

# URCNA Synod Escondido 2001 Decision on Creation, with related excerpts.

Taken from Acts of Synod 2001

## ARTICLE XXXVIII

### **Advisory Committee 2**

Reporter: Rev. Mark D. Vander Hart

Materials: Overtures 6, 11, 12, and OCRC concerns [See pp. 162-63, 174-75, 35]

### **Recommendation 1**

That synod affirm that the Bible teaches that God created all things good and in six historical days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20:11).

- a. Motion to amend by replacing the “historical” with” ordinary days as we know them today.”  
*Defeated*
- b. Motion to amend by omitting “historical” and “defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20:11).”  
*Defeated*
- c. A substitute motion is offered: “That synod affirm that the Bible rules out any evolutionary view, including so-called theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures.”  
*Defeated*
- d. Motion to postpone Recommendation 1 indefinitely.  
*Defeated*

[Advisory Committee 2 is continued in Article XLIII]

## ARTICLE XLIII

### **Advisory Committee 2** (continued from Article XXXVIII)

#### A. Recommendation 1, continued

1. The main notion in its original form from the committee is before the body.
  - a. Motion to amend by adding the following: “This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures.” *Adopted*
  - b. Motion to table part one until part two of Recommendation 1 has been before us. *Adopted*
  
2. Part two of Recommendation 1: That synod affirm that the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity teach:
  - The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (Belgic Confession V; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII).
  - Necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (Belgic Confession VII; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII).
  - God the Father almighty created the heavens and the earth and all things visible and invisible (Apostle’s and Nicene Creed).
  - The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day IX).
  - God gave every creature its shape and being (Belgic Confession XII).
  - The creation and fall of man. “God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to the devil.” (Belgic Confession XIV).
  - The historicity of Adam (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII.20; Canons of Dort III, IV.1).
  - Man was created good, in a garden and was led into temptation by the devil (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day III and IV).
  - God’s words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VI).
  - Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (Belgic Confession XVI).

- Adam’s fall into sin and our connection to it. (Canons of Dort I.1).
  - God came seeking man when he trembling fled from Him (Belgic Confession XVII).
  - Adam fled from God by hiding behind the fig leaves (Belgic Confession XXIII).
- a. Motion to amend by adding to the preamble “that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds . . . .” *Adopted*
  - b. The preamble now reads: “Synod affirms that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity:”
  - c. Motion to amend the eighth item listed, by adding before the citations from the creeds: “and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience.” *Adopted*
  - d. The eighth item now reads: “Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Days III and IV).”
  - e. Motion to table this report and consider Overture VI (see page 162-63). *Defeated*
  - f. Motion to amend by deleting the thirteenth (last) item in the list, namely, “Adam fled from God by hiding behind the fig leaves (Belgic Confession XXIII).” *Adopted*
  - g. The main motion with the amendments is *adopted.*
3. Motion to remove from the table the first part of Recommendation 1 (see A.1, above). *Adopted*
    - a. Motion to amend by removing the word “historical” from the statement. *Adopted*
    - b. The statement now reads: “Synod affirms that the Bible teaches that God created all things good in six days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 &2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures.” *Adopted*
    - c. Motion to place the statement on creation in six days (see b, above) as last item in list under A.2., above, with the addition of (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day IX) at the conclusion. *Adopted*
    - d. The completed statement on creation reads as follows: “Synod affirms that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity:
      - The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (Belgic Confession V; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII).
      - Necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (Belgic Confession VII; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII).
      - God the Father almighty created the heavens and the earth and all things visible and invisible (Apostle’s and Nicene Creed).
      - The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day IX).
      - God gave every creature its shape and being (Belgic Confession XII).
      - The creation and fall of man. “God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to the devil.” (Belgic Confession XIV).
      - The historicity of Adam (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VII.20; Canons of Dort III, IV.1).
      - Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day III and IV).
      - God’s words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day VI).
      - Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (Belgic Confession XVI).
      - Adam’s fall into sin and our connection to it (Canons of Dort I.1).
      - God came seeking man when he, trembling, fled from Him (Belgic Confession XVII).
      - God created all things good in six days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 &2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s

Day IX).

4. Synod affirm our commitment as churches to discipline those who teach anything that stands in conflict with the Bible, as summarized in the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.
  - a. Motion to postpone this indefinitely. *Defeated*
  - b. Main motion is *adopted.*
5. Synod affirm our commitment as churches to church orderly procedure in dealing with the matters of discipline of those whose teaching stands in conflict with the Bible as summarized in the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.
  - a. Motion to amend by changing “to church orderly procedure” to read “ to the Church Order’s procedure.” *Adopted*
  - b. Motion to amend by changing “with the Bible as summarized” to “with the Bible, or as summarized.” *Defeated*
  - c. Motion as amended is *adopted.*
  - d. The statement now reads: “Synod affirm our commitment as churches to the Church Order’s procedure in dealing with matters of discipline of those whose teaching stands in conflict with the Bible as summarized in the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.”
  - e. Motion to adopt grounds 1 - 4 for the record. They read as follows:

Grounds:

1. The above is consistent with the basis of our federative unity, which we declare is in the Bible as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. We have said together in the introduction of our church order:

*We as a federation of churches declare complete subjection and obedience to the Word of God delivered to us in the inspired, infallible and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. We believe and are fully persuaded that the Reformed Creeds do fully agree with the Word of God and therefore do subscribe to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. . . The churches of the federation, although distinct, voluntarily display their unity by a common confession and church order.*

2. The Three Forms of Unity adequately contain the parameters within which the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 can responsibly take place.
3. The above will provide the context in which we are able to protect the churches from heresy and spur one another onto faithful and vigilant discipline in order to protect our confessional unity. There is no specific case before this synod in which someone has been charged with violating the Three Forms of Unity regarding matters put forward by any of the overtures.
4. This provides a brotherly way to address the concerns raised by the OCRC and to give pastoral response for the members of our own federation.

*Adopted*

- B. Recommendation 2: That this be our response to Overtures 6, 11, and 12 and the concerns expressed to us by the OCRC (Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches).
  1. Motion to substitute the statements 5-9 listed in Overture 6, pp. 162-63. *Defeated*
  2. Recommendation 2 is *adopted.*

## Overture VI

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2001 to adopt the following statements regarding the interpretation of Scripture and more specifically, interpreting the creation account Genesis:

1. Synod affirms and subscribes to the Bible as the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. [Belgic Confession, Arts. 3, 4, 5] We therefore believe that the Scriptures, and more specifically, Genesis, gives an authentic, although not exhaustive, history of creation.
2. Synod affirms that the sovereign God created all things out of nothing by the Word of His Power, in space of six days, and all very good. [Ps. 33:6. John 1:1-3, Heb. 11:3, 2 Pet. 3:5]
3. Synod affirms that the whole creation was accomplished in six ordinary days [Gen. 1:3-2:2; Ex. 20:11]. The creation days are clearly defined in Scripture as each being composed of a period of darkness and a period of light, and as each having evening and morning and are presented as following chronologically one after the other. [Gen. 1:5b, 8b, 13, 19, 23, 31b; Ex. 20:19]
4. Synod affirms that all plants and animals and all living things were created “after their own kind.” [Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25] The body of man, the crown of creation, was formed immediately by God from the dust of the earth [Gen. 2:7, Eccl. 12:7], and the woman of the rib of man, “after the image and the likeness of God.” [Gen. 1:26, 27; Belgic Confession Art. 14]
5. Synod affirms that the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is a straightforward, accurate and historical narrative showing the origin of all things including the human race, whereas the more specific focus of the account of creation in Chapter 2 of Genesis is the history of the first man and woman.
6. Synod rejects any method of Biblical interpretation that posits a contradiction between the account of creation in Genesis 1 and the account in Genesis 2.
7. Synod rejects any method of Biblical interpretation that views the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as limited to being a literary figure of speech or a poetic device providing a pedagogical framework for affirming that God created all things.

8. Synod rejects any method of Biblical interpretation that espouses either a non-chronological or a non-historical view of the days mentioned in Genesis 1.
9. Synod rejects any readings of the creation account that reinterprets the meaning of words from the “ordinary, natural sense” without weighty exegetical warrant.

Grounds:

1. Genesis 1 is divinely inspired history. It is sufficiently clear and understandable, in the context of the book of Genesis and of the whole Scripture, to make the affirmations above.
2. Different methods of interpreting the creation account of Genesis challenge the view historically held by the churches. These differences among us imperil the peace and unity of the churches in the federation and therefore the matter must be addressed by the churches.
3. Any interpretation of Scripture that challenges or rejects the natural, ordinary meaning of the words of Scripture without weighty exegetical warrant minimizes our doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture.
4. Any exegetical principles applied to interpreting the creation account must do justice to the grammatical/historical hermeneutic historically held and applied among us.
5. Any interpretation of Genesis 1 must adequately address the many specific historical details clearly revealed in that part of Scripture, for example:
  - a) that the creation was accomplished supernaturally by a series of divine “fiats”, that is “by the word,” not by way of a process but immediately;
  - b) that each of the “six days” is clearly distinguished by “evening and morning” as well as by its numbering;
  - c) that each of the six days follow in the sequence of those numbers.
6. Any interpretation of Genesis must adequately address, and not contradict, the clear statement in Exodus 20 on the fourth commandment that God created the world in six days, and instituted the Sabbath day rest on the seventh.

Classis Michigan  
Rev. W. H. Oord, clerk

**Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches in Synodical Session on October 21 and 22, 1999**

G.J. van Daalen, Clerk of Synod '99, P.O. Box 284, Kleinburg, ON, L0J 1CO, Canada

December 2, 1999

United Reformed Churches of North America  
Attention: Rev. J. Julien, Clerk  
345-193rd Place  
Lansing, Illinois  
60438 USA

Dear Brothers:

On behalf of the OCR Churches, meeting in Synod 1999, we express our gratitude for the communication of your churches and your invitation that we unite together in one federative body.

We are thankful to our God that your invitation has come to us. It has made us once again conscious that we ought to strive for unity as we came out of the same wayward CRC federation; our roots are the same. Our consistories and congregations have since been deeply involved in discussions on unity. Our delegates at Synod did not come unprepared, knowing the sentiments of their home churches, where concerns were raised related to union and issues involved. We assure you that your invitation is taken seriously in our churches. And so the OCRC delegates seriously considered your invitation resulting in the adoption of the following motion:

*We wholeheartedly express the unity which we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your officebearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation.*

In our mutual pursuit of confessional and federative unity, we pray that our Covenant God will bless your deliberations as you consider our answer and request.

May the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, bless us together in this time of testing to seek and to find each other in true unity of faith and confession.

In His Service,

G.J. van Daalen  
Clerk of Synod '99



## Overture XI

The council of the Covenant United Reformed Church of Pantego, North Carolina, overtures the meeting of Synod, June 2001, in Escondido California, to clarify for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches our position regarding the six days of creation, namely that according to Scripture God created the world in six days, the word day understood according to common usage.

Grounds:

1. The OCRC have asked us to clarify our position, and brotherly relations requires that we do so.<sup>1</sup>
2. There are solid exegetical reasons for understanding the word 'day' as meaning what we commonly understand as day.<sup>2</sup>
3. Although our confessions do not specifically deal with the issue of six day creation, the Heidelberg's treatment of the fourth commandment (Q&A 92, 103) would require that the days of creation be understood in the normal sense. This is supported by Ursinus' commentary on it (see pp. 558, 561-145). Belgic Confession Article 12 also suggests a literal interpretation of Genesis 1. This Interpretation is consistent with the understanding of the Reformed church in history (see, e.g., Westminster Confession Chapter IV 1).<sup>3</sup>
4. It is our duty to discover what the Biblical author has said and what he intended to mean, and to communicate this to the church and world at large.

This overture was before Classis Eastern U. S. on October 18, 2000, and was defeated.

## Overture XII

The consistory of the Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa overtures the Synod of United Reformed Churches in North America, to declare that with respect to the days of Genesis 1, understanding them to be normal 24 hour periods of time, is the position most consistent with our confessions.

Grounds:

1. While our confessions are not as specific as they could be on this subject, nevertheless it can be argued that to understand the days of Genesis 1 as anything other than 24 hour days in the normal sense of the word would be inconsistent with what the confessions say about God creating all things out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 9, Belgic Confession Article 12)
2. While it is true that the Hebrew term for day does not always refer to a specific 24 hour period of time (ex. Hosea 2:15), nevertheless, given how Genesis 1 speaks of evening and morning in the context of the days of the creation week, and given how Exodus 20:11 refers to the days of the creation week to support the establishment of the Sabbath day, understanding the days of the creation week to be normal, 24 hour periods of time is the most exegetically responsible conclusion. Therefore, other positions, such as the framework hypothesis, are not fully consistent with the confession of Belgic Confession Article 5 that we believe without a doubt all things contained in the books of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup>They adopted the following motion: "We wholeheartedly express the unity we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your officebearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation."

<sup>2</sup>See article by Dr. B. Grossman, 'The Light He Called Day,' MJT 3/1 (1987). See also article by Dr Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., 'From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3,' Chapter 8, pp153ff, Did God Create In Six Days?, Southern Presb. Press, 1999

<sup>3</sup>Westminster Confession of Faith, IV.1 reads: "It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein whether visible or invisible, **in the space of six days**; and all very good" [emphasis ours].

3. The Westminster Confessions refer to how God created all things in the space of six days (The Confessions of Faith, Chapter IV, paragraph 1; The Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 15; The Shorter Catechism, Q. & A. 9). A straightforward reading of these statements would certainly suggest 24 hour days in the usual sense of the word. While we do not officially subscribe to the Westminster Standards, many of us do find them to be consistent with our own Reformed confessions.
4. While it would be unwise to begin adopting official position papers that in effect become extra confessional statements, nevertheless we do need to express a common understanding of how our confessions speak to crucial contemporary issues such as the one addressed in this overture.
5. A divisive battle over this issue would be detrimental to our unity as a federation. Making a simple declaration, with the understanding that each consistory will be responsible for how it responds to such a declaration, might help avoid such a battle by allowing for local autonomy while at the same time making clear the common understanding of the churches.
6. Making a simple declaration based on our confessions would be consistent with our past practice at Classis. For example, at our 1999 classis meeting we made a simple declaration regarding what our confessions say about the connection between profession of faith and full participation in the Lord's Supper.
7. Making such a declaration at the level of classis and synod would help foster unity with those Orthodox Christian Reformed churches that are concerned about our stand on this issue.

Done in consistory on Nov. 21, 2000

Don Tuininga, clerk

This overture was before Classis Western Canada of the United Reformed Churches in North America held on March 8 & 9, 2001 and was defeated by a vote of 14 to 11.