

THE ABIDING LEGACY OF THE REFORMATION'S CONFESSIONAL ORTHODOXY: THE REQUIRED VOWS OF WESTMINSTER SEMINARY PROFESSORS AND NAPARC MINISTERS¹

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ABSTRACT: Since the Reformed faith has been characterized from its sixteenth century origins, thus for both Catholic and Protestant the century was an era characterized by faith speaking through the composition of their respective confessions of faith. This article begin to examine the problems raised by confessional subscription for Protestantism and its solutions. The various purposes for confessional subscription to the historic creeds of the Reformation and confessional subscription at Westminster Theological Seminary, and finally confessional subscription in the PCA and the OPC are also discussed. This article argues that the abiding legacy of the Reformation's Confessional Orthodoxy manifested in the required vows of Westminster Seminary professors and NAPARC ministers as shown in the appendix.

KEYWORDS: *creeds; confessions; catechisms; Reformed.*

ABSTRAK: Karakter permulaan iman Reformed telah muncul dari abad keenam belas; bagi pihak Katolik maupun Protestan abad tersebut adalah era yang ditandai oleh pernyataan iman melalui pengakuan iman mereka masing-masing. Artikel ini mulai memeriksa masalah-masalah yang diangkat oleh pengakuan yang diterima oleh Protestan dan membahas solusinya. Berbagai tujuan untuk mengadopsi pengakuan dari kredo Reformasi yang bersejarah dan pengakuan yang diadopsi di Westminster

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Theological Seminary, dan akhirnya pengakuan di PCA dan OPC juga dibahas. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa warisan mengikat dari Ortodoksi Pengakuan Reformasi bermanifestasi di dalam sumpah yang diwajibkan bagi para profesor di Westminster Seminary dan para pejabat di NAPARC yang terlampir di appendix.

KATA KUNCI: *kredo; pengakuan; katekismus; Reformed.*

Part II: Confessionalism at Westminster Theological Seminary²

The Reformed faith has been characterized from its Sixteenth Century origins by a profound desire to declare its convictions to its own adherents, the surrounding nations and to the generations to come. This is strikingly evident when the sheer numbers of Reformed creeds, catechisms and Confessions are considered from the earliest examples in the Swiss Reformation to the culminating Creeds of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its variants.³

This should not be surprising since the Sixteenth Century was an era of faith. For the medieval Catholic tradition, it was implicit faith in the Roman Church and her magisterial authority expressed by meritorious works of penance. For the Protestant, it was faith in Holy Scripture with a simultaneous emphasis upon faith as the sole means of justification of sinners *coram Deo*. But in spite of all the era's theological tensions, the Sixteenth Century was united in the Pauline spirit of 2 Corinthians 4:13 (KJV), ". . . having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, 'I believed, and therefore have I spoken'; we also believe, and therefore speak." Thus, for both Catholic and Protestant the Sixteenth Century was an era characterized by faith speaking through the composition of their respective confessions of faith.

The Problems Raised by Confessional Subscription for Protestantism

In tandem with the confessional outlook of the Sixteenth Century was the logically subordinate question of individual subscription to the confessions of faith. While both Protestants and Catholics required subscription to their confessions of faith, from the Roman perspective, subscription to

² See Peter Lillback, "Confessional Subscription Among the Sixteenth Century Reformers," in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. David W. Hall (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 33-66.

³ See, for example, Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) where seven creedal documents are compared or Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III where over twenty Reformational creedal texts are presented.

protestant creeds appeared to be inherently contradictory. Hugh Pope declares,

That the Catholic Church, which claims the prerogative of teaching revealed truth with infallible certitude, should have drawn up articles of faith and demanded for them the internal assent and outward confession of her children, was logical and consistent; but it is difficult to understand with what logic or consistency Protestantism, which proclaimed the Bible as interpreted by the private judgment of the individual, to be the sole and sufficient rule of faith, could follow her example.⁴

But Roman Catholics have not been alone in raising this alleged inconsistency. Thus, a preface to the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* published by the Church of Scotland in 1719 sought to deal with a growing movement among Protestants rejecting confessional subscription as inherently Roman Catholic in nature.

The first and most noisy argument whereby endeavours are made to run down all *creeds*, and expose them to contempt and hatred is, “(a) That they are in their own nature an arbitrary and tyrannical invasion upon the natural rights of mankind whereby every man hath a title to judge for himself, and not to be imposed upon by the determinations of others, whether private persons or *councils* and *churches*; That therefore, for any to form *creeds*, and make their own sentiments and darling opinions the *standard* of truth and orthodoxy, is to usurp an authority over the consciences of men, founded upon the maxim of *poper*y, and directly contrary to the spirit of the *Reformation*. And therefore as it is an attempt to be abhorred in every body so ‘tis particularly inexcusable in *Protestants*, who separate from the *Church of Rome* upon the foot of *private judgment*; and seems to argue, that tho’ they plead for a liberty of dissenting from every body else, yet they would fain keep others from exercising their own judgments, in following the dictates of their own minds, and that while they are engaged in a pretended defiance to *implicite faith*: Besides ‘tis alledged that ‘tis contrary to our avowed principle, *That the Scriptures are the only rule by which we are to try all opinions, and determine all controversies*; for a church at the same time to claim an authority in matters of *faith*, decide disputable questions, and either absolve or condemn men according to their own *formulas*, as well as the *Scriptures*.”⁵

In fact, the Arminian Episcopius (1583-1643) saw the hand of the Devil himself in the “tyranny” of confessional subscription:

The Devil knows that tyranny is universally abhorred by mankind, and therefore is too cunning to attempt the barefac’d promoting of it; he more artfully slips in by undiscerned chinks and gradually winds himself into a station, to which he could not make way by the straight road. First he perswades men

⁴ Hugh Pope, “Protestant Confessions of Faith,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), 5:760.

⁵ *A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, Etc. Of Public Authority in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1719), 1:lviii.

in order to preserve the purity of doctrine, to compose confessions about matters that are not absolutely necessary to be known or believed and thus far the affair goes on easily: Then he urges a consent to these articles as a bond of peace and union; good still! Next measures must be taken that this consent be kept inviolable, this also is specious enough, and is an encouragement to farther advances; therefore, he loudly cries up the necessity of forms and creeds to be subscribed, so as not only a consent, but a perseverance in that consent may be promised. And that is the first visible step to the tyranny of men and tyrannical confessions of faith, by this way it is not hard for the Devil to ascend to the highest elevation of tyranny, especially if such a creed be venerable for its antiquity, and unshaken hath outbrav'd many persecutions; if it hath been stoutly defended against adversaries, and be fortified and recommended by the blood of martyrs who adhered to it; all these are supports and helps by which the Devil makes way for establishing the most ambitious aims of humane authority.⁶

Solutions to the Problem of Confessional Subscription for Protestantism

In responding to the charges brought against the protestant practice of confessional subscription, two fundamental issues must be addressed, namely, the nature of the authority of the confessions and the extent of that authority. The first issue is clarified by the difference between a *norma normans* and a *norma normata*; while the second is explained by the difference between a *quia*-subscription to a confession and a *quatenus*-subscription.

In regard to the matter of the nature of the authority of the protestant confessions, Schaff writes,

The value of creeds depends upon the measure of their agreement with the Scriptures. In the best case a human creed is only an approximate and relatively correct exposition of revealed truth, and may be improved by the progressive knowledge of the Church, while the Bible remains perfect and infallible. The Bible is of God; the Confession is man's answer to God's word. The Bible is the *norma normans*; the Confession the *norma normata*. The Bible is the rule of *faith* (*regula fidei*); the Confession the rule of *doctrine* (*regula doctrinæ*). The Bible has, therefore a divine and absolute, the Confession only an ecclesiastical and relative authority. The Bible regulates the general religious belief and practice of the laity as well as the clergy; the symbols regulate the public teaching of the officers of the Church, as Constitutions and Canons regulate the government, Liturgies and Hymn-books the worship of the Church.

Any higher view of the authority of symbols is unprotestant and essentially Romanizing. Symbololatry is a species of idolatry, and substitutes the tyranny of a printed book for that of a living pope. It is apt to produce the opposite extreme of a rejection of all creeds, and to promote rationalism and

⁶ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. xlii.

infidelity.⁷

But if the Confession of Faith is a norm that is normed by Scripture, to what *extent* can it be considered authoritative? Is it to be subscribed because (*quia*) it is Scripture or is it to be subscribed as far as (*quatenus*) it is Scripture? Klotsche explains,

To decide this question we must remember that the object of a confession is, not to find out what God teaches, for this we find in the Scriptures, but to show what we believe. A quatenus-subscription is no real confession, but an evasion and leaves it to a person's subjective judgment what to accept and what to reject. The church must ask for a quia-subscription, for she must know where her ministers and teachers stand. A confession of faith is to the church what a constitution is to a society, and no one has a right to enter or remain in any Christian church except as its terms of membership give him that right.

Not only the heretical sects connected with Protestantism but also the liberal theologians of the church have raised an outcry against the authority of symbols as inconsistent with "the right of private judgment." They style the church's attitude in respect to symbols "symbololatry," worship of symbols, and see in the symbols only a yoke of human authority, a new popery in the form of printed documents. Making all due allowance for the prejudice which many of the opponents of the church's confessions have displayed, and for their ignorance which lies behind most of their comments on the subject, nevertheless, we cannot in the least support such a tirade against the symbols of the church, for the church does not *compel* anyone to accept her doctrines. A candidate for the ministry offers himself to the church for service, and his offer is accepted by the church on the ground that he is one with her in faith. If he cannot subscribe to the confessions of his church, he should not seek her ministerial office; or if, as a minister of the church, he has abandoned the faith of his church, he will, if he is at all sincere, leave that church and join another with which he is one in faith.⁸

Thus, the protestant confessional tradition simultaneously recognizes the subordinate character of its standards with respect to the Scriptures and the superiority of its standards with respect to the qualifications of its ministers and officers.

These clarifications obviously do not solve all of the problems attendant to the discussion of a protestant view of Scripture and confession. For example, does a quia-subscription require a complete or full subscription to the confession, that is, one without any exceptions? And if exceptions to the confession are granted for conscience's sake before the *norma normans* of Scripture has the quia-subscription actually devolved

⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:7-8.

⁸ E. H. Klotsche, *Christian Symbolics or Exposition of the Distinctive Characteristics of the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Churches as well as the Modern Denominations and Sects Represented in this Country* (Burlington: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1929), 15-16.

into a quatenus-subscription? Further, does a quatenus-subscription have to bear the perjorative sense placed upon it by Klotsche? Is it perhaps the more honorable position, since it is not necessarily evasive, but is instead, honoring to the authority of Scripture, especially if exceptions to the confession are specified? And of course, none of this begins to solve the unique American Presbyterian problem of subscription inherent in the Adopting Act of 1729 with its allowance for individual Presbyteries to examine the scruples of candidates for the ministry with respect to "articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government."⁹

The Various Purposes for Confessional Subscription to the Historic Creeds of the Reformation

While all Creeds are intended to declare the faith of its authors and subscribers, there are several other purposes that are either intended or implicitly result. If one surveys the main confessional/subscriptorial issues inherent in the Sixteenth Century Reformation, he will discover that there are several purposes for confessional subscription. The purposes for subscription to a confession are essentially the same as the purposes for having a confession in the first place, since the act of subscription is nothing less than the personal application of the confession. At least eleven distinct purposes for Confessional production and subscription can be cited:

- 1) *Confessional Purpose*—to express one's faith¹⁰;
- 2) *Apologetic Purpose*—to defend one's faith¹¹;
- 3) *Fraternal Purpose*—to establish common ground and unity¹²;
- 4) *Pedagogical Purpose*—to teach the youth, new converts and future leaders¹³;
- 5) *Uniformity Purpose*—to standardize doctrine and practice in an ecclesiastical context¹⁴;

⁹ Cf. James R. Payton Jr., "The Background and Significance of the Adopting Act of 1729," in *Pressing Toward the Mark* (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 136ff.

¹⁰ This purpose is evident in every example considered. It is nearly tautological since the compositions are called "confessions."

¹¹ Melancthon's *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* published in 1531 is an obvious example of this purpose.

¹² Examples of this purpose include the *Consensus Tigurinus*, The Synod of Emden's subscription to both the *Gallican* and *Belgic Confessions* and using both the *Heidelberg* and *Genevan Catechisms*, and The Scots' subscription of the *Second Helvetic Confession*.

¹³ All of the Reformational catechisms served this purpose. Our examples include the *Genevan* and *Heidelberg Catechisms*.

¹⁴ The *Heidelberg Catechism* was an attempt to establish unity in doctrine and practice in the theologically torn Palatinate in the rivalry between Lutherans and the Reformed. The *Thirty-Nine Articles* attempted to do the same in the face of the Protestant and Catholic struggles in Elizabethan England.

- 6) *Testing For Orthodoxy/Heterodoxy Purpose*—to require one to candidly reveal his faith to determine if it is sound or erroneous¹⁵;
- 7) *Qualifying Purpose*—to enable one to enter into the leadership offices of the Church¹⁶;
- 8) *Defining Purpose*—to distinguish one religious viewpoint over against another¹⁷;
- 9) *Polemical Purpose*—to attack a divergent theological viewpoint¹⁸;
- 10) *Restrictive Purpose*—to prevent the advance of a divergent theological viewpoint¹⁹;
- 11) *Coercive Purpose*—to compel another into submission in regard to doctrine or practice.²⁰

Confessional Subscription at Westminster Theological Seminary

Into this broad context of the history of confessional subscription the Faculty Pledge that is required of Westminster Seminary Faculty must be placed. This pledge states:

I do solemnly declare, in the presence of God, and of the Trustees and Faculty of this Seminary, that (1) I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and (2) I do solemnly and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the form in which they were adopted by this Seminary in the year of our Lord 1936, as the confession of my faith, or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, ex animo, profess to receive the fundamental principles of the Presbyterian form of church government, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in that system of doctrine, nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of that form of church government,

¹⁵ Examples of this purpose include the *Sorbonne Articles*, the *Scots Negative Confession*, Calvin's oath required for students at the Genevan Academy in the aftermath of the Italian Anti-Trinitarian controversy, and the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* which attempted to discover if one was a Gnesio-Lutheran or a Crypto-Calvinist. Calvin's unwillingness to sign the *Athanasian Creed* is also an example of a refusal to submit to a confessional test for orthodoxy.

¹⁶ Most of the Confessions were clearly required for the clergy and theological students and in some cases elders and deacons, and even subjects of the Prince. Compare here all of the examples given on a case by case basis to see where the qualification was established.

¹⁷ This is particularly well illustrated in the case of the *Tetrapolitan Confession* and *Zwingli's Confession* both submitted in the context of the Augsburg Confession to define the distinctiveness of their views.

¹⁸ The *Profession of the Council of Trent* is the best example of this, along with question #80 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

¹⁹ Calvin's *Confession of Faith in Name of the Reformed Churches of France* written to prevent the introduction of Lutheranism into France and the *Formula of Concord* composed to halt the advance of Crypto-Calvinism in Germany are two notable examples of this purpose.

²⁰ The Lutheran use of the *Augsburg Confession* in Frankfort, the Catholic use of the *Sorbonne Articles* in France, and Calvin's use of his Trinitarian Confession *vis-à-vis* the Italian Anti-Trinitarians are all examples of this coercive purpose of confessional subscription.

while I continue a member of the Faculty in this Seminary. I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition, not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God and I do further promise that if at any time I find myself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, I will on my own initiative, make known to the Faculty of this institution and, where applicable, my judicatory, the change which has taken place in my views since the assumption of the vow.

It is important to notice that this pledge specifies: 1) a commitment to the infallibility of the Scriptures; 2) it develops distinctive language for its subscription; 3) it concludes with a profession of faith in the Gospel itself.

For our purposes here, items 1) and 3) are not the primary issues for our discussion. Item 2), however, is at the core of what confessionalism must mean in the Westminster context. Before we consider item two, however, let us note that the language of the Westminster subscription to the infallibility of the Scriptures is identical to that of the OPC and nearly so to the PCA, the only difference being that the PCA's text adds a phrase indicating commitment to the inerrancy of the *autographa*.

Westminster: *I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.*

OPC: *Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice? (Book of Church Order, OPC, XXIII.8.)*

PCA: *Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice? (Book of Church Order, PCA, 21-5.)*

So then, to consider the matter of confessional subscription carefully, let us first note the salient points the Westminster Faculty subscription formula requires in terms of **commitment**.

1. The Subscription is a personal commitment to the Seminary's 1936 version of the *Westminster Standards* viewed as one's personal confession or as a true summary and expression of the Bible's divinely revealed system of doctrine and teachings of salvation.

- a. to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the form in which they were adopted by this Seminary in the year of our Lord 1936,*
- b. as the confession of my faith,*
- c. or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation;*

2. The Subscription is a serious, personal and soul-deep commitment.

I do solemnly and ex animo

3. The Subscription requires a complete, free and openly acknowledged commitment.

adopt, receive, and subscribe

4. The Subscription likewise requires a serious, personal and soul-deep commitment to the Biblically consistent fundamentals of Presbyterian ecclesiology.

and I do solemnly, ex animo, profess to receive the fundamental principles of the Presbyterian form of church government, as agreeable to the inspired oracles.

To consider the magnitude of this subscription we must also note five salient points the Westminster Faculty subscription formula requires in terms of **teaching**.

1. The Subscription is a serious personal commitment in word as well as in deed:

And I do solemnly promise and engage

2. The Subscription is both sweeping in scope and self-governing in character:

anything which shall appear to me

3. The Subscription's intent is to uphold each of the elements of the Confession's System of Doctrine and ecclesiology:

*any element in that system of doctrine,
any of the fundamental principles of that form of church government,*

4. The Subscription's method for upholding these Confessional elements is by forbidding the faculty to teach, speak, or act openly or covertly in any manner against the *Confession*.

a. Teaching: denial of intensity, instruction and implication against the Confession.

not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate

b. Speaking: denial of speaking against
to contradict

c. Acting: denial of opposing

To contravene, nor to oppose

d. Transparency: denial of explicit or clandestine opposition in any of these activities

either directly or impliedly,

5. The Subscription does not bind the conscience since it is freely taken and thus provides relief for those who can no longer maintain the demands of the subscription by either leaving the Faculty, or the Seminary.

while I continue a member of the Faculty in this Seminary.

Confessional Subscription in the PCA and the OPC

The summation of all of the above is that the subscription to the *Confession* taken by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary is of the very highest nature both in terms of commitment and in terms of teaching, requiring both the highest personal and professional integrity. To underscore this, compare the vows that are taken by ordained teaching elders in the PCA and in the OPC. Of the five vows taken by the ordinand in the PCA and the OPC, the second deals with the *Westminster Standards*, and the third deals with ecclesiology. Note their text:

2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity? (*Book of Church Order*, PCA, 21-5.)

The parallel ordination vows in the OPC declare:

2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
3. Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? (*Book of Church Order*, OPC, XXIII.8.)

The upshot of this is patent: the Westminster Faculty subscription pledge is far more intense and demanding than that required of the clergy in the PCA and OPC. Once this is recognized, then, the tacit assumption that can easily be made that the Seminary's views of subscription are somehow less demanding than those established by the provenance of the ecclesiastical Presbyteries must immediately be dismissed. The truth is the demands of Confessional subscription placed upon the Faculty by the pledge and freely taken by each faculty member is of the very highest form known in Presbyterian Confessional life.

In light of the history of the formation of Westminster Seminary in 1929 in the context of the reorganization of Princeton Seminary, the purposes that most closely explain the remarkably high standard set by the Westminster faculty pledge are likely all of the first ten purposes for a confession referred earlier! Clearly the eleventh, which is coercive purpose is not in view, since the subscription provides relief from the subscription by leaving the faculty or the seminary. If we were to put our subscription to the test of the historical milieu that created that subscription, a historical-redemptive subscription in this sense has a powerful and compelling demand upon our fidelity to the *Confession*.

What then does this all mean? I believe that it means that for all who teach at Westminster Seminary, that we ought to require of ourselves and one another the highest allegiance and commitment to the *Confession*. Let us begin by asking ourselves if we are evading the force of the *Confession's* teaching by ignoring it, diminishing its authority, or even openly disagreeing with its teaching. Next, are we prepared to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord and be held accountable to what we have publicly pledged ourselves to "*in the presence of God, and of the Trustees and Faculty of this Seminary*"? Professors at Westminster, then, must recognize the duty they have to admit openly exceptions to the teachings of the Westminster Standards when they meet to be reviewed annually by the Dean. This is a matter of profound concern for the seminary's heritage, integrity and survivability as a seminary committed to the propagation and defense of historic Reformed confessional orthodoxy.

Consider a word picture. The *Confession* is like a sea-going vessel or sailing ship. The Seminary is like the equipment on the ship. The Faculty is like the crew on the ship. The students are like the passengers on the ship. Our legacy is like the cargo on the ship. The churches that look to us to train their clergy are like the families that await the passengers on the ship. If the analogy holds, if the *Confession* or the ship goes down, so does the equipment (the seminary), as well as the crew (faculty), the passengers (students) and the cargo (our legacy) to the great sorrow of the families (churches). How tragic of the crew to use the equipment established for the safety of the ship and the health of the passengers as well as the crew to use its equipment to weaken or even to damage the vessel that gives life and meaning to everything else! Westminster Seminary and the *Westminster Confession* share a world-renowned name and a gloriously rich history. Simply put, as goes the *Confession* at the Seminary so goes the Seminary. For Westminster is not just the seminary's name, it is the very *ex animo* vow of our integrity and our legacy. The professors at Westminster should

periodically renew their covenant vows to maintain, advance, protect, promote and strengthen the confessional Reformed Biblical-Theological heritage of Westminster.

In conclusion, it is evident that there is an abiding legacy of the Reformation's Confessional Orthodoxy manifested in the required vows of Westminster Seminary professors and NAPARC Ministers. The final section of this paper found in Appendix assembles these vows that underscore the necessity of fidelity to Scripture and confession.

Part III: Westminster Theological Seminary and North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC) Vows²¹

The word "vow" can be used as either a noun or a verb. In relation to ordination it is both. As they appear here, and in the printed books of church order, it is used as a noun, a text on a piece of paper. Yet when church officers stand before their presbyteries, synods, or congregations, and when Westminster Faculty members stand before their fellow Faculty and Trustees pledging their allegiance to this noun, the vow becomes a verb, an action. The noun, the vow on the piece of paper, sets out the parameters that one must agree to in order to teach at the seminary or be a member of the board of trustees or serve as an officer in a NAPARC church. The verb is the act of an individual agreeing with the vow. In such a process, vows move from the abstract to the practical; things on paper become promises made, promises that are to be kept and lived out in one's service as a professor or trustee or an officer. Here we find the true intention of vows. Vows are never written merely to remain on the page as nouns; they are pledges that are to be made and to be kept.

Paramount to all of these vows is the individual's commitment to Scripture. In line with the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, the vows presented here affirm that the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Yet, Scripture must be interpreted. As a result, confessional standards, like the ones presented in this volume, are used to promote the peace, purity, and unity of our churches and seminaries.

This use of vows and commitment to theological standards reflect the Reformed heritage of Westminster Theological Seminary and of all the NAPARC churches. This practice, however, precedes the Reformation by

²¹ For references, see William Barker, "System Subscription," in *Word to the World* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 207-28; David W. Hall, ed., *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995); Charles Hodge, "What Is Meant by Adopting the Westminster Confession?" in A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (1869; repr., Carlisle, Pa: Banner of Truth, 1958), 420-26. See appendix for the Westminster Theological Seminary and NAPARC Ordination Vows.

many centuries, dating all the way back to the early church. Back then church leaders were required to assent to the creeds in order to protect the church from heretical teachings (cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 205-11.; cited by Runia, p. 15).²² The ancient creeds—a witness to the early efforts to define orthodoxy—were definitions and summaries of the truth contained in Scripture. The practice of drawing Scriptural confessions and requiring assent to them is thus as old as the church itself and continued at the time of the Reformation.

This explains why Presbyterian and Reformed churches are confessional churches. All of the NAPARC churches subscribe to either the *Westminster Standards* or the *Three Forms of Unity*. Confessional churches require their officers to subscribe, or to vow, that they are personally persuaded and convinced that the system of doctrine presented in their denomination's confessional documents accurately and truly presents the system of doctrine contained in Holy Scripture. Similarly, Westminster Theological Seminary requires that its Faculty Members and Trustees subscribe to the Westminster Standards. Confessional standards are central to the ordination and seminary vows, but they do not exhaust the vows. The officer or professor also vows to fulfill faithfully the duties of the office into which they are entering.

Chapter 22 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches that vows are lawful as long as they do not contradict the Word of God.²³ First and foremost, vows are made to God alone, not to other creatures, though the one taking the vows is responsible to either his presbytery or the other members of the Westminster Faculty and Board of Trustees. Vows are to be made voluntarily and with a sense of the responsibility of the task into which one is entering. Therefore, the vows of the seminary and of ordination are not to be entered into lightly. Vows are public declarations and promises of both belief and practice. Some of the vows require that if one's belief or practice should change after taking the ordination or seminary vows, the individual has the responsibility to tell his presbytery or fellow Faculty Members of this change. If such a situation occurs, the appropriate judicatory is to determine if the individual is still within the boundaries of subscription. Thus, ordination and seminary vows are serious promises to promote and to defend biblical truth as taught in the Reformed confessions.

²² J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. 3rd ed. 1950 (London: Longman, 1972); Klaas Runia, "The Authority of the Confession: The Barthian and the Reformed View," *The Reformed Theological Review* 18, 1 (February 1959), 6-20.

²³ See Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 22 (Of Lawful Oaths and Vows).

APPENDIX

A. Westminster Theological Seminary Vows

1. Westminster Theological Seminary Faculty Vows¹

Faculty Pledge

Westminster is committed to Scripture and to the systematic exposition of biblical truth known as the Reformed faith. Our constitution prescribes the following pledge for every voting member of the faculty:

I do solemnly declare, in the presence of God, and of the Trustees and Faculty of this Seminary, that (1) I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and (2) I do solemnly and *ex animo* adopt, receive, and subscribe to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in the form in which they were adopted by this Seminary in the year of our Lord 1936, as the confession of my faith, or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, *ex animo*, profess to receive the fundamental principles of the Presbyterian form of church government, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in that system of doctrine, nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of that form of church government, while I continue a member of the Faculty in this Seminary. I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition, not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God and I do further promise that if at any time I find myself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, I will on my own initiative, make known to the Faculty of this institution and, where applicable, my judicatory, the change which has taken place in my views since the assumption of the vow.

2. Westminster Theological Seminary Board of Trustees Vows²

Board of Trustees Pledge

¹ This pledge is available online at <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/facultypledge.html> (accessed: 9/29/2012).

² This pledge is found on pages 1 and 2 of "Affirmations and Denials Regarding Recent Issues," available online at <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/affirmationsanddenials.html> (accessed: 9/29/2012).

Each member of the board is required by the charter to subscribe to a pledge of a character similar to that required of the Faculty:

I hereby solemnly declare in the presence of God and this Board (1) that I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, (2) that I sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America in the form which they possessed in 1936, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, (3) that, approving the Charter of Westminster Theological Seminary, I will faithfully endeavor to carry into effect the articles and provisions of said Charter and to promote the great design of the Seminary. I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God.

B. NAPARC Ordination Vows

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church³

Formula of Questions for Ordination (Ministers)

- (1) Do you believe in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and do you confess anew the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and acknowledge Him Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body?
- (2) Do you reaffirm your belief in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of the Living God, the only perfect rule of faith and practice, to which nothing is to be added and from which nothing is to be taken at any time or upon any pretext?
- (3) Do you accept the doctrines of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as founded on the Word of God and as the expression of your own faith, and do you resolve to adhere thereto?
- (4) Do you accept the government, discipline, and worship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as agreeable to and founded on the Word of God?
- (5) Do you promise to submit in the spirit of love to the authority of the Presbytery in subordination to the General Synod, and to promote the unity, peace, purity, and prosperity of the Church?
- (6) Do you sincerely resolve to fulfill all your responsibilities in your home life and in all your relations with your fellowman, following after righteousness, faith, and love?
- (7) Do you accept and enter upon your ministry with a desire to glorify God and to be instrumental in strengthening His Church?
- (8) Do you promise to preach the gospel in its purity and simplicity, declaring

³ Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church, *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church: Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, Shorter Catechism, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, Directory of Public Worship* (n.p.: Printed Under the Auspices of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2008), 211-12, 202-3. Available online at arpchurch.org/documents/arp-standards/ (accessed: 09/19/2012).

the whole counsel of God, and to perform all your official duties with zeal and faithfulness, seeking the salvation of sinners?

Formula for Ordination and Installation (Ruling Elders and Deacons)

- (1) Do you believe in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and do you confess anew the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and acknowledge Him Head over all things for the Church, which is His Body?
- (2) Do you reaffirm your belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of the living God, the only perfect rule of faith and practice, to which nothing is to be added and from which nothing is to be taken at any time or upon any pretext?
- (3) Do you accept the doctrines of this Church, contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as founded on the Word of God and as the expression of your own faith and do you resolve to adhere thereto?
- (4) Do you accept the government, discipline, and worship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church?
- (5) Do you accept the office of ruling elder (deacon) in this congregation; and do you promise to perform faithfully all the duties of the office; and do you promise to endeavor by the grace of God to live your life in Christian witness before the church and in the world?
- (6) Do you promise to submit in the spirit of love to the authority of the session and to the higher courts of the Church?
- (7) Do you promise in all things to promote the unity, peace, purity, and prosperity of the Church?

2. Canadian Reformed Churches⁴

Ordination (or Installation) [of Ministers of the Word]

Beloved brother _____, you are now about to enter upon your office. We ask you to answer the following questions before God and His holy church.

First, do you feel in your heart that God Himself, through His congregation, has called you to this holy ministry?

Second, do you believe the Old and the New Testament to be the only Word of God and the complete doctrine of salvation? Do you reject all doctrines conflicting with it?

Third, do you promise faithfully to discharge the duties of your office and to adorn the doctrine of God with a godly life? Do you also promise to submit to the discipline of the church in case you should become delinquent in doctrine or life?

What is your answer?

Answer

I do.

Laying on of Hands*

God, our heavenly Father, who has called you to this holy office, enlighten you with His Spirit and so govern you in your ministry that you may fulfil

⁴ Taken from: Canadian Reformed Churches. *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Premier Printing, 1993), 621-23, 632; also available online at: www.canrc.org (accessed: 09/17/2012).

it obediently and that it may bear fruit to the honour of His Name and the expansion of the kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The laying on of hands shall not take place in the case of those who are already in the ministry.

Ordination [of Elders and Deacons]

Beloved brothers, you are about to enter upon your respective offices. We request you to answer the following questions before God and His holy church.

First, do you feel in your hearts that God Himself, through His congregation, has called you to these offices?

Second, do you believe the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God and the complete doctrine of salvation? Do you reject all doctrines conflicting with it?

Third, do you promise to discharge faithfully the duties of your office and to adorn it with a godly life - you elders in the government of the church and you deacons in the ministry of mercy? Do you also promise to submit to the discipline of the church in case you should become delinquent in doctrine or life?

What is your answer?

Answer

I do (to be answered by each personally).

The almighty God and Father grant you His grace, that you may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your offices. Amen.

3. L'Église Réformée du Québec (Reformed Church of Quebec)⁵

Ordination [des ministres de la parole]:

Nous arrivons maintenant au moment de l'ordination de notre frère _____. Que tous les membres du Synode de l'Église réformée du Québec s'avancent et se placent autour du candidat.

_____, vous débutez aujourd'hui votre ministère de la Parole. Nous vous demandons de répondre aux questions suivantes comme des promesses faites devant Dieu et son peuple ici rassemblé.

- (1) Croyez-vous que Dieu vous appelle, par son Église, à son saint ministère et que vous désirez cette charge par motif d'amour pour Lui?
- (2) Promettez-vous de maintenir la grâce et la vérité de l'Évangile ainsi que la pureté, de paix et l'unité de l'Église, peu importe l'opposition ou la persécution que vous pourriez rencontrer?
- (3) Vous engagez-vous à être fidèle et diligent dans l'exercice de toutes vos responsabilités de Ministre de la Parole et de vous conduire en privé aussi bien qu'en public d'une façon digne de votre Seigneur et Sauveur Jésus-Christ?
- (4) Croyez-vous que la Bible, l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament, est l'unique parole de Dieu, infaillible et sans erreurs, et la doctrine complète du

⁵ These two ordination vows (for ministers of the word and elders) are reproduced as given by Rev. Jean Zoellner. These texts are not official versions of the vows. The two standards referred to in the vows are the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, which are the official confessions of the Reformed Church of Quebec.

salut?

- (5) Acceptez-vous la *Confession de Foi* et le *Catéchisme* de cette Église comme déclaration du système de doctrine enseigné par les Saintes Écritures, et promettez-vous de prendre l'initiative d'en informer le Synode si jamais vous êtes en désaccord avec ce système de doctrine?
- (6) Promettez-vous d'exercer votre ministère parmi nous selon l'Ordre et la discipline ecclésiastiques de l'Église réformée du Québec?

Imposition des mains et prière:

Notre Dieu souverain et miséricordieux,

Que ton amour, Père, reste sur ton serviteur que tu appelles avant même la création du monde,

Que ta grâce, Seigneur Jésus, l'encourage à garder ses yeux fixés sur toi,

Que ta communion, Esprit-Saint, l'anime afin qu'il porte beaucoup de fruits à ta gloire.

Amen.

Ordination ou Instauration [des anciens]:

Nous arrivons maintenant au moment de (l'ordination ou l'instauration) de notre frère _____. Que les membres du Conseil pastoral de l'Église _____ ainsi que les représentants du Synode de l'Église réformée du Québec s'avancent et se placent autour du candidat.

_____, les membres de cette paroisse vous ont appelé pour les servir comme ancien. Pour cette raison, nous vous demandons de prononcer les vœux suivants :

- (1) Croyez-vous que Dieu vous appelle, pas son Église, à son saint ministère et que vous désirez cette charge par motif d'amour pour Lui?
- (2) Promettez-vous de maintenir la grâce et la vérité de l'Évangile ainsi que la pureté, la paix et l'unité de l'Église, peu importe l'opposition ou la persécution que vous pourriez rencontrer?
- (3) Vous engagez-vous à être fidèle et diligent dans l'exercice de toutes vos responsabilités d'ancien et de vous conduire en privé aussi bien qu'en public d'une façon digne de votre Seigneur et Sauveur Jésus-Christ?
- (4) Croyez-vous que la Bible, l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament, est l'unique parole de Dieu, infaillible et sans erreurs, et la doctrine complète du salut?
- (5) Acceptez-vous la *Confession de Foi* et le *Catéchisme* de cette Église comme déclaration du système de doctrine enseigné par les Saintes Écritures, et promettez-vous de prendre l'initiative d'en informer le Synode si jamais vous êtes en désaccord avec ce système de doctrine?
- (6) Promettez-vous d'exercer votre ministère parmi nous selon l'Ordre et la discipline ecclésiastique de l'Église réformée du Québec?

Imposition des mains (ordination) et prière:

Notre Dieu souverain et miséricordieux,

Que ton amour, Père, reste sur ton serviteur que tu appelles avant même la création du monde,

Que ta grâce, Seigneur Jésus, l'encourage à garder ses yeux fixés sur toi,
 Que ta communion, Esprit-Saint, l'anime afin qu'il porte beaucoup de
 fruits à ta gloire.
 Amen.

4. Free Reformed Churches of North America⁶

Ministers of God's Word

First. I ask thee whether thou feelest in thy heart that thou art lawfully called of God's Church, and therefore of God Himself to this holy ministry?

Secondly. Whether thou dost believe the books of the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God and the perfect doctrine unto salvation, and dost reject all doctrine repugnant thereto?

Thirdly. Whether thou dost promise faithfully to discharge thy office, according to the same doctrine as above described, and to adorn it with a godly life; also, to submit thyself in case thou shouldst become delinquent either in life or in doctrine to ecclesiastical admonition, according to the public ordinance of the churches?

Answer. Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Elders and Deacons

And in the *first* place I ask you, both elders and deacons, whether you do not feel in your hearts that ye are lawfully called of God's Church, and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective holy offices?

Secondly. Whether ye believe the books of the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God and the perfect doctrine of salvation, and do reject all doctrines repugnant thereto?

Thirdly. Whether ye promise, agreeably to said doctrine, faithfully, according to your ability, to discharge your respective offices, as they are here described—ye elders in the government of the Church together with the ministers of the Word, and ye deacons in the ministration to the poor? Do ye also jointly promise to walk in all godliness and to submit yourself, in case ye should become remiss in your duty, to the admonition of the Church?—Upon which they shall answer: Yes.

5. Heritage Reformed Congregations⁷

Ministers of God's Word

First. I ask thee whether thou feelest in thy heart that thou art lawfully called of God's Church, and therefore of God Himself to this holy ministry?

Secondly. Whether thou dost believe the books of the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God and the perfect doctrine unto salvation, and dost reject all doctrine repugnant thereto?

⁶ Taken from *The Psalter: With Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 143, 146-47.

⁷ Taken from *The Psalter: With Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 143, 146-47.

Thirdly. Whether thou dost promise faithfully to discharge thy office, according to the same doctrine as above described, and to adorn it with a godly life; also, to submit thyself in case thou shouldest become delinquent either in life or in doctrine to ecclesiastical admonition, according to the public ordinance of the churches?

Answer. Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Elders and Deacons

And in the *first* place I ask you, both elders and deacons, whether you do not feel in your hearts that ye are lawfully called of God's Church, and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective holy offices?

Secondly. Whether ye believe the books of the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God and the perfect doctrine of salvation, and do reject all doctrines repugnant thereto?

Thirdly. Whether ye promise, agreeably to said doctrine, faithfully, according to your ability, to discharge your respective offices, as they are here described—ye elders in the government of the Church together with the ministers of the Word, and ye deacons in the ministration to the poor? Do ye also jointly promise to walk in all godliness and to submit yourself, in case ye should become remiss in your duty, to the admonition of the Church? —Upon which they shall answer: Yes.

6. Korean American Presbyterian Church⁸

Ordination (Pastor and Missionary)

Vow: The Presbytery being convened, and a sermon suitable for the occasion preached by the person appointed, the moderator shall, in solemnity, state the nature and importance of ordination. With the person concerned standing, the moderator shall put to him the following questions:

- a. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible and inerrant rule of faith and practice?
- b. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Creed of this Church, and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- c. Do you approve of the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship of this church?
- d. Do you promise to cooperate with, and be in subjection to, your brethren in the Lord?
- e. Have you been induced, as far as you know in your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, his only begotten Son?
- f. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel, and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, despite persecution or opposition that may arise against you on that account?
- g. Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private

⁸ Korean American Presbyterian Church, *The Book of Church Order* (Los Angeles, CA: Korean American Presbyterian Church, 2008), 102, 104, 92, 94.

and personal duties that become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to glorify the gospel and walk with exemplary piety before those among whom God has appointed you to labor?

Ruling Elders and Deacons

When the congregation assembled on the day and at the place appointed by the session, a sermon shall be preached by the pastor, after which the presiding minister shall briefly state the warrant and nature of the office (of ruling elder or deacon). Having done this, he shall ask the candidate to stand, and shall ask him, in the presence of the church, the following questions:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible and inerrant rule of faith and practice?
 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Creed of this Church, and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
 3. Do you approve of the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship of this church?
 4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise, by the grace of God, to faithfully perform all the duties thereof?
 5. Do you promise to strive for the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- (Note: Questions 4 and 5 above are the "Installation vow.")

7. Orthodox Presbyterian Church⁹

Ministers

Then, addressing the minister to be installed, he shall propose to him the following questions:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- (3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?
- (4) Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
- (5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son?
- (6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever

⁹ The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodoxy Presbyterian Church: Containing the Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship Together with Suggested Forms for Use in Connection with the Book of Discipline and Particular Services and The Recommended Curriculum for Ministerial Preparation* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 47-48, 70.

persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

- (7) Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your life, and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?
- (8) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation, in agreement with your declaration when you accepted their call? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them as God shall give you strength?

Ruling Elders and Deacons

He shall then propose the candidate the following questions:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- (3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?
- (4) Do you promise to seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church?
- (5) Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon) in this congregation and promise, in reliance on the grace of God, faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?

8. *Presbyterian Church in America*¹⁰

Ministers

Questions for Ordination¹¹

Then, addressing himself to the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical

¹⁰ Presbyterian Church in America, *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2012), sections 21-5 and 24-6. Available online at www.pcanet.org/BCO2012forACwebsite.pdf (accessed: 09/19/2012).

¹¹ For an assistant minister, only questions 1-7 shall be used.

- polity?
4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
 5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
 6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
 7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?
 8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Ruling Elders and Deacons

Having done this, he shall propose to the candidate, in the presence of the church, the following questions, namely:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?

9. *Presbyterian Reformed Church*¹²

Formula of Subscription for Office Bearers:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the

¹² Presbyterian Reformed Church, "II - Formula of Subscription for Office Bearers," Basis of Union, available online at: <http://www.presbyterianreformed.org/basisofunion.htm> (accessed: 09/17/2012).

Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

2. Do you receive and adopt, as subordinate standards, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, believing them to be founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God in setting forth the system of truth taught in Holy Scripture?
3. Do you sincerely own the purity of worship presently authorized and practiced in this Church and also the Presbyterian form of government as the form of government instituted by Christ and prescribed in the New Testament, and do you promise faithfully to adhere thereto?
4. Do you accept the Westminster "Directory for the Public Worship of God" as a scriptural and suitable guide in the conduct of public worship?
5. Do you promise to study the purity, peace and unity of this Church and to exercise discipline according to the Scriptures?
6. Do you accept the office of elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this congregation and promise, through grace, faithfully, diligently and cheerfully to discharge all the duties thereof?

In case of a deacon, on being ordained, Question 5 will omit the last clause, namely, "and to exercise discipline according to the Scriptures."

In the case of a minister, on being ordained, Questions 1-5 as above will be the same and the following will be added:

6. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
7. Have you been induced, as far as you know in your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the gospel of His Son?
8. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercises of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and minister of the gospel, as well as in all relative duties and the public duties of your office, endeavouring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your conversation, and by walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?

When a minister is being inducted as pastor of a congregation a further question will be added:

9. Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation, agreeable to your declaration when you accepted their call, and do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them as God shall give you strength?

10. Reformed Church in the United States¹³

Ministers of the Word

And now in the name of God we request you to answer the following questions:

¹³ "3.1 Ordination and Installation," in *Directory of Worship of the Reformed Church in the United States*, available online: <http://rcus.org/rcuswp/direct-ordain/> (published: 01/16/2009; checked: 05/21/2014).

First: Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are infallible and inerrant, and are the only and perfect rule of our Christian faith and life?

Answer: I do.

Second: Do you honestly and in good conscience before the Lord declare that you believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the confessions of this Church, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt, are in complete and accurate agreement with the Word of God; and do you promise to teach and defend the same in good faith and reject all doctrines conflicting therewith?

Answer: I do.

Third: Do you believe with your whole heart that you are called by God to this office, and do you rely in the performing of its duties upon the grace and help of the Holy Spirit?

Answer: I do; this is my belief.

Fourth: Do you promise to be faithful in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn your profession of the gospel by a life of exemplary piety wherever you may be?

Answer: I do.

Fifth: Do you acknowledge the rightful authority of the Reformed Church in the United States, and do you promise to perform your office faithfully in it and to show all proper regard for its laws and ordinances, and render all suitable obedience to its government in the Lord?

Answer: I do acknowledge and promise it; may the Lord help me.

Elders and Deacons

And now, brother(s), having carefully considered the nature and design of the office(s) to which you have been called by the voice of this congregation, please answer the following questions:

First: Do you accept the call as coming to you from God, and are you willing to undertake the work and service it sets before you, in the name [and for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ?]

Answer: Yes.

Second: Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are infallible and inerrant, and are the only and perfect rule of our Christian faith and life?

Answer: Yes.

Third: Do you honestly and in good conscience before the Lord declare that you believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the confessions of this Church, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt, are in complete and accurate agreement with the Word of God; and do you promise to teach (deacons: “promote”) and defend the same in good faith and reject all doctrines conflicting therewith?

Answer: Yes.

Fourth: Do you promise to be faithful in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and church officer, endeavoring

to adorn your profession of the gospel by a life of exemplary piety wherever you may be?

Answer: Yes.

Fifth: Do you promise to exercise your ministry, as elder(s) and deacon(s), among this people, with faithful diligence, according to what you have now declared to be the rule and measure of your faith, showing all proper regard for the lawful authority of the church, and taking heed to your own lives, so that you may adorn the gospel of God our Savior by word and practice answerable to the place you occupy in Christ's house?

Answer: Yes.

11. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America¹⁴

Queries for Ordination, Installation, and Licensure

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and life?
2. Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only Redeemer of men, and do you confess Him publicly as your Saviour and Lord?
3. Do you believe that it is the duty of Christians to profess publicly the content of faith as it applies to the particular needs of each age and situation, and that such public profession, otherwise called covenanting, should be made formally by the churches and other institutions as well as informally by each believer according to his ability?
4. Do you believe in and accept the system of doctrine and the manner of worship set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures?
5. Do you believe it to be the teaching of Scripture—that church and state are distinct and separate institutions; that both are under the mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that the permanent form of church government is Presbyterian?
6. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations, and that in loyalty and obedience to Him, it is our duty to follow the noble example of the faithful confessors and martyrs of Jesus in their witness for divine truth, and in their sacrifices and labors to establish the Kingdom of God on earth?
7. So far as you can know in your own heart, is it the call of Christ, the glory of God and the welfare of the church, and not any selfish object, that moves you to undertake this sacred office?
8. That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you promise, in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church—(to deacons): to lead the congregation in the ministry of mercy, to practice the grace of scriptural stewardship, to cultivate it in the congregation, and

¹⁴ Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburg: Crown and Covenant, 2010), G-2 and G-3; available online at www.reformedpresbyterian.org (accessed: 09/17/2012).

to endeavor to handle the Lord's money in a manner which is efficient and above reproach? (*to elders*): to watch over the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation, to endeavor to win others to Christ, to visit the afflicted and to attend the meetings associated with your office? (*to persons certified to preach, or to licentiates*): to seek diligently to become an able expositor of the Word, an understanding and helpful counselor, a true minister of God? (*to ministers*): to bring to your congregation the fruits of earnest study of the Word, to maintain a testimony for the Kingdom of God, to endeavor to minister to others and win them to Christ, to watch for souls as one who must give account?

9. Do you promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of this church, and engage to follow no divisive courses from the doctrine and order which the church has solemnly recognized and adopted; and do you promise to submit to all the brotherly counsel which your brethren may tender you in the Lord?

12. United Reformed Church of North America¹⁵

Pastor in an Established Congregation

Do you believe that in the call to this congregation you are called by God Himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Do you promise to discharge duties of your office faithfully, conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline the church?

Answer: I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

Elders and Deacons

First: Do you, both elders and deacons, feel in your hearts that you are lawfully called of God's church, and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective holy offices?

Second: Do you believe the Old and New Testaments to be the only Word of God, and the doctrinal standards of this church to be in harmony therewith?

Third: Do you, having heard the exposition of the meaning and requirements of these offices, promise to discharge them faithfully by the grace of God: you elders, in the government of the church, together with the ministers of the Word; and you deacons, in the ministration of the poor?

Fourth: Do you promise to walk in all godliness and submit to the government of the church in all things pertaining to your office?

N—, what is your answer?

Answer: I do (*to be given by each individually*).

¹⁵ The United Reformed Church of North America uses the *Psalter Hymnal: Doctrinal Standards and Liturgy of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 167, 176.