “whatever may be decided by a majority vote shall be considered binding unless it is proved to conflict with the Word of God or the articles of this CO.” (p. 90)

Although in both the DCO (p. 166) and the 1914 CO the article only explicitly governs an appeal against a decision of a lesser assembly, the article was evidently read as applying to all decisions, not only those adjudicating an appeal. (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:149) The RCO made this broader application explicit, adding the following article to the CO: “The decisions of assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the CO.” (Art. 29; 131)

<sup>9</sup> This did not prevent the study committee from recommending that synod “leave it to the discretion of the minister, in consultation with their consistories, whether or not to introduce this custom” - namely, having the congregation stand while singing, a custom that prevailed in the American-speaking churches - “in their respective churches.” The committee allowed that “in these minor matters a mere recommendation is better than a hard and fast rule.” (Acts, 1920:188)

Similarly, while the committee certainly preferred the practice of the American-speaking churches of having the congregation recite the Creed in unison, it acknowledged that “it may not be advisable for Synod to impose this custom upon our churches,” suggesting instead that “Synod go no further than to go on record as favoring it, and

decisions are binding for all the churches, in so far as they do not conflict with the Word of God. (Acts, 1920:186, emphasis original)

The advisory committee of the Synod of 1920, judging that “our churches are not ripe to make a decision with respect to this matter,” advised synod to refer the report “to the consistories for consideration, with the request that this report be discussed at classical meetings, so that we also, without disturbing the congregations, can come to a satisfying decision at the next synod.” Synod adopted this advice and continued the study committee “in order to give our people more enlightenment, and to serve the Synod of 1922 with advice.” (Acts, 1920:26)

The study committee expected that the introduction of a new order of worship would meet with “some opposition,” (Acts, 1920:203) but that, as Boonstra (1998:8) writes, “turned out to be a major understatement.” Carl Kromminga (1972:4) describes the congregations’ and classes’ responses as “vigorous.” No less than nine of thirteen classes submitted overtures to Synod 1922, nearly all of them negative,<sup>10</sup> which left the committee disheartened. In its report to the Synod of 1928, the committee recalled:

What especially discouraged the committee is the fact that the classes - with the exception of Illinois - had employed strong terms of disapproval without taking the trouble to state their objections except in the most general terms and without attempting to prove their assertion.<sup>11</sup> The committee could not avoid receiving the impression that it was fighting a false conservatism which refused to be convinced. (Acts, 1928: 277)

The Synod of 1922 had two reports before it, both described as “voluminous” by the synodical advisory committee: one from the study committee, the other from Classis Illinois. (Acts, 1922:66) While both reports are now lost, having been printed in neither the Agenda nor

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to urge the churches to keep it before them as the ideal.” (Acts, 1920:194) Regarding the Lord’s Prayer, the committee recommended the same: “Here again we deem it proper for the whole congregation to join with the minister in reciting it and would advise Synod to recommend this to the churches.” (Acts, 1920:195)

At the same time, when the committee experienced a difference of opinion regarding the opening of the worship service, it “gladly submitted this difference of opinion in its midst to Synod for decision.” (Acts, 1920:189) In this case, the committee clearly expected that Synod would adopt one of the options presented, which would then, having been adopted by synod, become binding for all.

<sup>10</sup> De Jong (2007:43) characterizes the objections as “unanticipated and wide-ranging.” “Suspicion of novel worship elements, fear of ritual, and resistance to change all come to expression in the various overtures.” (Boonstra, 1998:8)

<sup>11</sup> Classis Oostfriesland referred to the proposed order of worship as “too cumbersome,” but neither explained how nor why. Similarly, Classis Sioux Center offered no explanation of its judgment that “the report as a whole cannot be recommended by classis.” (Acts, 1922:67) Classis Hudson asked synod “to clarify the questionable elements” within the proposed order of worship, but did not specify which elements were questionable. (Acts, 1922:68)



the Acts of Synod,<sup>12</sup> their content can be partially reconstructed from the advisory committee's report and from subsequent reports of the study committee.

In its report to the Synod of 1926, the study committee refers to "a long report and overture from Classis Illinois criticizing the proposed plan and offering another in its stead."<sup>13</sup> From the advisory committee's report, which indicates that the study committee, responding to the overture from Classis Illinois, "especially urged that synod express itself concerning the principles that are basic to the proposed plan, especially whether or not it is desirable to have the Service of Reconciliation," it seems clear that the absolution was a point of contention.<sup>14</sup>

This, however, was not the only objection Classis Illinois raised. Nor was it the only principle basic to the study committee's proposed plan on which it urged synod to express itself. The study committee's report to the Synod of 1928 claims that "at the Synod of 1922, Classis Illinois took the position that the regulation of public worship is a matter in which synods should only enlighten and advise, but that synodical prescriptions in this matter conflict with the freedom of the local church."<sup>15</sup> The committee complained that the Synod of 1922 "did not answer this assertion." (Acts, 1928:278)

Indeed, the Synod of 1922 did not express itself on any of the principles basic to the study committee's proposed plan. The advisory committee "did not believe that the time had as yet come to express itself with respect to the principles basic to the report." Nor did it believe that the time had yet come "to urge the churches to introduce the new order." "Yet," it said, "it would be regrettable if the matter would hereby lapse." Thus, it advised that the Synod of 1922

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<sup>12</sup> The study committee's report to the Synod of 1926 refers to a mimeographed report that was distributed to the delegates at synod but was not printed in the Acts of Synod, 1922. The committee also notes that the overture and report from Classis Illinois were not printed in either the Agenda or the Acts of Synod, nor was it sent to the committee, but that the committee received it from Dr. Beets, the denomination's Stated Clerk. (Acts, 1926:305)

<sup>13</sup> The advisory committee of the Synod of 1922 also described the report from Classis Illinois as one in which "criticism is made concerning the plan of the study committee and a new plan presented and proposed." (Acts, 1922:67)

<sup>14</sup> In its report to the Synod of 1928, the study committee also refers to "the criticism of Classis Illinois leveled especially against that part of our proposed Order of Worship which we called 'The Service of Reconciliation.'" (Acts, 1928:279) The committee quotes its now-lost second report as having argued that "all the essential elements of our life and communion with God should come to expression in our public worship," which means that "a 'service of reconciliation' is not only essential but the basic element of such worship." (Acts, 1928:280) In deciding to retain the absolution, over the objections presented to the Synod of 1922, the committee argued that "no divine service is complete without it since it is an essential element of the fellowship of God with his people and of his people with him." (Acts, 1928:286)

<sup>15</sup> The Synod of 1922 also received an overture from Classis Hudson, asking synod to recommend the proposed order of worship to the churches "in no other manner than as advice." (Acts, 1922:68) Because the overture did not include any grounds for its request, it is not clear whether Classis Hudson's was based on practical considerations or on principle considerations similar to those of Classis Illinois regarding the nature and extent of synodical authority.

continue the study committee and instruct the committee “to continue its study in this matter and in a clear manner inform our people in our church papers,”<sup>16</sup> which the Synod of 1922 did. (Acts, 1922:69) The study committee reported to the Synod of 1926<sup>17</sup> that while it had renewed its study of the matter, it had not written in the church paper due to “the doctrinal controversies which have agitated our churches so greatly,”<sup>18</sup> which made it “quite impossible to awaken sufficient interest in our leaders and among the rank and file of our members in the matter of improving our public worship.” (Acts, 1926:304-305)

Additionally, the study committee was hesitant to continue its work so long as the objection raised by Classis Illinois in 1922 - that “the regulation of public worship is a matter in which synods should only ‘enlighten and advice’ but that synodical prescriptions in this matter conflict with the freedom of the local church” (Acts, 1928:278) - had not been addressed. The study committee wrote to synod: “As long as the possibility exists that our Church as a whole through its Synod should take this stand, all the work of your committee might be in vain.” Accordingly, before the committee could continue its work, it urged synod to “express itself on the question raised by Classis Illinois.” The study committee report concluded: “If Synod will grant our urgent request to take a definite stand ... and will reaffirm the principle adopted by previous synods that a uniform order of services is desirable and necessary, your committee will be glad to continue its labors.” (Acts, 1926:305-306, 309)

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<sup>16</sup> Several of the overtures received by the Synod of 1922 asked for further discussion in the church papers. Classis Muskegon asked that the committee “clarify this matter in our church papers.” (Acts, 1922:67) Classis Sioux Center went further, asking that the committee “advocate the most necessary elements from the reports of the Order of Worship for the church in our papers.” (Acts, 1922:67) Classis Hudson said that the churches needed “better information, which up until now has not been done.” (Acts, 1922:68) Classis Holland encouraged the committee to “take steps to inform our people with respect to the necessity of improving our order of worship, especially by means of our church papers.” (Acts, 1922:68)

<sup>17</sup> Although the study committee did not present a report to the Synod of 1924, that synod did receive one overture, from Grand Rapids West, concerning the committee’s work. It asked synod to “discontinue the committee.” (Acts, 1924:105) In its report to the Synod of 1930, the study committee claimed that “at one time it asked synod to be discharged.” (Acts, 1930:50) No such request is found in any of the committee’s published reports. Given that H.J. Kuiper, the committee’s secretary, pastored a church in Classis Grand Rapids West at that time, the comment in the committee’s 1930 report may refer to this overture, (De Jong, 2007:43) with which the committee, according to its report to Synod of 1928, “was pleased.” (Acts, 1928:277-278)

<sup>18</sup> These include the Maranatha controversy concerning eschatology, addressed by the Synods of 1918, 1920 and 1922; the Janssen case concerning biblical criticism, addressed by the Synods of 1920, 1922, and 1924; and the controversy regarding common grace, addressed by the Synods of 1924 and 1926. For a summary of these controversies, see Beets (1946:107-109), Kromminga (1949:72-75, 82-86), and Schaap (1998:234-253). For a more complete history and analysis of the Janssen case, see Boer (1972, 1973a, 1973b).

The study committee did “not agree that it is not desirable or proper for Synod to arrange a uniform order of worship for our congregations,” offered several reasons why “a uniform though flexible order of worship should be adopted by Synod,”<sup>19</sup> and expressed a “willingness to alter its proposed plan by removing those features to which several have raised objections and to make it so flexible that room is left for individual preferences which will not seriously impact our unity of worship.”<sup>20</sup> (Acts, 1926:305-306)

The Synod of 1926 granted the study committee’s request, expressing “itself as favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship for our churches,”<sup>21</sup> giving five grounds, which reflected the study committee’s argument:

1. Denominational unity is expressed by unity of worship as well as by unity of doctrine and of discipline;

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<sup>19</sup> As it had in 1918, the study committee again argued that denominational unity required unity, not only in doctrine and discipline, but also in worship. It insisted that “synod has more than an educational mission and advisory power in this matter” and appealed to the example of the GKN Synod of 1923, which adopted an order of worship “similar to the one proposed by this committee.” Finally, it noted that “our CO contains a number of provisions regarding our public worship which imply the necessity of unity of worship. At least thirteen of its articles contain regulations touching on this matter (16, 20, 56, 57, 58, 62, 63, 67, 68, 69, 76, 77, 78).” (Acts, 1926:305-307)

<sup>20</sup> The feature that had raised the most objections was the absolution. Those who expected the study committee to remove it would be disappointed by its report to the Synod of 1928.

<sup>21</sup> The Synod of 1926 did not explicitly define the “uniform but flexible order of worship” that it favored, but another of its decisions, regarding the introduction of choir singing in public worship, suggests that its understanding of “flexible” was broader than the study committee intended. The Synod of 1926 decided to “leave the final decision with regard to the question of choir singing in public worship to the local consistories” on the ground that “it belongs to the province of the local consistories.” (Acts, 1926:70)

The study committee objected to the Synod of 1928, stating its “conviction that the decision of the Synod of 1926 that in the final analysis each consistory decided this matter for its own church embodies an unreformed principle and that is in direct conflict with a decision made by the same Synod that Reformed Church polity requires that our churches should have a uniform though flexible order of worship. This means, if it means anything at all, that the synod, not the local church, decides whether such prominent elements as singing by a choir be introduced or not.” (Acts, 1928:297, emphasis original)

The Synod of 1928 disagreed, adopting the advice of its advisory committee to “abide by its decision of 1926 relative to choirs.” “But of the grounds adduced by the [advisory] committee only the first and fifth [were] adopted.” Those grounds appealed to the settled and binding nature of synodical decisions and noted that the decision of 1926 did not compel any consistory to introduce choirs, but rather discouraged their introduction. Among the grounds not adopted by synod was this one, appealing to the decision of 1926 regarding a “uniform but flexible order of worship:” “If flexibility means anything, it means that variation in the order of worship should be permitted in order to allow for the peculiar circumstances and traditions of the individual churches.” Twenty delegates, including three members of the study committee, registered their protest against synod’s decision. (Acts, 1928:58-59)

2. Our CO contains a number of provisions regarding our public worship which imply the necessity of unity and uniformity in public worship. (Art. 16, 20, 56, 57, 58, 62, 63, 66, 67, 69, 76, 77, 78);<sup>22</sup>
3. In the past contributions to uniformity in liturgy have been made, such as the forms for Baptism, Lord's Supper, etc.;
4. There is a growing sentiment for a better order of worship;
5. The uniformity sanctioned by custom and tradition is gradually being broken. (Acts, 1926:43-44)

Buoyed by the decision of the Synod of 1926,<sup>23</sup> the study committee presented an extensive report to the Synod of 1928, which De Jong (2007:44) characterizes as “a refinement of what it presented in 1920 and defended again in 1922, but this time the committee prudently designated a number of elements in the service as ‘optional’ and provided choices in the implementation of others.”<sup>24</sup>

The Synod of 1928 adopted the order of service for the morning service as presented by the study committee with minor modifications. (Acts, 1928:55) The advisory committee expressed “some dissatisfaction” with the proposed orders of worship for other services on the

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<sup>22</sup> The articles include provisions regarding baptism (Art. 56, 57, 58), the Lord's Supper (Art. 62, 63), the observance of special days (Art. 67), catechism preaching (Art. 68), Psalm singing, (Art. 67) the use of liturgical formularies for sacraments, (Art. 58, 62) and the exercise of church discipline. (Art. 76, 78)

<sup>23</sup> The study committee triumphantly noted that its request to the Synod of 1926 to declare itself in favor of a uniform but flexible order of worship was granted: “On grounds taken from Reformed Church Polity and from the history of Reformed Liturgy, which clearly show that it is the privilege of a synod to prescribe the form or mode of public worship, the Synod of 1926 declared itself as ‘favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship for our churches.’ There is no longer any doubt as to the position of the Church on this fundamental question.” (Acts, 1928: 278)

The study committee may have claimed too much. Boonstra (1998:8) argues that by speaking of “uniform but flexible,” the Synod of 1926 “did not give a clear yes or no” to the question “whether a synod's decision about worship had binding authority on all congregations.”

<sup>24</sup> The study committee did not remove from the proposed order the element to which the most objections had been raised, namely, the absolution. It did, however, offer more options than it had in 1922. The committee now offered three options for the service of reconciliation, but each option still included the absolution. (Acts, 1928:289)

Whereas in 1922 the study committee presented the difference of opinion in its midst regarding the opening of the worship to synod for a decision, “in the interest of greater flexibility” the committee now proposed “to make the use of either of the two groups of opening elements optional.” (Acts, 1928:288) With regard to the Lord's Prayer and Creed, whereas in 1922 the study committee asked synod to go on record as favoring unison recitation of both, it now proposed “that it be left to the judgment of every individual church whether to let the minister pronounce the Lords' Prayer and the Creed or to permit the congregation to join in with him.” (Acts, 1928:290)

Lord's Day and for special services on weekdays. Synod referred the suggestions from its advisory committee to the study committee, with instructions to report to the next Synod. (Acts 1928:55-57)

The Synod of 1928 also adopted the following statement on synodical authority as proposed by the study committee:

That the regulation of public worship should not be left to the individual churches, since our denominational existence requires unity of doctrine, discipline, and worship. Consequently that it is the task of the Synod, representing all of the churches, to alter our present form of worship, and that only minor details should be left to the individual consistories.<sup>25</sup> In short, that our churches should have a uniform but flexible order of worship. (Acts, 1928:50-51, emphasis original)

Accordingly, the Synod of 1928 urged

our consistories not to make any changes in their public worship other than those included in the order adopted by Synod; and impresses upon them the fact that denominational unity and loyalty require that all the churches shall conform to whatever decisions touching this matter have been taken, unless they shall be proved to be contrary to God's Word. (Acts, 1928:61, emphasis original)

This approval of a uniform order of worship would be short-lived, however. As De Jong (2007:78) notes, "reaction in the churches against imposed standardization had already set in." "The action of the Synod of 1928 proved only to be the beginning of the end." (Kromminga, 1972:13) The Synod of 1930 received overtures from eight classes and eight consistories, as well as protests from ten individuals, eight of whom were members of a single congregation, Ripon, California. As had been the case in 1922, nearly all of the overtures opposed the new order of worship.

Synod's advisory committee divided the objections into three classes: practical objections, which claimed that the imposition of a new order of worship would disrupt the peace of the church;<sup>26</sup> formal objections, which denied synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of

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<sup>25</sup> Exactly what constituted a "minor detail" was not defined. Opinions differed, as the discussion regarding the introduction of choir singing in public worship reflects. (See note 21 above.)

<sup>26</sup> This concern was present from the beginning. The advisory committee of the Synod of 1916, which received the original overture requesting a uniform order of worship, observed that "the congregations are not yet ripe for a change." (Acts, 1916:30) When a uniform order was first presented to the Synod of 1920, that synod's advisory committee also noted that "our churches are not ripe to make a decision." Rather than adopt the proposed order, it referred it to the consistories and classes for consideration and discussion, hoping that "we also, without disturbing the congregations, can come to a satisfying decision at the next synod." (Acts, 1920:26)

worship for all of the congregations;<sup>27</sup> and material objections, which objected to the content of the new order itself, especially the service of reconciliation and its absolution.<sup>28</sup> (Acts, 1928:156-157) Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry are the formal objections, which concerned the nature and extent of synodical authority, particularly whether synod has the authority to adopt an order of worship and liturgical formularies for the denomination.

### 3.3 ~ The Question of Synodical Authority

Throughout the CRCNA's discussion of a uniform order of worship (1916-1932), the study committee insisted that synod has the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship for the denomination. In its first report to the Synod of 1920, the study committee argued that denominational unity not only requires a common confession and CO, but that it also requires a common liturgy, which, if it is to be common to all, cannot be left to the discretion of the local churches, but is properly within the jurisdiction of synod, whose decisions are binding on all. (Acts, 1920:186) However, because the Synod of 1920 did not adopt the study committee's report, but rather referred it to the consistories for consideration with a request that it also be discussed at classical meetings, (Acts, 1920:26) it did not explicitly adopt or endorse the study committee's comment on the authority of synod to adopt a uniform order of worship.

The Synod of 1922 received a lengthy overture from Classis Illinois<sup>29</sup> which argued, in part, that "the regulation of public worship is a matter in which synods should only enlighten and advise, but that synodical prescriptions in this matter conflict with the freedom of the local church." (Acts, 1928:278) But, as the study committee would later complain, at the Synod of 1922 "no reply was given to the contention of Classis Illinois." (Acts, 1926:306)

At the study committee's request, the Synod of 1926 did express "itself as favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship for our churches." (Acts, 1926:43) The study committee understood this to imply that "it is the privilege of synod to prescribe the form or mode of

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Boonstra (1998:8) suggests that the entire synodical conversation on a uniform order of worship from 1916 to 1930 "demonstrated a conservatism that was more interested in maintaining the status quo than in the theological argument of historic Calvinism." As the study committee itself once complained, there was within the church "a false conservatism which refused to be convinced." (Acts, 1928: 277)

<sup>27</sup> Boonstra (1998:9) notes that the church polity issue of "the relative authority of synods versus that of congregations ... became one of the major stumbling blocks in the reaction to the proposed liturgy."

<sup>28</sup> For the material objections, see Hoeksema (1930), which Hyde (2011:160) describes as "a summation of all previous overtures and appeals from individuals and classes."

<sup>29</sup> Because this report was not printed in either the Agenda or the Acts of Synod 1922, it has been lost. However, its contents can be partially reconstructed from references to it in the advisory committee report to the Synod of 1922, as well as references to it in subsequent reports from the study committee.

public worship.” (Acts, 1928:278) The Synod of 1928, which adopted a uniform but flexible order of worship, adopted the clearest synodical statement on the authority of synod to adopt a uniform order of worship: “It is the task of synod, representing all the churches, to alter our present form of worship, and that only minor details should be left to the individual consistories.” (Acts, 1928:50-51) However, as De Jong (2007:79) notes, by the time the Synod of 1930 convened, “reaction in the churches against imposed standardization had set in.”

In 1920, Henry Beets (1920:296), editor of *The Banner*, an official publication of the CRCNA, expressed his agreement with the study committee’s assertion that “the liturgy is a matter which belongs in the jurisdiction of synod.” In May 1928, prior to the Synod of 1928, Beets (1928a:373) expressed his “hope that something along the lines laid down by the [study] committee will be decided by our synod, and that in the interest of denomination-wide uniformity,” although he also expressed sympathy for an overture from Classis Hudson objecting to the absolution in the proposed order of worship.<sup>30</sup>

However, by September 1928, Beets (1928b:700-701) called it “a cause of wonderment that synod voted in favor of the proposed order.” He wondered if synod had not acted too hastily in this manner and proposed that, while “it may not be the way things are done usually in our denomination,” “would it not have been far wiser for our synod to have delayed action on the matter and sent the subject down to the consistories and to the classes, ask these bodies for a vote, and then pass on it finally?”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Classis Hudson asked the Synod of 1928 to “not adopt the proposed change in our worship services, as centered in the absolution.” The Synod of 1928 did not accede to Classis Hudson’s overture, noting in its decision that “the absolution is found essentially in the form used for the administration of the Lord’s Supper.” (Acts, 1928:51-52)

<sup>31</sup> As De Moor (2010:262) notes, “In distinction from other traditions, the CRCNA does not have ‘ratification’ procedures where classes or even local churches must agree before synodical approved changes are in effect.” Instead “our rules seek to ensure that minor assemblies have sufficient time to consider important matters before synod meets and to present any viewpoints they may have by way of overture or communication.” (De Moor, 2010:171)

Classis Pacific submitted an overture to the Synod of 1957 asking “that it study the advisability of making a rule that constitutional changes, such as concerns matters of doctrine, discipline, government, or worship, shall become binding on the churches only after a majority of the classes have approved their final formulation.” (Acts, 1957:134) Contrary to its advisory committee’s recommendation, which was to refer the overture to the Revision Committee for its consideration, the Synod of 1957 simply declared “that such a procedure would be contrary to our CO and usage.” (Acts, 1957:85)

Subsequent synods have consistently upheld the final authority of synod. The Synod of 1977 did not accede to an overture from Classis Grand Rapids North requesting that revisions to the CO only become binding and effective when ratified by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the classes. (Acts, 1977:15) Similar overtures were received by the Synod of 1979 from Classes Illinois, Sioux Center, and Kalamazoo, and from the consistory of East Palmyra, New York. The same Synod also received an overture from Classis Chicago South, requesting approval, not from a majority or supra-majority of classes, but of consistories. The Synod of 1979 did not accede to any of the overtures on the grounds that they “reverse the decision-making process envisioned in Art. 28 and 29 of the

In a reply to Dr. Beets, published in the 5 October 1928 issue of *The Banner*, the study committee accused Beets of “fostering a spirit of insubordination.”<sup>32</sup> They asked:

Since when have we become congregationalist<sup>33</sup> in our church polity? Are we not presbyterial<sup>34</sup> in our government and does not our CO say that “whatever may be agreed upon (in our major assemblies) by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles of the CO, as long as they are not changed by a General Synod?” (Heyns et al, 1928:743)

Citing his growing responsibilities as the denomination’s Director of Missions, Beets had asked the Synod of 1928 “not to be regarded as a candidate for re-appointment to the position of editor-in-chief of *The Banner*.” (Acts, 1928:41) The Synod of 1928 elected H.J. Kuiper,<sup>35</sup> secretary of the uniform order of worship study committee, to succeed Beets.<sup>36</sup> Kuiper assumed his responsibilities as the editor of *The Banner* on 1 January 1929. When he did, the tone of *The Banner* regarding the uniform order of worship shifted dramatically.

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CO,” (Acts, 1979:88-90) which stipulate that major assemblies, which possess authority over the minor assemblies, (Art. 28) deal with matters that concern the churches in common or that cannot be finished in the minor assemblies. (Art. 29)

Similar overtures were also submitted to the Synod of 1985 by the consistory of Immanuel, Wappingers Falls, NY and to the Synod of 1994 by Classis California South. The Synod of 1994 defeated a recommendation from its advisory committee to require that any substantial change to the CO be ratified by a majority of the classes. (Acts, 1994:486)

<sup>32</sup> In response to Beet’s specific suggestion that Synod had been “too hasty” in this matter, the committee noted that it has been “twelve years since one of our synods appointed a committee to present a new order of worship” and “eight years since practically the same order of worship was presented which has now been adopted.” To the suggestion that the proposed order of worship be referred to the churches, the committee noted that this had been done by the Synod of 1920 and that “the results of this ‘referendum,’ if we may call it such, are tabulated in the Acts of 1922.” (Heyns et al, 1928:742-743, emphasis original)

<sup>33</sup> As Waldron (2004:187) notes, “congregationalism may refer to the independence of the local church or independency. It also may refer to a democratic form of government in the local church or democracy.” References to “congregationalism” or “independentism” within discussions of synodical authority in the CRCNA have the former meaning.

Waldron’s (2014:193) observation that “there are those who have welded a ‘presbyterian view’ of the rule of elders onto congregationalism (in the sense of independency)” aptly describes *Doleantie* polity, to which a subsequent section of this chapter will attend.

<sup>34</sup> This reference to Presbyterial government refers not only to rule by elders (presbyters), but also to the connective nature of Presbyterian polity; that is, local congregations are “bound together by a connective government of graded courts reflecting mutual accountability, dependency, and submission among them.” (Reymond, 2004:95)

<sup>35</sup> Kuiper would serve as editor of *The Banner* until 1956. In an obituary of Kuiper, John Kromminga wrote that “no man in our time has left a deeper impression on the Christian Reformed Church than Henry J. Kuiper.” (De Jong, 1998:11-12) According to Schaap, (1998:273) “Many looked to Kuiper’s words as if they were Holy Writ.”

<sup>36</sup> The Synod of 1928 had initially elected D.H. Kromminga to succeed Beets as editor-in-chief of *The Banner*, (Acts, 1928:41) but when the same Synod appointed Kromminga to teach historical theology at Calvin Seminary,



Kuiper's biographer, De Jong, (2007:79) notes: "In his first eighteen months as editor of *The Banner*, from 1929 until the Synod of 1930, Kuiper wrote more than twenty editorials on worship. Most of them advocated implementation of the uniform order of worship approved by the Synod of 1928." While most of Kuiper's editorials related to the material objections against the new order of worship, specifically against the service of reconciliation and especially against its absolution - referred to by some as "the new Roman menace"<sup>37</sup> (De Jong, 2007:79) - some related to the formal objections regarding the authority of synod to adopt a uniform order of worship. The latter objections are of interest to this church juridical inquiry.

Particularly significant is the position published by one minister, Rev. De Leeuw, "that if the local consistory disagreed with the new order of worship, it could simply retain the order it had in place, since the synod's decisions cannot trump those of the local consistory." (De Jong, 2007:80) Kuiper's response (1929a:56) to De Leeuw's claim that "synod's decisions cannot trump those of the local consistory" (De Jong, 2007:80) echoed the study committee's reply to Dr. Beets. Kuiper expressed surprise at such a congregationalist statement, asserting that the "adoption of an order of worship is a matter which pertains to all the churches." As such, it rightly falls within the jurisdiction of synod. Furthermore, Kuiper argued that "now that synod has adopted the new form every one of our churches is in conscience bound to introduce it, unless it can prove to the satisfaction of synod that this new form is, in part or as a whole, contrary to the Word of God."

In January 1930, prior to the convening of the Synod of 1930, Kuiper published two articles by Samuel Volbeda, professor of practical theology at Calvin Seminary, the theological school of the CRCNA. Volbeda (1930a:92) wrote that "it is perfectly in harmony with the CO that Synod determine matters of liturgy."<sup>38</sup> Volbeda (1930b:105) called it "nothing short of strange that any church living under our CO should ever have contemplated such actions and overtures as the forthcoming Agendum will register," anticipating overtures that would call for

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he asked to be released from the editorship of *The Banner*. (Acts, 1928:97) Synod granted Kromminga's request and, in one of its final acts, appointed H.J. Kuiper to serve as editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. (Acts, 1928:146)

<sup>37</sup> Beets (1920:296) had issued a similar warning in 1920, writing of adversaries to the proposed order of worship: "How quickly they would be to make an outcry against our 'ritualism' and 'high churchism,' in general, and especially against what they would dub 'popish' confession and absolution."

<sup>38</sup> Citing 1914 CO Art. 31, which stipulates that the decisions of broader assemblies are "binding unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the CO, as long as they are not changed by the General Synod," (p. 90) and Art. 86, which stipulates that only the General Synod, not congregations nor classes, has the right to alter, add to, or reduce the articles of the CO, (p. 107) Volbeda argued that only synod has the authority to revise the CO, in which Volbeda included the liturgical ordinances.

the repeal of the uniform order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928 and would leave every congregation free to construct its own order of worship.

Volbeda (1930b:105) considered local option in matters of worship “utterly and unqualifiedly unconstitutional.” He argued that the third section of the CO<sup>39</sup> “manifestly proceeds upon the assumption that it is the competence of the synod only to determine matters of worship.” Not only do matters of worship fall under the jurisdiction of synod, but Volbeda also argued that “Art. 30 of the CO<sup>40</sup> specifically prohibits synod of granting liturgical local option.” Its statement that matters pertaining to the church in general, in which Volbeda includes liturgy, belong to the jurisdiction of the major assemblies, necessarily implies that such matters do not fall under the jurisdiction or competence of the minor assemblies.

While committed to the uniform order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928, Kuiper (1929b:280) had proposed that “Synod decide to leave it entirely to the discretion of the local church whether to introduce the new order, but with the understanding that whatever changes such a church might afterwards desire to make shall be taken from this new order.”<sup>41</sup> The study committee presented similar recommendations to the Synod of 1930: First, that synod rescind the decision of the Synod of 1928, which had made the introduction of the new order of worship obligatory on the churches, and “leave the introduction of the new order of worship entirely to the discretion of the churches.”<sup>42</sup> But, second, it recommended that synod also “recommend anew the introduction of the order of worship for the first service on the Lord’s Day, as adopted by the Synod of 1928.”<sup>43</sup> And finally, it called on synod to “again strongly urge our consistories not to introduce any changes in their public worship other than those adopted by synod.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Articles 53-70, which deal with doctrine, sacraments, and usages.

<sup>40</sup> “In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In greater assemblies only such matters shall be considered as could not be finished in lesser assemblies, or as pertain to the churches of the assembly in common.” (1914 CO Art. 30; p. 90)

<sup>41</sup> This is a noticeable change in rhetoric from the study committee’s Reply to Dr. Beets, which argued that “when a church refused to introduce such an order of worship [as has been adopted by synod] and fails to show that it conflicts with the clear Word of God, it violates its denominational obligations.” (Heyns et al, 1928:743)

<sup>42</sup> The grounds offered for this recommendation were solely practical: “The majority of our churches are not ready for the introduction of the new order. By removing the element of compulsion, churches which are not ripe for a change will not be made to feel uneasy, ... consciences will not be bound, and denominational peace and harmony will be preserved.” (Agenda, 1930:59)

<sup>43</sup> That the committee remained committed to the principle that ecclesiastical decisions are settled and binding is obvious in the first ground offered for this recommendation: “No objections have been advanced which prove that the new Order as adopted by the Synod is contrary to the Word of God, our Confession, or our CO.” (Agenda, 1930:59)

<sup>44</sup> It is evident from the grounds offered that this recommendation was intended to preserve the principle that synod, not the local church, has jurisdiction over matters of worship: “By restricting future changes to those

In response to Volbeda's articles, Kuiper (1930b:148-149) asked if this would be the local option that Volbeda opposed. He concluded that it would not be, because it "does not propose to give each consistory the right to adopt whatever order of worship it pleases." Instead, it would allow those congregations that were not ready for the new order or that had serious objections to it to retain the old order of worship. Kuiper concluded that although this would not lead, at least not at once, to the desired uniformity, "the principle that synod, not the local church, should determine matters of public worship would be left inviolate." It was precisely this principle that would be contested at the Synod of 1930.

### 3.3.1 ~ The Synod of 1930

The Synod of 1930 received overtures from eight classes and eight consistories, as well as protests from ten individuals, eight of whom were members of a single congregation, Ripon, California. All of the overtures asked Synod to either rescind or revise the decisions of the Synod of 1928 regarding the uniform order of worship. While all but one of the overtures included material objections against the new order of worship - specifically its service of reconciliation and particularly the absolution it contained - many also included formal objections. The synodical advisory committee summarized these objections: "The position of several classes and churches is that the Synod of 1928 exceeded its powers when it adopted a specific order of worship to be introduced by synodical authority into all our churches."<sup>45</sup> (Acts, 1930:170)

Aware of these objections, in its report to the Synod of 1930 the study committee reminded synod that the question of synodical authority was brought before the Synod of 1926 and that that synod had expressed itself as favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship, which the committee understood to imply that it is the privilege of synod to prescribe the form or mode of worship. It also noted that "for more than two years no protest was raised against this decision regarding this fundamental question" and complained that "it seems out of order to raise this question again at this late date." (Agenda, 1930:52)

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approved by synod, the calamity of every congregation determining its own mode of worship will be averted. ... Although some churches will be using the old and others the new order, this will be far better than to have every church in independentistic fashion do what seems good to it in its own eyes." (Agenda, 1930:59)

<sup>45</sup> Contra the study committee's appeal to the statement of the Synod of 1926 regarding a "uniform but flexible order of worship," against that same synod's decision regarding the introduction of choirs singing in public worship, Classis Zeeland argued that, "The decision of the Synod of 1928 regarding the worship service is in flagrant conflict with the decision of the same Synod to leave choir singing in the worship service over to the discretion of the local consistory." (Acts, 1930:171) Classis Zeeland failed to appreciate which grounds the Synod of 1928 adopted for that decision and which grounds were not adopted. (On the 1926 and 1928 decisions regarding choirs singing in public worship, see note 21 above.)

The study committee invoked 1914 CO, Article 31,<sup>46</sup> arguing that the decision of the Synod of 1926 regarding the authority of synod to adopt a uniform order of worship for the denomination should be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the CO. To the study committee's knowledge, "no serious attempt had been made to overthrow the grounds upon which the decision of 1926 rested." (Agenda, 1930:52)

John Kromminga (1949:196n30) characterizes the advisory committee's report (Acts, 1930:173-176) as "a rather full discussion of the discretionary powers of synod as conceived of in Reformed polity," which did attempt to overthrow the grounds on which the decision of the Synod of 1926 regarding synodical authority rested. The advisory committee's position was that "it does not lie within the province of synodical regulation to determine upon a specific order of worship and to enforce its introduction into the churches." (Acts, 1930:173)

De Jong (2007:80) describes it as the study committee's "stock answer since the early 1920s:" "Denominational unity in the Reformed tradition applies to unity in doctrine, government, and worship." Unity in worship necessitates the adoption of a uniform order of worship by synod, the church's broadest assembly, which would then, having been adopted by synod, be binding on all the churches. The advisory committee of the Synod of 1930 agreed that "denominational unity requires unity in worship," but that "uniformity with respect to an order of worship is something distinct from unity of worship."<sup>47</sup>

The advisory committee argued that synod would have the inherent right to adopt a uniform order of worship if, and only if, "our Reformed principles pertaining to public worship permit only one order." However, the advisory committee wrote, "no one would go so far as to insist that it is not entirely possible to compose more than one order of worship that would do justice to scriptural and Reformed principles." (Acts, 1930:173-174) Therefore, as Classis

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<sup>46</sup> "If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a lesser assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a larger assembly, and whatever may be decided by a majority vote shall be considered binding unless it is proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of this CO, as long as they have not been changed by the General Synod." (1914 CO Art. 31; p. 90) While this article only explicitly governs an appeal against a decision of a lesser assembly, it was evidently read as applying to all decisions of a broader assembly, not only those adjudicating an appeal.

<sup>47</sup> This appears to be the first time in the CRCNA's discussion of a uniform order of worship (1916-1932) that a distinction was made between unity and uniformity. From the original overture to the Synod of 1916, the assumption appears to have been that unity requires uniformity and that without uniformity there is no unity.

Here the advisory committee follows the argument of an overture submitted to the Synod of 1930 by Classis Orange City, which took "the position that denomination unity certainly requires unity of worship, but that unity of worship does not of necessity imply uniformity with respect to order of worship." (Acts, 1930:170)

Orange City argued, “a specific order of worship cannot properly be a matter of synodical prescription,” but belongs to the domain “in which the local consistory should be left to decide,<sup>48</sup> as long as the order of worship it adopts does full justice to our Reformed principles.”<sup>49</sup> (Acts, 1930:170)

The advisory committee argued that, because neither Scripture nor Reformed principles permit only one possible order of worship, synod does not have the inherent right to adopt a uniform order of worship. However, the advisory committee also acknowledged that synods possess “certain discretionary powers” that allow them to “make binding decisions in matters pertaining to the life and activities of the churches, even when these decisions cannot be said to be demanded by scripture or CO.” (Acts, 1930:174) To the advisory committee, a uniform order of worship was clearly one of these decisions not demanded by scripture or CO, but could the adoption of a uniform order of worship fall within these discretionary powers of synod?

The advisory committee said, no. “A major assembly may make use of these discretionary powers only in so far as need requires in order to ensure the purity and denominational unity of the church.” These discretionary powers may justify the adoption of liturgical formularies for the sacraments, which, though not demanded by Scripture, have been adopted “to preserve the unity and purity of faith with respect to the sacraments.” (Acts, 1930:174-175, emphasis original)<sup>50</sup> The same, however, is not true of a uniform order of worship.

“Unity of principle is necessary,” argued the advisory committee. Synod could certainly adopt principles for the order of worship, and the various orders of worship within the congregations should follow those scriptural and Reformed principles, which, the advisory committee

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<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in its overture to the Synod of 1930, Classis Sioux Center argued that “the specific form and order of the worship service must be left to the local office with an eye to the needs and circumstances of the local congregation.” (Acts, 1930:171)

<sup>49</sup> Boonstra (1998:9) observes: “That synod had the right to prescribe uniform principles was agreed upon by all. ... However, the issue became much more clouded when synod specified certain practices for all congregations.”

<sup>50</sup> This same argument may have been advanced in the now-lost overture from Classis Illinois to the Synod of 1922. In its report to the Synod of 1926, the study committee referred to “the idea that synod is called only ‘to make binding rules in so far as it is necessary on the one hand to safeguard the right administration of Word and sacrament and the faithful maintenance of discipline, and on the other hand to ensure the effective unity of the faith.’” (Acts, 1926:307) While the study committee did not cite the source it quotes for this idea, which the study committee rejected, previous references in the report to the overture of Classis Illinois to the Synod of 1922 strongly suggest that here the committee is quoting that overture.

argued, admit more than one possible order of worship. “That denominational unity is threatened if one congregation employs a different order or arrangement of the elements of worship than does another, does not at all follow,”<sup>51</sup> wrote the advisory committee. (Acts, 1930:177)

In addition to its discussion of the discretionary powers of synod as conceived in Reformed polity, the advisory committee also answered the stock answer of proponents of the order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928, who argued that CO Art. 31, which described synodical decisions as settled and binding, applied to the decision of the Synod of 1928 on a uniform order of worship. (De Jong, 2007:80) The advisory committee argued that the requirement of Art. 31 that a decision be proved to conflict with the Word of God applied only to decisions made on the basis of the Word of God. The requirement does not apply to decisions made on discretionary grounds, which, the advisory committee argued, could be repealed or revised upon the same class of grounds, discretionary, as the decision was made. (Acts, 1930:180)

In 1926 the study committee had argued that the provisions of the CO regarding public worship “imply the necessity of unity in worship” and grant synod “more than an educational mission and advisory power in this matter.” (Acts, 1926:307) On the grounds that “our CO contains a number of provisions regarding our public worship which imply the necessity of unity and uniformity in public worship,” the Synod of 1926 expressed “itself as favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship,” (Acts, 1926:43) which the study committee understood to imply that it is the privilege of a synod to prescribe a form or mode of public worship, thus justifying the adoption of a uniform order of worship by the Synod of 1928.

Contra the decision of the Synod of 1926 and the study committee’s understanding of that decision, the advisory committee to the Synod of 1930 insisted that it “has never been proved that our CO gives a synodical body warrant to prescribe an order of worship.”<sup>52</sup> (Acts, 1930:181) The advisory committee argued that the only CO articles dealing with liturgical matters deal with the proper administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of church

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<sup>51</sup> This, however, was precisely what the study committee had been arguing: “We fail to see how there can be ‘effective unity’ of the churches in matters of worship when every consistory can arrange its public worship as it sees fit.” (Acts, 1926:307)

<sup>52</sup> The advisory committee also noted that “until 1928 we have had no prescribed order of worship in our churches.” Even so, “the old order became the generally accepted order, not because a synod had prescribed it, but because the churches themselves adopted it.” (Acts, 1930:178)

discipline, marks of the true church. (BC Art. 29) Nothing indicates that all of the churches must follow an identical order of worship in their services.<sup>53</sup> (Acts, 1930:178)

Although the advisory committee's recommendations to the Synod of 1930, which were all adopted, appear to be similar to those of the study committee, they actually differed greatly. Both the study committee and the advisory committee recommended that the Synod of 1930 "revise the decision of the Synod of 1928 by rescinding the clauses which make the introduction of the new order obligatory." (Acts, 1930:186) The study committee offered practical reasons for this recommendation,<sup>54</sup> but the advisory committee offered the following statement of principle as a ground: "It is not to be sustained upon the grounds of scripture and CO that it lies within the jurisdiction of synod to prescribe a specific order of worship and to enforce its introduction into the churches." This statement the Synod of 1930 adopted. (Acts, 1930:187)

Similarly, the advisory committee also recommended that the Synod of 1930 revise the decision of the Synod of 1928 "by deciding that the new order of worship (as revised) is laid before the churches with the recommendation of Synod and that its introduction is left to the discretion of each local church." (Acts, 1930:187) However, the uniform order of worship now recommended by synod was not the order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928, but a revision of that order,<sup>55</sup> which, to the mind of the study committee - particularly because it eliminated the absolution<sup>56</sup> - must have been a different order altogether.

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<sup>53</sup> Whereas the Synod of 1926 cited 1914 CO articles 16, 20, 56, 57, 58, 62, 63, 66, 67, 69, 76, 77, 78, the advisory committee to the Synod of 1930 referred only to articles 56, 57, 58, 62, 69, 76, 78, omitting articles 16, which describes the office of a minister; 20, which allowed theological students to "speak a word of edification in congregational services;" 63 regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper; 66 regarding special days of prayer; 67 regarding special days; and 77, which lists the steps of discipline.

The omissions are significant, because the study committee had appealed to some of the omitted articles, especially article 67 regarding special days (as well as article 68, which required weekly catechism preaching, and article 69, which required Psalm singing), as evidence that the interest of synod in public worship extended beyond safeguarding the proper administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of church discipline, and thus justified the adoption of a uniform order of worship. (Acts, 1926:307)

<sup>54</sup> "a. The majority of our churches are not ready for the introduction of the new order. b. By removing the element of compulsion, churches which are not ripe for a change will not be made to feel uneasy ... consciences will not be bound, and denominational peace and harmony will be preserved." (Agenda, 1930:59)

<sup>55</sup> Upon the recommendation of its advisory committee, the Synod of 1930 adopted the following revisions: It eliminated the absolution, the Creed, and the Psalm after the Creed. As the advisory committee itself noted, what was left came "very close to the old order now in vogue in most of our churches." (Acts, 1930:184-185) Four delegates, including H.J. Kuiper, the secretary of the study committee, registered their protest. (Acts, 1930:186)

<sup>56</sup> In its report to the Synod of 1928, the study committee had argued that "no divine service is complete without it [the absolution], since it is an essential element of the fellowship of God with his people and of his people with him." (Acts, 1928:286)

The study committee was devastated. Carl Kromminga (1972:19) describes its final report to the Synod of 1932 as “bitter, though brief.” The study committee wrote of “the reactionary procedure of the Synod of 1930” that had “nullified almost completely what had been accomplished.”<sup>57</sup> To the study committee, it was “a catastrophe.” The study committee informed the Synod of 1932 that at its first meeting subsequent to the Synod of 1930, “a motion to discontinue, at least for the present, was unanimously adopted. No other meetings were held, and hence your committee has nothing to report.” (Agenda, 1932:70) Convinced that any further work on its part was “foredoomed to failure,” the study committee asked to be released from further service. (Agenda, 1932:72) The Synod of 1932 granted the study committee’s request, and it was honorably discharged. (Acts, 1932:22)

### 3.3.2 ~ *Doleantie* Ecclesiology

Many of the formal objections to the uniform order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928 reflected the influence of *Doleantie* ecclesiology,<sup>58</sup> - the doctrine, developed by Abraham Kuyper, that the local church is an *ecclesia completa*.<sup>59</sup> (Van Oene, 1973:30) In the first decades of the twentieth-century, the impact of the *Doleantie* came to be felt more keenly in the CRCNA,<sup>60</sup> and the phrase “autonomy of the local church” was heard more frequently, with lessening reserve. (De Moor, 1986:159)

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<sup>57</sup> Boonstra (1998:8) concurs: “Synod did not exactly rescind all of 1928, but in its substitute order of worship, its rejection of the absolution, and its emphasis on local prerogative, it in effect nullified the work of the committee and the decision of 1928.”

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Classis Illinois’ contention that the imposition of a uniform order of worship by synod conflicts with “the freedom of the local church,” (Acts, 1928:278) Beets’ (1928b:700-701) suggestion that the order of worship be ratified by the consistories and/or classis, and De Leeuw’s claim that “synod’s decisions cannot trump those of the local consistory.” (De Jong, 2007:80)

<sup>59</sup> For an introduction to Kuyper’s ecclesiology, see Zwaanstra (1979) and Kuyper (2016), which Kuyper himself described as “a compendium of his ecclesiology.” (de Bruijne, 2014:445) For a critical summary of *Doleantie* ecclesiology, especially in regard to the nature and extent of the authority of major assemblies, see Hoeksema. (1926:26-36)

It should be noted that not everyone sympathetic to *Doleantie* ecclesiology denied synod the authority to adopt liturgical formularies, or even a uniform order of worship. Even Kuyper (2016:156) appeared to allow that “the order and content of the worship service ... can be decided exclusively by the national synods,” and to appreciate the liturgical formularies. (Kuyper, 2009: 5, 27, 237; 2016:185)

See also Van Dellen & Monsma (1969:186): “It is to be understood that the churches themselves, at their broadest assemblies, i.e., their synods, should determine the liturgy of the churches. Thus also the unity of the churches in doctrine and worship is enhanced.”

<sup>60</sup> Continued Dutch migration from the Netherlands to North America by those, including ministers, who had participated in the *Doleantie* brought its ideas to North America. (Beets, 1946:83; Zwaanstra, 1973:25; Schaap, 1998:191) The re-publication of Kuyper’s articles in North America, especially by L.J. Hulst, popularized Kuyper’s views in the CRCNA. (De Moor, 1986:232)



The *Doleantie* had a very different understanding of synodical authority than the *Afscheiding van 1834* had.<sup>61</sup> Volbeda (1937:113) correctly notes that leaders of the *Doleantie* “were deeply distrustful synodical authority,” but he incorrectly suggests that leaders of the *Afscheiding van 1834* had a similar distrust, albeit to a lesser degree. The *Afscheiding van 1834* objected to synodical boards, not synodical authority per se. “They were willing to be governed by classes and synods, which are assemblies of ministers and elders delegated by lower assemblies, but not by state appointees who had no reason to uphold pure doctrine and worship.” (Boonstra 1982:78; see also Kromminga, 1949:21) The leaders of the *Afscheiding van 1834* did not believe that there was no earthly authority higher than the local consistory.<sup>62</sup> But contra the *Algemeen Reglement*, they contended that earthly authority higher than the local consistory resided in the ecclesiastical assemblies of classis and synod, constituted by office-bearers, not classical or synodical boards.

The CRCNA inherited the understanding of synodical authority of the *Afscheiding van 1834*; that is, it was willing to be governed by classes and synods. The 6 June 1877 meeting of the general assembly received a protest against a decision of Classis Michigan regarding the appointment of a janitor in the Zeeland congregation.<sup>63</sup> To the argument that “the classis has no right to meddle in the appointment of a custodian, since this is purely a congregational meeting,” the general assembly responded: “Classis does have this right, since classis stands above the church council, and it may not stand apart but must concern itself with the smallest item of congregational matters when through that difficulties arise with the congregation.”<sup>64</sup> (Sheeres, 2013:384-386)

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<sup>61</sup> Foppe Ten Hoor, professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, the seminary of the CRCNA, from 1900-1924 and an outspoken critic of *Doleantie* ecclesiology, argued that the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the *Doleantie* proceeded from fundamentally different conceptions of the essence of the church that were directly opposed to and mutually exclusive of one another. (Zwaanstra, 1973:80-89)

<sup>62</sup> So also D.H. Kromminga, (1942:197) who writes: “To claim that the consistory is the supreme authority in the church is to set our church government on its head instead of on its feet.”

<sup>63</sup> See Sheeres (2013:385n82) for a complete description of the situation in Zeeland and the decisions of Classis Michigan.

<sup>64</sup> De Moor (1986:340) cites this decision as evidence that the CRCNA adopted a denominational or synodical model of church government. The Synod of 1982 affirmed the general assembly’s position, albeit in a more significant case involving the deposition of a consistory by a classis: “It is indeed proper according to Reformed church polity for either classis or synod to intervene in the affairs of a local congregation, if the welfare of that congregation is at stake.” (Acts, 1982:55) In the history of the CRCNA, controversy about the authority of broader assemblies often centered around the question of whether a classis may depose a consistory, a question to which synods of the CRCNA have consistently given an affirmative answer. For a history of these controversies, see Danhof (1961b) and De Moor (1986:156-172; 2010:149-152).

The CO Revision Committee recommended the addition of the following article to the CO: “In exceptional circumstances a major assembly may suspend or depose office-bearers even when action leading to suspension or

The *Doleantie* had a very different understanding of synodical authority, arising from a very different model of church government - one “that constituted a drastic departure from the traditional structure of the Reformed church.” (De Moor, 1986:339) Kuyper himself (2016:115) appeared to acknowledge this: “The view presented here - that the local church is the primary manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ, and national churches arose only as secondary through the federating of these churches<sup>65</sup> - is not generally held.” Both the NHK and the *Afscheiding* Church spoke of one national church consisting of local congregations. Both used the word “church” in reference to the denomination as a whole and the word “congregation” in reference to local churches. (Van Oene, 1973:11; Zwaanstra, 1979:171; Bouma, 1995:146)

For Kuyper, (2016:128-129) however, the local church is the “starting point of all church government,” “the cornerstone of the entire system.” Indeed, the *Doleantie* churches’ Provisional Synod of 1891 said that “it is impossible that there should be anything other than local churches.” These local churches “may work together on the level of classes and synods and thereby come into federation with one another,”<sup>66</sup> but the Provisional Synod argued that there can be no such thing as “a national church as an entity or a communion.”<sup>67</sup> (Bouma, 1995:161) De Moor (1986:339-340) describes this as “a drastic departure from the traditional structure of the Reformed church” that “can hardly be squared with the underlying principles of Art. 36 of the DCO,” which recognizes that “the classis has the same authority over the

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deposition has not been initiated by the consistory.” The Synod of 1965 did not adopt the recommendation, but not for reasons of principle. Rather, it offered this purely pragmatic reason: “Rules about the exceptional and abnormal that may occur” do not belong in “the regular ecclesiastical order of the church.” (Acts, 1965:93-94)

<sup>65</sup> For Kuyper (2016:90, 116, 275) the essence of the church is found in the local church, which is a complete church. Church federations are always secondary, and non-essential, for the church. A local church “would remain a church even if all other local churches to which it is connected were to fall away. ... The existence of the church always precedes the existence of the church federation, and the federation is born out of the churches.” (Kuyper, 2016:224-225) Additionally, when churches enter a federation, they do not thereby surrender any part of their autonomy or authority. (Van Oene, 1973:21-22) Rather, they retain the right to withdraw from the federation, relinquishing their bond with its other churches. (Kuyper, 2015:234)

<sup>66</sup> Kuyper (2016:158, 169) uses the language of “correspondence” to describe the federative bonds between local churches, usage that deviates from its traditional usage among the Dutch Reformed. “Historically the Dutch Reformed churches introduced correspondence between particular synods because the government refused to allow the churches to meet in a general synod.” (Zwaanstra, 1991:32)

<sup>67</sup> Kuyper (2016:118) allowed for a collegial system on the local level, arguing that the boundaries of a local church should coincide with those of its municipality, regardless of the size of the municipality: “If the municipality remains single, then the formation of the church ought to be one, even if it would include a hundred thousand individuals or more.” This does not mean, however, that the church cannot be divided into parishes, “as long as these parishes have as their head one consistory, representing the unity of the congregation.” Kuyper does not explain why this cannot also be true on a regional, provincial, or national level.

consistory that the particular synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the particular.” (p. 167)

Kuyper thought that “when looked at in terms of church polity, the churches of the *Afscheiding van 1834* left much to be desired.”<sup>68</sup> (Zwaanstra, 1979:172) Specifically, he objected to what he perceived to be a hierarchical spirit of the *Afscheiding* Church that gave the general synod final authority. (Bouma, 1995:71) Kuyper (2016:275) urged the *Afscheiding* Church, “with increasing clarity, to emphasize their independence as local churches in order to remove all remaining leaven of the collegial system.”<sup>69</sup>

When the *Afscheiding* Church and the churches of the *Doleantie* united in 1892, developments that “were watched with considerable interest by the Dutch immigrant churches in North America,” (Zwaanstra, 1991:13) they took the name *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN). Approval of this name by the *Afscheiding* Church was not without considerable discussion, because, as Bouma (1995:204) notes, “behind the question whether the united churches should use the singular (*kerk* / church) or the plural (*kerken* / churches) in their collective name lay differing conceptions concerning the unity of the church,” and, accordingly, of synodical authority.

P.Y. De Jong (1995:295) argues that by adopting this name the GKN “declared that the congregations did not constitute one over-arching and embracing church, controlled by synodical regulation, but a federation of local bodies of believers bound by the same confessions and CO.” This may have been true of the GKN,<sup>70</sup> but here the CRCNA departs from her “mother church.” One of the constants in every name the CRCNA has adopted has been consistent use of the singular “church.”<sup>71</sup> Van Oene (1973:186) rightly concludes that “the singular form of

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<sup>68</sup> The *Doleantie* was “church politically more self-conscious,” than the *Afscheiding van 1834*; it had a “definite church political strategy to combat synodocracy.” (De Moor, 1986:338-339) Zwaanstra (1979:164) notes that “the right ordering of the church was a matter of grave concern for Kuyper.”

<sup>69</sup> A collegial system is one in which the denomination is considered the church; the congregations are considered parts or divisions of the whole.

<sup>70</sup> How true it would remain in the GKN is debatable as is demonstrated by the deposition of Geelkerken and the consistory of Amsterdam-Zuid by the GKN Synod of 1926 and the deposition of Schilder and Greijdanus - who had registered a negative vote against the deposition of Geelkerken and the Amsterdam-Zuid consistory in 1926 (De Moor, 1986:169) - by the GKN Synod of 1944.

De Moor (1986:168) calls the GKN’s decision in the Geelkerken case “devastating news” for advocates of *Doleantie* ecclesiology in the CRCNA, especially because the depositions were supported by H.H. Kuyper and H. Bouwman, respected church polity professors, who had previously argued that the most a major assembly could do was disaffiliate the congregation of a delinquent consistory. Both now declared their former position, which reflected *Doleantie* ecclesiology, in error. (Danhof, 1961d:9)

<sup>71</sup> For its first two years, the CRCNA was a nameless denomination. In 1859, it adopted the name Holland Reformed Church. In 1861 this was changed to Free Dutch Reformed Church, which became True Dutch Reformed

the word ‘church’ in Christian Reformed Church reflects the characteristic polity of the CRCNA.”

However, the CRCNA has not opted for a strictly collegial ecclesiology in which the denomination is the church and the local congregations are only parts of it. As De Moor (1986:337) notes, both congregationalism<sup>72</sup> - of which *Doleantie* ecclesiology has been often accused<sup>73</sup> - and denominationalism<sup>74</sup> “are anathema in a Reformed system of church government.” To argue that either the local consistory or the general or national synod is the highest authority in the church presents a false dichotomy. It ought not be an either/or. Rather, it should be a both/and. De Moor (1986:160) calls it “an old Reformed principle so well-articulated by Bavinck: every local church is an independent revelation of the Body of Christ and at the same time part of a greater whole.”<sup>75</sup>

Danhof<sup>76</sup> (1961d:9) notes that “authority in the church is vested by Christ only in the office-bearers,” not in any particular ecclesiastical assembly, such as the local consistory. This means that “the nature of the authority exercised by a classis or synod is not essentially different in its nature from the exercise of authority by a consistory,” (Danhof 1961b:11) because all ecclesiastical assemblies, minor and major, are essentially the same; that is, all are constituted

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Church in 1863. The name Holland Christian Reformed Church was adopted in 1880. In 1894 “Holland” was dropped, leaving Christian Reformed Church. When the denomination was legally incorporated in 1974, it became the Christian Reformed Church in North America. (Harms, 2004:vii)

De Moor (2010:16) notes that there have been many attempts to change the denomination’s name to include “churches” throughout the history of the CRCNA, but none has been successful. Boonstra (1982:83), citing an interview with John Kromminga, chair of the CO Revision Committee, claims that “some on the Revision Committee argued for a change in the denominational name to the Christian Reformed Churches,” but no such recommendation was ever made to a synod. Even so, Van Dellen & Monsma (1949; 1967) consistently refer to the denomination as “Christian Reformed churches” in their CO commentaries.

<sup>72</sup> Here congregationalism refers to the autonomy or independence of the local congregation. It does not refer to a democratic form of church government within the local congregation. *Doleantie* ecclesiology affirmed a presbyterial (rule by elders) polity.

<sup>73</sup> Hoeksema (1926:101-102) described *Doleantie* ecclesiology as “a system of church polity that is practically Congregationalism.” Volbeda (1937:113) accused the leaders of the *Doleantie* of being “naïvely unmindful of the danger of Independentism that arose when they stressed unduly the right of the local church and by that token disparaged the authority of the major assemblies.” See also Zwaanstra (1979:175): Kuyper came “dangerously near espousing independentism.”

<sup>74</sup> By “denominationalism,” De Moor means more than a connectional system. In discussions of synodical authority within the CRCNA, denominationalism, as De Moor uses the term - also referred to by its opponents as synodicalism - often connotes hierarchalism; that is, the major assemblies are not seen as broader assemblies, but as higher assemblies.

<sup>75</sup> See Bavinck (2008a:373-375): “Every local church is simultaneously an independent manifestation of the body of Christ and part of a larger whole.” (374, emphasis original)

<sup>76</sup> Ralph J. Danhof served as denominational Stated Clerk from 1945-1971. (Harms, 2004:178) Thus, he was an important leader of and respected voice in the CRCNA.

by office-bearers in whom Christ has vested authority in the church.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, Danhof (1961d:9) describes the authority and actions of major assemblies as “consistorial.” Classes and synods should be regarded as the consistory, or the governing assembly, of the regional and national church respectively. (De Moor, 1986:342, 351; 2010:154)<sup>78</sup> They are best described, not as higher assemblies, but as broader assemblies. “They are distinguished, not by a different kind of power or a higher power, but only by more power - power that is brought together from and extends to a larger territory,” encompassing the minor assemblies. (Bavinck, 2008a:434)

The CRCNA has been and continues to be guided primarily by the denominational model,<sup>79</sup> (De Moor, 1986:337, 345) the model reflected in the RCO, which Van Oene (1973:138) rightly describes as “an abandonment of the church-political concept of the *Doleantie*.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See also Hoeksema (1926:65-66) and Bavinck (2008a:434): There is no essential difference in character or power between minor and major assemblies. Not only the local consistory, but classes and synods also have the power to govern the church in Christ’s name because they are gatherings of office-bearers, as is the local consistory. Contra Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:162; 1967:115-116).

<sup>78</sup> De Moor (1986:157n2; 342) credits Heyns with this image.

<sup>79</sup> As evidence De Moor (1986:350) cites inter alia the CRCNA’s refusal to adopt a system whereby the decisions of major assemblies must be ratified by the lower assemblies. (On which, see note 31 above.)

Although the CRCNA has tended toward a denominational model in its official decisions, pleas for the congregational model of the *Doleantie* have persisted, particularly in the CO commentaries of Van Dellen & Monsma, (1949; 1967; see also Monsma, 1961) which many erroneously regarded as official CO commentaries of the CRCNA. (Boonstra, 1982; 87; De Moor, 1986:345) They were not, however, beyond criticism by important leadership with the CRCNA, including H.J. Kuiper (in Van Oene, 1973:129), editor of *The Banner*, an official publication of the CRCNA, and Ralph J. Danhof (1961b; 1961c), denominational Stated Clerk, particularly on the question of synodical authority. See also Herman Kuiper (1950:78), who notes that “in many instances there is a sharp difference between what the Christian Reformed Church has said in its synodical deliverances and the views propagated by Revs. Van Dellen and Monsma.”

<sup>80</sup> Adoption of the denominational model is especially evident in the addition of Art. 27 to the RCO: “Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ.” (p. 130) The original draft, translated from the CO adopted by the GKN in 1959, said that each assembly exercises the authority entrusted to it by Christ. The Synod of 1965 adopted the more ambiguous reading “entrusted to the church.” (Acts, 1965:173)

The Synod of 1965, by way of compromise to proponents of the congregational model, (De Moor, 1986:157, 347) added the following statement, proposed by the Synod of 1963, to Art. 27: “the authority of the consistories being original, that of major assemblies being delegated.” (Acts, 1963:110; Acts, 1965:173) De Moor (1986:157n5) contends that this statement is “manifestly contradictory” with the preceding sentence. Consistent with a denominational model of church government, contra *Doleantie* ecclesiology, the CRCNA tends to read the second sentence in light of the first, rather than vice versa. (De Moor, 2010:148-154)

Van Oene (1973:131) also notes the RCO’s thirteen references to “synodical regulations” and three references to “ecclesiastical regulations,” in contrast with the three references to “ecclesiastical regulations” in the 1914 CO. Heerema (1965:10) writes: “The striking frequency of such language ... suggested the presence of a drift toward heirarchism in the [RCO].”

### 3.3.3 ~ The Revised Church Order of 1965

Like the *Afscheiding van 1834*, those who seceded from the RCA on 8 April 1857 “wanted to continue strict adherence to the original DCO.” (Sheeres, 2013:xxv) Accordingly, at their first classical assembly on 29 April 1857, they adopted the DCO among their standards. (Beets, 1946:61) “From this first meeting onward this instrument for church government had played a decisive role in the life of the Christian Reformed Church.” (De Ridder, 1983:93)

In 1904, the consistory of La Grave Ave. asked synod to “consider whether the time is not ripe to take steps, in consultation with other churches, to obtain a basic review of the CO.” The Synod of 1904 appointed a committee to correspond with the GKN regarding such a review. (Acts, 1904:58-59) In its report to the Synod of 1906, the committee noted that the GKN Synod of 1905 had already adopted a revised CO.<sup>81</sup> (Acts, 1906:13) Contra the committee’s initial assessment that the GKN’s revision “did not answer sufficiently to the mandate of Synod, which had in mind a more basic revision,” (Acts, 1906:13) the Synod of 1912, having rejected a more thorough revision of the CO,<sup>82</sup> appointed a new committee and instructed it to “as much as possible adhere to the DCO and the revised CO of the GKN, 1905.” (Acts, 1912:49) This the committee did, and a revised CO was adopted by the Synod of 1914, (Acts, 1914:52-86) which can be accurately described as the DCO “as amended in 1914.”<sup>83</sup> (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:viii)

In 1950, the CRCNA received a request from the GKN seeking its cooperation in revising the CO. (Acts, 1950:427) Thus began the fifteen-year process that resulted in the adoption of the RCO by the Synod of 1965.<sup>84</sup> The Synod of 1951 appointed a committee to study “the extent and manner of the revision to be undertaken.” (Acts, 1951:16) Convinced that “the

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<sup>81</sup> The Synod of 1904 had decided not to send a fraternal delegate to the GKN Synod of 1905, because “as far as we know, no pressing matters of general concern will take place at the Synod of 1905.” (Acts, 1904:61) This proved not to be the case as the GKN Synod of 1905 adopted both a revision of the CO and the Conclusions of Utrecht.

<sup>82</sup> An advisory committee of the Synod of 1910, which examined an outline of the proposed CO, complained that it was “constructed along lines that are too broad, and by which the DCO would be sunk.” (Acts, 1910:65)

<sup>83</sup> “The changes were relatively minor, and did not basically alter the traditional order.” (Kromminga, 1949:205)

<sup>84</sup> The CRCNA was slow to reply to the GKN’s request: The Synod of 1950 appointed a committee to study the request and formulate a response to be approved by the next synod. (Acts, 1950:64) Then, in 1951, the CRCNA expressed a willingness to join in the work, but wanted to study “the extent and manner of the revision to be undertaken” first. (Acts, 1951:16) The appointed study committee informed the Synod of 1952 that the GKN’s CO Revision Committee, which progressed much further in its work than the CRCNA committee, had already prepared a draft. (Acts, 1952:162) Thus, by 1953, the committee concluded that “it is inadvisable and virtually impossible to work in such close collaboration with the other churches [GKN and *De Gereformeerde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika*] as to make the revision the work of a combined transatlantic committee.” (Acts, 1953:411)

church will want to maintain continuity with the historical DCO,” the committee recommended that “the proposed revision seek to retain the venerable DCO as to its general order and the number of articles,” (Acts, 1952:162-163) as had the 1914 CO. The Synod of 1952 adopted this recommendation, but in 1957 the Revision Committee informed synod that it “found it not only inadvisable, but also impossible to retain the old numbering system. Good order and proper sequence compels us to follow a new numbering system.”<sup>85</sup> (Acts, 1957:398) The RCO (Acts, 1965:57-70, 74-79, 90-94) is not an amendment of the DCO; it is best described as a CO based on the DCO.<sup>86</sup>

This RCO granted synod significant authority over worship, declaring that “the task of synod ... the adoption of ... the liturgical forms, of the psalter hymnal, and of the principles and elements of the order of worship,<sup>87</sup> as well as the designation of the Bible versions to be used in the worship services.”<sup>88</sup> (Art. 47; 135) The RCO requires that “the consistory shall regulate the worship services,” (Art. 52a; 136) but this regulation is defined in terms of synodical mandates: “The consistory shall see to it that synodical approved Bible versions, liturgical forms, and songs are used, and that the principles and elements of worship approved by synod are observed.”<sup>89</sup> (Art. 52b; 136) It also required that “the consistory shall see to it that if choirs

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<sup>85</sup> It was not merely a matter of sequence and order. De Ridder (1982:124-143) lists seven articles of the DCO and 1914 CO that were not retained in the RCO, and nineteen articles in the RCO for which there is no parallel article in either the DCO or the 1914 CO.

<sup>86</sup> Thus, *The Revised Church Order Commentary* (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1967) is not a revised commentary on the CO, but a commentary on the RCO.

<sup>87</sup> The Synod of 1957 received an overture from Classis Pacific objecting to this provision in an earlier draft of the RCO, asking that the words “and elements” be removed. Referring to the Synod of 1930, Classis Pacific noted that “our churches in the past have resisted the attempt of synod to impose on them a uniform order of worship.” (Acts, 1957:135) Synod asked the CO Revision Committee “to take cognizance of the suggestion” made by Classis Pacific. (Acts, 1957:37) The Revision Committee did not accede to the request of Classis Pacific, and the words “and elements” remained.

<sup>88</sup> The original draft of this article, for which there is no parallel in either the DCO or the 1914 CO, did not include “the designation of the Bible versions to be used in worship.” In an overture to the Synod of 1959, Classis Chatham asked, “Should not the right of synod to designate the Bible versions which are acceptable for use in the churches be stated? In our day, when such a variety of versions exist, such right should not be withheld.” (Acts, 1959:532) Why this might be the right of synod, the overture does not explain.

The Synod of 1959 asked the Revision Committee to “carefully weigh all the overtures that are beyond the present synod,” including the overture from Classis Chatham. (Acts, 1959:95) Evidently, the Revision Committee concurred with the suggestion of Classis Chatham, as it revised the proposed article to include the designation of the Bible versions to be used in worship.

<sup>89</sup> The first draft of the RCO submitted to the Synod of 1957 read: “Public worship shall be under the supervision of the consistory. The synodical approved order of worship, liturgical forms, and psalter hymnal shall be used exclusively.” (Acts, 1957:409) Given that the draft’s description of the task of synod included adoption of “the principles and elements of the order of worship,” this reference to “the synodical approved order of worship” was probably an unintentional error.

or others sing in the worship services, they observe the synodical regulations governing the content of the hymns and anthems sung.”<sup>90</sup> (Art. 52c; 136)

The RCO required that liturgical formularies be used for the ordination or installation of office bearers,<sup>91</sup> (Art. 4; p. 125) the sacraments<sup>92</sup> (Art. 56, p. 136; Art. 58; p. 137), public profession of faith,<sup>93</sup> (Art. 60; p. 137) excommunication<sup>94</sup> (Art. 86; p. 141); and readmission.<sup>95</sup> (Art. 88; p. 141) Notably, the RCO did not require use of the ecclesiastical form for marriage.<sup>96</sup>

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Classis Pacific objected to this article in an overture to the Synod of 1957. Synod asked the Revision Committee to take cognizance of the overture, which it did, although, contra the request of Classis Pacific, it included the “elements of the order of worship.”

The consistory of La Grave Ave. Christian Reformed Church asked the Synod of 1970: “How much autonomy does a local consistory have in conducting and arranging the liturgy for its services? How are Articles 51-55 of the CO to be interpreted? How mandatory are they? Do they lay down guidelines, or do they prescribe rules which shall never be broken?” (Acts, 1970:529)

Synod answered that it “expects the churches to observe the CO in its explicit statements with regard to worship services so as to maintain unity of liturgical policy.” (Act, 1970:69) Synod also advised the Liturgical Committee “to take note of the request of LaGrave Avenue consistory for future recommendation to synod,” (Acts, 1970:69) but no such recommendations were ever made to a future synod.

<sup>90</sup> The draft revisions to the CO submitted to the Synods of 1957 and 1958 stipulated that “Choirs, soloists, or groups who sing at the public worship services shall sing only those anthems or hymns which are found in the official psalter hymnal or have been previously approved by the consistory as to their scriptural soundness and general appropriateness.” (Acts, 1957:410; Acts 1958:397) Local control disappears, without explanation, from later drafts of the RCO and from the draft adopted by the Synod of 1965, which spoke of “the synodical regulations governing the content of hymns and anthems sung.”

<sup>91</sup> Consistent with the DCO (Art. IV; p. 225), the 1914 CO spoke of “appropriate stipulations and questions, admonitions and prayer ... agreeable to the adopted Form,” (Art. 4; p. 82) without requiring use of the liturgical formulary complete and unchanged. (See also Art. 5; p. 83) Early drafts of the RCO did not mention the liturgical formularies for ordination and installation. Classis Chatham (Acts, 1959:531) and Classis Alberta South (Acts, 1959:543) both noted and objected to this omission. Their overtures were referred to the Revision Committee, (Acts, 1959:95) which incorporated the required use of the liturgical formulary into subsequent drafts of the RCO.

<sup>92</sup> Article 56 (p. 136) - “The sacrament shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory, in the public worship service, by the minister of the Word, with the use of the prescribed forms” - was an addition to the CO, but the requirement that the sacraments be administered with the use of the prescribed form was not. The 1914 CO required the use of said forms for baptism (Art. 58; p. 99) and the Lord’s Supper. (Art. 62; p. 100)

<sup>93</sup> The requirement that profession of faith be made “with the use of the prescribed forms” was new to the RCO. In response to an early draft of the RCO, both Classis Chatham (Acts, 1959:531) and Classis Alberta South (Acts, 1959:543) noted that this article omitted any reference to the form for public profession of faith. These overtures were referred to the Revision Committee, (Acts, 1959:95) which incorporate the required use of the liturgical formulary for profession faith into subsequent drafts of the RCO.

<sup>94</sup> In the DCO, excommunication “shall finally take place following the form prepared for this purpose.” (Art. LXXVI; p. 173) Similarly, the 1914 CO spoke of excommunication being done “agreeably to the adopted form.” (Art. 76; p. 104)

<sup>95</sup> The DCO allowed an excommunicated person to “be reinstated publicly with profession of his conversion, following the form for this purpose.” (Art. LXXVIII; p. 174) The 1914 CO included the same provision. (Art. 78; p. 105)

<sup>96</sup> The final revision adopted by the Synod of 1965, which stipulates that “Christian marriages should [not shall] be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, as provided for in the official Form,” (Art. 70; p. 139) follows a revision of the 1914 CO adopted by the Synod of 1955. (Acts, 1955: 43-44) The Revision Committee recommended the following language to the Synod of 1961: “Christian marriage should be solemnized



The RCO also referred to the approved liturgical prayers;<sup>97</sup> churches were permitted, but not required to use these.<sup>98</sup> (Art. 61; p. 138)

The provisions of the RCO that require the use of liturgical formularies, especially for the sacraments, raise questions about the standing of the liturgical formularies: What authority do they have? What is the relationship between the liturgical formularies and the confessional standards? To those questions, the next section attends.

### 3.4 ~ The Standing of the Church's Liturgical Formularies

No element in the order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928 generated more controversy than the absolution. H.J. Kuiper, who had assumed the editorship of *The Banner* on 1 January 1929, wrote several editorials in 1929 and 1930 responding to objections raised against the absolution. The objections themselves lie beyond the interest of this church juridical inquiry, but Kuiper's response, particularly his appeal to the liturgical formularies, is of interest insofar as it addresses the standing of those formularies in the church.

Kuiper (1929c:620) wrote: "As official expressions of the doctrine of our church, our liturgy ranks next to our doctrinal standards." Accordingly, "those who wish to make a full statement of what are the official teachings of our church would have to acquaint themselves

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with the use of the ecclesiastical form." (Acts, 1961:460) The advisory committee to the Synod of 1962 offered no reason for its suggestion, which that synod submitted to the Revision Committee, that it return to the reading adopted by the Synod of 1955. (Acts, 1962:92-93) The Revision Committee heeded this suggestion in the draft of the RCO that it submitted to the Synod of 1963. (Acts, 1963:365)

<sup>97</sup> Both the 1934 and 1959 PsHs included these prayers from Datheen's Psalter. In both editions, they were prefaced with the following note: "These prayers are for voluntary use. Neither the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands nor the Christian Reformed Church in our country poses the use of prescribed forms of public prayer in worship. They are offered here, partly because of their historical interest, and partly because of the profitable aid they can render to those who are called to lead in public prayer." (PsH, 1934:72-83; PsH, 1959:74-84)

The Synod of 1964 appointed a liturgical committee "to review all of our liturgical materials." (Acts, 1964:60) The Synod of 1975, judging that this included the liturgical prayers, encouraged the Liturgical Committee to revise the collection of prayers in the PsH. (Acts, 1975:20) The Synod of 1980 referred the first collection of prayers prepared by the Liturgical Committee to the churches for study and provisional use. (Acts, 1980:43) A second collection of prayers was granted similar approval by the Synod of 1981. (Acts, 1981:28) The Synod of 1983 granted the entire collection final approval. (Acts, 1983:642) However, the Synod of 1986 decided that this collection of prayers, which was now thirty pages long, would not be included in the 1987 PsH, because "the new PsH as approved by synod already exceeds 1,000 pages," and "the collection of prayers will seldom be used by the entire congregation in worship." (Acts, 1986:722)

<sup>98</sup> The earliest draft of the RCO stipulated that in the ministry of prayer, "use may be made of the approved liturgical prayers, but not to the exclusion of free prayer." (Acts, 1957:410; see also Acts, 1958:397) The RCO adopted by the Synod of 1965 simply said: "In the ministry of prayer, the approved liturgical prayers may be used." (Article 61; 138) The Synod of 2010 removed this provision from the CO on the grounds that "A provision stating that certain written prayers may be used is superfluous and can be eliminated." (Acts, 2010:905)

not only with our creed, but also with the various forms which constitute our liturgy.” In defense of the absolution, Kuiper appealed specifically to the liturgical formulary for readmission,<sup>99</sup> which uses the term “absolution.”<sup>100</sup>

Coertzen (2004:158) makes a similar claim about the standing of the liturgical formularies, though he subordinates them to the CO:

Other than the Bible and the confessions of faith, the following documents are also important sources for practicing church law and church government. Firstly, there is the CO itself ... Second to church orders, the liturgical formularies and writings are also important sources. In the formularies and writings, a church justifies itself in a specific way with regard to its confession and theology, and, as such, it offers an important source for specific order regulations in the practice of church life.

In the history of the CRCNA, the liturgical formularies have occasionally served as “an important source for specific order regulations in the practice of church life.” For example, at the classical assembly meeting of 7 October 1863, which was the broadest assembly in the CRCNA at the time, the president asked how to deal with people who were guilty of slander against the high government officials. May they be admitted to the Lord’s Supper? The assembly “directed the attention of everyone to the contents of the form for communion, in which the situation is clearly explained.”<sup>101</sup> (Sheeres, 2013:78-79)

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<sup>99</sup> While this formulary may be little used in the church, “the authority of a liturgical form is not determined or measured by the frequency with which it is used.” (Kuiper, 1929c:620)

<sup>100</sup> The formulary claims that “the sentence of absolution, which is passed upon such a penitent sinner according to the Word of God, is counted binding and firm by the Lord.” But this sentence of absolution does not absolve the penitent sinner of their sin; it absolves them “from the bonds of excommunication.” (PsH, 1934:97-98) Kuiper overlooks this discrepancy between the order of worship adopted by the Synod of 1928 and the liturgical formulary.

<sup>101</sup> Regarding the discipline of office bearers, the DCO listed “gross sins that are worthy of being punished by suspension or deposition from office: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion into another’s office, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre ...” (Art. LXXX, p. 174) Regarding general discipline, however, the DCO simply required that one “who has committed a public or otherwise gross sin shall be barred from the Lord’s Supper,” without identifying those sins. (Art. LXXVI, p. 173)

When asked whether the CO should specify “the sins for which excommunication should be applied, the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1568) replied, “This is unnecessary since the outstanding [sins] are mentioned in the form for the Lord’s Supper:” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:155)

all those who know themselves to be defiled with the following gross sins to abstain from the table of the Lord ... idolaters; all who invoke deceased saints, angels or other creatures; all who show honor to images; all who resort to or confide in sorcery, fortune-telling, charms, or other forms of superstition; all despisers of God, his Word, and of the holy sacraments; all blasphemers; all who seek to raise discord, sects, and mutiny in the Church or state; all perjurers; all who are disobedient to their parents and superiors; all murderers; all quarrelsome persons, and all who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors; all adulterers, fornicators, drunkards,

Although it was not included in the RCO for the sake of brevity, the following comment included in the 1957 and 1958 drafts also utilized the liturgical formularies as “an important source for specific order regulations.” Regarding the duties of ministers of the Word who served as professors of theology, these drafts of the CO referred to the Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology where their “duties are more fully described.” (Acts, 1957:404; Acts, 1958:390)

### 3.4.1 ~ Prescribed Use

In his appeal to the liturgical formularies in defense of the absolution, Kuiper (1929c:620) also noted that “it has happened that ministers who refused to use the liturgical formularies in their entirety were deprived of the right to hold office.” This was true in the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands,<sup>102</sup> the *Afscheiding* Church,<sup>103</sup> and the CRCNA.

In 1914, Rev. J. Vander Werp, pastor of Luctor, Kansas, appealed to synod the following decision of Classis Pella: “The consistory of Luctor is not to have any administration of Holy Baptism without the use of the Form in its totality.” Rev. Vander Werp claimed that it was impossible for him to pray the entire prayer of thanksgiving after infant baptism.<sup>104</sup> In thirty years of ministry, he had never offered the prayer unchanged, and never had a consistory or a classis made it difficult for him until Luctor, where a member objected to Rev. Vander Werp’s alteration to the baptismal liturgy.

When the consistory decided that the member would need to bear with the minister in this matter, the member appealed to classis, which, on the grounds of DCO Art. 58,<sup>105</sup> ruled

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thieves, usurers, robbers, gamblers, covetous persons, and all who lead offensive lives. (PsH, 1934:90-91)

At its 12-13 October 1864 meeting, the classical assembly was again asked “if members who attend public gatherings, where speeches are directed to vilification of the government ... should be prevented from taking communion according to the Formulary.” The classical assembly answered affirmatively, “with unanimous support.” (Sheeres, 2013:107)

<sup>102</sup> In 1675, Jacobus Koelman, who “had continually refused to use the prescribed liturgical forms and prayers on the grounds that those forms were at best examples for the inexperienced,” was deposed. (ten Zythoff, 1987:13)

<sup>103</sup> The Synod of 1843 could not reconcile with Hendrick Scholte, who had been deposed by the Synod of 1840 for his refusal to accept the DCO, (Heideman, 2015:140) because Scholte refused its demands that he abide by the DCO and that he use the liturgical formularies. (Heideman, 2015:187; Oostendorp, 1964:128)

<sup>104</sup> The sentence to which Rev. Vander Werp objected - “We thank and praise Thee that Thou has forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism” - will be considered in chapter 4.

<sup>105</sup> “In the baptism of young children as well as of adults the minister shall use the forms of the institution and practice of baptism which have been respectively drawn up for that purpose.” (p. 171)

that the sacrament of baptism could not be administered without the form being read in its totality. The Synod of 1914, appealing not only to the DCO but also to the decisions of several early Dutch Reformed synods that required the use of approved formularies,<sup>106</sup> upheld the action of Classis Pella.<sup>107</sup> (Acts, 1914:77-80)

Vander Werp's appeal to the Synod of 1914 occasioned an overture from Classis Holland to the Synod of 1916. The overture asked synod to "declare whether our liturgy, which we do not sign, has the same binding force as the confessions, which we do sign."<sup>108</sup> (Acts, 1916:30-31) The question, as the synodical advisory committee understood it, was not whether the liturgy has any binding force,<sup>109</sup> but whether it has the same binding force as the confessions.

The advisory committee recommended that "synod declare that formally the liturgy does not have the same binding force as the Forms of Unity, because by the nature of the case the liturgy does not have the same character." This the Synod of 1916 did. (Acts, 1916:31) Thus, it is not true, as Kuiper (1929c:620) contended, that "as official expressions of the doctrine of our church, our liturgy ranks next to our doctrinal standards." The liturgy does not rank next to or beside the doctrinal standards; it ranks beneath them. The Liturgical Committee's report to the Synod of 1968 articulates well the difference in character between the confessional standards and the liturgical formularies, as well as the relationship between them.

The committee presented the Synod of 1968 a model service for the Lord's Supper that departed from traditional Christian Reformed usage by not including a special didactic section.

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<sup>106</sup> The Synod of Wezel, 1568; Dort, 1574 (Art. 67); Dort, 1578 (Art. 10); Middelburg, 1581 (Art. 41), and Dort, 1618-1619 (Art. 48). (Acts, 1914:80)

<sup>107</sup> Classis Pella subsequently released Rev. Vander Werp from ordained ministry in the CRCNA. He affiliated with the Berean Reformed in Muskegon, Michigan, and later with Calvary Udenominational Church, Grand Rapids, a congregation that did not practice infant baptism. (Harms, 2004:354)

<sup>108</sup> The history of the Vander Werp case, provided to the Synod of 1914 by its advisory committee, indicated that in his defense at classis, Vander Werp argued that while he "had put his signature to the confession, he never signed the form-prayers." Presumably Vander Werp had in mind the Form of Subscription, in which office bearers bind themselves to BC, the HC, and the CD, but, as Vander Werp rightly noted, the form of subscription says nothing about the liturgical formularies and prayers. (Acts, 1914:78-79)

While there is no signed pledge to observe the CO, De Moor (1986:70), appealing to its final article - "This CO, having been adopted by common consent, shall be faithfully observed" (DCO Art. 86, p. 175; RCO Art. 98; p. 143) - argues that the CO is plain enough. Its provisions should be obeyed, including the use the liturgical formularies. (Kamps, 2014:201)

<sup>109</sup> When the Vriesland congregation asked the 19 June 1867 classical assembly meeting, which was the broadest assembly in the CRCNA at that time, about the articles of faith, it was told "that other than God's Word as the highest law, the BC, the HC, the CD and the DCO, and the Liturgy are binding." (Sheeres, 2013:269)

The report explained that “the liturgy ought ideally to be limited to the actual doing of worship.” It is not necessary that “the liturgy itself instructs the congregation in the confessions regarding the sacrament,” though instruction is important, “of upmost necessity,” the committee wrote. But “the liturgical question has to do with the time and place for instruction.” Liturgy does not need to instruct the congregation, though it “must both express and be consistent with the confession of the church.” (Acts, 1968:186-187)

The liturgical formularies do not have the same character as the confessions. Accordingly, they do not have the same binding authority. Rather, the liturgical formularies are subordinate to the confessions.<sup>110</sup> That does not mean, however, that the formularies do not have standing in the church. The church orderly requirement that the sacraments be administered with use of the prescribed formularies indicates that they do. An overture to the Synod of 1968 regarding the administration of the Lord’s Supper from Classis Hudson challenged those church orderly provisions.<sup>111</sup>

Basic to the overture from Classis Hudson was this question, “whether the church, in the ordering of her life, is bound by the Scriptures, or whether ecclesiastical assemblies may by majority vote simply make whatever rules it seems fit to make;” or, more properly, what does it mean that the church, in the ordering of her life, is bound by the Scriptures.<sup>112</sup> Appealing to the BC,<sup>113</sup> Classis Hudson argued that any rules the church might make “must be limited by ‘those things which Christ has instituted.’” In other words, “church ordinances must be valid

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<sup>110</sup> This justifies the question of this church juridical inquiry, to which the subsequent chapters will attend: Do the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA reflect official Christian Reformed teaching as articulated in the confessional standards of the church?

<sup>111</sup> Classis Hudson’s overture also challenged the requirement that the sacraments only be administered “in the public worship services” (Art. 55) and advocated a change to Article 60 that would promote more frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Of interest here is the overture’s challenge to the required use of liturgical formularies. The frequency with which the Lord’s Supper is celebrated in the CRCNA will be considered in chapter 6.

<sup>112</sup> See Turretin’s (1997:285-293) distinction between laws of worship, including inter alia the sacraments, which “can be instituted and commanded by God alone,” and ecclesiastical canons and constitutions, including inter alia liturgical formularies, which the church adopts “as helps or instruments to perform worship suitably.” The former “sanction the essence of divine worship and it belongs to God alone to give them.” The latter, which “direct men in the practice of worship,” may be “variously altered as edification demands.” They can never bind the conscience.

<sup>113</sup> “We believe that although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us.” (BC Art. 32)

interpretations of Scripture,” obligating “the church to show that its rules have biblical warrant.” Otherwise its rules are the “human inventions” that the BC rejects.<sup>114</sup> (Acts, 1968:543-545)

To the best of Classis Hudson’s knowledge, “there is no place in the New Testament where actual forms are prescribed,” not even 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul addresses apparent abuses of the Lord’s Supper in Corinth: “It is worth observing that Paul’s answer to this is not to provide them with a prescribed form, a prescribed form which can be put to obligatory use not only in Corinth, but in Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Rome, as well.” The classis argued that 1 Corinthians 14:40,<sup>115</sup> a passage “often quoted in justification for imposing uniformity,” when read in context, actually has the opposite meaning: “A lot of freedom should be allowed - as long as decency and good order are respected.” (Acts, 1968:552)

Classis Hudson asked the Synod of 1968 to “examine the biblical foundations for prescribing obligatory forms,” in light of the study report provided by the classis. The classis claimed that its “study of the biblical material casts doubt on the propriety of prescribing forms, the use of which are obligatory in all circumstances.” (Acts, 1968:557) The Synod of 1968 commended the overture to the churches for study and appointed a study committee to serve the Synod of 1969 with advice. (Acts, 1968:66)

The appointed study committee recommended that the Synod of 1969 not accede to the overture from Classis Hudson on the grounds that “in its overture Classis Hudson has not demonstrated that prescribed forms have no biblical foundation.” Its study may have “cast doubt on the propriety of prescribing forms,” but, the study committee argued, “the casting of ‘doubt’ is not adequate grounds for change in the CO.”<sup>116</sup> (Acts, 1969:344) The Synod of 1969 took no action on the study committee’s recommendations. Instead, it recommitted the overture to the study committee, because “the study committee had not provided an analysis of the overture.” The overture, as the advisory committee understood it, “contends that a conflict

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<sup>114</sup> Art. 29 describes the false church as assigning “more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. ... It does not administer the sacraments as Christ commands in his Word; it rather adds to or subtracts from them as it pleases.” Classis Hudson’s overture appears to accuse the church, contra this article of its own confession, of adding to the sacrament with the required use of the liturgical formularies.

<sup>115</sup> “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Cor. 14:40)

<sup>116</sup> While Classis Hudson had put the burden of proof on the church to justify its rules by providing a biblical basis for them, the study committee put the burden of proof on the classis, arguing that rules, once adopted, should not be changed unless it is proved that they are contrary to Scripture. There is an obvious difference in ecclesiological principles here: The classis argued that the church may only make rules for which it finds biblical warrant; the study committee argued that the church may make rules, except those which violate Scripture.

exists between the biblical data and the practice prescribed by the CO, which contention the study committee has not adequately dealt with.” (Acts, 1969:43)

The overture may have implied such a contention, but in its explicit statements to which the study committee’s response was limited it only spoke of doubt about the propriety of prescribed formularies. In its report to the Synod of 1971, the study committee noted that, while Scripture does not require the use of prescribed forms, it does not prohibit them either. This lack of prohibition permits the church, exercising its discretionary power, to prescribe their use.<sup>117</sup> Acknowledging that the use of prescribed forms arose out of specific historical situations in the life of the church, the study committee asked about the necessity of such forms today. The committee concluded: “Ours is a day in which there is very much confusion as to the biblical understanding of the sacraments. We therefore believe the church would be served well by formularies in the administration of the sacraments.” (Acts, 1971:447)

Thus, it recommended that synod retain the church orderly provisions requiring the use of liturgical forms in the administration of the sacraments, and that it “declare that the prescribing of obligatory formularies is not contrary to the Bible.” This the Synod of 1971 did on the grounds that “the Bible neither commands nor prohibits the use of formularies, and that formularies are used by the church for the purpose of remaining faithful to her Lord.” (Acts, 1971:130-131)

### **3.4.2 ~ Model Services and Liturgical Formularies**

While there have been no efforts to adopt a uniform order of worship since the “catastrophe” of the Synod of 1930, the church orderly requirement that sacraments and other rites be administered with the use of approved liturgical formularies has been maintained. The subsequent approval of model services, or orders of worship, that include or integrate liturgical formularies raised questions about the difference between a model service and a liturgical formulary. To those questions, this section will attend.

The CRCNA’s next liturgical study committee, the Liturgical Committee,<sup>118</sup> appointed

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<sup>117</sup> Contra the advisory committee of the Synod of 1930, which argued that a synodical decision made on discretionary grounds could be revised on similar grounds, (Acts, 1930:180) this study committee argued that it must be proved that a synodical decision, including those made on discretionary grounds, conflicts with the Word of God before it can be revised. It argued that Classis Hudson’s request “could technically be set aside because [it] has not demonstrated that the use of prescribed forms is contrary to Scripture.” (Acts, 1971:446)

<sup>118</sup> Classis Grand Rapids East submitted an overture to the Synod of 1963 asking synod to appoint “a standing liturgical committee, akin to existing standing committees on education, Sunday school, and ecumenicity.” (Acts, 1963:460) The Synod of 1964 acquiesced to this request in part; it did appoint a committee, but not a standing

by the Synod of 1964,<sup>119</sup> provided the Synod of 1968 with three model services for Sunday morning worship, “only to illustrate how a morning liturgy could be done.” The committee was explicitly “not recommending that synod give any or all of them official status, certainly not to the exclusion of any now in use.”<sup>120</sup> (Acts, 1968:181) The Synod of 1968 commended the Liturgical Committee’s report to the churches for their study and consideration and asked the committee to “arrange for the publication of these model services in a form suitable for congregational use.” (Act, 1968:65)

Along with these model services, the Liturgical Committee also offered a communion service “as an option to the forms that are now in use by our churches.” (Acts, 1968:186, 195-197) This service was not a complete order of worship; that is, it did not provide an order of worship for the entire worship service, but only for the service of communion within a worship service. This meant that it would serve essentially as, or in the place of, a liturgical formulary. Because the CO explicitly required that sacraments be administered “with the use of the prescribed forms,” (Art. 55), it was necessary for the Synod of 1968 to “permit the churches to

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committee, noting that the “revision of liturgical forms, however long a process, can hardly be viewed as a continuing task.” (Acts, 1964:235)

Subsequent synods continued the committee for nine years, until the Synod of 1973, upon the advice of its advisory committee, changed the committee’s status from a study committee to a standing committee. (Acts, 1973:109) Twelve years later, the Synod of 1985, acting on requests from the Board of Publications (Acts, 1984:458; Acts, 1985:59-60) and the Liturgical Committee (Acts, 1984:243), made the Liturgical Committee a standing committee of the Board of Publications and renamed it the Worship Committee. Its members were no longer appointed by synod, but “selected by the Board of Publications from a list of nominations drawn up by the Worship Committee.” (Acts, 1985:684)

<sup>119</sup> The Synod of 1964 gave the committee a very large mandate:

to review all of our liturgical literature in the light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the churches; and to recommend such revisions or subtractions as the results of this review might recommend.

to study the liturgical usages and practices in our churches in the light of Reformed liturgical principles and past synodical decisions, and to advise synod as to the guidance and supervision it ought to provide local congregations in all liturgical matters. (Acts, 1964:60)

In its first report to the Synod of 1966, the Liturgical Committee informed synod of their conclusion that they could responsibly discharge their mandate “only by engaging in a thorough study of the history of Christian liturgy in general and of Reformed liturgy in particular.” (Acts, 1966:262) The result of this study was its report to the Synod of 1968, (Acts, 1968:134-198) which continues to provide the basic understanding of Reformed worship in the CRCNA. The CRCNA’s next liturgical study committee, appointed by the Synod of 1994, intentionally built on the biblical-theological framework of the 1968 report, using that report as the starting point for its reflections. (Agenda, 1997:94)

<sup>120</sup> In its report, the study committee provided four motifs for evaluating liturgy: biblical, catholic, confessional, and pastoral. Particularly in light of the pastoral motif, the study committee was “not disposed to look to synod for compulsory regulation of the details of the liturgy.” (Acts, 1968:157) See Acts, 1968:155-157 for the committee’s complete discussion of these motifs, for which they credit a report submitted to the GKN Synod of 1965.



make use of the Order for Communion,” which it did “on a provisional basis, with a view to reporting to the committee their experiences with this Order.” (Acts, 1968:65)

The Synod of 1978 approved a new form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which its advisory committee described as “essentially an editing and revision of the form which was approved by the Synod of 1968 for use on a provisional basis.” (Acts, 1978:60) Unlike the communion service approved by the Synod of 1968, however, this form was a complete worship service. (Acts, 1978:331-337) An advisory committee of the Synod of 1980 called this approval of the entire worship service as a New Form for the Lord’s Supper “unfortunate, since by this combination the distinction is blurred between a ‘Form’ in the category of the ‘synodical approved liturgical forms,’ on the one hand, and optional liturgical resources to be used at the discretion of the local church, on the other hand.” (Acts, 1980:47) Accordingly, the Synod of 1980 instructed the Liturgical Committee “to study and evaluate the difference between a synodical approved form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and a liturgy for a worship service which includes the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>121</sup> (Acts, 1980:48)

In its report to the Synod of 1981, the Liturgical Committee provided the following definitions: “A form is a synodical approved liturgical statement which is to be used in its entirety, without changes.” “A service is a model for a worship service which can be changed (by deletion, addition, rearrangement, or substitution) according to local needs.” But when a form is incorporated into a service, “a complication arises.” The committee recommended that “it should be understood that the original forms, as they are distributed throughout the order of worship, are to be read completely and unchanged,” but that “other features, such as the opening of worship, the number of hymns to be sung, the prayers for illumination, and so forth, may be changed.” (Acts, 1981:291)

The Synod of 1981 accepted this distinction and approved a “Service for Baptism,” (Acts, 1981:28) which it published with the following note:

This service was approved by the Synod of 1981 as a model order of worship that may be adapted to local needs. The ‘Confession and Assurance’ and ‘The Sacrament of Baptism,’ however, have the status of a synodical approved form; these components are always to be read complete and unchanged. (PsH, 1987:953)

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<sup>121</sup> In its grounds for this decision, the Synod of 1980 noted that this “distinction was made in the 1978 Liturgical Committee report but apparently was not acted upon by synod.” (Acts, 1980:48) See Acts, 1978:330-331 for the distinction made in the committee’s report.

The Synod of 1981 also gave final approval to the “Service of Word and Sacrament,” (Acts, 1981:27) which the Synod of 1978 had approved as the “New Form for the Lord’s Supper.” It was published with the following note:

This service, approved by the Synod of 1981, contains portions of a synodical approved Lord’s Supper form. These components, which should be read in their entirety and not changed in any way, are the following: the introduction spoken by the minister (‘Brothers and sisters in Christ...’); the first part of the thanksgiving (through ‘Christ our Lord’); the institution; the memorial; the preparation of the elements; and the communion. (PsH, 1987:972)

### **3.4.3 ~ Permission to Adapt**

The Synod of 1971 declared that the prescribing of liturgical forms was not contrary to the Bible, allowing such church orderly provisions to stand. But it also acknowledged that the Bible does not command the use of formularies, allowing later synods, beginning in 1991, to soften the church orderly provisions regarding the prescribed use of liturgical formularies.

The Synod of 1991 received two overtures regarding the liturgical formularies. The first overture, from Classis Georgetown, argued that the length and weighty language of the present forms gave pastors reason not to use them or to substitute forms which have not been approved. The overture asked synod to “provide liturgical forms for baptism and the Lord’s Supper that are shorter than the present forms and more contemporary in language.” (Agenda, 1991:512-513) The second overture, from Classis Central California, asked synod to “instruct the Worship Committee to develop guidelines for the preparation of new liturgical forms for the celebration of the sacraments.” The overture’s grounds, specifically that “churches should have the freedom within guidelines to produce forms that will best serve them,” suggests that the classis expected that these new liturgical forms would be prepared by local congregations, not a committee appointed by synod. (Agenda, 1991:513)

The Worship Committee’s report to the Synod of 1991 included the results of a survey it had conducted on worship practices in the CRCNA.<sup>122</sup> The survey results validated Classis Georgetown’s observation that the present liturgical formularies gave pastors reason not to use them or to substitute unapproved alternatives. Of the congregations that responded, only 57% used the baptismal formularies as written, 33% acknowledged shortening it, another 33% used partly their own words, and 8% wrote their own completely. Regarding public profession of

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<sup>122</sup> The committee, of its own initiative, “toward the fulfillment of its mandate ‘to study liturgical uses and practices in our churches,’” surveyed one in six congregations in the CRCNA. Some 118 congregations, “a very high percentage,” responded. (Agenda, 1991:48) See Agenda, 1991:57-62 for the complete survey results, and Brink (1991) for commentary on the results.

faith, 59% of congregations that responded used the formulary as written, 12% shortened it, 30% used partly their own words, and 3% wrote their own completely. Only half of the congregations that responded used the formularies for the Lord's Supper as written (51%), while 42% shortened it. A third, 32%, used partly their own words, and 11% wrote their own completely.<sup>123</sup> (Agenda, 1991:57-58)

The Synod of 1991 instructed the Worship Committee "to write shorter, more flexible sacramental forms to meet more effectively the increasingly diverse climate of worship."<sup>124</sup> (Acts, 1991:706) The Synod of 1991 also took "the extraordinary step"<sup>125</sup> (Smit, 1991:2) of "encouraging [not simply permitting] churches to adapt as needed all denominational liturgical forms for the spiritual nurture of their people." The grounds for this decision - "our diversity requires flexibility, yet uniformity of our denomination is enhanced by the use of synodical approved forms" (Acts, 1991:707) - recalls the decision of the Synod of 1926 favoring a uniform but flexible order of worship. As with that decision, this decision of the Synod of 1991 did not clarify where uniformity was expected and where flexibility was allowed.

The Synod of 1991 did not instruct the Worship Committee to "develop guidelines for the preparation of new liturgical forms" as requested by Classis Georgetown, (Agenda, 1991:513) but the Worship Committee received inquiries for ministers and consistories regarding the parameters of the adaptations of the liturgical forms encouraged by the Synod of 1991 that made the need for such guidelines apparent. Appealing its mandate "to advise synod as to the guidance and supervision it ought to provide local congregations in all liturgical matters," the Worship Committee offered the Synod of 1993 a set of guidelines for the adaptation of synodical approved sacramental forms. The Worship Committee also recommended a revision to CO, Article 52-b that would align the CO with the decision of the Synod of 1991 to "encourage churches to adapt all denominational liturgical forms."<sup>126</sup> (Agenda, 1993:69-70) The

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<sup>123</sup> In an article exploring the survey's findings, Emily Brink (1991:12), a member of the Worship Committee, noted that "questions about the liturgical forms generated more letters and comments than any other issue raised in the survey." Most respondents wanted new forms that would be "shorter, more flexible, more celebrative, and less didactic, especially for the sacraments."

<sup>124</sup> The grounds for this recommendation were those provided in the overture from Classis Georgetown with the following addition: The results of the Worship Committee's survey "indicates the need." (Acts, 1991:707)

<sup>125</sup> Smit (1991:2) considered this extraordinary for a denomination that "has steadfastly refused to adopt a standard order of worship while insisting on rigorously following sacramental forms." From the perspective of the CO, it is also extraordinary in that it contradicts the church orderly provisions requiring use of the prescribed formularies. The Synods of 1993, 1994, and 1995 would address and correct this contradiction.

<sup>126</sup> The proposed revision read: "The consistory shall see to it that if the liturgical forms are adapted, these adaptations conform to syndical guidelines and that if choirs ..." (Agenda, 1993:70, revised words underlined) It is

Synod of 1993 withheld action on both the proposed guidelines and CO revision. Instead, it recommended the guidelines to the churches for their study and response for possible adoption by the Synod of 1994. (Acts, 1993:511)

The Worship Committee presented a revised set of guidelines to the Synod of 1994.<sup>127</sup> The Synod of 1994 received only one overture, from Classis Hamilton, regarding the proposed guidelines. (Agenda, 1994:244-246) It asked synod to reject the guidelines proposed by the Worship Committee and instead accept the guidelines presented in its overture, which made more elements mandatory in the administration of the sacraments.<sup>128</sup> Contra the overture from Classis Hamilton, the Synod of 1994 adopted the proposed guidelines as recommended by the Worship Committee.<sup>129</sup> It also approved appropriate revisions to the CO,<sup>130</sup> (Acts, 1994:494) which the Synod of 1995 ratified. (Acts, 1995:676)

Although the CO now allows for local adaptation, it remains the synodical approved liturgical formularies that may be adapted, and then only within the guidelines established by

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not clear why the Worship Committee did not recommend a comparable revision to CO Art. 55, which required that the sacraments be administered “with the use of the prescribed forms.”

<sup>127</sup> Responses to the proposed guidelines were underwhelming, arising from only seventeen congregations. The only revision made was that the Apostles’ Creed was no longer a required element in the baptismal service, though the Worship Committee strongly recommended its inclusion. (Agenda, 1994:166)

<sup>128</sup> Classis Hamilton was concerned that the proposed guidelines “encourage little cohesion and uniformity in liturgical celebration” in the CRCNA. They would “allow for a multiplicity of localized forms, to the detriment of denominational unity.” (Agenda, 1994:246)

<sup>129</sup> Guidelines for adapting forms of the sacraments:

1. That liturgical consistency within the CRC be encouraged by the use of synodical approved or recommended Bible versions, liturgical forms, principles of worship and worship songs.
2. That the celebration of the sacraments be done in accord with the confession of the CRC and includes at least the following elements:
  - a. For baptism - the scriptural words of institution, the baptismal covenant (including God’s promises, and our promises), and the act of baptism with water and in the name of the Trinity.
  - b. For the Lord’s Supper - the scriptural words of institution (with actions of breaking and pouring), the thanksgiving and consecration, and the communion with bread and cup
3. That local adaptations of other synodical approved or recommended forms (such as profession of faith, ordination, and marriage) be made in accord with the principles of Reformed worship as approved or recommended by synod. (Agenda, 1994:167-168)

It is noteworthy that these guidelines speak of liturgical consistency, not liturgical uniformity, which had been the case in most, if not all, previous synodical conversations and decisions regarding worship.

<sup>130</sup> The revision of Article 52-b as proposed by the Worship Committee was adopted. The following words were added to Article 55, which requires that the sacraments be administered with the use of the prescribed forms: “or adaptations of them which conform to synodical guidelines.” (Acts, 1994:494)

synod.<sup>131</sup> According to a 2018 survey, 90% of CRCNA congregations continue to use (35%) or adapt (55%) synodical approved formularies for their celebrations of baptism, and 80% continue to use (25%) or adapt (55%) synodical approved formularies for their celebrations of the Lord's Supper.<sup>132</sup> Local adaptation has not displaced the synodical approved formularies, nor has it replaced the approval of new liturgies by synod.<sup>133</sup> It is evident that the sacramental liturgies continue to play an important role in the life of the CRCNA. To those liturgies, the following chapters will attend.

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<sup>131</sup> Thus Borgdorff (2008:232; 2015:213) does not say enough when he speaks of the "recommended," rather than required, use of liturgical formularies.

<sup>132</sup> <https://network.crcna.org/worship/crc-worship-survey-results-0> (accessed on 16 April 2019)

<sup>133</sup> The Synod of 1994, which adopted both the CO revisions that permit local adaptation and the guidelines for such adaptation, also adopted a collection of new formularies. (Acts, 1994:494) Additional liturgical formularies were also adopted by the Synods of 2013 (Acts, 2013:552-553) and 2016. (Acts, 2016:898-903)

## Chapter 4 ~ The Sacrament of Baptism

### 4.1 Introduction

Those of the *Afscheiding van 1834* who emigrated from the Netherlands to North America and established the CRCNA in 1857 brought with them not only the doctrine, discipline, and liturgical formularies established by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), but also differing baptismal practices, including the *doopledenstelsel*, or the baptism of the children of baptized members who had not yet made a public profession of faith. This chapter, which considers the liturgical formularies for the administration of baptism, will first examine that theological issue and others that relate to the administration of baptism. Attention will be given specifically to the adjudication of these issues by synod, the denomination's broadest assembly, as well as to the role of the liturgical formularies within that adjudication. This chapter will then consider the specific liturgical formularies for the administration of baptism as they have been adopted and adapted by the church, giving specific attention to the interplay of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Does the church's *lex credendi* determine its *lex orandi*? How has the faith of the church influenced changes in the church's *lex orandi*? How have changes in the church's *lex orandi* influenced the faith of the church?

### 4.2 Theological Issues

This chapter will consider four theological issues regarding the sacrament of baptism that have required synodical attention in the CRCNA. The first and second, the *doopledenstelsel* and the baptism of adopted children, ask, which children may be presented for baptism? The third and fourth, the discipline of baptized members and the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, address the status or standing of baptized members in the church and in relation to God, which, in turn, reflects a particular understanding of what baptism is or does.

#### 4.2.1 The *Doopledenstelsel*

The *doopledenstelsel* had a long history in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. (Beets, 1946:95) Throughout the century following the Reformation, all baptized persons had the privilege of presenting children for baptism; it was "the rule rather than the exception." (Sheeres, 2013:xxviii) Jonathan Gerstner suggests that the roots of this practice can be found in the theology of Guido de Brès, author of the BC. De Brès (quoted in Gerstner, 1991:16) wrote: "That covenant that God has established with our fathers is so mighty that it never can be violated or broken through the unbelief of the parents. Hezekiah and Josiah had evil parents,

yet the children from those fathers were not deprived of the Lord's covenant and promise."<sup>1</sup>

The earliest Dutch Reformed synods appealed to the covenant's unbreakable nature as reason to permit the *doopledenstelsel*. The Convent of Wesel (1568) even allowed for the baptism of the children of unbelievers, arguing that "God's covenant stretches to the thousandth generation." (Gerstner, 1991:188) Similarly, the Synod of Emden (1571) said that "one should always take into consideration that God's covenant extends to the thousandth generation."<sup>2</sup> (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:52) The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) allowed the baptism of children of excommunicated church members, "with the understanding that the godfathers, qualified for this responsibility, are all the more bound by the promises to teach these children."<sup>3</sup> (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:77) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) affirmed this decision, permitting the baptism of "children of all sorts of people such as of adulterers, excommunicated papists and others like them" on the grounds that "it is certain that these children are not outside the covenant" and, thus, cannot be denied baptism. However, they must

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<sup>1</sup> Gerstner (1991:16) comments: "This affirmation of the legitimacy of the baptism of the children of unbelievers who themselves had godly parents foreshadows the wide baptismal practice which would appear in the Netherlands."

<sup>2</sup> This language of a covenant that "extends to the thousandth generation" comes most directly from Deuteronomy 7:9, where God is described as a "faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments." (See also Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10.) This argument was not original to the Convent of Wesel. In a letter to John Knox, John Calvin defended the baptism of the children of unbelievers on similar grounds, arguing that "the descendants of pious ancestors belong to the body of the church, even if the grandparents or parents have apostatized," because "the promise includes not only the seed of every believer in the first generation, but it is stretched out to the thousandth generation." (in Gerstner, 1991:189)

Exactly how far this thousand generation covenant literally extends was never specified. Brownson (2007:191) notes that, if taken literally, "anyone who could trace their lineage back to any Christian might be eligible for baptism," but "this logic was never applied in such a sweeping way, even within Judaism." The Synod of Emden (1571) said that the consideration thereof does not allow the church "to receive pell-mell all sorts of children who are offered baptism, under the cover that their ancestors of more than a thousand years ago were Christian." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:52)

<sup>3</sup> While the DCO required that ministers "do their best and strive to the end that the father presents his child for baptism," it also acknowledged the practice in some congregations of including "godfathers or witnesses," sponsors, at baptism. The DCO referred to this custom as optional, but said that it "should not be lightly changed." (Art. LVII; pp. 170-171) Borduin (1935:111) explains: "They used to have special witnesses, whose special duty it was to see to it that the children were instructed in the right way in case the parents failed. But this witness system never flourished in the Reformed churches since the consistory already is witness, and, in a broader sense, the whole congregation."

When the CRCNA amended the DCO in 1914, it removed all references to sponsors at baptism, because "the custom of employing sponsors next to the parents had not been practiced for many decades." (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:240) The consistory of Second, Sarnia submitted an overture to the Synod of 1961, asking synod "to make provisions regarding the use of baptismal sponsors in extraordinary cases such as, when both parents have died, or when neither the father nor the mother is competent to assume the baptismal vows." (Acts, 1961:541) Because the overture had not been processed through the classis, the Synod of 1961 decided not to consider it. (Acts, 1961:96)

be “presented by those who answer the questions in the form for baptism and support the doctrine.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:103; Gerstner, 1991:192-193) The Synod of Middelburg (1581) allowed for the baptism of children gained after a person’s excommunication from the church, arguing that they are not outside the covenant, despite the fact that they were born after their parents’ excommunication. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:136)

Among the earliest church orders, the provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) simply spoke of “the children,” not specifying which children should be baptized.<sup>4</sup> A CO drafted in Zeeland in 1576 required that “as many children as are presented for baptism, none shall be refused.”<sup>5</sup> (Sheeres, 2013:xxviii-xxix) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) specified that it is to the “children of Christians” that the covenant should be sealed by baptism.<sup>6</sup> The Synod of Middelburg (1581) amended the designation to read “the children of baptized Christians,” but the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) dropped the word “baptized,” (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:230; 1967:220) returning to the wording of the Synod of Dordrecht (1578), which was retained in the DCO, (Art. LVI; p. 170) the 1914 CO, (Art. 56; p. 98) and the RCO. (Art. 57; p. 137) None of these church orders, however, define the term “Christian,” and consequently, particularly within the early decades of the CRCNA’s history, it was interpreted to include baptized persons who had not yet made a public profession of faith.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “God’s covenant be sealed to the children as soon as they are able to receive baptism.” (Art. LVII; p. 70)

<sup>5</sup> Gerstner (1991:192) suggests that the practice of baptizing all children brought to the font was defended by appeal to Luke 18:15-17 (see also Mark 10:13-16), the story of people bringing babies to Jesus: “If the little children’s being brought to Jesus was ground for infant baptism, why should not all children be baptized?”

The Dortian baptismal formulary includes this gospel story in its defense of infant baptism: “Therefore God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” (PsH, 1934:84) The 1976 formulary includes a similar apology for infant baptism, (PsH, 1987:963) which the 2016 formulary includes as an option for the “Introduction” to baptism. (Agenda, 2016:92)

<sup>6</sup> “God’s covenant shall be sealed for children of Christians with Holy Baptism as soon as this can be done.” (Art. VII; p. 91)

<sup>7</sup> Conflicting options can be found in the *Manual for Christian Reformed Church Government* (Engelhard & Hofman, 2001) and Van Dellen & Monsma’s (1967) *Revised Church Order Commentary*. Citing the decisions of the Synods of 1898 and 1902, Engelhard & Hofman (2001:316) define believers as those who “have acknowledged their own baptism by personal profession of faith,” whereas Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:221-222), do not mention those synodical decisions, and, appealing to Voetius and Jansen, suggests that, “If an illegitimate parent reveals no repentance and should even live a life of indifference and godlessness, but place the child under the control of God-fearing relatives, than these relatives may apply for baptism and act as sponsors at the time of baptism.” (See also Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:232) The frequent references to synodical decisions in Van Dellen & Monsma’s (1949:232-235; 1967:222-224) extensive discussion on the baptism of adopted children makes their silence on the synodical decisions of 1898 and 1902 all the more striking. Contra Van Dellen & Monsma, De Moor (2010:312) writes: “Grandparents do not have the right to present grandchildren for baptism unless the child’s parents are out of the picture entirely, and they have actually received legal custody or, as sometimes happens, actually adopted the child.”



The *Afscheiding* Church inherited this custom, the *doopledenstelsel*, “although not without considerable opposition.” (Beets, 1946:95) It was “one of the most contentious matters” at the *Afscheiding* Church’s first synod in 1836, one that threatened to break the unity of the church. (Heideman, 2015:67-68) Those who emigrated from the Netherlands to North America in 1847 and after brought both the practice and opposition to it with them. In 1854, Classis Holland, which the immigrants established in 1848 and from which those who established the CRCNA in 1857 would secede, affirmed the practice inherited from the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup>

The minutes of the earliest meetings of the CRCNA’s broadest assemblies contradict Sheeres’ (2013:xxvii) claim that by 1857, when the CRCNA was established, a stricter baptismal practice prevailed. For most of the first half-century of the CRCNA’s history, the denomination’s broadest assemblies consistently permitted the *doopledenstelsel*. For example, the 3 February 1858 classical assembly resolved to require that a woman separate from her second husband on the grounds that her first husband, who had returned to the Netherlands, was still alive. If the woman and her second husband remained together, the classical assembly resolved “to excommunicate them from the congregation.” But it also resolved that the woman’s children, fathered by her second husband, would be baptized, with their grandfather - the woman’s father, a former elder - serving as witness.<sup>9</sup> (Sheeres, 2013:6)

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Citing the conflicting opinions of Engelhard & Hofman (2001) and Van Dellen & Monsma (1967), Classis Lake Superior asked the Synod of 2007 to “appoint a study committee to consider the propriety of professing grandparents or other professing relatives presenting children, in their care, for baptism.” (Agenda, 2007:433-437) Synod declined, claiming that “historically and ordinarily, it is understood that only believing parents (parent) and/or legal guardians can present children for baptism.” (Acts, 2007:620)

The Synod of 2011, which adopted the CO changes necessary to admit baptized children to the Lord’s Supper, revised Article 56 to read: “The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism,” defining, for the first time in the CO, the meaning of “believers” or “Christians.” (Agenda, 2011:572; Acts, 2011:829)

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Vander Muelen asked the 13 September 1854 classis meeting “how to deal with children who have grown up in the congregation who have been baptized, and against whom there is no complaint, but who have not yet made confession of faith, when they wish to have their marriage solemnized in the church, and wish to have their children baptized.” Classis affirmed the practice inherited from the Netherlands on the grounds that “children of the church are baptized as members thereof by virtue of the covenant, not by virtue of their own faithfulness to the covenant;” and that “mere increase in age cannot bring to an end this relation, this membership, but only excommunication, and that on the ground of scandalous offenses as endanger the safety of the church and her honor.” The classis did not consider “the failure to make confession of faith, without accompanying circumstances, a sufficient reason to deprive them of the rights of membership,” including the right to present their children for baptism. (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:166)

<sup>9</sup> A similar case was presented to the 6-7 April 1870 meeting of the classical assembly. Although the assembly decided not to accept a woman estranged from her husband as a member of the church, it allowed her child to be baptized “if the maternal grandparents, who are members of the congregation, present it for baptism.” (Sheeres, 2013:252)

Rev. Vander Leeuwen asked the 1 June 1894 classical assembly “how to proceed with the baptism of children whose parents are not professing members and who refuse to become members of the congregation, but whose grandparents present the child for baptism.” The assembly decided to proceed with the baptism “if there are baptismal witnesses,” a role the grandparents could presumably fill.<sup>10</sup> (Sheeres, 2013:89)

In 1880, the synodical assembly decided “to gather and print the general decisions of our church.” (Sheeres, 2013:435) The appointed committee presented a collection of “general ecclesiastical regulations” to the Synod of 1881, which approved them. Regarding the *doopledenstelsel* the regulations required:

Parents must answer the questions of the form in preference to sponsors of baptism. Parents who are only members by baptism may present children for baptism and answer the questions of the form. (Article 60)

Members by baptism coming from outside can be received and have their children baptized if the parents are willing to be taught the Christian way of life which leads to confession of faith. (Article 61)

Parents who neglect to send their children for catechism training must be ecclesiastically admonished, and if they persist in refusing must be disciplined. Adult members by baptism who refused to be catechetically instructed must upon refusal be disciplined. (Article 62)

These regulations codified what was known as the “baptismal system” of church membership whereby baptized members could present their children for baptism if they agreed to “be taught the Christian way of life,” that is, attend catechetical instruction.

But not all favored the *doopledenstelsel*. In 1888, Classis Illinois asked synod to cancel Articles 60 and 61 of the General Regulations. The overture did not include any grounds or rationale for its request. (Agenda, 1888:8) The Synod of 1888 decided, without explanation, that: “This [the baptismal system] is not to be changed at this time.”<sup>11</sup> (Acts, 1888:24) Classis Muskegon asked the Synod of 1892 to “make changes in Articles 60 and 61 of the General

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<sup>10</sup> This decision was affirmed the following year at the general assembly’s 4 October 1865 meeting. The assembly preferred the baptism of the children of baptized members “with the stipulation that the parents regularly attend public worship services and catechism and are blameless in their walk,” but in cases where the parents were neither willing nor able to satisfy this stipulation, the assembly allowed that “baptism [may] be conducted under the sponsorship of the grandparents, if they are members of the congregation.” (Sheeres, 2013:138)

<sup>11</sup> Does the inclusion of “at this time” indicate that the Synod of 1888 foresaw at time in the future when the baptismal system could or should be changed? Without recorded grounds for the decision, it is difficult to determine with certainty.

Regulations,”<sup>12</sup> but “synod decided to make no changes.” (Acts, 1892:23-24) Instead, responding to an overture from the Consistory of Englewood, the Synod of 1892 insisted on the observation of Articles 61 and 62 of the General Regulations.<sup>13</sup> (Acts, 1892:23-24)

Opposition to the baptismal system did not dissipate. Two years later, at the Synod of 1894, Classis Grand Rapids asked for changes to Articles 61 and 62. Classis Holland suggested that Articles 60 and 61 did not accord with Reformed church government, were not in agreement with the Confessions, and, for those reasons, should be discarded. (Acts, 1894:15) The Synod of 1894 accepted its advisory committee’s report, which, while leaving the General Regulations unchanged, stated unequivocally that “in the Church of God there is really no tenable place for adult baptized members, since God’s Word calls the growing children of the congregation to demonstrate their obedience to Christ in a confession of faith and by participating in the Lord’s Supper.” The report described “the system of adult membership by baptism as a deviation from the Word of God.” According to the recorded Acts, there was complete agreement on the principles in this matter, but a difference of opinion on the matter in which the baptismal system might be ended.<sup>14</sup> (Acts, 1894:16-17)

Classis Illinois asked the Synod of 1896 to “declare Articles 60 and 61 of the General Regulations void.” (Acts, 1896:45) Synod tabled<sup>15</sup> the advisory committee’s recommendation that these articles be voided until the report of another committee appointed to review the ecclesiastical regulations was distributed to the rest of the synodical delegates. (Acts, 1896:46) The report had been distributed to officers of synod and the theological professors, (Acts, 1896:15) but from the Acts (1896) it appears that it was never distributed to the rest of the

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<sup>12</sup> The overture from Classis Muskegon did not indicate what changes should be made to Articles 60 and 61, thus one can only speculate that they opposed the baptismal system.

<sup>13</sup> It is not clear that the consistory of Englewood opposed the baptismal system per se. Their overture does not mention Article 60 of the General Regulations, which allowed baptized members to present their children for baptism. It refers to Articles 61, which required that such parents attend catechetical instruction, and Article 62, which stipulated that “adult members by baptism who refuse to be catechetically instructed must upon refusal be disciplined.” Their concern appears to be similar to that of an instruction from Classis Hudson, which asked the same synod: “How must married baptized members be dealt with who do not according to Article 61 of the General Regulations [do not attend catechetical instruction], and yet bring their children to be baptized?” The Synod of 1892 said that the “children are to be baptized and the elders [the parents] are to be dealt with according to Article 62,” that is, be disciplined. (Acts, 1892:23)

<sup>14</sup> Kromminga (1943:125) suggests that since the practice “was of long standing and was deeply rooted, synod proceeded cautiously and first cleared away misapprehensions.”

<sup>15</sup> To table means to “set it aside temporarily.” (De Vries, 1998:128) According to the CRCNA’s Rules of Synodical Procedure: “When synod deems it advisable, it may decide to table a motion temporarily. Tabling a motion implies that the assembly will resume consideration on the motion at a later hour or date.” (VIII.D.1)

synodical delegates. The recommendation that Articles 60 and 61 of the General Regulations be declared void was never taken from the table and discussed again by the Synod of 1896.

Five classes (Grand Rapids,<sup>16</sup> Hudson, Illinois, Oostfriesland, and Hudson) submitted overtures regarding the baptismal system to the Synod of 1898. All advocated an end to the baptismal system. (Agenda, 1898:26-27) Though synod did not change the General Regulations, which permitted the system, it said that baptized members should make profession of faith “at a propitious time, and the necessity of disciplinary procedures in the event one fails to make profession,” on the following ground:

Surely the custom of becoming confessors or communicants<sup>17</sup> at an advanced age is not according to Reformed tradition nor is it biblical. God’s covenant requires that children of the congregation show their adherence and obedience to Christ as soon as possible by profession of faith and partaking of communion. In that covenant there are always two parts always binding on both sides.<sup>18</sup> Those in Israel who came to years of understanding and were remiss in their civil responsibilities, lost civil privileges. And so it remains in the Church of God. All those who are not amenable to the covenant life, and thus do not produce the works of Abraham, lose their right to be recognized and dealt with as children of Abraham.<sup>19</sup> Those who do not confess Jesus Christ

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<sup>16</sup> Classis Grand Rapids was a driving force behind the demise of the baptismal system. It had also submitted an overture to the Synod of 1896, asking synod “to make progress in a change in the matter pertaining to adult baptized members in the church.” (Agenda, 1896:21, my translation) Synod’s advisory committee advised synod to “go no further” than the decision of 1894, which had expressed a principial opposition to the baptismal system, but which left the General Regulations unchanged. The classis submitted a more forceful overture to the Synod of 1898, asking synod to take further steps on the baptismal system “because it desecrates God’s covenant and paralyzes ecclesiastical discipline.” (Agenda, 1898:27, my translation)

<sup>17</sup> “Confessor” refers to someone who has made profession of faith. “Communicant” refers to someone who partakes of the Lord’s Supper. While, under the existing ecclesiastical regulations, all communicants would have been confessors, it is possible that not all confessors were communicants. Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:245) describe a practice of admitting individuals to full member privileges, including the privilege of presenting their children for baptism, who made a “profession of truth,” which “was considered to be profession of faith, made with the distinct understanding that the person making the profession simply made an objective profession.” That is, “he declared that he believed the Bible according to the Reformed conception but he made no appropriation of Christianity for himself. ... It was therefore distinctly understood that he would not be expected to come to Holy Communion.” Such persons would be “confessors,” but not “communicants.” The Synod of 1904 discouraged this practice. (Acts, 1904:38) The practice no doubt reflects the influence of the *Nadere Reformatie*. Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:245) judged it “contrary to the stipulation of Article 59” of the DCO, which said that recipients of adult baptism - and by extension all who made a public profession of faith - “are duty bound to partake of the Lord’s Supper.” (p. 171)

<sup>18</sup> Though not cited, the language of the covenant having two parts is clearly drawn from the liturgical formulary for baptism, which teaches: “Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, though baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in him, and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life.” (PsH, 1934:83)

<sup>19</sup> That children have an inherent right to be recognized and dealt with as children of Abraham until they demonstrate otherwise by failing to produce the works of Abraham reflects a doctrine of presumptive regeneration. (On which, see pp. 117-125 below.)

before men and decline to proclaim the death of the Christ,<sup>20</sup> the same he will not confess before the heavenly Father and the holy angels, but will deny them, and such we may not recognize as citizens and saints and as fellow members in the household of God. On the contrary, the congregation must exclude such children of the kingdom out of its midst, and thus in the name of God bind with the keys of the kingdom that shall be bound in heaven. (Acts, 1898:74-75)

Being excluded from the church, the Synod of 1898 judged that such persons could “not be addressed as ‘beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,’<sup>21</sup> nor comforted with the covenant blessings promised to the children of believers.” Accordingly, “the consistory must not only forbid them the table, but also the presentation of their children for baptism.” (Acts, 1898:76)

The Synod of 1902 took “the decisive step” toward ending the baptismal system and *doopledenstelsel*. (Kromminga, 1949:88) It declared that “Parents, who present their children for baptism, must, according to Holy Writ and the CO,<sup>22</sup> both or at least one appropriate their baptism by personal confession of faith,” because “it is in violation of the sacredness of baptism since the church uses a different standard for the baptismal system if baptized members are admitted to the use of Holy Baptism<sup>23</sup> but not to the Lord’s Supper.” Synod also noted the contradiction of those who, “be it because of conscientious scruples, dare not partake of the Lord’s Supper, but, according to their own admission, in good conscience, dare to be addressed as ‘beloved in the Lord’ at baptism.” (Acts, 1902:65) The Synod of 1902 mandated that the classes, at each meeting, should inquire of their congregations whether they were maintaining the synodical decisions abolishing the baptismal system.<sup>24</sup> (Acts, 1902:66) The Synod of 1936

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<sup>20</sup> To “confess Jesus Christ before men” refers to profession of faith; to “proclaim the death of the Christ” refers to participation in the Lord’s Supper. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Cor. 11:26)

<sup>21</sup> The quotation refers to the address to the parents found in the formulary for baptism that begins with these very words. (See PsH, 1934:84)

<sup>22</sup> This reference to the CO refers to DCO Art. 56, which read: “God’s covenant shall be sealed to the children of Christians by baptism as soon as the administration can take place.” (p. 170) This synodical declaration implies a first official definition of the word “Christians” in this article.

<sup>23</sup> This “use of Holy Baptism” does not refer to their own baptism, but to the privilege of presenting their children for baptism.

<sup>24</sup> These decisions of the Synod of 1902, which settled the question of the *doopledenstelsel*, “had a salutary effect on the relationship of confessing membership to the total membership” within the CRCNA. “Between 1900 and 1910 the number of families increased 41%, as did the number of souls (total membership). During the same period, the number of communicant members increased 87%.” (Kromminga, 1949:88) The proportion of communicants, families and souls change from 1.5:1:5 in 1900 to 2.3:1:4.8 in 1920. (Kromminga, 1943:120)

declared this rule “no longer obligatory,” on the grounds that “the intent of the rule had been attained,” making the rule unnecessary and obsolete. (Acts, 1936:92)

Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry is the understanding of baptism that supported the *doopledenstelsel*: Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s covenant of grace. It is based on the promise of God, which means that all those to whom God’s covenant promises are made are eligible to receive the sacrament. Thus, regarding the recipients of baptism, the question is: To whom are God’s covenant promises made? Whom has God taken up into this covenant?

Within a thousand generation covenant, the children of baptized members<sup>25</sup> had a right to baptism, because, as William Heyns<sup>26</sup> (1926:213) claims was “universally acknowledged,” “the Scriptures do not teach that the line of the covenant must be regarded as broken off already in the first generation, i.e., that already in the first generation the children of covenant breakers are to be regarded as having no share in the covenant.” Heyns (1926:212) argues that objections were raised against the *doopledenstelsel* and the baptismal system, “not because it was held that these children have no right to baptism, but because it was seen that such parents had no right to appear to offer the children for baptism.”<sup>27</sup> “The difficulty was not with the children, but with the parents.” (Heyns, 1926:213) In making this argument, Heyns appeals to the liturgical formulary for baptism. The second question asked of parents reads: “Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?” (PsH, 1934:84) Heyns (1926:211) writes: “By demanding this confession of faith, the Form excludes ‘adult members by baptism’ from the privilege of presenting their children for baptism.”

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<sup>25</sup> And, in the case of the Particular Synod of Harlingen (1590), also the children of the unbaptized, because “baptism is grounded on the covenant of God,” which extends a thousand generations. (Gerstner, 1991:196) Gerstner (1991:196) suggests that “here one truly finds the breadth of the covenant being extended so far that it is in danger of losing its meaning.”

<sup>26</sup> William Heyns was a ministerial delegate at the Synods of 1894, 1898, and 1902. He was an officer, first clerk, of the Synods of 1894 (Acts, 1894:8) and 1898. (Acts, 1898:8) As such, he is likely the primary author of the Acts of those synods. Not elected an officer, Heyns served on the advisory committee responsible for matters in the agenda regarding baptized members. (Acts, 1902:10) Heyns served on the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary from 1902-1926, (Harms, 2004:227) which meant being an advisor at every synod during that period.

<sup>27</sup> This was not an entirely new concern. Earlier synods, which permitted the baptism of the children of baptized members, did not always allow the parents to present their children. See, for example, the 1858 and 1870 decisions that required that the maternal grandfather serve as a witness. (Sheeres, 2013:6, 252)

#### 4.2.2 Baptism of Adopted Children

Like the *doopeldenstelsel*, the baptism of adopted children also concerns which children may be presented for baptism. Here the question was: May Christian parents present for baptism children, particularly those of unknown or non-Christian lineage, whom they have adopted? The issue first received synodical attention in 1908 when Classis Illinois asked synod to “point out on what grounds foundlings adopted by believers may be baptized.”<sup>28</sup> (Acts, 1908:38) After extensive discussion of a lengthy report from its advisory committee, which is not printed in the Acts, the Synod of 1908 “decided to appoint a committee to report to the next synod concerning this matter.”<sup>29</sup> (Acts, 1908:38)

The study committee’s report to the Synod of 1910 clearly defined the basic question. The committee noted that the issue is not:

1. Whether foundlings may be baptized of whom it is known that they are born within the boundaries of the covenant. Everyone who is Reformed will agree on this.
2. Whether they may be baptized as long as there is any indication of a covenant relationship. Concerning this there also will be no difference of opinion.
3. Whether any ground can be found outside of the covenant whereby such children could be baptized. All are agreed that they may only be baptized when it appears that they are in the covenant, and God’s covenant ordinance requires this. (Acts, 1910:140, my emphasis)

Unable to arrive at a unified opinion on that final question, whether foundlings adopted by believing parents are in the covenant, the appointed committee presented the Synod of 1910 with arguments for and against their baptism.<sup>30</sup> (Acts, 1910:140-148) Synod decided “not to enter into the conclusion of this report.” (Acts, 1910:60)

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<sup>28</sup> Classis Illinois’ overture assumes that some congregations did baptize foundlings adopted by believing parents. The overture does not explicitly oppose the practice. On the contrary, one can conclude from it that the classis sought justification for an existing practice, though it must be conceded that if no grounds could be pointed out, the practice would presumably need to be discontinued.

<sup>29</sup> References in the Acts to “extensive discussion” and a “lengthy report” from the advisory committee suggests that the Synod of 1908 was not of one mind on the question. The subsequent decision of the Synod of 1910 not to enter into the matter confirms that this was indeed a highly divisive issue within the denomination.

<sup>30</sup> The study committee presented these arguments in a single report signed by all of its members. While the report does not identify who favored and who opposed the baptism of foundlings, comparison between the report and Heyns’ *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* (1926:132-133) indicates not only that Heyns, a member of the advisory committee, opposed such baptisms, but also that he was the author of the argument against such baptisms within the report and that he made generous use of the study committee report when he wrote his *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*.

The issue returned to the synodical agenda in 1928 when Classis Grand Rapids presented a letter from J. Monsma Sr., a member of First, Grand Rapids, to synod. While the classis presented the letter “without expressing itself upon the views of brother Monsma,” it asked synod to make a definite ruling,<sup>31</sup> “so that there may be uniformity.” (Acts, 1928:133) Monsma asked synod “to declare itself definitely against the baptism of children who cannot be looked upon as covenant children in the third and fourth generation.” (Acts, 1928:132) The Synod of 1928 appointed a study committee to report to the next synod. (Acts, 1928:133)

The Synod of 1930 received the study committee’s report (Agenda, 1930:111-148) as information. (Acts, 1930:89) Its advisory committee focused specifically on this question: “Whether foundlings,<sup>32</sup> of whose origins one knows nothing, but who are adopted by believers as their children, can be viewed as included by God in his covenant.”<sup>33</sup> (Acts, 1930:89) The committee wrote:

Children adopted by believing parents thereby become not only part of, but members of, the family. They are thereby by an act of God’s providence led into fellowship of a Christian home where the promise of God is assured. It is not man who brings such a child into the covenant. Man never does that. It is always an act of the Lord himself.<sup>34</sup> If slaves born in Abraham’s house, and bought of a stranger, were to receive the sacrament of circumcision,<sup>35</sup> the Old

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<sup>31</sup> Referring to the actions of the Synods of 1908 and 1910, Monsma rightly concluded that, to date, synods of the CRCNA had “made no declaration.” (Acts, 1928:132) Regarding the decision of the Synod of 1910 not to enter into the conclusion of the study committee’s report, Carl Kromminga (1984:14) concludes: “The church took no stand. Consistories had to deal with the issue as they saw fit.” To that circumstance, Monsma responded.

<sup>32</sup> In its report, the advisory committee included “not only ‘foundlings,’ but all children whose past is unknown, or who were not born to believing parents, but were adopted by believing parents.” (Acts, 1930:89)

<sup>33</sup> In an editorial in *The Banner* prior to the Synod of 1930, H.J. Kuiper (1930c:542) noted that “there have always been two opinions about this matter in the Reformed churches.” The registration of negative votes by three delegates bears out Kuiper’s prediction that “it is not likely that synod at this time will be able to come to unanimity on the question.”

<sup>34</sup> These comments respond to the argument against the baptism of foundlings found in the study committee report presented to the Synod of 1910. That report had argued that “there is a great difference between the children born of believers and adopted children with respect to their relationship to the covenant of grace,” because “children born into a family is clearly the act of God,” whereas “children adopted is the initiative of people.” Because of this human initiative, “a direct guiding hand of God does not come into evidence, from which it would follow that [the child] would be taken up into the covenant of grace.” The report concluded that, because it is not evident that the child has been taken up into the covenant of grace, there are “no actual, tenable grounds for the baptism of foundlings adopted by believers.” (Acts, 1910:147-148)

<sup>35</sup> Here, too, the advisory committee report reflects the study committee report submitted to the Synod of 1910, which, in its argument in favor of the baptism of foundlings, relied heavily on the instruction of Genesis 17:12 that Abraham circumcise “every male among you ... including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Acts, 1910:140-141)

The report’s argument against the baptism of foundlings countered that this stipulation was confined only to Genesis 17, noting that in Genesis 17:7 “only the inborn are mentioned,” interpreting “your descendants after you,” with whom God also established his covenant, as “the seed that comes from Abraham’s loins.” (Acts, 1910:144) Similarly, Heyns (1926:132, 142) glosses references to Abraham’s seed, “natural seed.” Borduin, (1932; 1936) a



Testament sacrament of the covenant of grace, much more should children, adopted by believers as their own children and sharing the blessing of fellowship, be baptized. (Acts, 1930:92-93)

The committee advised the Synod of 1930 to “answer the question ‘whether children who are not born of believing parents, but who are adopted by believers, may be baptized’ in the affirmative,” which synod did,<sup>36</sup> a decision regarding which three delegates registered negative votes.<sup>37</sup> (Acts, 1930:93)

Carl Kromminga (1984:15) describes the Synod of 1932 as “awash with protests filed against the decision of the Synod of 1930.” The Synod of 1932 received six personal protests, including one from J. Monsma Sr., protests from seven consistories, including Grandville Ave., of which Y.P. De Jong, who had registered his negative vote at the Synod of 1932, was pastor, and eight overtures, two from congregations and six from classes, regarding the decision of the Synod of 1932. All of the protests and nearly all of the overtures opposed the decision of the Synod of 1930,<sup>38</sup> on the grounds that it conflicted with Scripture,<sup>39</sup> contradicted the HC,<sup>40</sup>

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proponent of the baptism of adopted children, challenges this interpretation, arguing that “seed” in Genesis 17:7 refers to Abraham’s “spiritual seed.”

<sup>36</sup> N. Monsma (1947a:101) argues that by using the word “may,” rather than “must,” the Synod of 1930 “left the question undecided and suspended.” D.H. Kromminga (1941b:674) agrees, describing synod’s declaration as “incomplete and doubtful,” “leaving the final decision to the local consistory.”

<sup>37</sup> The delegates were Rev. H. Keegstra (Classis Zeeland), Dr. Y.P. De Jong (Classis Grand Rapids West), and Elder Charles Vander Kooi (Classis Pella).

<sup>38</sup> Only one overture, from Classis Hackensack, urged synod to abide by the decision of the Synod of 1932, alluding to CO Art. 31: “A synodical decision can only be rescinded when it proves to be in conflict with the word of God and our CO. No proof has been offered that the grounds, or the conclusions [of the Synod of 1930] are in any way in conflict with the word of God.” (Agenda II, 1932:I)

The consistories of Allen Ave. Muskegon and Twelfth St. Grand Rapids asked synod to rescind the decision of the Synod of 1930. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv-xlix) Classes Zeeland and Grand Rapids West both asked synod to reconsider the prior decision. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv-xlv) Classis Wisconsin asked for further study and correspondence with other Reformed churches. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv) Classis Sioux Center wanted the grounds for the decision of the Synod of 1932 made more clear. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv) Classis Hudson asked for clarity about the statement “may be baptized.” (Agenda, II, 1932:xliv-l)

<sup>39</sup> In addition to arguments based on Genesis 17:7, (see note 35 above) some argued, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:14, that “Scripture seems clearly to affirm that children who are not of covenant lineage are not to be considered holy but unclean.” (Agenda II, 1932:xlvi) Contra these overtures, Bel, (1959:11) who would serve on the study committee appointed by the Synod of 1932, (Acts, 1932:188) argues the opposite. Just as an “unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her husband,” (1 Cor. 7:14) so are adopted children: “They are drawn into or placed into covenant relationships with God when they become children of their foster parents.” Thus 1 Corinthians 7:14, rather than arguing against the baptism of adopted children, argues in favor of it.

<sup>40</sup> Classis Zeeland argued that the HC’s teaching that “by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers,” (Ans. 74) precluded the baptism of adopted children of unknown or non-Christian lineage, interpreting “children” as strictly natural children or children by birth. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv)

violated the CO,<sup>41</sup> and was contrary to the decision of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).<sup>42</sup>

The committee appointed to advise the Synod of 1932, “from the moment” it was appointed, could “foresee that it was out of the question for the committee to take a unified stand either in favor of sustaining the decision of 1930 or of rescinding the same.” It advised the Synod of 1932 to appoint a larger committee “to consider the protests lodged against the decision of the Synod of 1930 ... and to report at the Synod of 1934, it being understood that meanwhile the decision of 1930 stands unimpaired.” The Synod of 1932 so decided. (Acts, 1932:109)

Unable to complete its work before the Synod of 1934, the study committee presented three reports to the Synod of 1936. (Agenda, 1936:97-234) The first report recommended rescinding the decision of the Synod of 1930; the second, upholding it; the third, upholding it with the following proviso: “That this 1930 decision in no way justifies the molestation of anyone who, whether as church member or in the specific capacity of office bearer, may have conscientious scruples against the administration of the sacrament to adopted children.” (Acts, 1936:54-55)

A motion to adopt the recommendation of the second report to uphold the decision of the Synod of 1930 failed on a tie vote. (Acts, 1936:53-54) A motion to adopt the recommendation of the third report, including its proviso,<sup>43</sup> carried 39 to 17. (Acts, 1936:54-55) Seven

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<sup>41</sup> Article 56, which requires that “the covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of Christians by baptism,” (p. 98) precludes the baptism of the children of non-Christians. As with HC, Answer 74, the word “children” was interpreted to refer strictly to natural children or children by birth.

<sup>42</sup> In the context of Dutch Reformed mission work in Dutch East Indies, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was asked “whether children born of pagan parents (in the East Indies) but adopted to be members of the household of believers might receive Christian baptism.” (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:232) According to Gerstner, (1991:198) the foreign delegates “were almost all in favor of baptizing heathen children so long as it was guaranteed that they receive a Christian upbringing and would not be sent back to heathen parents,” but the majority of the Dutch delegates opposed the idea, arguing that such children “stand outside the covenant,” which means “they have no part of the promise” and must be subject to Jesus’ great commission: “Our Lord Jesus commanded the Apostles first to teach such ones and then baptize,” when they, in due season, should make profession of faith. (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1949:232) Proponents of the decision of the Synod of 1930 were quick to note that this decision of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was by no means unanimous. According to Smedes, (1963:18) there were “vigorous objections” raised at the Synod of Dort. Indeed, “forty of the eighty-three members of the Synod of Dort who voted on the question of the baptism of adopted children agreed in principle with our Synod of 1930,” which permitted such baptisms. (Act, 1932:108)

<sup>43</sup> When Classis Alberta asked for clarification regarding this proviso, “specifically, has a consistory the right to refuse parents and ministers permission to baptize such children? Or must the decision [of 1936] be understood to mean only that no consistory may compel parents to have such children baptized, or ministers to administer the sacrament against their convictions?” (Acts, 1954:584) the Synod of 1954 declared that “a consistory has the right to refuse permission to baptize adopted children.” (Acts, 1954:84)

N. Monsma (1950:1125) argued that “a minister holds his office only at the assignment and the direction of the consistory,” which meant that when a consistory favored the baptism of an adopted child, but the minister did not,

delegates registered their negative votes, including Y.P. De Jong, who objected to both the word “may” in the decision of the Synod of 1930 and the proviso adopted by the Synod of 1936: “It is inconsistent with the church’s polity to say that such children ‘may’ be baptized. The only reason to say that they ‘may’ be baptized is if they are part of the covenant family; if so, they not only may, but must be baptized,<sup>44</sup> and if that is so, the church cannot leave ‘unmolested’ those who object.” (Acts, 1936:56)

Lewis Smedes’ response to the following article proposed in the draft RCO presented to the Synod of 1961 - “Children legally adopted by members of the congregation may be baptized”<sup>45</sup> (Art. 56-b; Acts, 1961:458) - echoes De Jong’s objections. Smedes (1963:18) calls the decision of the Synod of 1930 “indefensible.” To allow, but not require, the baptism of children considered part of the covenant “is strange doing for a church whose baptismal formulary teaches that children who are eligible ‘ought to be baptized.’” The formulary explicitly says: “We may not exclude them from baptism.” Smedes concludes: “The proposed CO revision threatens to make constitutional law what the church’s baptismal formulary prohibits.” The threat was not realized, however, as the version of Article 56 adopted by the Synod of 1965 does not include any reference to children legally adopted,<sup>46</sup> (Acts, 1965:76) though it would not be until 1982 that a synod would declare the provisions of Article 56<sup>47</sup> apply equally to children born into and children adopted into a family.

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the minister should appeal the consistory’s decision to classis, rather than arrange a pulpit exchange with a minister who had no such scruples against the baptism.

<sup>44</sup> The same argument is found in the overture from the consistory of Allen Ave. to the Synod of 1932: “We contend that if these children by means of adoption enter the covenant of grace, then synod should have decided not that they may, but that they must be baptized. All covenant children must be baptized.” (Agenda II, 1932:xlvi) In the protest that Classis Wisconsin submitted to the Synod of 1937 against the decision of the Synod of 1936, the classis argued that if adopted children belong in the covenant, “it is not merely a question of permissibility, whether they may, but a question of duty, they must” be baptized. (Acts, 1937:161)

Contra these overtures, D.H. Kromminga (1941b:674) argues the Synod of 1930 made no clear and unequivocal declaration regarding the covenantal status of adopted children, but intentionally chose the word “may,” rather than “must,” to leave its declaration “incomplete.” Kromminga (1941b:687) explains the decision of the Synod of 1930 thus: “The arguments for the baptism of adopted children are sufficient to permit the baptism of such children, and the arguments against their baptisms are sufficient for not demanding their baptism.” (his emphasis)

<sup>45</sup> The Revision Committee provided this explanation of the proposed addition: “Art. 56-b is a brief statement which reproduces the substance of a synodical ruling regarding the baptism of adopted children concerning whom covenantal lineage cannot be established.” (Acts, 1961:448)

<sup>46</sup> The proposed article appears in the drafts of the RCO presented to the Synods of 1961, 1962, and 1963, (Acts, 1961:458; Acts, 1962:421; Acts, 1963:363) but was omitted without explanation from the final draft presented to the Synod of 1965. (Acts, 1965:179)

<sup>47</sup> “The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of believers by holy baptism. The consistory shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible.” (Art. 56; p. 137)

The Synod of 1937 received one protest, from Classis Wisconsin, against the decision of the Synod of 1936 upholding the decision of the Synod of 1930 with the proviso protecting those with conscientious scruples against the administration of the sacrament to adopted children. Classis Wisconsin wanted the Synod of 1937 “to rescind the decision adopted in 1936 ... and to leave the whole matter in the indeterminate state in which the question was before 1930,” on the grounds that “the argument from Scripture on both sides is of such a nature that it cannot be said to be compelling or to enjoin either the one or the other practice on the church.” Classis Wisconsin considered it a matter of principle that “if a debatable matter cannot be definitely decided by sacred Scriptures, no Synod should render any decisions, even though it only includes a permissibility.” (Acts, 1937:160) On the recommendation of its advisory committee “for practical reasons,”<sup>48</sup> the Synod of 1937 decided “not to enter upon this matter at this time.” (Acts, 1937:53)

No future synod entered upon this matter until 1949, when Classis Grand Rapids East submitted an overture to the Synod of 1949, asking it “to make it the position of the entire denomination that no adopted child shall be baptized until the probation period is over and the adoption is final.”<sup>49</sup> (Acts, 1949:401) Kuiper (1949:836) reports that “there was a brief discussion of this proposal.” While “a few delegates expressed disapproval and stated that the churches they served had not refused to baptize adopted children during the trial period,” there was “general agreement with overture.” The Synod of 1949 concurred with the classis’ argument that “parents of an adopted child cannot satisfactorily answer the questions of the Form for the Baptism of Infants before the adoption is final. ... Parents must be sure the child is theirs before they can assume the baptismal vows.” (Acts, 1949:20)

Classis Cadillac asked the Synod of 1965 to reconsider the decision of the Synod of 1949, (Acts, 1965:453) but synod did not on the following grounds: “1. The grounds of the 1949 decision are still valid. 2. Classis has not demonstrated any widespread dissatisfaction or hardship because of our present rule.” (Acts, 1965:26) Classis Cadillac may not have demonstrated the dissatisfaction, but the consistory of Calvary, Minneapolis was sure that it was present in the denomination. In an appeal to the Synod of 1968, endorsed by overtures from Classis

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<sup>48</sup> While the advisory committee did not specify what these practical reasons were, it is noteworthy that they offered practical rather than principal reasons for its advice. This means that the decision of the Synod of 1937 not to enter into the matter should not be understood as an endorsement of the decision of the Synod of 1936.

<sup>49</sup> In the grounds for its request, Classis Grand Rapids East noted that consistories within the CRCNA were not in agreement on the question of when adopted children may be baptized. (Acts, 1949:401) Seventeen years earlier, Classis Grand Rapids West submitted a similar request to the Synod of 1932, asking that the Synod of 1932, as it reconsidered the decision of the Synod of 1930, would declare that “meanwhile no children shall be baptized who have not been legally adopted. (Agenda II, 1932:xliv)

Lake Erie (Acts, 1968:586) and from the consistory of Medicine Hat submitted by Classis Alberta South “without classical endorsement,” (Acts, 1968:589) Calvary’s consistory argued: “Contrary to the thinking of the Synod of 1965, there is widespread disagreement with our present legislation. Some are convinced it is unscriptural and a sin for the church to refuse baptism when believing parents come with such a request.” (Acts, 1968:607) The Synod of 1968 lifted the restriction imposed by the Synod of 1949 and granted each consistory, in consultation with the adoptive parents, the freedom to decide when children placed in adoptive homes should be baptized.<sup>50</sup> (Acts, 1968:17)

In the CRCNA’s earliest debates about the baptism of adopted children, the question - well-articulated by the study committees that reported to the Synods of 1910 and 1930 - was whether such children are included in God’s covenant. As in the denomination’s debate about the *doopledenstelsel*, baptism was clearly understood to be the sign and seal of God’s covenant of grace. Only persons to whom God made his covenant promises were eligible to receive the sacrament of baptism.<sup>51</sup> Later synodical discussions and debates, however, reflect a significant shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism.

The decision of the Synod of 1949 placed more emphasis on parental vows than did previous synodical decisions. It is noteworthy that its answer to the question of the timing of the baptism of adopted children was based solely on the parent’s ability to answer the baptismal questions and assume the baptismal vows. An even greater shift from an emphasis on the promises of God to the parental promises is evident in the discussions and decisions of the final CRCNA synod to address the baptism of adopted children, the Synod of 1982. This shift in emphasis is inconsistent with the confessions of the CRCNA. It is true that “in the baptism of infants, the parents and congregation also promise to instruct and encourage their children in faith. ... But whenever our confessions talk about baptismal promises, they are always God’s promises to us.” (Bierma, 2008:12; BC Art. 34; HC Q&A 69, 71, 74)

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<sup>50</sup> Contra the later claim by the Synod of 1982 that “the Synod of 1968, on biblical and theological grounds, permitted the immediate baptism of adopted children,” (Acts, 1982:85) the Synod of 1968 offered the following grounds, which include neither biblical nor theological rationale, for its decision: “1. Adoptive procedures vary greatly from one place to another, and therefore a synodical rule should not be made binding upon all consistories. 2. Individual consistories ought to determine the feasibility of baptism on the basis of individual cases.” (Acts, 1968:17)

<sup>51</sup> In an editorial in *The Banner*, Kuiper (1932:557) noted that: “The only ground on which we, believers, baptize our children is that they are included with us in the covenant of grace. ... They are not children of the covenant because they are baptized, but they are baptized because they are children of the covenant. ... The only question on which we do not agree is whether adoption by Christian parents makes the child concerned a child of those parents in such a real sense that it is heir of all the spiritual rights of a natural child.”

Classis Grand Rapids South submitted an overture to the Synod of 1982 asking synod “to declare that ordinarily an adopted child ought to be baptized at the same time and in the same manner as a child born into a family.”<sup>52</sup> (Acts, 1982:601) Especially significant is this ground on which the request was made, which clearly emphasizes the parental promises more than the promises of God:

Baptism is a forward-looking sacrament.<sup>53</sup> In the form(s) for the sacrament, no mention is made of how a child came into the family.<sup>54</sup> That is not important. But the importance lies in the future, in the vows the parents make to instruct the child and to cause the child to be instructed. Parents of adopted children need this means of grace as well as parents of children born into a home.<sup>55</sup> (Acts, 1982:601)

The Synod of 1982 declared that CO Art. 56 “applies both to adopted children and children born into a family,”<sup>56</sup> on the ground that “our policy of leaving to the discretion of the churches the timing of the baptism of adopted children had created confusion and unjustly sets apart adopted children.” (Acts, 1982:86)

#### 4.2.3 Discipline of Baptized Members

The historic Reformed Church in the Netherlands has been described as a public church, because its ministers were obliged to baptize every child of Christian parents. It was not a state church, however, because the church maintained its own standard for admission to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>57</sup> (van Lieburg, 2014:124; Blei, 2006:25-26) van Lieburg (2014:124) argues

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<sup>52</sup> See Otte (1982) for the background to this overture and for a first-hand description of an adoptive parent’s feelings of being discriminated against by existing synodical decisions.

<sup>53</sup> Contra this description of baptism, the CRCNA’s oldest liturgical formulary, inherited from the Synod of Dort, (1618-1619) presents baptism as backward-looking sacrament, that is, it seals and confirms what God has already done.

<sup>54</sup> In 1982 the CRCNA had two liturgical formularies for baptism: one inherited from the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and one adopted by the Synod of 1976. While neither formulary mentions how a child came into the family, the overture appears to be influenced more by the formulary adopted by the Synod of 1976 than by the Dortian liturgical formulary.

<sup>55</sup> To describe baptism as a means of grace for the parents, rather than the baptized child, is a deviation from historic Reformed theology. Both the BC (Art. 34) and the Dortian baptismal formulary explain baptism as a means of grace for the recipient of the sacrament, the person who is baptized. (Meeter, 2007:56-57) See Berkhof (1938:641-642) for a discussion of infant baptism as a means of grace.

<sup>56</sup> Contra arguments presented to the Synod of 1932, the Synod of 1982 clearly interpreted the word “children” in Article 56 to include both adopted children and children born into the family.

<sup>57</sup> Already at the Convent of Wesel (1568) the following rule was adopted: “No one shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper if he has not first made profession of faith and submitted himself to the discipline of the church.” (Art. 7; p. 36) Similar rules are found in the Church Orders of Middelburg (1581), (Art. XLIII; p. 115) ’s Gravenhage (1586), (Art. LIV; p. 150), and Dort (1618-1619). (LXI; p. 171)

that, because only professing members partook of the Lord's Supper, only they were subject to discipline.<sup>58</sup>

However, as Schaver (1947:201) notes, "in Reformed circles children have ever been regarded as members of the church, and as members of it they are subject to its discipline," or, at least, its "spiritual care." (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1967:28) Schaver (1947:201) describes the discipline of baptized members as "only partial." It is "limited to warnings, exhortation, reproof, and erasure." In considering the discipline of baptized members in the CRCNA, this section will examine the relevant church orderly provisions and synodical decisions regarding such discipline and a proposed liturgical formulary for its exercise. Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry is the standing, position, that baptized members were accorded in the church in these discussions.

Neither the DCO nor the 1914 CO include specific provisions for the discipline of baptized members. In their article on ecclesiastical discipline, both church orders speak about debarring an obstinate person who persistently rejects the consistory's admonition from the Lord's Supper and, if the person continues to show no repentance, excommunicating them from the church. (DCO Art. LXXVI; p. 173; 1914 CO Art. 76; p. 104) Given that neither CO admitted baptized members to the Lord's Supper, this provision can only apply to professing members. However, in its earliest history, the CRCNA often applied this article to the discipline of baptized members, suggesting that the church did not distinguish between the discipline of baptized members and the discipline of professing members. The same church orderly provisions applied equally to both.

At its 6 January 1869 meeting, the classical assembly "decided that if baptized members lead offensive lives, and they come to the point of being removed from the rolls, they first must be announced to the congregation for the purpose of praying for them," (Sheeres, 2013:209) an explicit requirement in the DCO regarding ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>59</sup> A similar decision was made at the 2 June 1875 meeting of the general assembly, which, notably, spoke not only of

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<sup>58</sup> The earliest Dutch Reformed Church synods frequently connected submission to church discipline with profession of faith. The Convent of Wesel (1568), for example, spoke of those who "indicate their agreement with them," that is, "the most important parts of faith and of religions," and "at the same time ... place themselves under the discipline of the church." (Art. 101; p. 37) Similarly, the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) spoke of "the profession of faith and the submitting to discipline" as a single event. (Art. LXX; p. 72)

<sup>59</sup> "Before proceeding to excommunication the obstinacy of the sinner shall be publicly announced to the congregation ... and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him." (Art. LXXVII; p. 174)

removing baptized members from the rolls, but of excommunicating them from the congregation.<sup>60</sup> Classis Holland asked the Synod of 1894 “whether a consistory needs the advice of the classis if it wishes to dismiss baptized members from the church,” (Acts, 1894:36) as required in the DCO’s article on ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>61</sup> Synod decided that “if there should arise the need for their dismissal, then the classis should first be informed and consulted.” (Acts, 1894:37)

The abolition of the *doopledenstelsel* and the baptismal system of church membership prompted an extended discussion of the discipline of baptized members in the CRCNA.<sup>62</sup> In an instruction to the Synod of 1912, Classis Grand Rapids South argued that “it is inconsistent to refuse the baptism of children of baptized members, and yet consider these parents as members of the church.” (Acts, 1912:50) Two years earlier, Classis Grand Rapids East had asked the Synod of 1910 to “make a rule concerning the time when adult baptized members, who do not make confession of faith, are to be excluded from the church institute.” Although synod refused to make a general rule, noting that “each case must be considered on its own merits, which can only be done by the consistory in consultation with the classis,”<sup>63</sup> it acknowledged that “the failure to make confession of faith when one comes to years of understanding may be a reason for discipline.” (Acts, 1910:59-59)

The Netherlands Liturgy, adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and inherited by the CRCNA from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, included liturgical formularies for excommunication and readmission to church membership of an excommunicated person,<sup>64</sup> but these formularies were thought to apply only to professing members. In 1912,

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<sup>60</sup> “Classis Michigan posed [the question] to the assembly of how to deal with baptized members who, after repeated warnings, remain negligent in making responsible use of catechization and attending public worship services. It is decided that the congregation should pray for such, and if this brings no results, to excommunicate them from the congregation, and this is to be announced publicly to the congregation.” (Sheeres, 2013:358)

<sup>61</sup> “No person shall be excommunicated except with previous advice of the classis.” (Art. LXXVI; p. 173)

<sup>62</sup> It is clear in this context, which referred to baptized members who were parents, that, as De Moor (2010:412) notes, “the disciplinary exclusion of baptized members is applied only when such members have clearly come to the age of discretion.”

<sup>63</sup> The 1912 instruction of Classis Grand Rapids South made a similar request, which the Synod of 1912 also denied, for similar reasons. (Acts, 1912:50-51)

<sup>64</sup> The Synod of Middelburg (1581) first proposed the preparation of a liturgical formulary for excommunication. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:125) The formularies for excommunication and readmission were both added to the liturgy by the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586), (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:153) and retained in the liturgy approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

The DCO mandated the use of both formularies. (Art. LXXVI; p. 173 and Art. LXXVIII; p. 174) This requirement was maintained in the RCO, (Art. 86; p. 141 and Art. 88; p. 141) but omitted in the revision of the final section of the CO proposed by the Synod of 1991 (Acts, 1991:717) and ratified by the Synod of 1992. (Acts, 1992:612)



Classis Orange City asked synod to provide a comparable formulary “for the erasure of disobedient baptized members,” for the following reasons:

- a. Baptized members are members of the congregation as well as confessing members;
- b. The significance of this membership will be understood more clearly;
- c. The action of erasure will create more seriousness and interest. (Acts, 1912:51)

The Synod of 1912 complied with the request and appointed a committee to present a draft formulary to the Synod of 1914. (Acts, 1912:51) The committee did,<sup>65</sup> but, rather than approve the proposed formulary, the Synod of 1914 appointed another committee “to give further consideration to the whole question of baptized members.” (Acts, 1914:72)

Among the questions raised by that study committee in its report to the Synod of 1918 were: “What is the status of so-called adult members by baptism in the church?” and “How to deal with such adult members, if they persevere in their unnatural position?” Regarding the first question, the committee wrote: “By virtue of their birth they belong to the seed of members of the congregation and thus are children of the covenant and through baptism incorporated into the church,” including both “the mystical body of Christ” and “the church as institute.” (Acts, 1918:174-175)

The committee rejected descriptions of profession of faith as “becoming a member” or “joining the church,” arguing that “such a view is not valid with the Scriptural meaning of covenant and baptism, and such expressions are false and objectionable.” Even if “the membership of baptized members is as yet incomplete,” that incompleteness “may never lead to the practical denial of that membership.” What is incomplete demands completion, which, in the case of baptized children, means that “as soon as they come to years of understanding,” they must “offer themselves with heart and hand to the Lord and by means of profession of faith and participation in the Lord’s Supper reveal themselves as major and obedient members of the church of Christ.” (Acts, 1918:175)

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The Synod of 1991 adopted a guideline permitting, but not requiring, use of the liturgical formulary “if the consistory judges that this will further the purposes of discipline and will serve the welfare of the congregation.” (Acts, 1991:718)

Classis Hudson submitted an overture to the Synod of 1973 requesting a new liturgical formulary for excommunication on the grounds that “the present form is not clear and simple” and that “its language is archaic and subject to misunderstanding.” (Acts, 1973:735-736) Synod referred the overture to the Liturgical Committee, (Acts, 1973:17) which was already working on a new formulary. (Acts, 1973:502) The Synod of 1979 granted provisional approval to the new formulary. (Acts, 1979:125) The Synod of 1982 adopted the new formularies for excommunication and readmission, (Acts, 1982:84) which the Synod of 1991 amended. (Acts, 1991:720-723)

<sup>65</sup> See Agenda, 1914:31-34 for the draft formulary.

Referring to their position in the church as “abnormal and untenable,” the committee argued that baptized members who have come to the years of understanding and fail to make profession of faith and to participate in the Lord’s Supper should not be designated “adult baptized members,” but “unfaithful covenant members.” It is impermissible for the church to carry such members undisturbed; rather, it must consider them objects of discipline. But, because their membership is “incomplete,” the discipline to which they are subject is also “incomplete.” (Acts, 1918:175-176)

Concerned that use of a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members would “unwittingly give the impression that their membership since they came to years of understanding had rather great significance;” that is, their membership in the church was more complete than it actually was, the study committee recommended that synod not consider the formulary for the exclusion of baptized members that had been proposed to the Synod of 1914 and that synod rescind the decision of the Synod of 1912 to prepare such a formulary. The procedure approved by the Synod of 1894, which only required an official announcement, (Acts, 1894:17) was sufficient. (Acts, 1918:178)

The Synod of 1918 adopted the study committee’s recommendations, (Acts, 1918:58) though it also “received as information” the advisory committee’s comments questioning the study committee’s argument against the adoption of a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members. (Acts, 1918:60) Those comments reflect the influence of William Heyns, who served as an advisor to the advisory committee. (Acts, 1918:10) Heyns (1926:181) would later write:

The awful significance of this excommunication [that is, the exclusion of baptized members] is not felt so deeply as that of the excommunication of confessing members. A reason thereof may be that it is done without the solemnity of a liturgical form. ... It is advisable to have this excommunication take place as nearly as possible the same way as the excommunication of confessing members.

The discipline of baptized members would not be on the synodical agenda for a generation, until Classis Grand Rapids West submitted an overture to the Synod of 1946, asking synod to “provide the churches with a liturgical form which is to be used when delinquent baptized members are placed outside the visible church (erased) by action of the consistory.”<sup>66</sup> (Agenda, 1946:116)

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<sup>66</sup> The advisory committee’s report to the Synod of 1946 lists overtures from Classes Grand Rapids West and Holland among the materials assigned to it regarding a liturgical form for the erasure of baptized members. The

Classis Grand Rapid West's first ground contradicts the judgment of the study committee that reported to the Synod of 1918. The procedure approved by the Synod of 1894 and, upon the recommendation of said study committee, affirmed by the Synod of 1918 requiring only a formal announcement was not sufficient. The classis argued that "since such individuals are by virtue of their covenant membership and baptism also members of the visible church, placing them outside of her fellowship should require more than a mere statement to that effect." (Agenda, 1946:116)

Classis Grand Rapids West's second ground echoes the grounds of Classis Orange City's overture to the Synod of 1912, the first request for a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members, and Heyns' (1926:181) judgment: "Such a form would also impress upon the congregation that seriousness of erasure from the membership of the visible church." (Agenda, 1946:116)

Mindful that synod should "effect no new legislation before the old minutes of synod have been consulted," the Synod of 1946 appointed a committee "to study, in the light of the history of former synodical decisions, the advisability or inadvisability of drawing up a form for the erasure of baptized members." (Acts, 1946:58-59) Acting upon the appointed study committee's recommendations, the Synod of 1948, to which the committee reported, appointed "a committee to draft a form for the excommunication of delinquent members by baptism," on the ground that, because "baptized members are considered to be members of the church, their excommunication is essentially, not substantially, the same as confessing members. If it is edifying to have a form in the case of one, it is also by that very reason true of the other." The Synod of 1948 also asked the appointed committee "to review our current practice of excommunicating disloyal covenant members, and if possible to recommend a more suitable and edifying mode of procedure," noting that "our CO is silent on this score." (Acts, 1948:38)

The study committee appointed by the Synod of 1948 provided the Synod of 1950 with a liturgical formulary (Acts, 1950:240-242) and a new mode of procedure for the exclusion of baptized members, (Acts, 1950:243) both of which adopted "the pattern given to us in the excommunication of confessing members," because "erasure is virtually excommunication."

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advisory committee's report indicates that both overtures contain the same request. (Acts, 1946:58) Only the overture from Classis Grand Rapids West is printed in the Agenda; neither overture was printed in the Acts. Accordingly, one cannot determine if these were identical overtures or if Classis Holland had different grounds for its request and, if so, what they might have been.

The study committee objected to the term “incomplete” members,<sup>67</sup> arguing, with appeal to HC Q&A 74,<sup>68</sup> that “there is no status as an ‘incomplete’ member of the covenant.” (Acts, 1950:239)

The Synod of 1950 recommitted the liturgical formulary to an expanded study committee, “asking them to rewrite it keeping mind... [that] the distinction between erasure and excommunication should be clearly marked.” (Acts, 1950:40) The expanded study committee informed the Synod of 1953, to which it reported, that it was unable to incorporate the distinction between erasure and excommunication into the proposed liturgical formulary, because “its incorporation into a form would tend to make the form too academic and cumbersome.” (Acts, 1953:177)

The study committee also noted that “at present the term ‘erasure’ is employed for the excommunication of delinquent baptized members.” This was “done to give a certain distinction between the excommunication of a non-confessing and a confessing member without defining what that distinction is.” (Acts, 1953:179) But, to the study committee, it was a distinction without a difference.<sup>69</sup> The committee recommended that synod adopt the following distinction between “erasure” and “excommunication:”

1. That the term “erasure” be used in an administrative sense for the removal of a name from the books of the church because of death, excommunication, change of membership, resignation, or departure without a contactual address.
2. That the term “excommunication” be used in a disciplinary sense for the exclusion from the fellowship of the church, the body of Christ, by divine authority invested in the church whether the person excommunicated is a non-confessing or a confessing member. (Acts, 1953:179)

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<sup>67</sup> The study committee appointed by the Synod of 1914 that reported to the Synod of 1918, on which Idzerd Van Dellen served, (Acts, 1914:83) had used this terminology. This terminology is also found in Van Dellen & Monsma’s CO commentaries. (1947:295; 1967:307)

<sup>68</sup> “Q. Should infants, too, be baptized? A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.” (HC Q&A 74)

<sup>69</sup> The committee observed that the distinction was ill-defined in CRCNA history. (Acts, 1953:179) An advisory committee of the Synod of 1918 referred, without explanation, to “erasure” as “less than excommunication.” (Acts, 1918:59) But a study committee reporting to the Synod of 1948 noted that “in past synodical references to erasure of baptized members, very frequently the word excommunication is inserted in brackets,” which “reveals to us that our church has thus committed itself to the position that essentially there is no difference between erasure and excommunication.” (Acts, 1948:131; emphasis original)

With these definitions, “erasure” becomes a broader category, encompassing all removals from the church rolls, regardless of circumstance or reason. Discipline or excommunication is one type of erasure. No distinction is made between the discipline or excommunication of a non-confessing or baptized member and a confessing member.

The advisory committee of the Synod of 1953 rightly accused the study committee of “virtually wiping out the distinction between the erasure of baptized members and the excommunication of communicant members.” The study committee had “even characterized the exclusion of baptized members as being ‘excommunication’ without any qualification.” (Acts, 1953:48-49) The advisory committee judged that this “did not do justice to the mandate the study committee received from the Synod of 1950, namely, ‘that the committee in rewriting the form should keep in mind that the distinction between erasure and excommunication should be clearly marked.’” (Acts, 1953:48; cf. Acts, 1950:40) While “gratefully acknowledging” the work done by the study committee, the Synod of 1953 rejected all of its recommendations and referred the whole matter once more to a new committee. (Acts, 1953:49-50)

The new study committee submitted majority and minority reports to the Synod of 1955. The majority report proposed the term “exclusion” for the exclusion of baptized members, noting that, by its very definition, “excommunication” only applied to professing members who enjoyed “the privileges of full communion with the people of God.”<sup>70</sup> It argued that “the relation of a member who has made confession of faith to the covenant of grace is different from that of a non-confessing member.” “The obligations graciously imposed by God in his covenant are the same in either case,” but “the member having made confession of faith has consciously and publicly assumed the responsibility of the obligations.” The majority report described that assumption as “tantamount to swearing an oath.”<sup>71</sup> (Acts 1955:425-426) While the majority report included a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members, (Acts, 1955:428-429) it did not provide a procedure for the exclusion of baptized members.

The minority report provided neither a liturgical formulary nor a procedure. Noting that “in all their history the Reformed Churches have never had official forms for use in public

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<sup>70</sup> Here the majority report explicitly cites the liturgical formulary for public profession of faith. (See PsH, 1934:86) The majority report concluded: “Of course, Confession of Faith is not a sacrament, but it is intimately related to both sacraments, and its significance should not be minimized.” (Acts, 1950:426) The influence of the adoption of a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith on the church’s understanding of baptism and church membership will be considered in chapter 6.

<sup>71</sup> An earlier study committee, which reported to the Synod of 1948, emphasized the similarity between the two situations, rather than the difference: “We do not hesitate to assert that in our judgment this is the difference essentially - delinquent baptized members have refused to confess Christ, delinquent confessing members have rejected the confession they had made. Both, however, are rejecting Christ.” (Acts, 1948:130)

worship for the exclusion of members by baptism,” it argued that “more careful deliberation should go into the formulation of such a form.” Significant theological questions still needed to be answered. “The doctrine of the covenant which underlies such a form must be clearly understood.” The minority report raised important questions, including: “What is the person being ‘excluded’ from, and what does it mean? What is he being deprived of?” (Acts, 1955:429-430) Unfortunately, because the Synod of 1955 did not act upon the minority report, these questions have never received an official answer in the CRCNA.

A baptized person may be excluded from membership in the visible church, but it was unclear what their exclusion meant. A baptized person could not be deprived of “the privileges of full communion,” (PsH, 1934:86) specifically admission to the Lord’s Supper, if they have not yet received that privilege through a public profession of faith. “Withholding the sacraments” is the HC’s definition of exclusion “from the Christian fellowship.” (HC Q&A 85)

A baptized person cannot be excluded from the covenant. The Dortian baptismal formulary describes the covenant as “eternal,”<sup>72</sup> meaning that it is inviolable.<sup>73</sup> A baptized person can never be un-baptized; one who has been excluded from church membership is not re-baptized when they are restored to church membership.<sup>74</sup>

The Synod of 1955 did not adopt the liturgical formulary proposed in the majority report, judging it “unsatisfactory, not only because of cumbersome expressions, but also because it is impossible for one form to reflect possible variety of cases.” (Acts, 1955:98) Noting that “efforts to produce a satisfactory form have been going on for many years without success,” the advisory committee recommended that “synod seek to determine whether there is a pressing need and real desire for such a form.” Synod tabled that recommendation, and it was never again taken up for discussion by the Synod of 1955 nor any subsequent synod. (Acts, 1955:98)

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<sup>72</sup> “And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God’s mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.” (PsH, 1934:83) The 1976 formulary omitted this assurance. It was restored in the 2013 and 2016 formularies: “Yet, when we fall into sin, we must not despair of God’s mercy, nor continue in sin, for baptism is the sign and seal of God’s eternal covenant of grace with us.” (Agenda, 2013:335; Agenda, 2016:92)

<sup>73</sup> “The promises sealed in baptism cannot be made invalid by the unfaithfulness of God’s child.” (Wielenga, 2016:141) While people may break covenant with God, God never breaks his covenant with people. (See Heyns, 1926:130; Berkhof, 1938:278)

<sup>74</sup> The BC clearly rejects all re-baptism: “We believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it.” (Art. 34) The DCO, (Art. LXXVIII; p. 174) the 1914 CO, (Art. 78; p. 105) and the RCO (Art. 87; p. 141) all require that excommunicated persons be reconciled to the church by means of the approved Formulary for Readmission, which includes a confession of sin and a profession of faith. The RCO, the first CO to include provisions specifically for the discipline of baptized persons, stipulates that such members “who have been excluded from the church and who later repent of their sin shall be received again into the church only upon a public profession of faith.” (Art. 83; p. 140)

Thus ended all efforts in the CRCNA to adopt a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members.

The Synod of 1948 had appointed a study committee not only to draft a liturgical formulary for the exclusion of baptized members, but also “to recommend a more suitable and edifying procedure” for such exclusion, because “our CO is silent on this score.” (Acts, 1948:38) The appointed committee provided the Synod of 1950 with a proposed procedure, patterned on the church orderly procedure for the excommunication of professing members. (Acts, 1950:243) The Synod of 1950 did not act on the proposed procedure. Instead, its decisions focused on the proposed liturgical formulary, which it recommitted to an expanded committee. (Acts, 1950:40) Subsequent study committee reports focused on the proposed liturgical formulary rather than on “more suitable and edifying procedure” for the exclusion of baptized members. Though no study committee recommended a procedure, one was included in the RCO.

The first draft of the RCO, presented to the Synod of 1957, included an article regarding the discipline of baptized members.<sup>75</sup> (Acts, 1957:412-413) The proposed article used the term “erasure,” rather than “excommunication,” for the exclusion of baptized members, but its procedure closely followed the church orderly procedure for the excommunication of professing members.<sup>76</sup> Classis Chatham submitted an overture to the Synod of 1959, which argued that the proposed RCO “contains many inaccuracies and lacks precision in various places,” including its articles on ecclesiastical discipline in which “a clear distinction between discipline respecting confessing members and baptized members is not made.” (Acts, 1959:530-531) The Synod of 1959 referred this overture to the Revision Committee, asking it to re-evaluate its proposed revision. (Acts, 1959:95)

The RCO draft presented to the Synod of 1962 included an article on the discipline of baptized members “who fail to make public profession of faith, or are otherwise delinquent in doctrine or life,” but the article did not specify a procedure for their exclusion from church membership. Instead, it simply said that “the consistory shall deal with [them] in accordance

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<sup>75</sup> In its report to the Synod of 1957, the Revision Committee included this article among “a number of articles in our draft which are new in the sense that they deal with matters which are not covered by our present CO.” (Acts, 1957:400-401)

<sup>76</sup> The article governing the excommunication of professing members (Art. 78) and the article governing the erasure of baptized members (Art. 80) both stipulated similar steps to be taken in each case. The first announcement to the congregation should omit the person’s name. In both cases, a consistory could not proceed with the second announcement, in which the person’s name could be mentioned, without the concurring advice of the classis. (Acts, 1957:412-413)

with the regulations of synod.”<sup>77</sup> (Acts, 1962:425) The consistory of First Rocky Mountain House submitted an overture to the Synod of 1962 objecting to the wording of this article, which suggested that failure to make profession of faith was grounds for ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>78</sup> First Rocky Mountain House judged that members who claim they are not ready to make profession of faith, yet are faithful in church attendance, should not be objects of church discipline for the sole reason that they have not made a public profession of faith.<sup>79</sup> (Acts, 1962:497)

Sympathetic to the overture it received from First Rocky Mountain House, the Synod of 1962 revised the proposed article to refer to “members by baptism who willfully neglect to make public profession of faith,” (Acts, 1962:93; my emphasis) but the revision did not satisfy Classis Alberta North, to which First Rocky Mountain House belonged. The classis submitted an overture to the Synod of 1963 repetitious of the overture that First Rocky Mountain House had submitted to the previous synod. All reference to a neglect or failure to make public profession of faith should be omitted. Instead, the article should refer solely to “members by baptism who are delinquent in doctrine or life.” In the classis’ opinion, even the revised reading implied “that all members by baptism who fail to make profession of faith shall be excluded. We disagree.” (Acts, 1963:439; their emphasis) The Synod of 1963 referred the overture from Classis Alberta North to the Revision Committee, (Acts, 1963:112) which was not sympathetic to the classis’ request. Contra Classis Alberta North’s request, the final draft of the RCO retained the reading adopted by the Synod of 1962.<sup>80</sup> (Acts, 1965:91)

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<sup>77</sup> Given the failure of previous synods to adopt an alternate procedure or a liturgical formulary, these regulations can only refer to the procedure adopted by the Synod of 1894 and affirmed by the Synod of 1918. In their respective explanations of this article of the RCO, both Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:307-308) and Spaan (1968:205) cite the Synod of 1918. The Synod of 1974 amended the procedure. (Acts, 1974:109-110) Englehard & Hofman’s (2001:452) *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* includes the procedure defined by the Synod of 1918 and amended by the Synod of 1974. Inexplicably, Borgdorff’s revisions (2008:297-301; 2015:263-267) say nothing about the discipline of baptized members.

<sup>78</sup> The proposed revision referred to “baptized members who fail to make public profession of faith or are otherwise delinquent in doctrine and life,” (Acts, 1962:425) suggesting that if either one of the two conditions prevailed, a person was worthy of ecclesiastical discipline. The consistory of First Rocky Mountain House preferred the reading, “baptized members who are delinquent in doctrine and life.”

<sup>79</sup> One wonders if First Rocky Mountain House was referring to those still influenced by the *Nadere Reformatie*. Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:308) argue that “those who judge themselves unworthy of profession of faith and the Lord’s Supper ... go beyond the Bible:” “The important thing is not a full and undoubted and constant subjective assurance, but rather sincere repentance of sin and a genuine faith in Christ as the only Lord and Savior, and a complete and unconditional surrender to the Lord.”

<sup>80</sup> “Members by baptism who willfully neglect to make public profession of faith, or are delinquent in doctrine or life, and do not heed the admonitions of the consistory shall be dealt with in accordance with the regulations of Synod and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from the Church of Christ.” (Art. 84a; p. 140)



The Synod of 1991 proposed significant revisions to the fourth section of the CO, which deals with ecclesiastical discipline, “so that the principles are retained in the CO and the procedures are located in the CO supplements.” (Acts, 1991:716) It proposed a single article on ecclesiastical discipline that did not distinguish between baptized members and professing members: “Members who have sinned in life or doctrine shall be faithfully disciplined by the consistory and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from membership in the church of Christ.”<sup>81</sup> (Acts, 1991:717) When the Synod of 1992 ratified this revision, it noted that “no communications have been received asking for reconsideration or proposing any further amendments.” (Acts, 1992:612)

Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry is the ambivalence regarding the status of baptized persons in the church reflected in the CRCNA’s discussion of their discipline. They were baptized on the basis of God’s covenant promises, which grant them membership within the community of believers. But exactly what that membership means, how it might be described, the privileges that come with it - these things remain unclear, resulting in ambiguity about the discipline to which baptized persons are subject. This ambiguity is evident in the debates over nomenclature, whether the exclusion of a baptized person should be described as an excommunication or an erasure, and what, if any, is the difference between those terms. Some of the ambiguity appears to result from a lack of clarity on the spiritual standing of baptized persons, the nature of their covenant holiness. The next section, which deals with the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, addresses that question. The subsequent sections will consider how this ambivalence and different understandings of covenant holiness are reflected in the liturgical formularies for baptism adopted by synods of the CRCNA.

#### 4.2.4 Presumptive Regeneration

When the Synod of 1908 “expressed its agreement with the four Conclusions of the Synod of Utrecht,”<sup>82</sup> (Acts, 1908:41) it gave synodical sanction to a doctrine of presumptive

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<sup>81</sup> That the term “members” includes both baptized and confessing members is clear from the article’s subsequent sub-sections, which deal with the readmission of both “members by baptism who have been excluded from membership” and “confessing members who have been excluded from membership in the church.” (Acts, 1991:717) The article does not explicitly include failure to make public profession of faith a reason for church discipline, nor does it mention the use of liturgical formularies.

<sup>82</sup> The Synod of 1906 had received four overtures, from Classes Grand Rapids West, Hudson, Grand Rapids East, and Iowa, asking synod to express its agreement with the Conclusions of Utrecht. (Agenda, 1906:45-46) After lengthy discussion, it tabled the matter. (Acts, 1906:54) The Synod of 1908 adopted the tabled recommendation to “express its agreement” with the Conclusions, because the doctrinal differences addressed by them “are known

regeneration.<sup>83</sup> The Conclusions came to have “a more prominent, perhaps even a different role [in the CRCNA], than their original adoption by our synod ever intended.”<sup>84</sup> (Acts, 1962:143) Schaver (1947:34-37) presents the Conclusions as a doctrinal deliverance supplementary to the Three Forms of Unity, publishing them in his book of Christian Reformed church polity “only until such time as they find a place in the PsH.”<sup>85</sup> The Synods of 1955 and 1956 granted the Conclusions of Utrecht a binding nature in the CRCNA. The Synod of 1955 included the Conclusions among the church’s “explanatory doctrinal statements,”<sup>86</sup> which it described as “still in force,” (Acts, 1955:43) and the Synod of 1956 informed ministers of the GKN who accepted calls to serve in the CRCNA that “acceptance of the call will be understood to imply a promise to abide by those deliverances in the exercise of the ministerial office in the CRCNA.”<sup>87</sup> (Acts, 1956:38)

The Conclusions of Utrecht were drafted and adopted by the GKN’s Synod of Utrecht (1905). The GKN was born in 1892 of the union of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands

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to our people and create division.” (Acts, 1908:40) The first three Conclusions of Utrecht, regarding supralapsarianism, eternal justification, and immediate regeneration, lie beyond the scope of this dissertation. Only the fourth conclusion, regarding presumptive regeneration, which relates to the sacrament of baptism, is of interest here, particularly as it involved interpretations of the liturgical formulary for baptism.

<sup>83</sup> Berkouwer (1969:180) argues that in the Conclusions of Utrecht “the doctrine of presumptive regeneration was not directly stated,” though the Conclusions certainly “implied it.” Berkouwer (1969:181) rightly notes that the Conclusions’ admission that regeneration may happen before, during, or after baptism “excludes the doctrine that regeneration must absolutely precede baptism.” Of interest here, however, is not whether regeneration precedes baptism in fact, but the Conclusion that “the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promise of God, must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” (All quotation from the Conclusions of Utrecht in this dissertation come from the CRCNA’s official English translation. [Acts, 1943:352-354])

<sup>84</sup> Young (1974:165) argues that the Conclusions of Utrecht gave “confessional or quasi-confessional status to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration in the GKN,” in which they originated. Given that the CRCNA looked to the Netherlands and the GKN for theological leadership, (Kromminga, 1949:56) it is understandable that the Conclusions would come to have a similar status in the CRCNA.

<sup>85</sup> Schaver’s description of the Conclusions as supplementary to, rather than subordinate to, the Forms of Unity and his assumption that they would find a place among the doctrinal standards in the PsH granted the Conclusions a creed-like status. Contra Schaver, neither the Synod of 1908, which first expressed agreement with the Conclusions, (Acts, 1908:41) nor the Synod of 1942, which adopted an official English translation, (Acts, 1942:79) made any decision to publish the Conclusions in the PsH.

<sup>86</sup> Along with the Conclusions of Utrecht, the Synod of 1955 listed the six points adopted by the Synod of 1881 regarding the fourth commandment (Acts, 1881:19) and the three points adopted by the Synod of 1924 regarding the doctrine of common grace. (Acts, 1924:145-147)

<sup>87</sup> Similarly, N. Monsma (1947b:5) described presumptive regeneration as a doctrine to which the CRCNA “subscribes.” He contended that the Form of Subscription does not allow those who do not affirm the doctrine to hold office in the CRCNA.

and the churches of the *Doleantie* of 1886.<sup>88</sup> The union, “preceded by suspicion and difficulties,” “proved to be less than harmonious from the start.”<sup>89</sup> (Beach, 2008:14-15) Doctrinal differences regarding covenant, regeneration, and baptism existed between the two groups. Prior to the Union, the *Afscheiding* Church expressed “an overriding concern against having to pronounce ‘Reformed’ what certain leaders of the *Doleantie* churches ... have taught regarding regeneration and baptism,” (Bouma, 1995:198) especially Abraham Kuyper and his doctrine of presumptive regeneration.

Kuyper (1891:388) argued that “Calvinists have always taught that baptism should be administered on the presumption that regeneration has preceded it.”<sup>90</sup> Though infants cannot express faith, which Kuyper described as the “budding” or “sprouting” of faith, there can be a “seed of faith” or “the faculty of faith” implanted in them, which Kuyper called “regeneration proper.” Kuyper (1891:390) contended that not to assume that God has produced this seed of faith in the children of believers was “a total subversion of the Calvinist view.” “Unless this is assumed there is no authority for baptizing a child;<sup>91</sup> for the seed of faith failing, baptism cannot

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<sup>88</sup> See Bouma (1995) for a comprehensive history of the negotiations between the synods of the *Afscheiding* Church and the *Doleantie* churches that preceded the Union of 1892. Mouw (2006:246) describes those negotiations as “complicated, not the least reason of which was their different views on the relationship between election and covenant.”

<sup>89</sup> Hanko (2000:17) writes: “The marriage, however, was never really successful. The differences in doctrine were too many and too great. In 1905 the synod was almost entirely preoccupied with efforts to arbitrate and, if possible, resolve the differences.”

<sup>90</sup> Kuyper (1891:389-390) cites Calvin (*Institutes*, 4.16.17-20) and several Dutch Reformed theologians. Young (1973:61) contends that Kuyper’s appeals are “far from conclusive.” See Young (1973:62) for a critique of Kuyper’s appeal to Calvin. Regarding the same passages in Calvin, Bavinck (2008a:56n35) acknowledges that “it cannot be said with certainty precisely what the force of these expressions is.” See Young (1974:156-165) for a critique of Kuyper’s appeals to earlier Dutch Reformed theologians, including Voetius. See Bavinck (2008b:62) for his interaction with Voetius’ disputation, which Young (1973:54) describes as “highly controversial.”

While Young (1973:61) also claims that Kuyper’s appeal to the Dutch Reformed standards is “far from conclusive,” he does not interact with those standards. Surprisingly, on the issue of the children of believers who die in infancy, Young (1973:63) only cites the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 10.3, which is not a Dutch Reformed standard. He says nothing about the CD I/17, which is a Dutch Reformed standard and to which Kuyper would have subscribed.

See Venema (2006) for a comprehensive analysis of the Canons of Dort I/17 and a comparison of it with the WCF 10.3. Venema concludes: “A Reformed believer who subscribes to WCF 10.3 might not be prepared to subscribe to Article I/17. For what is expressly affirmed in Article I/17 is not expressly affirmed or necessarily implied in WCF 10.3.”

<sup>91</sup> For Kuyper, “for believing parents to present their covenant child for baptism ... with the assumption that this child, in spite of the divine promise, is dead in sin and under the wrath of God, having no communion with Christ, and no part in the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit ... [was] tantamount to presenting an unbeliever for baptism.” (Beach, 2008:43) It was also contrary to the liturgical formulary for baptism, which speaks of our children as “received unto grace in Christ,” describes them as “heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant,” and asks Christian parents: “Do you acknowledge that our children ... are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of his church ought to be baptized?” (PsH, 1934:83-84)

serve *ad fidem corroborandam*.”<sup>92</sup>

Doctrinal differences between the *Afscheiding* and *Doleantie* did not disappear with the Union of 1892.<sup>93</sup> Rather, as Gleason (2010:190) notes, in the early years of the GKN “Kuyper’s theology would come under closer scrutiny,” causing significant “disagreement and ecclesiastical irritation” within a decade of the union. (Beach, 2008:15) Adjudicating these doctrinal differences, including Kuyper’s theology of baptism, “occupied a great deal of time and attention” at the GKN’s Synod of 1905. (Gleason, 2010:340)

The Conclusions of Utrecht did not condemn Kuyper’s view, but they were not “a straightforward endorsement of Kuyper’s view,” as Mouw erroneously claims. (2006:247) Beach (2008:13) describes the Conclusions as “Bavinckesque in their formulations,” reflecting “the texture and traits of Bavinck’s theology.” Herman Bavinck, a leading theologian of the *Afscheiding* Church, “played an integral role” at the Synod of Utrecht (1905). (Gleason, 2010:338) Bavinck was “a mediating figure,” “a man of synthesis.” (Hoekema, 1962:18)

The Conclusions affirmed that “the seed of the covenant by virtue of the promises of God must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ,<sup>94</sup> until upon growing up they should manifest the contrary in their way of life or in their doctrine,” on which Kuyper and Bavinck agreed. Indeed, “the difference between Kuyper and Bavinck on the issue of assumed regeneration [was] actually small.” (Beach, 2008:63)

Bavinck (2008a:68, 124) affirmed that “in general the children of believers should in accordance with the judgment of charity<sup>95</sup> be regarded as elect and regenerate until from their ‘talk’ or their ‘walk’ the contrary is evident.” Bavinck (2008a:57n36) described this as a doctrinal point “on which Reformed theologians unanimously agree.” “Even in the case of those

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<sup>92</sup> An article in the Yearbook of the *Doleantie* churches presents the same argument. Rev. W.F.A. Winkle wrote: “Baptism presupposed regeneration, for baptism is a sacrament. A sacrament serves to strengthen faith.” Although “there can be no talk of the exercise of faith” on the part of little children, that they are baptized must presume “that they possess the faith-disposition or the faith capacity,” which they cannot have “otherwise than through regeneration.” (in Bouma, 1995:199)

<sup>93</sup> Not all of the *Afscheiding* Church participated in the Union of 1892. Those who did not became the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (CGKN). Plantinga (1995:217) includes presumptive regeneration among the primary doctrinal points of concern on the part of these dissenters from the Union of 1892.

<sup>94</sup> The phrase “sanctified in Christ” comes directly from the Dortian baptismal formulary. (PsH, 1934:84)

<sup>95</sup> Bavinck acknowledges that this judgment of charity “is not an infallible proclamation that establishes the salvation of every baptized person.” (2008a:531) The Synod of Utrecht (1905) came to the same conclusion: “The judgment of charity with which the church regards the seed of the covenant as regenerated does not imply that every child is actually born again, seeing that God’s Word teaches that they are not all Israel that are of Israel, and of Isaac it is said, ‘In him shall thy seed be called.’ (Rom. 9:6-7)” Beach (2008:43) explains: Presumptive regeneration is “not an ontic claim about the regeneration status of a baptized person,” but “a subjective disposition and a kind of epistemological posture.”

who have come of age, we may and must - according to the judgment of charity that must prevail in the church of Christ - believe they are saved if the contrary is not patently evident.” (Bavinck, 2008a:530-531)<sup>96</sup>

But what Bavinck disputed,<sup>97</sup> contra Kuyper, was that presumptive regeneration is a principal ground on which baptism is administered to the children of believers.<sup>98</sup> The Synod of Utrecht concluded that “it is, however, less correct to say that baptism is administered to the children of believers on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is found in the command and the promise of God.”<sup>99</sup>

Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry is the appeal made by the Synod of Utrecht to the liturgical formulary for baptism in its conclusion regarding presumptive regeneration:

Synod in agreement with our confessions maintains that “the sacraments are not empty or meaningless signs, so as to deceive us, but visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by which God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit” (BC Art. 33) and that more particularly baptism is called the “washing of regeneration” and “the washing away of sins” because God would “assure us by this divine pledge and sign that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are outwardly washed by water;”<sup>100</sup> wherefore our church in the prayer after baptism<sup>101</sup> “thanks

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<sup>96</sup> This is not to say that Bavinck was not cautious about presumptive regeneration, though Gleason’s (2010:191) claim that Bavinck wrote “extensively against the tenets of presumptive regeneration” is indefensible. Bavinck (2008b:90-94) did enumerate some potential problems with the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. Yet even as he warned against providing “ready occasion for many to be lost who imagine they are headed to heaven,” he did not abandon the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, arguing that it “need not and should not do that.”

<sup>97</sup> Gleason (2010:265) summarizes Bavinck’s argument: “The doctrine of presumptive regeneration, as the ground for baptism, was most definitely not an improvement over what was taught earlier, namely that the covenant of grace, the promises of God were considered the ground of infant baptism.” Bavinck (2008a:531) writes: “The basis for baptism is not the assumption that someone is regenerate, nor even that [there is] regeneration itself, but only the covenant of God.”

<sup>98</sup> Beach (2008:65) asks: “Was it really Kuyper’s intention to make the baptism of covenant infants rest on the single ground of a human assumption or presumption?” He concludes that it was not. When the GKN Synod of 1896 demonstrated that his writings implied such a teaching, Kuyper “offered a correction and clarification of his views,” which show that he was “very rounded and fulsome in his understanding of the grounds for infant baptism,” including a child’s inclusion in the covenant of grace as the only legal ground for infant baptism. (See also Beach, 2008:52)

<sup>99</sup> Noting that the Synod of Utrecht called this “less correct,” not wrong, Gleason (2010:340) characterizes the synod’s Conclusions as “a kind of ‘pacification formula that was designed to appease both sides of the theological aisle present at the synod and in the Reformed church.” Mouw (2006:247) calls this “a gentle correction to the way the Kuyperians typically talked about the ground for administering baptism.” Beach (2008:66) characterizes this criticism of Kuyper’s doctrine as “restrained.”

<sup>100</sup> This is an unattributed quotation from the BC Art. 34. Beach (2008:44) observes how “in exposing his view of assumed regeneration, Kuyper echoes the language of the BC Art. 34.”

<sup>101</sup> Kuyper (2009:243) described this prayer as “actually beautiful, especially because it includes such a fine confession of the sanctification of covenant children.”

and praises God that he has forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of his beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through his Holy Spirit as members of his only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be his children and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism;” so that our confessional standards<sup>102</sup> clearly teach that the sacrament of baptism signifies and seals the washing away of our sins by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, the justification and the renewal of the Holy Spirit as benefits which God has bestowed upon our seed.<sup>103</sup>

N. Monsma (1952:1093) suggests that the Synod of Utrecht (1905) could have also cited the CD I/17,<sup>104</sup> which Bratt (1961:17) describes as “a corollary” to the Conclusion of Utrecht regarding presumptive regeneration. The Canons “offer a ringing, unqualified affirmation of the confidence believers may have in the election and salvation of [all] their children whom God calls to himself in their infancy.”<sup>105</sup> (Venema, 2006:60) The argument of the Dutch professors at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) that “believers ought to regard their children as elect” since “such children have not broken the conditions of the covenant and would not, accordingly, be subject to God’s judgment on that account,” (Venema, 2006:70-71; Heyns, 1926:129) anticipates the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. “What is true of those who die in infancy is doubtlessly as a rule also true for those who do not die in childhood.” (Monsma, 1948/1949:211)

When the Synod of 1908 expressed agreement with the Conclusions of Utrecht, it did so on the ground that the doctrinal differences addressed by the Conclusions “are known to our people and create division.” (Acts, 1908:40) A later synodical study report, describing developments since 1908, noted: “Although some discussion of these matters continued for a time, after a few years it subsided.” (Acts, 1962:141) Supralapsarianism, which lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, was the issue most discussed (Kromminga, 1949:52-57) and the issue which generated the only protest against the Conclusions of Utrecht received by a subsequent

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<sup>102</sup> The Synod of Utrecht (1905) does not seem to distinguish between the standing of the BC and the liturgical formulary for baptism, referring to both as confessional standards.

<sup>103</sup> Contra the overture of Classis Grand Rapids South to the Synod of 1982, which described baptism as a “forward-looking sacrament,” the Conclusions of Utrecht, echoing in the liturgical formulary for baptism, refers to benefits that have been - past tense, backward-looking - bestowed upon our seed, the recipients of baptism.

<sup>104</sup> “Since we must make judgments about God’s will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.” (CD I/17)

<sup>105</sup> Venema (2006:83) interprets the Canons’ “ought not doubt” as a litotes, a figure of speech in which the negative intends to express the positive. Thus, “ought not doubt” means “must be firmly assured.”

synod, the Synod of 1914.<sup>106</sup> The Synod of 1942 adopted an official English translation of the Conclusions of Utrecht. (Acts, 1942:79)<sup>107</sup>

The doctrine of presumptive regeneration, though “not universally accepted in the church,” (Bratt, 1967:10)<sup>108</sup> became an accepted doctrine in the CRCNA. The doctrine, as articulated in the Conclusions of Utrecht, was affirmed by leading Christian Reformed theologians, including Heyns (1926:210-211) and Berkhof.<sup>109</sup> (1939:639-640) It was popularized in *The Banner* by Hendriksen,<sup>110</sup> (1940:950) N. Monsma, (1952:1093) and Kuiper. (1955:1348-1349) All of these authors cite the Conclusions of Utrecht, referring to them as one of the church’s confessional statements.

The Synod of 1960 received five overtures, from Classes Hamilton, (Acts, 1960:420) Eastern Canada, (Acts, 1960:423) Alberta North, (Acts, 1960:452-453) the Consistories of First, Toronto, (Acts, 1960:449) and Second, Toronto, (Acts, 1960:457) asking that the Conclusions of Utrecht be set aside on the grounds that they are “of such a nature that they are not essential to our doctrinal position” and because they “are an obstacle to closer relationship with certain Reformed churches that subscribe to the same creeds as the CRCNA.”<sup>111</sup> (Acts,

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<sup>106</sup> M. Borduin, an opponent of supralapsarianism, believing that “in the Conclusion of Utrecht, the supralapsarian doctrine of salvation has been taken under protection over against the confession of our church,” expressed a desire “to see that our church would forget about all these Conclusions.” (Acts, 1914:76) The Synod of 1914 denied his appeal on the grounds that “the Conclusions of Utrecht express themselves more carefully than what our brother reads in them.” (Acts, 1914:77) The Conclusions argued, though the confessional standards “follow the infralapsarian position,” it is not their intention to “thereby condemn or exclude the supralapsarian position.” Thus, those who hold a supralapsarian position ought not be molested for their view, but neither may they present their position as the doctrine of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

<sup>107</sup> The original request for an English translation, received by the Synod of 1940 from Classis Sioux Center, noted that “from time to time some of our people openly express disagreement with the theology contained in the Conclusions,” reflecting the influence of the “Baptistic Fundamentalism of our day,” to which the overture referred but did not define. (Acts, 1940:30)

<sup>108</sup> Bratt (1967:11) specifically mentioned Foppe Ten Hoor, who taught at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1900-1924, (Harms, 2004:333) as one who “contested its scripturalness.” Bratt’s own bias against the Conclusions appears in a later article where he (1968:7) writes that “their scriptural foundation is hard to lay down.”

<sup>109</sup> Louis Berkhof taught at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1906-1944. (Harms, 2004:150) Through his *Systematic Theology* (1938), which became a standard seminary textbook, he influenced generations of CRCNA ministers and theologians.

<sup>110</sup> Hendriksen (1940:950) described presumptive regeneration as “definitely the position of Scripture.” He (1940:962) called it “a colossal blunder” to assume that covenant youth in one’s audience are “heathen who need conversion in the sense of a change from unbelief to faith, from Satan to Christ.” “Our children do not need to be converted in the sense in which the heathen need to be converted.” (Hendriksen, 1940:971) Hendriksen taught at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1943-1952. (Harms, 2004:225) Through a popular series of New Testament commentaries that he wrote, his influence extended beyond the classroom.

<sup>111</sup> The overture from the consistory of Second Toronto referred specifically to the Conclusions of Utrecht regarding presumptive regeneration as an obstacle to unity with the Free Christian Reformed Church in Canada, a church planted by immigrants from the CGKN, and the Canadian Reformed Churches, a church planted by immigrants

1960:46) The most recent synod of the GKN, (1959-1960) to which several of the overtures referred, had declared the Conclusions to be no longer binding. In his report to the Synod of 1960, Ralph J. Danhof, the CRCNA's fraternal delegate to the GKN's Synod, noted: "It should be borne in mind, however, that the [GKN] Synod did not say that [the Conclusions of Utrecht] were unscriptural and for that reason were declared no longer binding." (Acts, 1960:412) The Synod of 1960 appointed a study committee to study these overtures, because "an answer to these overtures can only be given after a thorough study of the entire matter." (Acts, 1960:47)

The appointed study committee, reporting to the Synod of 1961, recommended "the synod not accede to the request to set aside the Conclusions of Utrecht," on the grounds that "no grounds have been adduced to show that these conclusions are in conflict with the Word of God or our confessional statements."<sup>112</sup> (Acts, 1961:146) However, the committee, noting that the Conclusions "have been given a more prominent, perhaps even a different role, than their original adoption by our synod ever intended,"<sup>113</sup> (Acts, 1961:143) also recommended "that synod state that these conclusions shall not be used as a test for membership or holding office in the Christian Reformed Church, nor as a test for admitting ministers to the Christian Reformed ministry." (Acts, 1961:146) The Synod of 1961 adopted both recommendations. (Acts, 1961:108)

Classis Toronto submitted an overture to the Synod of 1968, again asking synod to set aside the Conclusions of Utrecht since they had "already lost their binding power" in the decision of the Synod of 1961. (Acts, 1968:55) The overture was endorsed by Classis Alberta North, which, in the light of the decision of the Synod of 1961, characterized the Conclusions as "a dead letter in our church." (Acts, 1968:616) The Synod of 1968 responded by declaring

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from the GKN-*Vrijgemaakt*, a federation of churches established in the Netherlands in 1944 after the GKN deposed Klaas Schilder over doctrinal differences related to the Conclusions of Utrecht and presumptive regeneration. (Acts, 1960:457; See Van Oene [1991] for a history of the Canadian Reformed Churches, including its interactions with the CRCNA.)

<sup>112</sup> In its report, the study committee noted that the Synod of 1908 had simply expressed its "agreement or concurrence" with the Conclusions of Utrecht. The committee argued that "such an action can hardly be reversed by us unless we no longer agree with [them.]" But no such argument had been made. The committee noted: "It is significant that none of the overtures which request that the conclusions be set aside challenges the biblical character of the doctrines they express." The committee asked "whether a church that wants to be true to the Word of God may properly set aside its agreement with a statement of biblical doctrine unless that statement can be shown to be contrary to or unsupported by the Word of God." (Acts, 1961:142)

<sup>113</sup> In its overture to the Synod of 1960, Classis Hamilton had argued that the Conclusions were "originally intended to be no more than an explanatory statement of what was already contained in the Three Forms of Unity." (Acts, 1960:420) Daane (1960:15) describes the Conclusions as "a functional rather than a confessional instrument," intended "not to set down what is true about the matters at issue," but "to declare that finely refined differing theological positions of a highly academic character can and may exist within the same church, and ought not to lead to ecclesiastical separation."



that the Conclusions of Utrecht “no longer have the status of binding doctrinal deliverances” within the CRCNA. (Acts, 1968:62) Contra Bratt’s assertion, (1968:7) the Synod of 1968 did not make this decision “since their scriptural foundation is hard to lay down.” In none of the overtures submitted to the Synods of 1960 or 1968, nor in the study committee’s report to the Synod of 1961, nor in the decisions of the Synods of 1961 and 1968 were any grounds adduced that the Conclusions of Utrecht are in conflict with the Word of God.

The Synod of 1968 set them aside in the CRCNA to “take away an obstacle that hinders the CGKN from entering into a sister-relationship with our church,” and to “facilitate the efforts of synod through its Committee for Contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to unity with these churches.” (Acts, 1968:62) Hopes for developing closer relationships with these Reformed churches were never fully realized, particularly because in setting aside, but not revoking, the Conclusions of Utrecht, the CRCNA did not officially repent of a doctrine of presumptive regeneration,<sup>114</sup> though the liturgical formulary for baptism adopted by the Synod of 1976, to which a subsequent section will attend, reflects movement away from the doctrine in the CRCNA.

### 4.3 The Liturgical Formularies for Baptism

Those who established the CRCNA were “stern Dortians who withdrew [from Classis Holland and the RCA] and formed the CRCNA to maintain their revered religious tradition,” (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:2) the doctrine, polity, and liturgical practices of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). For the first century of its history, the Netherlands Liturgy, adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), including its liturgical formularies for the baptism of infants and for the baptism of adults, was the liturgy of the CRCNA.<sup>115</sup> The Synod of 1976 adopted new liturgical formularies for baptism. Additional formularies were adopted by the Synods of 1994, 2013,

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<sup>114</sup> That the decision of the Synod of 1968 did not fully satisfy the CGKN is evident in their letter to the CRCNA Synod of 1969 asking it “to clarify [its] present stand on the question whether the seed of the covenant must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” In response, the Synod of 1969 referred to the BC Art. 34 and the HC Q&A 74, stating, “We have no binding extra-confessional position in this matter.” (Acts, 1969:75)

<sup>115</sup> The Synod of 1912 adopted the New York Liturgy (1767), with the full text of the prayer that precedes the baptism proper restored, (Acts, 1910:128) as the denomination’s first official English translation. (Acts, 1912:47) The New York Liturgy, originally published by the consistory of the Reformed Church in New York City for use by its own congregation, was adopted by the General Synod of the RCA for use throughout that denomination in 1792 and published as part of that church’s *Constitution* in 1793. (Meeter, 1996:188) See Meeter (1998) for a complete history and analysis of this liturgy.

The Synod of 1934 adopted a new translation, which its advisory committee judged to be “a great improvement,” (Acts, 1934:84-85) based on the version defended by Prof. Rutgers of the Free University of Amsterdam. (De Jong, 1976:20) The CRCNA’s current translations the Dortian baptismal formularies were adopted by the Synod of 1976.

and 2016. This section considers these liturgical formularies and to the church juridical processes by which they were adopted. Because the most significant theological issues concerning baptism in the CRCNA relate specifically to infant baptism, this section will focus primarily on the liturgical formularies for the baptism of infants, before commenting briefly on the liturgical formularies for the baptism of adults.

### 4.3.1 The Dortian Formulary

The Synod of Utrecht (1905) cited the prayer of thanksgiving with which the Dortian formulary ends as evidence that “our confessional standards clearly teach that the sacrament of baptism signifies and seals the washing away of our sins by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, the justification and the renewal of the Holy Spirit as benefits which God has bestowed upon our seed.” That prayer reads:

We thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism. (PsH, 1934:85)

The Synod of 1914 received an appeal from Rev. J. Vander Werp, pastor of Luctor, Kansas, against the decision of Classis Pella “that the consistory of Luctor is not to have any administration of Holy Baptism without the use of the Form in its totality.” At issue was Vander Werp’s refusal to read the prayer of thanksgiving,<sup>116</sup> because he believed that in it “thanks is given for the personal and individual application of regeneration and justification for every baptized child.”<sup>117</sup> (Acts, 1914:77-79) The Synod of 1914 was “convinced that it cannot change this vigorous and fitting expression of our fathers in this form, because the sound covenant doctrine found in this sentence of the prayer of thanksgiving is so resolutely confessed.” (Acts, 1914:81)

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<sup>116</sup> This refusal was not unique in the history of the Dutch Reformed church. In the early eighteenth-century, the “thanksgiving prayer at the end [of the baptismal formulary] was frequently omitted and replaced by a free prayer. Johannes à Marck noted in 1728 that it was rare to hear the thanksgiving prayer read, a phenomenon that J.A. Mensinga rightly attributes to ‘Puritanism,’” that is, the *Nadere Reformatie*. (Gerstner, 1991:137)

<sup>117</sup> “One must assume that many, if not most, uneducated people who heard this sentence assumed their children were regenerated through baptism.” (Gerstner, 1991:56)

Its advisory committee, citing Wielenga,<sup>118</sup> argued that the prayer of thanksgiving “per-tained to the congregation as a whole in its unity.” (Acts, 1914:79) Wielenga (2016:389, emphasis original) notes that while the prayer before baptism refers to “this child,” the child being baptized, the prayer of thanksgiving after baptism refers to “us and our children,”<sup>119</sup> the congregation as a whole, and writes: “It is true that our fathers have taught on the basis of God’s word that the congregation of Christ as a congregation truly and really partakes of this blessing, but the Reformed church has never taught that it would possess this inner rebirth head for head.”<sup>120</sup> Heyns, (1926:207) who served as a theological advisor to the Synod of 1914, offers a similar assessment of the prayer of thanksgiving, describing it as “entirely in agreement with what holy baptism is said to signify and seal” in the formulary’s exposition of baptism, which presents the sacrament as the sign and seal of such a powerful work of God in us that readers may need “to rethink any prejudice they have about a low view of the sacraments in the Reformed tradition.” (Meeter, 2007:56)

The formulary’s exposition claims that “when we are baptized into the name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals unto us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs.” “When we are baptized into the name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.” (PsH, 1934:83)

Wielenga, (2016:99, 106) highlights the formulary’s use of the present tense (makes, adopts, washes), concluding that “it seems crystal clear from all this that holy baptism does not accomplish the washing away of sin or present it as a future possibility. Baptism simply establishes this washing as a fact that has happened and is now guaranteed with the seal of truth.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bastiaan Wielenga was a son of the *Afscheiding van 1834*. His theological instructor and mentor was Herman Bavinck. The first edition of his commentary on the liturgical formulary for baptism was published in 1906 in the wake of the Synod of Utrecht (1905) and its Conclusions regarding presumptive regeneration.

<sup>119</sup> Borduin (1935:115-117) offers a different reading of the prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer thanks God for forgiving “us and our children.” It then speaks only “us” being received by the Holy Spirit, “us” being adopted as God’s children, and these blessings being sealed and confirmed “unto us” by holy baptism. Borduin argues that “the word ‘us’ has reference only to the parents.” Thus, while the prayer thanks God for forgiving our children, it does not thank him for receiving them or adopting them. Borduin’s interpretation was not widely received.

<sup>120</sup> Because “the promises of God are given to the seed of believers collectively, and not individually,” (Berkhof, 1938:288) “the church may never say about a particular child with a firm conviction: this child is born again. They may hope, presume, pray for it, assume it as long as the contrary is not evident, but to ascertain it as a fact and to thank God for this established fact, the congregation can and may not.” (Wielenga, 2016:389)

<sup>121</sup> Thus Monsma (1949/1950:210) describes baptism as “a sign and seal of God’s saving grace in Christ.” It does not merely seal a promise, but the promised thing itself.

(Wielenga, 2016:51) Thus, we may thank God for sealing and confirming unto us and our children by holy baptism reception through the Spirit and adoption as God’s children. However, as Heyns (1926:208) notes, “that these benefits are sealed to us, even though all are not saved, and even though there is no apostasy of the saints, can offer no objection, if we but remember that baptism is the seal of the covenant, and thus seals the benefits of the covenant in the same sense as that in which the covenant grants them”: collectively, not individually.

Borduin<sup>122</sup> notes the formulary’s use of the future tense to describe the Spirit’s work: “When we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ.”<sup>123</sup> (PsH, 1934:83) Borduin (1935:33-34) writes: “For this reason it is that our form does not only make use of the present tense, but also of the future tense, in order that we may know that in baptism God seals to us a promise on condition of active faith, by which we appropriate the proffered grace.”<sup>124</sup> Contra Borduin, Wielenga (2016:84, 106, emphasis original) argues that “those who say baptism seals only the promises impoverish baptism.” The idea that baptism is “a sealing of God’s promise only,” is “entirely contrary to God’s word.” It is also contrary to the Dortian liturgical formulary for baptism.

According to the Dortian formulary, baptism seals to us something God has already done. This is especially evident in the first question asked of parents: “Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, yea, to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of his church ought to be baptized?”<sup>125</sup> (PsH, 1934:84) Baptism does not make children members of the

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<sup>122</sup> An 1896 graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, Menno Borduin served as a minister in the CRCNA from 1896-1934. (Harms, 2004:158) His commentary on the Dortian baptismal formulary offers a significantly different understanding of baptism than does Wielenga’s influential commentary. Borduin anticipates the understanding of baptism to which the CRCNA would move.

<sup>123</sup> Wielenga, (2016:106) who sees more certainty in the future tense than Borduin does, writes: “We may not conjure up a meaning in our form that presents the work of the Spirit as weaker or less sure than that of the Father and the Son. Not a possible future but a delightful present, not a perhaps in the future but a blessed present is meant.” Monsma (1947/1948:214) concurs: “This is a positive declaration. It tells us what the Spirit is going to do. The Holy Spirit assures unto us definite certainties. He does not testify to us regarding things problematic or uncertain.”

<sup>124</sup> Borduin (1935:33) argues that “if our form had made use only of the present tense, there would have been room left for the opinion that what God seals to us is more a declaration of what God does than a promise on condition of faith.”

<sup>125</sup> Most of the Netherlands Liturgy is a “nearly verbatim translation” of the Palatinate liturgy, except “the questioning of those presenting children for baptism” which has been “changed dramatically [by Datheen] by making use of questions similar to those used by à Lasco.” (Gerstner, 1991:52; see Wielenga, 2016:265-265 for the questions used by à Lasco.) There is agreement between the questions of Datheen and those of à Lasco, but it is “not

church; they already are members of the church and, for that reason, ought to be baptized. Similarly, children are not sanctified in Christ by baptism; before the child is baptized, the parents are asked if they acknowledge that their children are already sanctified in Christ.<sup>126</sup> The formulary's exposition explains: Covenant children "are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received unto grace in Christ."<sup>127</sup> (PsH, 1934:83)

"No part of the form has given so much occasion for disputes as the first baptismal question," (Wielenga, 2016:264-265) specifically the phrase "sanctified in Christ." van Londenstein, a leader of the *Nadere Reformatie*, led opposition to the first question in the seventeenth-century. (Gerstner, 1991:136; Kromminga, 1943:59) He and those who shared his opinion replaced the question with variations that acknowledged that "some children are sanctified" or that our children "can be sanctified," "perhaps are sanctified," or "ought to be sanctified."<sup>128</sup> (Wielenga, 2016:305)

As Gerstner (1991:5) explains: Reformed theologians "all agreed that in the light of the explicit testimony of 1 Corinthians 7:14 the children of believers are 'holy.'<sup>129</sup> The question was what this covenant holiness meant." Gerstner (1991:5-10) identifies three views of covenant holiness among Reformed thinkers: internal holiness,<sup>130</sup> external holiness,<sup>131</sup> and seminal

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at all literal," leading Wielenga (2016:266) to conclude "that the work of Datheen may rightfully be called original."

<sup>126</sup> "The child is already included in the covenant of grace from the time of his birth." (Wielenga, 2016:31) "They are not children of the covenant because they are baptized, but they are baptized because they are children of the covenant." (Kuiper, 1932:557)

<sup>127</sup> "This extremely strong statement was added by Caspar van der Heyden, composer of the shorter Dutch form. It is without precedent in the German original, or in the longer Dutch form." (Gerstner, 1991:52)

<sup>128</sup> "In 1727 four ministers of Utrecht had to be admonished to use these questions as prescribed." (Kromminga, 1943:62)

<sup>129</sup> "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." (1 Corinthians 7:14) Wielenga (2016:311-312) and Bavinck dispute that the phrase "sanctified in Christ" in the baptismal formulary is an allusion to this verse. (Beach, 2016:49) Wielenga notes that 1 Corinthians 7:14 refers to a person being sanctified through their spouse, not in Christ; the phrase "sanctified in Christ" appears in 1 Corinthians 1:2. Bavinck appeals to John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 2:11; and Hebrews 10:10 to define "sanctified in Christ." (Beach, 2016:50)

<sup>130</sup> The internal holiness view held that covenant children had already experienced the blessings of regeneration and sanctification before baptism.

<sup>131</sup> The external holiness view held that covenant children are set apart by baptism "in a special sphere in which they were most likely to be regenerate by the means of grace." (Gerstner, 1991:8)

holiness.<sup>132</sup> The Dortian formulary and the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes, especially CD I/17, reflect the internal holiness view. (Gerstner, 1991:10-29; Venema, 2000:46-50, 61-64) This was how the phrase “sanctified in Christ” was interpreted in the early history of the Dutch Reformed Church (Gerstner, 1991:56) and how it was interpreted by influential voices in the CRCNA, including Wielenga,<sup>133</sup> Bavinck,<sup>134</sup> Berkhof,<sup>135</sup> and Monsma,<sup>136</sup> albeit with the usual caveat that “the children of believers in general are sanctified in Christ.” The general statement “may not be particularized.”<sup>137</sup> (Berkhof, 1939:869)

The Palatinate liturgy concluded with an exhortation to the parents after the baptismal act “as a response to baptism and not as a condition” for it.<sup>138</sup> (Meeter, 2007:65) Datheen revised this exhortation, making it a question and adding it to those asked before the baptismal act: “Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, when they come to the years of

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<sup>132</sup> The seminal holiness view held that covenant children “are not yet internally holy in the full sense, nor are they totally devoid of internal holiness. God has planted in the elect the seed of regeneration, usually in the womb.” (Gerstner, 1991:9) Gerstner (1991:10) notes that “most of the defenders of seminal holiness in the Dutch Reformed tradition used seminal holiness as a way of explaining internal holiness.”

<sup>133</sup> “There is no need to doubt for a moment the true sense of the word ‘sanctified.’ In connection with the whole structure of the form, it cannot have meant anything other than real, internal, subjective holiness.” “After good, sound, precise historical research, they conclude that our fathers, in the preparation of the form, had not thought of anything other than real, internal holiness.” “We may safely conclude that ‘sanctified’ in the first baptismal question was understood and intended by the compilers in a real, internal sense.” (Wielenga, 2016:304-305, 319) The Synod of 1914 cited Wielenga in its response to Vander Werp’s appeal. He is also cited approvingly by Berkhof and Monsma.

<sup>134</sup> Bavinck, who “played a significant role in shaping the theological thinking of the CRCNA,” (Hoekema, 1962:18) argued that “the spirit and the letter of the Form for Baptism excludes the notion of merely objective, external sort of covenant membership. Christian baptism, as much for children as for adults, always signifies and seals the washing away of sins and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” (Beach, 2016:50; see Bavinck, 2008a:525-532)

<sup>135</sup> Berkhof (1939:869) argued that “the confession that our children are sanctified in Christ forms an antithesis to the confession that they are conceived and born in sin.” Thus, it must mean that they “are regenerated and have received the Spirit of sanctification.” The same argument was made by Wielenga (2016:313) and Mensinga, “the classic historian of the Dutch Reformed liturgy.” (Hageman, 1973:114; Gerstner, 1991:53)

<sup>136</sup> In a lengthy series of articles on the baptismal formulary in the *Federation Messenger*, a publication of the Federation of Christian Reformed Men’s Societies, Monsma (1949/1950:61) wrote: “I am convinced that the form here refers to sanctification in Christ in its full, inward, subjective sense.” Because covenant children are “received unto grace in Christ,” Monsma (1948/1949:211) claims that baptism assures Christian parents, “You and your children - marvelous, unbelievable truth - have been cleansed from the leprosy of sin. You and your babe are forgiven! You and your babe are saved!”

<sup>137</sup> Similarly, Wielenga (2016:323) writes: “The church does not ask its members to confess that all her children are sanctified in Christ, nor even that these (about to be baptized) children are regenerated, but that our children are sanctified in Christ. One senses the difference. Without judging a specific case about the internal condition of the people (something the church may not do), she expresses her confession in general that God has cleansed the seed of his church by the blood of Jesus.” Monsma (1949/1950:60) quotes Wielenga approvingly.

<sup>138</sup> “Baptism demands such instruction, and presenting a child for baptism obliges one to assume that responsibility for it.” (Heyns, 1926:212)

discretion,<sup>139</sup> in the aforesaid doctrine,<sup>140</sup> and cause them to be instructed therein,<sup>141</sup> to the utmost of your power?" (PsH, 1934:84) Wielenga (2016:266) writes, "It is difficult to deny that without such questions baptism would be quite conceivable and permissible," because baptism is based on God's promises, not the parents'. But by placing the question before the baptismal act, Datheen gave it "a different force." (Meeter, 1998:223)

In the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1976 and 1994, that different force is more pronounced. The 1976 and 1994 formularies are devoid of the controversial language appealed to in defense of a doctrine of presumptive regeneration. They reflect an external holiness view of covenant holiness. In them the parental promises are more prominent - all of which reflect a significant shift in the denomination's understanding of baptism. Nelesen (2003:24-25) wonders if this has not led to an erosion at the font<sup>142</sup> in the CRCNA in which people see little

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<sup>139</sup> Classis Sioux Center, convinced that the phrase "years of discretion" was an inaccurate translation of the Dutch text, submitted an overture to the Synod of 1940, asking that the formulary be revised to read "as soon as they are able to understand." The Synod of 1940 adopted the proposed revision. (Acts, 1940:30; see PsH, 1959:86)

<sup>140</sup> While some commentators, such as Monsma (1949/1950:120) interpret "aforesaid doctrine" to refer to the doctrine of baptism explicated in the formulary, it more naturally refers to the immediately prior question, which asks about "the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church." (PsH, 1934:84)

<sup>141</sup> "To cause them to be instructed" refers to instruction by others, which Monsma (1949/ 1950:120) interprets to include "ministers, elders, school-teachers, etc." Wielenga (2016:362) argues for a strong connection between these words and Christian day school education. The absence of any reference to instruction by third parties in the formulary adopted by the Synod of 1976 was highly controversial.

<sup>142</sup> As professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, Henry De Moor's advice was frequently sought by congregations. In a 1994 article titled *Erosion at the Font*, De Moor reflects on requests for advice on how a consistory might respond appropriately to parents who request infant dedication in lieu of infant baptism. According to De Moor (1994:168) the issue "has not commanded as much attention as it should." It would not be on the synodical agenda until 2007 when Classis Alberta North asked synod "to appoint a study committee to study the growing practice of infant dedication in our churches . . . and to provide guidance to the churches in these matters." (Agenda, 2007:437) For the background to this overture, including evidence that infant dedication was practiced in some CRCNA congregations, see Van Harmelen (2007:10).

The Synod of 2007 "affirmed the church's commitment to the practice of covenant baptism," on the grounds that infant baptism is "the normative practice prescribed by the Reformed confessions (HC Q&A 74; BC Art. 34) and the CO (Art. 56)." It "strongly discouraged the practice of infant dedication," and asked the newly appointed Faith Formation Committee (FFC) to "provide biblical and pastoral guidance for councils who are conversing with members who are requesting infant dedication in place of infant baptism." (Acts, 2007:659)

The FFC presented a preliminary report to the Synod of 2011, (Agenda, 2011:612-621; for the committee's final report, see Agenda, 2012:612-621) in which it noted that "while there has never been an explicit prohibition in the confessions or CO against infant dedication, it was always understood as a practical denial of infant baptism." The committee expressed gratitude for and agreement with "synod's prior decision to discourage infant dedication ceremonies." On the basis of the committee's report, the Synod of 2011 advised pastors to "refrain from leading rituals of infant or child dedication," on the grounds that "infant dedication is not consistent with the Reformed confessions" and that "a ritual of infant or child dedication could easily create confusion about the meaning and purpose of the sacrament of baptism." (Acts, 2011:831) The Synod of 2012 affirmed this advice. (Acts, 2012:774-775)

Despite these synodical decisions, the practice of infant dedication has persisted in some congregations of the CRCNA. In 2014, *The Banner* reported on a recent meeting of Classis British Columbia South-East where "it was

difference between infant dedication and infant baptism.<sup>143</sup>

### 4.3.2 The 1976 Formulary

The new liturgical formulary adopted by the Synod of 1976 reflects and reinforces a significant shift in the denomination's understanding of baptism. That it did not cause this shift is evident from the overtures submitted to the Synod of 1964.<sup>144</sup> Classis Lake Erie asked the Synod of 1964 to "appoint a Liturgical Committee to consider a possible revision of, or the preparation of a new form for infant baptism." Among the grounds for this request, the classis noted that "the present form makes no mention of the congregation's responsibility concerning the spiritual nurture of the child baptized" and that "in the present form there is an insufficient response from both the parents and the congregation." (Acts, 1964:482) In its request for "a committee to revise the form for baptism," Classis Grand Rapids South argued that "the closing prayer seems to be based on a concept of baptismal regeneration not officially adopted by the church." (Acts, 1964:444)

The Synod of 1964 appointed "a liturgical committee to review all our liturgical literature in the light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the churches; and to recommend such revisions or substitutions as the results of this review might recommend." (Acts, 1964:60) The overtures received from Classes Lake Erie and Grand Rapids South were "referred to the Liturgical Committee for study." (Acts, 1964:62)

Impatient for a revised baptismal formulary, Classis Alberta South submitted an overture to the Synod of 1965, asking it to "direct its Liturgical Committee to undertake the revision of the form for infant baptism, or if revision would not lead to the desired end of achieving a contemporary and liturgically acceptable formulary, the preparation of a new form within the next two years." The classis argued that "dissatisfaction with the present form ... continues to

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noted that several congregations are offering infant dedication, contrary to Christian Reformed Church polity." (Yan, 2014:12) In 2018, 17% of CRCNA congregations said that they would dedicate children instead of baptizing them, if requested by the parents. (<https://network.crcna.org/worship/crc-worship-survey-results-0> [accessed on 16 April 2019])

<sup>143</sup> "The 'typical' way of administering baptism - where parents make vows just prior to the baptism of their children - fails to provide clear answers to these questions: What is going on? Who is most important?" (Nelesen, 2003:24)

<sup>144</sup> The Synod of 1963 received an overture from Classis Kalamazoo asking it "to consider making revisions to the baptismal form of the CRCNA," because "several of the phrases in the present forms are archaic, and their intended meaning for the listening audience is not clear." (Acts, 1963:430) Synod denied the request because the overture did not sufficiently specify what revisions the classis desired, nor which expressions in the present formulary could be characterized as archaic or perplexing. (Acts, 1963:80)



be widespread and serious.” (Acts, 1965:444) The Synod of 1965 declined to so direct the Liturgical Committee, noting that this work had already been assigned to the committee in its mandate to review all of our liturgical literature. In the judgment of synod, the classis had “not demonstrated the need for haste.” (Acts, 1965:25)

Three years later, in its report to the Synod of 1968, the Liturgical Committee noted that it had “now turned its attention to the baptismal service and confidently anticipates presenting a report embodying orders for the baptismal service to the Synod of 1969,” (Acts, 1968:134) which the committee did, presenting to the Synod of 1969 “not a revision, but an entirely new form.”<sup>145</sup> (Acts, 1969:334)

Particularly noteworthy in the new formulary is the section titled The Vows,<sup>146</sup> which “contains a recasting of the traditional vows and a fuller response on the part of the parents”<sup>147</sup> and the addition of “vows to be assumed by the assembly of God’s people.”<sup>148</sup> (Acts, 1969:335) The formulary’s concluding prayer was also revised to refer “quite directly to the vows taken by the parents and the congregation.” (Acts, 1969:336) The controversial sentence to which the Synod of Utrecht (1905) appealed in its conclusion regarding presumptive regeneration was omitted.

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<sup>145</sup> The possibility of an entirely new formulary was raised by Classes Lake Erie (Acts, 1964:482) and Alberta South. (Acts, 1965:444) The committee’s mandate, “to recommend such revisions or substitutions as the results of this review might recommend,” (Acts, 1964:60, my emphasis) allowed for it. Although the committee assembled “a large amount of liturgical material from the GKN, the RCA, and other denominations in the generic Reformed tradition,” as its report to the Synod of 1966 notes, (Acts, 1966:262) and the Synod of 1966 empowered it “to confer with the Liturgical Committee of the RCA in order to explore common concerns and share the fruit of their current work,” (Acts, 1966:66) the new formulary appears to be largely of the committee’s own creation.

<sup>146</sup> In the Dortian formulary this section was titled “Address to the Parents.” Meeter (1998:223n13) is adamant that this address “should not be thought of as any kind of vow:” “To call these questions ‘vows’ suggests that the validity of the sacrament is more or less conditioned by the intentionality of the parents.” Meeter (2007:59) describes that as “a kind of semi-Pelagianism that would have been intolerable to the church that wrote the Canons of Dort.”

Olds (1992:201) contends that “in the Reformed baptismal rites [of the sixteenth-century] the vows made by parents or godparents or other members of the family are not really understood to be actual baptismal vows. It is only the vows of the one baptized, professing his or her own Christian faith, which are regarded as the real baptismal vows,” even when “the making of vows is postponed until the child is old enough to understand the instruction, and to make vows on the basis of that instruction.” (Olds, 1992:285)

<sup>147</sup> This “recasting of the traditional vows” omitted the first question of the Dortian formulary and its acknowledgment that covenant children are “sanctified in Christ.” In the Dortian formulary, parents responded with a simple, “yes.” The Synod of 1934 revised this to read, “We do.” (Monsma, 1949/1950:148) The fuller response proposed by the Liturgical Committee added the words “with all our heart,” (Acts, 1969:338) which was changed to “God helping us” in the formularies proposed to the Synods of 1971 (Acts, 1971:42) and 1976. (Acts, 1976:347)

<sup>148</sup> John Vriend, (1970c:7) a member of the Liturgical Committee, explained: “The congregation itself, and not the parents alone, assume responsibility for the Christian nurture of the children. This is a typical Reformed feature in the life of the church. In the past we gave too little attention to it and lacked for it the opportunity for ritual expression.” See Greidanus (1979) for a comprehensive explanation of this vow.

The Liturgical Committee recommended that the Synod of 1969 “receive this proposed Form for the baptism of children and permit its use in our churches on a trial basis,” but synod did not. (Acts, 1969:339) Instead, it “recommitted the proposed form” to the Liturgical Committee, on the grounds that “the church at large has not had sufficient time to study this new form.” The Liturgical Committee would solicit reactions and report accordingly to the Synod of 1971. (Acts, 1969:87)

At the Liturgical Committee’s request, (Acts, 1970:218) John Vriend, the committee’s corresponding secretary, wrote three articles for *The Banner* introducing the proposed liturgical formulary to the church at large “to stimulate much-needed discussion and to elicit some responses for the further education of the Liturgical Committee.” (Vriend, 1970a:4) Vriend (1970a:5) acknowledged: “There is not a man on the Liturgical Committee who does not believe that the proposed form could stand improvement.” He (1970b:10) informed readers that “a few examples of how a revised and improved version ... might read would be most welcome.”

The Liturgical Committee received over 150 responses to the proposed formulary, (Acts, 1971:518) which informed the revisions it presented to the Synod of 1971. Especially noteworthy among the revisions were changes made to the questions asked of parents who present their children for baptism. A second question, “in which the parents indicate their conviction that their child ought to be baptized” was added. (Acts, 1971:523) While similar to the first question asked in the Dortian formulary, the question does not describe the children of believers as “sanctified in Christ,” which is more amenable to the internal holiness view of covenant holiness, but as “a member of [God’s] family,”<sup>149</sup> (Acts, 1971:521) which reflects the external holiness view of covenant holiness.

The committee also “strengthened the force of what is now the third vow” in which parents were asked to “instruct this child in the Christian faith and lead him by your example into the life of Christian discipleship” by adding the words “to do all in your power,” which the Dortian formulary had included. (Acts, 1971:523) As in the Dortian formulary this question and the new congregational vow immediately precede the act of baptism. A shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism is evident in that fact that the omission of reference to instruction by third parties from this question, not the omission of those parts of the Dortian

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<sup>149</sup> The Synod of 1976, which adopted the proposed formulary for permanent use, substituted the word “covenant” for “family.” (Acts, 1976:89)

formulary that most reflected a doctrine of presumptive regeneration, was the most controversial part of the proposed formulary. What appeared to be most important, because it was most controversial, was not the action of God sealed in baptism, but the promises of the parents.

The Dortian formulary asked parents, not only to instruct their children, but also to “cause them to be instructed.” The new formulary omitted this reference to instruction by third parties, which some interpreted as including a commitment to send one’s child to a Christian day school.<sup>150</sup> (Schultze, 1935:1067; Monsma, 1949/1950:120; Wielenga, 2016:362) The Consistory of Dutton included this omission as a reason for the Synod of 1971 not to adopt the proposed form,<sup>151</sup> as did Classis Grandville in its overture to the Synod of 1976, which asked that synod not adopt the proposed formulary for permanent use.<sup>152</sup> The consistory of Williamsburg also questioned it in a letter to the editor of *The Banner*.<sup>153</sup> The Synod of 1971 permitted the use of the proposed formulary “on a trial basis for three years with a view to eventual adoption by synod.”<sup>154</sup> (Acts, 1971:40)

Although the Liturgical Committee was mandated “to recommend revisions or substitutions” to the church’s liturgical literature, it did not present its proposed formulary as a substitution for the Dortian formulary. In its reports to the Synods of 1970 and 1971, it emphasized: “The new form is not proposed to replace the old one, but it is to be an alternative form.” (Acts,

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<sup>150</sup> Schultze (1935:1067) had argued that “although the baptismal pledge does not obligate the parents, in any direct sense, to send their children to the Christian schools and to support such schools, it may well be argued indirectly, by way of implication, loyalty to the pledge given at the baptism of their children requires of Christian parents, that they send them to Christian schools and support these.” This argument was now advanced in a *Banner* editorial by John Vander Ploeg (1970a:8-9), to which Nicholas Wolterstorff (1970:20), a member of the Liturgical Committee, responded. See Vander Ploeg (1970c:8-9) for his response to Wolterstorff’s response.

In his articles introducing the proposed formulary, John Vriend (1970c:7) argued that “before 1800 it was understood that the phrase served to acknowledge the presence of baptismal sponsors. ... Until the nineteenth century and the rise of separate Christian schools, the phrase was not associated with the obligation to seek a Christian school training for covenant children.” Johanna Timmer (1974:14) called it “a significant omission that touches the whole matter of Christian education.”

<sup>151</sup> “The covenant responsibility of Christian parents to see that their children receive a Christian education does not get the degree of emphasis that it did in the old form since the promise to ‘cause them to be instructed therein’ is rather pointedly omitted.” (Acts, 1971:662)

<sup>152</sup> The third question asked of parents “weakens the emphasis on Christian education by failing to add something similar to what we read in the old form, ‘and cause them to be instructed therein.’” (Acts, 1976:676)

<sup>153</sup> “Is it wise to omit the obligation of Christian parents with respect to catechetical instruction and the choice of a day school?” (Consistory of Williamsburg, 1975:25)

<sup>154</sup> The Synod of 1974 adopted a recommendation of the Liturgical Committee to delay final approval of the new baptismal formulary until the Synod of 1976, because the Supplement to the PsH, in which the Synod of 1973 had decided to publish the formulary, was not generally available until the spring of 1974. (Acts, 1974:22, 352)

1970:218) “We are not recommending that synod abandon the present form. Nor do we recommend that synod oblige any congregation to use the form we propose.” (Acts, 1971:521-522) In fact, the committee also prepared a new translation of the Dortian formulary.<sup>155</sup>

The Liturgical Committee received more than 140 communications regarding the proposed formularies approved for use on a trial basis.<sup>156</sup> The formulary for the baptism of infants that it presented to the Synod of 1976, which that synod adopted for permanent use in the CRCNA, (Acts, 1976:89) was not significantly different from the formulary adopted for use on a trial basis by the Synod of 1971.<sup>157</sup> Covenant children are no longer “sanctified in Christ,” but “members of God’s covenant,” implying an external holiness view of covenant holiness. The parental promises and the promise elicited from the congregation still immediately precede the baptism.

In the prayer with which the formulary concludes, the controversial statement to which the Synod of Utrecht (1905) appealed in its conclusion regarding presumptive regeneration was not completely eliminated, but, significantly, its verbs have been changed from the past tense to the future tense. Whereas the Dortian formulary prayed: “Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins ... and received us through the Holy Spirit as members ... and so adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism,” (PsH, 1934:85, my emphasis) the 1976 formulary prays: “We thank you for reassuring us again that you will forgive us and receive us as children in Christ.” (Acts, 1976:347, my emphasis)

Unlike the prayer of thanksgiving in the Dortian formulary, which focused on the acts of God sealed and confirmed in baptism, the new baptismal prayer “invokes the blessing and

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<sup>155</sup> The Liturgical Committee presented its new translation of the Dortian formulary as “not a new form but a translation of the old one.” It believed that a comparison with the language of the form published in the PsH (1959) would make it clear “that the updated form is not a substitute, or new, or revised form, but a translation.” (Acts, 1973:503) Not all were convinced. In overtures to the Synods of 1975 and 1976, the consistory of First Highland characterized the translation as “true to neither the letter nor to the spirit of the present form,” (Acts, 1975:664) and the consistory of Escalon characterized it as “a paraphrase rather than an accurate translation.” (Acts, 1976:628) Over these objections, the Synod of 1973 approved the new translation for provisional use, (Acts, 1973:43) and the Synod of 1976 approved it for permanent use. (Acts, 1976:89) See De Jong (1976) for an explanation of the committee’s translation philosophy and a response to the objections of the consistories of First Highland and Escalon.

<sup>156</sup> In addition to the new formulary for infant baptism, these formularies included a new translation of the Dortian formulary for infant baptism, approved for provisional use by the Synod of 1973; (Acts, 1973:43) a new formulary for the baptism of adults, approved for provisional use by the Synod of 1971; (Acts, 1971:40) and a new formulary for public profession of faith, approved for provisional use by the Synod of 1972. (Acts, 1972:43)

<sup>157</sup> In light of the discussion above regarding the final question asked of parents, it is worth noting that while the words “cause them to be instructed therein” remained absent, the third question now asked parents if they would instruct their children “with the help of the Christian community.” (Acts, 1976:347)

guidance of God upon all who were involved in the sacrament.” It focuses, not on the promises of God, but on the “vows just made” by the parents and the congregation. Rather than presume that the person baptized has received the seed of faith, it asks God to “enable them to respond in faith to the gospel,” and rather than presume that the baptized person has received the Holy Spirit, it asks God to “fill them with your Spirit.”<sup>158</sup> (Acts, 1976:347-348) Such language reflects a significant shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism away from a doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view of covenant holiness. The liturgical formularies adopted by the Synod of 1994 also reflect this shift in understanding, albeit not as sharply as the 1976 formulary does.

### 4.3.3 The 1994 Formulary

Classis Georgetown submitted an overture to the Synod of 1991, asking synod to “provide liturgical forms for baptism and the Lord’s Supper that are shorter than the present forms and more contemporary in language.” (Agenda, 1991:512) Classis Central California, in its own overture to the Synod of 1991, concurred with Classis Georgetown, writing: “Many churches find the current forms for the sacraments too didactic and desire shorter, more celebrate forms.”<sup>159</sup> (Agenda, 1991:513) Synod instructed the Worship Committee “to write shorter, more flexible sacramental forms to meet more effectively the increasingly diverse climate of worship.”<sup>160</sup> (Acts, 1991:706)

The Worship Committee, via the denominational Board of Trustees, presented new liturgical formularies to the Synod of 1993,<sup>161</sup> with a recommendation that synod “approve the

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<sup>158</sup> The Dortian formulary did not ask that the baptized person would be filled with the Holy Spirit, but that they would be “governed by the Holy Spirit,” who was assumed to have been already given to them that they might “grow and increase” in the faith they were presumed to already have. “It does not say convert or regenerate but govern the child.” (Wielenga, 2016:399, emphasis original) Monsma (1949/1950:211, my emphasis) speaks of “the further work of the Holy Spirit upon the baptized children,” beyond the work - regeneration proper or the implantation of the seed of faith - that is presumed to have already happened.

<sup>159</sup> Classis Georgetown argued that “the present forms, because of their length, tend to render the sacrament itself an anticlimax following the overly long explanatory sections.” (Agenda, 1991:512)

<sup>160</sup> Although synod left the “diverse climate of worship” undefined, the grounds for its decision suggest primarily linguistic diversity, particularly those for whom English was not their first language: “The increasing diversity of people in our denomination, for which we are thankful, would be better served by forms that are shorter and written in crisper, simpler English.” (Acts, 1991:707)

<sup>161</sup> When the Liturgical Committee became a standing committee of the Board of Publications in 1985 it was renamed the Worship Committee. The denominational Board of Trustees, formerly known as the Synodical Interim Committee, was responsible to gather the reports of denominational ministries, including the Board of Publications, and present them to synod as a unified ministries report.

forms for use in the churches.”<sup>162</sup> (Agenda, 1993:69) The committee presented a single formulary for baptism that was adaptable for the baptism of infants and for “the baptism of older children or adults.” (Agenda, 1993:80-88) The committee reviewed the baptismal formularies of several major denominations and “chose to include such traditional elements as a prayer of thanksgiving<sup>163</sup> and the renunciation of evil (in the case of adult baptism).” It also shortened the form, “especially the segment formerly called, ‘The Meaning of Baptism,’ which was a long didactic sentence in the older Reformed forms.” (Agenda, 1993:80) This section of the form the committee titled God’s Covenant Promises, offering four alternatives from which to choose.<sup>164</sup>

In light of the Synod of 1991’s encouragement that churches “adapt as needed all denominational liturgical forms for the spiritual nurture of their people,” the Worship Committee also proposed to the Synod of 1993 a set of guidelines for such adaptations: “Even when liturgical freedom is exercised, certain essential words and elements should always be included:

- a. The scriptural words of institution.<sup>165</sup>
- b. A confession about the meaning of baptism (entitled “God’s Covenant Promises” in the form).
- c. The baptismal promises (personal confession of faith and vows,<sup>166</sup> communal recitation of the Apostles’ Creed).<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Because the recommendation does not specify that this approved use would be provisional, one assumes that the board was recommending immediate approval for permanent use within the denomination.

<sup>163</sup> The prayer of thanksgiving, which replaced the prayer that precedes baptism, retained its references to the Old Testament stories of Noah and the Red Sea, but with additional opening words thanking God “for our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection,” not specifically the gift of water and the gift of baptism, as the prayers of thanksgiving found in the 2013 and 2016 formularies would.

<sup>164</sup> Each of the alternatives could be used for either the baptism of an infant or the baptism of an adult. The first and fourth options included a defense of infant baptism that should be included when baptism is administered to an infant.

<sup>165</sup> Significantly the Dortian formulary did not include the words of institution. Wielenga (2016:23) offers one possible explanation: “The Lord’s words here (Matt. 28:19-20) pertain particularly to mission. ... Our baptism of infants is a consequence and a continuation of the baptism of the heathen. ... Yet among God’s people, the administration of baptism to the children of believers carries a somewhat different character.”

<sup>166</sup> Datheen reworded the Palatinate liturgy’s concluding exhortation to parents as a question asked of parents prior to the baptismal act. The different force thereby given, the theological fruit of that liturgical labor, is evident here, particularly in the committee’s references to “vows.”

<sup>167</sup> “Because it is the historic, ecumenical baptismal creed of the Christian church, the Apostles’ Creed enjoys a special status in the sacrament and should not be omitted.” (Agenda, 1993:89) The Palatinate liturgy included the Creed, but Datheen omitted it for reasons unknown. Meeter (1998:221n8) suggests: “Perhaps he omitted both the Lord’s Prayer and Creed because both would have been said elsewhere in the service. But the same would have been true of the Lord’s Supper, yet in that form he retained both.”

For reasons equally unknown, the inclusion of the Creed in the baptismal formulary proved to be controversial. A motion made to remove this reference to the Apostles’ Creed was defeated by the Synod of 1993. (Acts, 1993:510) Even so, in its report to the Synod of 1994, the Worship Committee noted that “the most common

- d. The act of baptism with water in the name of the Trinity.” (Agenda, 1993:81)

The proposed formulary included a significant revision of the questions asked of parents who present their children for baptism. Both the Dortian formulary and the 1976 formulary asked three questions: One regarding the parents’ conviction that their children should be baptized, one regarding the parents’ profession of faith, and one regarding their commitment to raise the child in the Christian faith. The formulary proposed to the Synod of 1993 included four questions: one regarding the parents’ profession of faith, none regarding the parents’ conviction that their children should be baptized,<sup>168</sup> and three regarding the parents’ commitment to raise their child in the Christian faith.<sup>169</sup> This increased the confusion to which Nelesen (2003:24) referred: “What is going on? Who is important?” When these questions immediately precede the baptismal act, it suggests that the parental promises are indeed the most important part of the sacrament, or that they are the ground on which the child is baptized. In the 1994 formulary, the congregation’s promise follows the baptismal act. Two options are given. One is worded as a question, the other is phrased as a charge. (Agenda, 1994:176)

The proposed formulary also included an element not found in either the Dortian formulary or the 1976 formulary. Immediately after the baptismal act, the minister “may place a hand on the head of each person baptized or make a sign of the cross on each one’s forehead,” while offering this blessing: “(name), child of the covenant, in baptism you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.” (Agenda, 1993:87) The word “forever” was objectionable and would be removed from the formulary adopted by the Synod of 1994.

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criticism of the proposed form for baptism was what some perceived to be the mandatory inclusion of the Apostles’ Creed.” (Agenda, 1994:166) The committee removed this reference to the creed in the formulary it presented to the Synod of 1994, (Agenda, 1994:169) “though the committee remained strongly convinced that inclusion of the creed has great merit and ought to be strongly recommended.” (Agenda, 1994:166)

The formularies adopted by the Synods of 2013 and 2016 both include the Apostles’ Creed. The rubric in the 2013 formulary makes the communal recitation of the Creed mandatory: “The congregation and the candidates (or parents) join in affirming the faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed.” (Agenda, 2013:336) In the 2016 formulary, the recitation of the Creed by the congregation is optional: “The minister may invite the congregation to join the parents in reciting the Apostles’ Creed.” (Agenda, 2016:94, my emphasis)

<sup>168</sup> The first question, which asks parents to “affirm the promises of God made to you and your children in his Word,” (Agenda, 1993:86) can be understood as a reason why the child should be baptized. If so, however, it is certainly a significantly weaker conviction than the Dortian formulary’s language of being “received unto grace in Christ” and “sanctified in Christ” and the internal holiness view of covenant holiness it implied.

<sup>169</sup> “Do you promise to instruct these children by word and example in the truth of God’s Word, and in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ? Do you promise to pray for them and to teach them to pray? Do you promise to nurture them within the community of the church?” (Agenda, 1993:86)

The concluding prayer that follows thanks God “that you make us new persons in Jesus Christ through grace alone.” (Agenda, 1993:87) In the Dortian formulary, the verbs in this prayer were in the past tense, implying an internal holiness view of covenant holiness and supporting a doctrine of presumptive regeneration. In the 1976 formulary, the verbs were in the future tense, implying an external holiness view of covenant holiness and reflecting a movement away from the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. In the formulary proposed to the Synod of 1993, the verb is present tense, “you make us new persons.” It reads as a statement of fact of what God does without defining when he might do it. In fact, on any connection between this act of God and baptism, the prayer is silent.<sup>170</sup> The prayer was intended to be used at both the baptism of an infant and the baptism of an adult. It asks God to “deepen *their* faith.” (Agenda, 1994:175) This request, when offered at the baptism of an infant, may reflect a doctrine of presumptive regeneration, because it assumes the presence of faith, or the seed of faith, in the baptized person, which God is then asked to deepen.

Contra the Board of Trustees’ recommendation that synod “approve the forms for use in the churches,” (Agenda, 1993:69) the synodical advisory committee recommended “that synod approve the sacramental forms for provisional use until final ratification by the Synod of 1995.” (Acts, 1993:510) As the Worship Committee would note in its report to the next synod, there was “much discussion.” (Agenda, 1994:166) A motion to recommit the recommendation to the advisory committee “because of the theological issues raised,”<sup>171</sup> failed. (Acts, 1993:510) Instead, the Synod of 1993 adopted a motion “that the sacramental forms be recommended to the churches for study and response so that the Synod of 1994 may consider provisional ratification.” (Acts, 1993:511) Responses to the proposed formulary were underwhelming. The Worship Committee only received a fraction of the responses received by the Liturgical Committee in the 1970s in response to its proposed formularies.<sup>172</sup> Only seventeen

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<sup>170</sup> The Dortian formulary explicitly thanked God for “sealing and confirming the same unto us by holy baptism.” (PsH, 1934:85) The 1976 formulary is less explicit, thanking God “for assuring us again,” presumably through the sacrament of baptism. (PsH, 1987:955)

<sup>171</sup> The Acts do not record what theological issues were raised, nor about which proposed formulary, the formulary for baptism or the formulary for the Lord’s Supper, they were raised. The Worship Committee’s report to the Synod of 1994 identified theological concerns with both formularies. The concern regarding the baptismal formulary centered on the word “forever” in the blessing pronounced over a child immediately after their baptism.

<sup>172</sup> In 1971, the Liturgical Committee reported receiving 150 responses to its proposed liturgical forms. (Acts, 1971:518) In 1976, the committee reported receiving 140 responses to the formularies then being used on a trial basis. (Acts, 1976:342)



responses were received from individuals and congregations; not enough, the committee concluded, to draw any general conclusions. No overtures were submitted to the Synod of 1994 regarding the proposed formularies.<sup>173</sup>

The Worship Committee did, however, offer a few minor revisions to its proposed formularies.<sup>174</sup> One of the theological issues raised at the Synod of 1993 may have been a concern that the blessing following the baptismal act implied baptismal regeneration. The Worship Committee named this concern in its report to the Synod of 1994. The committee did not believe that the blessing implied such a doctrine, but to avoid misunderstanding it removed the word “forever.” The blessing was amended to read: “Child of the covenant, in baptism you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own.” (Agenda, 1994:175)

In response to other suggestions, the committee also revised the parental vows “to clarify commitments to Christian education.” The words “with the help of the Christian community” were added to the first question, and the final question was revised to read: “Do you promise to nurture them within the body of believers, as citizens of Christ’s kingdom?”<sup>175</sup> (Agenda, 1994:174) That the Worship Committee received suggestions about a commitment to Christian education in the questions asked of parents, but not about the parents’ conviction that their children should be baptized, as the Liturgical Committee had in 1971, (Acts, 1971:523) further indicates a shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism.

Contra the recommendation of the advisory committee at the Synod of 1993 that the formularies receive final approval at the Synod of 1995, (Acts, 1993:510) and contra the motion adopted by the Synod of 1993 that “the Synod of 1994 may consider provisional approval,” (Acts, 1993:511) the Synod of 1994 approved the forms as presented and commended them for use in the churches. (Acts, 1994:494) Unlike the formularies adopted by the Synod of 1976, there was no period of provisional use or use on a trial basis.

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<sup>173</sup> In addition to shorter liturgical formularies, the Worship Committee also recommended to the Synod of 1994 a set of guidelines for the adaptation of synodical approved formularies. These guidelines did elicit one overture, from Classis Hamilton.

<sup>174</sup> It also noted: “These forms are designed to supplement, not replace, the existing approved sacramental forms.” (Agenda, 1994:166)

<sup>175</sup> The CRCNA bases its commitment to distinctively Christian education in a theology of God’s kingdom, which is understood to include all areas of human life. The Synod of 2003 revised CO Art. 71 to urge parents to educate their children “in harmony with the vision of Christ’s Lordship over all creation.” (Acts, 2003:628-629) See Klooster (1983) for a historical survey of kingdom theology in the CRCNA. For an official articulation of that theology, including its implications for Christian education, see *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, para. 45-55. (PsH, 1987:1033-1037)

#### 4.3.4 The 2013 Formulary

In response to an overture regarding infant dedication, the Synod of 2007 asked the Faith Formation Committee (FFC) to “provide guidance concerning liturgical practices surrounding baptism,” on the following ground: “Because liturgical practices teach doctrine, it is important that liturgical practices reflect the doctrinal standards of the denomination.”<sup>176</sup> (Acts, 2007:621) One senses in this ground some skepticism about the extent to which the denomination’s current liturgical practices reflected its doctrinal standards. Though some have characterized some infant dedications as “dry baptisms,” (Agenda, 2012:427) the advisory committee that presented this recommendation was concerned that infant baptism in the CRCNA had become essentially “wet dedications.”<sup>177</sup>

Initially, the FFC provided liturgical materials that it judged “consistent with the Confessions and CO of the CRCNA” “related to strengthening baptism” on its website. But all congregations availed themselves of these resources, because CO Art. 55 requires the use of synodical approved forms or adaptations thereof. The committee judged that “there is great value in asking synod to expand the number of liturgical forms that have been explicitly approved by synod.” It asked the Synod of 2012 to recommend to the churches a set of formularies, developed by the RCA, which it judged to be “consistent with the Reformed confessions, with prior synodical approved forms, and with the work of our committee,” for review and comment. (Agenda, 2012:421-422)

The opening of the proposed formulary for baptism was very similar to the 1994 formulary. Both begin with the words of institution (Matt. 28:18-20) and a series of Scripture passages from which the minister may choose.<sup>178</sup> The proposed formulary continues with a passage akin to God’s Covenant Promises in the 1994 formulary, but different from any of the options included in that formulary. Here the proposed formulary depends on the Dortian formulary:

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<sup>176</sup> The Synod of 2007 appointed the FFC in the midst of the denomination’s discussion of paedocommunion, (Acts, 2007:654-657) to which chapter 5 will attend. (See pp. 181-205 below.) On infant dedication in the CRCNA, see note 142 above.

<sup>177</sup> The author of this dissertation was a member of the advisory committee that submitted the recommendation to the Synod of 2007. (Acts, 2007:574) This is his recollection of the committee’s discussion.

<sup>178</sup> The lists of suggested passages are nearly identical with the following exceptions. The 1994 formulary included 1 Peter 2:9-10, which the proposed formulary did not, and the proposed formulary includes Galatians 3:29, which the 1994 formulary did not.

Proposed 2012 Formulary	Dortian Baptismal Formulary
<p>In baptism God promises by grace alone: to forgive <u>our sins</u>;</p> <p>to <u>adopt us</u> into the Body of Christ, the Church;</p> <p>to send the Holy Spirit <u>daily</u> to <u>renew</u> and <u>cleanse</u> us;</p> <p>and to resurrect us to <u>eternal life</u>.</p>	<p>When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that He washes us in His blood from all <u>our sins</u>, <u>incorporating</u> us into the fellowship ... the Holy Spirit assures us ... the He will dwell in us ... <u>washing</u> away of our sins and <u>daily renewing</u> our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in <u>life eternal</u>.</p>
<p><u>Through baptism</u> Christ calls us to a <u>new obedience</u>;</p> <p>to <u>love</u> and <u>trust</u> God completely;</p> <p>to <u>forsake</u> the evil of <u>the world</u>; and to live a new and <u>holy life</u>.</p>	<p>Therefore are we by God, <u>through baptism</u>, admonished of and obliged unto <u>new obedience</u> ... that we <u>trust</u> in Him and <u>love</u> Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we <u>forsake the world</u>, crucify our old nature, and walk in a <u>godly life</u>.</p>
<p>Yet, when we <u>fall into sin</u>, we <u>must not despair</u> of God's mercy, <u>nor continue in sin</u>, for baptism is the sign and <u>seal</u> of God's <u>eternal covenant</u> of grace with us.</p>	<p>And if we sometimes through weakness <u>fall into sins</u>, we <u>must not</u> therefore <u>despair of God's mercy</u>, <u>nor continue in sin</u>, since baptism is a <u>seal</u> and indubitable testimony that we have an <u>eternal covenant</u> with God.</p>

The promises of God, signed and sealed in baptism, are “made visible,” not in the baptismal act itself,<sup>179</sup> but “in the water of baptism,” which the formulary says, “cleanses; purifies; refreshes; sustains.”<sup>180</sup> (Agenda, 2012:435-436)

Whereas the 1994 formulary offered different “baptismal promises” for the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults respectively, the proposed formulary asks the same questions regarding the renunciation of evil and faith in Jesus to both adult candidates for baptism and parents who present their children for baptism. An additional question is asked at the baptism

<sup>179</sup> The Reformed confessions emphasize the baptismal act more than water alone. The HC says that “Christ instituted this outward washing,” not only the sign of water. Similarly, the sacramental sign is not the water, but the baptismal act: “As water washes dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away all my soul’s impurity.” (Q&A 69; see also Q&A 71-73) The BC also speaks about water washing away dirt from the body, and baptismal water being sprinkled on the person baptized. (Art. 34)

<sup>180</sup> Meeter (2007:58) notes that this description of the water of baptism deviates from the language of the prayer that preceded the baptismal act in the Dortian and 1976 formularies, in which “the water of baptism is not the water of life but the water of death. It is not for drinking but for drowning.” He (2007:63) argues that the final words, “refreshes, sustains,” are really for the Lord’s Supper, not baptism, and offers this alternative: “Water drowns; kills; judges.”

of infants regarding the parents' commitment to nurture the child in the Christian faith.<sup>181</sup> Noticeably absent, however, are the revisions made to this promise in the 1994 formulary "to clarify commitments to Christian education." (Agenda, 1994:174) The child is no longer instructed "with the help of the Christian community." Though still nurtured "in the body of believers" or "in the church," the child is not nurtured "as a citizen of Christ's kingdom." As in the 1976 formulary, the baptismal promises also include a congregational vow prior to the baptismal act.

Whereas the 1994 formulary, in its prayer of thanksgiving, only thanks God "for our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection," (Agenda, 1994:173) the proposed formulary now thanks God "for the gift of water,"<sup>182</sup> and "for the gift of baptism." How this formulary may strengthen baptism becomes evident as the prayer of thanksgiving speaks explicitly of what God does in the sacrament. God "confirms to us that we are buried with Christ in his death, raised to share in his resurrection, and are renewed by the Holy Spirit." The prayer of thanksgiving asks God to "pour on us your Holy Spirit, so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive new life." (Agenda, 2012:438) Such a strong view of what God might do in baptism echoes the Dortian formulary's exposition<sup>183</sup> and could be a paraphrase of the prayer preceding baptism in that formulary.

Proposed 2012 Formulary	Dortian Baptismal Formulary
In this water you confirm to us that we are <u>buried with Christ</u> in his death, <u>raised</u> to share in his resurrection, and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit. Pour out on us your <u>Holy Spirit</u> , so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive <u>new life</u> .	We beseech Thee ... graciously to look upon <u>these Thy children</u> and incorporate them by <u>Thy Holy Spirit</u> into Thy Son Jesus Christ, that they may be <u>buried with Him</u> through baptism into death and be <u>raised</u> with him in <u>newness of life</u> .

<sup>181</sup> "Do you promise to instruct this child/these children in the truth of God's Word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for them, to teach them to pray; and to train them in Christ's way by your example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church?" (Agenda, 2012:437)

<sup>182</sup> The prayer of thanksgiving replaces the prayer that preceded the baptismal act in the Dortian and 1976 formularies, which was "not a eucharistic prayer because it does not give thanks for water." (Meeter, 2007:58) The intention may have been to create a formulary that paralleled the formulary for the Lord's Supper, which also includes a eucharistic prayer. Meeter (2007:52) judges this thanksgiving negatively. Why not give thanks for the water? he asks. "Because eleven times in the New Testament our Lord took bread and blessed it and gave thanks for it, but never once did he do so with water."

<sup>183</sup> "When we are baptized into the name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that he washes us in his blood, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God." (PsH, 1934:83)

The baptismal act itself begins with a short address to the child: “For you Jesus Christ came into the world; for you he died; and for you he conquered death. All this he did for you, little one, though you know nothing of it as yet.”<sup>184</sup> (Agenda, 2012:438) The baptismal act concludes with the same blessing of the child found in the 1994 formulary. In the proposed formulary, however, the word “forever” is restored. There follows a new declaration in which the child is “received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church”<sup>185</sup> and “engaged to confess the faith of Christ, and to be God’s faithful servant(s) until life’s end.” (Agenda, 2012:439)

Other than its opening sentence, the proposed formulary’s concluding prayer is identical to the prayer found in the 1994 formulary. In the 1994 formulary, the prayer began: “We thank you that you make us new persons in Jesus Christ through grace alone.” (Agenda, 1994:175) The Dortian formulary spoke similarly about “us and our children.” (PsH, 1934:85) Both prayers can be interpreted as referring to the congregation as a whole, without making a definitive statement about the children just baptized. The prayer of thanksgiving in the proposed formulary, however, excludes such an interpretation. It claims more than the Dortian formulary did, for it thanks God “that you cleanse and renew these your children through your grace alone,” (Agenda, 2012:439) referring explicitly to the children just baptized.

The Synod of 2012 asked “congregations to assess” this liturgical formulary “and to respond to the committee about the feasibility of presenting them to the Synod of 2013 for approval.” (Acts, 2012:423) The committee’s report to the Synod of 2013 did not indicate how many responses they received to the proposed formularies. The Synod of 2013 received no overtures regarding the proposed formularies. The committee only made one change in the proposed formulary for baptism: an explanatory footnote was added to the profession of faith elicited from adult candidates for baptism and from parents who present their children for baptism. The proposed formulary asked them “to confess the faith of the church.” The explanatory

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<sup>184</sup> Meeter (2007:63) inexplicably calls this address “an innovation.” In an earlier article, however, he (2002:52) acknowledged that this address is “derived from the French Reformed liturgy,” one of the oldest Reformed liturgies. For the full text of the address in the French Reformed liturgy, see Steenwyk & Witvliet (2011).

<sup>185</sup> Meeter (2007:61) suggests that this declaration’s reference to the visible church “takes back what it just gave.” Contra the rest of the 2013 formulary, the declaration reflects an external holiness view of covenant holiness. It contradicts the Dortian formulary, which said that children ought to be baptized because they are members of the church already - “and not the visible church, but simply the Church.” (Meeter, 2007:62)

It may also contradict BC Art. 34, which says that “by [baptism] we are received into Christ’s church.” “The first Dutch translation of the Confession in 1563 added to the original statement the crucial word ‘external,’ thus ‘we are received into the Christ’s external church,’ an addition for which there is “absolutely no ground in the French original or earlier Latin translation.” “The added word quickly disappeared from all later additions,” (Gerstner, 1991:11-12) suggesting that the church to which BC Art. 34 refers is not the visible church, but simply the Church.

footnote clarified that this is “the faith of the church as taught in the creeds and confession of this church.” (Agenda, 2013:336)

The Synod of 2013 adopted the formulary for baptism as presented by the FFC. (Acts, 2013:552) The 2013 formulary is more amenable to a doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view than either the 1976 or 1994 formularies. However, its approval by the Synod of 2013 does not signal a complete return within the denomination to the understanding of baptism found in the Dortian formulary. The story of the 2016 formulary reveals that concerns about the internal holiness view and a doctrine of presumptive regeneration remain in the CRCNA.

#### 4.3.5 The 2016 Formulary

In its report to the Synod of 2016, the denomination’s Worship Ministries office<sup>186</sup> reported that “over the past years previous employees of Faith Alive Christian Resources, professors at Calvin Theological Seminary, staff of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship,<sup>187</sup> and others have received requests for various liturgical forms that represent the current ministry context.” In response, Worship Ministries presented a proposal to develop new formularies to the Board of Trustees. (Agenda, 2016:75) With the board’s approval, Worship Ministries assembled a committee to draft new liturgical formularies, mailed the proposed formularies directly to churches for input, and presented them to the Synod of 2016 for approval.<sup>188</sup> (Agenda, 2016:38)

The baptismal formulary presented to the Synod of 2016 made generous use of other formularies approved by previous synods. Two of its options for the Introduction with which the formulary begins are taken verbatim from the 1976 and 2013 formularies. A third option quotes the words of institution from Matthew 28:19-20.

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<sup>186</sup> Since 1985, the denomination’s Worship Committee had been part of the Board of Publications, which was later renamed Faith Alive Christian Resources. When the Synod of 2013 approved the dissolution of Faith Alive as a distinct ministry, it promised to retain its core functions. (Acts, 2013:550) The Board of Trustees reported to the Synod of 2014 that “the functions formerly contained within Faith Alive have been reassigned to other, or in some cases, reorganized, ministry offices,” including the newly formed “office of worship and proclamation,” or simply Office of Worship. (Agenda, 2014:34-35; Acts, 2014:432) In subsequent reports to synod, this office would identify itself as Worship Ministries. (Agenda, 2015:266-268)

<sup>187</sup> An institute of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, educational institutions of the CRCNA.

<sup>188</sup> That the initial requests for new formularies were made to denominational staff and personnel at the denomination’s educational institutions, rather than to synod; that the liturgical form committee was appointed by the Board of Trustees, rather than by synod; and that the proposed formularies were mailed directly to the churches, bypassing synod, all reflect a changing ecclesiology in the CRCNA, in which the ecclesiastical assemblies appear to play a diminished part. This shift in the denomination’s ecclesiology, while worthy of further study, lie beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The proposed formulary's baptismal promises are taken directly from the 2013 formulary and include the renunciation of evil for both the baptism of adults and the baptism of infants. Worship Ministries' defense of its inclusion for the baptism of infants focuses exclusively on the parental promises. The renunciation is "appropriate for infant baptism, since the parents are making a covenant commitment to raise their children in the Christian faith and in the covenant community of the Christian church." (Agenda, 2016:90) Kuyper (2009:226) firmly rejected its inclusion for infant baptism, because it contradicts a doctrine of presumptive regeneration. A renunciation of evil may be appropriate for the baptism of an adult convert, but it is not appropriate for the baptism of a covenant child who is "not unholy like heathen children." Covenant children "are not subjected to baptism as impure, but as pure."

Two options are presented for additional questions to be asked of parents who present their children for baptism. One was taken from the 2013 formulary; the other was taken from the 1976 formulary and includes the parents' conviction that their child, "received by God in Christ as a member of his covenant," ought to be baptized. The question asked of the congregation before the baptismal act is taken from the 2013 formulary. (Agenda, 2016:91-94)

A prayer of thanksgiving immediately precedes the baptismal act. The prayer quotes the first half of the prayer found in the 2013 formulary, but it ends with an expanded petition for the Holy Spirit's work in the sacrament. The proposed prayer reads:

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray, upon these here baptized that this water may be a spring gushing up to eternal life. Wash away their sin, raise them to new life, and graft them to the body of Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon them, that they may have wisdom to discern their gifts, strength to obey your will, and joy in answering your call. (Agenda, 2016:95)

The baptismal act itself follows the 2013 formulary and includes the address to the child, the blessing (with the word "forever" restored) and the declaration. The prayer with which the formulary concludes omits all thanksgiving and petitions for the baptized person, leaving only petitions for the parents who have presented their children for baptism. (Agenda, 2016:95-96)

The synodical advisory committee recommended the adoption of the proposed formulary as revised. Along with the proposed formulary, Worship Ministries had prepared an Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, which it proposed to the Synod of 2016 for adoption. The advisory committee also recommended significant revisions to that Introduction. The committee said that these revisions were needed "where the language of the introduction and forms for baptism described baptism in terms that could lead to the conclusion that baptism is a sacramental sign and seal of the eternal salvation of the child." (Acts, 2016:899)

Whereas the proposed statement had said that “the water of baptism signifies that God claims us as his own, unites us to his Son, Jesus Christ, washes away our sins, and sets the seal of the Holy Spirit on us,” (Agenda, 2016:88) the advisory committee’s revision spoke of “the sacrament of baptism as a sign and seal of God’s promise” to do those things “as we embrace these promises by faith.” (Acts, 2016:900) Similar changes were also made to Option 1 of the Introduction in the proposed formulary. (Acts, 2016:901) Baptism does not signify or seal what God has done or does in the sacrament, but what God promises to do. These changes reflect the ascendancy of Borduin’s baptismal theology in the CRCNA. Borduin (1935:34) wrote: “In baptism God seals to us a promise on condition of active faith, by which we appropriate the proffered grace.” Wielenga (2016:84), an influential commentator on the Dortian liturgy in the first half of the twentieth century, rejected that view: “Those who say that baptism seals only the promises and no internal pouring out of grace impoverish baptism.”

The proposed statement that described baptism as “a kind of drowning, in which the old self dies and a new self in Christ comes to life,” (Agenda, 2016:89) was revised to say that “baptism symbolizes a deluge of God’s grace through which the old self dies,” etc. (Acts, 2016:900) Baptism is not the drowning itself, but a symbol of the drowning. It is not in, by, or through baptism that our old self dies and a new self rises; it is only through the grace of God - grace which is symbolized, but not conveyed, in baptism. This says less than the BC, which “follows Calvin in insisting that the sacraments not only ‘exhibit’ but also ‘confer’ the grace of Christ upon believers.”<sup>189</sup> (Venema, 2000:42n21) About the Reformed confessions generally, Venema (2000:80) concludes:

Though the Reformed confessions do not teach baptismal regeneration, they do ascribe a real power and efficacy to the sacrament of baptism in conferring the grace of God in Christ upon believers ... Again and again, the sacrament of baptism is described as that which effects, or brings about, what is visibly represented and pledged. As a divinely appointed instrument for the confirmation of faith, it could not be otherwise.

Worship Ministries’ Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism said that “in baptism we are adopted into the trinitarian family through Christ.” (Agenda, 2016:89) The trinitarian family into which we are adopted is the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This was the doctrine of the Dortian formulary, which spoke of our reception “through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son.” (PsH, 1934:85) The advisory committee

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<sup>189</sup> See Gerrish (1982) for an account of Calvin’s “symbolic instrumentalism” vis-à-vis Bullinger’s “symbolical parallelism.”



revised this statement to read: “In baptism we are adopted into God’s covenant family,” that is, the church, “through Christ.” Contra the Dortian formulary, the advisory committee’s revised statement reflects an external holiness view of covenant holiness. (Acts, 2016:901)

Finally, the blessing that immediately followed the baptismal act - first adopted by the Synod of 1994 without the word “forever” because of concerns that it might be misunderstood to reflect a doctrine of baptismal regeneration but included in the 2013 formulary with the word “forever” restored - was completely eliminated by the advisory committee. The committee replaced it with the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. (Acts, 2016:902) Surprisingly, the advisory committee left untouched the proposed formulary’s prayer of thanksgiving, despite its petition that the water of baptism “may be a spring gushing up to eternal life.” (Agenda, 2016:95)

The Synod of 2016 adopted its advisory committee’s recommendation that the formulary and introductory statement be adopted as revised. (Acts, 2016:899) However, as with the formularies presented to the Synods of 1976, 1994, and 2013, this formulary was not intended to replace other formularies approved by previous synods. In fact, the advisory committee’s own recommendation spoke of “strengthening the pool of explicitly approved synodical forms.” (Acts, 2016:899) The earlier forms, including the blessing that followed baptism and the word “forever,” remain among the synodical approved forms whose use, or adaptation thereof, is required by the CO Art. 55.

#### **4.3.6 The Liturgical Formularies for Adult Baptism**

Datheen’s liturgy, and the Palatinate liturgy on which it was based, had only one baptismal formulary, which was titled Form to Perform (or Administer) Holy Baptism. (Wielenga, 2016:11n5) With only one liturgical formulary available, the same formulary would have been read when baptism was administered to children and when it was administered to adults. It is unclear, however, how many, if any, adult baptisms occurred in the early Reformed Church of the Netherlands.<sup>190</sup> The church’s wide baptismal practice suggests that most, if not all, persons were baptized as infants.

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<sup>190</sup> The earliest Dutch Reformed church orders do not include any provisions for the baptism of adults. Rather, all of their articles regarding baptism presume that the persons to be baptized are infants or children. Explicit reference to adult baptism appears for the first time in the DCO, adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which added the first formulary for adult baptism to the Netherlands Liturgy: “In the baptism of young children as well as of adults the minister shall use the forms of the institution and practice of baptism which have been respectively drawn up for that purpose.” (Art. LVIII; p. 171)

The rise of Anabaptism, however, introduced the practice of adult baptism into the Netherlands, not only among the Anabaptists, who rejected infant baptism, but also in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, when “a number of Baptists [who would not have received baptism as children] sought union with the Reformed Church.” (De Ridder, 1983:80) The expansion of the Dutch colonies and missions also provided new opportunities to use a formulary for adult baptism.<sup>191</sup>

In 1603, “after much call for such a form,” (Meeter, 1998:235) the Provincial Synod of South Holland produced the Reformed Church of the Netherlands’ first liturgical formulary for adult baptism. In 1611, the Provincial Synod of Zeeland drafted its own. Both adapted the existing baptismal formulary. (Diephouse, Kromminga & Polman, 1988:837) “The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) blended the forms, incorporating the Zeeland exposition with the South Holland questions,” (Meeter, 1998:235) producing the Form for the Administration of Baptism to Adult Persons, which it added to the Netherlands Liturgy.<sup>192</sup>

For the most part, this formulary follows closely the traditional formulary for infant baptism. The exposition of baptism is the same in both formularies, because, as Wielenga (2016:51) notes: “The form does not treat the baptism of children here, but baptism in general.” The Reformed believed, contra the Anabaptists, that a single doctrine of baptism was applicable to both the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults. (Diephouse, Kromminga & Polman, 1988:838) In the original formulary, the exposition concludes with an apology for infant baptism. In the form for adult baptism, this was replaced with an answer to the “theological problem that was set up by the apology in the Form for Infant Baptism:<sup>193</sup> if baptism does not depend on an infant’s knowledge or confession, then why should it be different for

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<sup>191</sup> Abraham Kuyper (2009:226) argued that “these two kinds of adult baptisms,” the baptism of persons born to Christian parents “whose baptism did not take place because of forgetfulness or for some other reason” and the baptism of converts who were “born as Jews, Mohammedans, or heathens,” “differ from one another fundamentally, and really the same liturgical form cannot suffice for both.” Kuyper (2009:243) judged that the Dortian formulary for adult baptism was “intended exclusively for adults born of parents at least one of whom is a church member, and should not be used for those who come to the Christian church from the Jewish faith or from paganism or Islam.”

<sup>192</sup> The Synod of 1912 adopted the RCA’s English translation of the Netherlands Liturgy as the denomination’s official English translation. The Synod of 1934 adopted an updated translation. The denomination’s current translation of the Dortian formulary for adult baptism was adopted by the Synod of 1978. (Acts, 1978:57)

<sup>193</sup> “And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received unto grace in Christ.” (PsH, 1934:83)

adults?” (Meeter, 1998:236) The formulary’s answer, explaining the necessity of adult baptismal candidates making “confession of their repentance and of their faith in Christ,” (PsH, 1934:87) includes the words of institution, which were absent from the original formulary.<sup>194</sup>

The address to the parents has also been replaced with an address to the person to be baptized, a series of five questions in which the baptismal candidate professes faith in the triune God, acknowledges their own sinfulness, professes faith in Jesus Christ, assents to the articles of the Christian faith, and promises to lead a Christian life. To each question, the baptismal candidate responds, “I do.” (PsH, 1934:88-89)

Minimal adaptations were made to the prayer that precedes baptism. Rather than pray for “these Thy children,” as the formulary for infant baptism does, the formulary for adult baptism prays for “this brother (sister).” (PsH, 1934:84, 88) The petitions, however, that the Holy Spirit would incorporate the baptized person into Christ and that they would be united with Christ in his death and raised with him in newness of life are the same in both formularies. Both formularies conclude with the same prayer of thanksgiving, though “these children” in the original formulary has again become “this brother (sister)” in the formulary for adult baptism. (PsH, 1934:85, 89)

The CRCNA’s new formulary for adult baptism adopted by the Synod of 1976 follows the same format. When it presented this formulary to synod, the Liturgical Committee called to synod’s attention “a matter which was carefully considered by the committee.” Some had expressed a desire to have “two distinct forms for baptism, one which sets forth the theology in support of the baptism of infants and the other which sets forth the theology underlying the baptism of adults.”<sup>195</sup> The committee judged that “a move in this direction would not be in harmony with Scripture,” which “teaches that there is but one baptism whether it is administered to a child or to an adult.”<sup>196</sup> Consequently, the 1976 formulary for infant baptism and the

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<sup>194</sup> Wielenga (2016:23) offers one possible explanation for the omission of the words of institution from the formulary for infant baptism: “The Lord’s words here (Matt. 28:19-20) pertain particularly to mission. ... Our baptism of infants is a consequence and a continuation of the baptism of the heathen. ... Yet among God’s people, the administration of baptism to the children of believers carries a somewhat different character.”

<sup>195</sup> The Liturgical Committee did not explain what the difference in these two theologies might be. For one possibility, see Kuyper, (2009) who argued that an adult convert comes to baptism “as a heathen and through the sign of baptism is brought into the kingdom of God.” (p. 225) For this reason, “exorcism at the baptism of a heathen or Mohammedan could be allowed, if connected to the renunciation of the main contrast between the pagan religions and the Christian religion.” (p. 244-245) Infants, however, are “not subjected to baptism as impure, but as pure.” (p. 226) Thus, exorcism “must never be applied to the baptism of children from Christian parents since the confession of our Reformed churches is that such children are sanctified through their parents.” (p. 244)

<sup>196</sup> In this the Liturgical Committee follows the Dortian tradition. Regarding the Dortian formularies, Wielenga (2016:146) writes: “It does not surprise us that our fathers, when they compiled both baptism forms for children

1976 formulary for adult baptism contain identical expositions of baptism, now titled The Institution, The Promises, and The Instruction.<sup>197</sup> Both formularies also include identical prayers of preparation.

Unlike the Dortian formulary, in which the address to the person to be baptized immediately preceded the baptismal act, the 1976 formulary begins with the person's public profession of faith. The three questions asked are identical to three of the questions contained in the formulary for public profession of faith also adopted by the Synod of 1976.<sup>198</sup> (PsH, 1987:964-965, 969) Immediately prior to the baptismal act, the candidate is also asked: "Do you now wish to be baptized in the name of the triune God, and will you receive your baptism as a sign and seal that God accepts you in Christ, forgives all your sins, and incorporates you into his church?"<sup>199</sup> (PsH, 1987:970)

Following the baptismal act, the adult candidate is welcomed "to all the privileges of full communion," and "to full participation in the life of the church."<sup>200</sup> (PsH, 1987:971) There follows a baptismal prayer different from the prayer with which the 1976 formulary for infant baptism concludes, which is understandable given the focus in that formulary's prayer on the vows just made by the parents and the congregation.

The 1994 and 2013 formularies reflect even more clearly the Reformed principle that all baptisms are the same in principle and substance. (Wielenga, 2016:146) Whereas the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and the Synod of 1976 adopted separate, albeit parallel, formularies for the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults respectively, the Synods of 1994 and 2013 adopted single formularies for baptism to be used at both the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults. These formularies, however, include adaptations for each baptism.

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and adults, preceded it with an entirely identical doctrine of baptism. Thereby they indicated that in principle and substance there is no difference."

<sup>197</sup> A note indicates that the apology for infant baptism should only be included in the case of a family baptism. (PsH, 1987:970)

<sup>198</sup> The following question, including in the formulary for public profession of faith, is omitted from the formulary for adult baptism, for the obvious reason that the person addressed has not yet been baptized: "Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism, and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?" (PsH, 1987:964)

<sup>199</sup> The second and third questions asked of parents in the 1976 formulary for infant baptism are also included for use "in case of family baptism." (PsH, 1987:971)

<sup>200</sup> The words of welcome are identical to those found in the 1976 formulary for public profession of faith. No comparable words of welcome are found in the 1976 formulary for infant baptism.

The adaptations are similar to those included in the Dortian and 1976 formularies. An apology for infant baptism may be included in the case of infant baptism.<sup>201</sup> Two sets of questions are provided: one to be asked in the case of parents who present their children for baptism, another to be asked of adult candidates for baptism.<sup>202</sup> In both the 1994 and 2013 formularies, the same blessing and declaration receiving the baptized person into the visible membership of the holy catholic church follows the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults.<sup>203</sup> (Agenda, 1994:175-176; Agenda, 2013:338) In both formularies, the same prayer of thanksgiving is offered, and the same prayer concludes the baptismal ceremony. An additional set of petitions for the parents is provided for the baptism of infants. (Agenda, 1994:173, 175-176; Agenda, 2013:337-339)

While the Synod of 2016 adopted different formularies for the baptism of infants and young children and for the baptism of older children and adults respectively, nearly all of the materials found in the formulary for adult baptism are also found in the formulary for infant baptism. The only exception is the prayer offered for the baptismal candidate following the baptismal act. The formulary for adult baptism includes such a prayer, while the formulary for infant baptism only includes a prayer for the parents who presented their children for holy baptism. (Agenda, 2016:96, 100)

A single constant in all of the liturgical formularies for adult baptism adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and subsequent synods of the CRCNA has been the affinity between these formularies and the formularies for infant baptism adopted by the same synods. This clearly demonstrates the conviction that, whether administered to an infant or to an adult, there is only one baptism. Regardless of the sacrament's recipient, it remains the same in substance and principle.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The Dortian liturgical formulary for baptism inherited by the CRCNA from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857 presents baptism as “the sign and seal of a real

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<sup>201</sup> The first and fourth options for God's Covenant Promises in the 1994 formulary include optional apologies for infant baptism; the second and third options do not. (Agenda, 1994:170-173) The 2013 formulary includes no such apology.

<sup>202</sup> The 1994 formulary offers two completely different sets of questions. Only the questions asked of adult candidates for baptism include the renunciation of evil. (Agenda, 1994:174) In the 2013 formulary, the same questions are used for both infant baptism and adult baptism, with one additional question, eliciting a promise to raise the child in the Christian faith, asked at the baptism of infants. (Agenda, 2013:335-336)

<sup>203</sup> Only the 2013 formulary includes the address to the child before baptism, taken from the French Reformed liturgy. This element is only included for the baptism of infants. (Agenda, 2013:338)

and powerful work of God in us,” that causes readers “to rethink any prejudice [they] might have about a low view of the sacraments in the Reformed tradition ... so real and so miraculous is the baptismal work of God in us.” (Meeter, 2007:56) The emphasis is clearly on God’s actions, God’s promises, God’s side of the covenant of grace.

Appealing to the Dortian formulary, the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1905) concluded that “the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promises of God, must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” The CRCNA gave this doctrine of presumptive regeneration synodical sanction when the Synod of 1908 “expressed agreement with the four Conclusions of the Synod of Utrecht.” (Acts, 1908:41) It is not baptism, but the promises of God, of which baptism is the appropriate sign and seal, that justifies the presumption. Those promises are given to “the seed of the covenant,” and, accordingly, only the seed of the covenant may be baptized.

This understanding of baptism as the sign and seal of God’s covenant promises was especially evident in the CRCNA’s discussions of the *doopledenstelsel* and the baptism of adopted children. Children who were “the seed of the covenant” were recipients of God’s promises and, according to the Dortian formulary, “ought to be baptized.” (PsH, 1934:84) But children who could not be considered “the seed of the covenant” were not recipients of God’s promises and, therefore, should not be baptized. Within a thousand-generation covenant, the children of baptized members were considered “the seed of the covenant,” but adopted children of unknown or non-Christian lineage were not.

Later synodical discussions about the baptism of adopted children reflect a shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism away from an emphasis on the promises of God toward an increasing emphasis on the parental promises and away from the internal holiness view of covenant holiness consistent with the doctrine of presumptive regeneration to an external holiness view of covenant holiness.<sup>204</sup>

The new liturgical formulary for baptism adopted by the Synod of 1976 reflected and reinforced this shift in the denomination’s understanding of baptism. The same shift is evident in the formulary for baptism adopted by the Synod of 1994. The formulary adopted by the Synod of 2013 is a hopeful sign that the CRCNA may be shifting back to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, though the story of the 2016 formulary shows that concerns about that theology remains in the CRCNA.

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<sup>204</sup> The covenant into which adopted children are included places children “in a special sphere in which they are most likely to be regenerated by the means of grace.” (Gerstner, 1991:8) All children who grow up in a covenant home, whether born or adopted into the family, should be continually confronted by the gospel.

Meeter's (2007:52) observation about the RCA is true of the CRCNA: The church is "uncertain of baptism's significance." This uncertainty creates ambivalence about the status or standing of baptized persons within the church, an ambivalence evident in the denomination's discussion of the discipline of baptized members. The ambivalence is due to the lack of definite answers to the questions raised in a minority report to the Synod of 1955: "What is the person being 'excluded' from, and what does it mean? What is he being deprived of?" (Acts, 1955:429-430) and to the inverse questions: In what is a baptized person included? What does it mean to welcome a baptized person into the church's membership? What privileges accompany such membership? This ambivalence is also due to the development of a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith and the codification of a church orderly distinction between baptized members and professing members to which the next chapter attends.

## Chapter 5 ~ Public Profession of Faith

### 5.1 ~ Introduction

The rite of public profession of faith is not a sacrament,<sup>1</sup> but it is closely associated with both sacraments. Calvin considered a person's profession of faith to be their baptismal profession delayed. In his *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva* (1537), he spoke of children coming "to testify their faith to the church, to which they were unable at their baptism to render witness." (Calvin, 1954a:54) Olds (1992:201, 285) contends that in the Reformed rites of the sixteenth century, this profession by the baptized person was the real baptismal vow, even if, as in the case of infant baptism, it was postponed until the baptized person was old enough to receive religious instruction. Baptism demands a profession of faith, as the Dortian formulary explains:

Therefore, are we by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in him and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. (PsH, 1934:83)

In the earliest polity and practice of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, however, the connection between baptism and profession of faith was not emphasized. Rather than present profession of faith as a person's baptismal profession delayed, the earliest Dutch Reformed church orders uniformly present it as the means by which a baptized person is admitted to the Lord's Supper. These church orders only mention profession of faith in their articles on admission to the Lord's Supper. They do not speak of those who desire to make profession of faith, but of those who seek admission to the Lord's Supper. Such persons were required to make a profession of faith.<sup>2</sup> Given that this profession of faith took place in connection with the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper, the historic practice of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands might best be described as "first communion" rather than "profession of faith."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes teach that there are only two sacraments instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord's Supper. See HC Q&A 68 and BC Art. 33.

<sup>2</sup> A study report submitted to the Synod of 1988 notes: "It needs to be remembered that the CO of the CRCNA never specifies a rite called "public profession of faith." Rather the CO reminds the churches that admission to the Lord's table must include a public profession of faith. The emphasis of the article is to supervise the Lord's table. Profession of faith has no standing in the CO apart from that purpose." (Agenda, 1988:309)

<sup>3</sup> This was also the practice in Calvin's Geneva: "The saying of the baptismal vows is followed by the young people receiving communion for the first time. This is clearly a rite of admission to the Lord's Table or, as some might call it, a rite of First Communion." (Olds, 1992:216; see also Osmer, 1996:31)



This chapter will consider, first, the practice of profession of faith in the historic Reformed Church in the Netherlands from its first synods through the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The Netherlands Liturgy, adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and inherited by the CRCNA from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, did not include a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith. Second, this chapter will consider the practice of public profession of faith in the CRCNA from the denomination's founding in 1857 through the decision of the Synod of 1920 to draft the denomination's first liturgical formulary for profession of faith.

Third, this chapter will examine the practice of profession of faith in the CRCNA after 1920, giving particular attention to the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1932 and 1976 and to the understandings of baptism and profession of faith that each reflects. The liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1932 and 1976 both present profession of faith as more than simply admission to the Lord's Supper. In both profession of faith also included a commitment to the confessional standards of the church and the assumption of adult responsibilities within the congregation.

Fourth, this chapter will attend to the ambiguity about the essential meaning of profession of faith that became evident in the denomination's discussion of paedocommunion. The Synod of 1988 declared that "the profession of faith of covenant children required for admission to the Lord's Supper is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within the congregation." (Acts, 1988:560) The Synod of 1995 adopted a liturgical formulary specifically for the profession of faith of younger children. The Synod of 2011, however, removed the church orderly requirement that baptized children make a public profession of faith prior to their admission to the Lord's Supper. The CO changes that it adopted describe profession of faith as a rite of passage into adult church membership. Finally, attention will be given to the additional liturgical formularies for profession of faith adopted by the Synods of 2013 and 2016.

## **5.2 ~ Profession of Faith in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (1568-1618/1619)**

The earliest Dutch Reformed church orders uniformly required that baptized members make a profession of faith before they were admitted to the Lord's Supper. The regulations drawn up by the Convent of Wesel (1568), "which everyone should observe in the church over which he is placed, until something better and more complete has been ordered after the calling of a synod," (DeRidder, 1983:38) stipulated: "No one shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper

if he has not first made profession of faith and submitted himself to the discipline of the church.”<sup>4</sup> (Art. 7; p. 36)

The Convent established a two-step procedure affirmed by subsequent church orders. First, candidates for profession of faith were examined by the consistory, or a committee thereof. In the case of adults the Convent advised that “it is not necessary or even beneficial that this [examination] take place in public.” (Art. 9; p. 36) In the case of children, however, the Convent judged it fitting “to do the examination... in the presence of the whole church, according to the shorter Catechism, to which should then be added the most important parts of the larger Catechism.”<sup>5</sup> (Art. 10; p. 36) Then, “those who had been properly examined” would “present themselves to the church,” “indicate their agreement with the most important parts of the faith,” and “place themselves under the discipline of the church.”<sup>6</sup> (Art. 11; p. 37)

The Convent of Wesel required that the candidates approved by the consistory be presented to the church “on the day which precedes the day of the Lord’s Supper,” so that they “may be admitted to the table of the Lord on the next day.” (Art. 11; p. 37) The liturgies most influential on worship in the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands, including à Lasco’s

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<sup>4</sup> Similar stipulations are found in the church orders of Middelburg (1581), Art. XLIII (p. 115); ’s Gravenhage (1586), Art. LIV (p. 150); and Dort (1618-1619), Art. LXI (p. 171).

<sup>5</sup> It is not clear to which Catechisms the Convent refers. The larger Catechism could be the HC, published in 1563. However, the shorter Catechism cannot be the Faulkelius’ Compendium that the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) would adopt for such examinations, because it was not written until 1608.

<sup>6</sup> The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), (Art. LXX; p. 72) the national Synod of Dordrecht (1578), (Biesterfeld & Kuiper, 1982:93) and the Synod of Middelburg (1581) (Biesterfeld & Kuiper, 1982:123) explicitly endorse this procedure. Not found in either the DCO or the 1914 CO, the procedure reappeared in the RCO of 1965, which stipulated: “Before the profession of faith the consistory shall examine them concerning their motives, doctrine, and conduct.” (Art. 59a; p. 137) Changes to the CO adopted by the Synod of 2011, which admitted baptized members to the Lord’s Supper, retained this requirement for public profession of faith, which was still required for admission to the rights and privileges of adult church membership. (Art. 59b; Agenda, 2011:573; Acts, 2011:829-830)

Commentators differ, however, over the importance of each step. According to Kuiper, (1934:59) “The preliminary examination may never represent anything more than the vestibule through which one passes to public confession.” The latter “represents the holy and decisive moment for the great decision of your life.” Similarly, Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:254) write: “Confession before the consistory or a committee of the consistory is only preliminary to the real confession of faith, which takes place before the whole church.”

Contra Kuiper and Van Dellen & Monsma, De Moor (2010:119) highlights the importance of the preliminary examination, allowing non-ordained persons, who must “refrain from all official acts of ministry,” (CO Art. 55) to hear a person’s public profession of faith because “reception or dismissal of members is really an act of the consistory as a whole.” According to De Moor, even non-ordained seminary students may “welcome people into adult confessing membership on behalf of the elders who have met with them.”

*Forma ac Ratio*<sup>7</sup> and the Palatinate Liturgy,<sup>8</sup> included such preparatory services. Including profession of faith within these preparatory services<sup>9</sup> or, in the case of the Synod of Dordrecht (1578), in the communion service itself,<sup>10</sup> reinforced the understanding of profession of faith as primarily the means by which baptized persons are admitted to the Lord's Supper.

Although the earliest Dutch Reformed church orders uniformly present profession of faith as the means of admission to the Lord's Supper, they also reflect diversity in the manner in which profession of faith was practiced in the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands. Not all of the earliest church orders required that profession of faith take place within the context of congregational worship; some allowed it to take place "in the consistory."<sup>11</sup> "Profession of faith was more a pastoral or consistorial matter than a liturgical act." (Diephouse, Kromminga, & Polman, 1998:835) Diversity in practice may account for the various church orders' references to profession of faith "according to the custom [or usage] of the church one joins."<sup>12</sup>

Olds (1992:209) argues that in the sixteenth century Reformed rite, persons made profession of faith by reciting a catechism. Datheen's liturgy, which would become the Netherlands Liturgy, included such a catechism, a Short Examination of Faith, which he took not from

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<sup>7</sup> Nichols (1968:80) describes à Lasco's preparatory service: "A sermon was preached on the true understanding of the sacrament, new candidates for admission to the Supper were to be examined before the congregation, and then the whole congregation was charged in public questions and answers to confess their sin, affirm their faith, and dedicate themselves in thankful devotion."

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Rowe (1996:57-58) describes the Palatinate liturgy's preparatory service: "On Saturday afternoon before communion Sundays a preparatory service was required. ... After preaching a sermon 'on the true understanding of the sacrament,' the minister left the pulpit and stood in front of the table. Young people wishing to be admitted to the sacrament were required to stand with the minister before the Holy Table and to recite the Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer and to answer questions from the catechism concerning the Lord's Supper. A general congregational examination then followed based on the three-fold structure of the HC (sin, redemption, duty), requiring the people's assent by the words, 'We do' and 'It is.'"

<sup>9</sup> Following the Convent of Wesel, the Synod of Middelburg (1581) placed profession of faith after "the sermon that takes place for preparation for the Lord's Supper." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:123)

<sup>10</sup> The Synod of Dordrecht (1578) stipulated that profession of faith should take place "after the sermon which is delivered just before the serving of communion." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:93)

<sup>11</sup> The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) required that profession of faith take place "publicly in such places accessible to everyone," but allowed that such places could be "either in the consistory or in the church." (Art. LXX; p. 72) Similarly, the national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) required that people "openly declare in the consistory or in the church ... that they receive the doctrine of the church." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:93) The Synod of Middelburg (1581) placed profession of faith "either in public after the sermon that takes place for preparation for the Lord's Supper or in the consistory." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:123)

<sup>12</sup> See Middelburg (1581), Art. XLIII (p. 115); 's Gravenhage (1586), Art. LIV (p. 150); and Dort (1618-1619), Art. LXI (p. 171).

the Palatinate liturgy, but from Micron's *Christian Ordinances*.<sup>13</sup> (Meeter, 1998:5) However, in 1608 Hermannus Faulkelius wrote a Compendium for the HC to replace Datheen's Short Examination, "which, while having been itself a source for the authors of the [Heidelberg] Catechism,<sup>14</sup> perhaps did not sufficiently conform to it." (Meeter, 1998:15) The length of Datheen's Short Examination and Faulkelius' Compendium make it unlikely that they were used liturgically for a person's public profession of faith. It is more likely that they were used in the consistory's preliminary examination, as the Compendium would be in the CRCNA, with a shorter series of formulated questions asked at the public profession of faith.<sup>15</sup> Endorsement of Faulkelius' Compendium by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) "sealed the fate of Datheen's Short Examination." (Meeter, 1998:17) The Netherlands Liturgy, which the CRCNA inherited from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, included neither Datheen's Short Examination nor a liturgical formulary for profession of faith.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.3 ~ Profession of Faith in the CRCNA (1857-1932)

Those who established the CRCNA in 1857 were committed to the polity and liturgical practices of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Accordingly, they maintained the Dortian tradition of using Faulkelius' Compendium to examine candidates for profession of faith, though there was disagreement about the manner in which the Compendium would be used.<sup>17</sup> The 4 October 1865 meeting of the general assembly - the CRCNA's broadest assembly at the time - left the matter to the discretion of the local consistories. (Sheeres, 2013:138) Two years later, however,

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<sup>13</sup> D.H. Kromminga (1943:23) claims that "candidates for communion were till 1618 indoctrinated from Micron's *Corte Ondersoekinghe*," the source of Datheen's Short Examination. The decision of the Synod of Middelberg (1581) to make the use of the Short Examination (or *Corte Ondersoekinghe*) optional, (Meeter, 1998:15n40) and the composition of an alternative, Faulkelius' Compendium, in 1608 suggest that this indoctrination was not uniform within the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

<sup>14</sup> It was not Datheen's Short Examination but Micron's *Christian Ordinances*, on which Datheen based his Short Examination, that was a source for the authors of the HC.

<sup>15</sup> Koelman's *Office and Duties of Elders and Deacons* (1694) includes such a set of questions, taken from Voetius (1589-1676), indicating the history of this practice in the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands. The 2 June 1875 general assembly meeting adopted Voetius' questions as found in Koelman for use in the CRCNA. (Sheeres, 2013:355)

<sup>16</sup> The Netherlands Liturgy approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) included "the public prayers, the forms for administering the sacraments, the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline [that is, the forms for excommunication and readmission], the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons, and the solemnization of marriage." (Biesterfeld & Kuiper, 1982:200)

<sup>17</sup> Some wanted the Compendium used literally; that is, they wanted the questions of the Compendium asked and answered as written during examinations for profession of faith. Others argued that consistories should inquire into a person's doctrine and conduct more generally, not simply their knowledge of the Compendium. (Sheeres, 2013:174)

at its 19 June 1867 meeting, the general assembly “decided to use the short catechism [the Compendium] as a guide for accepting members<sup>18</sup> into the congregation, as our forebears did.” (Sheeres, 2013:272) A decade later, at its 6 June 1877 meeting, the general assembly affirmed this rule requiring use of the Compendium for examining candidates for profession of faith. (Sheeres, 2013:396) Four years later the rule was codified in Article 57 of the General Regulations adopted by the Synod of 1881, which stipulated: “The *Kort Begrip* (Compendium) is to be used chiefly in the spirit of the fathers of old.”<sup>19</sup> (Spaan, 1968:125)

The Compendium was used for the consistory’s examination of those who desired admission to the Lord’s Supper,<sup>20</sup> but for their public profession of faith no guidance was offered by either the Compendium, which was too lengthy, or the Netherlands Liturgy, which did not include a liturgical formulary for this rite. At its 2 June 1875 meeting, the general assembly was asked “if when accepting members, some uniformity can be created.” To that end, the assembly was asked to choose between the questions used by Rev. Frieling<sup>21</sup> and the questions of Voetius, found in Koelman’s *Office and Duties of Elders and Deacons*.<sup>22</sup> The assembly opted for the latter questions which read:

1. Do you acknowledge and declare that you hold the doctrine of our church, in so far as you have learned, heard, and confessed it, to be the true doctrine of salvation in accordance with the Holy Scripture?
  
2. Do you promise by the grace of God, that you will persevere in the confession of this doctrine of salvation, and will live and die according to it?

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<sup>18</sup> The phrase “accepting members” was frequently used to refer to the rite of profession of faith. See Heyns (1926:161) for a critique of this terminology.

<sup>19</sup> The Compendium was not thereby added to the denomination’s confessional standards. The Synods of 1936, 1937, and 1938 denied repeated requests from Classis Sioux Center to include the Compendium in the PsH, on the grounds that “only those things which belong to our official creed and liturgy should be placed in our book of praise.” (Acts, 1936:42-43; see also Acts, 1937:13; Agenda, 1938:180) The Compendium belonged to neither.

<sup>20</sup> The Compendium continued to be used in the CRCNA for generations. The Synod of 1936, responding to an overture from Classis Pella, appointed a committee to revise the Compendium. (Acts, 1936:17) Seven years later, the Synod of 1943 adopted a revised Compendium, (Acts, 1943:80-81), which the Synod of 1951 decided to rewrite. (Acts, 1951:57) The revision, which was “to remain materially the same” as the revision adopted by the Synod of 1943, was approved by the Synod of 1957. (Acts, 1957:56) By that time, “in teaching doctrine to catechumens only one half of ministers of the Christian Reformed Church use[d] the authorized Compendium as a basic text.” (Stob, 1952:7; see also Acts 1951:365) A decade later, the Synod of 1967 appointed a committee to “draft a new version of the Compendium ... that follows the HC more closely.” (Acts, 1967:49) When the Synod of 1968 decided to appoint a committee to draft a new translation of the HC, (Acts, 1968:24) revision of the Compendium was delayed until this new translation was adopted. By the time the new translation of the HC was adopted eight years later by the Synod of 1975, (Acts, 1975:90-93) the matter of Compendium revision had disappeared from the synodical agenda.

<sup>21</sup> The questions used by Rev. Frieling, which the general assembly did not adopt, are not recorded in the minutes.

<sup>22</sup> Koelman’s work was well-known within the denomination. At its 12 October 1864 meeting, the classical assembly had decided to print and distribute it to the church councils “as a clarification of the DCO.” (Sheeres, 2013:100)

3. Do you promise that according to this sacred doctrine, you will at all times, with the help and grace of Christ, present yourself as godly, honorable, and guiltless, and adorn your confession with good works?

4. Do you promise that you will yield and submit to the instruction, admonition, and discipline of the church, if (God forbidding) it should occur that you should deviate either in doctrine or life? (Sheeres, 2013:355)

The assembly instructed its correspondents for Classes Illinois and Michigan “to send copies of this to the various congregations of our church.” (Sheeres, 2013:355) These questions, codified in Article 59 of the General Regulations adopted by the Synod of 1881, were revised by the Synod of 1890 to read:

- a. Do you acknowledge that doctrine which is taught in the Old and New Testament, and the articles of the Christian faith, and in the Christian church here, to be the true and only doctrine for salvation?
- b. Do you promise through God’s grace to remain in this doctrine and to reject all heresies in conflict with it and to live and walk in a new and holy life?
- c. And if indeed you should go astray, will you then submit to the discipline of the church, and be subservient to the rule of the church? (Acts, 1890:22)

Neither the general assembly in 1875 nor the Synod of 1890 adopted a complete liturgical formulary for profession of faith. Instead, they adopted a set of questions to be used for a person’s public profession of faith. Both sets of questions, which included a profession of faith and a submission to discipline, were silent on the sacrament of baptism.

It is clear from an instruction submitted by Classis Grand Rapids West to the Synod of 1912 that profession of faith was understood primarily as the means by which a person was admitted to the Lord’s Supper. The classis’ instruction claimed that “there is a gap in the questions with respect to the public profession of faith in our church, since no question is asked ... concerning misery and redemption.” (Acts, 1912:50) The classis considered such a question essential to profession of faith because the HC describes a sense of both misery and redemption as necessary for participation in the Lord’s Supper.<sup>23</sup> That their necessity for participation in the Lord’s Supper made them essential to profession of faith indicates that profession of faith was understood primarily as admission to the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>23</sup> “Q. Who are to come to the Lord’s table? A. Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their continuing weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life.” (HC Q&A 81)

The classis proposed that the following question be added to the approved set of questions for profession of faith: “Do you confess that you, in conformity with the doctrine, are displeased with yourself through the grace of God because of your sins, and place your trust in Christ Jesus and all his promises as all that is necessary for salvation?” (Acts, 1912:50) The Synod of 1912 appointed a study committee to advise the Synod of 1914 on the requested addition. (Acts, 1912:50) The appointed committee’s advice to synod “not to consider this matter,” because the requested addition “is factually already comprehended in the first question,” was adopted by the Synod of 1914. (Acts, 1914:68)

The CRCNA had a set of synodical approved questions to be asked at public profession of faith, but it did not yet have a complete liturgical formulary. The first request for such a formulary was submitted to the Synod of 1916 by Classis Illinois. The classis described profession of faith as “an ecclesiastical ceremony of great importance” and suggested that with an official liturgical formulary “the significance of making public profession of faith will be better understood by the congregation.”<sup>24</sup> (Acts, 1916:31)

The Synod of 1916 adopted its advisory committee’s recommendation that it “not consider this matter,” on the grounds that “the customary questions cover this material in this matter and give satisfactory unity.”<sup>25</sup> Contra Classis Illinois’ claim the profession of faith is an ecclesiastical ceremony of great importance, the Synod of 1916 was concerned that its importance might be overestimated: “By means of an established form the impression can be given that by means of making profession of faith one is incorporated into the fellowship.” (Acts, 1916:31) According to the church’s *lex credendi*, one is incorporated into the fellowship, “received into God’s church,” by baptism, not by profession of faith.<sup>26</sup> (BC Art. 34)

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<sup>24</sup> Neither the DCO (Art. LXI, p. 171) nor the 1914 CO (Art. 61, p. 100) retained the requirement of the earliest Dutch Reformed church orders that profession of faith take place in connection with the church’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper. (Wesel [1568], Art. 11, p. 37; Dordrecht [1578] [Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:93] Middelburg [1581] [Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:123]). The understanding of profession of faith as “an ecclesiastical ceremony of great significance” in its own right may be attributed to the loss of this connection. The denominational Worship Committee would later counsel: “The ritual of profession of faith should ordinarily be conducted in association with the Lord’s Supper. ... Separation of the ritual of profession of faith from participation in the Lord’s Supper has the effect of raising the ritual of profession of faith to a level of importance which is not warranted.” (Agenda, 1993:241)

<sup>25</sup> Classis Illinois’ instruction had also argued that an established liturgical formulary would “serve to create unity in practice” and remove “all arbitrariness in the worship services.” (Acts, 1916:31)

<sup>26</sup> A study committee that reported to the Synod of 1918 rejected descriptions of profession of faith as “becoming a member” or “joining the church,” arguing that “such a view is not valid with the Scriptural meaning of covenant and baptism, and such expressions are false and objectionable.” (Acts, 1918:175)

While the Synod of 1916 did not consider Classis Illinois' request that it establish a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith, it did act on another request from Classis Illinois to "express the desirability of introducing a uniform order of service." (Acts, 1916:30) In its report to the Synod of 1920, the committee appointed to draft a uniform order of worship "took the liberty of calling the attention of synod" to other liturgical matters that it considered "urgently in need of consideration." These matters included "the desirability of a more complete form for profession of faith."<sup>27</sup> (Acts, 1920:204) The Synod of 1920 appointed a committee to study this desirability, (Acts, 1920:27) beginning the process that would lead to the adoption of the CRCNA's first liturgical formulary for profession of faith by the Synod of 1932.

#### **5.4 ~ Profession of Faith in the CRCNA (1932-1988)**

The Synod of 1920 appointed a committee "to study 'the desirability of a more complete form for profession of faith.'" (Acts, 1920:27) This mandate suggests that the appointed committee would serve a subsequent synod with advice on whether a more complete form was in fact desirable or not. The denial of a similar request for such a form four years prior by the Synod of 1916 (Acts, 1916:31) suggests that the establishment of a more complete formulary for profession of faith was not equally desirable to all. However, when the committee members were appointed, the Synod of 1920 named the committee a Committee for Drafting a Form for Making Profession of Faith. (Acts, 1920:94)

In its report to the Synod of 1922, which included a draft formulary, the committee said that it had been appointed "to draw up a more complete form to be used for public profession of faith," not to study whether such a formulary was in fact desirable. The committee noted that "never before have the Reformed churches, with which we have counted ourselves, had

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<sup>27</sup> The study committee was certainly influenced by Kuyper's *Our Worship*, which the committee quoted in defense of absolution. (Acts, 1920:190) Kuyper (2009:259) described profession of faith as "an ecclesiastical event of the highest importance" and urged the church "to provide an official form." A later study committee would cite Kuyper's influence as what "presumably prompted our churches to act" on the request to adopt a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith. (Acts, 1976:352)



such a form.” Leading theologians, such as John Calvin<sup>28</sup> and Abraham Kuyper,<sup>29</sup> had expressed the desirability of having such a form, but, as far as the committee knew, none had written one for the churches. (Agenda, 1922:27-28, my translation)

The study committee’s draft formulary followed the outline suggested by Kuyper.<sup>30</sup> It began with a didactic section that explained the significance of the ceremony, explicitly connecting baptism and profession of faith. “All those who are baptized in their youth and come to the years of understanding are called and obliged to proclaim the Lord’s death,<sup>31</sup> and in the midst of the church, after examination by the consistory, to make a profession of faith.” In their baptism, they were “sanctified in Christ, that is, separated from the world, that they might confess, honor, and serve him.”<sup>32</sup> God fulfilled his promise to take care of them through their parents, through the ministry of the Word, and through the Holy Spirit, so that they might now “appropriate<sup>33</sup> what they have in Christ,” what was signed and sealed to them in their baptism. (Agenda, 1922:29, my translation) The draft formulary offered two possible sets of questions to be asked at a public profession of faith: those of Voetius<sup>34</sup> and those of the committee’s own

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<sup>28</sup> The study committee misquotes a section of Calvin’s *Institutes*, (4.19.13) wherein Calvin does not advocate for a liturgical formulary but for a shorter catechism which children could recite at a special service of admission to the Lord’s Supper, (Osmer, 1996:73) which Calvin did write. (See Bonar, 1866:93-95 for the text of Calvin’s Manner to Examine Children before They are Admitted to the Lord’s Supper.) Similar in form to Faulkelius’ Compendium, which was already in use in the CRCNA, Calvin’s Manner to Examine Children does not model the type of liturgical formulary the committee desired. Olds, (1992:216) who reconstructs the Genevan service based on Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Ordinances, wonders “if each child was indeed asked all twenty-eight questions separately.”

<sup>29</sup> “Our churches also have to provide for making public profession of faith... This profession is an ecclesiastical event of the highest importance, and the churches are obligated to provide an official form.” (Kuyper, 2009:259-260)

<sup>30</sup> “Such a form must explain the significance of this ceremony, and it should contain the questions to be asked of the persons who have come to make profession of faith.” (Kuyper, 2009:260)

<sup>31</sup> The phrase “to proclaim the Lord’s death,” which alludes to 1 Corinthians 11:26 - “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” - refers to participation in the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>32</sup> Contra the Dortian baptismal formulary, where the phrase “sanctified in Christ” reflects the internal view of covenant holiness, the study committee’s draft formulary for profession of faith adopts the external holiness view. “Separated from the world,” covenant children are set apart by baptism “in a special sphere in which they are most likely to be regenerated by the means of grace.” (Gerstner, 1991:8)

<sup>33</sup> Language of appropriation (or acceptance) suggests that it is not the things themselves, but the promise of those things that is signed and sealed to a person in baptism. To possess the things themselves, a baptized person must appropriate (or accept) the promises. This reflects Borduin’s (1935:33-34) theology of baptism: “In baptism God seals to us a promise on condition of active faith, by which we appropriate the proffered grace,” which Wielenga (2016:84) rejected: “Those who say baptism seals only the promises impoverish baptism.” Wielenga (2016:106) called the idea that baptism is “a sealing of God’s promise only,” “entirely contrary to God’s word.”

<sup>34</sup> The general assembly had approved Voetius’ questions, as quoted in Koelman, in 1875. (Sheeres, 2013:355)

composition.<sup>35</sup> Contra Kuypers (2009:260) comment that “the first of these questions must refer to the baptism they received as infants,” neither set of questions refers to baptism.<sup>36</sup>

The Synod of 1922 adopted its advisory committee’s recommendation that the study committee’s report “be placed in the hands of the Committee for the Revision of our Church Forms,” (Acts, 1922:79) which the Synod of 1920 had appointed to “study the revision of forms of the church in cooperation with the GKN and the Reformed Churches of South Africa.”<sup>37</sup> (Acts, 1920:94) Synod judged that “uniformity is desirable,” not only within the CRCNA but also with her sister denominations. “Correspondence with sister churches requires cooperation in devising such a form.” (Acts, 1922:79)

The GKN, however, did not feel the same need to correspond with the CRCNA before its Synod of Utrecht (1923) adopted a liturgical formulary for profession of faith. Classis Illinois asked the Synod of 1924 to encourage CRCNA congregations to use the questions approved by the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1923), to provide an English translation of those questions, and to send copies to every church council. The Synod of 1924 appointed a committee to “study this matter and report to the next synod.” (Acts, 1924:90)

In its report to the Synod of 1926, the appointed study committee reviewed four sets of questions for profession of faith: those approved by the Synod of 1890, those of Voetius, those drafted by the 1922 study committee, and those approved by the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1923). The committee noted that in both the 1922 draft formulary’s didactic section and the questions approved by the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1923), profession of faith was presented as an acceptance or appropriation of the covenant promises signed and sealed in one’s baptism. The committee judged this to be preferable to Voetius’ questions and those approved by the Synod of 1890. (Agenda, 1926:62-67)

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<sup>35</sup> “First, do you confess the doctrine which is taught in the Old and New Testaments and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in the Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Second, do you confess to be displeased with yourself, because of your sin, and therefore humble yourself before God, and is it your heartfelt desire to love and serve Jesus Christ, God’s Son, your chief prophet, only high priest, and eternal king?

Third, by the grace of God, do you promise to remain in the pure doctrine, to renounce the world, and to lead a new Christian life, and if you fail (which God mercifully forbid) to submit to the discipline of the church?” (Agenda, 1922:30-31, my translation)

<sup>36</sup> The study committee report includes no comment on the questions approved by the Synod of 1890 (Acts, 1890:61) nor any explanation of why it did not include them as an option in the proposed formulary.

<sup>37</sup> The committee was appointed to consider especially revision of the liturgical formulary for marriage. (Acts, 1920:27) It reported to the Synod of 1922 that it had “entered into correspondence with the foreign Reformed churches,” but it had not yet completed its work. (Acts, 1922:254)

Preferring both the shorter introductory words of the GKN formulary<sup>38</sup> to the didactic section of the 1922 draft formulary<sup>39</sup> and the logical order of the questions in the GKN formulary to those proposed by the 1922 study committee, the committee recommended that “the questions established by the Synod of Utrecht (1923) be recommended to our churches.”<sup>40</sup> (Agenda, 1926:70) Given that the historic polity and practice of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands presented profession of faith primarily as a means of admission to the Lord’s Supper, the first ground for this recommendation is significant: The questions approved by the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1923) “are based on the assumption that public profession of faith is an acceptance of baptismal privileges and obligations.” Accordingly, they “point back to baptism and the covenant of grace.” (Agenda, 1926:70)

The Synod of 1926, after initially recommitting the formulary to the study committee “for more precise formulation,” (Acts, 1926:53) tabled the entire matter. (Acts, 1926:74) It was not taken from the table and discussed again at the Synod of 1926, prompting Classis Orange City to submit an instruction to the Synod of 1928, asking it to “consider again the desirability of reviewing the questions in use at the time of public profession of faith” “in the spirit of the proposal of the committee which reported to the last synod,” the Synod of 1926. (Acts, 1928:116)

The Synod of 1928 agreed to reconsider the matter and referred it to an advisory committee. (Acts, 1928:116-117) The advisory committee recommended that the Synod of 1928

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<sup>38</sup> These words - “Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ: You have appeared before us to make confession of your faith before God and His holy church, to the end that you may obtain access to the Lord’s Holy Supper” (Agenda, 1926:71) - do not satisfy Kuyper’s (2009:260) desire, which guided the 1922 study committee, for a formulary that explains the significance of this ceremony.

<sup>39</sup> The study committee argued that a didactic section was unnecessary for the rite of profession of faith. If a didactic section was necessary, the committee judged that the one in the 1922 draft formulary “contained weak points” that “should in any case be improved.” (Agenda, 1926:67, my translation) But the committee did not specify what the alleged weak points were.

<sup>40</sup> The study committee provided this English translation of the questions approved by the Synod of Utrecht (1923): “First, Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation; and do you promise steadfastly to continue in the confession thereof, by the grace of God, both in life and death?

“Second, Do you believe the promise of God’s covenant, signified and sealed unto you in baptism, and do you confess, whereas now you request access to the Holy Supper, that you abhor yourself before God, and that you seek life outside yourself in Jesus Christ, the only Savior?

“Third, Do you confess it to be your cordial desire to love the Lord God, and to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to crucify your old nature, and to walk in a new and holy life?

“Fourth, Do you promise to submit to the church government, as well as to all admonitions and discipline in case you should become delinquent (which God may graciously prevent)?” (Agenda, 1926:71-72)

adopt the GKN formulary as presented in the study committee's report to the Synod of 1926,<sup>41</sup> which the Synod of 1928 did. It did not adopt the English translation provided in the study committee's report to the Synod of 1926, however, and, instead, asked the Committee for the Revision of our Liturgical Forms to provide such a translation. (Acts, 1928:159)

That committee presented two formularies to the Synod of 1930: a literal translation of the GKN formulary and a suggested rendering in which the formulary's opening and concluding statements were revised. The GKN formulary opened with a statement that those who came to make profession of faith came "in order that [they] may thus obtain access to the Lord's Supper." (Agenda, 1930:94) The study committee, arguing that profession of faith "does not only give one access to the Lord's Supper but also to other privileges,"<sup>42</sup> revised this opening statement to speak of those who came to make profession of faith "in order that [they] may obtain the privileges of full communion with the people of God." (Agenda, 1930:95) The following was also added to the GKN formulary's concluding statement: "In the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord and King, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God. Rest assured that all of the privileges of such communion are now yours." (Agenda, 1930:95)

The Synod of 1930 did not accept its advisory committee's advice to adopt the study committee's literal translation of the GKN formulary. Instead, it adopted a motion to "appoint a committee to once more subject the Dutch and English formulary for public profession of faith to a thorough examination" and to consider not only the GKN formulary and the study committee's suggested rendering, but also "the forms used in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches of this country," the United States. (Acts, 1930:138-139)

#### **5.4.1 ~ The 1932 Formulary**

The formulary adopted by the Synod of 1932 was a hybrid, drawing from all three sources: the GKN formulary, the 1930 study committee's suggested English rendering, and the

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<sup>41</sup> The advisory committee inserted one minor change to the questions of the proposed formulary. It added the modifying phrase "in doctrine or life" after the word "delinquent" in the fourth question. (Acts, 1928:156-157)

<sup>42</sup> The study committee's report left these "other privileges" undefined. Neither the DCO nor the 1914 CO use the language of "membership privileges" or "rights." Regarding church discipline, the 1914 CO spoke of persons being "suspended from the Lord's Supper." (Art. 76; p. 104) In the RCO, "responding to the baptismal questions, and exercising any other rights of membership" which Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:314) define as "the right of taking part in and voting at congregational meetings," were added. (Art. 85; p. 141) The Synod of 1991 would also add "eligibility to hold office." (Acts, 1991:718)

forms used in American Presbyterian churches.<sup>43</sup> Its opening statement is taken from the suggested rendering presented to the Synod of 1930 and speaks of admission to “the privileges of full membership,” rather than solely admission to the Lord’s Supper. The 1932 formulary employs the questions found in the GKN’s 1923 formulary, including the acceptance of God’s promises, which are signed and sealed to one at one’s baptism, with one significant revision. The GKN formulary reads “*geloof gij Gods verbondsbelofte*,” (Agenda, 1926:64) translated “do you believe God’s covenant promises” in the 1930 study committee report. (Agenda, 1930:94) But the formulary adopted by the Synod of 1932 reads “do you openly accept God’s covenant promises,” (Acts, 1932:79) translated “*aavaardt gij openlijk Gods verbondsbelofte*” in the official Dutch translation. (Acts, 1932:81)

There follows the suggested rendering’s solemn declaration that welcomes the confessor “in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord” to “full communion with the people of God.” The formulary concludes with an optional prayer, borrowed from an American Presbyterian directory of worship, which thanks God for having from the beginning embraced our children in his covenant<sup>44</sup> and for adding the special grace of his Spirit, so that they now of their own will<sup>45</sup> come to profess their faith and consecrate their lives to God’s service. (Acts, 1932:79-82) The suggestion that the “special grace” of the Holy Spirit must be “added” to baptized persons contradicts the language of the Dortian baptismal formulary, which assumes that baptized children have received the Holy Spirit and prays that they would be “governed by the Holy Spirit” in order to “grow and increase” in the faith that they are presumed to have.<sup>46</sup> (PsH, 1934:85)

Many considered profession of faith “an ecclesiastical ceremony of great importance” before the adoption of a liturgical formulary for it. It was, in fact, that consideration that led to

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<sup>43</sup> This formulary was not the one proposed by the study committee, but the one proposed by the synodical advisory committee, which closely resembled a formulary proposed by Classis Illinois in an overture to the Synod of 1932. (Acts, 1932:77-79)

<sup>44</sup> As the first committee appointed to draft a liturgical formulary for profession of faith noted, this formulary was intended to be used for those who, having been baptized as infants, now desire to profess their faith. For older children and adults who were baptized upon their profession of faith, another liturgical formulary, the formulary for adult baptism, was used. (Agenda, 1922:27)

<sup>45</sup> In an overture to the Synod 1936, the consistory of Manhattan, Montana objected to the phrase “of their own will” for “fear that free-will-keepers will invoke the disputed expression in support of their opinion.” (Acts, 1936:52, my translation) The Dutch translation of the 1932 formulary reads: “*zich thans gedrongen gevoelen*,” (Acts, 1932:81) that is, “now feel compelled.” The Manhattan consistory asked that the English formulary be amended to read “that they now feel constrained.” The Synod of 1936 denied the Manhattan request on the grounds that in the formulary “the context is sufficiently clear to exclude the Arminian implication.” (Acts, 1936:52)

<sup>46</sup> As Wielenga (2016:366, his emphasis) notes: The Dortian formulary “does not say convert or regenerate but govern the child.”

the adoption of a liturgical formulary by the Synod of 1932. Prior to the Synod of 1932, Zacharias Sherda (1932a:225) wrote in *The Banner*, “the significance of public confession cannot be easily exaggerated or overestimated.” But the first request for a liturgical formulary for profession of faith had been denied by the Synod of 1916 for that very reason. The Synod of 1916 was concerned that “by means of an established form the impression can be given that by means of making profession of faith one is incorporated into the fellowship,” (Acts, 1916:31) which would overestimate the significance of profession of faith, because the church’s *lex credendi* teaches that a person is incorporated into the church’s fellowship by baptism, not by profession of faith. (BC Art. 34) Unfortunately the 1932 formulary, particularly its solemn declaration: “In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God,” (PsH, 1934:86) created the very impression about which had concerned the Synod of 1916.

In a series of articles in *The Banner* on the 1932 formulary, P.Y. De Jong (1950c:554) described this welcome as “the climax of the ceremony” and even commended the practice of many Congregational and Baptist churches - which did not share the CRCNA’s confessional commitments - of “extending the right hand of fellowship” to confessors as a practice that “could properly be introduced into our churches.” Contra De Jong’s (1950a:458) own caution that profession of faith “must by no means be construed to mean that the membership of such covenant children is in any way partial or incomplete,” the formulary’s welcome, which welcomes confessors to full communion, implied that very thing. But HC Q&A 74 precludes any status as an “incomplete” member of the covenant or the church. Radius (1966:10) rightly notes: The formulary’s welcome would be “appropriate to address these words to converts entering church membership for the first time,”<sup>47</sup> but “it is not proper to address them to covenant young people” who were incorporated in the church by baptism.

Radius (1966:10) notes that “in American churches<sup>48</sup> this ceremony [profession of faith] was often called ‘joining the church,’” terminology that she described as “not in accord with our doctrine of the covenant.” As early as 1918, a synodical study committee report cautioned against such language, calling it “false and objectionable.” (Acts, 1918:175) Even so,

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<sup>47</sup> This formulary, however, was not intended for use with converts entering church membership for the first time. In such situations, another formulary, the formulary for adult baptism, was used. The formulary for profession of faith was developed specifically for those who had been baptized as infants or young children.

<sup>48</sup> In this context “American churches” refers to non-Dutch Reformed denominations in the United States.

its use persisted in the CRCNA,<sup>49</sup> demonstrating, as Sherda (1932b:586) observed, that “the proper conception of the church is lacking.”<sup>50</sup> The assumption was that “although one is baptized one is not in all strictness to be regarded as a member of the church until one has gone through the process of joining,” that is, made profession of faith.<sup>51</sup> (Sherda, 1932b:586) Only in the liturgical formulary for profession of faith was one welcomed in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord into full communion with the people of God. The absence of a comparable declaration in the liturgical formulary for baptism<sup>52</sup> reinforced the impression that it is by profession of faith, rather than by baptism, that a person is incorporated into the fellowship.

The absence of a comparable declaration in the Dortian baptismal formulary may be explained by the formulary’s statement that covenant children are born into, rather than baptized into, the church. The formulary asks parents before their children are baptized, if they believe that their children “as members of the church ought to be baptized.” Children of believers are “received unto grace in Christ.” They are “heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant” and are “sanctified in Christ.” (PsH, 1934:83-84) With this language and the prayer of thanksgiving with which the formulary concludes,<sup>53</sup> the Dortian baptismal formulary reflects an internal holiness view of covenant holiness and a doctrine of presumptive regeneration.

When the Synod of 1908 expressed its agreement with the Conclusions of Utrecht, it gave synodical sanction to a doctrine of presumptive regeneration. Although the CRCNA never officially rescinded that doctrine, the denomination clearly moved away from it. Movement

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<sup>49</sup> Sherda (1932b:586) described it as “current in our circles” in the 1930s. Veenstra (1964:3) would allege the same in the 1960s: “When a young person makes public profession, he is not joining the church, as is often inaccurately said.” In the 1940s, N. Monsma (1949:165) corrected a reader of *The Banner* who described one who makes profession of faith as “becoming a member.” In the 1970s, another reader would ask about those who “have not yet made profession of faith and joined the church.” (Bratt, 1973:12)

<sup>50</sup> Sherda (1932b:586) describes the incorrect conception of the church that prevailed: “She is thought of too much as a society of voluntary membership. Just as one may according to one’s good pleasure apply for membership in a society, so one may seek membership in the church. According to this conception, you are not a member of the church, but you become a member of the church.” Contra this erroneous conception, Sherda (1932b:586) contends: “The origin of the church lies in the divine decree of election.... No one becomes a member of the church through his own initiative. God determines the membership of his church and he alone brings it to pass.”

<sup>51</sup> “Sometimes we get the impression as if many people in the church think that professing members are the only members, and the baptized members are, well, who knows what.” (Sherda, 1932b:683)

<sup>52</sup> Until 1976, the Dortian formulary was the CRCNA’s only liturgical formulary for baptism. Neither it nor the 1976 formulary for infant baptism welcome baptized person into the church’s communion. The 2013 formulary was the CRCNA’s first baptismal formulary to include this declaration after baptism: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ the only King and Head of the church, this child/these children of God is/are now received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church.” (Acts, 2013:556; Agenda, 2013:338)

<sup>53</sup> The concluding prayer thanks God “that Thou has forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.” (PsH, 1934:85)

away from the doctrine of presumptive regeneration and from the internal view of covenant holiness is evident in the 1932 formulary for profession of faith, particularly its second question, which asks about God's covenant promises signed and sealed in one's baptism. The GKN formulary, from which the 1932 formulary's questions were taken, asked "do you believe God's covenant promise." (Agenda, 1930:94, my emphasis) This is more consistent with the Dortian baptismal formulary and a doctrine of presumptive regeneration than is the 1932 formulary, in which the second question was revised to ask, "do you openly accept God's covenant promise." (PsH, 1934:86, my emphasis)

The Dortian baptismal formulary presented baptism as the "sign and seal of God's saving grace in Christ." (Monsma, 1948/1949:210) In baptism God the Father "seals our adoption as his children" and God "the Son seals unto us that he washes us in his blood of all our sins." (PsH, 1934:83) These things have already happened. They are true of baptized children before the children become aware of them, as the formulary itself claims: "Although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation of Adam, and so again received unto grace in Christ." (PsH, 1934:83)

As covenant children grow and mature, their parents are obligated "to give them further instruction into these things." (PsH, 1934:84) Parents are to nurture their children toward a subjective awareness of what is objectively true of them, of which their baptism is a sign and seal. Hendriksen, (1940:971) a proponent of presumptive regeneration, argues that covenant children "do not need to become converted in the sense in which the heathen need to be converted."<sup>54</sup> Covenant children are "the sons and daughters of the Great King of Kings. Let us not insult them by viewing them as heathen." This was also the GKN view, as Plantinga (1995:219) explains it: One should presume that covenant children "are already justified before God, and therefore also regenerated. Faith is only a becoming aware that one is justified."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Monsma (1949/1950:90) explains the prayer that precedes baptism in the Dortian formulary as "a prayer that God may in due season give them [baptized children] an active faith, by which they will actively and consciously share in Christ's blessings of salvation." These children do not come to share in these blessings only when they express faith, rather their sharing in those blessings, which had been passive and unconscious, becomes active and conscious when they come to faith. Hendriksen (1940:1010) describes this as "the change from passive, more-or-less unconscious religion to conscious, voluntary self-surrender."

<sup>55</sup> Wielenga (2016:81-82, his emphasis) offers this illustration: "Observe, behind the cradle's curtains of silk and lace a child slumbers. He is a child of a mighty king. ... He is of all subjects in his kingdom the object of the king's most ardent love. ... But at this moment, the child does not know anything of all this. ... This is an example for us of the person who has already been adopted as God's child but has not yet arrived at faith's awareness of his election.



(Plantinga, 1995:219) Thus, in the GKN formulary the question is phrased: “Do you believe the promise of God’s covenant, signified and sealed unto you in baptism?” (Agenda, 1926:71)

But in the 1932 formulary the question has been revised to read: “Do you openly accept God’s covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism?” (PsH, 1934:86) This language of accepting, rather than believing, God’s covenant promises suggests a different understanding of baptism. Baptism is not a “sign and seal of God’s saving grace in Christ.” (Monsma, 1949/1950:210) It does not seal and confirm to us forgiveness of sins and adoption into Christ through the Holy Spirit, as the Dortian baptismal formulary’s concluding prayer claimed. (PsH, 1934:85) Rather, “in baptism God seals to us a promise on condition of active faith, by which we appropriate the proffered grace.” (Borduin, 1935:34)

Borduin (1935:74) claims that “baptism seals only the promise to the children, and no grace which the children already possess.” “When the children grow up to years of responsibility they have to accept this promise by faith to receive the benefits of the promises.” (Borduin, 1935:79) Those benefits only become theirs when they are appropriated by faith. (Borduin, 1935:34) It is not clear in this theology if the promises of baptism differ from “the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life.” (CD II/5) Indeed, Hanko (2000:306) characterizes this theology of baptism as “only a slight variation of the well-meant offer of the gospel.” Given the teaching of the CD (II/5) that “this promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people,” it is not clear why - if baptism nothing more than a visible proclamation of this command and promises - it is restricted to believers and their children.

But, as Wielenga (2016:99) points out, “Those who say that only the promise is sealed here place the baptized child of God outside actual contact, outside true communion with Christ.” That Borduin (1935:37) does, contra the Dortian baptismal formulary<sup>56</sup> and the HC,<sup>57</sup> to which the CRCNA subscribes: “God does not make his covenant with the elect before faith, but after faith, or by faith. ... There is never a covenant made before the party to whom it is

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“But observe, the king’s child grows up. The eyes of the child open; his awareness awakens. He sees those courteous men, the wealth of the palace, and the crowds shouting for joy, and he realizes: the man on the throne, who is praised by all - is my father! ... This is the same for baptism.”

<sup>56</sup> According to the Dortian formulary, the children of believers “are received unto grace in Christ.” They “should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant.” “As members of the church [they] ought to be baptized.” (PsH, 1934:83-84)

<sup>57</sup> “Q. Should infants, too, be baptized? A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant and are his people ...” (HC Q&A 74)

presented agrees to its condition.” Because infants cannot agree to its conditions, there cannot be a covenant made with them.

However, contra Borduin, one does not profess faith to enter into a covenant relationship with God<sup>58</sup> or to receive the benefits of that relationship.<sup>59</sup> Certainly, baptism obligates the baptized persons to “cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; trust in him, and love him with all [their] heart, with all [their] soul, with all [their] mind, and with all [their] strength.” (PsH, 1934:83) These are the responsibilities baptized persons must accept in order to remain in the covenant and to retain the benefits thereof. Those who do not respond to their baptism with trust and love are covenant breakers, “and it is evident that no one can become a covenant breaker unless the covenant has been established with him.” (Heyns, 1926:127) This is the implication of CD I/17.<sup>60</sup> Covenant children who profess faith may be said to confirm their covenant relationship with God, but their profession of faith does not initiate or activate the relationship.

Unfortunately, however, the 1932 formulary, especially with its language of “openly accepting God’s covenant promises,” suggests that only through profession of faith does one possess the benefits of a covenant relationship with God. Contra the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, it is not baptized children, but only those who have publicly professed their faith who are then regarded as regenerated. De Boer, (1970:35) who discussed profession of faith with several high school classes, cites one young man who “thought we had reached the point of equating profession of faith with conversion. He pointed out that the minister even had a

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<sup>58</sup> “A covenant made by the infinite God with his creature cannot be other than one-sided. The covenant is not brought into existence through the acceptance of the covenant member, it is already established with him in his infancy.” (Heyns, 1926:127)

<sup>59</sup> “It is not correct to call the covenant of grace an ‘agreement’ or a ‘treaty,’ and to formulate the second part of the definition thus: ‘and the sinner accepts this believingly,’ as if the accepting was essential to the covenant transaction in the sense that thereby the covenant became effective.” (Heyns, 1926:217)

<sup>60</sup> Bavinck, (2008a:530) quotes the CD (I/17) to support his claim that “for all the children there is in Scripture, to the extent that they are included in the covenant of grace, a promise from the Lord that they cannot consciously and voluntarily reject. If they die before the time they are able to do so, ‘godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children.’”

See also Venema (2006:85n36), who argues that the Canons’ doctrine assumes that “an infant who dies before reaching the years of discretion cannot be a covenant breaker; it cannot despise and violate the obligations of the covenant of grace. Therefore, we have the best reasons for believing that all children of believing parents dying in infancy are not only within the covenant of grace, but also of the number of the elect and shall certainly be saved.”

special message for the ‘babes in Christ.’” Others with whom De Boer spoke were also “bothered by the ceremony in the service since many of their pastors addressed them as though they had just been converted.”<sup>61</sup>

The concern of the Synod of 1916 that the adoption of a liturgical formulary for profession of faith would result in the importance of the rite being overemphasized was realized. Urging young people to make profession of faith, Veltkamp (1943:13) referred to it as “a tremendous event in life.” De Jong (1950b:522) wrote: “Few moments in our life are as weighty and solemn.” Veenstra (1965:3) described profession of faith as “far more important than one’s wedding.” Strangely, however, all of these writers are silent about the importance of a person’s baptism. Calvin rejected confirmation, in part, because he thought it devalued baptism.<sup>62</sup> (*Institutes*, 4.19.8) He was concerned that the Roman church esteemed confirmation more than baptism. (*Institutes*, 4.19.10) It appears that his concerns were realized in the CRCNA’s practice of profession of faith, especially after the Synod of 1932 adopted the denomination’s first official liturgical formulary for that pastoral rite.<sup>63</sup>

#### 5.4.2 ~ The 1976 Formulary

The Synod of 1964 appointed a Liturgical Committee “to review all of our liturgical literature in light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the church; and to recommend such revisions or substitutions as the results of this review might recommend.” (Acts, 1964:60) The committee informed the Synod of 1969 that it had turned its attention to the form for public profession of faith. (Acts, 1969:334) A draft formulary was presented to the Synod of 1970 with a recommendation “that synod commend the formulary

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<sup>61</sup> Hendriksen (1940:962) argued that to require that covenant children “become ‘converted’ - in the sense that the heathen become converted - is without justification whatever.” About the “conversion” of covenant children, he (1940:1010) wrote: “I know individuals - not one but a good many of them - with whom this change from the more or less unconscious to the fully conscious, from passive to active, from involuntary to voluntary, was so gradual that the ‘date’ when it occurred cannot be recalled.” This was certainly the testimony of the young man with whom De Boer (1970:35) spoke, who “pointed out that he had been a Christian all along.”

<sup>62</sup> “They are so shameless as to deny that baptism can be duly completed without confirmation.” (*Institutes*, 4.19.8)

<sup>63</sup> The CRCNA now had a synodical approved formulary for public profession of faith, but its use was not yet prescribed by the CO. The Netherlands Liturgy did not include such a formulary. Thus, the DCO could not require its use. No formulary existed in 1914. Thus, the 1914 CO could not require its use either. The first and second drafts of the RCO followed the DCO and 1914 CO. (Acts, 1957:410; Acts, 1958:398) In overtures to the Synod of 1959, Classes Chatham and Alberta South both noted that “reference to the form for the public confession of faith is omitted” in the draft RCO article regulating admission to the Lord’s Supper. (Acts, 1959:531, 543) The final version of the RCO adopted by the Synod of 1965 stipulates: “Members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon a public profession of Christ according to the Reformed creeds, with the use of the prescribed form.” (Article 59a; p. 137; my emphasis)

for public profession of faith to the churches and permit its use in the churches on a trial basis.” (Acts, 1970:219-220) The Liturgical Committee’s report to the Synod of 1970 included no explanation of or commentary on the draft formulary.<sup>64</sup>

The draft formulary retained language from the 1932 formulary that erroneously suggested that people are incorporated into the church’s fellowship by profession of faith. Its introduction spoke of admitting “to the full life of the church’s fellowship” those “who wish to confess their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.” (Acts, 1970:219) This could be interpreted as an acknowledgement that those who now wish to confess their faith were already in the church fellowship, though their participation in it was partial. But the formulary’s subsequent prayer took away anything that the introductory statement might have granted. It says that we now “welcome into the fellowship of the church those who confess your Name,” (Acts, 1970:219) suggesting that previously they had not been in the church’s fellowship. The 1932 formulary’s solemn declaration of welcome “in the name of our Lord, the great King of the church” was also retained. (Acts, 1970:219)

The draft formulary reflected an external view of covenant holiness. The following statement preceded the questions posed to confessors: “You were baptized as a child, grew up in a covenant home, and you have been continually confronted with the Christian gospel.” (Acts, 1970:219) The only apparent benefit of the covenant is that it places a child in a covenant home where they will be continually confronted by the gospel, “a special sphere in which they are most likely to be regenerated by the means of grace.” (Gerstner, 1991:8) The formulary’s introduction spoke of confessors now declaring publicly that they accept God’s promises made to them in their baptism, but none of its questions explicitly asked the confessors to accept God’s promises. The 1932 formulary’s question about openly accepting God’s promises was omitted entirely.

Upon the recommendation of its advisory committee, the Synod of 1970 recommitted the formulary to the Liturgical Committee “for further study and revision with the mandate to report to the Synod of 1971.” (Acts, 1970:101-102) The advisory committee noted several difficulties with the proposed formulary, including the following: “Without editing, the form does not lend itself to use when converts from non-covenant homes make profession of faith.” (Acts, 1970:102) But that was never an intended use of the formulary for profession of faith. For the professions of faith of converts from non-covenantal homes, another formulary - the formulary

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<sup>64</sup> The formulary’s only introduction was a quotation of CO Art. 59 which required the use of the prescribed form for public profession of faith. (Acts, 1970:218-219)

for adult baptism (for those from non-covenantal homes would not have been previously baptized) - already existed. The advisory committee also noted that “some feel the language in the questions can be edited to strengthen ... the concept of church discipline,” anticipating future synodical discussion regarding the importance of including a submission to church discipline in a revised formulary for profession of faith. (Acts, 1970:102) On the theology of baptism implicit in the draft formulary, however, the advisory committee was silent.

The Liturgical Committee was not able to present a revised draft formulary to the Synod of 1971 as instructed by the Synod of 1970. (Acts, 1971:518) Instead it presented a revised formulary for adult baptism in which a public profession of faith preceded baptism. (Acts, 1971:523-527) The Synod of 1971 permitted its use “on a trial basis for three years with a view to eventual adoption by synod.” (Acts, 1971:40) A revised formulary for profession of faith, “designed to harmonize with the Form for the Baptism of Children<sup>65</sup> and the Form for the Baptism of Adults approved by the Synod of 1971 for trial use in our churches” was presented to the Synod of 1972. (Acts, 1972:397) Three of the formulary’s four questions were the same as those asked for candidates of adult baptism in the formulary approved by the Synod of 1971. The only question that differed “corresponded to the pre-baptismal question in the adult baptism form but was formulated in the light of the fact that the confessors were baptized as infants and now publicly embrace God’s gracious promises signified and sealed in baptism.” (Acts, 1972:397)

Contra the external holiness view of the draft formulary presented to the Synod of 1970, which spoke of baptism placing a person in a covenant home where they would be continually confronted by the gospel, (Acts, 1970:219) the revised formulary presented to the Synod of 1972 opened with a statement recalling God’s action in baptism. (Acts, 1972:397) Erffmeyer (1972:15) reports that the statement “when they were baptized God claimed them as his own” and the reference to “what was done in their baptism” generated a lively discussion on the floor of synod about the nature of baptism. Is baptism God’s initial claim on these children, or are they, as the Dortian baptismal formulary teaches, already heirs of the covenant and members of the church and, for that reason, ought to be baptized? (PsH, 1934:84) Consistent with the Dortian baptismal formulary, the Synod of 1972, upon the recommendation of its advisory committee, revised the formulary’s statement to read: “When they were baptized God made

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<sup>65</sup> The committee’s report did not explain how the proposed formulary harmonized with the Form for the Baptism of Children.

clear his claim on them as his own.” (Acts, 1972:43) God did not claim them in baptism; rather, baptism makes clear his prior claim on them.

In an overture to the Synod of 1972, the consistory of Williamsburg argued that the phrase “what was done in their baptism” could “leave the door open to the doctrinal misconception of baptismal regeneration.” Williamsburg suggested the following revision, “what was promised to them in their baptism.”<sup>66</sup> (Acts, 1972:640) The advisory committee recommended a simpler revision, changing the word “done” to “sealed.” This recommendation was adopted by the Synod of 1972. (Acts, 1972:43) Given the formulary’s subsequent reference to “the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism,” however, there is no substantial difference between Williamsburg’s suggestion and the advisory committee’s recommendation. What was sealed in baptism is what was promised in baptism. This is the baptismal theology of Borduin,<sup>67</sup> which Wielenga rejected.<sup>68</sup>

The consistory of Williamsburg also asked the Synod of 1972 to add a fifth question to the formulary, dealing explicitly with Christian discipline: “Do you ask for pastoral admonishment and Christian discipline, expressed in the spirit of brotherly love, in case you should forsake your confession either in doctrine or life?” (Acts, 1972:641) The earliest Dutch Reformed church orders consistently spoke of “profession of faith and submission to discipline.”<sup>69</sup> Voetius’ questions approved by the 2 June 1875 general assembly,<sup>70</sup> the questions approved by the Synod of 1890,<sup>71</sup> and those contained in the 1932 formulary<sup>72</sup> all included such submission.

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<sup>66</sup> Williamsburg’s overture was signed by John de Prater, who served as pastor of Williamsburg from 1970-1975, as President. A similar overture, also signed by John de Prater as President was submitted to the Synod of 1976 by the consistory of Escalon, where de Prater served from 1975-1978. (Acts, 1976:629) After his retirement from ministry in the CRCNA, de Prater would affiliate with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, a sister denomination of the CGKN, the part of the *Afscheiding* Church in the Netherlands that did not participate in the Union of 1892 because of its objection to Kuyper’s theology of presumptive regeneration. (Harms, 2004:188)

<sup>67</sup> “Baptism seals only the promise to the children, and no grace which the children already possess.” (Borduin, 1935:74)

<sup>68</sup> “Those who say baptism seals only the promises impoverish baptism.” To say that is “a sealing of God’s promise only” is “entirely contrary to God’s word.” (Wielenga, 2016:84, 106)

<sup>69</sup> Convent of Wesel (1568), Art. 7; (p. 36) Synod of Dordrecht (1574), Art. LXX; (p. 72) Synod of Dordrecht (1578). (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:93)

<sup>70</sup> “Do you promise that you will yield and submit to the instruction, admonition, and discipline of the church, if (God forbidding) it should occur that you should deviate either in doctrine or life?” (Sheeres, 2013:355)

<sup>71</sup> “And if indeed you should go astray, will you then submit to the discipline of the church, and be subservient to the rule of the church?” (Acts, 1890:22)

<sup>72</sup> “Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?” (PsH, 1934:86)

The Synod of 1972 did not adopt its advisory committee's recommendation that Williamsburg's request be granted and a fifth question be added. (Erffmeyer, 1972:16; Vanden Heuvel, 1975:9) Apparently the Synod of 1972 was satisfied that the phrase "honoring its authority" in the fourth question as presented by the advisory committee<sup>73</sup> sufficiently included submission to ecclesiastical discipline. It approved the formulary as presented by the Liturgical Committee, with the two revisions noted above, "for provisional use for a period of three years"<sup>74</sup> (Acts, 1972:43) and asked churches to present to the Liturgical Committee their reactions to the formulary.

In an article in *The Banner*, John Vriend, (1976:17) a member of the Liturgical Committee, noted that "a number of churches were emphatic in demanding a promise of submission to the authority of the church." Classis Grandville judged "honoring its authority" to be a "a very oblique reference" to submission to church discipline. (Acts, 1976:677) Henry Vanden Heuvel (1975:8) included "the absence of a question dealing with the matter of the discipline of the church" as an item of concern. He regretted that the Synod of 1972 had rejected the "very good addition" proposed by the consistory of Williamsburg. The committee acquiesced; the words "submitting to" were added to the fourth question<sup>75</sup> in the formulary presented to the Synod of 1976 for final approval. This formulary would not replace the 1932 formulary, but would provide congregations an alternative to the 1932 formulary, because "as our denomination continues to grow and extend itself, it seems that the varied needs of our congregations can best be met by offering a variety of liturgical forms rather than requiring congregations of diverse backgrounds to fit into a single liturgical mold." (Acts, 1976:341)

The Synod of 1916 denied the first request for a liturgical formulary for profession of faith, because it was concerned that "by means of an established form the impression can be given that by means of making profession of faith one is incorporated into the fellowship." (Acts, 1916:31) The 1932 formulary gave that impression. Although the 1976 formulary used more careful language than the 1932 formulary - acknowledging that those who professed their

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<sup>73</sup> "Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring its authority and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?" (Acts, 1972:399)

<sup>74</sup> The Synod of 1974 extended this trial period one year, to 1976, because the Synod of 1973 had decided to publish the proposed formulary in a Supplement to the Psalter Hymnal that was not generally available until the spring of 1974. (Acts, 1974:353)

<sup>75</sup> "Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?" (Acts, 1976:353)

faith “were received into the church” when they were baptized and asking, “do you affirm your union with Christ and his church<sup>76</sup> which your baptism signifies?”<sup>77</sup> (PsH, 1987:964) - a study report submitted to the Synod of 1989 would include among “popular misconceptions about profession of faith in the CRCNA,” “the impression that profession of faith is “the ritual of joining the church.” This report suggested that “the perception of finally becoming a ‘real’ member of the church upon profession of faith is quite popular in the CRCNA.”<sup>78</sup> (Agenda, 1989:64)

The 1976 formulary does not speak of welcoming “into the fellowship of the church those who confess” their faith, as the 1970 draft formulary had, (Acts, 1970:219) but it does welcome confessors “into the full life of the church’s fellowship,” to “all the privileges of full communion,” and to “full participation in the life of the church.” (Agenda, 1972:398-399, my emphasis) The implication that prior to their profession of faith, their membership in and communion with the church was partial or incomplete contradicts the church’s *lex credendi*, which does not admit partial or incomplete covenant members. (HC Q&A 74) The implication also reinforced the idea that one “joined the church” when one made public profession of faith.

This idea, that one “joined the church” by making profession of faith, is a misnomer, because those who make profession of faith are already members of the church by baptism. But, as Fennema (1985:8-9) notes, the idea remained “because one gains the right to vote, becomes eligible to hold elected office, and, of course, accept responsibility to contribute through budget envelopes” when one makes profession of faith. This admission to “all the privileges of full communion” likely contributed to an increase in the average age of persons making profession of faith in the CRCNA. Calvin thought that “a child of ten [should be able to] present himself to the church to declare his confession of faith.” (*Institutes*, 4.19.13) “The sixteenth-century Dutch Reformed churches customarily admitted young people at ages thirteen and fourteen.” (Agenda, 1986:363-364) But in the CRCNA “age 18 (or before one

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<sup>76</sup> Though the comment predates the 1976 formulary, it accurately interprets this question: “When a young person makes public profession, he is not joining the church. ... He is confirming a membership that he has enjoyed for years.” (Veenstra, 1964:3)

<sup>77</sup> It is not clear why the formulary describes “union with Christ and his church” as “signified,” but not “sealed” in baptism. Contra this formulary, the prayer of thanksgiving with which the Dortian baptismal formulary concluded thanked God for sealing our reception through the Holy Spirit as members of Christ by our baptism. (PsH, 1934:85)

<sup>78</sup> In an article in *The Banner*, Brian Bosscher, (1997:19) director of the CRCNA-related ministry Youth Unlimited, referred to profession of faith as “one of the biggest of the big decisions” a young person makes in life. He wrote: “You are joining the church when you profess your faith.” As director of Youth Unlimited from 1989-2000, Bosscher was an influential voice in youth ministry and faith formation in the CRCNA. (Harms, 2004:159)



heads off to college) in the United States and age 21 in Canada” were “traditionally viewed as the ‘proper time’ to make profession of faith.” (Fennema, 1985:9)

Vander Kam (1977:23) suggested that many young people who loved the Lord and whose manner of life was blameless did not come to profess their faith because they did not consider themselves mature enough to assume the adult responsibilities that accompany profession of faith. A survey of young people in grades 7-12 at Ridgeview Hills Denver confirmed his suggestion. It revealed that “most young people tend to think of profession of faith as something for older, more mature people.” These young people were “ready to say yes to Jesus, but reluctant to say yes to specifically adult responsibilities requiring adult maturity.” (Kelderman, 1987:8-10)

The CRCNA’s discussion of paedocommunion, which the next section explores, raised questions about the nature and purpose of profession of faith. Initially, the church maintained its church orderly requirement that baptized children publicly profess their faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper, but to facilitate profession of faith by younger children, the Synods of 1988 and 1995 separated admission to the Lord’s Supper from the acceptance of specifically adult responsibilities. The liturgical formulary adopted by the Synod of 1995 reflects a return to the “first communion” model of the earliest Dutch Reformed churches. However, the Synod of 2011 decided to remove the church orderly requirement that baptized children publicly profess their faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper. The CO changes that it adopted describe profession of faith as a rite of passage into adult church membership. The liturgical formulary adopted by the Synod of 2016 presents profession of faith as the acceptance of adult responsibilities and privileges within the congregation.

### **5.5 ~ Profession of Faith in the CRCNA (1988-2019)**

The Synod of 1984 received an overture from Classis Rocky Mountain, asking synod to “appoint a committee to study the issue of covenant children partaking of the Lord’s Supper and the report of the study committee of Classis Rocky Mountain.” (Acts, 1984:424) The classis’ study report, which its overture to synod included, (Acts, 1984:419-424) advocated for the admission of children to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their inclusion in the covenant of grace. The report argued that “infant baptism and infant communion belong together.”<sup>79</sup> “It is

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<sup>79</sup> Later advocates for the admission of all baptized persons to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their covenant membership did not necessarily advocate for infant communion. Instead, they often spoke of children participating in the Lord’s Supper “at whatever age they begin to be a part of the worship service.” (Agenda, 1986:370; see also Agenda, 1988:288) In its report *Children at the Table*, the FFC noted: “At present the committee is not aware

consistent with our view of baptism, which views children as in the church and, therefore, eligible for all its privileges.” (Acts, 1984:421) The classis’ report referred repeatedly to the Dortian baptismal formulary, which reflects an internal view of covenant holiness and supports a theology of presumptive regeneration, rather than the 1976 formulary, which reflects an external holiness view of covenant holiness and movement away from the doctrine of presumptive regeneration in the CRCNA.<sup>80</sup> The report argued:

In Reformed thinking [covenant children] are in the church at birth. ... They are members of the covenant community prior to baptism. Baptism is a witness of the fact that they are heirs of God’s kingdom and of his covenant.<sup>81</sup> This view of children at birth and the meaning of baptism has a profound impact on how we look at children in their relationship with the church. ... If children are ‘adopted as God’s children and heirs of God,’ if they are ‘washed in Jesus’ blood from all their sins,’ if they have the Holy Spirit making his home within them,<sup>82</sup> if they are ‘in God’s covenant and are his people,’ if they are ‘members of his church and ought to be baptized,’<sup>83</sup> then we

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of a strong desire in the CRCNA to practice infant communion. But we do hear people asking this theoretical question.” The committee judged that it “would not be a wise pastoral practice,” but offered no rationale for that judgment. (Agenda, 2010:621)

<sup>80</sup> The report acknowledged that, “the case for children at the Lord’s table rests on our view of the covenant and how our children are included in it.” (Agenda, 1984:420) Arguments in favor of paedocommunion often reflect a theology of presumptive regeneration: “Such an arrangement [the admission of baptized children to the Lord’s Supper] would be taking baptism more seriously as a genuine means of grace which is a sign and seal of a real covenant rather than presuming (as is currently often done) that a baptized child has no practical standing in the church until he or she makes adult profession of faith. ... The creeds of the church, reflecting biblical language, attribute considerable significance to baptism. ... Infants are here regarded as members of the church who are presumed to receive redemption from sin and the gift of faith. Baptism is not the cause of these presumptions, but is an appropriate sign based on these presumptions.” (Marsden, 1977:19-20)

But, as Marsden (1977:22) acknowledges, “The argument [for paedocommunion] based on the meaning of baptism is more open to counter-argument simply because there is not much agreement in the church as to what is presumed regarding the status and spiritual condition of baptized children.” Indeed, opponents of paedocommunion often explicitly rejected a doctrine of presumptive regeneration, which some confused with a theology of baptismal regeneration. An overture submitted by Classis Pella to the Synod of 2007 contended that “there is no biblical warrant for contending that all baptized children may be presumed to be born anew by the Spirit of God.” (Agenda, 2007:429) Similarly, an overture submitted to the Synod of 2010 by Classis Zeeland argued: “Unless we believe in baptismal regeneration, we cannot simply presume that such faith exists.” (Agenda, 2010:666)

<sup>81</sup> The words “heirs of God’s kingdom and of his covenant” are an unattributed quotation of the Dortian formulary, which says that “children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant.” (PsH, 1934:84)

<sup>82</sup> The above quotations are all taken from the Dortian formulary’s exposition of baptism: “When we are baptized into the name of the Father, God the Father ... adopts us for his children and heirs. ... When we are baptized into the name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that he washes us in his blood from all our sin. ... When we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us ... that he will dwell in us.” (PsH, 1934:83)

<sup>83</sup> The Dortian formulary asks parents if they acknowledge that their children “are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of his church ought to be baptized?” (PsH, 1934:84)

can no longer view children as ‘non-members’ or ‘minor members’ or ‘partial members’ but as full-fledged members of the church.<sup>84</sup> (Acts, 1984:421)

The Synod of 1984 defeated the recommendation of the majority of its advisory committee that it not accede to the overture from Classis Rocky Mountain,<sup>85</sup> and adopted the recommendation of the minority of its advisory committee that it “appoint a committee to study the issue of covenant children partaking of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>86</sup> (Acts, 1984:651) The advisory committee minority argued that “the issue has been under discussion for many years in the CRCNA and warrants the church officially answering the questions being asked.”<sup>87</sup> (Acts, 1984:651)

The appointed study committee presented three reports to the Synod of 1986. These reports reflect the various positions on paedocommunion that would prevail in the subsequent three decades of discussion in the CRCNA. The majority report argued that “the biblical requirements for meaningful participation in the Lord’s Supper is faith that discerns, remembers, and proclaims the body of Christ while partaking,” (Agenda, 1986:354-356) which it said “generally begins to emerge somewhere around age twelve to fourteen.” (Agenda, 1986:363) “Consistories properly supervise the Lord’s Supper only when they require a profession of faith on

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<sup>84</sup> The report also quotes extensively from the Dortian formulary’s exposition of baptism to support its contention that baptism not only signifies, but also “affirms the child’s union with Christ through God’s covenantal grace.” (Acts, 1984:422)

<sup>85</sup> Appealing to CO Art. 28, which read, in part, “a major assembly shall deal only with those matters which ... could not be finished in minor assemblies,” the advisory committee majority argued that though the classis’ study was incomplete, “it is wholly within the competency of this classis to complete this study. If the further study of classis requires synodical action, Classis Rocky Mountain may then forward to synod concrete proposals for subsequent adjudication.” (Acts, 1984:650-651)

<sup>86</sup> The advisory committee minority also appealed to CO Art. 28, which gives synod the responsibility to deal “with those matters which concern its churches in common.” It argued, “if any changes are to be made in the CO and/or church practice, it must be done on the synodical level.” (Acts, 1984:651) Contra the request from Classis Rocky Mountain, the mandate given to this study committee by the Synod of 1984 did not mention the classis’ study report.

<sup>87</sup> The issue first appeared in *The Banner* in 1965 when a reader asked, “Why do we not permit children to partake of the Lord’s Supper on the same grounds” on which we baptize infants? John Bratt’s (1965:15) response affirmed the historic Reformed practice of requiring a public profession of faith prior to admission to the Lord’s Supper. Rolf Veenstra (1969:3) wrote the first article arguing that “the weight of evidence would seem to be in favor of including children” at the Lord’s Supper, to which Editor John Vander Ploeg (1969:8-9) responded. Vander Ploeg (1970b:9) addressed the issue again the following year after receiving letters in which it was evident that “there are those who remain unconvinced that our present practice is according to Scripture.”

A decade later, the issue was the cover story in the 24 November 1980 issue of *The Banner*, which included an editorial by Andrew Kuyvenhoven, (1980:8) a symposium of key denominational leaders, (Tuininga, De Jong, Vriend, Hoksbergen, Greidanus & Kuntz, 1980:9-13) and a report on surveys conducted in several CRCNA-related elementary and secondary schools. (Mereness, 1980:13-17) In March 1984, three months prior to the Synod of 1984, Harry der Nederlanden (1984:17) wrote an article advocating paedocommunion. Editor Andrew Kuyvenhoven (1984b:7) responded in the next issue.

the part of all who partake,” but that contrary to the prevailing custom of delayed profession of faith in the CRCNA,<sup>88</sup> “faithful covenant youth should be urged to make profession of faith and begin partaking of the Lord’s Supper no later than early adolescence.”<sup>89</sup> (Agenda, 1986:366)

One member of the committee, Albert Helder, argued that children can “meet the minimal biblical requirements for participation in the sacrament already around the age of seven.” (Agenda, 1986:367) Consistories should not require a public profession of faith on the part of such children prior to their admission to the Lord’s Supper. Instead, Helder advised:

Make a part of the family visiting process a discussion between elders, parents, and children regarding a child’s faith and subsequent participation in the Lord’s Supper. If it is agreed that a child is ready to receive the covenant blessings of God in nurturing that faith, such a decision be affirmed by the consistory and be announced to the congregation.<sup>90</sup> (Agenda, 1986:367)

Traditional profession of faith could be retained as a rite of passage whereby late adolescents affirm their assent to the confessions and affirm their readiness to accept the privileges and responsibilities of adult participation in the church.<sup>91</sup> (Agenda, 1986:367)

Another member of the committee, Russell Maatman, asked synod to declare that “it is desirable for covenant children to begin partaking of the Lord’s Supper at whatever age they begin to be a part of the worship service,”<sup>92</sup> but that such a change not be implemented by any congregation until “synod judges that such change is in harmony with the standards of the church and the CO.” (Agenda, 1986:370) The rationale for Maatman’s recommendation reflects a theology of presumptive regeneration: “Covenant children should be treated as brothers

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<sup>88</sup> In the CRCNA “age 18 (or before one heads off to college) in the United States and age 21 in Canada” were “traditionally viewed as the ‘proper time’ to make profession of faith.” (Fennema, 1985:9)

<sup>89</sup> Contra the original intent of the phrase “all the privileges of such communion,” the committee argued that “when the church welcomes a new professing member ‘to all the privileges of such communion’ it is issuing a welcome to the spiritual privileges of the sacraments, not to its ecclesiastical machinery.” (Agenda, 1986:364) Thus, a consistory could welcome an early adolescent to the privileges of “full communion” and still “retain the right to decide at what age professing members are entitled to vote.” (Agenda, 1986:366) This position would be reflected in the study committee’s minority report to the Synod of 1988 and Report A submitted by another study committee to the Synod of 1995.

<sup>90</sup> The study committee’s majority report to the Synod of 1988 and the FFC’s report to the Synod of 2010 would reflect this position.

<sup>91</sup> In a later article in *The Banner*, Helder (1987:13) would define formal public profession of faith as “a public celebration of the change in status from children in the covenant to responsible adults in relationship to God. It is a reaffirmation that we are a confessional church and that, as members, those professing their faith affirm those confessions.”

<sup>92</sup> An addendum to the study committee’s majority report to the Synod of 1988 and Report B submitted by another study committee to the Synod of 1995 would reflect this position.

and sisters in the Lord because they are covenant children, not because of what they say or do. Covenant children, as well as adults, are to be nourished by the means of grace which the Lord has provided.”<sup>93</sup> Maatman was aware that not all baptized persons keep covenant. He wrote: “If, however, a person who began to partake of the Lord’s Supper as a child becomes a covenant-breaker, then the approach should be the same as it is now: those who break the covenant should not be allowed to partake of the supper any longer.”<sup>94</sup> (Agenda, 1986:368)

The committee advising the Synod of 1986 observed that “the fact that there are three reports” demonstrates that “there are differences of opinion about the nature of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and what the biblical requirements are for participation.” The committee argued that “this in itself supports the need for further study.” The only overture received by the Synod of 1986 regarding the study committee reports, from Classis Minnesota South, asked that the reports be referred to the churches for one year, because they “deal with matters of great importance for congregational life. Consistories, classes, and church members should have an adequate opportunity to study and respond before synod makes decisions on its recommendations.”<sup>95</sup> (Agenda, 1986:478) Rather than appoint a new study committee as its advisory committee recommended, the Synod of 1986 referred the reports not to the churches as Classis Minnesota South requests, but back to the study committee, which it augmented by two members, for two years. (Acts, 1986:620)

The augmented study committee presented two reports to the Synod of 1988. The majority report argued that “members in good standing and their children should be welcomed to the Lord’s table, provided those children testify to a saving faith in Christ and know the difference between the Lord’s Supper and regular eating.” (Agenda, 1988:283) The committee judged that the ability to discern between regular eating and the Lord’s Supper “can be present by the time a normal child reaches his fifth year.” (Agenda, 1988:276)

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<sup>93</sup> Proponents of paedocommunion often reflect a “sacramentalism view” of the Lord’s Supper in which “the elements actually carry the grace they signify.” (Male, 1988:24) Emphasis often falls on the Lord’s Supper as a means of grace given to nourish and strengthen faith. Opponents of paedocommunion often reflect “a latent Zwinglian view of the sacrament” that emphasizes the Lord’s Supper as a memorial and the necessity of understanding on the part of participants. (Male, 1988:24; see also Agenda, 2010:607)

<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the study committee majority report submitted to the Synod of 1988 would argue: “If children were in fellowship at the Lord’s table, excommunication could then be practiced for both baptized and professing members because all covenant members would have communicated at the table. ... Indeed, consistories would feel more compelled to pursue a course of formal discipline in the case of delinquent baptized members who come to the Lord’s table than they do under the present order in the case of delinquent baptized members who have never professed their faith and therefore do not sit down at the Lord’s Table.” (Agenda, 1988:274, 282)

<sup>95</sup> The overture, which originated from First Edgerton, was adopted by the classis without dissent. (Te Grootenhuis, 1986:22)

Children should testify to a saving faith in Christ, but “this faith need not be attested by a public profession of faith with the degree of maturity now represented by the synodical approved forms for public profession of faith.” (Agenda, 1988:285) The report recommended that synod declare that public profession of faith “is not a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s Supper.” Instead, CO Art. 59, which regulates admission to the Lord’s Supper, should be amended to read: “Each consistory shall satisfy itself through personal interviews with the children and their parents concerning their understanding of the sacrament and their motivation for participation.” (Agenda, 1988:287) Three members of the six-person majority submitted an addendum to the majority report that argued that the Lord’s Supper “should be made available as soon as the child is a participating member of the worshipping covenant community, regardless of age or capacity.” (Agenda, 1988:288)

The majority report acknowledged that no longer requiring a public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper would represent “a significant departure from the current and long-standing practice of the Christian Reformed Church.” (Agenda, 1988:286) While profession of faith could continue “as an important milestone in the covenant teenager’s life, a public recognition of adulthood in the covenant, an affirmation of the confessions, and the beginning of rights and responsibilities of adult membership,” (Agenda, 1988:283) “once the historic connection between public profession and admittance to the Lord’s table is dissolved, the question as to the necessity and legitimacy of public profession of faith as we have come to know it in the CRCNA arises with new urgency.”

Thus, the majority report recommended that synod appoint a committee “to study the biblical warrant for and the theological and practical significance of public profession of faith for covenant children,” that this practice of the church might rest “on a clear biblical foundation.” This question of biblical warrant “becomes even more pressing in the light of our common commitment to ‘reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way.’ (BC Art. 32)” (Agenda, 1988:286-287)

The study committee’s minority report repeated the arguments of the committee’s majority report submitted to the Synod of 1986: “The biblical requirement for meaningful participation in the Lord’s Supper is faith that discerns, remembers, and proclaims the body of Christ while partaking.” (Agenda, 1988:295) “The Bible does not intend to keep members of the covenant away.” (Agenda, 1988:306) Indeed, as the 1986 majority report had said: “When a child is baptized into God’s covenant, one more place is set at the table of the Lord. Indeed, at the time of entrance into the covenant a seat is reserved at the Lord’s Supper for that new covenant

member.” (Agenda, 1986:347) The question is not whether baptized children may partake of the Lord’s Supper, but how they come to partake of the Lord’s Supper. The minority report argued that the Bible “prescribes how anyone is to come to the feast. It is by ‘an informed confession,’<sup>96</sup> a confession that discerns, remembers, and proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ, his person and work.” (Agenda, 1988:306)

But the report did not indicate where the Bible prescribes such a confession; it cited no biblical texts. Nor did the report indicate why this confession must take the form of a public profession of faith before the congregation with the use of a prescribed form - something the report appears to take for granted. It concludes: “Admission to the Lord’s table seems to be the only biblical ground which the church can give to demand a public profession of faith. ... The only legitimate warrant the church has for requiring a public profession of faith is its duty to supervise the Lord’s table.”<sup>97</sup> (Agenda, 1988:309) The report did not consider other possible means of supervising the Lord’s table, such as the personal interview envisioned in the revision to CO Art. 59 proposed in the majority report.

The minority report recommended that the Synod of 1988 adopt four pastoral guidelines “to assist the elders of the churches in leading covenant youth in the way of their covenant Lord.”<sup>98</sup> (Agenda, 1988:312) The Synod of 1988 adopted four declarations that reflect the pastoral guidelines recommended in the study committee’s minority report - though rather than

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<sup>96</sup> By “informed confession” the committee meant that “the person making the profession personally believed the faith being professed.” The term “simply indicates that the profession is an expression of personal conviction.” (Agenda, 1988:307)

<sup>97</sup> The minority report, appealing to 1 Corinthians 11:31 - “But if we [plural] judged ourselves we would not come under judgment” - claimed that “the apostle Paul used his authority in the Corinthian church to guard the table and demanded that the church do so too.” (Agenda, 1988:309) 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 are better read, however, as parallel to 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, where Paul admonishes believers to examine themselves. (Fee, 1987:566) The plural “we” in verse 31 does not refer to the church as an organization nor to its office bearers, but to the sum of the individual self-examinations to which each person was called in verse 28.

<sup>98</sup> “1. The condition for admitting covenant children to the Lord’s Supper is that condition which Christ established for participation of any covenant member in his Supper; namely, faith that discerns, remembers, and proclaims the body of Christ while partaking.

2. To be faithful in supervising the Lord’s Supper properly, consistories require a profession of faith on the part of all who partake.

3. Because the Bible establishes no specific age requirement, covenant youth should be encouraged to make a profession of faith as soon as they exhibit that faith which can discern, remember, and proclaim the body of Christ while partaking.

4. The profession required for admission to the Lord’s Supper is an expression of faith and not necessarily the acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation.” (Agenda, 1988:312-314)

speak of “covenant youth,” as had the minority report, the advisory committee’s recommendations refer to “covenant children:”<sup>99</sup>

1. The church is warranted in admitting to the Lord’s Supper covenant children who give evidence of faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.<sup>100</sup>
2. The church is to assure itself of such faith through a public profession of faith on the part of covenant children.<sup>101</sup>
3. Covenant children should be encouraged to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.
4. The profession of faith of covenant children required for admission to the Lord’s Supper is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation; therefore:
  - a) the church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the Reformed confessions;
  - b) adult responsibilities of membership are to be granted by the church council and assumed by professing individuals at age eighteen or as granted by the Articles of Incorporation of the congregation. (Acts, 1988:558-560)

The Synod of 1988 also asked the denominational Worship Committee “to review the forms for public profession of faith in light of these declarations covering the public profession of faith of covenant children,” (Acts, 1988:560) which clearly distinguished between admission

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<sup>99</sup> The minority report’s use of “youth” suggests sympathy with the majority report submitted to the Synod of 1986 that suggested that the faith necessary for participation in the Lord’s Supper “begins to emerge somewhere around age twelve to fourteen.” (Agenda, 1986:363) The advisory committee’s use of “children” suggests sympathy with the majority report’s opinion that the faith and discernment necessary for participation in the Lord’s Supper “can be present by the time a normal child reaches his fifth year.” (Agenda, 1988:276)

<sup>100</sup> The synodical advisory committee noted that both the majority and minority reports “regard faith as a necessary condition for participation in the Lord’s Supper.” The grounds for this guideline, appealing to HC Q&A 76 and BC Art. 35, argue that “the necessity of faith for participation in the Lord’s Supper” is also the teaching of the church’s confessional standards. (Acts, 1988:558) The question is not whether faith is necessary for admission to the Lord’s Supper, but whether faith can be presumed of covenant children, and, if so, whether that presumption warrants admission to the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>101</sup> To require that the church “assure itself of such faith through a public profession of faith” implies a doctrine of presumptive non-regeneration. Baptized children are presumed to be non-regenerate until by a public profession of faith they prove otherwise. This clearly contradicts the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, which, according to the judgment of charity, regards covenant children as elect and regenerate until from their talk or their walk the contrary is evident.



to the Lord's Supper and the acceptance of adult responsibilities,<sup>102</sup> in which the Synod of 1988 included a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the church.<sup>103</sup> This request would lead to the adoption of a new formulary for public profession of faith by the Synod of 1995, to which the next section attends.

### 5.5.1 ~ The 1995 Formulary

In its report to the Synod of 1989, the Worship Committee observed that the 1932 and 1976 formularies "assume a more mature, even adult understanding of the Christian faith and life than what is commonly found in children."<sup>104</sup> They also assume a more mature profession of faith than the Synod of 1988 deemed necessary for admission to the Lord's Supper. The Worship Committee noted that profession of faith in the CRCNA had come "to bear additional meanings and functions" beyond professing faith in Jesus Christ and being admitted to the Lord's Supper. It had come to include a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the church and the acceptance of the responsibilities of adult membership. The committee concluded: "Thus we have one ritual that signifies different milestones and processes, some of which are not clearly or not even necessarily related to each other." (Agenda, 1989:63-64, emphasis original)

The committee characterized the CRCNA's existing formularies as "composite" forms, because they "ritualized several facets of the process of Christian initiation by means of a single formulary." These formularies would "undoubtedly continue to have a place in the CRCNA practice of making profession of faith," specifically by youth and adults. But, because "a simple revision would not suffice to distinguish between the profession of children and older adolescents and adults," the existing formularies should be "supplemented with a new form," designed specifically for profession of faith by younger children. (Agenda, 1989:63-65)

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<sup>102</sup> At least one Christian Reformed Church - Ridgeview Hills Denver - already distinguished between the profession of faith necessary for admission to the Lord's Supper and the acceptance of the responsibilities of adult membership. In an article in *The Banner*, Duane Kelderman (1987:8-10), its pastor, offered the church's practice as one possible way "to address some of our denomination's concerns about profession of faith and holy communion - and to do so without dismantling our historic connection between the two."

<sup>103</sup> That the Synod of 1988 included a commitment to the Reformed confessions within adult responsibilities is evident from its declaration that "the church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the Reformed confessions." (Acts, 1988:560) A commitment to the Reformed confessions cannot be expected from those who have not yet been duly catechized in them.

<sup>104</sup> The Worship Committee report cites the second question in the 1976 formulary, which solicits a commitment to the confessions of the church, as evidence of the "more mature and even adult understanding of the Christian faith" assumed by the present formularies: "Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect that revelation?" (Agenda, 1989:63)

The Worship Committee presented a new formulary, which it tentatively called the “Admitting to Table Fellowship” model, to the Synod of 1989. The proposed formulary reflected the practice of the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands in form and function. A series of “preparatory guidelines” that accompanied the formulary recommended that preparation for profession of faith should include “understanding and memorization of the three traditional catechetical tools: the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.” Prior to making a public profession of faith, a child should be examined “before elders, though not necessarily at a consistory meeting.” (Agenda, 1989:66) Profession of faith “should take place in a public worship service, ordinarily at a service of Holy Communion,” as required by the earliest Dutch Reformed church orders.<sup>105</sup> (Agenda, 1989:87)

The proposed formulary began with a simple introduction that affirmed the baptized children’s membership in the church: “When they were baptized they were welcomed into the covenant family of God.” It did not speak of welcoming confessors to “the privileges of full communion,” as did the 1932 and 1976 formularies. The committee judged that “welcoming a child into ‘all the privileges of full communion’ would be inappropriate,” since “children would normally not vote in a congregational meeting or hold church office.” (Agenda, 1989:63) Instead, the formulary spoke of the confessors’ desire “to join that family at the Lord’s table,” the covenant family into which they were welcomed when they were baptized. (Agenda, 1989:67) Three simple questions were asked:

1. Whom do you trust as your Savior and Lord?
2. Do you know that you belong to the family of God through your baptism?<sup>106</sup>
3. Will you continue to learn more about God and his Word,<sup>107</sup> and will you continue to serve him with your life and worship? (Agenda, 1989:67)

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<sup>105</sup> Convent of Wesel (1568) (Article 11; p. 37), Synod of Dortrecht (1578) (Biesterveld & Kuypers, 1982:93), and Synod of Middelburg (1581). (Biesterveld & Kuypers, 1982:123) This was the practice of Ridgeview Hills Denver, which may have served as a model for the decisions of the Synod of 1988: “To highlight the connection between profession of faith and the privilege of holy communion, we try to schedule all public professions of faith on communion Sunday.” (Kelderman, 1987:10)

<sup>106</sup> These first two questions embody the commitments requested in the first and third questions of the 1976 formulary - “1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to redeem the world, do you love and trust him as the one who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace him as Lord of your life? ... 3. Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?” (PsH, 1987:964) - which the committee judged “most relevant to younger professions of faith.” (Agenda, 1989:65)

<sup>107</sup> This question replaces the second question in the 1976 formulary - “Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect that revelation?” (PsH, 1987:964) - which the committee thought was “clearly meant for mature teens or adults.” (Agenda, 1989:63)

The Synod of 1988 had declared that the assumption of the responsibilities and privileges of adult membership was not an essential component of the profession of faith required for admission to the Lord's Supper. Those responsibilities would be granted when professing members reached the age of eighteen or as granted by the Articles of Incorporation of the congregation. (Acts, 1988:560) The Worship Committee wrote that whether this implied "another ritual or a second stage profession of faith for those who made a young profession of faith" would "require further study and discussion!" (Agenda, 1989:66)

The consistory of First Sioux Center submitted an overture to the Synod of 1989 asking it to reject the Worship Committee's proposals. The consistory was concerned that, contra CO Art. 59 which "requires that all profession of faith be in accordance with the Reformed creeds," the committee's recommendations would "shift the CRCNA away from its historical practice of professing the faith of the Christian religion as taught in the Bible and as summarized in the confessions of the church." (Acts, 1989:397) However, the declaration of the Synod of 1988 that "the church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the Reformed confessions" (Acts, 1988:560) already implied this shift. A commitment to the Reformed confessions cannot be expected from those who have not yet been duly catechized in them.

The Synod of 1989 did not accede to First Sioux Center's overture. It recommended to the churches the Worship Committee's report and its guidelines to the churches for study and its proposed formulary for trial use.<sup>108</sup> (Acts, 1989:469) Synod did not act upon a recommendation from the Worship Committee that it affirm "the concept of a public profession of faith as occurring at more than one occasion in the life of a Christian," (Agenda, 1989:68) on the ground that this was unnecessary "since the whole body of the report is being referred to the churches." (Acts, 1989:469)

The Synod of 1991 received an overture from Classis Alberta North asking it to: clarify the requirement for public profession of faith by covenant children by declaring,

The church should provide ways for covenant children to profess their faith consistent with their individual stages of physical, intellectual, emotional, and faith development, and the church should distinguish these professions of faith from a late-adolescent / adult reaffirmation of faith. (Agenda, 1991:517)

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<sup>108</sup> Churches were asked to submit their responses to the Worship Committee by 1 November 1990. (Acts, 1989:470) However, when initial feedback was scarce, the Worship Committee surveyed pastors in the denomination. The survey results - only 37 of 183 respondents in the United States and only 1 of 55 respondents in Canada had used either the guidelines or trial form - prompted the Synod of 1991 to extend the trial period for one year, on the ground that "as yet relatively few reactions have been received." (Agenda, 1991:49-50; Acts, 1991:702)

The classis' proposed declaration indicates that the classis wanted clarification of the profession of faith by covenant children that was required for their admission to the Lord's Supper. The classis contended that "difficulties arise first of all from the ambiguity over the term 'profession of faith.'" "Profession of faith should not be seen as a static, one-time event that can be standardized for all believers of all ages." (Agenda, 1991:517)

The classis was concerned that young covenant children who meet the requirement established by the Synod of 1988 for admission to the Lord's Supper - those who "give evidence of faith" and are "able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper" (Acts, 1988:558) - might be excluded from the Lord's Supper in churches where profession of faith "has been understood exclusively as a formal adult or late-adolescent ceremony in front of the entire congregation with use of approved liturgical forms."<sup>109</sup> The classis was also concerned that the Worship Committee "was working with too restrictive a notion of how that faith can be appropriately professed, since there seems to be an operative guideline that 'a form' must be developed." The classis desired "other appropriate mechanisms for profession of faith" that would "give the churches room to admit covenant children to the Lord's Supper in more creative and, for children, less threatening ways." (Agenda, 1991:518)

The advisory committee's initial recommendation that synod not accede to the overture from Classis Alberta North was referred back to the committee "in order for it to provide better grounds."<sup>110</sup> (Agenda, 1991:707) When the advisory committee returned its recommendation to the floor of synod, it had reinterpreted the request from Classis Alberta North. Classis Alberta North wanted clarification of the public profession of faith required for admission to the Lord's Supper. But the advisory committee recommended that synod "appoint a study committee to clarify the requirement of public profession of faith for admission to the Lord's Supper on the part of younger children." "The clarification of the requirement for public profession

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<sup>109</sup> A survey conducted by *The Banner* revealed that the decisions of the Synod of 1988, with which such an understanding of profession of faith conflicted, were not implemented consistently throughout the denomination. Some churches disagreed with or simply ignored the decisions. As a result, while "the traditional age of profession of faith may be dropping" overall, "in such churches, the age for professing faith holds steady." (Ten Elshof, 1989:24-25)

<sup>110</sup> The advisory committee's initial grounds, that "the Worship Committee is presently working on forms for public profession of faith of younger members," and that "churches are presently adapting forms to meet specific needs," both assume the operative guideline to which the classis objected, that a "form" must be developed because the only way a person can make a public profession of faith was with the use of a liturgical formulary. (Acts, 1991:707)

of faith by young members raises significant theological issues concerning the basis of participation in the Lord's Supper." (Acts, 1991:785)

The Synod of 1991 adopted the advisory committee's new recommendation and appointed the study committee. (Acts, 1991:785) In light of this appointment, the Worship Committee postponed its continued work on the liturgical formularies for public profession of faith until after synod had acted upon the study committee's report. (Agenda, 1992:53; Agenda, 1993:68) The study committee returned to the intent of the original overture. It claimed that it had been "appointed to clarify the practical implications of the decision of the Synod of 1988," (Agenda, 1993:239) that is, to clarify the public profession of faith required of covenant children prior to their participation in the Lord's Supper.<sup>111</sup> The committee held that "the simplest expression of faith by a younger child should be adequate for admission to the Lord's table"<sup>112</sup> (Agenda, 1993:243) and that "an expression of personal faith can be given with integrity at an early age." (Agenda, 1993:239) This expression, however, should be public, because "profession of faith as an ecclesiastical event [is] by its nature public." Yet, "the form or manner for the expression of that faith ought not to be legislated." Instead, "congregations should have the freedom to determine within their own individual settings the most appropriate way by which a person can make profession of faith." (Agenda, 1993:241)

For those who professed their faith at an age younger than that which the church judged appropriate to assume adult responsibilities and/or mature enough to understand the creeds and confessions of the church, congregations should provide a subsequent public ceremony at which adult responsibilities are assumed and a personal commitment to the creeds and confessions declared. Those who were not ready to make such a public commitment at the age of 18 would need to receive permission from the council on an annual basis to continue their participation in the Lord's Supper.<sup>113</sup> (Agenda, 1993:243, 245)

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<sup>111</sup> The study committee presented a single report to the Synod of 1993, to which the committee's chair "was unable to sign name." (Agenda, 1993:246) Smit (1993:7) took that to be "a sign that serious disagreement still exists" within the denomination about paedocommunion.

<sup>112</sup> The study committee's Report A, submitted to the Synod of 1995, clarifies this simplest expression of faith: "The professions of faith in the Bible are all quite simple and straightforward. Peter says to Jesus, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' (Matt. 16:16) The Pauline confession indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit is 'Jesus is Lord.' (1 Cor. 12:3) The profession of faith necessary to receive the promise of baptism in the early church was 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,' as indicated by the addition of Acts 8:37 in the early manuscripts." (Agenda, 1995:269)

<sup>113</sup> The denominational Worship Committee, in its report to the Synod of 1993, and Classis Alberta North, in a communication to the Synod of 1993, expressed its reservation about this recommendation. To the Worship Committee it seemed "problematic in many respects." (Agenda, 1993:69) The classis judged it to be in "conflict somewhat with the spirit of inclusivity of all God's people in the celebration of the Lord's Supper." (Agenda, 1993:327)

Classis Alberta North communicated to the Synod of 1993 its “delight” with the study committee’s recommendations. (Agenda, 1993:327) This delight was not shared by Classes Hudson and Hamilton, however. Both submitted overtures asking the Synod of 1993 to reject the study committee’s recommendations. Classis Hudson argued that while “a young child may express a genuine love for the Lord and have a basic understanding of who Christ is,” they do not have “understanding and maturity” to discern the body of the Lord as required by 1 Corinthians 11:29.<sup>114</sup> (Agenda, 1993:280-281) Classis Hamilton said: “If covenant children do not understand and cannot answer the simple question of our standard form for public profession of faith, they also cannot understand the biblical requirements for participation in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as prescribed in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.”<sup>115</sup> (Acts, 1993:424)

The majority of the committee advising the Synod of 1993 argued that “there is only one understanding of profession of faith spelled out for the church” in the CO Art. 59.<sup>116</sup> It recommended that the church retain a single profession of faith “according to the Reformed creeds,” with “the privileges and responsibilities of professing members” continuing to be “assumed in a way that is appropriate to their age, ability, and spiritual giftedness, as determined by the local consistory.” (Acts, 1993:551-552) A minority of the advisory committee, however, saw “no reason why the profession of faith required for admission to the Lord’s Supper” as defined by the Synod of 1988 - which did not require a commitment to creeds and confession of the church - “and the profession of faith required for admission to adult responsibilities” - which does require such a commitment<sup>117</sup> - “cannot be separated.” (Acts, 1993:555) After lengthy discussion, the Synod of 1993 recommitted the entire matter to the study committee for another year. (Acts, 1993:604)

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<sup>114</sup> “For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.” (1 Corinthians 11:29) Among the many practical difficulties confronting congregations in the implementation of the decisions of the Synod of 1988, the Synod of 1991 included: “Does the statement ‘I love Jesus, and believe that he died for me’ give evidence of ‘discerning the body?’ Does 1 Corinthians 11 require a more theological explanation of who Jesus is?” (Acts, 1991:785) The study report said, yes and no; Classis Hudson said, no and yes.

<sup>115</sup> Both overtures’ emphasis on the participant’s ability to understand the sacrament suggest a latent Zwinglian view of the sacrament.

<sup>116</sup> “Members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon a public profession of faith according to the Reformed creeds, with the use of the prescribed form.” (RCO Art. 59, p. 137)

<sup>117</sup> The study committee distinguished between the assumption of adult responsibilities and a commitment to the creeds and confessions, though it recommended that both “would normally be done on the same occasion.” (Acts, 1993:242) The CO revision adopted by the Synod of 1995 would make a commitment to the creeds and confessions a condition for the reception of the privileges of adult membership: “Confessing members who have reached the age of 18 and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and the responsibilities of adult membership in the church shall be accorded the full rights and privileges of such membership.” (Acts, 1995:762)

The study committee submitted two reports to the Synod of 1995.<sup>118</sup> Because each report was signed by four members of the study committee, they were designated Report A and Report B. Report A affirmed the decision of the Synod of 1988 that a public profession of faith should be required of those who participate in the Lord's Supper. This profession, however, did not "require fully developed cognitive understanding of Reformed theology." "A profession of faith that lays hold of Christ simply and sincerely is all that Scripture requires." (Agenda, 1995:269) Thus, children who "make a public profession of faith in a simple and appropriate manner during a regular worship service"<sup>119</sup> should be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The trial form approved by the Synod of 1989 could meaningfully be used for this profession of faith, but its use should not be prescribed. Congregations should have "the freedom to determine the most contextually appropriate ways by which a person can make his/her profession of faith." (Agenda, 1995:271) Report A argued that this should be the church's only formal process of public profession of faith. A commitment to the creeds and confessions and the assumption of adult responsibilities could "be made through an interview with the church council when those children who have made an earlier profession of faith reach age 18." (Agenda, 1995:273) "Because a commitment to these adult responsibilities is more of a pastoral or consistorial matter than a liturgical act, it is unnecessary to have a public profession of adult responsibilities within a worship service." (Agenda, 1995:271)

Report B argued that baptized children should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper "on the basis of the faith of the community."<sup>120</sup> (Agenda, 1995:281-282) "Only those who give evidence of not discerning the body should be encouraged to change their way or not to attend,<sup>121</sup> but covenant children of all ages should attend and partake as soon as they can." (Agenda, 1995:288) Public profession of faith should be retained "as a rite of passage marking

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<sup>118</sup> Due to changes in membership, the study committee requested and received a one-year extension of its mandate from the denominational Board of Trustees, (Acts, 1994:30) which further delayed the Worship Committee's work on the formularies for profession of faith. (Acts, 1994:77)

<sup>119</sup> "Since baptism is commemorated during a worship service, the appropriation of baptismal promises should also be celebrated during a public worship service." (Agenda, 1995:270)

<sup>120</sup> Similar arguments were made in the Old Testament section of the 1988 majority report, which argued that "participation in the Passover demanded appropriate acts of faith on the part of those participants capable of making them (and by them for those who were not capable.) ... Adults capable of this action did so, but this did not deny children the privilege of the meal. ... In the absence of such capacity the remembrance resided in the covenant community of which the child is a member. ... For those who are not able, the remembrance and believing are found in the community of which they are a part." (Agenda, 1988:267, 270, 274)

<sup>121</sup> This argument parallels the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. Just as covenant children are presumed, according to the judgment of charity, to be regenerated unless by their walk and talk they give evidence to the contrary, so they should be welcome to the Lord's Supper until they give evidence that they do not discern the body.

the transition between adolescence and the adult responsibilities of faith in the church community.” Report B erroneously argued that this was “the intention of the Reformers,” (Agenda, 1995:299) overlooking the fact that Calvin encouraged 10-year-old children to make a public profession of faith. (*Institutes*, 4.19.13) Contra Report B, both Olds (1992:216) and Osmer (1996:31) characterize profession of faith among the Reformers as “first communion.” Report B said “we would need to revise the present Form for Profession of Faith into a rite of passage ceremony,” though it did not identify what the revision would entail nor how a rite of passage ceremony would differ from the existing practice of public profession of faith. Given the admission of all baptized children to the Lord’s Supper, which Report B recommended, “simpler forms for profession of faith [would] become unnecessary.” (Agenda, 1995:282)

The Synod of 1995 received overtures from Classes Hudson, Columbia, and Heartland opposed to Report B.<sup>122</sup> Classes Hudson<sup>123</sup> and Heartland<sup>124</sup> also asked the Synod of 1995 to reject the recommendations of Report A. (Agenda, 1995:371-376) Classis Hamilton wanted both reports returned to the study committee “in order to obtain a majority report.” (Acts, 1995:605) In a communication to the Synod of 1995, the consistory of First Everett Washington, argued that “those partaking of holy communion should be old enough to fully understand and appreciate what it is all about.” It asked that both reports be withdrawn and that synod take no further action relative to children at the Lord’s Supper. (Acts, 1995:613) The advisory committee’s recommendations followed the recommendations proposed in the study committee’s Report A. The committee judged that “the recommendations in Report B diverged from the decisions of the Synod of 1988 instead of clarifying them.” (Acts, 1995:714)

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<sup>122</sup> All three overtures wanted to retain the requirement that baptized members make a public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>123</sup> Classis Hudson objected to the lack of “a commitment to the Reformed creeds as part of public profession of faith.” (Agenda, 1995:371)

<sup>124</sup> Classis Heartland objected to the three categories of membership proposed in Report A: baptized members; communicant (or professing) members, those who had made a profession of faith and were welcome to the Lord’s Supper; and corporate (or voting) members, those who had made a commitment to the creeds and confessions and been granted the privileges of adult membership. (Agenda, 1995:272) Classis Heartland argued that the recommendation “was not grounded in Scripture and the confessions but, rather, seems to be grounded in expedience.” (Agenda, 1995:376) However, the classis offered no biblical or confessional defense for the existing categories of membership: baptized members and confessing (or communicant) members.

Keeley, (2006:8) a proponent of paedocommunion, erroneously suggests that these categories, which he refers to as “a system of membership that is muddy and confusing,” was created by the Synods of 1988 and 1995. Though not found explicitly in either the DCO or the 1914 CO, the system is found in the RCO 1965. (See RCO Art. 59, p. 137; Art. 66, p. 138; Art. 83, p. 140; Art. 84-86, p. 141) Keeley argues that it is “not theologically nor biblically sound for Reformed Christians, who emphasize covenant theology.”



The Synod of 1989 had recommended a set of guidelines for preparing children for profession of faith to the churches for study. (Acts, 1989:469) The process included “understanding and memorization of the three traditional catechetical tools: the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.” (Agenda, 1989:66) Report A altered this guideline to “focus on the nature and meaning of the sacraments and on a basic explanation of the Apostles’ Creed.” (Agenda, 1995:270) In response to the overture from Classis Hudson, the advisory committee added “instruction in the basic meaning of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer” so that “the core of the HC would be used for preparation in profession of faith as has been the custom in most of our churches.” The Synod of 1995 encouraged churches to use this process in the implementation of the decisions of the Synod of 1988 regarding public professions of faith by covenant children. (Acts, 1995:714)

Contra the overture from Classis Hudson, however, neither the guidelines nor the proposed liturgical formulary included an explicit commitment to the confessions within the profession of faith itself. Assuming that younger children cannot yet commit themselves to the creeds and confessions because they have not yet been instructed therein, the proposed formulary asked: “Will you continue to learn more about God and his Word?” (Acts, 1995:716) Those who profess a simple faith in Jesus Christ would need to express a commitment to the creeds later. The Synod of 1995 gave each local consistory the responsibility to “devise an appropriate means for securing a commitment to the creeds of the CRCNA and to the responsibilities of adult membership in the local congregation for confessing members who, having attained the age of 18, have not yet made such a commitment.” (Acts, 1995:720)

Report A recommended that “the trial form of 1989 be accepted as the form for public profession of faith by children.” (Agenda, 1995:272, my emphasis) The advisory committee recommended that this formulary, as modified by the advisory committee,<sup>125</sup> be “accepted as a form for public profession of faith by children.” (Acts, 1995:715, my emphasis) The Synod of 1995 accepted the modified trial formulary as “a suggested form for public profession of faith.” (Acts, 1995:720, my emphasis) But the CO changes adopted by the Synod of 1995,

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<sup>125</sup> The advisory committee expanded the first question: “Whom do you trust as the Savior from your sins and the Lord of your life?” (Acts, 1995:715, additions underlined) and added a fourth question submitting to ecclesiastical discipline: “Will you allow us, your church family, to encourage you in your faith and hold you responsible to your commitment to Jesus and his church?” or, alternatively, “If you begin to weaken in faith and commitment, will you allow us, as your church family, to call you back to a strong relationship with Jesus and his church?” (Acts, 1995:716)

which required the use of “a prescribed form,” (Acts, 1995:762) took back any flexibility in the form of a child’s profession of faith suggested by this decision.

The Synod of 1995 revised CO Art. 59. The stipulation that “members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon a public profession” was retained. However, the description of this profession as “a profession of Christ according to the Reformed creeds” was revised to simply read “a profession of their faith in Christ,”<sup>126</sup> without reference to the Reformed creeds. (Acts, 1995:762) The CO no longer considered a commitment to the confessions of the church an essential part of public profession of faith, though such a commitment was required of those who were “accorded the full rights and privileges of [adult] membership” in the church.<sup>127</sup> How that commitment should be expressed, neither the CO nor the Synod of 1995 specified.

The Synod of 1995 gave each local consistory the responsibility of devising “appropriate means” of securing that commitment. (Acts, 1995:720) Confirming De Moor’s (2010:330) conclusion that the Synod of 1995 thereby “deliberately refused to dictate that this rite of passage be observed in a worship service,”<sup>128</sup> the Synod of 1999, “after lengthy debate,” defeated a recommendation to add the words “upon a reaffirmation of faith” - essentially a second public profession of faith - to this new section of CO Art. 59 which granted the full rights and privileges of adult membership to confessing members. (Raakman, 1999:17; Acts, 1999:563)

The Synods of 1988 and 1995 adopted a “soft” paedocommunion position.<sup>129</sup> Baptized persons were still expected to make a public profession of faith prior to participation in the

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<sup>126</sup> De Moor (2010:328, emphasis original) calls attention to the additional word “their:” “There is nothing necessarily wrong with that language. Surely such faith ought to be theirs, personally, deep within their hearts. But the strength of earlier versions that simply said ‘a public profession’ or ‘the public profession of Christ’ can easily be lost on us. The truth is that ‘their faith’ is always also to be the church’s faith, our corporate faith as it lives within the church as a whole and comes to expression in its creeds and confessions.”

<sup>127</sup> Consistent with the declaration of the Synod of 1988 that the profession of faith necessary for admission to the Lord’s Supper “is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation,” (Acts of Synod, 1988:559) the Synod of 1995 added the following section to CO Art. 59: “Confessing members who have reached the age of 18 and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the CRCNA and the responsibilities of adult membership in the church shall be accorded the full rights and privileges of such membership.” (Acts, 1995:762)

<sup>128</sup> An advisory committee to the Synod of 1999 rightly observed that the decision of the Synod of 1995 “does not guarantee that the commitment is made before the Lord and his people by way of a significant rite of passage liturgically celebrated.” (Acts, 1999:563)

<sup>129</sup> Venema (2005:26-27) distinguishes between a “soft” paedocommunion position which “admits young covenant members to the table who have made a simple, but credible profession of the Christian faith” at an earlier age than is customary in many Reformed churches, and a “strict” paedocommunion position which “admits any baptized child of believing parents who is physically able to receive the communion elements.” He describes the “soft” paedocommunion position as “but a modification of the historic view of the Reformed churches,” because it still requires a public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper.

Lord's Supper, but such professions were encouraged at younger ages than had been practiced in the CRCNA.<sup>130</sup> The guidelines recommended by the Synods of 1989 and 1995 and the liturgical formulary adopted by the Synod of 1995 to facilitate public profession of faith by younger children mark a return to the historical practice of the earliest Dutch Reformed church. Unlike the CRCNA's first liturgical formulary, which spoke of welcoming confessors "to all the privileges of full communion," the 1995 formulary simply granted confessors admission to the Lord's Supper.

But the 1995 formulary did not replace the 1932 and 1976 formularies. In its report to the Synod of 1989, the denominational Worship Committee noted that the existing formularies continued to have a place in the practice of profession of faith in the CRCNA. (Agenda, 1993:63) The result was two kinds of professions of faith: the simple profession of faith in Christ necessary for admission to the Lord's Supper by some, using the 1995 formulary, and a fuller profession of faith that included commitment to the Reformed confessions for admission to both the Lord's Supper and the privileges and responsibilities of adult membership by others, using the 1932 or 1976 formulary. For those who had made a simple profession of faith in Christ, there was no comparable liturgical rite by which they expressed their commitment to the Reformed confessions and accepted the responsibilities of adult membership.<sup>131</sup> The result was confusion about public profession of faith.<sup>132</sup> The confusion would not dissipate when the issue of paedocommunion returned to the synodical agenda in 2006 by means of an overture from Classis Holland.

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<sup>130</sup> Report B submitted to the Synod of 1995 argued that the decisions of the Synod of 1988 had not actually changed anything: "What is allowed to take place after 1988 was already allowed before 1988. It was always possible in the CRCNA for covenant children who gave evidence of faith and were able to discern and proclaim to participate in the Lord's Supper. There was never an age limit in the CRCNA." (Agenda, 1995:281) That is true, but it does not grant enough. The requirement of a public profession of faith remained, but the nature of the required profession had changed. It was no longer a profession according to the Reformed creeds, but the profession of a simple faith in Jesus.

<sup>131</sup> Robert De Moor (2005:6) argued that "encouraging children to make an early profession of faith presents us with a problem we haven't yet solved: we really don't have a good rite of passage to mark a child's coming of age in our faith communities." The Synod of 1995 left this to local consistories. A task force report to the Synod of 2007 would describe the "implementation of this second and more mature commitment" as "uneven and inconsistent" and as "one of the most significant challenges in living with the decision and direction of the Synod of 1995." (Agenda, 2007:50)

<sup>132</sup> Confusion was already evident in *The Banner* report regarding the decisions of the Synod of 1995. In her report, Ten Elshof (1995:6-7) confusingly referred to "the age at which children who have not made profession of faith should be urged to do so." But the children of which she wrote were those who had made a younger profession of faith, the only profession of faith required by the CO. The "profession of faith" about which she wrote refers to their commitment to the Reformed confessions, which the revisions to CO Art. 59 adopted by the Synod of 1995 did not include in public profession of faith.

### 5.5.2 ~ The Admission of Baptized Children to the Lord's Supper

Classis Holland asked the Synod of 2006 to “appoint a study committee to examine the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper and to consider the nature and practice of profession of faith in the life of the individual and the church.” (Agenda, 2006:527) Its overture, which quoted extensively from the 1988 majority report, argued that covenant membership alone should be sufficient for admission to the Lord’s Supper: “There is no basis in the theology of the covenant or theology of the sacraments for denying to growing children the Lord’s Supper which repeatedly signs and seals to them continuation in that union and communion already sealed to them in their baptism.”<sup>133</sup> “The only basis for denying them the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is not their youth or the immaturity of their faith but covenant unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and rebellion.”<sup>134</sup> (Agenda, 1988:293; Agenda, 2006:527)

The majority of the synodical advisory committee recommended that the Synod of 2006 not accede to the classis’ overture on the grounds that the overture’s grounds were “not sufficiently new or weighty to warrant another committee to study this matter,” specifically the admission of baptized members to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>135</sup> On “the nature and purpose of profession of faith,” however, the advisory committee majority recommended that a task force be appointed to evaluate the implementation of the decision of the Synod of 1995 and to “propose appropriate ways of celebrating the entrance of young confessing members into the full privileges and responsibilities of adult membership.” (Acts, 2006:728)

Contra the majority’s judgment that the overture’s grounds were not sufficiently new or weighty, a minority of the advisory committee found “sufficient theological grounds in the overture itself to admit all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper.” It recommended that “synod allow for the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their full membership in the covenant community.” This permission, however, was not meant

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<sup>133</sup> The 1976 formulary for profession of faith said that baptism signifies union with Christ and his church, but, inexplicably, it did not say that baptism seals that union. (PsH, 1987:964) The classis’ contention that union with Christ is not only signified but also sealed in baptism represents a shift back to the internal view of covenant holiness embodied in the Dortian baptismal formulary.

<sup>134</sup> That the classis would not require evidence of this faith prior to admission to the Lord’s Supper suggests that, according to the judgment of charity, covenant children are presumed to have faith until the contrary is evident, consistent with a doctrine of presumptive regeneration.

<sup>135</sup> CO Art. 31 required that requests such as Classis Holland’s “be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented.” The Synods of 1988 and 1995 had both considered and rejected arguments for the admission of baptized members to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of covenant membership alone. (Acts, 2006:727-728) Those decisions “shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the CO.” (CO Art. 29)

to deny “the need of an expression of faith,” but was intended to be “a healthier understanding that faith is expressed in many ways and at many levels..., not only through a verbal affirmation of beliefs.” The advisory committee minority argued that participation in the Lord’s Supper is itself a profession of faith: “The very act of hearing the ‘invitation’<sup>136</sup> to communion and responding in faith by participating is an age-appropriate expression of knowing that communion is about being part of a community that receives the gift of life from the Jesus who said, ‘Let the little children come to me.’”<sup>137</sup> (Acts, 2006:729) The advisory committee’s recommendation is confusing. The recommendation itself appears to advocate a “strict” paedocommunion position, but the explanatory note - which requires an expression of faith, though not necessarily through the liturgical rite of public profession of faith - appears to advocate a “soft” paedocommunion position.

The Synod of 2006 adopted the minority recommendation permitting the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper. However, because such admissions would violate CO Art. 59, which required a public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper,<sup>138</sup> the Synod of 2006 appointed a task force to “bring any appropriate CO articles into conformity with the reality that children are welcomed to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their membership in the covenant community of faith.” (Acts, 2006:730) The appointed task force presented the Synod of 2007 with the CO changes necessary to implement the decision of the Synod of 2006.<sup>139</sup> But the Synod of 2007 did not adopt them. Instead, it “received them

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<sup>136</sup> One assumes this refers to the following “invitation” found in the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament: “The Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him, are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.” (PsH, 1987:975)

<sup>137</sup> Earlier study reports had argued similarly. The 1988 majority report argued that “to participate in this sacrament [the Lord’s Supper] is an act of faith,” (Agenda, 1988:280, 282) and a report submitted to the Synod of 1993 stated: “While faith is surely required for participation in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the expression of that faith is apparent in the very act of participating in the sacrament.” (Agenda, 1993:240) In an overture to the Synod of 2007, however, Classis Pella expressed skepticism, asking: “How credible a profession of faith is that? Uninstructed visitors could come forward to receive communion at the invitation of the pastor or elder in charge. However, that does not mean that they should.” (Agenda, 2007:430)

<sup>138</sup> Violation of the CO did not prevent at least one congregation (Redeemer Sarnia) from welcoming all baptized children to the Lord’s Supper. When the Synod of 2007 did not adopt the CO changes necessary to implement the decision of the Synod of 2006, the congregation found itself in conflict with its classis, Classis Chatham. (Wright, 2008:11)

<sup>139</sup> CO Art. 59, which read: “Members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon a public profession of their faith in Christ with the use of a prescribed form” (Acts, 1995:762) would be revised to read: “All baptized members are welcome at the Lord’s Supper. Baptized members who have reached the age of maturity and have been catechized in the Reformed tradition shall be encouraged to publicly profess their faith and their commitment to the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA with the use of a prescribed form. ... Upon profession of faith, they shall be designated as ‘confessing members’ and shall be granted the full rights and responsibilities of such membership.” (Agenda, 2007:46-47)

for information” and forwarded them to the Faith Formation Committee (FFC) that it appointed “for further review.” (Acts, 2007:657)

As recommended by the task force, the Synod of 2007 appointed the FFC “to deepen the integration of biblical teaching;<sup>140</sup> confessional norms;<sup>141</sup> church polity; and liturgical, educational, and pastoral practices in the CRCNA with respect to (1) participation of children in the Lord’s Supper, and (2) public profession of faith.” (Acts, 2007:655) Whether pastors greeted the decisions of the Synod of 2006 with enthusiasm or with criticism, all expressed a concern for what would happen to public profession of faith when it no longer is the means by which a baptized person is admitted to the Lord’s Supper and a “concern for maintaining some kind of robust and meaningful public profession of faith within their fellowship.” (Agenda, 2007:53) The FFC was asked to report annually to synod for the next five years.<sup>142</sup> (Acts, 2007:656) A recommendation that synod, “during the five year mandate of the FFC, grant to congregations the freedom to admit all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper upon approval of the consistory” was defeated.<sup>143</sup> (Acts, 2007:657)

The Synod of 2007 asked the FFC 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, 2007:655) Towards fulfillment of that mandate, the committee prepared a document, *Children at the Table: Toward a Guiding Principle for Biblically Faithful Celebrations of the Lord’s Supper*. A draft was presented to the Synod of 2010, (Agenda, 2010:592-625) along with a recommendation that synod “endorse the following guiding principle as a basis for the committee’s continuing work:

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<sup>140</sup> The most common concern expressed to the task force was that the decision of the Synod of 2006 was made “without significant biblical-theological reflection.” (Agenda 2007:51) Classis Illiana expressed the same concern in an overture submitted to the Synod of 2007: “The biblical case for covenant children at the Lord’s Supper is not yet well understood, particularly by our parishioners; therefore, the current practice is not easily dismissed.” The classis requested that CO changes be delayed “until a more careful and more clearly expressed biblical study on this issue can be provided to the churches.” (Agenda, 2007:433)

<sup>141</sup> Another common concern expressed to the task force was “how the decision to allow baptized children at the Table fits with our Reformed confessions,” which require faith on the part of participants in the Lord’s Supper. The task force noted that even Report B submitted to the Synod of 1995, “which favored baptized children at communion, acknowledged that this practice did not align with the traditional understanding of the Reformed confessions.” (Agenda, 2007:51; see also Agenda, 1995:300)

<sup>142</sup> In a separate decision, the Synod of 2007 also asked the FFC to “provide biblical and pastoral guidance for councils who are conversing with those members who are requesting infant dedication in place of infant baptism” and to “provide guidance concerning liturgical practices surrounding infant baptism.” (Acts, 2007:659)

<sup>143</sup> Delegates were concerned that this freedom would “undermine the work of the FFC” by predetermining the outcome of their work. It would be difficult for a future synod to rescind this permission if the committee’s study did not yield biblical and theological grounds for the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper. (De Moor, 2007:32)

All baptized members are welcome to the Lord's Supper for age- and ability-appropriate obedience to biblical commands<sup>144</sup> about participation, under the supervision of the elders. The elders have responsibility to nurture grateful and obedient participation by providing encouragement, instruction, and accountability in the congregation. Requiring a formal profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper is one pastoral approach to consider, but is not required by Scripture or the confessions.<sup>145</sup> (Agenda, 2007:590)

The committee argued that this principle "honors the covenant status of all who are baptized ... is faithful to the instruction of 1 Corinthians 11 ... implements the instructions of the HC Q&A 81 ... honors the polity of the CRCNA, in which the sacraments of the church are to be celebrated under the supervision of the elders ... [and] allows for diversity of local practice within a standard principle." (Agenda, 2010:591)

Contra the objections of Classes Zeeland,<sup>146</sup> Columbia,<sup>147</sup> and Illiana,<sup>148</sup> the Synod of 2010 adopted the guiding principle as revised by its advisory committee:

All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Table and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation (e.g., to 'examine themselves,' to 'discern the body,' to 'proclaim the Lord's death,' and to 'wait for others') in an age- and ability-

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<sup>144</sup> Commenting on 1 Corinthians 11, Children at the Table lists the following biblical commands for participation in the Lord's Supper: "doing this in remembrance of Jesus, (vv. 24-25) eating, drinking, proclaiming the Lord's death, (v. 26) examining ourselves, (v. 28) discerning the body, (v. 29) and waiting for one another. (v. 33)" (Agenda, 2010:598) The committee did not deny the necessity of faith for participation in the Lord's Supper, but included it in the biblical commands about participation. In its report, the committee acknowledged: "Proper participation arises out of faith." "Table participation is for believers." (Agenda, 2010:603-604)

<sup>145</sup> The committee noted that "the confessions do not speak about public profession of faith. Requiring public profession of faith before entrance to the table certainly fits well with the confessions' claim that proper participation arises out of faith. At the same time, the confessions do not require this particular form of confession. That is, there may be any number of ways by which the church conveys that table participation is for believers and through which the church allows participants to express their faith as they come to the table." (Agenda, 2010:604)

<sup>146</sup> Classis Zeeland asked that synod "withhold action on the recommendations of the FFC." The classis' grounds reflect Borduin's theology of baptism: "The promises offered by God in baptism must be accepted in true faith in order for the realities of those promises to be made manifest in the baptized child." The classis' grounds also reflect a rejection of presumptive regeneration: "We cannot simply presume that such faith exists." (Agenda, 2010:664-667)

<sup>147</sup> Classis Columbia asked that synod "withhold action on the recommendations of the FFC," because the command to "examine oneself" in 1 Corinthians 11:28, had not received adequate attention in the committee's report. (Agenda, 2010:668-675) In response to this overture, the Synod of 2010 asked the FFC to "include a more detailed study of the command to 'examine oneself'" in future drafts of its document Children at the Table. (Acts, 2010:812)

<sup>148</sup> Classis Illiana asked synod to "reject the guiding principle," because it "and the report underlying it downplay the significant role that profession of faith serves in the life of the individual ... and of the community." The classis argued: "The only standard that the Bible authorizes in supervising the Lord's Supper is a public expression of faith and, of course, a life consistent with that profession." (Agenda, 2010:680-681) The 1988 minority report had advanced the same argument. (Agenda, 1988:309)

appropriate way, under the supervision of the elders. The elders have responsibility to nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation through encouragement, instruction, and accountability. (Acts, 2010:810-811)

The Synod of 2010 also adopted these statements intended to “clarify the guiding principle:”

1. A formal public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper is not required by Scripture or the confessions.
2. A formal public Profession of Faith is a vital practice for faith formation and is one pastoral approach to consider prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper.
3. Professing faith regularly in and outside of corporate worship is a natural practice for lifelong faith formation which the church should encourage, enhance, and express. (Acts, 2010:811)

And the Synod of 2010 reminded “the churches that any changes in local practice arising out of this principle should be delayed until changes to the CO are adopted at a future synod.” (Acts, 2010:811)

The FFC recommended to the Synod of 2011 the CO changes necessary to implement the guiding principle adopted by the Synod of 2010.<sup>149</sup> (Agenda, 2011:569-577) The changes were adopted by the Synod of 2011. (Acts, 2011:829-830) CO Art. 59, which regulates admission to the Lord’s Supper, would now read: “All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord’s Supper and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation in an age- and ability-appropriate way under the supervision of the elders.” (Agenda, 2011:573) No longer the means of admission to the Lord’s Supper, public profession of faith would be accorded its own place in the CO: “Baptized members shall be encouraged to make a public profession of faith with the use of a prescribed form in a public worship service... Upon their public profession of faith, they shall be designated as ‘confessing members.’”<sup>150</sup> (CO Art. 59; Agenda, 2011:573)

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<sup>149</sup> In addition to the changes noted below, the following other CO articles were also revised: Art. 25b, which describes the tasks of elders; Art. 56, which regulates the presentation of children for baptism; Art. 63, which describes faith nurture; and Art. 78-81, which regulate ecclesiastical discipline.

<sup>150</sup> An additional paragraph was added to CO Art. 59 that explained: “Confessing members receive all the privileges and responsibilities of such membership. Privileges include but are not limited to presentation of children for holy baptism, the right to vote at congregational meetings, and eligibility to hold office.” (Acts, 2011:829)

In an overture to the Synod of 2011, the consistory of Owen Sound expressed concern that the reception of adult responsibilities upon a public profession of faith “may be misinterpreted as putting an age requirement upon profession of faith,” and asked that the age- and ability-appropriate rule that governed admission to the Lord’s Supper be explicitly applied to these privileges and responsibilities as well. (Agenda, 2011:688-689) In response, the Synod of 2011 adopted the following explanatory regulation for Art. 59: “Each congregation shall determine



The Synod of 2011 adopted a motion from the floor that removed the following sentence from CO Art. 59 as proposed by the FFC: “This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA.” (Acts, 2011:830) The FFC judged that “something significant” had been “lost from their proposal and from the CO,” and recommended that the Synod of 2012 reinsert the sentence into Art. 59b, on the ground that “the matter of a commitment to the creeds and confessions made at the time of public profession of faith has been specifically included in the CO since the sixteenth century.”<sup>151</sup> (Agenda, 2012:421-423)

The CO changes adopted by the Synod of 2011 connected public profession of faith solely with the assumption of the adult responsibilities of church membership. But a regulation, proposed by the FFC and adopted by the Synod of 2011, allowed each consistory to “determine an appropriate age at which a confessing member shall receive such privileges and responsibilities.” (Agenda, 2011:574) The regulation suggests that both the committee and synod anticipated that younger children would continue to make public profession of faith. Indeed, in its document *Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith*,<sup>152</sup> the FFC wrote: “We call on each other to be sensitive to the faith often found in younger children, and to encourage younger children to consider professing their faith as the Synods of 1988 and 1995 have encouraged.” (Agenda, 2011:561) But those synods had not considered a commitment to the creeds and confessions to be a necessary part of the public profession of faith of younger children. Neither the CO changes nor the liturgical formulary approved by the Synod of 1995 required that commitment. Some delegates at the Synod of 2012 expressed “concern about young members expressing their commitment to documents they might not understand,” which was why the Synods of 1988 and 1995 did not include that commitment in the profession of faith of younger children. (Struyk, 2012:31) Nevertheless, the Synod of 2012 adopted the FFC’s recommendation: public profession of faith includes a commitment to the Reformed creeds.

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the appropriate age at which a confessing member shall receive such privileges and responsibilities.” (Agenda, 2011:574)

<sup>151</sup> The church orders of Middelburg (1581) (Art. XLIII, p. 115), ’s Gravenhage (1586) (Art. LIV, p. 150), and Dort (1618-1619) (Art. LXI, p. 171) speak of a “confession of the Reformed religion.”

<sup>152</sup> The Synod of 2011 endorsed this document “as a guiding document for the work of denominational agencies and congregations in the area of faith formation.” (Acts, 2011:829; Agenda, 2011:550-569)

### 5.5.3 ~ The 2013 & 2016 Formularies

In light of the FFC's insistence that public profession of faith should include a commitment to the Reformed confessions, it is ironic that the liturgical formulary for public profession of faith that it recommended to the Synod of 2012 did not include an explicit commitment to the Reformed confessions. The Synod of 2007 had asked the FFC to provide liturgical materials that strengthen baptism and profession of faith. (Acts, 2007:656) In fulfillment of this mandate, the committee presented to the Synod of 2012 a set of liturgical formularies developed by the RCA that it judged "consistent with the Reformed confessions, with prior synodical approved forms, and with the work of our committee" for review and comment. (Agenda, 2012:421-422)

The proposed Order for Profession of Faith<sup>153</sup> included material for both the consistorial examination and the liturgical rite proper. The consistorial examination begins with Scripture Promises,<sup>154</sup> Romans 10:9-11.<sup>155</sup> There follows a time of Faith Sharing,<sup>156</sup> after which a series of questions are posed to the confessors.<sup>157</sup> Neither the Faith Sharing nor the questions refer to the Reformed confessions. (Agenda, 2012:440-442)

The formulary for the liturgical rite proper presents profession of faith as the affirmation of one's baptism. It begins with the baptismal words of institution,<sup>158</sup> (Matt. 28:18-20) and an explanation of baptism:<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Unlike the 1932 and 1976 formularies, which were designed solely for the profession of faith of persons who had been previously baptized, this Order was designed both for the professions of faith of baptized persons and for the profession of faith and baptism of adults who had not been previously baptized, and, if applicable, the baptism of their children.

<sup>154</sup> The 1932 and 1976 liturgical formularies had been criticized for not including a biblical basis for the practice of profession of faith. (Veenstra, 1965:3; Veldstra, 1973:21) Hielema (2007:20) argued that "the reason the forms in the PsH contain no biblical instruction" is that "the Bible says next to nothing about our current practice."

<sup>155</sup> "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The Scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'" (Rom. 10:9-11, NRSV)

<sup>156</sup> "The elders shall engage in a conversation with the people, inquiring concerning their acceptance of the Christian faith and the sincerity of their desire to live as confessing members of the congregation. If personal credos (written faith statements) have been prepared, they shall be presented at this time." (Agenda, 2012:440)

<sup>157</sup> "Do you believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only rule for faith and life? Do you, relying on the grace of God, promise to confess Christ publicly before others, to serve Christ daily, and to walk in Jesus' way? Do you promise to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ; to share fully in the life of the church; to be faithful in worship and service; and to offer your prayers and gifts? Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church; to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace?" (Agenda, 2012:441)

<sup>158</sup> The following passages, also found in the FFC's proposed formulary for baptism, may also be read: Ephesians 4:4-6; Galatians 3:27-28; Romans 6:3-4; John 1:12-13; Acts 2:39. (Agenda, 2012:434-435, 442)

<sup>159</sup> The same explanation is found in the FFC's proposed formulary for baptism. (Agenda, 2012:435-536)

In baptism God promises by grace alone: to forgive our sins, to adopt us into the body of Christ, the church, to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and to resurrect us to eternal life. ...

Through baptism, God calls us to a new obedience: to love and trust God completely, to forsake the evil of the world, and to live a new and holy life. (Agenda, 2012:442-443)

Profession of faith is one's obedient response to God's call through their baptism. The formulary speaks of those who "have been baptized into the body of Christ" and who now, "in making public this profession of faith, affirm the meaning of their baptism."<sup>160</sup> (Agenda, 2012:443)

Other understandings of profession of faith - that it is the means by which a person is welcomed to the Lord's Supper and/or to the privileges and responsibilities of adult membership - are noticeably absent. There is no solemn word of welcome akin to those with which the 1932 and 1976 formularies concluded. The declaration, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the church, these children of God are now received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church," is to be used only when baptism - either the baptism of the confessor or the baptism of the confessor's children - accompanies the profession of faith, and then only in reference to those being baptized. (Agenda, 2012:447)

In the profession of faith proper, candidates are asked "to profess [their] faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church." (Agenda, 2012:444) The Synod of 2012 asked congregations to assess the proposed formulary and respond to the FFC about the advisability of presenting it to Synod 2013 for approval as a synodical approved form. (Acts, 2012:772) Based on feedback received, the committee added an explanatory footnote intended to "specify that 'the faith of the church' refers to 'the faith of the church as taught in the creeds and confession of the church,'" thereby including in these professions of faith a commitment to the Reformed confessions. (Agenda, 2013:333) The Synod of 2013 approved the formulary with the explanatory footnote. (Acts, 2013:552-553) However, when the denominational Worship Committee presented new liturgical formularies to the Synod of 2016, its Form for the Holy Baptism and Profession of Faith of Older Children and Adults,<sup>161</sup> used the same question provided in the Order for Profession of Faith that the FFC had recommended in 2013, but omitted

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<sup>160</sup> Unlike the 1976 formulary, which spoke of "accepting the gracious promises of God," (PsH, 1987:964) the 2013 formulary spoke of "affirming" one's baptism. This suggests the understanding of baptism implicit in the GKN's 1923 formulary, which asked if confessors "believed" the promises of God signed and sealed to them in their baptism.

<sup>161</sup> Unlike the 2013 formulary, which was intended both for adult baptism and for profession of faith, the Worship Committee's proposed formulary was only intended for adult baptism.

the explanatory footnote. (Agenda, 2016:96-100) The Synod of 2016 adopted the formulary without the footnote. (Acts, 2016:898-903)

The Worship Committee also presented the Synod of 2016 with a new Form for the Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth. (Agenda, 2016:102-105) It presents profession of faith as a person's obedient response to the call of their baptism and the means by which they become "a full participant in the life and ministry of the church." The formulary instructs the presiding minister to "invite those making profession of faith to approach the baptismal font." The formulary's opening section acknowledges God's action in baptism: "In the sacrament of holy baptism we are adopted as God's own children in Jesus Christ and made members of the body of Christ. In our baptism we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection and are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Agenda, 2016:102) The language here is as strong as the Dortian baptismal formulary. Adoption as God's own children and union with Christ are not merely promised in baptism; they actually happen in baptism. The formulary's opening section continues: "Our baptism also calls us to personally respond to God's promises by publicly declaring our faith in Jesus Christ and promising to live wholeheartedly for him." There follows a quotation from Romans 10:9-10, making this the CRCNA's first and only liturgical formulary for profession faith to offer any biblical rationale for the liturgical rite.<sup>162</sup> (Agenda, 2016:102)

The formulary offers two options for the questions posed to confessors. The questions in the first option were taken from the 2013 Order for Profession of Faith, minus the explanatory footnote defining "the faith of the church," with one addition. The following question, taken from the 1976 formulary, is added: "Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in baptism, and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church, which your baptism signified?" (Agenda, 2016:103) The first three questions of the second option were taken from the 1976 formulary.<sup>163</sup> The following question, from the 2013 formulary, replaces the 1976 formulary's fourth question: "Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church and to walk in the spirit of love with this congregation?" significantly reducing the submission to ecclesiastical discipline that was historically part of public profession of faith. (Agenda, 2016:103)

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<sup>162</sup> While the biblical text calls for a verbal profession, ("it is with your mouth that you profess your faith" [Rom. 10:10]), it does not necessarily mandate the liturgical rite of public profession of faith.

<sup>163</sup> The second question solicits a commitment to the Reformed confessions: "Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?" (Agenda, 2016:103)

The formulary does not include a solemn welcome “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” as had the 1932 and 1976 formulary, but the sense that profession of faith is the means by which one “joins the church” is not entirely absent. The formulary’s opening section describes public profession of faith as another step on a person’s faith journey whereby they become “full participants in the life and mission of this congregation.” (Agenda, 2016:102) The formulary ends with the presiding minister exhorting the congregation, “Let us welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ,” to which the congregation responds, “Joyfully we receive you.” (Agenda, 2016:104) This refrain suggests, contra BC Art. 34, that a person is received into the church by profession of faith, rather than by baptism. The Synod of 2016 adopted the proposed formulary as presented by the Worship Committee. (Acts, 2016:899)

## 5.6 ~ Conclusion

The history of profession of faith in the CRCNA confirms Osmer’s (1996:xv) observation: “Until the church is clear about its theological understanding of confirmation [profession of faith], uncertainty and ambivalence will surround this practice.” As it developed in the CRCNA, public profession of faith took on multiple meanings that are not necessarily related to one another. In the polity and practice of the earliest Dutch Reformed churches, profession of faith was primarily, if not exclusively, understood to be the means by which baptized persons were admitted to the Lord’s Supper. By 1920, however, when the CRCNA began to draft its first liturgical formulary for public profession of faith, the rite, separated from the church’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper, had become an important ecclesiastical event in its own right.

The denomination’s first liturgical formulary for public profession of faith, adopted by the Synod of 1932, presented profession of faith as the means by which baptized persons were welcomed to all the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership, which included, but were not limited to, admission to the Lord’s Supper. This understanding of profession of faith as the rite of passage to adult church membership, increasingly described as “joining the church,” prevailed in the 1976 formulary.<sup>164</sup>

The decisions of the Synods of 1988 and 1995 returned the denomination to the historic practice of the earliest Dutch Reformed churches. In the liturgical formulary adopted by the

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<sup>164</sup> An overture submitted by Classis Rocky Mountain to the Synod of 1984 articulates well this understanding of profession of faith: “Profession of faith is a very important spiritual ‘rite of passage’ for a young person. It is the point at which they own their covenant position as a decision-making adult. It is the time they take responsibility for their faith as adults, ... the time they become adult decision-makers in the church at congregational meetings and ministry functions.” (Acts, 1984:423)

Synod of 1995, profession of faith was primarily, indeed exclusively, the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper. But the 1995 formulary did not replace the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1932 and 1976, which presented profession of faith as the means of admission to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership, though the Synod of 1988 had declared that the assumption of those privileges and responsibilities was not a necessary part of profession of faith. (Acts, 1988:560)

The Synod of 2010 declared: "A formal public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper is not required by Scripture or the confessions." (Acts, 2010:811) The Synod of 2011 adopted the CO changes necessary to implement that decision. (Acts, 2011:829-830) But, as a study report submitted to the Synod of 1988 had noted: "Once the historic connection between public profession of faith and admittance to the Lord's table is dissolved, the question as to the necessity and legitimacy of public profession of faith as we have come to know it in the CRCNA arises with new urgency." The study report raised important questions: "What is the biblical warrant for this liturgical ceremony and what is its theological and practical significance in the life of maturing covenant children?" It recommended that synod appoint a committee "to study the biblical warrant for and the theological and practical significance of profession of faith for covenant children," "with a view to resting the practice of the church on a clear biblical foundation." The need for biblical warrant is "even more pressing in light of our common commitment to 'reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in worship of God, which bind or force our consciences in any way.' (BC Art. 32)" (Agenda, 1988:286-287)

Although the Synod of 1988 did not appoint the recommended study committee, the Synod of 2007 gave a similar mandate to the FCC. (Acts, 2007:655-656) The FCC was unable to rest public profession of faith on a clear biblical foundation. It acknowledged that "public profession of faith is neither biblically nor confessionally mandated." The practice of publicly professing one's faith is required by Scripture, (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9) but profession of faith as a formal liturgical practice is not. The liturgical rite may be consistent with those biblical passages, but it is not demanded by them. (Agenda, 2010:604) The FCC could only speak to the practical significance of public profession of faith, arguing that there are "significant developmental and psychological reasons for affirming profession of faith," particularly as a rite

of passage into adult church membership. (Agenda, 2010:609; Agenda, 2011:560) But “significant developmental and psychological reasons” do not rest the church’s practice on a clear biblical foundation.<sup>165</sup>

Ambiguity about the nature and purpose of profession of faith is evident in the documents produced by the FFC. They describe profession of faith as “the gateway to confessing membership” and all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.<sup>166</sup> (Agenda, 2013:329) The committee wrote: “Now that public profession of faith is the gateway to confessing membership, we anticipate that this event will naturally occur toward the end of high school, as was customary in the past.” But congregations in which professions of faith often take place at younger ages do not need to change their practice. (Agenda, 2013:330) In fact, in *Affirming Baptism, Forming Faith*, the FCC “calls [the church] to be sensitive to the faith often found in younger children and to encourage younger children to consider professing their faith as the Synods of 1988 and 1995 have encouraged.”<sup>167</sup> (Agenda, 2011:561)

*Affirming Baptism, Forming Faith* described a person’s profession of faith as “both an affirmation of their baptism and a response of commitment to the promises of God given at baptism.” (Agenda, 2011:560) Report A submitted to the Synod of 1995 argued that this “appropriation of baptismal promises can happen at a much younger age.”<sup>168</sup> (Agenda, 1995:268) The FCC agreed. Baptized persons should “resist the temptation to unnecessarily delay or postpone their personal response to baptism, and sense the urgency of such a response.” (Agenda, 2011:560) But these younger professions of faith did not satisfy the “significant developmental

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<sup>165</sup> The committee was critical of the Reformation period for failing to “provide an argument why profession of faith is scripturally required for admission to the Lord’s Supper,” (Agenda, 2010:607) yet the committee itself failed to provide an argument why profession of faith is scripturally required for admission to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership.

<sup>166</sup> The FCC’s *Primer for Welcoming Children to the Lord’s Supper* asks: “What is confessing membership? Confessing membership requires an interview with the elders and a public ceremony during worship in which a candidate makes a personal commitment to the creeds and confessions of the church. Confessing members pledge to support the church with prayers and gifts, and they become eligible to vote in congregational meetings and to be considered for leadership positions.” (Agenda, 2013:330)

<sup>167</sup> Similarly, *Children at the Lord’s Supper* - which the Synod of 2011 accepted as “fulfillment of the [FFC’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 our churches’” (Acts, 2011:832) - suggested that “requiring public profession of faith before participation in the Lord’s Supper is a wise pastoral practice in some circumstances” (Agenda, 2011:579) and noted that “the resources provided by the Synod of 1995 can assist churches who would continue to require a public profession of faith prior to table participation in welcoming younger children to profess their faith.” (Agenda, 2011:605)

<sup>168</sup> The study committee argued that “the primary association of profession of faith with a rite of passage to adulthood,” as the FFC would advocate, “undermines the close ties between baptism and profession of faith.” (Agenda, 1995:268)

and psychological reasons” for affirming profession of faith as a rite of passage into adult church membership.

The professions of faith encouraged by the Synods of 1988 and 1995 were explicitly not “a gateway to confessing membership.” Consistent with the decisions of those synods, the FCC’s Primer for Welcoming Children to the Lord’s Supper suggested that in congregations where younger children professed their faith, consistories “may want to consider postponing some responsibilities and privileges of confessing membership until a later age.” (Agenda, 2013:330) In light of the “significant developmental and psychological reasons” advanced by the FCC for affirming profession of faith, it is strange that its Primer did not advocate for a second profession of faith or another formal rite of passage whereby those who had made a younger profession of faith would assume the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership.

The CRCNA’s current practice of public profession of faith is confusing. The denomination has five official liturgical formularies, available on the denomination’s website,<sup>169</sup> which embody diverse, perhaps even conflicting, understandings of public profession of faith: (1) The 1932 and (2) 1976 formularies in which profession of faith is the means by which a baptized person is admitted to the Lord’s Supper and to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership; (3) the 1995 formulary in which profession of faith is the means by which a baptized person is admitted to the Lord’s Supper, but not to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership; (4) the 2013 formulary in which profession of faith is a baptized person’s obedient response to the call of their baptism to profess faith in Jesus Christ, but in which nothing is said about admission to either the Lord’s Supper or the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership; and (5) the 2016 formulary in which profession of faith is the means by which a baptized person, presumably already admitted to the Lord’s Supper, is admitted to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership.

This confusion confirms Osmer’s (1996:xv) observation: “Until the church is clear about its theological understanding of confirmation [profession of faith], uncertainty and ambivalence will surround this practice.” The CRCNA needs clarity about the biblical and theological warrant for public profession of faith. “Significant developmental and psychological reasons” do not rest the church’s practice on a clear biblical foundation. Lacking biblical warrant, the CRCNA should reconsider the necessity of this liturgical practice, especially in light

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<sup>169</sup> [www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources/profession-faith](http://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources/profession-faith) (accessed on 3 March 2019)



of its own confessional commitment: “We reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind or force our consciences in any way.” (BC Art. 32)

## Chapter 6 ~ The Lord's Supper

### 6.1 ~ Introduction

The Synod of 2004 declared that HC Q&A 80, which describes the Roman Catholic Mass as “a condemnable idolatry,”<sup>1</sup> “can no longer be held in its current form as part of our confession given our study of official Roman Catholic teaching.” (Acts, 2004:629) However, the committee that studied Q&A 80 and official Roman Catholic teaching noted that Q&A 80 does not refer to what the Roman Catholic Church teaches; it refers to what “the Mass teaches.” The committee “struggled to discern whether Q&A 80 was written in response to official Roman Catholic teaching, to the practice of the Roman Catholics in sixteenth-century Europe, or to some combination of the two.” It concluded that Q&A 80 was written in response to both. (Agenda, 2004:299)

The committee judged Q&A 80 neither a fair nor an accurate response to official Roman Catholic teaching today. It recommended that the following footnote be appended to Q&A 80: “The Synod of 2004 concluded that the Mass, when celebrated in accordance with official Roman Catholic teaching, neither denies the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ nor constitutes idolatry.” (Agenda, 2004:306) However, the committee also recognized that “in certain contexts,” where the Mass is not celebrated in accordance with official Roman Catholic teaching, it could deny the one sacrifice and suffering of Christ and could contribute to idolatrous worship. In those contexts, “Q&A 80 has offered, and will continue to offer, a needed warning against teachings, attitudes, and practices related to the Eucharist.” Thus the committee recommended that “Q&A 80 be retained but printed in a smaller font.”<sup>2</sup> (Agenda, 2004:305)

The CRCNA's discussion of the Mass raises important self-reflective questions regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA: What does the celebration of the Lord's

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<sup>1</sup> “Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which he himself finished on the cross once for all. It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ, who with his very body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father where he wants us to worship him. But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.” (HC Q&A 80)

<sup>2</sup> The Synod of 2006 decided to bracket the final three sentences of Q&A 80 “to indicate that they 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 CRCNA.” (Acts, 2006:711) See Venema (2013) for a critique of these decisions.

Supper in the CRCNA teach? Does it accord with the official teaching of the CRCNA, as expressed in the confessional standards to which the CRCNA subscribes? This chapter will address those questions.

Among Protestants, and especially the Reformed, *lex orandi, lex credendi* means prescriptively that the church's rule of faith should determine its rule of prayer: "What must be believed governs what may and should be prayed." (Wainwright, 1980:251) Accordingly, this chapter will first examine the theology of the Lord's Supper contained in the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes. They are the denomination's *lex credendi*; they define what must be believed. This chapter will then evaluate the CRCNA's practice of the Lord's Supper, specifically the frequency with which the sacrament has been celebrated and the liturgical formularies prescribed for those celebrations, its *lex orandi*, in light of its *lex credendi*. In so doing, it will attend to the following questions: What understanding of the Lord's Supper does the sacramental practice of the CRCNA reflect and/or reinforce? Is a shift in the denomination's understanding of the Lord's Supper discernible in an increase in the frequency with which the Lord's Supper is celebrated and in the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1964, 1981, 1994, and 2016? What influence, if any, have these liturgical formularies had in the denomination's discussion of paedocommunion? Do the denomination's newer liturgical formularies allow for or encourage paedocommunion? If so, how?

## 6.2 ~ The Sacramental Theology of the Reformed Confessions

The CRCNA confesses "its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation this Word." (CO Art. 1) Those creeds - the BC, the HC, and the CD - "define the way we understand Scripture." Every office bearer promises to "promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming their preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them." (Covenant for Officebearers; Acts, 2012:761)<sup>3</sup> These confessions contain the CRCNA's official doctrine of the Lord's Supper. They are the *lex credendi* by which the denomination's *lex orandi* may be judged.

This section will attend specifically to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper articulated in the BC and the HC. The Form of Subscription adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) describes the CD as "an explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine ["the points of

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<sup>3</sup> The Synod of 2012 adopted the Covenant for Officebearers to replace the Form of Subscription inherited from the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). (Acts, 2012:761-764) All office bearers, "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." (CO Art. 5)

doctrine contained in the BC and HC”] made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1619.” (Biesterfeld & Kuyper, 1982:188) The CD are not a comprehensive statement of faith; they do not include a specific doctrine of the sacraments. Even so, their single mention of the sacraments should be noted:

And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments. (CD IV/14)

The Canons describe the sacraments as an important means by which God “preserves, continues, and completes” the work of grace begun by the preaching of the Word. God is the primary actor in the sacraments, not the believer. The sacraments are not a token of the believer’s faith; they are a means of God’s grace.

### 6.2.1 ~ The Belgic Confession (1561)

Guido de Brès<sup>4</sup> wrote the BC in 1559, the same year that the Synod of Paris adopted the Gallican (French) Confession.<sup>5</sup> De Jong (1980:31) suggests that de Brès “drew upon the work done by the synod of Paris. ... Often the language is almost identical. Yet [de Brès’] work is not merely a translation or even a slight emendation of the Gallican Confession.”<sup>6</sup> Numerous scholars consider credible the old story that Savaria took the confession to Geneva in 1559. The Genevans advised against its publication. Instead, they urged de Brès to make use of the

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief biographical sketch of de Brès, see De Jong (1980:21-26) and Hyde (2008:11-20).

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin may have authored a preliminary draft of this confession, (Venema, 2001:142; Faber, 1979:355) which De Jong (1980:28) characterizes as “a summary of the *Institutes*,” but Riggs (2015:119) argues that the final product was “a joint effort by Genevan theologians based on prior confessional materials.” Verduin (1961b:20) attributes the Gallican Confession to Antoine Chandieu, “who is to be considered the responsible author of the Gallican Confession, not Calvin as is commonly held.”

<sup>6</sup> Faber (1979:355) claims that the Gallican Confession was “the model” for the BC and can rightly be called “the mother of the BC.” De Jong (1980:30) refers to the BC as “plainly the child of the creed adopted by the French churches.” Venema (2001:153) alleges that de Brès “used the Gallican Confession as a prototype in formulating the [Belgic] Confession.” Though de Brès’ “work is not merely a translation or even a slight emendation of the Gallican Confession.” (De Jong, 1980:31)

Verduin (1961b:20) argues that “there is no external evidence that de Brès followed an already existing document.” He concedes that “it is evident that the two creeds [Gallican and BC] have much in common, so that complete independence is impossible,” and suggest that de Brès and Chandieu, whom he considers the “responsible author” of the Gallican Confession, “may have compared notes before either man became to compile his creed.” However, Verduin offers no external evidence to support this theory.

Gallican Confession.<sup>7</sup> For two years de Brès did. The BC was first published in Emden in 1561. (Verduin, 1961b:19; De Jong, 1980:30; Hyde, 2008:14-15) The Synod of Antwerp (1566) adopted a revised BC, which was approved by Geneva. (De Jong, 1980:44) Commentators dispute the nature of the revisions. De Jong (1980:43) argues that “the substance of what de Brès had penned remained unchanged.” Verduin (1961a:17) refers to the revisions as “drastic.”<sup>8</sup> A study report submitted to the Synod of 1979 concluded that the 1559/61 and 1566 texts constitute “virtually two confessions.” (Acts, 1979:538)

Classis Walcheren's question to the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), asking which version of the Confession was authoritative, indicates that not all used the revisions of 1566. (Verduin, 1961c:15-16) The Synod of Middelburg (1581), acknowledging that the Confession was “badly misprinted,” authorized a new translation “from the French into the Dutch language.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:134) According to De Jong, (1980:45) “many of the printers who issued editions of the Confession were guilty of slovenly work. Often the articles were quoted without regard for the changes approved by the Synod of Antwerp (1566).” The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) sought to end the uncertainty by establishing authoritative versions of the Confession in Dutch, French, and Latin.<sup>9</sup> (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:176) Historically, English translations of the BC were based on the Latin text commissioned by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). (Venema, 2001:151n19) This was true in the CRCNA until a study committee asked the Synod of 1979, Which confession?

### 6.2.1.1 ~ Which Confession?

In response to two overtures, requesting that the church re-express its faith in a new confession, (Acts, 1971:624-625, 672-673) the Synod of 1971 appointed a committee to study “how the church can confess its faith in contemporary ways today, whether the churches consider it necessary to augment their confession at this time, and if so, in what areas the church

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<sup>7</sup> While some argue that Savaria approved of the BC's form and content, (De Jong, 1980:30; Hyde, 2008:14-15) Verduin (1961b:2) suspects that theological disagreement motivated Geneva's veto of the BC: “It is more plausible that it was the tenor of de Brès' articles [that gave rise to Geneva's veto]. ... de Brès' delineation of the duty of the magistrate was less than satisfactory to Geneva.”

<sup>8</sup> Verduin's articles (1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d, 1962) focus exclusively on revisions to Article 36 on civil authority.

<sup>9</sup> Only the Dutch and French versions were completed before the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) adjourned. Only they were officially adopted by the synod. (De Jong, 1980:45; Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:190-191) Thus, Festus Hommius' Latin version was “commissioned” by the Synod of Dort, (Venema, 2001:151n19) but the synod never officially adopted it, as Hyde (2008:4) erroneously claims.

desires to augment its confession.” (Acts, 1971:109-110) This committee recommended that the Synod of 1975 commission a new translation of the CD. (Acts, 1975:104-105)

The committee did not find “the kinds of inaccuracies that led [it] to recommend a new translation of the Canons,” but it was concerned that the “archaic language and cumbersome style” of the current translation of the BC “do not allow this confession to be as accessible to the church as it might be.” Accordingly, the committee recommended that the Synod of 1977 appoint another committee to provide the church with “a readable, accurate, and properly referenced translation” of the BC. (Acts, 1977:656-657) This the Synod of 1977 did. (Acts, 1977:88)

The appointed translation committee<sup>10</sup> provided the Synod of 1979 with a draft translation, but did not recommend it for final approval because of “an enduring problem that the committee has wrestled with since the very beginning of its work, the problem of the *textus receptus* - i.e., which text we should use as the standard, authoritative original,” (Acts, 1979:535) the 1559/61 text or the 1566 revised text inherited from the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The committee argued that the CRCNA “had already entered into the debate ... by rejecting the revised reading of Art. 36 as channeled through the Synod of Dort.”<sup>11</sup> The committee concluded that the CRCNA “has inclined to look on 1559/61 as the *textus receptus*.” (Acts, 1979:535, 539)

Changes to BC Art. 36 on civil authority, which lie beyond the scope of this church juridical inquiry, were the most significant revisions adopted by the Synod of Antwerp (1566), but they were not the only revisions adopted. Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry are revisions to the BC’s articles on the sacraments (Art. 33) and the Lord’s Supper. (Art. 35) The translation committee noted “the ‘higher’ sacramental theology of the revisionists compared to de Brès.” (Act, 1979:593) Whereas the 1559/61 text describes the sacraments as a means by which God “confirms salvation in us,” the 1566 revision says that God “thereby confirms in us the salvation which he imparts.” (Art. 33) The committee was concerned that this could be interpreted to mean that salvation is imparted through the sacraments, a perspective the committee thought “possibly enhanced by the words that follow.” Whereas the 1559/61

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<sup>10</sup> The committee included Leonard Verduin, whose series of articles, “Which Confession?” in the *Reformed Journal* was sharply critical of the 1566 revision. (see Verduin, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d, 1962)

<sup>11</sup> See Acts, 1979:595 for a brief history of the CRCNA’s synodical decisions regarding BC Art. 36. The study committee concluded: “It seems to us that this discussion and controversy, extending more than 70 years, could have been largely avoided if Reformed churches subscribing to the BC had been aware of the original Confession of de Brès and had adopted its language in Art. 36. The original text avoids most of the issues that were debated.” (Acts, 1979:595)

text describes the sacraments as “symbols and visible signs,” the 1566 revision adds the word “seals.” “This concept could suggest a ‘high’ sacramentalism in which salvation is delivered to us in that which is ‘sealed.’” (Acts, 1979:593) It “could go in the direction of an *ex opere operato* or a mechanical idea of the sacraments.” (Acts, 1979:600)

The Synod of 1979 received two overtures responding to the report of the translation committee. The consistory of Lucas, Michigan asked synod “to instruct the committee to use the version of the BC adopted by the Synod of Dort.”<sup>12</sup> The committee that had recommended a new translation of the BC had said: “We do not see the time of translation as an occasion to make changes in the content of the confession.” (Acts, 1977:657) Appealing to the translation committee’s own report, which characterized the two text as “virtually two confessions,” (Acts, 1979:538) the Lucas consistory argued that adopting a translation of the 1559/61 text “would amount to a revision of our confessional position.” The overture noted that “this is the case particularly with the doctrine of the sacraments as sealing ordinances.” (Acts, 1979:715) The overture from Classis Hackensack argued similarly: “The committee, in using a different text for its work, is not translating the Confession, but is revising it.” (Acts, 1979:716)

The advisory committee, while noting the problem of the translation committee’s choice of the 1559/61 text,<sup>13</sup> declined to answer the question raised by the translation committee: Which confession? Instead, it advised the Synod of 1979 to instruct the translation committee to also translate the text of the BC approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), and to publish - in side-by-side columns - its translation of the 1559/61 text and its translation of the 1619 Dort text, incorporating in the 1619 Dort text “the substance of the amendment of Art. 36” approved by the Synod of 1958. (Acts, 1979:126) The Synod of 1979 did this, expressing no opinion on which text should be the *textus receptus* nor any judgment on the apparent theological differences between the two texts. Four years later, the committee presented the requested translations to the Synod of 1983. (Agenda, 1983:280-393)

The Synod of 1983 submitted only the new translation of the 1619 Dort text of the BC to the churches for study. Its advisory committee judged that “a delay in choosing which version to submit to the churches would produce uncertainty on the question of the text which underlies the creed.” (Acts, 1983:647) The grounds given by the Synod of 1983 for choosing

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<sup>12</sup> The overture had been submitted to Classis Cadillac, which neither rejected nor adopted the document as an overture. (Acts, 1979:715)

<sup>13</sup> “This is not the text on which the translation adopted by the Synod of Dort was based and which is also the version adopted by our own denomination,” (Acts, 1979:126)

the 1619 Dort text - which was essentially the 1566 revision - did not address the apparent theological differences between the 1559/61 and 1566 texts:

- a. The translations of the BC that have been used to shape the life and thought of the CRCNA through its history are based on the 1619 Dort text.
- b. The 1619 Dort text of the BC is common to Reformed churches throughout the world.
- c. No convincing arguments have been presented for abandoning the Dort text of the BC which has been in general use throughout the world since 1619. (Acts, 1984:648)

The Synod of 1985 adopted this translation of the 1619 Dort text of the BC,<sup>14</sup> with its higher sacramental theology. (Acts, 1985:789) This is the text to which the CRCNA has subscribed throughout its history. To this text the next section will attend.

### 6.2.1.2 ~ The Belgic Confession on the Lord's Supper

In an essay on the Lord's Supper in the Reformed confessions, Brian Gerrish (1982:123) asks "whether their central thought on the Lord's Supper is commemorative or communication."<sup>15</sup> Gerrish identifies three doctrines of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition: symbolic memorialism,<sup>16</sup> symbolic parallelism,<sup>17</sup> and symbolic instrumentalism.<sup>18</sup> Although one section of the BC's article on the Lord's Supper "could, if taken out of context, be interpreted parallelistically,"<sup>19</sup> (Gerrish, 1982:331n35) the article, when read as a whole,

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<sup>14</sup> Unlike most English translations of the BC, which "have historically been based on the Latin translation which was commissioned by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)," this translation was based on the French text adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). (Venema, 2001:151n19) The study committee explained: "Our first decision was to work with a French text. We were led to that decision by the very constituency of our committee. The Synod of 1977 saw fit to appoint to our committee several persons proficient in the French language. We were influenced also by the precedent set by the HC Committee which enunciated this principle: 'We recognize that the original language of the HC is German, and so we take as our standard and authoritative text the original German.'" (Acts, 1979:536)

<sup>15</sup> Riggs (2015:113) describes Gerrish's essay as "the single most insightful essay written on the Supper in the Reformed confessions."

<sup>16</sup> This view, often associated with Zwingli, teaches that "the elements call to mind something that has happened." (Gerrish, 1982:124)

<sup>17</sup> This view, often associated with Bullinger, teaches that the symbolic action, outward eating, parallels an inward event, feeding upon Christ. The two events happen at the same time, but "the outward event does not convey or cause or give rise to the inward event, but merely indicates that it is going on." (Gerrish, 1982:124)

<sup>18</sup> This view, often associated with Calvin, "holds that the signs or elements of a sacrament are the instruments through which or by which God's Spirit conveys the spiritual reality that they symbolize... Sacraments are, in the strictest sense of the term, 'means of grace.'" (Bierma, 2013:76)

<sup>19</sup> "Just as truly as we take and hold the sacraments in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouths ... so truly we receive into our souls ... the true body and true blood of Christ." (BC Art. 35)



teaches symbolic instrumentalism: “the bread and wine are the means by which the Holy Spirit mysteriously communicates Christ to his people.” (Hyde, 2008:467) The central thought of the BC is communication, not commemoration.

BC Art. 35 describes the Lord’s Supper as “a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits.”<sup>20</sup> It is not only the merits of Christ’s suffering and death, but Christ himself that believers enjoy at the Lord’s Table. While Christians “engage together, with thanksgiving, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ,” remembrance does not exhaust the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the BC. The Supper was ordained by Christ “to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and grafted into this family.” Thus, at the Lord’s table, Christ “nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.”<sup>21</sup>

The Lord’s Supper is an objective means of grace. The sacramental symbols “are not empty and hollow signs.”<sup>22</sup> (BC Art. 33) “The sacrament and the things signified are joined together.” (BC Art. 35) Yet Art. 35 says that “not all receive them.” While Christ is truly offered to all; he is only received by faith.<sup>23</sup> An unbeliever “does not receive the truth of the sacrament,” which is Christ.<sup>24</sup> Christ “is communicated only to believers,” because “the manner in which we eat it [Christ’s own natural body and his own blood] is not by the mouth but

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin also described the sacrament as a “spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality.” (*Institutes*, 4.17.1)

<sup>21</sup> The Confession draws “upon the imagery of the discourse in John 6,” (Venema, 2001:153) where the Reformed found “solid ground for their convictions concerning the reality of Christ’s presence and our partaking of him” in the sacrament. (De Jong, 1980:380) Calvin referred to the sacrament as “nothing but a visible witnessing of that promise contained in the sixth chapter of John, namely, that Christ is the bread of life come down from heaven.” (*Institutes*, 4.17.14) On John 6 Calvin comments, “I acknowledge that there is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented, and actually bestowed on believers, in the Lord’s Supper; and Christ even intended that the holy Supper should be, as it were, a seal and confirmation of this sermon” (*Commentary* on John 6:54).

<sup>22</sup> Calvin argued that the sacramental signs “not only symbolize the thing that it has been consecrated to represent as a bare and empty token, but also truly exhibits it.” (*Institutes*, 4.17.21) Rozeboom (2012:152) explains that *exhibere* does not simply mean “‘to present,’ as in ‘to show,’ as the English implies. It means ‘to present,’ as in ‘to offer,’ ‘to proffer,’ ‘to hand over.’”

<sup>23</sup> On this distinction between what is offered and what is received in the sacrament, see Calvin (*Institutes*, 4.17.33) and Berkouwer (1969:250-253).

<sup>24</sup> The sacraments “are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is Jesus Christ, without whom they would be nothing.” (BC Art. 33)

by the Spirit,<sup>25</sup> through faith,” which the Confession calls “the hand and mouth of our souls.”<sup>26</sup> While the efficacy of the sacrament requires faith, faith does not cause efficacy; the Holy Spirit does. “Faith is like a receiving vessel, which adds nothing in itself.” (Billings, 2018:69)

The BC provides “a vigorous and extensive statement of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament,” which it affirms “more emphatically than any of the standard symbols of the Reformed churches.” (Venema, 2001:153) “We do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood.”<sup>27</sup> (BC Art. 35) This statement occasioned the CRCNA’s first confessional gravamen, to which the next section attends.

### 6.2.1.3 ~ The Boersma Gravamen

The Synod of 1952 received an overture from the consistory of Calvin, Grand Rapids, asking it “to study the weight and relevancy of the objections” it had received against the BC.<sup>28</sup> The objections<sup>29</sup> included an allegation that “the Confession errs when ... it states: ‘In the

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<sup>25</sup> In the CRCNA’s first English translation of the BC, the word “spirit” was not capitalized, suggesting that it referred to the human spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit. (PsH, 1934:18) This was corrected in the translation adopted by the Synod of 1985, which is quoted above.

While affirming a real presence of Christ in the sacrament, the Reformed rejected “any inherent power in the elements to work saving grace within the hearts of the believing church. [The elements] are made fruitful only by the power of the Holy Spirit ... None more than the Reformed stressed the working of the Spirit in this connection.” (De Jong, 1980:343, emphasis original)

<sup>26</sup> Billings (2018:74) considers this “manner” of eating “essential for rightly framing how Christ is communicated to believers.” But, he cautions, that this happens “spiritually” should not be understood to mean that it happens “in one’s own head” or that it is “the product of one’s own faith.” It happens “by the Spirit,” and the Spirit “communicates far more than a mental remembrance of Christ or a mental sense of Christ’s presence.” (Billings, 2018:76; see also Venema, 2001:144) Here, the Confession follows Calvin, for whom “spiritual” “did not intend to say that something other than Christ’s true body and blood [are] communicated, but simply that such communication happens by the Spirit.” (Riggs, 2015:92)

<sup>27</sup> Venema (2001:154n21) comments: “The strength of this affirmation of Christ’s real presence in the sacrament was impressed upon me a number of years ago when, to my embarrassment, I identified this language as Roman Catholic during an oral examination at Calvin Theological Seminary.” Meeter (1985:5) recounts a similar experience. De Jong (1980:386) admits that these words can sound like “a concession to the Romanists.”

<sup>28</sup> The consistory was “in receipt for a communication from one of its members, in which attention is called to certain elements in the BC which he considers objectionable.” (Acts, 1952:520) The member in question was Dr. Clarence Boersma. Dr. Boersma was a member of the Calvin congregation, not its consistory. (Boer, 1970a:5) A study committee report to the Synod of 1958 erroneously identified him as “an elder.” (Acts, 1958:175) Dr. Boersma had been appointed to teach German at Calvin College, an educational institution owned by the CRCNA. All professors at Calvin College were required to sign the Form of Subscription, in which they claim to “heartily believe ... all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the [Belgic] Confession,” and “promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same.” (PsH, 1934:70; Boer, 1970a:5)

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Boersma’s other objections are not germane to this church juridical inquiry: The Confession attributes the book of Hebrews to the Apostle Paul; it omits Lamentations from its list of the canonical books; it includes 1 John

meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us (in the Holy Supper) is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ.”<sup>30</sup> The Calvin consistory did “not consider that it is within its competence to enter into this study.”<sup>31</sup> (Acts, 1952:521, emphasis original) The Synod of 1952 “readily consented” (Boer, 1970a:6) to the request from the Calvin consistory, appointing Rev. J. Weidenaar, Rev. L. Verduin, and Dr. Clarence Boersma to study Boersma’s objections.<sup>32</sup> (Acts, 1952:68, 114)

Boersma (1960) articulated his objection in an article published in the *Reformed Journal*. He was “convinced that in the text of Art. 35 we find a remarkably clear, literal, unambiguous statement concerning the presence of Christ in the holy elements which does not square with the teachings of the HC, nor with the teachings of John Calvin,” because the Confession declares that “the believing communicant comes into contact with the physical body of Christ.”<sup>33</sup> (Boersma, 1960:19) Boersma (1960:20, emphasis original) admits that in Calvin’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper, “what the believing community receives is the substance of Christ’s body,” but Boersma argues that for Calvin this substance is “something quite non-material and quite other than ‘the proper and natural body’” mentioned in the BC.<sup>34</sup>

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5:7, a text which does not appear in the American Revised Version, in support of the doctrine of the Trinity; and it detests the Anabaptists rather than the error of the Anabaptists. (Acts, 1952:521)

<sup>30</sup> The French Reformed Synod of La Rochelle (1572) rejected a similar objection against similar language in the Gallican Confession, asserting that in the sacrament “we not only have communion with [Christ’s] merits and his gifts, but with himself. (Berkouwer, 1969:227; see also Bavinck, 2008a:559)

<sup>31</sup> Classis Wisconsin would overture the Synod of 1961 to “take no action on the revision of the BC until such a time as it receives a properly constituted and duly processed gravamen.” (Acts, 1961:534) The Synod of 1961 responded that “the communication of Dr. Boersma to the Synod of 1952 had the characteristics of a gravamen and all synods from 1952 (1954, 1956, 1957, 1958) have accepted it as such.” (Acts, 1961:88)

Classis Wisconsin argued that if Boersma’s communication was in fact a gravamen, his consistory was competent - indeed, it was required by the Form of Subscription - to judge his objections: “The consistory is thereby called upon to make a judgment. Having studied the matter, it either sustains or does not sustain the objector. If he is not sustained, he is free to appeal his case to classis or even to synod if classis does not sustain him. ... The original communication of Dr. Boersma, since it had the characteristic features of a gravamen, should have been dealt with as such by his consistory, and if necessary, by classis and then by synod.” (Acts, 1961:535)

<sup>32</sup> Boer (1970a:6) suggests that the Synod of 1952 appointed Dr. Boersma to the committee “just to make sure the committee got to see things from the inside.” In contrast, Classis Wisconsin, in an overture to the Synod of 1961, took strong exception to the appointment of Dr. Boersma to the original study committee appointed to study his own objections: “This is not judicial procedure to say the least!” (Acts, 1961:535)

<sup>33</sup> Contra Boersma, a synodical advisory committee would argue that “the phrase against which objection is made in the overture of 1952 faithfully reflects, in the light of its context, the teaching of John Calvin as to the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.” (Acts, 1957:86-87)

<sup>34</sup> Boersma (1960:20) quotes Calvin (*Institutes*, 4.17.32): “It is sufficient for us that Christ inspires life into our souls from the substance of his flesh, and even infuses his own life into us, though his flesh never actually enters us,” to support his contention.

The study committee presented two reports to the Synod of 1954. The majority report, signed by Weidenaar and Verduin, recommended re-punctuating the Confession to reflect the 1559/61 text, in which the offending sentence “runs right into the following sentence which tells us that the manner of our partaking is not with the mouth but with the spirit.” (Acts, 1954:251) The majority report argued, further, that the word “proper” (*le propre corps de Christ and son propre sang*) really means “own.” It recommended retranslating the Confession to read: “In the meanwhile we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is Christ’s own body and blood; but the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith.”<sup>35</sup> (Acts, 1954:252)

In his minority report, Boersma objected that this revision “neither changes the substance nor increases the clarity of the passage in question.” (Acts, 1954:253) He recommended the following revision: “Nor do we err when we say that the sum of that which is appropriated by us when we eat the bread and drink the wine of the holy sacrament is spiritual; that is to say, the saving and sanctifying grace of Christ by which we become vigorous members of Christ’s body, the church. The manner of our partaking of Christ is not physical, by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith.” (Acts, 1954:255)

Boersma’s proposed revision would drastically change the Confession’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. It removes the language of eating and drinking the body of Christ; only the sacramental signs are eaten and drunk. Communicants do not receive Christ in the sacrament, but only his saving and sanctifying grace.<sup>36</sup> The Lord’s Supper is not a communication of

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Boersma (1960:21) claims that “the Confession is also utterly out of harmony with Calvin’s teaching when it quotes and paraphrases at considerable length the discourse of Jesus on the ‘Bread of Life’ in John 6,” apparently unaware of Calvin’s own comment on John 6: “There is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented and actually bestowed on believers in the Lord’s Supper.” (*Commentary* on John 6:54, my emphasis)

<sup>35</sup> The translation of the BC adopted by the Synod of 1985 would re-punctuate Art. 35 as recommended in this report. It would also retain the word “natural,” which was omitted in this report.

<sup>36</sup> Vander Zee (2004:180) argues that this view, which he describes as “virtualism” - that is, “we do not really receive Christ’s body and blood, but only its virtues or benefits” - “became the orthodox Calvinist interpretation of the Lord’s Supper in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.” One finds it in Berkhof’s (1938:654) influential *Systematic Theology*, which quotes Hodge approvingly: “the virtues and effects of the sacrifice of the body of the Redeemer and the cross are made present and are actually conveyed in the sacrament.” This view, however, does not fully accord with the BC which teaches that in the Lord’s Supper “Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits,” (Art. 35) or with the teaching of Calvin and Bavinck: “According to Calvin, says Bavinck, there was a still deeper communion, ‘a communion not only with the benefits, but with the person of Christ himself, with his own flesh and blood.’” (Berkouwer, 1969:226) Berkouwer (1969:227) contends that there is an “unbreakable relationship between the communion with Christ’s benefits and with himself in the one communion of salvation.” There is no communion with Christ’s benefits apart from communion with Christ; it is only in union with Christ that one receives his benefits.

Christ. The body of Christ to which believers are united is not Christ, but the church.<sup>37</sup>

The Synod of 1954 decided to “confer in the matter of the proposed changes with our sister churches that give the BC binding authority” and continued the study committee to carry out that mandate. (Acts, 1954:103) The committee informed the Synod of 1956 that it was unable to carry out its mandate until synod took a position relative to the revisions proposed in the 1954 majority and minority reports. The Synod of 1954 had neither approved nor disapproved the recommendations in either report. (Acts, 1956:511) Rather than take a position on the proposed revisions, the Synod of 1954 instructed the study committee to distribute its 1954 reports to the churches.<sup>38</sup> (Acts, 1956:91-92)

The study committee’s report to the Synod of 1957 included the 1952 overtures and the 1954 reports. The Synod of 1957 decided to “adopt no changes in the Confession without prior consultation with other Reformed churches holding the same confession”<sup>39</sup> (Acts, 1957:96) - essentially the same decision as the Synod of 1954. A new committee was appointed, but it encountered the same challenge with the decision of the Synod of 1957 that the first study committee encountered with the decision of the Synod of 1954. In its report to the Synod of 1958, the committee claimed that it was “embarrassed” with its mandate: “We do not think our study committee is warranted in asking a sister church ... to consider possible changes concerning which synod has made no declaration, nor even stated that any changes are necessary.” (Acts, 1958:175, 179) The committee asked the Synod of 1958 “to take action and declare whether or not any alterations are feasible and necessary.” (Acts, 1958:175)

The Synod of 1958 declared that “some alterations in the BC may be feasible and necessary,” but declined to specify what those alterations might be. After prolonged debate and consideration of the advisory committee’s recommendation that synod adopt the revision proposed in the 1954 majority report, the Synod of 1957 heard Dr. Boersma present his 1954

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<sup>37</sup> Compare Boersma’s language of becoming “vigorous members of ... the church” with the HC Q&A 76: “Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ’s blessed body. And so, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.”

<sup>38</sup> Synod claimed that “the report containing the request arrived too late for proper consideration by synod” and that no confessional change should be considered “until there has been ample time for study of them by the churches.” (Acts, 1956:91-92) In its report to the Synod of 1957, the study committee countered that, given that the reports were contained in the Agenda of 1954, “the consistories have already had the ‘ample time for study’” of which the Synod of 1956 spoke. (Acts, 1957:146)

<sup>39</sup> The advisory committee’s initial recommendation: “In light of the objection voiced against the statement concerning Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper in Art. 35, we recommend that Synod appoint a committee to study whether or not this statement faithfully reflects the teaching of Scripture,” was recommitted to the committee for reformulation, resulting in the decision to consult with other Reformed churches holding to the same confession. (Acts, 1957:87)

minority report. In the end, another study committee was appointed “to come to the next synod with definite recommendations.” (Acts, 1958:31) The study committee submitted two reports to the Synod of 1959. Neither recommended adopting changes to BC Art. 35.

The majority report argued that Boersma’s proposed revision “fails to give adequate expression to the fullness and the reality of Christ’s presence in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” and “does not do justice to the teaching of John 6.”<sup>40</sup> (Acts, 1959:181) The Synod of 1959 decided to “postpone consideration of the BC revision until next year and [to] refer the reports to the churches.” (Acts, 1959:109) The Synod of 1960 was no more inclined to act than the previous synods; it “referred the reports of the study committee on the revision of the BC to the Synod of 1961 for action.” Meanwhile, the study committee was instructed “to solicit responses from the consistories and the classes.” (Acts, 1960:52) Of the 45 consistories that responded directly to the study committee, only two favored the revision proposed by Boersma in his 1954 minority report. (Acts, 1961:206)

The Synod of 1961 did not adopt any of the changes to the BC proposed by its advisory committee,<sup>41</sup> choosing instead to “not accede to the suggested alterations.”<sup>42</sup> The Synod of 1961 declared that to be its answer to the 1952 overture from Calvin Grand Rapids, and the gravamen of Dr. Boersma contained therein.<sup>43</sup> (Acts, 1961:88) The Confession remained unchanged: “We do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood - but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth but by the Spirit, through faith.” (Art. 35) In the BC, the Lord’s Supper is more than a commemoration; it is a communication of Christ himself.

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<sup>40</sup> “Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.’” (John 6:53-56)

<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, the Acts of Synod did not record the changes proposed by the advisory committee.

<sup>42</sup> This is “the full and complete response to the appeal that had for ten years been before CRCNA synods.” Synod only adopted this recommendation. “So far as the wording of the decision is concerned,” the Synod of 1961 did not adopt “the argumentation out of which the decision flowed.” (Boer, 1970b:10)

<sup>43</sup> Boer (1970b:12) judged this response to Boersma’s gravamen insufficient. In its overture to the Synod of 1961, Classis Wisconsin had argued that “to the best of our knowledge no judgment has ever been made by a consistory or classis with respect to Dr. Boersma’s objections to the BC.” (Agenda, 1961: 534, emphasis original) Boer (1970b:12) concludes, “It is now a matter of record that synod did not do so either.” Instead, synod simply “established that creedal change is not wanted,” (Boer, 1970b:13) without fully addressing the substance of Dr. Boersma’s objections.

### 6.2.2 ~ The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Among the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes, the HC has been the most influential. Meeter (1998:4) rightly acknowledges that “the BC has simply been far less important to us than we’ve been willing to admit.” It “has been far from the theological force it should have been.” The HC has been the more prominent confession. “One can find a good deal of material on the HC,” but “for the BC we have nothing to serve as a seminary-level scholarly book to accompany the Confession itself.”<sup>44</sup> (Meeter, 1985:4)

The CO requires that “at one of the services each Lord’s Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the creeds and confessions of the church, especially the HC,”<sup>45</sup> (Art. 54, my emphasis) and that “each church shall instruct the youth in Scripture and in the creeds and confessions of the church, especially the HC.”<sup>46</sup> (Art. 63, my emphasis) What doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is contained therein? To that question, this section attends.

The HC’s explanation of the Lord’s Supper is “of far greater length” than that of the BC. Indeed, in the HC “more attention is given to this subject than any other,” due in large part to the historical context in which the HC was commissioned and written. (De Jong, 1950d:1036) Although the Reformation was firmly established in the Palatinate when Frederick III succeeded Otto Henry as Elector in 1559, the church was seriously divided. “Polemics focused especially on the Lord’s Supper and the question of the manner of Christ’s presence in the sacrament.” (Venema, 2013:35) “Convinced that the controversy regarding the Lord’s Supper between Lutheran and Reformed theologians needed to be settled for peace and unity to prevail in the church,” Frederick III appointed a theological commission to draft a new confession of faith. (Rowe, 1996:55) The new confession, the HC, was written “in significant

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<sup>44</sup> Hyde (2008:3) offers a similar assessment, lamenting that commentaries on the Confession are “few and far between, as well as sorely outdated.” See Hyde (2008:505n5) for a bibliography.

<sup>45</sup> Both the DCO (Article LXVIII; p. 172) and the 1914 CO (Art. 68; p. 102) required that, each Sunday in one of the worship services, ministers “briefly explain the sum of Christian doctrine contained in the HC which at present is accepted in the Netherlands Churches in such a way that it may be finished annually.” This was revised to read, “preach the Word as summarized in the HC, following its sequence,” in the RCO. (Article 54; p. 136) The Synod of 1973 “encouraged the use of the BC and the CD, as well as the HC, in preaching,” (Acts, 1973:65) but the CO was not revised to incorporate this encouragement until 2010 when synod adopted the reading quoted above. (Acts, 2010:905)

<sup>46</sup> Neither the DCO nor the 1914 CO include any articles on catechetical instruction. These were added to the RCO, which required that “the HC and its Compendium shall be the basis of instruction” (Art. 64; p. 138) “in the teaching of Scripture as formulated in the creeds of the church.” (Art. 63; p. 138) The reading quoted above was proposed by the Synod of 1992, (Acts, 1992:664) and adopted by the Synod of 1993. (Acts, 1993:578)

measure to end the theological fighting that had long plagued the churches of the region.”<sup>47</sup> (Venema, 2013:38)

Bierma (2013) describes the HC as “a Reformation synthesis.” Its authors “seemed to have tried especially hard” in the HC’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper “to reflect what Verboom has called ‘maximal consensus’ and ‘minimal dissensus.’”<sup>48</sup> (Bierma, 2013:72) The HC “was designed in such a way as to allow latitude on such controversial sacramental matters as the relation of sign and signified.” (Bierma, 1999:39) The HC admits a Calvinist interpretation, a neo-Zwinglian or Bullingerian interpretation, and a blend of the two interpretations.<sup>49</sup> (Bierma, 1999:3; 2013:71)

The HC defines the sacraments as “holy signs and seals for us to see.” As signs, they help “us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel.” (Q&A 66) The Lord’s Supper “reminds [us] ... that [we] share in Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross.” “As surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken<sup>50</sup> for me and the cup given to me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross.” (Q&A 75) One might detect a Zwinglian symbolic memorialist view here.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the BC, in which the sacrament

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<sup>47</sup> The HC explicitly excludes the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ’s human nature. The divine attribute of omnipresence is communicated to the person of Christ, but his human nature does not thereby become omnipresent. (see HC Q&A 47-48) Thus, the presence of Christ in the sacrament, while real, cannot be located “in, with, or under” the elements as it is in the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation. The risen and ascended Christ remains in heaven. Believing communicants feast on Christ as, through the Spirit who lives both in them and him, they are united more and more to his blessed body. (HC Q&A 79)

<sup>48</sup> Bierma cites Verboom, W. 1996. *Theologie van de Heidelbergse Catechismus*. Utrecht: Boekencentrum, p. 215.

<sup>49</sup> The Calvinist interpretation corresponds to Gerrish’s symbolic instrumentalism, and the neo-Zwinglian or Bullingerian interpretation corresponds to Gerrish’s symbolic parallelism. For a survey of the scholarly debate on the HC’s sacramental theology, see Bierma (1999:1-7). Bierma (1999:5) notes that “this variety of labels has been applied not simply to the HC’s general approach to the sacraments but also to the details of its sacramental teaching.”

<sup>50</sup> “The references to ‘broken’ here are to that moment in the Lord’s Supper in which the presiding minister breaks the eucharistic bread before it is distributed to the congregation. Lutheran and Catholic churches did not practice this *fractio panis*; Reformed churches did, not just because in their view, Christ commanded it but also as a symbolic rejection of any notion of Christ’s bodily presence in the bread or as the bread.” (Bierma, 2013:87)

The Convent of Wesel (1568) was “of the opinion that the breaking of bread is in every respect necessary because it has been clearly established by Christ and has been observed by the apostles and the entire early church for the weightiest reasons.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:37) The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) assumed the *fractio panis*, requiring that the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 10 and the *Londonse aenhangel* accompany it. (Article LXVII; p. 73) The Synod of Middelburg (1581) allowed each congregation to “serve [administer] the Lord’s Supper as it judges contributes to the most edification, but with the understanding that the external ceremonies prescribed by God’s Word [which presumably included the *fractio panis*] are not changed.” (Article XLIV; p. 116) The Synods of ‘Gravenhage (1586) (Article LVI; p. 150) and Dort (1618-1619) (Article LXII; p. 171) retained this provision, as did the 1914 CO (Article 62; p. 100) and the RCO. (Article 60; p. 137)

<sup>51</sup> For Zwingli, the sacramental signs are “not instrumental, but indicative... they signal the fact that something has already been accomplished by the activity of God.” They serve “to remind believers of Christ’s work.” (Gerrish, 1993:164, 168)



is described as “a banquet” and a “spiritual table,” (Art. 35) the HC focuses the communicant’s attention to Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. (Wandel, 2006:205) The sacramental signs remind communicants of Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross.

The HC emphasizes the sacrament’s commemorative aspect more than the BC does, but it does not present the sacrament as exclusively a memorial. The HC does not deny that the Lord’s Supper is a memorial, but “this by no means expresses, much less exhausts, the significance of the Lord’s Supper.” (De Jong, 1980:381) The Lord’s Supper is not only a sign; it is also a seal. Contra Zwingli, “the sacraments are much more than visual aids, for no visual aid can seal or guarantee.” (Klooster, 2001:827) The Lord’s Supper is more than a commemoration; it is also a communication.

As a seal, the Lord’s Supper “assures [us] ... that [we] share in Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross.” “As surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ’s body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.” (Q&A 75) Based on its “as surely as ... so surely ...” structure, Gerrish (1982:126) argues that the HC takes the symbolic parallelism view of the Lord’s Supper.

However, Bierma (2013:79) argues that the HC does not necessarily exclude a symbolic instrumentalist interpretation: “Where Calvin and Bullinger parted ways was not on whether the sign and signified are parallel but on whether they are merely parallel... This is a question the HC does not address. It neither affirms nor denies one position or the other.” “Followers of Calvin and Bullinger could all affirm the HC’s parallelism ... and still hold to different understandings of the union between sign and signified.” (Bierma, 2013:81)

However, HC Q&A 75 is interpreted, both views - symbolic parallelism and symbolic instrumentalism - affirm “the nourishing and refreshing that occur in and through the sacrament.” (Klooster, 2001:828) The two views do not dispute that a communication occurs in the Lord’s Supper. What they dispute is how that communication occurs. Like the BC, the HC affirms a communication of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, as Q&A 76 explains:

Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood?

A. It means to accept with a believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ and by believing to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But it means more. Through the Holy Spirit,<sup>52</sup> who lives both in Christ and in us, we

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<sup>52</sup> “The aspect of the HC’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper most often alleged to be a Calvinist trademark is the role of the Holy Spirit as the bond of the mystical union between Christ and the believer.” (Bierma, 1999:17) See also

are united more and more to Christ's blessed body. And so, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as members of our body are governed by one soul.

While the first part of the answer affirms Zwingli's position, the second part distances the HC from a purely Zwinglian position.<sup>53</sup> To eat and to drink means "to accept with a believing heart," but that is not all that it means. "It means more." Q&A 79 "immediately adds the very Reformed assertion of the mystical true presence." (Riggs, 2015:121) De Jong (1950d:1036) concludes: "It cannot be denied that the HC ... teaches that we receive something in and through the proper use of the sacrament by the operation of the Holy Spirit ... namely, 'a communion with the body and blood of Christ.'"<sup>54</sup>

Venema (2001:187) concludes that the Reformed confessions, including those to which the CRCNA subscribe, "speak of the sacrament as a memorial of Christ's death and sacrifice on the cross," but never as "merely a memorial or occasion for thanksgiving to God." Writing specifically about the HC, De Jong (1950d:1036) observes: "It is evident that our Reformed fathers were strongly adverse to making the Supper only a meal of commemoration." In the Reformed confessions "the Zwinglian doctrine of the sacrament is uniformly... repudiated as inadequate." (Venema, 2005:28) Gerrish (1982:128, emphasis original) concludes: "All of the leading confessions place the emphasis on communication rather than commemoration. ... Communion with Christ actually takes place in the Lord's Supper and is the focal point."<sup>55</sup>

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Q&A 79: "More importantly, [Christ] wants to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge that we, through the Holy Spirit's work, share in his true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in his remembrance." It is noteworthy that in Q&A 79 the sacramental seal is described as more important than its sign.

<sup>53</sup> Q&A 76 "sounds very much like Calvin," who "highlighted common ground with the Zwinglians and then took his own position a step beyond it." (Bierma, 2013:84) Calvin wrote: "For there are some who define the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of his blood as, in one word, nothing but to believe in Christ. But it seems to me that Christ meant to teach something more definite, and more elevated, in that noble discourse in which he commends to us the eating of his flesh. ... We admit indeed, meanwhile, that this is no other eating than that of faith. ... But here is the difference between my words and theirs: for them to eat is only to believe; I say that we eat Christ's flesh in believing." (*Institutes*, 4.17.5) Bavinck (2008a:558) succinctly explains: "Eating is not identical with believing, even though it always only comes about by believing."

<sup>54</sup> In his lectures on the HC, Ursinus, (1888:416) one of its chief authors, defined "the correspondence or analogy which is between the bread and the body of Christ" as: "1. As bread and wine support this temporal life, so the body and blood of Christ are the true meat and drink by which our souls are fed unto eternal life. 2. As bread and wine are received by the mouth, so the body and blood of Christ are received by faith which is the mouth of the soul." The similarity between Ursinus' remarks and the BC Art. 35 is striking.

<sup>55</sup> Gerrish (1982:128) acknowledges that some confessions, including the HC, "reflect a certain shyness toward the idea of the means of grace." But, he contends, "the real division in the Reformed confessions is not Zwingli versus Calvin." It is Calvin versus Bullinger. The question is not whether there is a communication of Christ in

This is the CRCNA's official teaching on the Lord's Supper, the *lex credendi* by which its *lex orandi* must be judged. The question, to which the next section attends, is how well has the church's *lex orandi* reflected this *lex credendi*.

### 6.3 ~ The Sacramental Practice of the CRCNA

This section will examine two aspects of the sacramental practice of the CRCNA: the frequency with which the sacrament is celebrated and the liturgical formularies prescribed for those celebrations. Other aspects of the church's sacramental practice could also be considered, but these are of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry because they are regulated by the CO and have received synodical attention.<sup>56</sup> Horton (2000:156) argues that "one's view of the nature of the Supper plays no small part in determining frequency." The historic practice of quarterly communion services in the CRCNA owes more to Zwingli than it does to Calvin.<sup>57</sup>

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the sacrament, but whether this communication occurs "simultaneously with the elements [Bullinger] or through the elements [Calvin]?"

<sup>56</sup> Other aspects of the church's sacramental practice that might have been considered are left to the discretion of the local consistory. They include the manner of distribution, which Boonstra (1991:37) regards as "secondary, but not immaterial. The mode will both reflect our understanding of the Supper and will shape its future meaning for us." Wolterstorff (1978:2) laments the loss of the common loaf and cup in celebrations of the sacrament: "The symbolic import of serving communion in trays loaded with pre-cut cubes of bread and individual 'shot glasses' of juice or wine is not the unity of Christ's people but their separateness." See Boonstra (1998:7) for a brief history of the CRCNA's transition from the use of a common cup to the use of individual cups.

Historically, communicants in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands received the sacrament standing or sitting at the table. The Convent of Wesel (1568) was "of the opinion that the Lord's Supper can be celebrated either sitting or standing." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:37) The Synods of Emden (1571) and Dordrecht (1578) said that "whether one stands or sits in receiving the Lord's Supper" was "an indifferent matter." (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:45, 94) The Synod of Middelburg (1581) allowed congregations to stand or sit, but said that "kneeling shall not be allowed because of superstition and the danger of worshipping" the elements. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:124) Boonstra (1991:37) notes that "Zwingli introduced the posture most radical at the time: the people remained seated [in the pews] as the elders and deacons distributed the bread and wine. However, virtually no one else adopted this custom," because it did "not at all resemble a meal."

However, "the immigrant churches [in North America] all ... eventually changed to the American method - the distribution of the elements in pews. The main (only?) reason seems to have been logistics: As congregations became larger, the number of servings increased and so did the length of the service." (Boonstra, 1998:8) Moore-Keish (2008:126) notes that "pew communion... cultivates a [memorialist] attitude of interiority and personal reflection." See Roeda (1988) for an account of one CRCNA congregation's return to gathering around the table for the celebration of communion. Roeda (1988:2) writes: "It is doubtful whether sitting still is the best way to capture the significance of the communion celebration."

Boonstra (1991:38) concludes that the CRCNA has "adopted Zwingli's memorialist theology of the Lord's Supper, his infrequent celebration, and his mode of distribution - in all three cases settling for the most meager of the Reformation options."

<sup>57</sup> Nichols (1968:45) describes Zwingli as "quite content with a quarterly celebration." Bucer said that Zwingli "preferred that the Lord's Supper should be observed rarely." (in Hyde, 2008:474) Billings (2018:203) refers to quarterly communion celebrations as "Zwingli's standard," and Hageman (1962:21) calls it "Zwingli's deliberate design."

Venema (2001:194) argues that “the infrequency of the administrations of the Lord’s Supper illustrates in a rather striking way the distance between the affirmations of the Reformed confessions and the practice of many Reformed churches.”

Did the historic practice of quarterly communion services in the CRCNA reflect and/or reinforce a Zwinglian memorialist understanding of the sacrament? Does the increasing frequency with which CRCNA congregations celebrate the Lord’s Supper reflect a movement toward the Calvinist understanding of the sacrament of the denomination’s *lex credendi*? What understanding of the Lord’s Supper do the denomination’s liturgical formularies convey? Is a shift in the denomination’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper discernible in the liturgical formularies adopted by later synods? What influence, if any, have the liturgical formularies for the Lord’s Supper had on the frequency with which the church celebrates the Lord’s Supper and the denomination’s discussion of paedocommunion? Those questions this section explores.

### 6.3.1 ~ The Frequency of Communion

Calvin advocated for frequent, even weekly, celebrations of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>58</sup> This advocacy “stems from his understanding of the nature of the sacrament as a genuine means of grace. ... Since the sacrament is a means of imparting Christ’s life to us, celebration should be very frequent. It should be frequent because we all need the grace of Christ so badly.” (Smedes, 1954:5) Despite Calvin’s best efforts, he was unable to convince the Genevan city council to permit weekly communion celebrations. His Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances (1541) provided for the Lord’s Supper to “be always administered in the city once a month, in such a way that every three months it takes place in each parish. Besides, it should take place three times a year generally, that is to say at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.” (Calvin, 1954b:66-67)

The Palatinate CO required that the Lord’s Supper be celebrated “at least monthly in the cities and bimonthly in the villages, and always on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.” (Meeter, 1998:240; Dorn, 2007:27) The earliest Dutch Reformed churches celebrated the sacrament less frequently. The first recorded regulation regarding the frequency of communion,

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Zwingli’s order of worship, which the Dutch Reformed inherited via à Lasco, was based on the medieval *prone* or preaching service. It assumed that a normal worship service would not include the sacrament. The liturgy of the sacrament was something apart from and additional to the normal liturgy. (Hageman, 1962:17; Acts, 1968:150-153)

<sup>58</sup> In his Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva (1537), Calvin wrote: “It is certain that a church cannot be said to be well-ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequently.” (Calvin, 1954a:48) Similarly, in his *Institutes*, (4.17.46) Calvin argued that the Lord’s table should be spread before believers “at least once a week.”

from the provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), required that: “The churches shall strive to celebrate the Lord’s Supper every two months as much as possible.” (Art. LXIX, p. 72) The national Synods of Dordrecht (1578)<sup>59</sup> and Middelburg (1581)<sup>60</sup> affirmed this rule. The Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) added to these bimonthly celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, “whenever the circumstances allow, the [administration of the Lord’s Supper] shall be done on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.”<sup>61</sup> (Art. LVI, p. 150) The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) maintained the requirement that “the Lord’s Supper shall be administered once every two months,” but softened the requirement that “the same be done on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas,” (’s Gravenhage [1586], Art. LVI; p. 150) stating that, while “it shall be edifying,” the matter was left to the discretion of the consistories. (Art. LXIII; p. 171)

The practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper on feast days, though not unknown in the early history of the CRCNA, was not widespread.<sup>62</sup> The 1914 CO removed the DCO’s comment on holy day communion celebrations without objection, and reduced the minimum number of required communion services per year from six (“every two months”) to four (“every two or three months.”) (1914 CO Art. 63; p. 100) Quarterly communion celebrations - the frequency advocated by Zwingli, not by Calvin - became the norm within the CRCNA. It was codified in the RCO, which removed the 1914 CO’s reference to bimonthly communion, simply stating: “The Lord’s Supper shall be administered at least once every three months.” (RCO Art. 60; p. 137)

The 1914 CO required that the Lord’s Supper be administered every two or three months, but few, if any, Christian Reformed congregations celebrated communion on a bimonthly basis. Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:264) write that “in our Christian Reformed churches ... the Lord’s Supper is celebrated four times a year, or every three months.” Similarly, De Jong (1950f:1548) takes for granted that “four times a year in our Christian Reformed

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<sup>59</sup> The Lord’s Supper “shall be celebrated in the well-established churches every two months as much as possible.” (Art. XXI, p. 94)

<sup>60</sup> “The Lord’s Supper shall be administered once every two months, as much as possible; but in places where as yet no church has been organized, elders and deacons shall first be installed.” (Art. XLV, p. 116)

<sup>61</sup> When asked whether the Lord’s Supper should be held on these holy days, the Synod of Dordrecht (1578) had advised churches to follow “the usual times,” that is, every two months. The Lord’s Supper should only be held on those holy days “when the usual time and the prescribed feast day coincide.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:104)

<sup>62</sup> The issue of observing the feast days was itself controversial in the early years of the CRCNA. (Sheeres, 2013:xxx-xxxi). Sheeres (2013:63n67) cites one pastor, Rev. Smit, who, “insisting that his members abide by the Dortian decision to keep the feast days, served Communion on those days.”

congregations the Lord's Supper is celebrated." The uniformity with which CRCNA congregations followed a quarterly communion schedule is evident from overtures requesting uniform observance of the Lord's Supper, all of which took for granted that Christian Reformed congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper four times per year.<sup>63</sup>

Though the 1914 CO required that communion be celebrated every two or three months, the Guide for Church Visiting<sup>64</sup> required that councils be asked: "Is the Lord's Supper celebrated at least four times a year?" Daane (1955:10, emphasis original) concludes, "the 'Rules for Church Visiting' require the very least demanded by the CO." The CO did not require that the Lord's Supper be celebrated only four times a year, but at least four times a year. Yet nearly all CRCNA congregations, "with the exception of a few churches which celebrate the Lord's Supper on Good Friday," (Daane, 1955:11) followed the same pattern of Lord's Supper celebration: once every three months. Daane (1955:11) wondered what response church visitors would receive if they asked, Why only four times a year? He suggests that the answer would reflect a Zwinglian understanding of the Lord's Supper: "After hasty reflection there comes with predictable regularity this answer: 'If we had it more than four times a year the sacrament would become commonplace and lose its effectiveness.'" (Daane, 1955:11)

That is, in fact, the answer given in Van Dellen & Monsma's influential commentaries on the CO.<sup>65</sup> Van Dellen & Monsma (1949:265) considered quarterly communion services "a well-timed arrangement." They write, "to celebrate the Lord's Supper very frequently might detract somewhat from its sacredness and effectiveness."<sup>66</sup> Faber (1963:12) suggests that behind this "widely-held opinion expressed in the *Church Order Commentary*," is "the Zwinglian

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<sup>63</sup> The Synod of 1936 indefinitely tabled an overture from Classis California requesting that "all our churches, if at all possible, celebrate the Lord's death on the same Sunday." (Acts, 1936:17) The Synod of 1948 defeated a recommendation from its advisory committee that it accede to an overture from Classis Chicago South that it "recommend to all the churches that we observe the Lord's Supper on the same Sunday." (Acts, 1948:76; 437)

An overture from the consistory of Second Denver to the Synod of 1956 proposed a schedule by which communion could be celebrated on the same Sunday in every Christian Reformed congregation. The proposed schedule included quarterly communion services on the third Sundays of March, June, September, December. It said nothing about celebrating communion on feast days. (Acts, 1956:535) The Synod of 1956 denied the overture on the grounds that it "would be interfering with the prerogative of the local church to set the dates for the celebration of the Lord's Supper." (Acts, 1956:20)

<sup>64</sup> The 1914 CO (Art. 44; p. 94) required that each classis "authorize at least two of her oldest, most experienced, and most competent ministers to visit all the churches once a year, and to take heed whether the ministers and the consistories faithfully perform the duties of their office, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the accepted form of government, etc..." (See also DCO Art. XLIV; p. 168 and the RCO Art. 42; p. 134)

<sup>65</sup> Many treated Van Dellen & Monsma's commentaries as the official CO commentary of the CRCNA. (Boonstra, 1982; 87; De Moor, 1986:345)

<sup>66</sup> In their *Revised Church Order Commentary*, Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:240) grant: "Yet if any church should decide to celebrate Holy Communion bi-monthly we would not object. Neither would we seek to dissuade

doctrine that the sacraments are ‘empty signs;’ that is, the Lord’s Supper does no more than depict Christ’s broken body and shed blood and has no power of conveying the blessing that it signifies.” Indeed, as Daane (1955:11) wrote, “to argue that greater frequency would reduce the sacrament to something ordinary and ineffective is to deny the nature and power of the sacrament.” If, as both the BC and the HC teach, the Holy Spirit is the cause of the sacrament’s efficacy, it is not clear why or how more frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper would hinder the sacrament’s effectiveness. More frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper can only hinder the sacrament’s effectiveness if the effectiveness of the sacrament is understood, contra the Reformed confessions, in a purely subjective manner - that is, if, as Zwingli taught, the effectiveness of the sacrament is in the communicant’s remembrance or experience, rather than in the communication of Christ by the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup> Contra the CRCNA’s *lex credendi*, its practice of less frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper reflected and reinforced an understanding of the sacrament as primarily a commemoration, not a communication.

The Synod of 1968 received an overture from Classis Hudson, asking it to study the classis’ “report regarding the administration of the Lord’s Supper and to adopt the recommendations which it presents.” (Acts, 1968:543) Among the issues addressed by the classis’ study report was the frequency with which the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.<sup>68</sup> The report contended that in the early church, the Lord’s Supper was initially celebrated daily,<sup>69</sup> but that this practice eventually gave way to a weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>70</sup> (Acts, 1968:553) The report “was not prepared to say that a weekly celebration of the sacrament is a hard and fast requirement of Scripture,” but it did assert that “we cannot move far from the practice of the early church without asking whether the sacrament means to us what it meant to them.” “If we say that we must not have it frequently because it would then become ‘too commonplace,’ it appears that we must be a long way from the early church in what the sacrament means to us.”

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any church from celebrating the Lord’s Supper on Good Friday or Easter, if the consistory judges this advisable, and our CO reading certainly leaves room for such more frequent and special administrations.”

<sup>67</sup> “If ‘remembrance’ is the primary or exclusive meaning of the Supper, then one is likely to face the objection: if we celebrate more often, it will lose its significance.” “The sentiment ‘If we celebrate weekly, the Supper will no longer be special,’ might be true if the Supper were simply a mental act of remembrance. But what if it is a meal of nourishment?” Such an understanding of the sacrament would certainly promote more frequent celebrations. (Billings, 2018:17, 182)

<sup>68</sup> The report also questioned the church orderly requirements that sacraments be administered “in a public worship service” and “with the use of the prescribed forms.” (CO Art. 55)

<sup>69</sup> “This is suggested not only by the comparison with daily attendance in the Temple (Acts 2:46), but also by the reference in Acts 6:1 to the daily distribution of charity to the widows from the church’s table.” (Acts, 1968:553)

<sup>70</sup> “On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.” (Acts 20:7)

(Acts, 1968:554) The report recommended that CO Art. 60 be revised to read: “The Lord’s Supper shall be administered frequently.”<sup>71</sup> (Acts, 1968:557)

The Synod of 1968 commended the classis’ report to the churches for their study and appointed a committee to examine the report and serve the Synod of 1969 with advice for action. (Acts, 1968:66) The appointed study committee, because it was only given a year rather than the two years normally given to study committees to complete its work, limited itself to the CO revisions proposed by Classis Hudson. (Acts, 1971:441) It recommended that the Synod of 1969 not adopt Classis Hudson’s proposed revision to CO Art. 60, arguing that “the word ‘frequently’ is too indefinite”<sup>72</sup> and that the current CO wording, “at least once every three months,” already allowed for the greater frequency desired by the classis.<sup>73</sup> (Acts, 1969:345, emphasis original) But, as the synodical advisory committee noted, the substance of the classis report, which the study committee did not engage, alleged that “a conflict exists between the biblical data and the practice prescribed in the CO.” Upon the advice of its advisory committee, the Synod of 1969 recommitted Classis Hudson’s overture to the study committee “with the specific mandate to examine the substance of the overture.” (Acts, 1969:43)

The study committee “shared much of the concern of Classis Hudson regarding the present practice of observing the Lord’s Supper in our churches.”<sup>74</sup> (Acts, 1971:442) It agreed with Classis Hudson that “our churches should move to a more frequent celebration than has been our custom” and acknowledged that the earliest Dutch Reformed church orders required more frequent celebrations of the Lord’s Supper: at least every two months. The committee admitted that Dutch Reformed churches, including the CRCNA, “have moved rather steadily from a more frequent to a less frequent celebration of the Supper.” But it did not think that “the move to a less frequent celebration is actually taught or encouraged by the present wording of

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<sup>71</sup> This is the form of the recommendation as it appears at the conclusion of the classis’ report and as it was considered by the appointed synodical study committee. Within the report itself, however, the classis proposed a slightly different revision, which neither synod nor its study committee considered: “The Lord’s Supper shall be administered frequently, ordinarily at least once a month.” (Acts, 1968:555)

<sup>72</sup> This is true of the classis’ recommendation as it appears at the end of their report; it is not true of the version of the recommendation embedded in its report, which defined frequently as “ordinarily at least once a month.” (Acts, 1968:555)

<sup>73</sup> The classis’ report acknowledged that the present reading of CO Art. 60 “is acceptable, since it does not forbid having the Lord’s Supper frequently.” However, the classis argued that “while the present rule permits the churches to be biblical,” celebrating the sacrament more frequently than the bare minimum, “it teaches them otherwise,” because it suggests that “‘once in three months’ is an acceptable practice.” The classis judged that “the biblical evidence does not support this teaching.” (Acts, 1968:555, emphasis original)

<sup>74</sup> This concern is evident in the committee’s recommendation, on which the Synod of 1969 did not act, that it appoint “a committee to study whether the Lord’s Supper as we are now required to administer it allows God’s people to receive all the benefits of this sacrament as prescribed by Christ.” (Acts, 1969:345)



our CO.” In fact, the committee argued that the CO, “if properly understood, encourages a more frequent celebration when it adds the words, ‘at least once every three months.’” (Acts, 1971:449-450, emphasis original)

The study committee recommended that the Synod of 1971 not adopt the revision to CO Art. 60 proposed by Classis Hudson. It argued that “the word ‘frequently’ as it stands by itself is not a regulative word... Our present wording is far more regulative when it interprets ‘frequent’ to mean no less than once every three months.” (Acts, 1971:450) The study committee did not respond to the implicit criticism in Classis Hudson’s report that once every three months is not in fact frequent. Nor, unfortunately, did the study committee consider the revision to CO Art. 60 embedded in Classis Hudson’s report that defined frequently as “ordinarily at least once a month.” (Acts, 1968:555) The study committee’s recommendations were adopted by the Synod of 1971. (Acts, 1971:130) The CO Art. 60 would continue to require that the Lord’s Supper be administered at least once every three months.

In its report to the Synod of 1969, the study committee mentioned “present practices” which “seem at certain points to inhibit the ideal of frequency in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.” (Acts, 1969:345) In its report to the Synod of 1971, the committee named the following practices, “a single formulary that is quite lengthy,<sup>75</sup> as well as the 1912 ruling of synod that each celebration of the sacrament must have a preparatory and applicatory sermon,”<sup>76</sup> as “primarily responsible for the churches opting for the minimum number of celebrations.” (Acts,

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<sup>75</sup> By 1971, the CRCNA actually had three liturgical formularies for the Lord’s Supper. The report’s inaccurate reference to “a single formulary” may reflect the fact that the formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964 were often regarded as revisions of the Dortian formulary.

<sup>76</sup> The Convent of Wesel (1568) required that communion celebrations be announced two weeks ahead of time, but did not require preparatory sermons. (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:36) When the provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) adopted the first church orderly stipulation that “a simple sermon shall be included in the preparation for the Lord’s Supper,” it described this as “according to custom.” (Art. LXXIV; p. 72) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) affirmed the rule, (Art. XVI; p. 94) while the Synod of Middelburg (1581) gave each congregations the freedom to prepare for the Lord’s Supper “in the way that it deems to be most fitting.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:123) The DCO says nothing about either preparatory services or preparatory sermons.

The earliest Dutch Reformed church orders say nothing about applicatory sermons. The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574) decided that “in the evening following the celebration of the Lord’s Supper the preaching of the Catechism shall take place as is customary.” (Art. LXXX; p. 73) The national Synod of Dordrecht (1578) decided the same: “In the afternoon one shall proceed with the usual sermon or catechism [instruction].” (Art. XVI; p. 94) De Boer (1965:4) argues that the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) (Art. LXI; p. 151) and the DCO (Art. LXVIII; p. 172) decided against applicatory sermons, “for they [also] prescribed that the catechism was to be preached in the afternoon service without interruption or exception.”

Though not required by the DCO, early rules of church visiting including the following question: “Is a preparatory sermon preached before each celebration of the Lord’s Supper?” (Synod of Gelderland [1689], in Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:205; Synod of Delft [1721], in Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:209) The CRCNA followed this rule, and, in 1912, added an inquiry about an applicatory sermon as well. (Acts, 1912:54) The Revision Committee recommended that this “excellent custom ... should receive CO standing,” (Acts, 1961:449) and in the RCO it

1971:449) Proponents of more frequent communion celebrations in the CRCNA acknowledge these practices as challenges to more frequent celebrations.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, it was objections to the length of the Dortian formulary that led to the revisions adopted by the Synod of 1964.

Though the CO continues to require that the Lord's Supper be administered "at least once every three months," the frequency with which Christian Reformed congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper has increased. In 1955 Daane (1955:10) asserted that every congregation in the CRCNA, "with the exception of a few churches which celebrate the Lord's Supper on Good Friday," "follow the identical pattern of Lord's Supper celebration: once every three months." Polman's (1980:235) 1972 survey indicated that 72% of CRCNA congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper quarterly, while 25% celebrated it bi-monthly. 2% celebrated the Lord's Supper monthly; less than 1%, weekly.

In 1991, only 11% of CRCNA congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper quarterly. The majority, 68%, celebrated the Lord's Supper 5-7 times per year. 18% celebrated the Lord's Supper 8-12 times per year. Only 4% celebrated it more than once/month, and 1%, weekly. (Agenda, 1991:61) By 2018, the number of CRCNA congregations celebrating the Lord's Supper at least monthly had increased to 40%. 4% of congregations now celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly.<sup>78</sup>

That the frequency with which the Lord's Supper is celebrated within the CRCNA has increased without changes to the CO confirms the argument that the CO was not to blame for infrequent communion celebrations in the CRCNA. A main cause of infrequent communion celebrations was the prescribed liturgical formulary inherited from the Synod of Dort, (1618-1619) to which the next section attends.

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did: "The Lord's Supper shall ordinarily be preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon." (Art. 60; p. 137)

Classis Alberta North asked the Synod of 1988 to delete this requirement, which it described as "no longer in tune with what is actually the practice in many of our churches." (Agenda, 1988:366) Contra the recommendation of its advisory committee, the Synod of 1988 decided to delete the requirement from the CO. (Acts, 1988:610) That decision, removing the requirement of preparatory and applicatory sermon from the CO, was ratified by the Synod of 1989, over the objections of one classis. (Acts, 1989:524; Agenda, 1989:315)

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Venema (2001:194n51): "There are, of course, impediments to the frequent administration of the sacrament that are owing to local customs or practical obstacles. The liturgical forms for the administration of the Supper, for example, are often too long and unnecessarily didactic for frequent use. The practices of requiring preparatory and applicatory sermons ... militate against frequent communion as well." Similarly, Koyzis (1990:41) observed that "some people might point out that the use of lengthy formularies inhibits frequent celebration. This is probably true of the Lord's Supper forms inherited from the sixteenth-century Palatinate by way of the Netherlands." However, he notes that the CRCNA's newer formularies, "such as the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament, are much more appropriate than our older forms for frequent use."

<sup>78</sup> <https://network.crcna.org/worship/crc-worship-survey-results-0> (accessed on 16 April 2019)

### 6.3.2 ~ Liturgical Formularies for the Lord's Supper

For the first century of its history (1857-1964), the CRCNA had only one liturgical formulary for the Lord's Supper, the Dortian formulary inherited from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857. The formulary's length and Zwinglian memorialism reinforced the infrequency with which the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the CRCNA. The Synod of 1964 adopted two additional liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper, but both were often regarded simply as revisions of the Dortian liturgy. The frequency with which CRCNA congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper increased after the Synod of 1968 granted provisional approval to the Order for Communion, which the Synod of 1981 adopted as a Service of Word and Sacrament. It continued to increase with the liturgical formularies adopted by the Synods of 1994 and 2016, but this increase does not reflect a significant shift in these later liturgical formularies toward a more Calvinist understanding of the Lord's Supper. As this section, which attends to these formularies, will demonstrate, most of the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper continue to reflect a Zwinglian memorialist understanding of the Lord's Supper. It was not a return to the Calvinist theology of its confessions, but an increased emphasis on the communion of communicants with one another in the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA's newest formularies that contributed to the denomination's acceptance of paedocommunion.

#### 6.3.2.1 ~ The Dortian Formulary

The liturgical formulary for the Lord's Supper approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) "originated out of the form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper contained in a Dutch service book published by Peter Datheen in 1566." (Dorn, 2007:11) Datheen's formulary "was a close translation of the German original in the Palatinate CO."<sup>79</sup> (Meeter, 1998:4) The Palatinate formulary can be considered "the prototype of the celebrations of the Lord's Supper in

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<sup>79</sup> Datheen's main project was to provide his congregation with a psalter. Given that the Genevan Psalter was the source of his metrical psalms, it is surprising that Datheen used neither Calvin's Form for Church Prayers nor his Catechism, which were both included in the Genevan Psalter. (Meeter, 1998:8) Dorn (2007:11) suggests that it was "out of respect for the elector's desire for political and religious stability in his territory" that Datheen "diplomatically translated into Dutch many of the liturgical forms and prayers contained in the CO of the Palatinate."

the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.” (Dorn, 2007:11) Of all the formularies in the Netherlands Liturgy, the formulary for the Lord’s Supper “has remained the closest to its original in the Palatinate Order of 1563.”<sup>80</sup> (Meeter, 1998:239)

When Frederick III succeeded Otto Henry as Elector in 1559, the church in the Palatinate was badly divided. In 1562 Frederick appointed a theological commission to draft a new confession of faith, the HC, and a new liturgy, the Palatinate Liturgy, for the church.<sup>81</sup> (Rowe, 1996:55) The liturgical formularies “bear the stamp of the HC in their structure, theological content, and even in their wording.” (Dorn, 2007:24) “Since the drafters of the CO of the Palatinate intended the HC to serve as the standard for the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the churches, it is not surprising to find the form for the Lord’s Supper deeply imbued with it.” (Dorn, 2007:29) Like the HC, the formulary directs the communicant’s attention to Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. It emphasizes the commemorative aspect of the Lord’s Supper rather than the communication of Christ in the sacrament.

Along with the HC, those who composed the Palatinate liturgy also made use of the German editions of Micron’s *Christian Ordinances*, à Lasco’s *Forma ac Ratio*, Poullain’s *Liturgia Sacra*, and the Lutheran Pfalz liturgy (1557). (Spinks, 1984:136) Because the Palatinate formulary “betrays a close dependence on the liturgical scheme that John Calvin had drawn up,” some have suggested that its authors also made use of Calvin’s Form for Prayer. (Dorn, 2007:27) But the first German edition of Calvin’s liturgy was not published until 1563, the same year that the Palatinate liturgy appeared. It is more likely, then, that the liturgy’s Calvinist strains came from Poullain’s *Liturgia Sacra*, of which German editions had been published in 1554 and 1555. (Hageman, 1973:117; Spinks, 1984:136) Poullain succeeded Calvin at Strasbourg, and his work was “nothing more than the same liturgy which Calvin had drafted for use of the congregation in Strasbourg.” (Mast, 1998:97) Any material difference between Poullain’s work and Calvin’s is negligible, justifying comparisons between the Palatinate/Dortian formulary and Calvin’s Form for Prayers.

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<sup>80</sup> Hageman (1977:166) describes the Dortian liturgy as “completely faithful to its German original,” the Palatinate liturgy, but there is one significant difference between the two: The Dortian formulary includes the *Londonse aenhangsel*, the Palatinate liturgy does not.

<sup>81</sup> Wielenga (cited in Oostendorp, 1973:14) attributes the liturgical formulary to Caspar Olevianus. Nichols (1968:77) contends that Frederick III appointed Olevianus and Ursinus to write the HC and both, together with Tremellius, to draw up a liturgy.

The Dortian formulary begins with the Words of Institution “as they are delivered by the holy Apostle Paul.”<sup>82</sup> (PsH, 1934:90) The Words of Institution serve as Biblical warrant for the celebration: “Just as the biblical text precedes the sermon, so that there is no question that the minister proclaims the word under the authority of the Lord, so too the institution narrative precedes the entire celebration.” (Dorn, 2007:5) Institution by Christ was a significant concern of the HC.<sup>83</sup> The formulary quotes 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, which includes both the Words of Institution proper, cited by the HC, (1 Cor. 11:23-26; HC Q&A 77) and Paul’s warning against partaking of the sacrament “in an unworthy manner” and his call to self-examination. (1 Cor. 11:27-29) The admonitions, exhortations, and doctrinal statements that follow can be read as an extensive exegesis of the Pauline text, resulting in the Lord’s Supper becoming “a paranetic and didactic exhortation addressed to the community in the name of God.”<sup>84</sup> (Dorn, 2007:5) In fact, as Smedes (1957:10) notes, in some congregations of the GKN “the sermon is omitted at the communion service. This is not done because the sermon is considered unnecessary ... [but] because the formulary takes on the role of a sermon.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Given the Reformed emphasis on the presence of Christ in the sacramental rite, not solely in sacramental signs, (See, for example, HC Q&A 75, which speaks of seeing the bread of the Lord broken, and receiving it from the hand of the one who serves.), it is striking that in the Palatinate/Dortian formulary the Words of Institution do not accompany the *fractio panis*, where 1 Corinthians 10:16 is used instead.

<sup>83</sup> Contra the Roman church, the HC insists that Christ only instituted two sacraments in the New Testament. (HC Q&A 68) It quotes the same Pauline text (1 Cor. 11:23-26) as “the institution of the Lord’s Supper.” (HC Q&A 77)

<sup>84</sup> Hageman (1973:129) suggests that “this narrative of institution, being followed by the long didactic passages, was obviously meant to be read from the pulpit.” Similarly, Meeter (1998:253) suggests that it was only after the eucharistic prayer that the presiding minister left the pulpit and took his place at the table for the *fractio panis* and distribution of the elements. (Meeter, 1998:253)

Contra Hageman and Meeter, however, the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586) required that “after the completion of the sermons and the general prayers from the pulpit the form for the Lord’s Supper, together with the prayers pertaining to it, shall be read in front of the table.” (Art. LVI; p. 150, my emphasis) The same stipulation prevailed in the DCO. (Art. LXII; p. 171)

<sup>85</sup> D.H. Kromminga (1941a:5) referred to the omission of the sermon as “an entirely un-Reformed separation of the Word and the sacraments and a breach of the rule that the sacraments are adjuncts to the Word.” That would be true, unless one regards the formulary itself as the Word, which J. K. Van Baalen (1960:19) did in an exchange with Smedes: “I would not at all object to having the sermon omitted when the sacrament is being administered. The complete Form for the Lord’s Supper is the best conceivable brief and complete sermon on the sacrament.” A synodical study committee of which Van Baalen was a member referred to the formulary as “in effect administration of the Word in explanation of the sacrament.” (Acts, 1953:416)

But, Smedes (1960b:21) replied to Van Baalen: “If the formulary can be used as a sermon it is obviously not a good formulary. A formulary and a sermon are two distinct things.” (See also Smedes, 1957:10) Despite Smedes’ argument, the study committee of which he was a member submitted to the Synods of 1959 and 1963 formularies that were structurally akin to the Dortian formulary and that could also be used as a sermon.

The formulary continues with an extended call to self-examination<sup>86</sup> that follows the threefold structure of the HC.<sup>87</sup> It includes a list of “gross sins.” All who “know themselves to be defiled by these sins” are admonished “to abstain from the table of the Lord.” As in Calvin’s liturgy, the presiding minister excommunicates such persons, declaring “to them that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>88</sup> (PsH, 1934:90) The formulary’s list of “gross sins” “become our Reformed list of ‘mortal’ sins. Sometimes it is more than broadly hinted that there is cause for discipline because a man is guilty of one of the things mentioned in the Form for the Lord’s Supper.” (Stob, 1954:15) Indeed, the Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1568) did not think it necessary to specify “the sins for which excommunication should apply,” because “the outstanding [sins] are mentioned in the form for the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>89</sup> (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:155)

Here the faith of the church, shaped by its *lex orandi*, contradicts its *lex credendi*. There are no specific sins that make a person unworthy of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, as Stob (1954:15) argued, it is “the willful persistence in living consciously in any sin makes one unfit and unworthy.” “We are never disciplined by reason of our sins alone, in and of themselves ... nor are we disciplined in degrees according to the severity of our sin. Rather, we are always and only disciplined by reason of our not wishing to repent.” (De Moor, 2010:413) The only thing for which a person may be excommunicated is a lack of repentance. The HC itself teaches that the officers of the church may only withhold the sacraments from those who “refuse to abandon their error and wickedness” and who fail to respond to the admonition of the church. (Q&A 85) “What qualifies us to gather around the table of the Lord is not that we are perfected but that we acknowledge our total dependence on our Savior and look to him alone.” (De Moor, 2010:413-414)

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<sup>86</sup> “Scholars who have gone over this section carefully,” including the call to self-examination and the list of gross sins, “say that it contains almost nothing original but is in the main a rather skillful blending of Calvin’s *Liturgy* and Micron’s *Christian Ordinances*.” (Mast, 1998:111)

<sup>87</sup> “Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort? A. First, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.” (HC Q&A 2)

<sup>88</sup> In Calvin’s liturgy this excommunication precedes the call to self-examination; in the Palatinate/Dortian formulary, it follows the call to self-examination.

<sup>89</sup> Similarly, when asked how to deal with those who slander high governmental officials, the 7 October 1863 meeting of the classical assembly “directed the attention of everyone to the contents of the form for communion, in which the situation is clearly explained.” (Sheeres, 2013:78-79; see also p. 107 for a similar question and response at the 12-13 October 1864 classical assembly meeting.)

The formulary claims that its list of gross sins and statement of excommunication were “not designed ... to dissuade the contrite hearts of the believers, as if none might come to the supper of the Lord but he that is without sin.”<sup>90</sup> (PsH, 1934:91) But, as Meeter (1998:245) notes, “it has often been the case that many Dutch Reformed believers have not dared come forward to partake.” “The great majority of Reformed Christians in the Netherlands heard most forcefully Paul’s warning that the ‘unworthy’ ‘eat and drink to their damnation.’” Many wondered “whether ‘worthiness’ and ‘perfection’ were one and the same.” (Wandel, 2006:200-201)

This was also true within the CRCNA. Vander Zee (1998:21) quotes one person’s testimony: “When I was younger, I was very frightened of dying and that fear extended to the Lord’s Supper. I was very concerned about God’s judgment, and worried that if I participated in communion without being totally right with God, I’d be in danger of condemnation.”<sup>91</sup> A similar concern about judgment, even condemnation, can be found among opponents of paedocommunion.<sup>92</sup>

The Palatinate/Dortian liturgy describes “the end for which Christ has ordained and instituted” the sacrament: “that we should do it in remembrance of him.” (PsH, 1934:91) Polman (1973:10) calls this a “certainly questionable” treatment of the words “do this in remembrance of me,” words only recorded in one of the gospel accounts of the Upper Room, Luke 22:19.<sup>93</sup> While Paul includes these words in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, Polman (1973:10) contends that the apostle was not thereby “suggesting ‘remembrance’ as the heart of communion liturgy.”

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<sup>90</sup> The formulary here “draws extensively from the corresponding section in Calvin’s rite.” (Dorn, 2007:28; see Thompson, 1961:206-207)

<sup>91</sup> The FFC’s document *Children at the Table* noted this persistent error of confusing the judgment of which Paul writes with eternal judgment or condemnation. (Agenda, 2010:599) In the context of 1 Corinthians 11, it should be clear that the judgment of which Paul writes is divine discipline, aimed specifically at preventing eternal judgment or condemnation: “When we are judged (κρίνω) in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined (παιδεύω) so that we will not be finally condemned (κατακρίνω) with the world.” (1 Corinthians 11:32)

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Classis Northcentral Iowa’s communication to the Synod of 2007, which expressed concern that children might “eat and drink judgment to themselves,” (Agenda, 2007:539) and Classis Columbia’s overture to the Synod of 2010, which argued that the exhortation to self-examination does “not permit [children] to partake of the Lord’s Supper, for we would be administering poison to them.” (Agenda, 2010:672)

<sup>93</sup> Polman (1973:10) notes that Luke 22:19b-20, which include the words “do this in remembrance of me” are “not included by all the ancient authorities.” Green (1997:761n59) explains that “until recently, the ‘shorter text’ was regarded as original by those who found here an example of a ‘Western interpolation.’” However, the “longer text,” which includes “do this in remembrance of me,” is now generally accepted as authentic. Omitted from Nestle-Aland 25, the words were restored in Nestle-Aland 26, and most contemporary English translations, including the NIV, NRSV, and ESV, include them. See Green (1988:35-42) for a defense of the longer reading.

Remembrance was certainly not the heart of Calvin's communion liturgy. "Calvin did not take 'This do in remembrance of me' as the end for which the Lord instituted the Supper, as does [the Palatinate/Dortian] form." (Oostendorp, 1973:15) In Calvin's liturgy "emphasis is laid on what Christ accomplishes and testifies in the signs and seals." (Oostendorp 1959:15) The sacrament is a communication of Christ. Communicants are called to: "Above all ... believe those promises which Jesus Christ ... has spoken with his own lips: He is truly willing to make us partakers of his body and blood, in order that we may possess him wholly and in such wise that he may live in us and we in him." (Thompson, 1961:207) By contrast, the Palatinate/Dortian liturgy exhorts communicants to "be fully persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ ... was sent of the Father into this world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; [and] that he has borne for us the wrath of God, under which we should have perished everlastingly,"<sup>94</sup> (PsH, 1934:91) emphasizing a commemoration of Christ rather than a communication.

The formulary's exposition continues with a description of the sacrament as "a sure remembrance and pledge," words used in the Lutheran liturgy. In that liturgy the sacrament is a sure remembrance and pledge "that we abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and he in us;" that is, the sacrament is a communication of Christ. However, in the Palatinate/Dortian formulary the bread and cup are a sure remembrance and pledge that Christ gave his body "on the tree of the cross." Through his death, Christ removes the cause of our spiritual hunger, our sin. It is not the sacrament itself which feeds our hunger, but that of which the sacrament is a reminder, Christ's death on the cross. Hageman (1973:131-132) concludes: "It takes little theological insight to perceive that here we are dealing with the basic idea of Zwinglianism, the notion that the only value in the Supper is in making us remember the atoning death of Christ on Calvary." Hageman's (1973:132) judgment of the formulary's exposition of the Lord's Supper is pointed: It is "as thoroughly anti-Calvinist and so completely pro-Zwinglian as any Reformed document can be."

But the prayer that follows the formulary's exposition of the Lord's Supper "cannot be unambiguously reduced to a memorialistic understanding." (Dorn, 2007:34) It asks God "that in this supper.... [he] wilt work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that we... through the power of the Holy Spirit, may be nourished and refreshed with his true body and blood, yea

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<sup>94</sup> "Save for an occasional phrase which can be ascribed to Calvin, no original for [this paragraph] can be found. It is obviously the work of one of the Palatinate authors." (Mast, 1998:112) This paragraph draws heavily upon the HC Q&A 37, 38, and 44.



with him, true God and man.”<sup>95</sup> (PsH, 1934:92) The prayer expands a similar prayer in Calvin’s liturgy. Calvin’s prayer does not contain such an explicit reference to the work of the Holy Spirit as essential to the sacrament’s efficacy. Hageman (1977:169) concedes, “at this point, at least, the Palatinate-Dutch liturgy is a more faithful expositor of Calvin’s eucharistic theology than was Calvin himself.” In fact, he (1977:171) allows: “It can be said that the eucharistic prayer of the Palatinate liturgy is the finest and most complete of any of the eucharistic prayers produced in the Reformed churches during the Reformation period.”

A similar emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is also found in the *sursum corda* that immediately precedes the words of distribution.<sup>96</sup> The *sursum corda*, which alludes to HC Q&A 75<sup>97</sup> and reflects its “as surely as ... so surely” structure in the words “as truly as,” admits a Bullingerian symbolic parallelism interpretation, but stops short of requiring a Calvinist symbolic instrumentalism interpretation.

Dorn (2007:35) observes how the formulary’s exposition of the Lord’s Supper corresponds to the first part of Answer 76 in the HC,<sup>98</sup> while the eucharistic prayer and *sursum corda* correspond to the second part of Answer 76.<sup>99</sup> Hageman’s (1962:13-35) historical research shows, however, that in Reformed churches the former has tended to eclipse the latter. The Zwinglian interpretation of eating and drinking Christ as solely remembering him and believing in him has prevailed over the idea that when communicants receive the sacrament, they truly eat and drink Christ by faith.

The Palatinate/Dortian formulary does not deny that the Lord’s Supper includes a communication of Christ, but it clearly emphasizes the sacrament’s commemorative aspects. Smedes (1954:5) argues that in the formulary “the real participation in Christ by means of the

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<sup>95</sup> The prayer reflects HC Q&A 75, which speaks of being “nourished and refreshed ... with Christ’s crucified body and poured-out blood.” HC Q&A 76 explains what it means to eat Christ’s crucified body and poured-out blood by pointing to the work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>96</sup> “That we, then, may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts unto the external bread and wine but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is, our Advocate, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, whither also the articles of our Christian faith direct us; not doubting that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with his body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of him,” (PsH, 1934:93)

<sup>97</sup> “As surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ’s body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.” (HC Q&A 75)

<sup>98</sup> To eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood means “to accept with a believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ and by believing to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.” (HC Q&A 76)

<sup>99</sup> But to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood means more. “Through the Holy Spirit who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ’s blessed body.” (HC Q&A 76)

sacrament is touched upon almost incidentally,” while “the commemorative aspect is emphasized.” This emphasis is especially evident in the words of distribution prescribed in the Dortian formulary.

The Palatinate formulary only prescribed Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians 10:16 for the distribution of the elements.<sup>100</sup> D.H. Kromminga, (1944:293, emphasis original) who served German-speaking congregations that used the Palatinate formulary,<sup>101</sup> argued that this “formula suggests that we do not conceive of [the Lord’s Supper] merely as a memorial but as an actual communion.” Kromminga judged this “eminently harmonious with the Calvinist interpretation of the sacrament.” However, the Dortian formulary, which was used in the overwhelming majority of CRCNA congregations that were Dutch- and English-speaking, adds the *Londonse aenhangsel*, as found in Micron’s *Christian Ordinances*.<sup>102</sup>

The *Londonse aenhangsel* originally came from à Lasco’s pen, and, in his *Forma ac Ratio*, read: “Take, eat, and remember that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was for us given to death on the beam of the cross for the remission of all our sins.” “Take, eat and remember that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out on the beam of the cross for the remission of all our sins.” Micron expanded these words slightly, adding “and believe.” “Take, eat, remember and believe.” (Spinks, 1984:112) The addition, however, makes no difference to the formula’s Zwinglian theology. Whatever the communion-of-the-body-and-blood-of-Christ language of 1 Corinthians 10:16 gave, the *Londonse aenhangsel* takes away.

Calvin’s liturgy instructed communicants to “take, eat, the body of Jesus which has been delivered unto you,” (Thompson, 1961:208) suggesting that what communicants eat and drink in the Lord’s Supper is indeed the body and blood of Christ, as the BC teaches.<sup>103</sup> (Art. 35) In contrast, the *Londonse aenhangsel* dissociates the body and blood of Christ from the communion elements. Communicants do not take and eat the body of Christ. They take and eat

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<sup>100</sup> “The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ.” “The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ.”

<sup>101</sup> Granted permission to form an ethnically defined classis by the Synod of 1896, (Acts, 1896:10) the Ostfrisians maintained a “quasi-independent subculture” within the CRCNA. (Brinks, 1983:22) See Brouwer (1980) for a detailed history of the origin and growth of this German subculture.

<sup>102</sup> Use of the *Londonse aenhangsel* was first required by the provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), (Art. LXXVII; p. 73) a decision endorsed by the national Synod of Dordrecht (1578), (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:94) and the Synod of Middelburg (1581). (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:124)

<sup>103</sup> “We do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood.” (BC Art. 35)

the sacramental signs, which may well be empty signs.<sup>104</sup> As they do, they are exhorted<sup>105</sup> to remember and believe that Christ's body was given for them. Christ's body is not given to them in the sacrament; it was given for them on the cross. In "typical Zwinglian fashion," the *Londonse aenhangsel* presents the communion elements as "a mental reminder of the atonement on Calvary." (Spinks, 1984:112) They are not the means by which Christ "nourishes, strengthens, and comforts, our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood." (BC Art. 35) but a means by which communicants remember and believe. The *Londonse aenhangsel* and the formulary as a whole "succeed in conveying that the Supper is the 'remembrance of the atoning death of Jesus Christ,'" but they "do not spell out clearly enough that it is also a communion with the present Lord." (Dorn, 2007:120)

Meeter (1998:259-260) observed the tendency of Dutch Reformed churches to have "their climactic celebration of the Lord's Supper" on Good Friday. These congregations "almost never celebrate the Supper on Easter," contra their own tradition.<sup>106</sup> Meeter attributes this tendency "in some part to the character of the form itself." The formulary's emphasis on the commemorative aspect of communion "virtually demands that the Lord's Supper be celebrated on Good Friday rather than on Easter."<sup>107</sup> Keegstra (1965:4-5) argued that, "only on the Zwinglian basis of the Lord's Supper as a bare memorial of the death of Christ can it be celebrated on Good Friday." But "the occasion of celebrating the sacrament which best brings together all the themes dominant in the Reformed understanding of it is Easter." (Keegstra, 1966:6) Indeed, Kuyper (1960:101) argued that "when we rightly understand the sacrament, "we do not, as many foolishly do, celebrate the Lord's Supper on Good Friday as a kind of commemorative meal... [but] we prepare the table of the Lord on Easter Sunday."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Radius & Radius (1972:14) admit that "we often go so far as to remove all reality from it, supposing that what we eat and drink is just a symbol."

<sup>105</sup> De Jong's (1950g:1612) description of the *Londonse aenhangsel* as "practical exhortations" confirms its Zwinglian character because it implies that the sacrament's effectiveness is subjective; that is, it depends on the communicants' remembrance and belief.

<sup>106</sup> The DCO said that "it shall be edifying ... that [the Lord's Supper be administered] on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas," (Art. LXIII; p. 171). Calvin's Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances (1541) prescribed that the sacrament be celebrated on these three holy days, (Calvin, 1954b:66-67) as did the Palatinate CO. (Meeter, 1998:240; Dorn, 2007:27)

<sup>107</sup> Venema (2001:194n50) characterizes this tendency as "symptomatic" of a tendency in Reformed churches, including the CRCNA, to overemphasize the commemorative purpose of the sacrament." See, for example, Bratt (1964:11) who describes the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Good Friday as "an excellent practice... Good Friday is most appropriate for this monument of remembrance. We want to meditate on the Lord's sacrifice for us on that solemn occasion."

<sup>108</sup> See Klein-Geltink & Payton (2015) for a contemporary exchange about the (im)propriety of celebrating the Lord's Supper on Good Friday.

But, as van der Leeuw, (in Dorn, 2007:102) who “subjected not only the practice but also the form for the Reformed Supper to criticism,” concluded: “In the Reformed churches there has been an ‘almost exclusive relation between the Lord’s Supper and the death of the Lord, with a total neglect of his resurrection.’ For this reason, the Lord’s Supper resembled more of a ‘funerary ceremony,’ than a ‘joyful feast.’” This was certainly true in the CRCNA.

When Andrew Kuyvenhoven (1984a:6) began his ministerial career in the CRCNA in 1958, the Lord’s Supper was “a very solemn affair.” Ruth Donker (1996:8) remembers “dark-suited, unsmiling elders.” What most impressed Sylvia Keesmaat (2004:42, emphasis original) as a child “was the overwhelming seriousness of the Lord’s Supper.” Polman (1973:10-11) bemoaned “the dirge-like character of our communion celebration,” which were “obsessed with a narrow concern about Christ’s death and with liturgies that moralistically memorialize this death.” “The traditional formulary does not encourage any sense of joy or gratitude in its solemnity.” (Polman, 1980:207) Indeed, Lester De Koster, (1975:6-7) argued that the church should commemorate, not celebrate, the Lord’s Supper

Polman (1973:11) concludes: “If our communion is a Zwinglian memorialism, it is not surprising that it is commemorated so infrequently and with such sorrowful solemnity.” After all, who wants to attend a funeral every Sunday? But when one compares the Dortian formulary with “the most truly Calvinist of our theological standards, the BC,” one finds that the Confession “presents a very different theology from that of our liturgy.” (Hageman, 1973:132) Especially in the BC, the Lord’s Supper is a communication of Christ, not only a commemoration of his death. Despite this tension between the denomination’s *lex orandi* and its *lex credendi*, the first requests for revision of the Dortian formulary focused not on its theological emphasis, but on its length and archaic language. To those requests and the revised formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964, the next section will attend.

### 6.3.2.2 ~ The 1964 Formularies

Classis Zeeland made the first request that synod “study the matter of a revision of the Form for the Lord’s Supper” in 1952.<sup>109</sup> (Acts, 1952:538) The classis suggested that a revision was advisable for three reasons, none of which addressed the formulary’s theological emphasis:

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<sup>109</sup> The Synod of 1938 denied a request from Classis Pella to “draft an abbreviated Form for the Lord’s Supper to be used, if so desired, in place of the long form in the second and third services on the Lord’s Day.” (Acts, 1938:43) The requested formulary would have been an abbreviation, not a revision, of the Dortian formulary. The overture assumed that the complete formulary would continue to be read at the first communion service. For those reasons, the 1938 overture is not considered a request for a revised formulary.

1. The form could be shortened without doing violence to its content.
2. A revised and shortened formulary will aid in making the reading of it more effective.
3. A revision of the form will encourage the reading of the entire form at each communion service.<sup>110</sup> (Acts, 1952:538)

The Synod of 1952 adopted Classis Zeeland's overture and appointed a study committee "to study the matter of revision and abbreviation" of the Dortian formulary.<sup>111</sup> When it adopted the overture from Classis Zeeland, synod added the following to its grounds: "The sentence structure of our present form is cumbersome and difficult to read." (Acts, 1952:70)

In its report to the Synod of 1953 the study committee observed that its mandate "to study the matter of revision and abbreviation" did not necessarily commit it to favor revision. The committee recommended that "no extensive abbreviation and revision of our beautiful and well-rounded Form should be made." Radical revision would tend to "mar its effectiveness and beauty." (Acts, 1953:414-416) The committee acknowledged that the grounds on which it had been appointed - "the form can be shortened without doing violence to its content" (Acts, 1952:70) - implied that synod favored some revision. Thus, it recommended a few minor changes to the Dortian formulary.<sup>112</sup>

The study committee also addressed "practices common in our churches." It said that "the preparatory part of the form should not be read separately at the preparatory service." Accordingly, "synod should advise those consistories following this practice to discontinue

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<sup>110</sup> "Each communion service" refers to the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper in both the morning and evening (or second) worship services on communion Sundays, "largely for those whose families render it impossible for husband and wife to be present at the same service." (Smedes, 1957:12) "No one that partook of the Lord's Supper in the morning would also partake of the bread and wine again in the afternoon or evening," (Kromminga, 1941a:5) which caused some to wonder "why would it be wrong to take communion twice on communion Sunday?" (Bratt, 1963b:13) Daane (1955:12, emphasis original) considered it "not only strange but out of harmony with the very idea of communion" that "some saints do not have communion with other saints - even though they are sitting in the same building!" De Jong (1950e:1292) writes: "The feast [is] for the whole congregation. Calvin was the first to deplore the prevalent custom of having only some in the church communicate."

"Many churches read [the formulary] only in part at the second communion service." (Schaver, 1947:222) N. Monsma (1951:1157) deplored that practice as "a mutilated administration of the Lord's Supper," which was "not in agreement with the CO" that required that "the Form for the administration of the Lord's Supper ... be read" every time the church administered the Lord's Supper. (1914 CO Art. 62; p. 100) Schaver (1947:222) judged that when the entire formulary is not read at the second service, "those who were not present at the first service lose something essential in participating."

<sup>111</sup> The committee consisted of J.C. Verbrugge, E.H. Oostendorp, J.K. Van Baalen, and J. Hanenburg. (Acts, 1952:114)

<sup>112</sup> The Lord's Prayer, which the Dortian formulary included in both its eucharistic prayer and the prayer of thanksgiving following the sacrament, need only be offered once, and the list of "gross sins" could be revised "in more modern terms to meet our present situation." (Acts, 1953:417; for a draft of the revised formulary, see Acts, 1953:418-423)

doing so.”<sup>113</sup> (Acts, 1953:415) The undeniable fact that “many churches make their own unauthorized abbreviation of the form in the second service”<sup>114</sup> makes “for a lack of uniformity that is undesirable” and warrants the adoption of “an officially approved abbreviated form which may be used at the second administration of the sacrament.”<sup>115</sup> But synod should “make the reading of the unabbreviated form mandatory for the first administration of the sacrament, and when there is only one communion service.”<sup>116</sup> (Acts, 1953:416)

The Synod of 1953 decided to “postpone action” on the study committee’s report “in order to give the churches more time to study the things proposed therein.” (Acts, 1953:148) The study committee solicited reactions to the recommendations in its report from the consistories via a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire were included in its report to the Synod of 1954. On the question of dividing the formulary into two parts, a preparatory exhortation to be read at the preparatory service and a formulary proper to be read at the communion

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<sup>113</sup> The Synod of 1922 denied a request from Classis Pella that synod “recommend that the Form for the Lord’s Supper be used by the congregations in such a way that the section dealing with preparation be read the Sunday preceding the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and in connection with the preparatory sermon.” Classis Pella argued that “this section loses much of its significance when read after the [week of] self-examination.” (Acts, 1922:71) The Synod of 1936 decided to “take no action” on an overture from the Consistory of Summer Street Passaic, which asked for permission to divide the Lord’s Supper formulary into two parts, declaring that the 1914 CO Art. 62 “left the matter to the discretion of the consistories.” (Acts, 1936:11) The study committee argued that that decision was “erroneous and contrary to the spirit of Art. 62 and the decision of the Synod of 1922,” which “decidedly advised against reading the form in two parts.” (Acts, 1953:414)

<sup>114</sup> The committee acknowledged that “reading the long form twice on the same Lord’s Day to the same congregation tends to create weariness and dislike for the forms.” (Acts, 1953:416) This suggests that the length of the Dortian formulary contributed to the infrequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the CRCNA. Certainly a similar “weariness and dislike for the forms” would be created if the entire formulary was read to the same congregation every week as well.

N. Monsma (1951:1157) argued the contrary: “Though the phraseology of the form may be obsolete, yet the contents are so beautiful and edifying and so well adapted to the purpose that a spiritually hungry soul will not become bored by reading it very soon.” The formulary “contains beautiful ‘applicatory’ material. If anything or any elements is to be abbreviated [in the second service] it should be the post-communion sermon,” not the liturgical formulary.

<sup>115</sup> For a draft of the abbreviated formulary, see Acts, 1953:423-426. It retained the preparatory exhortation, but omitted its list of “gross sins.” The comfortable words that the preparatory exhortation “is not designed ... to discourage the contrite hearts of believers ...” (PsH 1934, 91), the exposition of the sacrament, and the *sursum corda* were also retained. Inclusion of the Creed in the eucharistic prayer was made optional, the Lord’s Prayer was removed from the eucharistic prayer, and the entire thanksgiving section following the sacrament was made optional. Stob (1954:13-14) judged the difference between the proposed long and short forms to be “negligible.” He argued that “the revised forms are still much too long to be read at a communion service.” “We are still left with liturgical forms which ‘tend to create weariness and dislike.’”

<sup>116</sup> The Synod of 1938, which denied Classis Pella’s request for an abbreviated formulary, was “keenly aware of the danger that an abbreviated formulary, once adopted by synod, may crowd out the regular form.” (Acts, 1938:43) The study committee contended that this recommendation addressed that concern. (Acts, 1953:416) Stob (1954:14) considered it “highly questionable.” Does Synod have “a right to mandate any consistory against using a form which synod itself approves?” He argued that “if a synodical approved form is suitable for worshippers who gather at evening communion, it is suitable also for those gathered at morning communion.”

service, “opinion was almost evenly divided: 160 for and 152 against the recommendation” that the formulary not be divided. The recommendation that “no extensive revision or abbreviation of our beautiful and well-rounded form be made” received “almost unanimous endorsement, 271 for and 41 opposed.”<sup>117</sup> 221 consistories favored adopting a shorter formulary for the second communion service, 80 opposed it; 246 favored requiring use of the full formulary for the first service, 40 opposed the recommendation. (Acts, 1954:136)

Some consistories and a few ministers provided additional suggestions for changes that could be made to the Dortian formulary. These suggestions focused on the formulary’s linguistic quality, not its theological emphasis. “The most commonly suggested improvements were breaking up long sentences into shorter ones and use of modern terms for some archaic expressions.” The study committee concluded: “Happily, there is overwhelming sentiment against extensive revision and abbreviation, and we consider this a mandate to keep changes to a minimum.” (Acts, 1954:137-138)

Rather than submit a revised formulary to the Synod of 1954, the study committee recommended a series of “guiding principles for further work on revision of the Form.” These principles addressed the length and language of the Dortian formulary, not its theological emphasis. They included: “That no extensive revision or abbreviation of our beautiful and well-rounded Form for the Lord’s Supper shall be made,” that “synod leave the reading of the part of the form which concerns self-examination at the preparatory service to the discretion of the consistory,” that the Lord’s Prayer only be included once in the formulary, and that the list of “gross sins” be revised. The Synod of 1954 adopted these principles and continued the committee “to revise the Form for the Lord’s Supper in accordance with the above recommendations [principles].”<sup>118</sup> (Acts, 1954:51, 138-140)

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<sup>117</sup> Though “it would seem that the old form has a place of deep regard in the hearts of our people,” the committee acknowledged that “there is a danger of unhealthy conservatism, clinging to the old forms when they have lost their effectiveness.” (Acts, 1954:136) “Unhealthy conservatism” would be Polman’s (1980:91) diagnosis of worship in the CRCNA: “Tradition is our norm for orthodoxy in liturgical matters,” recalling the frustration of the committee appointed to draft a uniform order of worship, which found itself “fighting a false conservatism which refused to be convinced.” (Acts, 1928:277)

<sup>118</sup> Despite the consistories’ desire for a shorter formulary for the second communion service, the study committee’s recommendations to the Synod of 1954 said nothing about such a formulary, nor did the committee’s report to the Synod of 1955 include such a formulary. The committee argued that “our recommendation that the form be used in two parts implied that a shorter form would not be necessary.” (Acts, 1955:114) Without the preparatory exhortation, the remainder of the Dortian formulary should be read in its entirety at both communion services.

In the revised formulary that it presented to the Synod of 1955, the study committee “kept changes to a minimum,” focusing primarily on the formulary’s language. A few repetitious words were eliminated, long sentences were broken up into shorter ones, and archaic words were replaced with more modern ones. In keeping with the decision of the Synod of 1954, (Acts, 1954:51) the revised formulary presented by the study committee divided the Dortian formulary into two parts. The synodical advisory committee judged that to be “a liturgical error,” arguing that the Dortian formulary “constitutes a beautiful, harmonious unit,” which “should not be broken.” (Acts, 1955:56)

The Synod of 1955 appointed a new study committee<sup>119</sup> to review the existing study committee’s labors and proposed revision and instructed the new study committee to “bear in mind the instruction of the Synod of 1954” that “no extensive revision or abbreviation of our beautiful and well-rounded Form for the Lord’s Supper shall be made.” The committee was also instructed to “preserve the unity of the form, and remove those alterations in the draft” - the division of the formulary into two parts - “which would effect that unity.” (Acts, 1955:56-57)

The committee informed the Synod of 1956 of its “conviction that a linguistic and liturgical revision would not satisfy.” In contrast to the previous study committee’s reports, which focused primarily, if not exclusively, on the formulary’s length and language, this study committee took issue with the formulary’s theological emphasis. The committee noted “an obvious imbalance” between the Dortian formulary and the sacramental section of the BC: “Whereas Article 35 of the Confession emphasizes the fact that the Lord’s Supper is a communion in the body of Christ in which we receive spiritual food and drink unto eternal life, the form stresses the element of remembrance and thus partakes of a Zwinglian rather than a Calvinistic character.” The committee believed that a “thorough going revision of both form and content was imperative.” It could not labor under the restriction imposed upon it by the declaration of the Synod of 1954 against any extensive revision or abbreviation of the Dortian formulary and informed synod: “If the synod ... still feels that its 1954 declaration must be observed ... your committee would suggest that a new committee be named.” (Acts, 1956:225, my emphasis) The Synod of 1956 rejected the study committee’s recommendation that “a thorough going revision of [the Dortian formulary in] both form and content” be made and adopted its advisory committee’s recommendation that a new committee be appointed “whose mandate

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<sup>119</sup> The new committee consisted of G. Goris, J. Bratt, Wm. Rutgers, and H. Zylstra. (Acts, 1955:109)



shall be that of the committee appointed in 1955,” including the 1954 restriction against extensive revision or abbreviation.<sup>120</sup> (Acts, 1956:112-113)

The Synod of 1957 did not act on the revised formulary presented to it by the study committee.<sup>121</sup> Synod had received a letter from the GKN asking if the CRCNA was engaged in making revisions to its liturgical formularies, and, if so, would it be willing “to establish relationships with us regarding eventual future revisions, in order to work together, under God’s favor, toward a common book of liturgy?” (Acts, 1957:97) In response, the Synod of 1957 appointed yet another study committee “to evaluate the revisions of our Form for the Lord’s Supper, proposed by our recent study committees; to enter into correspondence with representatives of the GKN ... [and] to draw up a proposed revision of the Form for the Lord’s Supper to be presented if possible to the Synod of 1959.”<sup>122</sup> (Acts, 1957:97)

Because the Synod of 1957 did not explicitly include the 1954 and 1955 restrictions in the committee’s mandate to “draw up a proposed revision of the Form for the Lord’s Supper,” (Acts, 1957:97), the new committee concluded that “it had been given greater liberty of action.”<sup>123</sup> (Acts, 1959:170) Accordingly, it presented the Synod of 1959 with two formularies for the Lord’s Supper, embodying “two possible approaches to liturgical form revision.”<sup>124</sup> (Acts, 1959:170) The first formulary presented was “an attempt to rewrite and revise the pres-

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<sup>120</sup> This new (third) study committee consisted of Wm. Kok, J. Eppinga, and E.J. Tanis. (Acts, 1956:126) Tanis had chaired the 1955 synodical advisory committee. (Acts, 1955:7)

<sup>121</sup> Contra its mandate to “preserve the unity of the form,” (Acts, 1955:57) the committee presented a divided formulary to the Synod of 1957. The Form for Preparatory Service omitted the list of “gross sins,” contra the principles adopted by the Synod of 1954. (Acts, 1954:51) For the proposed Form for Preparatory Service, see Acts, 1957:508-509; for the proposed Form for the Lord’s Supper, see Acts, 1957:509-513.

<sup>122</sup> This, now fourth, study committee consisted of A. Hoekema, J. Stek, J. Eppinga, W.A. De Jong, and J. Timmerman. (Acts, 1957:115) Because J. Eppinga “withdrew at an early date due to the press of other duties,” the Synodical Committee appointed L. Smedes to replace him. (Acts, 1959:170)

<sup>123</sup> The Synod of 1957 received an overture from Classis Hackensack asking it “to remove the restrictions placed by the Synods of 1954 and 1955 on the committee appointed to study and revise the formulary for the Lord’s Supper.” The grounds for this request did not explicitly address the theological imbalance of the Dortian formulary, though they suggested that synod should “grant at least the possibility that extensive revisions of the present formulary may be necessary or salutary.” The Synod of 1957 decided to “withhold action” on Classis Hackensack’s overture. (Acts, 1957:97)

<sup>124</sup> Both formularies would be characterized as “but restatements of the original form. In a true sense we can speak of an original and its copies. The thoughts and even sequence of thoughts are essentially the same.” (Symposium, 1961:21) Oostendorp, (1973:14) described the formularies as “only updated revisions” of the Dortian formulary. So did the Liturgical Committee. (Acts, 1968:187)

ently authorized formulary with a view to making it linguistically and liturgically more acceptable”<sup>125</sup> (Acts, 1959:170) The second formulary was “an attempt to write a new form which still embodies all the essentials of a good Lord’s Supper formulary.”<sup>126</sup> (Acts, 1959:170-171)

As early as 1954, Smedes, a member of the study committee, had raised questions about the Dortian formulary’s theological emphasis.<sup>127</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the formularies prepared by the study committee of which Smedes was a member sought to address the theological imbalance of the Dortian formulary. In the first formulary, the committee’s revision of the Dortian formulary, “that [Christ] by this sacrament might nourish and refresh us unto eternal life” was added to “that we should keep it in remembrance of him” as an end for which Christ had instituted the Lord’s Supper. But the section of the exposition that explicated this nourishment continued to direct communicants’ attention to Christ’s “perfect sacrifice, once offered on the cross,” which addresses the source of our spiritual hunger, sin, rather than direct communicants’ attention to the presence of Christ in the sacrament itself. As in the Dortian formulary, it is not the sacrament which nourishes and refreshes, but that of which the sacrament is a reminder, Christ’s death on the cross. The same memorialist emphasis is found in the first formulary’s retention of the *Londonse aenhangsel*. (Acts, 1959:172-174)

Stob, (1954:13-15) who disagreed with the 1954 study committee’s conclusion that the Dortian formulary was “beautiful and well-rounded,” had recommended a different approach to liturgical revision: “Why not a completely new form, produced through the efforts of the best literary, liturgical, and theological minds of the church, and drawing on the beauty and power of the liturgical treasures of the English and American, as well as the Dutch traditions?” Echoing Stob, Smedes (1957:11) wrote: “There is a rich treasury of communion liturgy in the

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<sup>125</sup> The proposed formulary preserved the unity of the Dortian formulary; no allowance was given for dividing the formulary into two parts. In the formulary’s preparatory exhortation, the list of “gross sins” were placed in parentheses and made optional. (Acts, 1959:171-174)

<sup>126</sup> Given this formulary’s affinity to the structure of the Dortian formulary, including both a preparatory exhortation and a lengthy didactic section, the committee must have judged that the Dortian formulary modeled “all the essentials of a good Lord’s Supper formulary.” Unlike the committee’s revision of the Dortian formulary, however, the second formulary was a divided formulary. It provided a Preparatory Exhortation to be read the week prior to the communion service and a Formulary proper to be read at the communion service. The form for Preparatory Exhortation began with Paul’s call to self-examination and his warning against unworthy participation in the Lord’s Supper. (1 Cor. 11:27-28) The Dortian formulary’s list of “gross sins” was omitted and an appropriate prayer was included to conclude the rite. (Acts, 1959:174-178)

<sup>127</sup> “Until now discussion of the form has been centered wholly on formal considerations: its length, its terminology. Another question that should at least be raised is its theological adequacy. Does the present form do justice to the nature of the sacrament as a real means of imparting the life of Christ to us? I would suggest that the present theological emphasis of the form is not the same as that of the creeds or of Calvin. A reading of both the HC and the BC as compared with the form for celebration shows that they are much more concerned to say that the sacrament is a real means of grace than the form.” (Smedes, 1954:5)

Christian church which should not be despised by us. The Anglo-Saxon church has been fruitful in liturgical work. The elements of *The Book of Common Prayer* are doctrinally inoffensive to a Reformed mind, and its liturgy is superb.” (Smedes, 1957:11) Unfortunately, the study committee’s second proposed formulary, its “attempt to write a new form,” does not evidence interaction with this rich treasury in the Christian church.<sup>128</sup> Given its close adherence to the structure of the Dortian formulary, it is doubtful whether this formulary satisfied Stob’s hope.

Smedes (1957:9-10) had argued that “in a real sense, we do not have a form for the communion service. What we have is a formulary for instruction in the proper understanding and celebration of the sacrament.” What was needed was “not just a revision of the present formulary, but the construction of a form for the complete communion service.” Such a liturgy “should lead us, not only to proper understanding, but to a proper devotional receptiveness for the climax of participation in Christ through the sacrament.” Sacramental celebration “is not the moment for an exhaustive exposition,” argued Smedes. “Our liturgy has promoted the notion that truth about a thing is of equal importance to the thing itself.”<sup>129</sup> (Smedes, 1960b:22) Even so, the study committee’s second formulary retained a lengthy didactic section akin to the Dortian formulary. The formulary remained susceptible to Smedes’ charge against the Dortian formulary: “If the formulary can be used as a sermon it is obviously not a good formulary.” (Smedes, 1960b:21)

But, consistent with Smedes’ (1954:5) concern that “in the Form for celebration emphasis is crucial. ... The real nature of the sacrament should be quite clear,” the second formulary’s exposition emphasized the communication of Christ in the sacrament:

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<sup>128</sup> The study committee was aware that the RCA was also engaged in liturgical form revisions. “The committee took the liberty of obtaining copies of its proposed revisions for purposes of study,” but did not recommend that the CRCNA correspond officially with the RCA in this matter. (Acts, 1959:170)

The Synod of 1957 had instructed the study committee to “enter into correspondence with representatives of the GKN.” (Acts, 1957:97) Regarding liturgical revisions in the GKN, the committee reported that the GKN had adopted three formularies for the Lord’s Supper: a revision of the Dortian formulary, an abbreviation of the Dortian formulary for use at the second communion service, and a still shorter form that was “quite different in language and concept” from the Dortian formulary. The committee “did not consider it wise to use them as a basis for our own revisions since Dutch literary style differs too much from our own.” (Acts, 1959:170) The committee reported to the Synod of 1963 that it had “not yet received a reply to its letter to the chairman of the Liturgical Revision Committee of the GKN, dated 10 December 1958.” (Acts, 1963:234) No further efforts were made to cooperate with the GKN in the revision of liturgical formularies.

<sup>129</sup> De Moor (2010:336) writes of a “persistent rationalism in the Netherlands” that had “fostered the notion that indoctrination was as important as the actual celebration of the Supper.” See, for example, Shaver’s (1947:222, my emphasis) concern that those who did not hear the entire formulary read lost “something essential in participating.”

Likewise, our Lord promises us that even as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we shall be nourished and refreshed with his crucified body and shed blood.<sup>130</sup> To this end he has given us his life-giving Spirit through whom the body and blood of our Lord become life-giving nourishment of our souls. Thus, he shall surely unite us to himself and so impart the precious benefits of his sacrifice to all who partake in faith. (Acts, 1959:176)

A similar emphasis on communication is found in the formulary's eucharistic prayer: "We beseech thee, gracious Father, that in the eating and drinking of this sacrament we may receive thy Holy Spirit, that through him thou wilt feed our souls with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus." (Acts, 1959:176) But, contra this language, the formulary also retained the memorialist *London aenhangsel* for the distribution of the elements.

The Synod of 1959 adopted the study committee's recommendation that both proposed revisions be approved "for study and provisional use by the churches for a period of four years." This approval of the proposed revisions did not affect the authorized status of the present (Dortian) formulary. (Acts, 1959:94-95) Congregations that preferred the Dortian formulary could continue to use it.

In an exchange with J. K. Van Baalen, Smedes (1960a:23) called attention to the second formulary's exposition of the sacrament: "Notice that the objective character of the sacrament as a means of grace is emphasized more adequately than it is in the old form."<sup>131</sup> But Van Baalen was not the only person to overlook the increased emphasis on the objective nature of

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<sup>130</sup> That we are nourished with Christ's crucified body and shed blood as we eat the bread and drink the wine reflects the symbolic instrumentalism understanding of the sacrament. The sacramental signs are the means or instruments through which communicants are nourished with Christ's crucified body and shed blood.

<sup>131</sup> Smedes (1960a:23) also noted "an eschatological element" in the new formulary. Here some influence from the RCA's liturgical revisions may be detected. The exposition of the sacrament in the study committee's second formulary appears to follow the same outline as *The Meaning of the Sacrament in the Provisional Liturgy* approved by the RCA's General Synod of 1958: remembrance, communion, and hope. (For the text of *The Meaning of the Sacrament*, which is frequently attributed to Howard Hageman [Billings, 2018:110n5], see *Worship the Lord*, 2005:11)

The study committee's second formulary's paragraph on hope may be dependent on the RCA's Provisional Liturgy. Both texts appeal to Paul's words about proclaiming the Lord's death "until he comes," (1 Cor. 11:26) both texts describe our present communion as "veiled," and both texts anticipate a time when we "behold him face to face and rejoice in the glory of his appearance." (Acts, 1959:176)

Dorn (2007:111) describes this paragraph as "something new." It has no parallel in the Palatinate/Dortian formulary. However, Hageman (1977:169) observed "the very eschatological way" in which the Palatinate/Dortian eucharistic prayer concludes. He considered this surprising, because "the eschatological significance of the Eucharist is not something which found expression in either the Latin mass nor the Reformation orders of worship." The prayer was informed by Micron's *Christian Ordinances*, which was based on à Lasco's *Forma ac Ratio* originally written for use in the Dutch Stranger Church in London. That church was not strictly Reformed, but also included Anabaptists and Lutherans who had also fled the Spanish terror. (Hageman, 1973:112) Hageman (1977:170) concludes that the prayer's eschatological emphasis "may well indicate Anabaptist influence since among them alone of the Reformation movements was there any strong eschatological expectation."

the sacrament in the study committee's second formulary. In September 1961, two years into the four-year trial period, *Torch and Trumpet* published a symposium on, Which of the three forms for communion now in use among us do I prefer, and why? (Symposium, 1961:12-21) The question was posed to 12 ministers of the CRCNA. Their responses were evenly divided: four preferred the already authorized translation the Dortian formulary;<sup>132</sup> four preferred the study committee's first formulary, its revision of the Dortian formulary;<sup>133</sup> and four preferred the study committee's second formulary.<sup>134</sup> Most of the reasons advanced for preferring the study committee's proposed formularies, including its second formulary, were linguistic or stylistic. Only one minister addressed the theological emphasis of the second formulary.<sup>135</sup>

The Synod of 1959 had continued the study committee "to receive reactions" to the formularies. In early 1962 the committee sent a survey to every consistory in the CRCNA. The survey results reflected the same diversity of opinion as the *Torch and Trumpet* Symposium had. 87.5% of the churches had used one or both of the proposed formularies. 14% preferred the study committee's first formulary, 32% preferred the study committee's second formulary, and 23% preferred the already authorized translation of the Dortian formulary. Of the 13% who desired a new revision of the Dortian liturgy rather than the revision presented by the study committee, 72% asked that it be "less radical." (Acts, 1963:235)

The committee concluded that "to arrive at a form, or forms," that would be "liturgically more acceptable" and "theologically more adequate," it should make changes to the proposed formularies that "can only be viewed as new revisions." (Acts, 1959:235) One of the most notable revisions was the division of the first formulary into two parts.<sup>136</sup> Reading of the list of

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<sup>132</sup> This preference did not necessarily mean complete satisfaction with the Dortian formulary. Alexander De Jong acknowledged that "the original liturgical form needs revision badly," but he thought that "it should not be revised as thoroughly as has been done." (Symposium, 1961:15) Henry Venema conceded the same: The existing "form should be shortened without doing violence to its content." (Symposium, 1961:19)

<sup>133</sup> Those who preferred the study committee's first formulary describe it as "linguistically more acceptable" than the existing formulary. They appreciated its improvements in "wording and sentence structure." They unanimously objected to the list of "gross sins" being optional rather than mandatory. (Symposium, 1961:14, 17, 18)

<sup>134</sup> The most named reasons for preferring the study committee's second formulary were its division into two parts, its brevity in comparison to the other formularies, and its omission of the list of "gross sins." (Symposium, 1961:17, 19, 21)

<sup>135</sup> "More important, the sacrament's character as a means of imparting Christ's life to us is emphasized more adequately. (Emphasis is crucial in a form). The communion isn't a mere symbol emphasizing the commemorative element. The Lord feeds us with his grace, grace objectively present because he promises it and gives it, apart from our moods and feelings at the moment of celebration." (Symposium, 1961:21, emphasis original)

<sup>136</sup> Opinion regarding division of the formulary into two parts, which had been "almost evenly divided" in 1954, (Acts, 1954:136) had changed significantly. The study committee reported that 71% of the consistories supported

“gross sins” in the Preparatory Exhortation remained optional.<sup>137</sup> An eschatological paragraph was added to the first formulary’s exposition of the sacrament:

And inasmuch as it is said to us, ‘As often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,’ (1 Cor. 11:26) we are assured by this holy supper that our Lord Jesus will come again to receive us to himself and we shall sit down with him and drink with him the fruit of the vine in the newness of our Father’s kingdom. (Matt. 26:29) (Acts, 1963:239)

Moving the *sursum corda*<sup>138</sup> to immediately precede the *fractio panis* and distribution of the elements could have highlighted the sacrament as a communication, but, unfortunately, the memorialist words of the *Londonse aenhangsel* were retained.

The Synod of 1963 received an overture from the consistory of Jamestown asking that it “make permanent the present arrangement whereby the churches are free to use any or all of the three forms now in use.” (Acts, 1963:440) Classis Minnesota communicated its endorsement of the Jamestown overture to the Synod of 1963. (Acts, 1963:467) Classis Chatham, however, asked the Synod of 1963 to “not accept the proposed revisions of the Form for the Lord’s Supper.” (Acts, 1963:442) This request was endorsed by the consistory of Second Toronto, which asked synod “to appoint a new committee which will propose new formularies.” (Acts, 1963:471)

The Synod of 1963 took no action on any of these overtures. Instead, it adopted its advisory committee’s recommendation to “refer to the consistories for study the [study committee’s] revisions of the proposed forms.” The study committee was continued “to serve the Synod of 1964 when this matter will be further continued,” but was “not expected to propose further revisions.” Use of the formularies approved for provisional use by the Synod of 1959 was authorized for an additional period of one year, on the grounds that these formularies had been “favorably received ... by a large number of churches” and were “deserving of continued use.” (Acts, 1963:62) Thus, the churches would continue to use the 1959 formularies, even as they studied the revised formularies that would be presented to the Synod of 1964 for adoption. Classis Grand Rapids West submitted an overture to the Synod of 1964 asking that it “postpone the final adoption of the latest revised forms for the Lord’s Supper ... until the churches have

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such a division of the formulary, while only 4% “expressed negative reactions to this suggestion.” (Acts, 1963:235)

<sup>137</sup> “With the understanding that this option belongs to the local consistory, not the liturgete.” (Acts, 1963:235)

<sup>138</sup> “Let us firmly believe all his promises, not doubting that we shall be nourished and refreshed with his body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit as surely as we receive the bread and wine in remembrance of him.” (Acts, 1963:240) The *sursum corda* admits symbolic parallelism, but stops short of requiring symbolic instrumentalism.

had sufficient opportunity to use them.” (Acts, 1964:446, my emphasis) To date, the churches had not had any opportunity to use them, because the Synod of 1963 had re-authorized the formularies approved in 1959 for provisional use rather than the revisions it was presented. But it was those revisions - not the 1959 formularies - that would be on the synodical agenda in 1964 for final approval.

The Synod of 1964 approved the formularies presented by the study committee in 1963, because “no objection against them have been substantiated by Scripture or our confessions.” “The present form for the Lord’s Supper,” the already authorized translation of the Dortian formulary, was also “retained as an authorized form.” The churches were reminded that approval of the provisional use of the 1959 formularies had now expired. Accordingly, their use should be discontinued. (Acts, 1964:56-57)

Despite the study committee’s assertion that their second formulary was “an attempt to write a new form,” (Acts, 1959:170) both of the formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964 were widely viewed as “but restatements of the original,” (Symposium, 1961:21) “only updated revisions” (Oostendorp, 1973:14) - even by the Liturgical Committee. (Acts, 1968:187) All three formularies, the original Dortian formulary and the formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964, “were characterized by theological reflection on the sacrament.” (Polman, 1973:11) The didactic nature of these liturgical formularies, regardless of the theological content of their expositions, contributed to a Zwinglian understanding of the effectiveness of the sacrament as primarily subjective. With these formularies, which were essentially instruction in the proper understanding of the sacrament, the Lord’s Supper becomes a didactic exhortation to the congregation, suggesting that the efficacy of the sacrament depends upon the communicant’s understanding. The retention of the *Londonse aenhangsel*, which exhorted communicants to “remember and believe,” in both of the 1964 formularies reinforced this suggestion.

Van Dellen & Monsma, (1967:216) explaining the church orderly requirement that sacraments be administered “with use of the prescribed form,” (CO Art. 55) wrote: “The sacraments possess not magical power... the correct understanding of the significance of the sacrament is very important.” Schaver (1947:222) argued that those who did not hear the entire formulary read lost “something essential in participating” in the sacrament. De Jong (1980:376) suggested that the reception of grace in the sacrament depends upon “some spiritual understanding of its nature, operation, and efficacy.” Here the faith of the church, shaped by its *lex orandi*, conflicts with its *lex credendi*. The BC teaches that Christ “works in us all he represents by these holy signs, although the manner in which he does it goes beyond our understanding

and is incomprehensible to us, just as the operation of God's Spirit is hidden and incomprehensible." (Art. 35, my emphasis) Calvin wrote similarly about the sacrament's efficacy, its communication of Christ: "It is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it." (*Institutes*, 4.17.32)

The faith of the church, contra its *lex credendi*, necessarily precluded paedocommunion. Indeed, opponents of paedocommunion would often cite children's inability to adequately, even fully, understand the sacrament as rationale for their exclusion from it. In a communication to the Synod of 1995, the consistory of First Everett Washington, wrote: The Lord's Supper "is a solemn and serious undertaking. Those partaking of holy communion should be old enough to fully understand and appreciate what it is all about."<sup>139</sup> (Acts, 1995:613, my emphasis) The 1964 formularies nurtured that same impression about the sacrament among children. Consistently, middle school-aged children responded to Mereness' (1980) survey on paedocommunion by saying that they did not have enough knowledge or understanding to participate in the sacrament.<sup>140</sup>

The liturgical formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964 bear close affinity with the Dortian formulary. They neither marked a significant shift in the denomination's liturgical practice of the Lord's Supper nor contributed to its eventual acceptance of paedocommunion. Even so, the Synod of 1964 did make a significant and lasting contribution to the CRCNA's sacramental practice. It appointed a liturgical committee "to review all our liturgical literature in light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the churches; and to recommend such revisions or substitutions as the results of this review might recommend." (Acts, 1964:60) This committee would develop the 1968 Order for Communion, which Polman (1973:11) described as "a milestone in our liturgical growth."<sup>141</sup> To that Order and the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament that resulted from it, the next section will attend.

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<sup>139</sup> See also Classes Hudson and Hamilton's overtures to the Synod of 1993. (Acts, 1993:280-281, 423-424)

<sup>140</sup> This response was consistent across the United States: Children in Classis Hackensack, on the East coast, described the Lord's Supper as "a very serious matter." They thought they needed "more knowledge" before they could participate. So, too, children in Classis Pella in the Midwest did not think they had "enough knowledge" to participate in the sacrament. Children in Classis Central California on the West coast expressed concern that children "won't take [the Lord's Supper] seriously enough," and that they didn't understand it sufficiently to participate. (Mereness, 1980:13-16)

<sup>141</sup> "The formulary makes Communion an active event, with constant participation - celebrative proclamation - by the entire congregation. It leaves out the didactic, moralistic content of our traditional formularies... Unfortunately, this form [was] not widely accepted in our denomination." (Polman, 1973:11)



### 6.3.2.3 ~ The 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament

The Liturgical Committee informed the Synod of 1966 that it could responsibly discharge its mandate “only by engaging in a thorough study of the history of Christian liturgy in general and Reformed liturgy in particular.” (Acts, 1966:262) The result was a report to the Synod of 1968 that continues to provide the basic understanding of Reformed worship in the CRCNA.<sup>142</sup> (Acts, 1968:134-198) Along with its model services for Sunday morning worship,<sup>143</sup> the report included an Order for Communion, which the Liturgical Committee presented “as an option to the forms that are now in use.” (Acts, 1968:186) The Order for Communion was not a complete order of service; that is, it did not provide an order of worship for the entire worship service, but only for the service of communion within a worship service.

The most significant aspect of this Order of Communion was the complete lack of a didactic section that explained the meaning of the sacrament. The committee explained the omission thus:

The biblical mandate is to do something as a proclamation of the Lord’s death. This doing includes more than the bare acts of eating and drinking; it includes the thanksgiving and dedication of the people along with the proclamation of the gospel. But it does not necessarily include a lengthy theological discussion in the correct doctrine of the sacrament. The Lord’s mandate which is being fulfilled in the communion service calls for a congregational action. Therefore, the liturgy ought to be limited to the actual doing of worship.<sup>144</sup> (Acts, 1968:186, emphasis original)

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<sup>142</sup> Lewis B. Smedes was the report’s primary author. The Synod of 1967 granted the Liturgical Committee’s request “that Calvin College release Prof. Lewis B. Smedes from one-third of his workload for the academic year 1967-1968 without reduction in salary, so that he may devote this released time to the work of the Liturgical Committee.” (Acts, 1967:34)

The CRCNA’s next liturgical study committee, appointed by the Synod of 1994, intentionally built on the biblical-theological framework of the 1968 report, using that report as the starting point for its reflections. (Agenda, 1997:94)

<sup>143</sup> Cognizant of the decision of the Synod of 1930 that “it is not to be sustained upon the grounds of scripture or CO that it lies within the jurisdiction of synod to prescribe a specific order of worship and to enforce its introduction into the churches,” (Acts, 1930:187), the committee provided these models only to illustrate how the liturgical principles contained in the report might be implemented. The committee was “not recommending that synod give any of them official status.” (Acts, 1968:181)

<sup>144</sup> The liturgy should be consistent with the church’s confessions, but the committee did “not understand confessional consistency as meaning that the communion liturgy instructs the congregation in the confessions regarding the sacraments. Instruction, of course, is of utmost importance. The liturgical question has to do with the time and place. In liturgy the people perform acts of worship with a mind and heart that are informed by and committed to the truth of the confessions. But instruction occurs in the preaching. ... The liturgy itself should only be a vehicle by which the congregation actually performs the worshipping act.” (Acts, 1968:187, emphasis original)

John Vriend, (1965:11) a member of the Liturgical Committee, had argued: “Teaching and learning doubtless play a role, but they are subordinate to the greater purposes of worship. Formularies used in connection with the sacraments, though they must be explicit and clear, must not be so freighted with doctrinal explanation that they can no longer lead the congregation into acts of devotion and commitment.”

The proposed Order for Communion was more celebratory than the existing formularies. It included more congregational participation, and, the committee hoped, would facilitate more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA.<sup>145</sup> The Order of Communion did not employ any existing formulary intact. Rather it "employed those parts which are integral to a catholic order for the communion service."<sup>146</sup> However, these parts were "used, not as instruction, but as liturgical acts." (Acts, 1968:187) The Order for Communion emphasized what the congregation is doing when it celebrates communion, but this doing, unfortunately, focused on the congregation's commemoration of Christ rather than its reception of a communication of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament.

The model service begins with a *sursum corda*, read responsively by the minister and the congregation. This *sursum corda* serves as a call to prayer; it is immediately followed by a prayer of thanksgiving. This reflects ancient Christian practice,<sup>147</sup> but is a very different use of the *sursum corda* than its use in CRCNA's existing formularies. The Liturgical Committee observed that in the existing formularies the *sursum corda* serves a didactic function, instructing "the people against a wrong (transubstantialist) view of the sacramental elements." The committee's contention that "it is doubtful whether the Reformed congregations are now threatened with a temptation to place too much stress on the visible elements" may be true. (Acts, 1968:189) However, it may also be true that Reformed congregations are now threatened with a temptation to place too little stress on the visible elements, seeing them, contra the BC (Art. 33), as empty or hollow signs.<sup>148</sup> The traditional *sursum corda* not only warned against a transubstantialist view of the elements - "let us not cling to the external bread and wine" - but also called attention to the communication of Christ in the sacrament - "that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with his body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as

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<sup>145</sup> The committee's primary motivation for removing a didactic section from the Order for Communion was pastoral: "There is, we discern, a growing sense among many of our congregations that a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper is a spiritual need ... but the formularies, with their lengthy, didactic sections, are a discouragement." (Acts, 1968:187)

<sup>146</sup> This marks a significant difference from the formularies presented to the Synod of 1959 that had taken the Dortian formulary as a model for "all the essentials of a good Lord's Supper formulary." (Acts, 1959:170-171) The Liturgical Committee began to realize Stob's (1954:15) and Smedes' (1957:11) hopes that the CRCNA would draw from the "rich treasury of communion liturgy in the Christian church" beyond the Dutch Reformed tradition.

<sup>147</sup> Attested as early as Hippolytus (c. 215) and Cyprian (252) in the West and Cyril (350) in the East, the *sursum corda* introduced the communion liturgy, preceding the Great Thanksgiving in the ancient liturgies. (Cross & Livingstone, 1997:1561)

<sup>148</sup> Radius & Radius (1972:14) admit that "we often go so far as to remove all reality from it, supposing that what we eat and drink is just a symbol."

truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of him.”<sup>149</sup> (PsH, 1934:93) That theological claim is absent from the *sursum corda* in the proposed Order for Communion.

The Words of Institution<sup>150</sup> that follow are introduced as “the commandment of our Lord to remember his sacrificial death in the holy sacrament.” (Acts, 1968:195) The 1964 formularies included in the purpose for which Christ instituted the supper, “that he by this sacrament should nourish and refresh us unto eternal life.” (Acts, 1963:239) This purpose is noticeably absent from the 1968 Order for Communion. Its introduction to the Words of Institution imply that remembering Christ’s sacrificial death is the sole purpose for which he instituted the sacrament. Indeed, there immediately follows a section titled The Remembrance in which the congregation claims to “do as the Lord commands.”<sup>151</sup> (Acts, 1968:195)

The Order for Communion’s prayer of consecration refers explicitly to the communication of Christ in the sacrament. Its language reflects symbolic instrumentalism: “We beseech thee, O Lord, to grant thy Holy Spirit, that by this holy supper our souls may be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>152</sup> (Acts, 1968:195) Unfortunately, this language of communication would be lost in the 1978 revision of the Order for Communion and in its final form, the Service of Word and Sacrament adopted by the Synod of 1981.

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<sup>149</sup> The fact that both Calvin’s Form for Prayer and the Palatinate/Dortian formulary revised the traditional *sursum corda* suggests that Hyde (2008:470) claims too much: “The greatest evidence of the ancient church’s teaching that Christ’s people feed upon him by faith through the work of the Holy Spirit is its Eucharistic liturgy, in which the minister calls out to the congregation, ‘Lift up your hearts,’ and the people respond, ‘We lift them up to the Lord!’ It is by lifting up our hearts to heaven and by being elevated by the Spirit that we feed upon Christ’s true and natural body and blood by faith, the mouth of our souls.” If that theological claim had been clear in the ancient *sursum corda*, neither Calvin nor those who drafted the Palatinate/Dortian formulary would have revised it.

<sup>150</sup> “Here the minister reads the Words of Institution from 1 Corinthians 11.” (Acts, 1968:195) The Dortian and 1964 formularies quoted 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, which includes both the Words of Institution proper (vv. 23-26) and Paul’s warning against partaking of the sacrament in an unworthy manner and his call to self-examination. (vv. 27-29) The Order for Communion did not indicate which verses were to be read.

<sup>151</sup> The emphasis here is clearly commemoration, not communication. The Remembrance mentioned Christ’s resurrection and return, but emphasizes his sacrificial death, referring to how he “bore the wrath of God,” “was condemned to die,” and “endured the death of the cross.” (Acts, 1968:195)

<sup>152</sup> The committee’s report included two other prayers of consecration in which the language of communication was equally strong. (Acts, 1968:192-193)

We most humbly beseech thee to send down thy Holy Spirit to sanctify both us and these thine own gifts of bread and wine which we set before thee, that the bread which we break may be the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless the communion of the blood of Christ; that we, receiving them, may by faith be made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, and to the glory of thy most holy name. (Scottish Book of Common Order)

Send thy Holy Spirit upon us, we beseech thee, that the bread which we break may be to us the communion of the body of Christ and the cup which we bless the communion of his blood... (Provisional Liturgy of the RCA)

With this prayer, “the table is now ready,” “the liturgy has reached the solemn moment of communion,” and the minister “shall issue an invitation to the table:” (Acts, 1968:193) “Beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him, are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.” (Acts, 1968:196)

The Words of Institution, quoted from 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, are repeated with the *fractio panis*. Rubrics indicate that the bread is distributed to the congregation immediately after the *fractio panis* and the words “do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Cor. 11:24) After all have been served, the minister invites the congregation to partake with the words of the *Londonse aenhangsel*.<sup>153</sup> The minister then continues the Words of Institution with the cup. It is distributed immediately after the words “do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me,” (1 Cor. 11:25) and, after all have been served, the minister invites the congregation to partake with the words of the *Londonse aenhangsel*. There is, thus, a strong emphasis on commemoration at the moment of communion that may eclipse in the communicants’ minds the prayer of consecration’s language of communication.

The Synod of 1968 commended the Liturgical Committee’s report “to the churches for their study and consideration” and permitted “the churches to make use of the Order for Communion on a provisional basis, with a view to reporting to the committee their experiences with it.” (Acts, 1968:65) Synod did not establish a time limit for this provisional use, nor did it issue a deadline for responses to be given to the committee.

In its report to the Synod 1969 the Liturgical Committee reported receiving only one written reaction to its report from a consistory. No formal reactions to the Order for Communion were received. (Acts, 1969:334) To the Synod of 1972, the committee reported: “It seems that the communion service which the Synod of 1968 decided to ‘permit the churches to make use of ... on a provisional basis’ ... has not been used by many churches.” (Acts, 1972:397)

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<sup>153</sup> Despite its acknowledgement that “these words have practically no place in the Christian tradition outside of the Palatinate/Dortian liturgy,” the Liturgical Committee thought it “pastorally wise” to retain them because of the firm hold they have in CRCNA practice. The committee did, however, omit the accompanying words from 1 Corinthians 10, which describe the sacrament as a communication, choosing instead “the simpler and more literal words of our Savior.” (Acts, 1968:194)

But the *Londonse aenhangsel* is neither simpler nor does it accurately reflect the words of our Savior. It adds “remember and believe” to Christ’s words “take and eat.” Contra Jesus’ words, “This is my body,” the *Londonse aenhangsel* dissociates the communion elements from the body and blood of Christ. The body of Christ is not given to communicants in the sacrament; rather, they remember that it was given on the cross.

Polman's (1980:235) 1972 survey of CRCNA congregations indicates that only 20.3% of congregations used the 1968 Order for Communion, while 30.8% regularly used the old Dortian formulary. The Liturgical Committee earnestly requested that congregations make use of the Order for Communion and report their evaluations to the committee by 1 October 1972. (Acts, 1972:397) From the committee's report to the Synod of 1976, it would appear that the congregations did not respond well to this earnest request. The committee informed synod of its "plan to ask for the response of the churches... with a view to asking the Synod of 1978 to adopt suitable models to be presented at that time for use by our churches." (Acts, 1976:358)

The Liturgical Committee surveyed 650 ministers, of whom 173 responded. Most (74%) were familiar with the Order for Communion; 67% had used it. The majority of those who had used the Order for Communion, 60%, had used it for more than four years, though only 18% used it for every celebration of the Lord's Supper. Most, 44%, used it several times a year; some, 38%, only used it once or twice a year. Pastors, 82%, overwhelmingly rated the Order for Communion excellent or good. The response of their congregations was less enthusiastic: 62% rated the Order for Communion excellent or good. Of pastors who had not used the Order for Communion, 21% were opposed to its content,<sup>154</sup> and nearly 75% of all pastors would suggest changes to it.<sup>155</sup> (Acts, 1977:410)

The Liturgical Committee presented a revised Order for Communion to the Synod of 1978. Unlike the Order for Communion it had presented in 1968, this Order for Communion was a full order of worship; it provided an order of worship for the entire worship service. Of interest to this church juridical inquiry are those sections of the service that "contain portions of a synodical approved Lord's Supper form ... which should be read in their entirety and not changed in anyway." (PsH, 1987:972)

The revised Order included both fixed and variable elements. The committee recommended that the following elements be fixed: the minister's introductory words, the dialogue of the thanksgiving, the Words of Institution, the memorial, the preparation of the elements, and the communion proper. Other elements - the thanksgiving proper, the prayer of consecration, the invitation, the dedication, and the thanksgiving following the sacrament - would be left "open to varied readings in keeping with the seasons of celebration." (Acts, 1978:357) The committee hoped to present those reading to future synods, so that "eventually the churches

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<sup>154</sup> The committee's report indicates that some were "uncomfortable with the invitation, because it sounded too much like open communion." (Acts, 1977:410)

<sup>155</sup> "Of those who were affirmative, several expressed a desire for a more celebrative form, more joyous music; seven wished for more variety; a few asked for still briefer forms." (Acts, 1977:410)

not be allowed to vary the new Order for Communion beyond the variations built into these different orders for the special days.” (Acts, 1978:330)

The introductory words with which the 1978 revision began, a fixed element, are significant. The Dortian liturgy began with the Words of Institution from 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, emphasizing the commemorative aspect of the sacrament and warning against eating and drinking judgment to oneself. This established the solemn nature of celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the CRCNA. In contrast, the 1978 revision begins with an allusion to Luke 24:30-31, Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to two disciples in Emmaus where he made himself known to them in the breaking of bread. These introductory words describe the sacrament as “the joyful feast of our Lord” and place it within an Easter context: “On the first day the week, the day on which our Lord rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples in the place where they were gathered and was made known to them in the breaking of bread.” (Acts, 1978:334) The implication is that the same is true in the sacrament. It is more than a commemoration. At the table Christ is present; he makes himself known in the breaking of bread.

As in the 1968 Order for Communion, the thanksgiving that follows begins with the *sursum corda*. The opening dialogue is a fixed element; the thanksgiving for God’s mighty acts in history is variable. It leads into the Words of Institution, which are introduced thus: “We give thanks to God the Father that our Savior, Jesus Christ, gave us this memorial of his sacrifice, until his coming again.” (Acts, 1978:335) This has a more celebratory tone - “giving thanks” - than the 1968 Order for Communion, which called the congregation to “reverently hear the commandment of our Lord to remember his sacrificial death until he comes,” (Acts, 1968:195) but it still unduly emphasizes the sacrament’s commemorative aspect. The 1978 revision describe the sacrament as a memorial - a memorial, not of Christ, but of his sacrifice.<sup>156</sup>

Significantly, whereas the Dortian and 1964 formularies include Paul’s warning against partaking in an unworthy manner and his call to self-examination (1 Cor. 11:27-29) in their quotation of the Words of Institution, the 1978 revision omits them. It quotes only 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The 1968 Order for Communion had instructed, “Here the minister reads the Words of Institution from 1 Corinthians 11” without specifying which verses should be read. (Acts, 1968:195) In the 1968 Order, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 were repeated with the *fractio*

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<sup>156</sup> Contra Wolterstorff, (1972:15, emphasis original) a member of the Liturgical Committee, who would later write: “What Paul says is that we are to reenact the last supper as a memorial of Christ - not as a memorial of Christ’s death.” Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” (1 Cor. 11:24-25; see also Luke 22:19) not “do this in remembrance of my death.”

*panis*. (Acts, 1968:196-197) In the 1978 revision, a new, fixed element called The Preparation of the Elements accompanies the *fractio panis*.

A significant loss in the 1978 revision is the prayer of consecration, which had included the 1968 Order for Communion's most explicit reference to the sacrament as a communication of Christ. The prayer of consecration in the 1978 revision includes a vague request that God might "show forth among us the presence of your life-giving Word and Holy Spirit, to sanctify us and your whole church through this sacrament." The prayer speaks of "all who share the body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ," but does not explicitly connect that sharing in the body and blood of Christ to the sacrament.<sup>157</sup> (Acts, 1978:335) In marked contrast to the 1968 Order for Communion, nothing is said about "our souls truly [being] fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts, 1968:195)

The omission can only be intentional on the part of the Liturgical Committee. The prayer of consecration ends with words taken from the Provisional Liturgy of the RCA: "And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that thy whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom." (Acts, 1978:336) That prayer, as quoted in the Liturgical Committee's 1968 report, began: "Send thy Holy Spirit upon us, we beseech thee, that the bread which we break may be to us a communion in the body of Christ and the cup which we bless may be the communion of his blood." (Acts, 1968:192-193) The committee's 1978 report does not explain why the latter section of the prayer was used, but not the former.

The prayer of consecration was a variable element. The committee would provide other seasonally appropriate prayers. Unfortunately, a sense of the sacrament as a communication of Christ is absent from those prayers as well. The Advent prayer asks that "this bread and wine" would be "a remembrance and assurance that you have come." (Acts, 1980:353) The Lenten prayer comes closest to conveying the communication of Christ in the sacrament: "O Father, send down your Spirit, so that through this bread and wine we may be united more fully with your Son and so with one another."<sup>158</sup> (Acts, 1981:302)

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<sup>157</sup> That this sharing occurs in the sacrament might be inferred from the formulary's subsequent description of "the bread which we break" as "a sharing in the body of Christ," and "the cup for which we give thanks" as "a sharing in the blood of Christ," based on 1 Corinthians 10:16. (Acts, 1978:336)

<sup>158</sup> The prayer reflects HC Q&A 76, "Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body." It speaks of being "united more fully" with Christ, but it stops short of asking that communicants be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of Christ, as the 1968 Order for Communion had.

The earliest Dutch Reformed synods required that Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 10 accompany the distribution of the elements.<sup>159</sup> The 1968 Order for Communion omitted those words, but the 1978 revision restored them in a new, fixed element called The Preparation of the Elements that accompanied the *fractio panis*.<sup>160</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16, which the minister reads, refers to the sacrament as a communication: "The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ." "The cup for which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ." A congregational response is included for each statement. The first response, "We who are many are one body, for we all share the same loaf," quotes 1 Corinthians 10:17 and reflects the communicants' union with each other, an aspect of the sacrament that would be increasingly emphasized in the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper.<sup>161</sup>

The Invitation was the element in the 1968 Order for Communion about which the Liturgical Committee received the most responses. Some thought that it presupposed open

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<sup>159</sup> These were the only words included in the Palatinate formulary. The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), (Art. LXXVII; p. 73) the national Synod of Dordrecht (1578), (Art. XVIII; p. 94) and the Synod of Middelburg (1581) (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:124) required them - with the addition of the *Londonse aenhangsel*.

<sup>160</sup> In addition to the *fractio panis*, the 1978 revision instructs the presiding minister to "pour the cup." This is a new rubric not found in either the Dortian formulary, which speaks of the minister "giving" the cup, (PsH, 1934:93) or the 1964 formularies, which speak of the minister "serving" the cup. (Acts, 1963:241) The 1968 Order for Communion instructed the minister "to raise" the cup. (Acts, 1968:197)

Gritter (1946a:458) recalls a minister who "spread his hands over the elements in what appeared to be an act of blessing," perhaps prompted by 1 Corinthians 10:16, which speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless." (KJV) That text, however, is better translated: "The cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks." (NIV) Gritter (1946a:458) concludes that "ministers today should not do this [spread their hands over the elements], because it is not a part of the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper." "There is no evidence that Jesus did it; Paul's expression in 1 Corinthians 10:16 evidently does not mean that; it does not appear that such a gesture could add anything to the meaning of the cup; and it is easily misunderstood by people as if the minister were pronouncing a blessing upon it." (Gritter, 1946b:554)

Gritter (1946a:458) argues that "we Reformed Christians make it a point to have our celebration conform as closely as possible to the original." This was, in fact, the rationale given by the earliest Dutch Reformed synods for requiring the *fractio panis*. There is, however, no evidence that Jesus poured the wine. Thus, Gritter (1946c:586) concludes: "One cannot say that it was part of the original procedure and that therefore it is essential. So if it is not done there is nothing of the original lost."

In the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1994 (Agenda, 1994:180, 182) and 2016 (Agenda, 2016:83) the rubric instructing the minister to "pour the cup" continues to accompany the Words of Institution. The guidelines for adapting the liturgical formularies for the sacraments adopted by the Synod of 1994 include among the elements essential to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, "the scriptural words of institution (with actions of breaking and pouring)." (Agenda, 1994:70)

<sup>161</sup> The formularies adopted by the Synods of 1994 and 2016 place more emphasis on communicants' union with one another than they do on their union with Christ. But, as this text acknowledges, communicants' union with one another is a consequence of their union with Christ. Union with Christ is primary. It is only because all share the same loaf, which is Christ, that they form one body.



communion.<sup>162</sup> The committee carefully considered the matter and recommended that the invitation be retained. It argued that “the invitation must be understood not as inviting everyone, but as inviting everyone eligible.”<sup>163</sup> (Acts, 1978:330, emphasis original) In the 1968 Order for Communion, the invitation addressed, “Beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ;”<sup>164</sup> in the 1978 revision, it addressed, “Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As in the 1968 Order for Communion, the Invitation invited “all who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him ... to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.”<sup>165</sup> (Acts, 1978:336)

The 1978 revision is a more celebratory formulary. It describes the sacrament as a “joyful feast” and presents it not as “the commandment of our Lord,” but as Christ’s gift: “We give thanks to God the Father that our Savior, Jesus Christ, before he suffered, gave us this memorial ...” However, the formulary’s theological emphasis falls on the sacrament as a commemoration of Christ and not on the communion of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. The Lord’s Supper is a “memorial.” As the people take and eat/drink the communion elements, they are

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<sup>162</sup> Historically, the CRCNA practiced “close communion,” whereby only those admitted to the Lord’s Supper by the consistory were allowed to participate. Guests were required to meet with the consistory prior to partaking of the sacrament to receive admittance. The DCO’s requirement that “only those shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper who ... have made confession of the Reformed religion, together with having testimony of a godly walk, without which also those who come from other churches shall not be admitted,” (Art. LXII; p. 171; see also 1914 CO Art. 61; p. 100) was understood to exclude all but those who were members of churches that subscribed to the Reformed confessions. Indeed, those who seceded from the RCA in 1857 to found the CRCNA include among their objections to the RCA: “inviting men of all religious views to the Lord’s Supper, excepting Roman Catholics.” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:242)

Quoting this invitation, the Synod of 1975 said that “it is the responsibility of the consistory to invite guests ‘who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him,’ to come to the Lord’s Supper.” Synod left to the local consistories the method of invitation and supervision. (Acts, 1975:102) Though practices vary within the CRCNA, most congregations today read this invitation as its means of “fencing the table,” allowing guests themselves to decide whether or not they will partake of the sacrament. (De Moor, 2010:339)

<sup>163</sup> Contra the Liturgical Committee’s rationale, later proponents of paedocommunion would appeal to this invitation, arguing that it did indeed invite everyone and that all who could accept it, including children, were thereby eligible to partake of the sacrament. (See, for example, Acts, 2006:729)

<sup>164</sup> A historic interpretation of “beloved” as addressing professing members may support the committee’s contention that the invitation only addresses those eligible. In the debate about the *doopledienst*, objections were raised against those who would not partake of the Lord’s Supper, yet dared to be addressed as “beloved” when presenting children for baptism. (See Acts, 1902:65)

<sup>165</sup> Lundberg (2010:9-11) calls attention to the adverbs: truly sorry, sincerely believe. “These are rather daunting conditions of invitation - and hefty assertions for the would-be participant to make.” He suggests that “another note needs to be sounded alongside the stringent adverbs in the invitation,” and recommends these words from an Evangelical Covenant liturgy: “Come to this sacred table, not because you must, but because you may; come to testify not that you are righteous, but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to be his true disciple; come not because you are strong, but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on the grace of God, but because in frailty and sin you stand in constant need of his mercy and help.”

exhorted with the words of the *Londonse aenhangsel* to “remember and believe that the body/precious blood of Christ was given/shed for a complete remission of all their sins.”

The Synod of 1978 approved the use of this new formulary for a period of three years, with the understanding that it replaced the provisionally approved 1968 Order for Communion. Synod also noted the Liturgical Committee’s intention “to present variations of this formulary especially adapted for use at Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.” (Acts, 1978:60) The Liturgical Committee was able to present variations for Advent and Christmas to the Synod of 1980, (Acts, 1980:349-360) which approved them for trial use by the churches. (Acts, 1980:47) In its report to the Synod of 1980, the committee repeated its intention to also present variations for Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. (Acts, 1980:326) However, the committee only presented variations for Lent and Pentecost to the Synod of 1981. (Acts, 1981:302-308) No explanation was given why a variation for Easter was not provided. The absence of a liturgical formulary for Easter communion celebrations confirms the memorialist emphasis in the 1978 revision. The lack of a response from synod to the absence of an Easter variation confirms the prevalence of Good Friday communion celebrations in the CRCNA, the lack of Easter communion celebrations, or both.

The Liturgical Committee asked the Synod of 1978 to consider publishing a loose-leaf *Service Book* that congregations could more readily update when new formularies were approved. It could also “give congregations more ready access to forms which have been granted provisional status.” (Acts, 1978:356) The Synod of 1978 directed the Board of Publication “to conduct a feasibility survey regarding the publication” of such a booklet. (Acts, 1978:67) Upon the Board’s recommendation, the Synod of 1979 authorized the publication of such a booklet. (Acts, 1979:40) The 1978 revision, which the Synod of 1978 had approved for use for a three-year trial period, was included. But the Synod of 1980, which approved the Advent and Christmas variations, decided that those variations would “not be published outside the Acts of Synod until the new form approved in 1978 is reviewed by the Synod of 1981.”<sup>166</sup> (Acts, 1980:48)

The Liturgical Committee presented a Service of Word and Sacrament to the Synod of 1981 for final approval. (Acts, 1981:292-297) The section entitled The Lord’s Supper, which

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<sup>166</sup> The Synod of 1980 also instructed the Liturgical Committee “to produce a Preparatory Exhortation to accompany the new Form for the Lord’s Supper,” because “all other forms for the Lord’s Supper are preceded by a preparatory section.” “Such preparatory exhortations are regularly read in many churches,” but “none are available in the style of the new form.” (Acts, 1980:48) The Liturgical Committee provided such a formulary to the Synod of 1981, (Acts, 1981:309-310) which the Synod of 1981 approved “for optional use.” (Acts, 1981:27) Unlike the Dortian formulary, which followed the HC’s threefold structure of sin-salvation-service, this preparatory exhortation was organized around the virtues of faith, hope, and love.

functioned as a liturgical formulary, remained as it had been presented to and provisionally approved by the Synod of 1978. The Synod of 1981 gave final approval to the Service of Word and Sacrament, and approved its inclusion, along with its seasonal variations, in the *Service Book*. (Acts, 1981:27) Thus ended the 13-year process by which the CRCNA adopted its fourth liturgical formulary for the Lord's Supper.<sup>167</sup>

The Synod of 1977 had appointed a committee to "revise and improve the Centennial Edition of the PsH." (Acts, 1977:139) In 1984, the Liturgical Committee advised synod that "the continued use of a *Service Book* ... does not appear advisable." Thus, it recommended "continuation of the tradition of including all liturgical materials (and confessional standards) in the new PsH." (Acts, 1984:197) However, space constraints prevented publication of all of the church's approved liturgical materials in the new PsH. The Liturgical Committee recommended that only the formularies for the Lord's Supper approved by the Synod of 1964 and the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament be included. Neither the oldest translation of the Dortian formulary nor the seasonal variations of the 1981 formulary would be included. (Acts, 1984:197) The Synod of 1984 adopted the Liturgical Committee's recommendation. (Acts, 1984:631)

Classis Illiana submitted an overture to the Synod of 1986, requesting that synod instruct the Board of Publications to include the older translations of the Dortian formularies in the forthcoming PsH. The classis argued that all of the church's approved formularies should be available in the new PsH.<sup>168</sup> Failure to include the older translations of the Dortian formularies "will relegate [them] to obscurity."<sup>169</sup> (Agenda, 1986:486) The Synod of 1986, however,

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<sup>167</sup> Throughout the thirteen-year process no overtures were submitted to any synod regarding the 1968 Order for Communion, the 1978 revision, the seasonal variations adopted by the Synods of 1980 and 1981, or the final Service of Worship and Sacrament adopted by the Synod of 1981. That the Liturgical Committee had presented the Order for Communion "as an option to the form[s] that are now in use by our churches" (Acts, 1968:186) may explain the lack of overtures in response to it. Because it was an option, churches that disliked it were free to ignore it and continue using other synodical approved formularies for the Lord's Supper.

<sup>168</sup> The Synod of 1964 approved the revised formularies in addition to the existing formulary, which it explicitly "retained as an authorized form." (Acts, 1964:56-57) The 1968 Order for Communion, which would become the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament, was initially presented as "an option to the forms now in use." (Acts, 1968:186) Nothing in the decision of the Synod of 1981 approving the Service of Word and Sacrament suggested that it replaced any of the existing formularies, including the older translation of the Dortian formulary.

<sup>169</sup> The same would happen to the seasonal variations which had been approved to accompany the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament.

did not accede to the overture from Classis Illiana, on the grounds that the first formulary approved in 1964 was a “retranslation” of the Dortian formulary.<sup>170</sup> To retain an older translation, “would violate the mandate of the Liturgical Committee to translate and update our forms.” (Acts, 1986:724)

Despite its absence from the 1987 PsH, use of the unrevised Dortian formulary persisted in the CRCNA. In a survey conducted by the Worship Committee in 1990, 14% of respondents indicated that their congregations continued to use the unrevised Dortian formulary.<sup>171</sup> The majority, however, used the 1964 revisions: 54% used the 1964 revision of the Dortian formulary and 62% used the second formulary adopted by the Synod of 1964. A significant minority, 44%, also used the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament. (Agenda, 1991:58)

The 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament did not mark a significant shift in the denomination’s liturgical practice toward the Calvinist understanding of the Lord’s Supper articulated in the confessional standards to which the CRCNA subscribes. This *lex orandi*, contra the church’s *lex credendi*, continued to convey the Zwinglian memorialist understanding of the sacrament that persisted in the CRCNA. In 1989 *The Banner* published an article by Lugene A. Bazuin, (1989:9) in which he argued that “the best way to explain the Lord’s Supper is to say that it is a time to remember.” Bazuin echoed the 1981 Service’s description of the sacrament as a “memorial of [Christ’s] sacrifice:” “The event communion recalls is brief - six hours on the cross.” He spoke of entering “into a special relationship with Christ’s death on the cross,” not Christ himself, “when we look at the bread and wine, handle them, and receive them into our bodies.” As late as 2007, Vander Zee (2007:38) expressed disappointment at “how many of my fellow CRCNA members haven’t really grasped the wonderful truth” that “when we receive the bread and cup in faith, we receive Christ.” Instead, he finds that Zwingli’s description of the sacrament as a merely a reminder of Christ’s redeeming work, which calls forth our faith,<sup>172</sup> “prevails among many who otherwise think of themselves as Reformed.”

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<sup>170</sup> The study committee, however, had presented this formulary as more than a translation; it was “an attempt to rewrite and revise the presently authorized formulary with a view to making it linguistically and liturgically more acceptable.” (Acts, 1959:170)

<sup>171</sup> The survey does not indicate if that formulary was used exclusively for their congregation’s celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Because congregations could use multiple formularies in the course of a year, the survey results add to more than 100%.

<sup>172</sup> See, for example, Buikema (1973:20) describes faith as a muscle and the Lord’s Supper as a means by which one exercises and thereby strengthens that muscle. He called it the “secret of the blessing” of the Lord’s Supper, that “we once again embrace the Lord Jesus Christ and we remember once again what he did for us on Calvary’s cross. ... As we exercise that faith, our faith is strengthened.” For Buikema, it is the communicant’s exercise of the communicant’s faith that strengthens the communicant’s faith. Buikema says nothing about the sacrament as

While the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament did not mark a shift in the CRCNA's practices the Lord's Supper toward the Calvinist theology of its confessional standards, the formulary may have contributed to the denomination's eventual acceptance of paedocommunion. Unlike the heavily didactic Dortian and 1964 formularies, one can imagine a child participating in the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament. Especially significant is the 1981 Service's lack of any exposition of the sacrament. That section in the earlier formularies suggested that a proper understanding of the sacrament, of which many deemed children incapable, was necessary for participation in the sacrament. The more celebratory nature of the 1981 Service suggests that the sacrament is not primarily to be understood, but experienced, which, of course, children can do.<sup>173</sup>

The complete absence of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 from the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament is also noteworthy. Unlike the previous formularies, the 1981 Service's Words of Institution quote only 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The omitted verses, which teach that "those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves," (v. 29) were often "adduced as the basis for denying children the right to communion."<sup>174</sup> (Vos, 1958:6) This was especially true when "discerning the body" was interpreted to mean that "if one does not reckon seriously with the fact that these elements symbolize the crucified and resurrected Christ who atoned for our sins, he is trifling with the sacrament and is guilty of heinous sin."<sup>175</sup> (Bratt, 1963a:17) The prospect of judgment gave a seriousness to the Lord's Supper from which some thought children needed to be protected.<sup>176</sup>

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a means of grace by which the Holy Spirit "confirms" our faith, (HC Q&A 65) and by which Christ "nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers." (BC Art. 35)

<sup>173</sup> Proponents of paedocommunion often countered the argument that children do not understand the sacrament sufficiently to participate in it with the argument that no one truly understands the mystery of the sacrament: "None of us can comprehend the depths of the mystery of the Lord's Supper. ... We are qualified to come to the table not because of our faith or our mental understanding ... but only because of God's gracious invitation." (Agenda, 2010:613-614) Appeal could be made to Calvin, who wrote regarding the Lord's Supper: "I am not ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. ... I rather experience than explain it." (*Institutes*, 4.17.32)

<sup>174</sup> See, for example, Classis Hudson's overture to the Synod of 1993, (Agenda, 1993:280-281) and Classis Pella's overture and Classis Northcentral Iowa's communication to the Synod of 2007. (Agenda, 2007:429, 539)

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Classis Pella's contention, appealing to 1 Corinthians 11:29, that "there must be a proper recognition of the elements as set apart for a holy use." (Agenda, 2007:432)

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, Classis Pella's claim that "it is wicked and dangerous to use [the communion elements] in a profane manner," which children who do not recognize that they are "set apart for a holy use" might do, (Agenda, 2007:432) and Classis Columbia's worry that the church "would be administering poison to them" if it allowed children to partake of the Lord's Supper. (Agenda, 2010:672) In a discussion on the floor of the Synod of 2008, some synodical delegates "described how we probably put too much emphasis on the Lord's Supper as an occasion for judgment rather than as a means of grace." (Agenda, 2009:436)

Because Paul’s warnings against “sinning against the body and blood of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:27) and “eating and drinking judgment to oneself” (1 Cor. 11:29) are coupled with his call to self-examination, (1 Cor. 11:28) the text might be considered more appropriate for a preparatory exhortation. The earlier formularies included such an exhortation, even if provision was made to divide the formulary, reading the preparatory exhortation the week prior to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Given the church orderly requirement that the sacraments be administered “with the use of the prescribed forms,” (CO Art. 56) and the fact that the preparatory exhortation was part of the formulary, it would seem that its reading, even if done a week prior to the Lord’s Supper, was still mandatory. But the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament did not include a preparatory exhortation. Accordingly, a congregation could abide by the requirement that the Lord’s Supper be administered with the use of a prescribed form - the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament - and not read any preparatory exhortation. The Synod of 1980 instructed the Liturgical Committee to prepare a Preparatory Exhortation for the Lord’s Supper. (Acts, 1980:48) The Synod of 1981 adopted this preparatory exhortation “for optional use.”<sup>177</sup> (Acts, 1981:27) It alludes to, but does not quote, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29. Paul’s comment about “discerning the body” is completely omitted:

As we prepare for holy communion, let us remember that Scripture calls us to examine ourselves before God. We are taught that eating and drinking unworthily brings judgment upon ourselves. Let us therefore ask God for the proper spirit in which to celebrate the sacrament. (PsH, 1987:976)

A survey conducted in 2018 by the denominational Worship Ministries office showed that 52% of CRCNA congregations continue to use a preparatory exhortation the Sunday prior to their celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. The same percentage of congregations that do not use a Preparatory Exhortation (48%) admit “all who are baptized, including children” to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>178</sup> One wonders about a possible correlation between the use or non-use of a preparatory exhortation and the non-admission or admission of children to the Lord’s Supper. One reasonably suspects that congregations which do not use a Preparatory Exhortation will

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<sup>177</sup> As the Liturgical Committee noted in its report to the Synod of 1981, “the CO does not require a preparatory exhortation but a preparatory sermon.” (Acts, 1981:309) The removal of that requirement was approved by the Synod of 1988, (Acts, 1988:610) and ratified by the Synod of 1989. (Acts, 1989:524)

<sup>178</sup> <https://network.crcna.org/worship/crc-worship-survey-results-0> (accessed on 16 April 2019)

be more likely to accept paedocommunion, while congregations which continue to use a preparatory exhortation, especially those found in the 1964 formularies, will not be. The Worship Ministries' survey does not provide this data.

That suspicion does not mean that proponents of paedocommunion disregard 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, though some have argued that it does not apply to children.<sup>179</sup> Many proponents of paedocommunion interpret Paul's comments on "discerning the body" in light of its socio-historical context, specifically the problem Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 to which his quotation of the Words of Institution, warnings against partaking in an unworthy manner, and call to self-examination are a response. The body of Christ which we are called to discern is neither the sacramental bread nor Christ's sacrifice on the cross, but the community, the church.<sup>180</sup>

When the church "came together," wealthier members went ahead with "their own private suppers." They neither waited for nor shared with poorer members. "As a result, one person remained hungry and another got drunk." (1 Cor. 11:17-22) In that context, Paul admonishes the Corinthians against "eating and drinking without discerning the body of Christ." "So then," Paul concludes, "brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together." (1 Cor. 11:33) The result of rightly discerning the body is that "all eat together."

Some proponents of paedocommunion argued that "it may even be the case that the historic Reformed practice of excluding children from the table of the Lord represents a failure to discern the body or church in a manner similar to the practice Paul condemns."<sup>181</sup> (Venema, 2005:29) The liturgical formularies adopted by the Synod of 1994, which the next section examine, emphasized this unity of the church and communicants' communion with one another, which may have influenced the CRCNA's acceptance of paedocommunion.

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<sup>179</sup> See, for example, Report B submitted to the Synod of 1995: "Is it possible to see these words addressed to those who are capable of self-examination without intending to eliminate all those, e.g., the mentally challenged, the infants, and children, who are incapable of doing so?" "Is it possible, as with self-examination, to see these words addressed only to those of the covenant community who are capable of discernment, without intending to exclude others?" (Agenda, 1995:290)

The CRCNA's official position is that "the scriptural commands about participation" in the Lord's Supper are applicable to all, but that obedience is always "in an age- and ability-appropriate way." (CO Art. 59) This means that the commands both apply to children and do not necessarily preclude their participating in the Lord's Supper. For an explanation of "age- and ability-appropriate," see Agenda, 2010:612-614.

<sup>180</sup> "In the following chapter Paul goes on to describe the community as the body of Christ. (12:27) In fact, the whole of 1 Corinthians 12 seems to reinforce the point of 11:17-34: all members of the body of Christ are necessary, and the weaker ones are 'treated with greater respect.' (12:23)" (Keesmaat, 2004:43, emphasis original)

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, Classis Holland's overture to the Synod of 2006: "How can Paul's concern for the unity of the body at communion be applied to exclude baptized children? The apostle's concerns actually suggest the opposite, namely, that all members of the covenant community should be included at the table rather than having some who remain spiritually hungry." (Agenda, 2006:529)

### 6.3.2.4 ~ The 1994 Formularies

The Synod of 1991, in response to overtures from Classes Georgetown and Central California, (Agenda, 1991:512-513) instructed the Worship Committee to “write shorter, more flexible sacramental forms to meet more effectively the increasingly diverse climate of worship” in the CRCNA. (Acts, 1991:706) The committee presented a draft of these formularies to the Synod of 1993 for approval. (Agenda, 1993:69, 89-102) In addition to new formularies, the Worship Committee had also presented a set of guidelines for the adaptation of synodical approved sacramental forms. These stipulated that the Lord’s Supper is celebrated “in accord with the confessions of the CRCNA” when it includes the following elements: “the scriptural words of institution (with actions of breaking and pouring), the thanksgiving and consecration, and the communion with the bread and cup.”<sup>182</sup> (Agenda, 1993:70) The guidelines include much less than what had once been deemed “all the essentials of a good Lord’s Supper formulary,” (Acts, 1959:171) the structure and elements of the Dortian formulary. The elements judged necessary in these guidelines are similar to but simpler than those elements which the Liturgical Committee had considered “integral to a catholic order for the communion service.” (Acts, 1968:187)

The Worship Committee presented its formularies for the Lord’s Supper to the Synod of 1993 “as materials to be used directly and as resources that may shape local adaptations.” (Agenda, 1993:89) They included: two revisions of the Lord’s Supper section of the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament; six “biblical models,”<sup>183</sup> all structured by a period of preparation, followed by the Lord’s Supper, and concluded with a thanksgiving; and “a form adapted from confessional documents and Reformation writings familiar to the CRCNA.” (Agenda, 1993:98) The only confession quoted in this last formulary is the HC. (Q&A 75, 80) The formulary includes three optional readings from *Our World Belongs to God*, which the Synod of 1986 adopted as “a testimony of faith for our times, subordinate to the creed and confessions.”<sup>184</sup> (Acts, 1986:679-680; Agenda, 1993:100-101)

All of the formularies retained the Words of Institution found in the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament that refer to the Lord’s Supper as a “memorial of [Christ’s] sacrifice,”

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<sup>182</sup> The Synod of 1993 recommended the guidelines to the churches for study and response. (Acts, 1993:511) They were adopted by the Synod of 1994. (Acts, 1994:494)

<sup>183</sup> Each model focused on either a single book of the Bible or the writings of a biblical author: the books of Psalms, Isaiah, Mark, and Luke, and the writings of John and of Paul.

<sup>184</sup> For a communion liturgy based on the BC, see Fluit (2010:41).



(PsH, 1987:974) contra the Worship Committee's introductory notes to its proposed formularies. The introductory notes acknowledged that the Lord's Supper is more than a memorial. It is a thanksgiving to God and a memorial of Christ, which "refers to his entire life and ministry, his death, resurrection, ascension, and return." It signifies the work of the Holy Spirit, symbolizes the unity of the church in all times and places, and seals the present and coming kingdom of God. (Agenda, 1993:89)

Noticeably absent from this list is an explicit reference to the Lord's Supper as a communication of Christ. The statement that "the Lord's Supper signifies the work of the Spirit (*epiclesis*)" may be an implicit reference to the communication of Christ in the sacrament. The first formulary presented by the Worship Committee included the following prayer of consecration: "Lord, our God, send your Holy Spirit so that this bread and cup may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>185</sup> (Agenda, 1993:93) But in the second formulary, the work of the Spirit is connected solely with communicants' communion with one another; nothing is said about communion with Christ: "Send your Holy Spirit upon us, that all who eat and drink at this table may be one body and one holy people." (Agenda, 1993:94) This is also true of the prayer of consecration included in the formulary adopted from confessional documents.<sup>186</sup> It gives thanks for Christ's suffering and death and requests "assurance that our sins are pardoned through his blood," but does not explicitly connect this assurance with the sacrament or with the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. The prayer's only reference to the Holy Spirit connects the Spirit's work with communicants' communion with one another: "Unite us with each other through your Spirit." (Agenda, 1993:98-99)

For the communion proper some of the draft formularies offered alternatives to the *Londonse aenhangel* that all of the CRCNA's other liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper included. Both the biblical models and the formulary adapted from the confessional documents retained the *Londonse aenhangel*. The revision offered in the first formulary suggests a communication of Christ in the sacrament - "Take, eat! Remember and believe that the body of Christ is the bread of heaven for us; Take, drink! Remember and believe that the blood of

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<sup>185</sup> This prayer was taken from the prayer of consecration in the Provisional Liturgy of the RCA, included in the Liturgical Committee's report to the Synod of 1968. (Acts, 1968:192-193) The 1968 Order for Communion included similar language, (Acts, 1968:195) but it was omitted in the 1978 revision and 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament.

<sup>186</sup> This formulary also included an alternative prayer of consecration, "adapted from 'Contemporary Testimony,' stanzas 24, 27-28, 31," on the work of Christ (24, 27-28) and the Holy Spirit (31 - The Spirit "renews our hearts, moves us to faith, leads us in the truth, stands by us in our need, and makes our obedience fresh and vibrant." [PsH, 1987:1028]). The prayer says nothing about the sacrament itself and reads more like a Great Thanksgiving than a prayer of consecration. (Agenda, 1993:100-101)

Christ is the cup of our salvation” - but stops short of explicitly saying that that body, the bread of heaven, is received in the sacrament. A second alternative wording refers to the signs of bread and cup as “The body of Christ, given for you; The blood of Christ, shed for you,” (Agenda, 1993:93) clearly conveying the communication of Christ in the sacrament. The second formulary includes words from the English Prayerbook of 1552: “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving; Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you, and be thankful.” (Agenda, 1993:94) These words include the aspect of remembrance and, in the words that accompany the bread, a communication of Christ, a feeding on him. Consistent with the BC,<sup>187</sup> these words teach that this feeding happens in the communicants’ hearts by faith.

The Synod of 1993 withheld action on the advisory committee’s initial recommendation “that synod approve the sacramental forms for provisional use until final ratification by the Synod of 1995.” A motion to recommit that recommendation to the advisory committee “because of the theological issues raised” was defeated.<sup>188</sup> (Acts, 1993:510) Instead, synod recommended the formularies to the churches “for study and response so that the Synod of 1994 may consider provisional ratification.” (Acts, 1993:511)

The Worship Committee received only seventeen responses from individuals and congregations. “Several respondents questioned whether the language of the prayer of consecration in the first option (‘... and send your Holy Spirit so that this bread and cup may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ’) is compatible with a Reformed view of the sacrament.” The committee noted that “this language is virtually identical to that found in the BC ... and as such is fully in keeping with the Reformed tradition.” (Agenda, 1994:167) The committee made only one revision to the formularies it had presented to the Synod of 1993. In response to suggestions it had received, the *London aenhangsel* was included as a first option for the communion proper in the first and second formularies.<sup>189</sup> The alternatives included in

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<sup>187</sup> “Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood - but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth but by the Spirit through faith.” (BC Art. 35)

<sup>188</sup> The Acts do not record what theological issues were raised, nor about which proposed formulary, the formulary for baptism or the formulary for the Lord’s Supper, they were raised. The Worship Committee’s report to the Synod of 1994 identified theological concerns with both formularies. The concern regarding the formularies for the Lord’s Supper related to the first formulary’s prayer of consecration.

<sup>189</sup> The Liturgical Committee had thought it “pastorally wise” to retain these words, despite the fact that they “have practically no place in the Christian tradition outside of the Palatinate/Dortian liturgy,” because of the firm hold they have in CRCNA practice. (Acts, 1968:194) The suggestions made to the Worship Committee to retain them reflect the “unhealthy conservatism, clinging to the old forms when they have lost their effectiveness,” (Acts, 1954:136) that has marked much of the CRCNA’s history and confirm Polman’s (1980:91) diagnosis: “Tradition is our norm for orthodoxy in liturgical matters.”

the draft formularies, which more clearly express the communication of Christ in the sacrament, were retained as a second and/or third option. (Agenda, 1994:167, 181-183) Contra the decision of the Synod of 1993 that the Synod of 1994 consider “provisional ratification,” (Acts, 1993:511) the Synod of 1994 approved the formularies as presented and commended them for use in the churches. (Acts, 1994:494)

These formularies convey the communication of Christ in the sacrament more clearly than the CRCNA’s previous liturgical formularies. But what they emphasized most was the communicants’ communion with one another, not their communion with Christ. In these formularies, the work of the Holy Spirit was connected with the unity of the church more often than it was connected with the communication of Christ. This emphasis may have influenced the CRCNA’s acceptance of paedocommunion: If children are members of the church by baptism, why exclude them from the Lord’s Supper? But only in the formulary adopted by the Synod of 2016, which the next section considers, does the CRCNA have a liturgical formulary for the Lord’s Supper that more clearly presents the sacrament as the “spiritual banquet” described in its *lex credendi*. (BC Art. 35)

### 6.3.2.5 ~ The 2016 Formulary

In its report to the Synod of 2016, the denomination’s Worship Ministries office reported that “over the past years previous employees of Faith Alive Christian Resources, professors at Calvin Theological Seminary, staff at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and others have received requests for various liturgical forms that represent the current ministry context.” In response, Worship Ministries presented a proposal to develop new formularies to the Board of Trustees. (Agenda, 2016:75) With the board’s approval, Worship Ministries assembled a committee to draft new liturgical formularies, mailed the proposed formularies directly to churches for input, and presented them to the Synod of 2016 for approval. (Agenda, 2016:38) These formularies included an Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion (Agenda, 2016:77-79) and a Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion. (Agenda, 2016:79-84)

The Worship Committee wrote about “less confessionally based understandings [of the Lord’s Supper] that have made inroads in the CRCNA.” Its Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion argued that “to properly integrate the Lord’s Supper in worship, it is important for worship leaders and the congregation to have a clear understanding of the CRCNA’s confessional stance on this sacrament.” (Agenda, 2016:77) The committee asked Gerrish’s (1982:123) question of the church’s confessional stance: Is their central thought that the Lord’s

Supper is a commemoration or a communication? “Broadly speaking, the main issue is whether the Lord’s Supper is merely a memorial of Christ’s death on the cross, or whether, in and through the sacrament, Christ actually communicates his risen and ascended life to believers?” (Agenda, 2016:77) Citing the BC, (Art. 35) the Introduction claimed that “it is clear that in this meal we receive Christ and all his benefits through the Holy Spirit.” “In and through the sacrament, Christ actually communicates his risen and ascended life to believers.” “This understanding of the sacrament should prompt us to celebrate it often (perhaps weekly, as John Calvin desired), and with appropriate joy, reverence, and faith.” (Agenda, 2016:77-78)

But the committee advising the Synod of 2016, to which this Introduction was presented, reflected the “less confessionally based understandings [of the Lord’s Supper] that have made inroads in the CRCNA.” (Agenda, 2016:77) The committee recommended revising the Introduction to remove its language about a communication of Christ in the sacrament. The Worship Committee had written: “In the Lord’s Supper, Christ communicates his grace and salvation in the form of physical bread and wine (grape juice).” The advisory committee revised this to read: “In the Lord’s Supper, Christ signifies our salvation through his atoning sacrifice on the cross in the form of physical bread and wine (grape juice).” (Acts, 2016:900, my emphasis) Despite the revision’s less confessional nature, it was adopted by the Synod of 2016. (Acts, 2016:898)

Given the advisory committee’s apparent aversion to describing the sacrament as a communication and the Worship Committee’s insistence that the sacrament is a communication, it is surprising that the advisory committee recommended only one revision to the Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion presented to the Synod of 2016. The formulary opened with the following invitation: “Christ invites all his baptized people to his table.” Consistent with the CRCNA’s position on paedocommunion, the guiding principle adopted by the Synod of 2010, (Acts, 2010:810-811) the advisory committee revised the invitation to read: “Christ invites all his baptized children who trust in Christ as their Savior ...” (Acts, 2016:900)

That the committee recommended only one revision to the Brief Form might suggest that the form did not present the Lord’s Supper as a communication. It retained some of the memorialist elements of other CRCNA liturgical formularies for the Lord’s Supper, including the Words of Institution that describe the sacrament as a “memorial of [Christ’s] sacrifice” and the *Londonse aenhangsel*. (Agenda, 2016:83) But there were numerous references in the Brief Form to the sacrament as a means by which Christ communicates himself to believers that the advisory committee did not revise.

The formulary begins with a rubric that contends that “many congregations may benefit from learning more about the Lord’s Supper,” and encourages ministers to add words to the invitation that “accent different aspects of the meaning of the sacrament.” These include: “At the Lord’s Supper ... we look up to our ascended Lord, who promises to feed us with his body and blood by the Holy Spirit.” (Agenda, 2016:80) The prayer of consecration asks God to “send your Holy Spirit so that this bread and cup may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Agenda, 2016:83) The formulary includes the *Londonse aenhangsel* as the first option for the communion proper, but includes alternatives that clearly convey a communication of Christ in the sacrament. These include: the revision proposed to the Synod of 1993,<sup>190</sup> “The body of Christ, given for you; The blood of Christ, shed for you,” and a reading from John 6: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” (vv. 54-55) These last two options indicate that “we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood.” (BC Art. 35) The formulary concludes with a prayer that acknowledges that God has “fed us with spiritual food in the sacrament of his body and blood.” (Agenda, 2016:84)

The Synod of 2016 adopted this Brief Form for Holy Communion, and instructed Worship Ministries to provide the forms in Spanish and Korean and other languages as requested and to find “the most efficient and financially feasible way to present these forms online in a user-friendly way.” (Acts, 2016:898-899)

#### 6.4 ~ Conclusion

The CRCNA’s *lex credendi*, the confessional standards to which it subscribes, understands the Lord’s Supper to be a communication of Christ, not merely a commemoration of him. The church has maintained this confession despite challenges to it, such as the Boersma gravamen. However, as Boer (1970b:12-13) notes, the synodical response to Dr. Boersma’s gravamen did not adjudicate his objections, but simply “established that no creedal change was wanted.” This could reflect the “unhealthy conservatism, clinging to old forms when they have lost their effectiveness,” (Acts, 1954:136) that has marked much of the CRCNA’s history, as much as it could reflect an endorsement of the BC’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, one wonders about the CRCNA’s commitment to its *lex credendi*, given that its *lex*

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<sup>190</sup> “Take, eat! Remember and believe that the body of Christ is the bread of heaven for us. Take, drink! Remember and believe that the blood of Christ is the cup of our salvation.” (Agenda, 2016:83)

*orandi*, especially the Dortian formulary for the Lord's Supper to which it has also been steadfast, has not always been consistent with the church's *lex credendi*.

What do the CRCNA's liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper teach about the sacrament? Contra the church's *lex credendi*, the Dortian formulary teaches that the Lord's Supper is primarily a commemoration of Christ. The sacramental practice that developed with this formulary, including quarterly celebrations of the Lord's Supper, was marked by a Zwinglian memorialism. Despite the "obvious imbalance" between the Dortian formulary and the sacramental section of the BC noted in a study report submitted to the Synod of 1956, (Acts, 1956:225) the denomination remained committed to the Dortian formulary: "No extensive revision or abbreviation of our beautiful and well-rounded form" was to be made. (Acts, 1954:51) There was indeed "an unhealthy conservatism, clinging to forms when they have lost their effectiveness." (Acts, 1954:136)

The formularies adopted by the Synod of 1964 offered little correction to the Dortian formulary of which they were essentially revisions. The Dortian and 1964 formularies teach that the sacrament is a solemn, serious, sober memorial of Christ's death, one that the church commemorates, but does not celebrate. Their preparatory exhortations teach that the Lord's Supper is as much an occasion for judgment as it is a means of grace. The formularies' lengthy expositions of the sacrament teach that communicants' understanding is essential to the sacrament's effectiveness. Children were necessarily excluded, lest they eat and drink judgment unto themselves.

The 1968 Order for Communion, which resulted in the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament, marked "a milestone in [the denomination's] liturgical growth." (Polman, 1973:11) Despite the 1981 Service's presentation of the sacrament as primarily a commemoration, it was more celebratory than the earlier formularies. It teaches that the sacrament is a joyful memorial of Christ's sacrifice, meant to be experienced rather than understood. The omission of a lengthy didactic section and 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 is significant and may have contributed to the CRCNA's eventual acceptance of paedocommunion. The 1968 Order and 1981 Service are the first formularies in which one can imagine children participating.

An understanding of the Lord's Supper as a memorial of Christ's sacrifice persists in the 1994 formularies, though these formularies emphasize the communication of Christ in the sacrament more than the CRCNA's earlier formularies. But what the 1994 formularies most emphasize is communicants' communion with one another. This emphasis on the unity of the church contributed most to the CRCNA's acceptance of paedocommunion: If children are members of the church by baptism, why exclude them from the Lord's Supper? The Brief Form

for the Celebration of Holy Communion adopted by the Synod of 2016 is the CRCNA's formulary for the Lord's Supper that best reflects the church's confessional understanding of the sacrament.

What does the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA teach? That is more difficult to judge, because there is no longer a single manner in which or a single formulary with which all congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper. What the Lord's Supper teaches in a particular congregation depends on how often that congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper, whether its celebrations are preceded by a preparatory exhortation, and if so, which one, and which of the synodical approved formularies it uses (or adapts) for its celebrations of the Lord's Supper. According to Worship Ministries' 2018 survey, the most prevalent theme in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in CRCNA congregations remains "remembrance of Christ's atoning death," (96%) but "communion," defined as "unity of the body," is also prevalent in 80% of congregations.<sup>191</sup> The 2016 Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion is a hopeful sign that one day the Lord's Supper will also be experienced by all in the CRCNA as "a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits." (BC Art. 35)

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<sup>191</sup> <https://network.crcna.org/worship/crc-worship-survey-results-0> (accessed on 16 April 2019)

## Chapter 7 ~ Conclusion

### 7.1 ~ Introduction

Those who founded the CRCNA in 1857 were “stern Dortians who withdrew [from Classis Holland and the RCA] and formed the CRCNA to maintain their revered religious tradition.” (Swierenga & Bruins, 1999:2) The seceders spoke of returning to “the standpoint we had when we left the Netherlands,” (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 1943:222) by which they meant “God’s Word, set forth doctrinally in the confessional standards of the historical Reformed church in the Netherlands and structurally in the CO adopted by the Synod of Dort.” (Zwaanstra, 1991:8)

The DCO to which the seceders were loyal stipulated that “no church shall in any way lord it over another church, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons.” (Art. LXXXIV; p. 175) Read in isolation from the rest of the DCO, this article “might easily lead one to conclude that in the Reformed system classes and synod can only advise and that these bodies cannot make authoritative decisions.” (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1967:336) But the provision was originally written to define Protestant principles over against Roman hierarchy, particularly the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. It defines the relationship between local congregations and the relationship between the office bearers.<sup>1</sup> The article was not intended to circumscribe the authority of the broader assemblies of classis and synod. In fact, the DCO maintained that “the classis has the same authority over the consistory that the particular synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the particular.” (Art. XXXVI; p. 167)

However, the DCO also placed the following limit on the work of the broader (or major) assemblies: “In major assemblies only that shall be dealt with that could not be finished in the minor [assemblies], or that which concerns the churches of the major assembly in common.” (Art. XXX; p. 166) This raises a question: Does synod have the authority to establish an order of worship and liturgical formularies for the denomination? Can matters related to worship be dealt with by the minor assemblies, particularly the local consistory, or are they among the matters of common concern that fall within the purview of synod?

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<sup>1</sup> Contra the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the Reformed maintained the parity of office bearers. “As for the ministers of the Word, they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.” (BC Art. 31)



## 7.2 ~ The Extent of Synodical Authority

For most of its history, the CRCNA has been challenged to steer between the excesses of congregationalism (or independentism), which emphasizes the autonomy of the local church, and denominationalism (sometimes called synodicalism), which emphasizes the authority of the broader assemblies. (De Moor, 1986:337, 345) The *Doleantie* ecclesiology developed by Abraham Kuyper - who argued that “the local church is the primary manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ and national churches arose only as secondary through the federating of these churches” (Kuyper, 2016:115) - reflects the excesses of congregationalism. De Moor (1986:339) characterizes it as “a radical departure from the traditional structure of the Reformed church,” which “can hardly be squared with the underlying principles of Article 36 of the DCO.”

The CRCNA addressed the issue of synodical authority in its discussion of a uniform order of worship (1916-1932). The first study committee appointed “to serve synod with elaborate proposals for improvement of our liturgical services” (Acts, 1918:156) presented the Synod of 1920 with a strong statement on synodical authority and the necessity of a uniform order of worship. Denominational unity not only requires a common confession and CO; it also requires a common liturgy. The committee wrote: “Such liturgical unity in all our churches ... is therefore a matter of principle and it may consequently not be left to the discretion of the individual congregations. ... It is a matter which belongs to the jurisdiction of the synod.” (Acts, 1920:186, emphasis original)

The influence of *Doleantie* ecclesiology is evident in the position of those who opposed the study committee’s report. Classis Illinois took the position that “the regulation of public worship is a matter in which synods should only enlighten and advice, but that synodical prescription in this matter conflicts with the freedom of the local church.” (Acts, 1928:278) Classis Orange City argued that synod could only adopt a uniform order of worship if “our Reformed principles pertaining to worship permit only one order.” But because they do not, “a specific order of worship cannot properly be a matter of synodical prescription.” Rather it belongs to the domain “in which the local consistory should be left to decide, as long as the order of worship it adopts does justice to our Reformed principles.” (Acts, 1930:170)

Contra the Synod of 1928, which had said that “the regulation of public worship should not be left to the individual churches,” (Acts, 1928:50) the Synod of 1930 adopted the following statement: “It cannot be sustained upon the grounds of scripture and CO that it lies within the jurisdiction of synod to prescribe a specific order of worship and to enforce its introduction

into the churches.” (Acts, 1930:187) Vriend (1965:10) concludes that this “story of a jurisdictional dispute over patterns of worship ended with a clear victory for the authority of the local church.” That was true with regard to a uniform order of worship.

The RCO included in the “task of synod,” “the adoption of the principles and elements of the order of worship.” (Art. 47; p.135) Synod may adopt the principles of the order of worship, but the local consistory is responsible for their expression within a particular worship service. Synod may adopt the elements of the order of worship,<sup>2</sup> but the local consistory is responsible for the arrangement of those elements within a particular worship service. Sensitive to the statement adopted by the Synod of 1930, the Liturgical Committee provided the Synod of 1968 with three model orders of worship “only to illustrate” how the principles contained in its report might be implemented. (Acts, 1968:181) The committee was “not asking synod to adopt and prescribe a uniform order of worship for the churches,” (Acts, 1968:135) because the CRCNA denies synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship.

That does not mean, however, that the CRCNA does not grant synod significant authority over the worship life of the church. It does. The advisory committee that drafted the statement adopted by the Synod of 1930 allowed that synod may adopt liturgical formularies and additional rules for the proper administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of church discipline (Acts, 1930:178) - two of the three marks by which the true church can be recognized. (BC Art. 29) The DCO required that sacraments be administered with the use of a synodical approved formulary.<sup>3</sup> The RCO retained the requirement.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the statement adopted by the Synod of 1930 can be considered anomalous in the history of the CRCNA, which has resisted *Doleantie* ecclesiology. *Contra Doleantie* ecclesiology, one of the constants in every name the CRCNA has adopted has been the singular “church.”<sup>5</sup> That constant “reflects the characteristic polity of the CRCNA,” (Van Oene,

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<sup>2</sup> The CO requires that “the congregation shall assemble for worship at least twice on the Lord’s Day to hear God’s Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude.” (Art. 51)

<sup>3</sup> “In the baptism of young children as well as of adults the minister shall use the form of the institution and practice of baptism which have been respectively drawn up for that purpose.” (Art. LVIII; p. 171; see also 1914 CO Art. 58; p. 99) When the church administers the Lord’s Supper, “the form for the Lord’s Supper, together with the prayers pertaining to it, shall be read in front of the table.” (Art. LXII; p. 171; see also 1914 CO Art. 62; p. 100)

<sup>4</sup> “The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory in the public worship service, by the minister of the Word, with the use of the prescribed forms.” (Art. 55; p. 136)

<sup>5</sup> When the *Afscheiding* Church and the churches of the *Doleantie* united in 1892, they took the name *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. The plural *kerken* (churches) “declared that the congregations did not constitute one over-arching and embracing church,” but was “a federation of local bodies of believers bound by the same confessions and CO.” (De Jong, 1995:295) By contrast, all of the

1973:186) which affirms that “every local church is simultaneously an independent manifestation of the body of Christ and part of a larger whole.” (Bavinck, 2008a:374, emphasis original) The consistory is the consistory of the local church, the classis is essentially the consistory of the regional church, and the synod is essentially the consistory of the national (or bi-national) church.

The RCO, which Van Oene (1973:138) rightly described as “an abandonment of the church-political concept of the *Doleantie*,” granted synod significant authority over worship. It included in “the task of synod,” “the adoption ... of the liturgical forms, of the psalter hymnal, and of the principles and elements of the order of worship, as well as the designation of the Bible versions to be used in worship services.” (Art. 47; p. 135) The RCO granted that “the consistory shall regulate the worship service,” but defined this regulation as ensuring “that synodical approved Bible versions, liturgical forms, and songs [were] used, that the principles and elements of worship approved by synod are observed,” and that “choirs or others who sing in the worship services ... observe the synodical regulations governing the content of the hymns and anthems sung.” (Art. 52; p. 136)

The CRCNA has been and continues to be guided primarily by the denominational model of church polity. Synod may not have the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship, but it has the authority - even the mandate - to adopt the principles and elements of the order of worship. It may not have the authority to decide which songs will be sung in a particular worship service, but it has the authority - even the mandate - to determine which songs will be included in the PsH from which those songs are chosen. Of particular interest to this church juridical inquiry is the authority of synod to adopt liturgical formularies for the sacraments.

### 7.3 ~ Liturgical Uniformity

The RCO retained the Dortian provision that “a major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.” (Art. 28; p. 131) The adoption of the liturgical forms, of the psalter hymnal, and of the principles and elements of the order of worship, as well as the designation of the Bible version to be used in worship services are included in the task of synod because they are

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names used by the CRCNA - Holland Reformed Church (1859-1861), Free Dutch Reformed Church (1861-1863), True Dutch Reformed Church (1863-1888), Holland Christian Reformed Church (1880-1894), Christian Reformed Church (1894-1974), Christian Reformed Church in North America (1974-present) - employ the singular “church” (*kerk*).

matters of common concern. These measures were designed to “assure a measure of uniformity in worship among all churches.” (Boonstra, 1982:101)

Indeed, for much of the CRCNA’s history, uniformity was emphasized. A study report submitted to the Synod of 1920 argued that “it behooves [the church] to express and reveal as much as possible her oneness as the body of Christ ... by means of a common liturgy, so that each church in its mode of public worship at once reveals itself as one of our churches.”<sup>6</sup> (Acts, 1920:186, original emphasis) Even the 1930 report, which denied synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship, acknowledged that “there is much to be said in favor of as great a uniformity as is feasible. ... The greater the uniformity, the better.” (Acts, 1930:177) The committee concluded that “the prescription of an order of worship is a matter for which there is no warrant in Scripture or CO,” (Acts, 1930:184) but argued that synod should “advise and educate our churches with a view to reaching as great a measure of uniformity as is possible and practicable.” (Acts, 1930:187)

Concern for uniformity was expressed in the requests for a standard set of questions to be asked at profession of faith<sup>7</sup> and for a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith.<sup>8</sup> A report to the Synod of 1953 described the lack of uniformity that resulted from congregations making their own unauthorized abbreviation of the formulary for the Lord’s Supper at the second service “undesirable.” (Acts, 1953:416) John Kromminga’s (1957:95) assessment of the CRCNA at its centennial - “increased uniformity in worship ... is needed” - echoed Beets’ (1928a:373) observation during the uniform order of worship debate: “As one who preaches in several churches, East and West, as well as in Michigan, we have been impressed repeatedly by the need of more uniformity in public worship.” For much of its history, the CRCNA was “concerned about preserving uniformity among the churches in liturgical practice.” (Tamminga, 1998:114)

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Van Dellen & Monsma (1967:187) acknowledge that “a slight variety in our orders of worship should not surprise us,” but also exhort the CRCNA: “Let us also foster and maintain as much uniformity as we reasonably can. For our oneness as a denomination and in Christ must also come to expression through the similarity, if not in the identity, of the orders of worship we maintain.” Volbeda (1930b:105) described “uniformity in matters of worship” as “a correlative of unity of doctrine and church government” and, referring to “the Reformed principle of liturgical uniformity,” said that “uniformity of liturgy is an essential of our Reformed Church system.”

<sup>7</sup> At the 2 June 1875 meeting of the general assembly, “the question [was] raised, if when accepting members into the congregation, some uniformity can be created, and toward this end it is proposed [to choose between] the questions which Rev. Frieling uses and reads; or those by Rev. J. Koelman. It is decided to use the latter.” (Sheeres, 2013:355)

<sup>8</sup> The grounds for Classis Illinois’ request to the Synod of 1916 to “establish a form for the Public Profession of Faith” included: “It serves to create uniformity in practice,” and “it eliminates all arbitrariness in the worship services.” (Acts, 1916:31)

But that has been changing. The Liturgical Committee's report to the Synod of 1968 was a harbinger of things to come:

We recognize that people of one place have needs and capabilities different from people in another place. ... The people who worship in Manhattan, New York are conditioned by another culture than the people who worship in Manhattan, Montana. ... The liturgy must serve to edify; and what is useful for edification in Manhattan, New York, may be harmful in Manhattan, Montana. (Acts, 1968:157)

Contra the committee's mandate to "recommend such revisions or subtractions" from the church's liturgical literature as recommended by the committee's review of that literature, the Liturgical Committee recommended that the Synod of 1976 adopt additional liturgical formularies. The new formularies would not replace the existing formularies, nor would any congregation be obligated to use the new formularies. The committee wrote: "As our denomination continues to grow and extend itself, it seems that the varied needs of our congregations can best be met by offering a variety of liturgical forms rather than requiring congregations of diverse background to fit into a single liturgical mold." (Acts, 1976:341) The CRCNA's historic emphasis on uniformity was giving way to a new emphasis on diversity and variety.

A similar emphasis on diversity is found in Classis Central California's overture to the Synod of 1991 requesting "liturgical forms ... which are shorter ... and more contemporary in language." The grounds for this request included "the increasing diversity of people in our denomination." (Agenda, 1991:512-513) Synod granted the request, instructing the Worship Committee "to write shorter, more flexible sacramental forms to meet more effectively the increasingly diverse climate of worship." (Acts, 1991:706) The Synod of 1991 also encouraged churches "to adapt as needed all denominational liturgical forms," on the ground that "our diversity requires flexibility." (Acts, 1991:707) When the Synod of 1994 adopted guidelines for this adaptation of syndical approved formularies, it spoke of liturgical consistency, rather than uniformity: "Liturgical consistency within the CRCNA [is] encouraged by the use of syndical approved or recommended Bible versions, liturgical forms, principles of worship and worship songs." (Acts, 1994:167)

A striking example of this shift from uniformity to diversity is the guiding principle regarding paedocommunion adopted by the Synod of 2010, which acknowledges that requiring a public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper is "one pastoral approach to consider," but that it "is not required by Scripture or the confessions." Synod adopted this principle because it "allows for diversity of local practice." (Acts, 2010:811) By contrast, it

had been concern about “diversity of local practice” that led the Synod of 1916 to appoint a committee to study the desirability of introducing a uniform order of worship. (Acts, 1916:30)

#### 7.4 ~ The Standing of the Liturgical Formularies

The RCO includes in “the task of synod,” “the adoption of the creeds, of the CO, and of the liturgical formularies.” (Art. 47; p. 135) This list raises questions about the standing of the liturgical formularies in the CRCNA and their relationship to the creeds, confessions, and CO. Meeter (1998:18) argues that when the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) added the Netherlands Liturgy to the public documents of the church<sup>9</sup> it gave “the Liturgy ... an authority equal to that of the other ‘public documents’ of the church - the BC, the HC, and the CD.”

At its 19 June 1867 meeting, the classical assembly of the CRCNA, at the time the CRCNA’s broadest assembly, said that “other than God’s Word as the highest law, the BC, the HC, the CD and DCO, and the Liturgy are binding.” (Sheeres, 2013:269) It would seem then, as Kuiper (1929c:620) argued, that the liturgical formularies, “as official expressions of the doctrine of the church, rank next to our doctrinal standards;” that is, the liturgical formularies have the same binding force as the confessions. But the Synod of 1916 declared that they do not: “The liturgy does not have the same binding force as the Forms of Unity, because by the nature of the case the liturgy does not have the same character.” (Acts, 1916:31)

In the Form of Subscription adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), office bearers declare that they “heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in [the confessional standards] do fully agree with the Word of God.” They promise to “diligently teach ... the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching and writing.” (PsH, 1934:70) As an overture to the Synod of 1916 from Classis Holland noted, office bearers subscribe to the church’s confessional standards, not to its liturgical formularies. (Acts, 1916:30-31)

In the Covenant for Officebearers, which the Synod of 2012 adopted to replace the Form of Subscription, it is the confessional standards, not the liturgical formularies, that “define the way we understand Scripture.” Office bearers promise to “promote and defend” the doctrines contained in the confessions, “conforming [their] teaching, preaching, writing, serving, and living to them.” (Acts, 2012:761) Like the office bearers’ teaching, preaching, writing,

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<sup>9</sup> “The Netherlands Liturgy in which are included the public prayers, the forms for administering the sacraments, the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons, and the solemnization of marriage shall be reviewed by the revisers of the condensed minutes or by the clerk of this synod, and having been reviewed shall be added to the public editions.” (Biesterveld & Kuyper, 1982:200)

serving, and living, the liturgical formularies should conform themselves to the church's confessional standards. In the CRCNA, the liturgical formularies do not rank next to the confessions, but below them. The formularies are subordinate to the confessions; they "must both express and be consistent with the confession of the church." (Acts, 1968:186)

## 7.5 ~ The Sacramental Liturgies of the CRCNA

Wainwright (1980:219) describes this "primacy of doctrine in relation to liturgy" as "characteristic of Protestantism." That is the reading of *lex orandi, lex credendi* assumed by this dissertation. The church's *lex credendi*, the confessional standards to which it subscribes, is the norm for its *lex orandi*, the liturgical formularies with which it celebrates the sacraments. This raises the central question of this church juridical inquiry: Does the sacramental practice of the CRCNA, particularly its liturgical formularies, reflect official Christian Reformed teaching as articulated in the church's confessional standards?

But "the relationship of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* is more continuous and dialectic than is sometimes assumed." (Irwin, 1994:16) Prescriptively, the church's *lex credendi* should determine its *lex orandi*. But descriptively, the church's *lex orandi* also shapes the faith of the church, its functional theology or what it actually believes. Thus, the question: If the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA do not conform to the church's official teaching, its *lex credendi*, what do they teach? What understandings of baptism, profession of faith, and the Lord's Supper do they convey? As the CRCNA has considered welcoming baptized children to the Lord's Supper, how have the church's liturgical formularies influenced those discussions and decisions?

### 7.5.1 ~ The Sacrament of Baptism

The Dortian baptismal formulary, which for the first century of the CRCNA's history was its only liturgical formulary for baptism (1857-1976), emphasizes God's action in the sacrament of baptism. Its exposition of baptism presents the sacrament as the sign and seal of such "a real and powerful work of God in us" that readers may need "to rethink any prejudice they have about a low view of the sacraments in the Reformed tradition." (Meeter, 2007:56) "When we are baptized into the name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins... When we are baptized into the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he will dwell in us and sanctify us as members of Christ." (PsH, 1934:83) These things, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, are not simply

signified by baptism, nor are they merely promised in baptism. They are sealed to the baptized person. Baptism confirms that the baptized person has indeed received them.

Appealing to the Dortian formulary, the GKN Synod of Utrecht (1905) concluded that these are “benefits which God has bestowed upon our seed.” Thus, the Dortian formulary concludes with a prayer that thanks God that “Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins... and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son... and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.” (PsH, 1934:85) Accordingly, the Synod of Utrecht (1905) concluded that “the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promises of God, must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ.”

This is the doctrine of presumptive regeneration to which the CRCNA gave synodical sanction when the Synod of 1908 “expressed agreement with the four Conclusions of the Synod of Utrecht.” (Acts, 1908:41) Presumptive regeneration is not baptismal regeneration, which teaches that “regeneration ... is effected by baptism.” (Berkhof, 1938:441) Presumptive regeneration does not hold that baptized persons are regenerated by virtue of their baptism. Rather it teaches that the seed of the covenant must be held (or presumed) to be regenerated by virtue of God’s covenant promises. It is not baptism, but the promises of God, of which baptism is the appropriate sign and seal, that justify the presumption. Those promises are given to the seed of the covenant, and, accordingly, only the seed of the covenant may be baptized.

This understanding of baptism as the sign and seal of God’s covenant promises was especially evident in the CRCNA’s discussions of the *doopledenstelsel* and the baptism of adopted children. The *doopledenstelsel*, the baptism of children of baptized members who had not yet made a public profession of faith, had a long history in the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands, (Beets, 1946:95) where it was “the rule rather than the exception.” (Sheeres, 2013:xxviii) Its roots may be found in the theology of Guido de Brès, author of the BC, who wrote: “That covenant that God has established with our fathers is so mighty that it can never be violated or broken through the unbelief of the parents.” (in Gerstner, 1991:16) Within a thousand generation covenant, such children were considered the seed of the covenant; that is, they were recipients of God’s promises and, accordingly, had a right to baptism. Those who objected to the *doopledenstelsel* did not deny these children the right to baptism; they denied that their parents had a right to present them for baptism. (Heyns, 1926:212)

The same understanding of baptism as the sign and seal of God’s covenant promises was evident in the CRCNA’s discussion of the baptism of adopted children, particularly those of unknown or non-Christian lineage. The first synodical study committee appointed to consider this matter noted: “All are agreed that they may only be baptized when it appears that



they are in the covenant, and God's covenant ordinance requires this." (Acts, 1910:140) The question, as defined by a later synodical advisory committee, was this: "Whether foundlings, of whose origins one knows nothing, but who are adopted by believers as their children, can be viewed as included by God in his covenant." (Acts, 1930:89) Baptism was clearly understood to be the sign and seal of God's covenant promises. If such children were the seed of the covenant, they were recipients of God's promises and, according to the Dortian formulary, "ought to be baptized." (PsH, 1934:84) If, however, such children could not be considered the seed of the covenant, they were not recipients of God's promises and, therefore, should not be baptized.

Later synodical discussions about the baptism of adopted children reflect a shift in the denomination's understanding of baptism away from an emphasis on the promises of God toward an increasing emphasis on the parental promises. The Synod of 1949 acceded to an overture requesting that it "make it the position of the entire denomination that no adopted child shall be baptized until the probationary period is over and the adoption is final," (Acts, 1949:401) on the ground that "parents of an adopted child cannot satisfactorily answer the questions in the Form for the Baptism of Infants before the adoption is final. ... Parents must be sure the child is theirs before they can assume the baptismal vows." (Acts, 1949:20) It is noteworthy that the Synod of 1949 based the timing of an adopted child's baptism on the parents' ability to answer the baptismal questions and assume the baptismal vows. No longer was it being the seed of the covenant that qualified a child for baptism; it was the parents' competence to answer the baptismal questions and assume the baptismal vows that qualified a child for baptism.

An even greater shift in emphasis to the parental promises is evident in the discussions and decisions of the final CRCNA synod to address the baptism of adopted children, the Synod of 1982. In an overture to the Synod of 1982, Classis Grand Rapids South described baptism as "a forward-looking sacrament," the importance of which "lies in the future, in the vows the parents make to instruct the child and to cause the child to be instructed." (Acts, 1982:601) This description of baptism stands in stark contrast to the Dortian baptismal formulary, which presented baptism as a backward-looking sacrament that seals or confirms what believers presume God has already done in their children. The description of baptism in the overture from Classis Grand Rapids South clearly evidences the external view of covenant holiness toward which the CRCNA was moving.

The new liturgical formulary for baptism adopted by the Synod of 1976 reflected and reinforced this shift in the denomination's understanding of baptism. That this formulary did

not cause the shift is evident from overtures submitted to the Synod of 1964. Classis Lake Erie requested “a revision of, or the preparation of a new form for baptism,” on the grounds that “there is an insufficient response from both the parents and the congregation” in the Dortian formulary. (Acts, 1964:482) Classis Grand Rapids South argued that “the closing prayer seems to be based on a concept of baptismal regeneration not officially adopted by the church.” (Acts, 1964:444)

The formulary adopted by the Synod of 1976 answered both classes’ objections to the Dortian formulary. The 1976 formulary places greater emphasis on the parental promises and the congregational promises, a new element in the baptismal service introduced in the 1976 formulary. The formulary’s closing prayer does not thank God “that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins ... and received us through the Holy Spirit ... and so adopted us,” as did the Dortian formulary. (PsH, 1934:85) Instead it thanks God “for reassuring us again that you will forgive us and receive us as children in Christ.” (Acts, 1976:347) This change in verbal tense from the past tense to the future tense is significant.

Unlike the Dortian formulary, which focused on the acts of God sealed in baptism, the 1976 formulary “invokes the blessing and guidance of God upon all who were involved in the sacrament.” It focuses, not on the promises of God, but on the “vows just made” by the parents and the congregation. Rather than presume that the baptized child has received the seed of faith, it asked God to “enable them to respond in faith to the gospel,” and rather than presume that the baptized person has received the Holy Spirit, the 1976 formulary asks God to “fill them with your Spirit.” (Acts, 1976:347-348)

The same shift away from a doctrine of presumptive regeneration and an internal holiness view of covenant holiness to an external holiness view and an emphasis on the parental promises is evident in the formulary for baptism adopted by the Synod of 1994. Three of the four questions asked of parents who present their children for baptism concern the parents’ commitment to raise their child in the Christian faith. These questions are asked immediately prior to the baptism proper, meaning that “worshipers see a format that appears to be just like that of dedication: parents make their commitment and then baptism follows.” It is not surprising that “many worshipers see little difference between infant dedication and infant baptism.” (Nelesen, 2003:23)

The Synod of 2007 asked the FFC to “provide guidance concerning liturgical practices surrounding baptism” on the following ground: “Because liturgical practices teach doctrine, it is important that liturgical practices reflect the doctrinal standards of the denomination.” (Acts,

2007:261) One senses in this ground some skepticism about the extent to which the denomination's existing baptismal formularies reflected its doctrinal standards. The advisory committee that presented this recommendation seems to have been concerned that in the CRCNA baptism had become essentially a "wet dedication."

In fulfillment of this mandate the FFC presented the Synod of 2012 a set of formularies developed by the RCA, which it judged to be "consistent with the Reformed confessions [and] with prior synodical approved forms." (Agenda, 2012:421-422) The baptismal formulary bears striking similarities to the Dortian formulary. Its prayer of thanksgiving speaks explicitly about what God does in baptism. God "confirms to us that we are buried with Christ in his death, raised to share in his resurrection, and are renewed by the Holy Spirit." The prayer asks God to "pour on us your Holy Spirit, so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive new life." (Agenda, 2012:438) The formulary concludes with a prayer that thanks God "that you cleanse and renew these your children through your grace alone," (Agenda, 2012:439) referring explicitly to the children just baptized. The formulary is more amenable to a doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view than either the 1976 or 1994 formularies. The Synod of 2013 adopted it. (Acts, 2013:552)

This should not be understood, however, as signaling a complete shift in the denomination back to the understanding of baptism found in the Dortian formulary. Revisions made by the Synod of 2016 to the baptismal formulary presented to it by Worship Ministries reveals that concerns about presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view remain in the CRCNA.<sup>10</sup> Similar concerns were also expressed by opponents of paedocommunion.

The first overture to a CRCNA synod regarding paedocommunion, submitted to the Synod of 1984 by Classis Rocky Mountain, argued that "infant baptism and infant communion belong together." It is significant that the overture repeatedly referred to the Dortian baptismal formulary, rather than the 1976 formulary, to support its argument that "we can no longer view children as 'non-members' or 'minor members' or 'partial members' but as full-fledged members of the church." As full-fledged members of the church, children are "therefore, eligible for all its privileges." (Acts, 1984:421) The BC teaches that "our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and ingrafted into his family: his church." (Art. 35) It clearly affirms that people are ingrafted into the church by baptism. (Art. 34)

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<sup>10</sup> For those revisions, see pp. 148-149 above.

But in the CRCNA's paedocommunion discussion, whether baptized children may be counted among "those who are already born again" was debated. In an overture to the Synod of 2007, Classis Pella explicitly rejected the doctrine of presumptive regeneration, arguing that "there is no biblical warrant for contending that all baptized children may be presumed to be born anew by the Spirit of God." (Agenda, 2007:429) In an overture to the Synod of 2010, Classis Zeeland, seemingly ignorant of the difference between presumptive regeneration and baptismal regeneration, argued: "Unless we believe in baptismal regeneration, we cannot simply presume that such faith exists." (Agenda, 2010:666) In a doctrine of presumptive regeneration, however, "baptism is not the cause of these presumptions, but is an appropriate sign based on these presumptions," (Marsden, 1977:19-20) which are, in turn, based on God's covenant promises.

The CRCNA should reclaim a doctrine of presumptive regeneration,<sup>11</sup> while clearly distinguishing it from a doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Whereas the 1976 formulary moved the denomination away for this theology as it was expressed in the Dortian formulary, the formulary adopted by the Synod of 2013 is a hopeful sign of a shift back to this theology. "In general the children of believers should in accordance with the judgment of charity be regarded as elect and regenerate until from their 'talk' and their 'walk' the contrary is evident."<sup>12</sup> (Bavinck, 2008a:68, 124) Accordingly, they should be welcomed to the Lord's Supper. They are among those for whom "our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain." (BC Art. 35)

"The only basis for denying [covenant children] the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is ... covenant unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and rebellion." (Agenda, 1986:283) According to the HC, to withhold the sacrament from someone is to excommunicate them. The church may only withhold the sacraments from - thereby excluding from the Christian fellowship - "those who ... profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and after repeated and loving counsel refuse to abandon their errors and wickedness." (Q&A 85) The church should not withhold the

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<sup>11</sup> The Synod of 1968 declared that the Conclusions of Utrecht "no longer have the status of binding doctrinal deliverances," for practical reasons: "to take away an obstacle that hinders the CGKN from entering into a sister-relationship with our church" and to "facilitate the efforts of synod through its committee for Contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to unity with these churches," not for theological reasons. No ground adduced that the Conclusions of Utrecht are in conflict with either the Word of God or the confessional standards of the church. (Acts, 1968:62)

<sup>12</sup> The church extends the same "judgment of charity" to all its members. In the case of converts, it is extended on the basis of their profession; in the case of covenant children, it is extended on the basis of God's promises. CD I/17 requires this judgment of "children whom God calls out of this life in infancy."

sacraments from covenant children who should be regarded as elect and regenerate until from their talk and walk the contrary is evident.

The corollary to paedocommunion is the discipline of baptized members. Just as all baptized persons should be welcomed to the Lord's Supper, so all baptized persons should be subject to ecclesiastical discipline. When it becomes evident by their talk and walk that the church can no longer regard them as regenerate, they should be excommunicated. A study report submitted to the Synod of 1988 argued: "If children were in fellowship at the Lord's table... consistories would feel more compelled to pursue a course of formal discipline in the case of delinquent baptized members who come to the Lord's table." (Agenda, 1988:282) This, however, has not appeared to be the case in the CRCNA. The denomination's discussions of the discipline of baptized members were marked by ambivalence about the status of baptized members within the church. The discipline of said members was not explicitly addressed in the denomination's discussion of paedocommunion. This apparent reluctance to address the discipline of baptized members may reflect a lingering ambivalence about their status within the church, even though they are welcomed to the Lord's Supper. This ambivalence is due in part to the development of a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith and the church orderly distinction between baptized members and professing members.

### 7.5.2 ~ Public Profession of Faith

The confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes acknowledge only two sacraments instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord's Supper. (HC Q&A 68; BC Art. 33) Public profession of faith is not a sacrament, but a pastoral rite of the church that has been closely associated with both sacraments. It has been viewed as a baptized person's obedient response to God's call to them in their baptism,<sup>13</sup> and, historically, it was the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper. Because of its relationship to the sacraments and its influence on the denomination's understanding of the sacraments, an inquiry into the sacramental liturgies of the CRCNA is incomplete unless it also examines the liturgical formularies for public profession of faith.

The Netherlands Liturgy, which the CRCNA inherited from the *Afscheiding van 1834* and the Secession of 1857, did not include a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith.

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<sup>13</sup> "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore we are by God, though baptism, admonished of and obliged unto a new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in him, and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life." (PsH, 1934:83)

In the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands, profession of faith was “more a pastoral or a consistorial matter than a liturgical act.” (Diephouse, Kromminga, & Polman, 1998:835) The earliest Dutch Reformed church orders uniformly required that baptized members make a public profession of faith before they were admitted to the Lord’s Supper,<sup>14</sup> but they did not all require that this profession of faith take place within the context of congregational worship.<sup>15</sup>

In an effort to create uniformity of practice within the denomination, at its 2 June 1875 meeting, the general assembly adopted the questions of Voetius as found in Koelman’s *Office and Duties of Elders and Deacons*. (Sheeres, 2013:355) This decision was codified in Article 59 of the General Regulations adopted by the Synod of 1881. The Synod of 1890 revised the questions. (Acts, 1890:22) The CRCNA now had a set of synodical approved questions to be asked at public profession of faith, but it did not yet have a complete liturgical formulary.

The first request for such a formulary, submitted to the Synod of 1916 by Classis Illinois, described public profession of faith as “an ecclesiastical ceremony of great importance.” The request was denied by the Synod of 1916, which expressed concern that “by means of an established form the impression can be given that by means of making profession of faith one is incorporated into the fellowship.” (Acts, 1916:31) Such an impression would contradict the church’s *lex credendi*, which teaches that people are received into the church by baptism. (BC Art. 34) Unfortunately, the formulary for public profession of faith adopted by the Synod of 1932 created such an impression.

The synodical study committee appointed to develop a uniform order of worship called the attention of the Synod of 1920 to the desirability of a more complete formulary for public profession of faith. (Acts, 1920:204) The committee was no doubt influenced by Abraham Kuyper, (2009:259) who described profession of faith as “an ecclesiastical event of the highest importance” and urged the church “to provide an official form.” The Synod of 1920 appointed a committee to study the matter, resulting twelve years later in the adoption of the CRCNA’s first liturgical formulary for public profession of faith by the Synod of 1932.

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<sup>14</sup> These church orders only mention profession of faith in their articles on admission to the Lord’s Supper. Profession of faith had no standing in these church orders apart from that purpose. See Convent of Wesel (1568), Art. 7 (p. 36); Synod of Middelburg (1581), Art. XLIII (p. 115); Synod of ’s Gravenhage (1586), Art. LIV (p. 150); and Synod of Dort (1618-1619), Art. LXI (p. 171).

<sup>15</sup> The provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), (Art. LXX; p. 72) the national Synod of Dordrecht (1578), (Biesterfeld & Kuyper, 1982:93) and the Synod of Middelburg (1581), (Biesterfeld & Kuyper, 1982:123) allowed public profession to faith to take place “either in the consistory or in the church.”

Unlike the GKN's 1923 formulary, which spoke of making profession of faith "to the end that you may obtain access to the Lord's Holy Supper," (Acts, 1926:71) the 1932 formulary, which was modeled after the GKN formulary, spoke of "obtaining the privilege of full communion with the people of God." (PsH, 1934:86) "Full communion" "does not only give one access to the Lord's Supper but also to other privileges" of membership as well, including the right to take part in and vote at congregational meetings. (Agenda, 1930:95) The 1932 formulary ended with a solemn declaration: "In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God." (PsH, 1934:86)

This language implies that prior to their public profession of faith a baptized person's communion with or membership in the church is partial or incomplete. The solemn word of welcome, for which there is no parallel in the Dortian baptismal formulary, suggests that by profession of faith, rather than baptism, a person "joins the church." Indeed, within the CRCNA public profession of faith was frequently and erroneously referred to as "joining the church." In some cases, the formulary for and practice of public profession of faith also contributed to a doctrine of presumptive non-regeneration, which presumes that baptized children are non-regenerate until by a public profession of faith they prove otherwise. De Boer (1970:35) recorded the complaint of a high school student who thought the CRCNA "had reached the point of equating profession of faith with conversion."

Despite the careful language of the 1976 formulary, which acknowledged that those who professed their faith "were received into the church" when they were baptized and asked them, "Do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?" (PsH, 1987:964) "the perception of finally becoming a 'real' member of the church upon profession of faith [remained] quite popular in the CRCNA." (Agenda, 1989:64) Fennema (1985:8-9) suggests that "the idea remain[ed] because one gain[ed] the right to vote, becomes eligible to hold elected office, and, of course, accepts responsibility to contribute through budget envelopes" when one made profession of faith. These are the "other privileges" of membership spoken of by the 1930 study committee. (Acts, 1930:95) Profession of faith was no longer simply the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper, as it had been in the historical Reformed Church of the Netherlands and as it was in the GKN's 1923 formulary. In the CRCNA it became the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper and the means by which a person received the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership.

The Synod of 1988 maintained that a public profession of faith was necessary for admission to the Lord's Supper. However, it encouraged covenant children "to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper." It noted that this profession of faith was "not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation." (Acts, 1988:558-560) The liturgical formulary adopted by the Synod of 1995 for such professions of faith reflects a return to the "first communion" model of the earliest Dutch Reformed churches.

The Synod of 1995 gave local consistories the responsibility of devising "appropriate means" of securing a commitment to the Reformed confessions from those who had made a younger profession of faith and of admitting them to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership when they reached the age of 18. The Synod of 1995 "deliberately refused to dictate that this rite of passage be observed in a worship service," (De Moor, 2010:330) and the Synod of 1999 defeated a recommendation that would have required "a reaffirmation of faith" - essentially a second public profession of faith. (Acts, 1999:563)

The Synod of 2010, however, declared that "a formal public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper is not required by Scripture or the confessions," (Acts, 2010:811) and the Synod of 2011 removed the requirement from the CO. No longer required for admission to the Lord's Supper, profession of faith was now accorded its own place in the CO as the means by which a person becomes "a confessing member" with the accompanying privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership. (Acts, 2011:829-830) That the Synod of 2011 allowed each consistory "to determine an appropriate age at which a confessing members shall receive [those] privileges and responsibilities" (Agenda, 2011:574) suggests that it anticipated that younger children would continue to make public professions of faith.

Additional liturgical formularies for public profession of faith were adopted by the Synods of 2013 and 2016. The 2013 formulary presents profession of faith as a baptized person's obedient response to the call of their baptism to profess faith in Jesus Christ. It says nothing about admission to the Lord's Supper or admission to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership. In the 2016 formulary, profession of faith is the means by which a baptized person, already admitted to the Lord's Supper, becomes a "full participant in the life and mission of this congregation," (Agenda, 2016:102) that is, receives the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership.

The CRCNA's current practice of public profession of faith is confusing. There is no single, consistent understanding of the rite in its five synodical approved liturgical formularies. Is public profession of faith the means by which a person is admitted to the Lord's Supper, as



in the 1995 formulary? Is it the means by which a person is admitted to the privileges and responsibilities of adult church membership, as in the 2016 formulary? Or is it both, as in the 1932 and 1976 formularies?

Historically, public profession of faith was the means by which a baptized person was admitted to the Lord's Supper. But, as the Synod of 2010 acknowledged, that church orderly requirement is "not required by Scripture or the confessions." (Acts, 2010:811) A study report to the Synod of 1988 had noted:

Once the historic connection between public profession and admittance to the Lord's table is dissolved, the question as to the necessity and legitimacy of public profession of faith as we have come to know it in the CRCNA arises with new urgency. What is the biblical warrant for this liturgical ceremony and what is its theological and practical significance in the life of maturing covenant children? (Agenda, 1988:286)

The CRCNA has not yet answered that question about the necessity and legitimacy of public profession of faith. Indeed, by the Synod of 2010's own admission, the rite is not required by Scripture or the confessions. There is no biblical warrant for it. Its theological significance has been explained as "a time to celebrate and affirm baptismal identity." (Agenda, 2010:609) Profession of faith can be viewed as a baptized person's obedient response to the call of their baptism to "put [their] trust for life and death in Christ." (PsH, 1987:954) It is, however, neither their first response nor their only response to that call. It is precisely because a person has already put their trust for life and death in Christ that someone makes a public profession of faith. When someone makes a public profession of faith, they are not thereby putting their trust in Christ, but expressing that their trust is in Christ. The liturgical rite of public profession of faith is not necessary for someone to respond obediently to the call of their baptism.

Furthermore, as the FFC rightly noted, "public professions of faith are a lifelong practice rather than a once-in-a-lifetime event. Some of these professions happen at significant life moments," such as when parents present a child for baptism or when a person is ordained and installed to ecclesiastical office. Others "happen as a recurring part of worship, as the congregation recites creeds, sings songs that testify to God's goodness" and celebrates the Lord's Supper. (Agenda, 2010:609-610) Given the committee's regret that "public profession of faith has tended to be seen as a once-in-a-lifetime event, overshadowing the fact that the act of professing faith happens throughout life and in many and varied ways in the life of a congregation" and its acknowledgment that "profession of faith may differ from other expressions of faith in degree, but not in kind" and that "we should gratefully receive all expressions of faith ... as

likely signs of God’s regenerating work,” it is unclear why the committee continued to encourage a once-in-a-lifetime liturgical rite of public profession of faith.

Lacking a solid biblical and theological rationale for the liturgical rite of public profession of faith, the FFC resorted to “significant developmental and psychological reasons for affirming profession of faith.” (Agenda, 2010:609; Agenda, 2011:560) The committee left these reasons undefined, but from their anticipation that “this event will naturally occur toward the end of high school,” (Agenda, 2013:330) one concludes that the committee understood profession of faith to be a rite of passage into adulthood. This contradicts the committee’s encouragement to congregations “to be sensitive to the faith often found in younger children, and to encourage them to consider professing their faith as the Synods of 1988 and 1995 have encouraged.” (Agenda, 2011:561) For such children profession of faith is not a rite of passage into adulthood. The “significant developmental and psychological reasons for affirming profession of faith” are not relevant to their professions of faith. The committee did not recommend a comparable rite for such children when they come of age. Instead it recommended that “the elders may want to postpone some responsibilities and privileges of confessing membership until a later age,” (Agenda, 2013:330) suggesting that no subsequent rite of passage ceremony was expected.

Unable to provide biblical warrant for the rite of public profession of faith, the CRCNA should reconsider the necessity of this liturgical practice, especially in light of its own confessional commitment: “We reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind or force our consciences in any way.” (BC Art. 32)

### **7.5.3 ~ The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper**

The confessions to which the CRCNA subscribe present the sacraments as a means of grace by which God “preserves, continues, and completes” his work of grace in us. (CD V/14) “The Holy Spirit ... confirms our faith through our use of the holy sacraments.” (HC Q&A 65) The Lord’s Supper is “a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us ... he makes us enjoy himself ... as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.” Indeed, “we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood.” (BC Art. 35)

The confessions do not deny that the Lord’s Supper includes a commemoration of Christ, but, according to the confessions, “this by no means expresses, much less exhausts, the significance of the Lord’s Supper.” (De Jong, 1980:381) The church’s *lex credendi* teaches that

the Lord's Supper is primarily a communication of Christ by the Holy Spirit. But in the church's *lex orandi*, its liturgical formularies for the Lord's Supper, the reverse was often true. The Dortian formulary, the revisions adopted by the Synod of 1964, and the 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament unduly emphasized the commemorative aspect of the Lord's Supper. The long didactic sections in the Dortian and 1964 formularies teach that the sacrament's efficacy is subjective; that is, efficacy depends on the communicant - what they hear, consider, remember, understand, and believe. The Zwinglian *Londonse aenhangsel*, which exhorts communicants to "remember and believe" as they partake of the sacramental symbols, reinforces this view. This, along with a heavy emphasis on Paul's warning against partaking in an unworthy manner, thereby eating and drinking judgment to oneself, (1 Cor. 11:27-29) excluded children from participating in the Lord's Supper because they lack the ability to examine themselves and the maturity to understand the sacrament.

The 1981 Service omitted both the lengthy didactic sections of the Dortian and 1964 formularies and Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29. The more celebratory nature of the 1981 Service teaches that the sacrament is not primarily to be understood, but experienced, which, of course, children can do. The 1981 Service provided a liturgical formulary in which children could potentially participate in the sacrament. But, contra the church's *lex credendi*, this *lex orandi* continued to convey the Zwinglian memorialist understanding of the sacrament that persisted in the CRCNA. It explicitly described the sacrament as "a memorial of Christ's death." (PsH, 1987:974)

Such a limited understanding of the Lord's Supper, which prevailed for much of the CRCNA's history, contributed to the infrequency with which it celebrated the Lord's Supper and to the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper on Good Friday, rather than Easter. The increasing frequency with which CRCNA congregations are celebrating the Lord's Supper does not necessarily indicate a revival of the Calvinist understanding of the sacrament as a communication of Christ found in its confessions. Most congregations remain content with monthly celebrations of the Lord's Supper, rather than the weekly celebrations advocated by Calvin.

The formularies adopted by the Synod of 1994 - which restored a prayer of consecration from the 1968 Order for Communion that was lost in the 1978 revision and 1981 Service of Word and Sacrament and offered alternatives to the *Londonse aenhangsel* - conveyed the communication of Christ in the sacrament more clearly than the CRCNA's previous liturgical formularies. The 1994 formularies did not emphasize the commemorative aspect of the sacrament as strongly as the earlier formularies had. However, what the formularies emphasized most was

not the communication of Christ in the sacrament, but the communicants' communion with one another. In these formularies, the work of the Spirit in the sacrament is connected with the unity of the church more often than it is connected with a communication of Christ. This emphasis on communicants' communion with one another influenced the CRCNA's acceptance of paedocommunion: If children are members of the church by baptism, why exclude them from the Lord's Supper?

Because there is no longer a single liturgical formulary with which all congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is difficult to judge what the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA today teaches. What the celebration of the Lord's Supper teaches in a particular congregation depends on which of the synodical approved formularies the congregation uses or adapts for its celebrations. For most of its history, the liturgical formularies for and the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA taught a Zwinglian understanding of the sacrament, contra the Calvinist understanding of the confessions to which the church subscribes. Although less confessional understandings still remain in the denomination, as the revisions to the Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion adopted by the Synod of 2016 indicate, the formulary adopted by the Synod of 2016 is a hopeful sign that the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA will one day be experienced by all as "a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits." (BC Art. 35)

## 7.6 ~ *Lex Vivendi*

A relationship exists, not only between worship (*lex orandi*) and belief (*lex credendi*), but also between worship (*lex orandi*) and life (*lex [con]vivendi*). Thus, Smit (1997:263n6; 2007:430-431; 2018:40) expands the ancient dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* to include *lex (con)vivendi* (the rule of life [together]).<sup>16</sup> "The ways Christians worship, the ways they believe, and the ways they live together ... ought to influence one another." (Smit, 1997:263n6) Smit (2018:40) argues that the relationship between *lex orandi* and *lex vivendi* is dialectic. Worship shapes life; life influences worship.

The story of South Africa is instructive. Smit (2018:40) writes: "As South Africans we are painfully aware of the role of worship in our apartheid past - since 1857, but also during

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<sup>16</sup> Smit (1997:263n6) cites Jörn K.P. 1988. *Lex orandi - lex credendi - lex convivendi*, in *Der Lebensbezug des Gottesdienstes: Studien zu seinem kirchlichen und kulturellen Kontext*. München: Chr. Kaiser. 12-22. as the source of this phrase.

the apartheid years themselves.”<sup>17</sup> The request of rural and frontier congregations to allow separate facilities and services for black converts was prompted by their *lex vivendi*. The Synod of 1857 of the Dutch Reformed Church granted their request “due to the weakness of some.” But, as Smit (2007:17) notes, “what started as an exception and concession, gradually became common practice and later determined the structure and order of the church.” This new *lex orandi* - not only separate communion tables, but separate churches - “would later form the religious roots of the ideology and political policy of apartheid,” a new *lex vivendi*.<sup>18</sup>

The Belhar Confession’s<sup>19</sup> argument that the biblical teaching on the unity the church (Eph. 2:11-22), the church’s *lex credendi*, “must become be manifested” in its *lex orandi*, including being “baptized with one baptism,” and “eating of one bread and drinking of one cup,”<sup>20</sup> acknowledges the possibility of a new *lex orandi*<sup>21</sup> creating a new *lex vivendi* - the rejection of “any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church.”<sup>22</sup> (Article 2)

The influence of the church’s *lex vivendi* on its *lex orandi* and the implications of its *lex orandi* for its *lex vivendi* warrant further study beyond what this dissertation provides. Smit’s (1997:268) call to South African theologians to attend to the relationship of *lex credendi*, *lex orandi*, *lex (con)vivendi* certainly applies to theologians in other countries and on other continents as well.<sup>23</sup> Muller’s (2006) discussion of how a renewal of basic Christian rituals, notably the sacraments, can foster a ministry of reconciliation has relevance well beyond

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as de Gruchy (1986) argued, “liturgy has been used to prevent the gospel from taking hold.”

<sup>18</sup> See Gerstner (1991) for the influence of early Dutch Reformed baptismal practices, particular the *doopledensel* and the (non)baptism of adopted children on the development of Afrikaaner nationalism.

<sup>19</sup> Although the Belhar Confession is not part of the CRCNA’s *lex credendi*, that is, the denomination does not subscribe to it in the same manner in which it subscribes to the BC, the HC, and the CD, the CRCNA recognizes that the Belhar Confession “speaks to global realities and uniquely enables the CRCNA to formally states its commitment to and live out key biblical principles.” (Acts, 2012:766)

<sup>20</sup> Contra the practice of separate communion services sanctioned by the Dutch Reformed Church’s Synod of 1857.

<sup>21</sup> As Smit (1997:272) notes, *lex orandi* is not limited to sacramental practices: “In many South African churches, particularly during the apartheid years, it was customary to develop liturgies with a view to specific ethical issues and challenges, with suggestions for prayers and litanies, scripture readings and sermons, etc. This is an initiative that could be very helpful.”

<sup>22</sup> Article 3 of the Belhar Confession, which explicit rejects “the forced separation of people on a racial basis,” applies this vision to the wider community.

<sup>23</sup> Smit (1997:268; 2007:449-451) offers Nicholas Wolterstorff’s (1983) *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* as “one very instructive way to explain the relationship between Christian liturgy and public life.” For a more recent

the South African context in which it was written. Smith's (2009:182-190, 197-203) discussion of the *lex vivendi* implications of the church's sacramental liturgies<sup>24</sup> may provide a helpful point of departure for this further theological enterprise.

## 7.7 ~ Conclusions & Recommendations

1. The polity of the CRCNA reflects the denominational or synodical model. The declaration of the Synod of 1930 that denied synod the authority to adopt a uniform order of worship can be regarded as anomalous. The CRCNA grants synod significant authority over the worship life of the church, including the authority to adopt liturgical formularies with which the sacraments should be celebrated.
2. Granting synod this authority was designed to ensure uniformity of worship within the denomination. In the last fifty years (1968-present), however, an emphasis on uniformity has given way to an increasing emphasis on flexibility and diversity. The CRCNA no longer requires uniformity, but consistency, in worship. This consistency is maintained by containing diversity and flexibility within synodical approved parameters. Increased diversity and flexibility in the CRCNA is not a move toward a more congregational model of church polity.
3. In the CRCNA, the liturgical formularies are subordinate to and should be consistent with the confessions to which the church subscribes.
4. The CRCNA's baptismal practice, especially the formularies adopted by the Synods of 1976 and 1994, has increasingly emphasized the parents' promises rather than the actions of God signed and sealed to the baptized person. Contra the church's confessional standards, which reflect the internal holiness view of covenantal holiness and support a doctrine of presumptive regeneration, these formularies reflect an external holiness view.
5. The baptismal formulary adopted by the Synod of 2013 is more amenable to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the internal holiness view of covenantal holiness to which the CRCNA should return. "In general the children of believers should in accordance with the judgment of charity be regarded as elect and regenerate until from their 'talk' and their 'walk' the contrary is evident." (Bavinck, 2008a:68, 124) The CD I/17 demands this judgment of covenant children "whom God calls out of this life in infancy."

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collection of Wolterstorff's essays on this relationship, see Wolterstorff (2011). See Wolterstorff (2013) for an account of the significant way in which he has been influenced by the story and theologians of South Africa.

<sup>24</sup> Smith interacts with liturgical formularies, including those into which this dissertation has inquired.

6. Accordingly, covenant children should be welcomed to the Lord's Supper. They should also be subject to ecclesiastical discipline, and, should it become evident from their walk and talk that the church can no longer regard them as regenerate, the church should excommunicate them. The CRCNA should address its apparent reluctance to attend to the discipline of baptized members.
7. The CRCNA's reluctance to attend to the discipline of baptized members reflects an ambivalence about the status of said members caused by the development of a liturgical formulary for public profession of faith and of a church orderly distinction between baptized members and confessing members.
8. The impression thereby caused, that it is by the rite of public profession of faith that a person "joins the church," contradicts the confessions to which the CRCNA subscribes, which teach that people are received into the church by baptism. (BC Art. 34)
9. Lacking a clear biblical warrant for either development, the CRCNA should reconsider the necessity of public profession of faith and the church orderly distinction introduced in the RCO between baptized members and confessing members.
10. The celebration of the Lord's Supper in the CRCNA has not always been consistent with the confessions to which the church subscribes. Though the confessions teach that the Lord's Supper is primarily a communication of Christ, most of the denomination's synodical approved formularies have taught a Zwinglian understanding of the Lord's Supper as primarily a commemoration of Christ.
11. It was not a renewed emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a communication of Christ in the CRCNA's most recently approved formularies, but the omission of lengthy didactic expositions of the sacrament, the omission of Paul's warning against eating and drinking judgment to oneself, and an increasing emphasis on communicants' communion with one another that influenced the CRCNA's acceptance of paedocommunion.
12. Although Zwinglian understandings of the Lord's Supper remain in the CRCNA, the formulary adopted by the Synod of 2016 is a hopeful sign that the denomination's practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper may become consistent with its confessions, which teach that the sacrament "is a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits." (BC Art. 35)

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